



AUKANA

newsletter 1/2020

HOUSE OF INNER
TRANQUILLITY



“The realisation of enlightenment could loosely be said to be the moment the universe wakes itself up from a dream it was having. It was a dream in which the universe was pretending it was not the universe at all, but a person instead. A person with a mind and a body, who was born, lived, suffered and died, but during the whole time, kept on pretending not to know the answer to the question of life, the universe and everything.”

PAUL HARRIS

EDITORIAL

We find ourselves entering a new decade. What will it bring? Ten more years of dashed hopes and shocking revelations? Almost certainly. A procession of triumphs and disasters, opportunities and threats, broken-hearts and fresh starts? All of that, without a doubt. The narratives, locations and actors may keep on changing, but we can be sure that the underlying patterns of human existence will just keep on emerging. There will still be the terrible wars, the endless political machinations, the ongoing environmental concerns and economic turbulence. The whirligig of births, marriages, divorces and deaths will continue its endless spin. There will still be those without enough and those with too much. Through it all, however, there will still be time for music, dancing and laughter. There will be times

of celebration and commiseration, sadness and joy, friendship, empathy and love. This is our human condition and, in that sense, life is not going to change one iota.

The salient point, then, is not so much speculating about what may or may not happen over the next ten years. Rather, it is how best to deal with the vagaries of life that will inevitably come our way. One of the benefits of marking the passage of time is that it allows us to pause, reflect and learn. Can we, as Buddhist practitioners, see the reality of these emergent patterns? Do we understand their inevitability given the nature of the law of *kamma* and of conditionality? Do we recognise that what makes many people angry and disillusioned about life is not so much the patterns that emerge, but rather

the passionate craving for it all to be different? The more we resist life and try to correct these emergent patterns from a position of non-acceptance, the more we suffer. We are rejecting reality and are, therefore, misaligned and unhappy. This unhappiness breeds more resistance and inevitably takes us further out of alignment and at ever greater odds with reality.

Applying the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path in our lives is undertaken specifically to undo that process. At its heart meditation is about learning to stop resisting and rejecting life. It is about learning how life actually works by mindfully investigating it. This brings us back into alignment with reality. When we are in alignment with reality we are happy. We are moving with the flow of life, rather than perpetually fighting against it.

Our difficulty as meditators is that resistance is utterly ingrained in our society. Whether through the constant feed of news via the media or in our personal relationships, the message that things are wrong is always being reinforced. We often, therefore, come to meditation practice already misaligned and unhappy. Before attempting to see reality for what it really is, we must first take the time to align ourselves. This can be done by adapting our internal commentary. We can change from fixating on everything

that is wrong or missing in our lives to focussing instead on appreciating what is good and is working well. Appreciation can take on so many different forms, from admiration for another person's good qualities, to simply enjoying the sound of a bird singing. Such appreciation is bringing the mind into sync with reality. As a result, we are no longer, as it were, fighting against the currents of life. We find that we are flowing easily and happily downstream with it. Meditation is always a joy once we are properly aligned and in the flow.

It is now ten years since the House of Inner Tranquillity's founder Alan James announced his retirement from teaching and asked the current head of the Centre, Paul Harris, to succeed him. It was a difficult time, with many students choosing to leave. The whole endeavour could so easily have been lost then. A decade later, however, and, thanks to the wisdom, devotion, loyalty, and hard work of so many people, our *Sangha* is thriving still. As a result, a whole new generation of students has the chance to study and practise the way of the Buddha and to discover for themselves the peace that lies beyond the world. A meditator, choosing to reflect on and appreciating this fact, is sure to experience more than their share of happiness, confidence and peace of mind. ■

NEWS

People: The autumn season was an eventful one at the Centre. In September, **Sister Sara** unfortunately broke her leg while she was out for an evening walk. Stranded on a busy road, she was very grateful that several of the town's residents came to her rescue, providing warm blankets and keeping her safe by directing the traffic around her. She was taken by ambulance to the Royal United Hospital in Bath where it was confirmed that the bones of her right lower leg, the tibia and fibula, had shattered. Sister Sara also sustained a blow to the right side of her head and a grazed left elbow. Although she could remember nothing about the incident, the ambulance crew suggested that her injuries were consistent with having been hit by a vehicle. The police were obliged to follow up this report but no further evidence came to light and no one had witnessed the event.

