



AUKANA

newsletter 7/2021

HOUSE OF INNER
TRANQUILLITY



“We are so driven and so conditioned to think of things in terms of being ‘me’ and ‘mine’, and ‘myself’, but they are not. Everything that arises is an expression of the unfathomable mystery of existence. Everything. Every atom, every molecule, every subatomic particle, every aspect of physical existence and every aspect of mental experience; every perception, every thought, every feeling is an expression of the unfathomable mystery of existence. That is the attitude you need when you go into meditation. We want to go into the meditation with a beautiful state of mind.”

PAUL HARRIS

EDITORIAL

It is wonderful that we are finally in the position to offer in-house events at the House of Inner Tranquillity and it has been lovely seeing members of our community again after such a long break. For all the diversity of our backgrounds, we are all united in sharing a love of the Buddha’s profound teaching on suffering and how to overcome it. Spending time in the company of like-minded friends is so beneficial in helping to foster and maintain the determination and enthusiasm necessary in following the Noble Eightfold Path. For many meditators, regular in-person contact with the Centre had become an integral part of how they incorporate the

teachings into their everyday life. The House of Inner Tranquillity provides a calm, friendly space for study and practice. Moreover, having been in existence for over forty years now, the Centre is steeped in an atmosphere that promotes and nurtures mindful living in accordance with the teaching of the Buddha. It is an island of peace amidst the chaos, a true refuge and a great resource.

The absence, therefore, of real, physical contact with the Centre during these unprecedented times cannot fail but to have had a major impact. Not just on our psychological and emotional well-being, but in regards to our spiritual aspirations as well.

Many of you have told us what a lifeline the regular online livestreams have been during the last sixteen months in helping to stay on track with the teaching. The effect of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns has been deeply traumatic for so many in the world. It was like taking a sledgehammer to everyone's hopes, dreams and aspirations and, into the vacuum it created, arose new, understandably troubled narratives based in mental states such as fear, doubt and anxiety. Even as we in the UK gradually come out of lockdown, the general sense of uneasiness is still palpable and it will be a while yet before we can expect the reverberations of it all to finally peter out.

What are we, as Buddhist practitioners, to make of all this? And, what does the future hold for us and the Centre? As we know, the Buddha taught that the world is inherently uncontrollable and unsatisfactory. Life is suffering, fundamentally. The pandemic and lockdowns have certainly demonstrated this beyond all doubt. The Buddha also taught that craving for life to be different and resisting the reality of suffering only exacerbates and perpetuates it. For Buddhist practitioners, therefore, the instruction is to face reality, irrespec-

tive of whether we find the conditions pleasant or unpleasant, wanted or unwanted. By mindfully – lovingly – observing all the ways in which we resist life, gradually we learn how to surrender to and make peace with it. We find, as a consequence, that as our personal cravings recede and diminish, so too does our personal experience of suffering.

Many meditators have reported that the events of the last sixteen months have given them plenty of motivation to deepen their practice and to make the most of the opportunity. In this regard, we can view the pandemic as a “divine messenger” – a wake-up call, alerting us to life's inherent uncertainty and persuading us of the need to urgently follow the spiritual path to its completion. Thanks to the hard work and devotion of so many over so many years, the Meditation Centre remains in an extremely healthy, vibrant, and robust condition. We have all the tools we need to help us readily at our disposal. As we all know, however, circumstances can change, and can change very rapidly. It makes sense, then, to harken to the call of recent times and devote ourselves to following the Buddha's path and to liberation from suffering in this very lifetime. ■

NEWS

Open Day: The biennial Open Day was postponed from 3rd July due to the extension of social distancing restrictions relating to Covid-19. Whilst the houses and grounds are spacious, certain areas would have been bottlenecks for people passing through. Those Government restrictions have now been lifted allowing more sociable contact between people. We have, therefore, rescheduled the Open Day which will now be held on Sunday 29th August from 2-6pm at the House of Inner Tranquillity, Bradford on Avon.

This event is a rare opportunity for meditators to invite friends and family to see the place where they come to meetings and retreats, and to meet the full-time community and fellow meditators. People will be able to come indoors and visit the Shrine Room where we meditate, and see the rooms where people stay on retreat and where the full-time students reside. The gardens will be open for people to wander around or to sit and relax on the several benches or lawns. The ponds in the Japanese garden will be restocked with fish – a popular attraction for children. There

will be a plant stall with items potted up from the garden and a shop with books, incense and Buddha figures. Refreshments will be available from a tea stall selling drinks and donated cakes. Please let us know if you would like to give a cake – either home-made or purchased – they will be gratefully received.

