



AUKANA

newsletter 1/2018

HOUSE OF INNER
TRANQUILLITY



There is a wonderful happiness in just being. One simply rests without wishing for life to be different. Into that completely guileless, unpretentious, genuine, humble, alive and alert mind, the truth of non-separation arises. You finally see life as it has always really been and comprehend that which is truly sacred. Discover your true nature – happy, peaceful, content. It is delightfully simple.

PAUL HARRIS

EDITORIAL

At times, following the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path can feel extremely trying, if not downright excruciating. It takes considerable time and effort to learn how to live life in ways that harm neither ourselves nor others. We make mistakes, many mistakes, along the way and, thanks to the increasing power of our mindfulness, we become ever more keenly aware of the painful results of those mistakes. Training the mind to behave as we wish it to can feel, at least sometimes, as vexing and thankless a task as house training a puppy. As for developing insight-wisdom, well, there is nothing quite like having all your views, perceptions and unconscious assumptions about reality being shown up to be the illusions

that they are. At times, for all of us, it can feel like, "Oh, why bother?" And yet we persist. Why?

Everyone needs a direction in life. Without a sense of purpose or an aspiration to follow through, a person can so easily end up drifting, quietly living out a "beta" level life; unfulfilled, dissatisfied and perennially anxious. To have a goal in life is important for our overall sense of well-being. It removes a deep-lying anxiety, we no longer need to fret about our place in the world, our identity or the meaning of life. All these are abundant, once we have a direction.

There is also a definite sense of rightness that emerges as a positive mental concomitant, when we act in

accordance with our aspirations. It is a sense of ongoing fulfilment, a simple satisfaction that comes from absorbing oneself in developing the skills and learning the lessons that will, eventually, result in us realising our aspirations.

What we find, however, is that, once we have achieved our aspirations in any one area of life, thereafter we tend to become bored, disillusioned or anxious. Why? It is because, once again, our lives have lost their meaning. It was not the accomplishment of the goal we wanted, rather, it was to absorb ourselves in the path that leads to it. Once we experience the result, that result necessarily ends. We then need a new meaning for our lives, a new vehicle for our learning, a new way of filling up the apparent emptiness of our lives, to which we can devote ourselves.

The ultimate goal for a Buddhist practitioner is the realisation of *nibbana*, the permanent cessation of suffering. The way to it is through the development of the three trainings in ethics, mental control and wisdom. It is, in a sense, the path of all paths. It provides us with the most meaningful of meaningful existences; the ultimate reason to get out of bed in the morning. Yes, sometimes it is hard,

but it is all the more worthwhile for it. After all, what value do we place on those things that come most easily to us? The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path give us a direction in life and we can absorb ourselves in developing the skills and learning the lessons we need in order to reach our goal. As the practice develops, we find that we are fulfilled and enriched by the very practice itself. We look forward to meditating. We discover aspects of life we never knew existed before, see things never seen before.

And, at the culmination of this process, a transcendent understanding emerges, one that frees us from the causes of our suffering completely. We discover life's true meaning and, from that point on, we are free to explore life's infinite pathways, learning and discovering as we go, endlessly. ■

DATA PROTECTION ACT

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NEWS

People: This November, the full-time community welcomed in **Rebecca Fisher** for a three week stay at the Centre. Rebecca was able to juggle working commitments, which allowed her this extended period of dedicated involvement with the teaching. During a longer stay, a student is regarded as a full-time lay recluse. They are expected to live by the five Buddhist precepts, they live on the generosity and support of the community and take an active part in all aspects of the life and work of the Centre, including the weekly Dhamma Talks with Paul. If any member of the group is interested in undertaking a longer retreat, they are welcome to contact Paul.

Online: Ensuring that the Centre has a strong presence on the Internet continues to be a priority. The latest development is a weekly House of Inner Tranquillity Podcast which is making recordings of the Wednesday evening lectures available to a wider listenership. The talks are available from audioBoom who are the podcast hosts and can also be downloaded from the iTunes podcast directory and Spotify. In addition, the Aukana website now has an audio page that

streams the podcasts. To access it, just click on the headphones icon on the menu bar. If anyone uses another podcast directory, please let us know and we will endeavour to have our lectures available there too.

We are also continuing to record and upload videos on our YouTube channel. Most recently, during her extended stay at the Centre, Rebecca Fisher posed some more questions to Paul. Rebecca, along with **Sister Sara, Sally Passfield, Giovanni Joris** and **Marc Cooper** have all generously offered to transcribe the video conversations. This means that we can upload proper subtitles, enabling people to gain a clearer understanding of the discussions. Further, YouTube's algorithms will automatically translate the subtitles into any language, meaning that even more people will be able to benefit from watching the videos. The channel is still growing. It has now been viewed over ten thousand times and has one-hundred and nineteen subscribers, which is great, given the uncompromising nature of the subject matter.