Sara underwent an operation to straighten the leg. Later X-rays showed that the bone had not set straight so she was moved to Bristol Royal Infirmary where a titanium rod supported by screws was inserted into the tibia. From there she was moved to a care home in Westbury for rehabilitation

for two weeks. In the meantime, two occupational therapists visited the Centre to review with **Anda Lutkevics** the possibility of Sara's return. Not yet able to climb stairs, it was agreed that the most suitable place for her was the Ruby Room opposite the office on the ground floor of no. 9. From here Sara could have access to the adjacent kitchen and downstairs bathroom without any stairs to climb.

Sister Sara visits a physiotherapist fortnightly to review progress and proceed onto the next stage of recuperation. She has her ups and downs but is recovering well. Sara is very grateful for all the visits and gifts she received from members of the group during her hospitalisation and convalescent period. We are all grateful to the NHS and its staff for the skilled treatment and care Sister Sara has received and for their continuing support. Sister Sara says that the incident has been a wake-up call. She adds that she was thrust into an environment and circumstances that made practice much more difficult and is very grateful, therefore, to be back at the Centre.

To facilitate Sister Sara's recovery, Anda has moved over to no. 9, occu-

pying the room above the Ruby Room so that she could deliver meals, offer assistance and be on call if needed. The rooms at the top of no.10 that have for so long served as the female monastery will for the time being house the male monastery.

Brother Nigel, however, is not alone. He has been joined by **Theo Sheraton**, who has entered the monastery with a view to ordaining as a monk. Theo first became aware of the Centre when he watched a video of Paul being interviewed by **Iain McNay** for Conscious.tv. Impressed by what he heard, he contacted Paul and arranged to come on his first inte-



Theo Sheraton

grated retreat in the autumn of 2017. He has since completed several six-day retreats and more recently asked Paul if he could become a full-time member of the community.

Theo gave up his job as a counsellor, tied up the loose ends of his worldly life and arrived on 25th October. He says he feels very comfortable being here and looks forward to completing his novitiate in due course. He is certainly adapting very well to the demands of full-time training.

Garden: The raised bed next to the vegetable plot was reorganised this autumn. A bamboo that had been planted there was not doing well, so it was replaced with a conifer moved from the far end of the garden. Day students **Dave Gilbert** and **Scott Harris** helped prepare the area. They dug a deep hole and filled it with compost before planting the conifer in it. A permeable membrane was placed over the whole area and some shrubs were planted through cuts in it. The rest was covered in gravel to keep it tidy.

Brother Nigel is renewing the *Leylandii* hedge that is past its best. Preparation included cutting the branches off on the garden side of



Scott Harris and Dave Gilbert

the hedge adjacent to the road and cutting the trees around the Japanese garden down to stumps. Day student **Paul Bonczyk** brought his pick-up truck into the drive on several occasions. This was loaded up with the severed branches and Paul took them to the recycling centre. He has a licence allowing him to take a dozen loads a year. He kindly offered the spare capacity to the Trust. Surplus branches were taken to the vegetable plot for burning.

Theo along with Scott and Dave have also been digging holes for a

hundred yew saplings purchased to replace the old trees. Some young yews were planted years ago on the outside of the hedge by the road in order to fill gaps. These were rooted up and relocated elsewhere. The fence in the Japanese garden has been extended vertically for privacy and other fencing is currently being constructed to shield neighbours' property. To soften the view for neighbours yews have been planted at the back of the fences. These will also serve as an established hedge when the fences come to the natural end of their lives.

Maintenance: Water problems have featured prominently this autumn. A meditator on retreat reported water running down the wall in cell 3 after a heavy bout of rain. **Nigel Tripp**, our roofer, came to inspect the roof to find that the flashing had deteriorated and come away. Mr Tripp has now repaired the damage using an aluminium scaffolding tower that he put up to access the annex roof above the kitchen.

Towards the end of the season we discovered that the toilets in the annex wash-rooms were not clearing when flushed. The pipes from the bathrooms go down into boxing that runs

around the top of the cloakroom adjacent to the shrine room. They then run through the wall into the drive and down into a manhole-covered drain. To clear the blockage, our plumber **Richard Carr** had to access the pipework in the cloakroom. This meant that he had no alternative but to smash through the boxing. Brother Nigel very neatly covered the holes in the boxing temporarily with plywood panels.