To ensure that the Centre looks its best there is a lot of work to do in the week leading up to Open Day, especially on the Saturday afternoon of the 28th for the finishing touches. Please let us know if you are able to help out for an afternoon or more in the week prior to the event. A large posse of volunteers is essential on the day itself to help out in the various stalls and direct people around the place. If you can spare an hour or more on the day itself please let us know as soon as possible how many hours you are able to do and which hourly time slots between 2 and 6 you prefer. Email info@aukana.org.uk or call us on 01225 866821.

We look forward to seeing you and your visitors on the day.

Retreats: We are pleased to be able to offer retreats again from September onwards after an absence of almost 18 months. We have emailed signing-up forms to our registered members via Mailchimp. If you have not received an email, please check your spam folder or contact us as soon as possible. Allocated places will be emailed or sent by post in early August. Please note that it is important to honour the commitment of attending

a retreat once booked. However, we suggest that if you show symptoms of Covid approaching your retreat date, take a lateral flow test and, if positive, let us know promptly and do not come on retreat. Remaining retreat availability will be posted on the Aukana website shortly.

Day Students: After a long break due to the winter lockdown day students were able to return to meditate

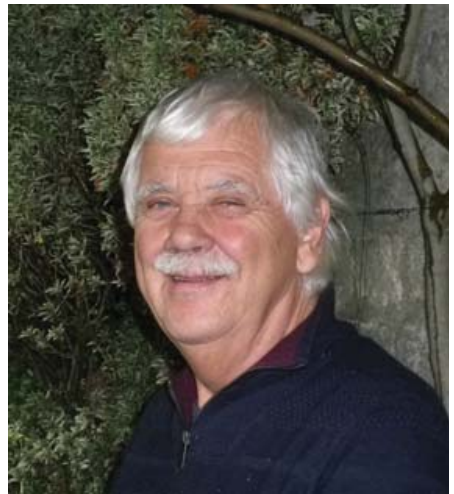


Day Students **Rebecca Skillman** and **Sally Passfield**



Day Students **Liz Kemp** and **Lin Quantick**

and help out at the Centre from mid-May. Numbers were restricted to a maximum of 3 per day to accommodate the limit of 6 people indoors. Now that restrictions have been lifted further we are able to increase the number of daily students who attend. A few places are still available for anyone who would like to sign up for this regular commitment. If anyone is thinking of being a day student please arrange to have a chat with Paul to discuss options. A leaflet giving details about being a day student is available on request.



Day Student **Paul Bonczyk**

Meetings: The House of Inner Tranquillity opened its doors on 28th July to welcome meditators back for the first Wednesday evening meeting since 21st March 2020. Prior to that several online meetings were held which were accessible to locals and distant meditators alike. Going forward live lectures and Question & Answer Sessions given by Paul will be livestreamed on the HoIT Facebook page so that they are accessible to a wider audience. The first of these was a lecture, 'Surfing the Wave of Your Bliss', on 4th August and is available in the video section of the Facebook page. It will also be posted on the Centre's YouTube channel. The dates of all the meetings are shown on the diary page.

Paul intends to maintain the interactive component with meditators by conducting Monday evening Facebook livestreams on a limited number of dates. The proposed dates are on the diary page but may be reviewed depending on Paul's workload.

If you would like to have a chat with Paul about your practice, interviews are available most week days at 2, 3.30 or 5pm. They can be conducted in person if you live locally or

you can call, Skype or use Facetime if you live at a distance. Please email or call the Centre to arrange a suitable time.

Audio: Paul has been experimenting with recording chapters from his book 'Postcards from Beyond'. These will be uploaded as regular podcasts on Audioboom. Paul intends to prepare graphics to accompany the recordings so that they can also be uploaded to our YouTube channel. ■

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DATA PROTECTION ACT

The mailing list used for the House of Inner Tranquillity Newsletter is maintained on computer. If you object to your record being kept on our computer file, please write to us and we will remove it.