Links to the latest video and podcast uploads are also posted on the

House of Inner Tranquillity Facebook page. If you would like to support the Centre, you are welcome to like, subscribe and leave reviews for any of these services.

Garden: Changes are afoot in the Vegetable garden. There is a rather untidy looking patch of ground on the other side of the compost bins. **Brother Nigel** is revamping the entire area, with the help of day-students **David Gilbert** and **Scott Harris**. An unidentified large woody shrub with copious top growth was pruned back. With that growth gone, however, the collection of stones and logs that had accumulated underneath made the area look somewhat messy. The stones were moved back to the high wall and some of the logs will be taken away for burning by our roofer **Mr Tripp**. The others will be used as borders to the area in a similar way to those in the Japanese garden. David and Scott worked hard to grub up the shrub and dig out its roots, as far as possible. The extensive ground covering plant of *Epimedium* was also dug up and discarded.

Inspired by the easy maintenance of the gravel garden on the other side of the vegetable plot shed, Brother Nigel plans to gravel the area by the bins and plant a selection of hardy,

rain tolerant *Yucca* plants that have been donated.

Some repair work is also required in the Japanese garden. The ponds and other features were first constructed in 1981. Over the years, the tea house has had new supports and floor fitted. Minor repairs and occasional maintenance work have been made to the small pools that the water cascades through. Apart from a repair to a minor leak in the middle pond, however, the large ponds have stood the test of time and received little attention, until now. The big pond at the bottom by the tea house has sprung a leak and loses water quite rapidly. An early spring project will be to empty the pond, investigate the cause of the leak and repair or reline the deteriorated concrete surface. Hopefully, the repair work will not be a major disturbance to the breeding toads and frogs, later in the spring.

Maintenance: Replacing the roof for 10 and 10a was rescheduled for the summer of 2017 from the previous year. Unfortunately, there was some confusion about the requirements for the scaffolding and traffic safety measures on Masons Lane. This led to a delay in the authorisation being received from the council to go ahead with the work. By the time it came

through in August, it was too late to proceed with the project as it would have caused too much disruption to the autumn retreats. The reroofing, therefore, has been further postponed until the summer of 2018.

It became imperative to mend the gutter at the front of no. 10, which leaked heavily onto the pavement below when it rained. The repair itself was a quick job, but accessing the gutter was logistically difficult. Building a scaffold tower was not possible without blocking the pavement and disturbing traffic. Using a ladder was dangerous and unfeasible because of the steep slope of the road and the height of the wall. A cherry picker, a hydraulic crane with a railed platform at the end for raising and lowering people, seemed to be a viable solution. Generally, however, they cannot be used on slopes. Fortunately, Brother Nigel found a local company that had recently invested in the latest, most sophisticated model, one that would work on a slope and was available for hire at a reasonable rate. **Richard and Jon Carr**, our regular plumbing team arranged it all and carried out the repairs.

A chimney pot on the roof of no. 9 was seen rocking in high winds during a storm towards the end of the year. There was concern about it potentially

falling off and damaging the roof and skylight below. Mr Tripp was called and came to investigate. The repair job was going to be simple and fast, but accessibility to the pot at the top of a high chimney was, again, a problem. Scaffolding had to be erected from the flat roof above the sewing room to create a platform that Mr Tripp could work from. The scaffolders spent most of a day carrying poles and planks through the drive, up no. 9 garden, and up through the house and sewing room. They were amply supplied with hot drinks and biscuits for their efforts. Mr Tripp kindly came in shortly before Christmas to effect the repairs. Fears about potential high winds meant that the scaffolding was removed promptly in the first week of the New Year.

Retreats: The Integrated retreats were fully booked up last autumn. Rather than being silent all week, on this kind of residential course, retreatants meditate in the morning and are given work assignments in the afternoon. This is to encourage the development, or integration, of mindfulness into working situations and during social interactions. Three new meditators came on Integrated retreats as their first six day retreat this season. The more social aspect

of these courses also helps to make meditators feel part of the Aukana community as a whole.

In the autumn, three students chose to do back-to-back retreats by following an Integrated retreat with a Silent retreat. **Olivia Rowlatt** was one of them and her thoughts on the experience can be found on pages 10 and 11.

Please check the Aukana website for retreat availability for spring 2018.