Richard will come back to replace the system with inclining pipes to ensure a good flow. Once that has been done, we will be able to fit new boxing around the pipes in the cloakroom and give it all a good lick of fresh paint.

Online: We have been busy developing our online presence over the last six months. The social media team comprises of Paul, Sister Sara, **Rebecca Fisher, Sally Passfield and Marc Cooper**. Recently they got together to review progress and discuss how to move things forward.

There has been a marked increase in numbers of subscribers to our Facebook pages. This is due to the hard work of Sally, **Natalie Bown** and **Glenda Brewer** who have been posting quotes, lecture and Q&A sum-

maries, extracts or articles every day.

Subscriptions and unique viewer figures have also increased on our YouTube video channel, with Paul's *Vipassana* series being well received. Starting in January we will begin uploading audio of these videos as podcasts. This is part of an evolving strategy the team has come up with which aims to co-ordinate our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts with new podcast content being published on a Friday afternoon. We hope it will also streamline and simplify the whole process of gathering, editing and distributing material by the team.

Another podcast development will be a monthly discussion show with Paul. The idea is to talk about issues and questions that have been raised previously on our social media pages. Paul will then sit down with a member of the group to discuss the teaching and answer any questions that are posed. This will mean that along with the lectures and other audio content the podcasts will have a lot of variety that we hope will help stimulate even more interest. The first of these will air at the end of January. ■

BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

RETREATS

6-Day Integrated Retreats

February 10-15
March 30-April 4
May 25-30

6-Day Silent Retreats

February 17-22
March 9-14
April 6-11
May 4-9
June 1-6

Weekend Retreats

February 28-March 1
April 17-19
May 15-17

TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

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

February 5	Lecture
February 12	Tape
February 19	Q&A
February 26	Tape
March 4	Lecture
March 11	Tape
March 18	Q&A
March 25	Tape
April 1	Lecture
April 8	Tape
April 15	Q&A
April 22	Tape
April 29	Lecture
May 6	Tape
May 13	Q&A
May 20	Tape
May 27	Lecture
June 3	Tape
June 10	Q&A

OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-11.15. The door will be open from 10.05am, February 8 - June 6 inc.

DIARY

SATURDAY WORKSHOPS

10am to 3pm

March 7

April 25

WESAK

Thursday May 7

Evening starts 7.30pm

Doors open from 7.15pm

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Notes on Loving-Kindness by Paul Harris

Practising loving-kindness is an essential component of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. It is an entirely wholesome way of thinking and helps to bring practitioners into alignment with their unfolding conscious reality. There are various ways to develop *metta*, but, at its heart, it is about appreciation and well-wishing. Imagine watching the antics of a squirrel, say, as he steals nuts from a bird-feeder and hops about scattering his plunder around the garden. Simple observations of positive qualities help to forge a mental connection with the being the loving-kindness is to be directed towards. In this case, it is not too difficult to find reasons to value the squirrel. For instance, we can appreciate his initiative and cunning in finding out how to undo the screw holding the bird-feeder together. We can admire the way he uses his long tail to hang from branches and to balance as he jumps from tree to tree. We can enjoy the skittish, excitable way he bounces across the lawn. Then wishing the squirrel peace, happiness and well-being comes very easily.

Buddhism traditionally lists eleven benefits of regularly practising *metta*. The first three deal with a problem common to so many people, that of getting a good night's rest. Practi-

tioners are said to sleep well, have pleasant dreams and tend to wake up feeling happy and refreshed. Developing loving-kindness will certainly reduce levels of stress and increase faith in life.

Practitioners are said to be dear to both humans and non-humans. The more mindful we become, the clearer we see the truth that our minds are like tuning forks that resonate with one another. The more we develop *metta*, therefore, the more we find that life reflects *metta* back towards us. In the same way, we are also said to enjoy the protection of *devas*, whilst violence and personal injury are far less likely to come our way. A serene, attractive countenance is another benefit, which, apart from anything else, will save on having to apply endless tubes of moisturiser. For *vipassana* meditators, intent on deepening their practice, it is helpful to remember that practising *metta* improves concentration and is, therefore, an ideal foundation upon which to develop insight-wisdom.

Finally, developing the practice of loving-kindness means that we will die unconfused and, if we do not make an end to suffering in this lifetime, we can, nonetheless, look forward to an extremely fortunate rebirth. ■

Extract from a Dhamma Talk with full time students

Question: What distinguishes sensory indulgence from just enjoying life?