Classes: The Monday evening Pali Canon Classes will make a welcome return in the spring. The syntax of the Pali texts can, at first glance, appear quite challenging. With time and application, however, we discover that studying the original discourses of the Buddha provides us with a wealth of wisdom, inspiration and practical help. These ancient teachings can become an indispensable aid to the meditative endeavour. Beyond simply explaining the narrative of each discourse, the aim of the classes is to equip students with the skill and confidence to be able to continue to explore the Pali Canon for themselves.

The classes are suitable for all levels of experience. Study materials will be provided. Some home study and preparation for each class will be essential. The dates of the classes

are available on the Diary page. Students must commit to attending all five classes. If you would like to book a place, please contact the Centre.

Satellite groups: **Jim Vuylsteke** in Toronto, Canada has tried to find a suitable venue to hire in Toronto where he could hold meetings. Unfortunately, nothing suitable is available. Currently the small, committed group meet at Jim's residence while he reviews the options. Jim rearranges the furniture to create a more appropriate atmosphere for formal meditation. The web site that Jim has created for the group will be launched when he has fixed a location for the meetings.

Dan Curtis in Victoria, Canada reports "Our dedicated group of seven members continues to meet every Wednesday from 7pm to 9pm. We held our annual winter residential weekend silent retreat in November.

"We completed a three month study of Dependent Origination and then went on to an in-depth study of Perceptions beginning with the *Girimananda Sutta*. We are still working on this, guided by Bhante Gunaratana's book *Meditation on Perception*." ■

BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

RETREATS

6-Day Integrated Retreats

February 12-17

March 26-31

May 28-June 2

6-Day Silent Retreats

February 19-24

March 12-17

April 2-7

April 30-May 5

June 4-9

Weekend Retreats

March 2-4

April 13-15

May 11-13

TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

Note: The evenings start at 7.30pm, the door will be open from 7.15pm.

February 7	Lecture
February 14	Tape
February 21	Q&A
February 28	Tape
March 7	Lecture
March 14	Tape
March 21	Q&A
March 28	Tape
April 4	Lecture
April 11	Tape
April 18	Q&A
April 25	Tape
May 2	Lecture
May 9	Tape
May 16	Q&A
May 23	Tape
May 30	Lecture
June 6	Tape
June 13	Q&A

OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-11.15. The door will be open from 10.05am, February 10 - June 9 inc.

WESAK

Tuesday May 29

Evening starts **7.30pm**

Doors open from **7.15pm**

CLASSES

MONDAY EVENINGS

7.30 to 9.45pm

Pali Canon

March 19, 26,

April 2, 9, 16

SATURDAY WORKSHOP

10am to 3pm

April 28

SATELLITE GROUPS

Activities: Please contact

Toronto Canada: Jim Vuylsteke

Tel: +1-416-536-5698

AukanaToronto@sunyata.ca

Victoria Canada: Dan Curtis

Tel: +1-250-598-5887

dancurtis8@gmail.com

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Other Voices: Olivia Rowlatt



“You did back-to-back retreats this autumn. Why was that and how did you find the experience?”

“I was curious what it would be like doing a longer period of time at the Centre. It would be interesting to see how it would impact on my practice. It was a really amazing experience. I didn’t really think that ‘fun’ would be a big feature on retreat, but the Integrated retreat was actually fun and relaxing. It was lovely being able to put down all the household chores, and concerns about work and the family. I was with Lin Quantick, who also did two weeks. It was great to have a companion going through both retreats.

In the morning, we meditated and were in silence, and then, during the afternoons, we would work with the community. It was quite social, but gentle and friendly and warm. I listened to some really good tapes and read different books. I thought about various aspects of the meditation that I wouldn’t have thought about if I hadn’t had all that space.

There was another key ingredient, which was having an irresolvable life situation that I was trying to get my head round. So, there was also some deep sadness and strong emotions that I was working through. I really wanted things to be different and I had to let go of that. Most of the thoughts I had were not helpful or accurate. I listened to one talk about ill-will which was about reaching a point where you just accept it. I realised I could just hold the ill-will in a loving place. One of the subtleties of getting deeper into the practice is noticing when the mind is moving towards grasping or moving towards ill-will. The key is noticing that whenever the mind wishes things were different, it is not happy, it is in pain.

In that sense, the Integrated retreat was really helpful. I think I got to that point because I had the space to let go. If I was then going home on the

Saturday, I might not have been able to explore it in such an open way. The second week was much more intense. It was more like getting into a zone and then following it through, whereas, the first week had been more experimental.