Student 1: The question is to do with whether one actively turns to look again. For example, if you are enjoying a beautiful sunset during the working part of the day. You have got other things to do but you deliberately stop and look again.

Paul: I would encourage you all to deliberately stop and look. To stop and take in the magnificence and mystery of life. We are following the Buddha's teaching because we want to be free of suffering. In being free of suffering we can truly appreciate what it is to be alive. By the same token, if we can take the time to truly appreciate life, we are coming into alignment with reality and are, therefore, not resisting and not suffering.

You are going about your day and you have got to sweep a path, say. You look up and you notice just how many shades of pink and orange it is possible to have in a sunset and you are pretty blown away by it. Just stop and enjoy it. There comes a certain point where you think, "Okay, I have done that now. I will carry on sweep-

ing up." The difference is you know exactly what you are doing. Mindfulness is present. The labelling process can continue. You can note the beautiful shapes and colours, the pleasant feelings, the desire to look again and the arising of thoughts about life's mystery and how wonderful it all is.

Sensory indulgence, on the other hand, is the loss of your mindfulness. It is being lost in the senses. That is not what I am suggesting at all. I am suggesting mindfully acknowledging the beauty and the mystery that is there. Buddhism is not life denying. It is helping to free us up to appreciate life. It is not a subjugation of our natural inclinations towards beauty and sensory experience, per se.

In terms of the training, it is right to put limits on sensory stimulation. We practise sense-restraint for a purpose, which is to create the psychological space necessary to practise mindfulness and generate wisdom into the true nature of things. It is intelligent, therefore, to restrain the senses.

It is quite natural, however, to notice that a flower has come out and wish to just stop and linger upon it for a while. We can experience that and investigate it mindfully. Seeing in real-time how there is a sense contact that

conditions a feeling and then there is a conditioned response to the feeling. That comes from, firstly, having restrained the excessive indulgence of the senses. Through not allowing ourselves to be constantly distracted we can gain a deeper wisdom and appreciation of life. It is perfectly possible to enjoy sense experience and practise mindfulness at the same time. The important thing is that you are not using sense experience to avoid anything.

Student 1: Thank you. What about the issue of using sense-restraint as a way to be pious?

Paul: Then it is about establishing and reinforcing your persona and not about reality at all. It is acting out the 'being a wise Buddhist' routine. (*laughter*) One has to let go of all that and just practise mindfulness. You cannot avoid having pleasant experiences. You open your curtains one morning and there is just the most magnificent sunrise. Or you just happen to look out the window at the moment a heron flies past. You do not have to chase life. You do not have to chase pleasurable experiences or run away from them. It is all there happening by itself.

Student 2: In the examples you have given the common factor is a degree of spontaneity.

Paul: Yes.

Student 2: I can imagine the person waiting to get home to watch television, or thinking, "When I get home, I can do this or that." Whereas the more wholesome enjoyment seems to be more spontaneous, like opening a window and seeing a sunset or walking past a flower.

Paul: There is nothing integrally wrong with looking forward to watching Match of the Day when it is on tonight, or whatever it might be. Anticipation is part of the process of our creative imagination and how we plan for things. But if it is obsessive, if it is escapism born of dissatisfaction with what is actually unfolding in the moment, then it is unwholesome.

My first real job was working in a bank. I think I spent the vast majority of the time just wishing I was not there, which is not healthy. No wonder I got so depressed. I was always wishing for sensual delights and, therefore, suffered regular bouts of boredom. I was never really looking at what was actually unfolding. There is, however,

nothing wrong with merely looking forward to things happening and experiencing that sense of anticipation.

For example, when I was in monastic training, I used to look forward to going to sleep. It was not that I hated what I was doing, quite the contrary. It was because I had just had a really fulfilling day of practising meditation and had been of service. Now the day was finished and I would think, "What am I going to do next? Oh, it's time to go to bed!" There is nothing wrong with looking forward to things. There is nothing wrong with full-time students looking forward to a Sunday quiet day. "Oh, I will go out for a walk. Where shall I go?" That is fine.

Student 1: And if you are planning for ages, as in, "Where should I go?"