At one interview, I asked Paul, 'Do I have to focus on the breath?' and he said, 'Yes, investigate it. It will be helpful.' Actually, because the breath is constantly moving, it brings awareness of the fact that transience is always here and cannot be avoided. There was a disinclination to engage with the breath, which I realised was to do with the discomfort of looking at something that was transient. That made a big difference. I then did two days of intensively exploring the breath and then got this real breakthrough of seeing how the breath just breathes itself, independent of me. I had always felt that it was me 'doing' the breathing. I began to see transience during the walking meditation, as well as the seated meditation, and, overall, got the sense that so much is happening that I don't have control over.

After I had noticed that the breath just breathed itself, I had a lot of discomfort, but I just really worked hard. I did loads of walking meditation between every seated meditation and it was really helpful. I was in a clear,

luminous mental space. I had no worries or concerns. I wasn't craving for the end of the retreat, which I would normally be. I thought I just have to make the most of this.

On the last day of meditation, whenever I noticed a hindrance arising, I would just note it and note the uncomfortable feeling and stick with it. I was so interested when hindrances arose. It was like, 'Ah! Something interesting is happening over here.' And I would go there. I realised that when discomfort comes, beneath the resistance, there could be new learning. I was actively following the discomfort and then it just bore fruit, it was incredible. It was like playing 'Dungeons and Dragons,' where you go into a room and you have to find the treasure. What I really took away is that a lot of the pain I experienced was because of a massive resistance to seeing how insubstantial thoughts are and how transient everything is. Following the discomfort was key to seeing that.

Doing back-to-back retreats was a really valuable experience. I did really work hard on the silent retreat in exploring where I could go with the depth of the meditation. There is no way I would have had that journey in a one week retreat. It is going to make it very difficult for me to take that as the only option in the future. ■

Extract from a Dhamma Talk with full time students

Question: Having read that completing the Noble Eight-fold Path is an immensely difficult task, how do you build confidence that it is entirely doable for an average person?

Paul: How many average people do you know?

Student 1: Seven billion. *(laughter)* Well, I do not know them all, but...

Paul: Or you could put it the other way and say there are no average people. There is nobody who actually conforms to the average. We are all slightly off our trolley *(laughter)* in one way or another. Implied within the question is a belief that people who realise enlightenment have, as an essential component of their being, some special quality that enabled them to become enlightened. Would you say that is implicit in the question?

Student 2: I see what you mean.

Paul: The presumption is that there is something special that marks out somebody who becomes enlightened, that they possess in their character something that other people do not

possess. It just isn't like that. If you create this idea for yourself that you are average, and that average people find it a lot more difficult to become enlightened, it is just reinforcing the belief in the self and keeps full engagement with the training at arm's length. There are no average people

Although you have a general blueprint for the path, it can only be undertaken individually and will, therefore, reflect the uniqueness that each brings to it. No two students journey is going to be the same. Each of us has a unique set of obstacles. Obviously, there might be some overlap, generally speaking. For instance, students who used alcohol as a way of avoiding the reality of suffering tend to sleep a lot in meditation. There is something that unites them. Even within that, however, there will still be variety and some people will be more afflicted with sloth than others.

So, there is a general blueprint which is the same for everyone. Everyone is going to suffer from one of the hindrances more than the rest. No one does all five to the maximum extent. There is similarity, but there is also variety within that. The question seems to be assuming that walking the path is always really, really hard

for everyone. Do you remember the Buddha's four types of people? One person walks the path quickly and with ease, another person walks the path quickly but with difficulty, for another it is slowly and with ease, and, again, for another it is slowly and with difficulty.

On the matter of confidence, I don't see confidence as something that someone has to build-up. Rather, it is that there is something getting in the way of our natural confidence. What might be getting in the way? What might oppose it or obstruct it?

Student 2: Doubt.

Paul: It all ties together beautifully when you realise that the question is based in doubt. The way a student with a strong habitual tendency towards doubt progresses in the training is to become more familiar with the quality of doubt. It is not trying to raise confidence. Anything that you build will be destroyed. True confidence is not the outcome of anything. Confidence is the absence of self-concern, essentially. You learn, instead, to deal with the doubt. It is the doubt that is saying, "The path is really hard for average people." But there are no average people. There are some stages of the training which are more tricky than

others, dependent upon your unique character. Someone might breeze through the first insight path, but then get really stuck on the second. Or, they might have a real terrible time getting onto the insight path at all, but once they are, they know exactly what they are doing and have the focus and the determination to see it through. You cannot, therefore, really make the comparison.