Paul: That means you are no longer aware of what you are actually doing in mind and body. It goes back to the original question. The spontaneous arising of that sense of delight is not wrong. That is just a mental factor arising. It is a subtle art, but if you take your most basic fundamental responsibility as being the commitment to be mindful, then much of this corrects itself naturally.

Student 1: Yes. What about the feeling that one is practising wrongly? I remember going for a walk on a beautiful summer's day and feeling kind of guilty.

Paul: Guilty about what?

Student 1: Guilty at just enjoying it so much. Like, I am not supposed to be so totally enjoying all that.

Paul: Yes. I think you have got a wrong view there. I mean, I would go out walking. I would be practising. Were you practising?

Student 1: Yes, but the trouble was those guilt feelings were coming up too strongly, so there was confusion about that.

Paul: Yes, because you have not noted the guilty feelings. You are wrestling with them instead.

Student 1: Yes.

Paul: The guilt does not arise devoid of conditions. There are reasons why that is there. So, if you include the guilt and you are mindful of the guilt, the cause of the arising of guilt becomes self-evident, so there is no confusion.

The confusion is because you do not want to include the guilty feeling. Now, the guilty feeling must be coming out of a wrong view, because there is nothing wrong with going out for a walk and enjoying the sounds of the birds chirping or the shapes of the trees, and finding it all remarkable.

See, I was the polar opposite. Finally, I knew. I had been quietly doing this all my life, and now I finally knew I was allowed to. I had been on the right track the whole time. The teaching was confirming to me that there really was a deeper appreciation of life available to me. By being in solitude, by going out and just being with nature, and observing what was actually happening, I was uncovering that deeper mystery. I was in a situation now where I was being entirely encouraged to do that.

Student 1: Yes. Is the idea of being a 'good meditator,' i.e. being able to note something once and then not be interested any more, is that also a wrong view?

Paul: Well noted! (*laughing*) It is indeed. You are not a good meditator. (*laughing*) You are not a bad meditator either, mind you. In fact you are not a meditator at all.

Student 1: Yes.

Paul: When I was going out for a walk to investigate, I was not trying to be a good monk. When I went into the shrine room, I was never trying to be a good meditator.

The one right question to ask is, "What is unfolding in my experience right now?" It is not, "How well am I doing at being a monk, today?" or "How well am I doing at being a meditator?" That means that the practice is all about the abstract concept of 'me' and not about the unfolding reality of mental and physical experience. That is what is getting in the way. It has to be about reality. Then you take so many of those concerns away instantly, because it has nothing to do with 'you'. It is everything to do with reality.

I remember walking down the road towards Turleigh village, running the twelve links of condition-dependent origination through my mind, and just noting, "Okay, so this is eye-base and this is shape and colour arising on eye-base." This is what I spent my time doing. I was not just randomly thinking about it. I was applying the links of condition-dependent origination to what was actually unfolding in my experience.

I once walked past a cow in a field, and realised that the cow 'experience' was entirely made up of aggregates. (*laughing*) There was the eye-base and the recognition that eye-consciousness arises because of the concurrence of a visible object and the eye-base. Of course, speaking at the conventional level, the cow does not have the same faculties as we humans do. That being's past *kamma* has helped shape it's birth into a realm where neither discursive thinking nor the cultivation of wisdom are possible. The cow does have a certain degree of conscious awareness, however. Enough to locate some grass to munch on, at least. So, there is some perceptual capacity. There is sense contact, feeling and a response, even in a cow. All that became evident because I was not self-absorbed. It was never about how well I was doing. It was just investigating reality.

I remember walking in a forest. A blackbird was cocking his head and looking at me with one eye. In that moment I was very struck with the strange sense that it was the universe that was looking at me, and, at the same moment, the universe was also looking at the blackbird. Having done all that meditative work looking at

ultimate reality, the drawstrings were finally coming together to form this picture of the whole. I was realising that, loosely speaking, it is only ever the universe looking at itself.

If you are completely immersed in the development of your mindfulness, and you are willing to include everything that arises, then all this takes care of itself, really. That is where the emphasis has to be. Progressively, the more you practise in this way, the idea of it needing to be about 'me', about my persona, about how well I am doing, about how other people view me, or about how I view myself in light of what I am doing, all that self-concern falls away. And what remains is simply the endless marvel and mystery of unfolding reality. ■

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AUKANA



HOUSE OF
INNER TRANQUILLITY

*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.*

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