I think that what lies at the heart of it is the desire to feel safe and certain, knowing where you are. The training does not work like that. You cannot measure yourself against anyone else, because somebody else has a different set of conditions that they are working with. Could you imagine the teacher handing out badges to students for completing each path? "Oh look, she's got three badges. I haven't got any badges yet and she's got three!" It is a bad idea, isn't it? What would be a more suitable approach to walking the Path?

Student 3: Get to know your mental culture with the help of the teacher. Try to follow the guidance to the best of your ability and keep coming back to look, and look, and look.

Paul: Yes, avoid making cast iron assessments about where you think

you are. Recognise that the important thing is not where you are on the path, rather, it is what you learn along the way. It is the willingness to be really open, to follow the instructions to the best of your ability, and to acknowledge the reality of what you find. If you discover there is a strong tendency towards doubt, engage mindfully with it in order to understand it. Do not try to get around it. The path is about learning to look straight at the obstacles.

I said this recently, that enlightenment is the easy bit, and that gaining insights are the easy bit. It is what prevents the insights from naturally occurring that is the difficult bit. It is learning to deal effectively with the obstacles to mindfulness that is the challenging nature of the path. Rather than trying to get somewhere, stop and look at what actually stands in your way. By gaining wisdom into the true nature of those obstacles, the hold they have over you is lessened and then you can move forward much more smoothly, relative to your individual characteristics.

Where did you read that it was immensely difficult?

Student 2: It was in Alan's book 'Gateway to Enlightenment.' That was the impression I got, at one point.

Paul: It is interesting to think about how we pick out certain aspects of what we read or listen to. For instance, I did a TV interview recently. The person interviewing me had my book which he quoted from. Given how much there was actually in the book, it interested me what he picked out.

Student 2: Is it a reflection of the person and what interests him?

Paul: Yes. Inadvertently we can reinforce the biases that are already in the mind. For instance, the doubter chooses a particular passage from a book that reconfirms his a priori assumption that the training is really, really, hard. Unconsciously, that is what the doubter wants to hear. It helps perpetuate his personal myth and, therefore, allows him to keep behaving in the same, familiar, habitual, safe old ways.

Student 3: Are you saying, because of the doubt that is already there, when we read something or hear something, we pick out that which reflects the doubt we already have?

Paul: Yes, precisely that. It might not necessarily be doubt. For instance, the interviewer was just interested in

descriptions of enlightenment. His wife, however, before the interview, picked out the chapter where I discussed what happened to the trapped squirrel. It was interesting to me that they had picked out such radically different aspects.

I am not saying he was wrong to pick out what he did, or that you were wrong to pick out what you picked out of Alan's book. It is interesting, though, what we do highlight, and to consider how it might be coming from a bias that is unconsciously seeking to reinforce the status quo.

To come back to the question. You do not have to resolve the doubt. You know the Large Hadron Collider that the physicists have built at Cern in Switzerland? For me, that is a question generating machine. (*Laughter*) It is an answer generating machine, but it is a question generating machine too. Every answer that their experiments arrive at immediately conditions another question. A new doubt to overcome. It is endless. The moment you note doubt as doubt, and you acknowledge the truth of that fully, that is the resolution of the hindrance of doubt, at that time. And the more comfortable you become with that process, the less obstructive the hindrance of doubt becomes.

Student 3: So, if we can become aware of those times when there is a question coming up, that can really help us, because then we can see what the bias is that we are coming out of?

Paul: Yes, but you do not need to solve anything. You do not need to then seek to understand what the bias is. That is just more mental chatter. That is just more reinforcing self-view. All you have to do is see it. There is nothing to solve. All you have to do is just see that doubt has arisen. You do not have to then speculate, "Oh, does this relate to something else?" That is just more of a hindrance. You just acknowledge and label the doubt as doubt. There is nothing to be resolved. As a consequence, the doubt falls away and that enables you to look clearly at what else is taking place in your conscious experience. There is nothing to solve. This is not psychotherapy. You do not have to go back in to your past looking for the first beginnings of problems in order to heal anything, you just want a clear mind. You just want clarity so you can observe and gain insight into what is taking place in your immediate experience. ■



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*The Aukana Trust is a registered charity
(no 326938) which provides instruction in
the Buddha's path to enlightenment,
from introductory evening classes
to full-time monastic training.*

9 Masons Lane
Bradford on Avon
Wiltshire BA15 1QN
England

Tel: +44-(0)1225 866821

e-mail: info@aukana.org.uk

<http://www.aukana.org.uk>

[Facebook@aukanaboa](https://www.facebook.com/aukanaboa)

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