BRADFORD ON AVON

HOUSE OF INNER TRANQUILLITY

RETREATS

6-Day Integrated Retreats

September 27-October 2

November 8-13

6-Day Silent Retreats

September 6-11

October 4-9

October 18-23

November 22-27

December 6-11

Weekend Retreats

September 17-19

October 29-31

TAPE & LECTURE EVENINGS

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

July 28 Tape

August 4 **Lecture**

August 11 Tape

August 18 **Q&A**

August 26 Tape

September 1 **Lecture**

September 8 Tape

September 15 **Q&A**

September 22 Tape

September 29 **Lecture**

October 6 Tape

October 13 **Lecture**

October 20 Tape

October 27 Tape

November 3 **Lecture**

November 10 Tape

November 17 **Q&A**

November 24 Tape

December 1 **Lecture**

December 8 Tape

December 15 **Q&A**

OPEN MEDITATIONS

Saturday mornings 10.15-11.15. The door will be open from 10.05am, July 31 - December 11 inc.

DIARY

OPEN DAY

On Sunday 29 August, the Centre, Monasteries and gardens will be open between 2 and 6pm. All readers of this newsletter, their families and friends are welcome to attend.

HOIT FACEBOOK PAGE LIVESTREAMS

Monday evenings 7.30.

Provisional dates:

23 August, 20 September, 25
October, 29 November.

SATELLITE GROUPS

Activities: Please contact

Toronto Canada: Jim Vuylsteke

Tel: +1-416-536-5698

AukanaToronto@sunyata.ca

‘Uncertainty Principle’ by Paul Harris (abridged)

Life is a lot more uncertain than, perhaps, we like to think it is. In reality, we cannot really rely on things. Things seem to have a life of their own. This is because, at any given moment there are an infinite number of conditions at work.

In Buddhism we talk about the three universal characteristics of conditioned existence. These are, firstly, that all the ‘things’ of life are necessarily **transient**. Secondly, being transient means they are not a suitable basis for happiness and are, therefore, fundamentally **unsatisfactory**. The third mark is **non-self**. This, in part, means that life has its own way, it moves according to impersonal conditions. We are part of this infinite river of conscious experience, of course, but we cannot own or control it absolutely.

We like to live our lives believing that we have a degree of security, a degree of certitude. If it becomes too certain, however, it becomes too deadening. Despite the fact that we want certainty, we also want a degree of uncertainty, to add a bit of spice and variety to life.

This really does matter a lot to meditators. When we meditate, we

are being asked to rest and stay with the uncertainty of life. Our instincts, however, are telling us to make certain, to be sure. One of the things that happens with meditation is that the hindrance of doubt arises. It is by far the most destructive of all the hindrances. Many meditators, however, do not actually realise that it is doubt. To be sceptical, to demand proof, is considered to be a very sophisticated position to take. To have faith, to believe in things you cannot see, is regarded to be a simplification of life.

It is understandable that we should desire certainty. Doubt, when it arises for a meditator, arises out of a desire to obtain certainty, to be sure, to know that the meditation is being done right. It is the desire to know what the outcome of undertaking this meditation will be. It is, therefore, very much bound up with self-concern.

One of the ways doubt operates is that somebody will feel this overwhelming need to get more information. This is because through getting more information it is assumed that there will be more certainty. It is an attempt to try and get the proof before the practice is undertaken.

Another way to deal with the un-

certainty is to stop meditating. It is deemed prudent just to suspend the practice until you have more information, until you are absolutely certain that it is going to be a success.

The other way that doubt affects somebody's practice is that they try massively too hard and try to affect the practice to get the results, so that they feel safe and secure and know that the practice is going in the right direction.

In reality, you cannot get proof of the effectiveness of meditation in any other way than practising. If somebody has a lot of doubt, then the teacher's guidance is that the way through the problem is to do more meditation, not less. This also means accepting the explanations and instruction that you get, and then being willing to put them into practice in order to find out whether they work or not.

This means that you have to be willing to undertake meditation not knowing what the outcome will be. You have to learn to recognise and **note doubt as doubt**. If you are willing to do that, then you have the potential to discover something quite amazing, that the absence of doubt is the faithful mind. What you need is to have the confidence to stay in

that place of not knowing, not understanding, of not being sure. And you stay there and observe exactly what happens. This is meditation free from expectations, free from choice, and staying in that zone of uncertainty. There will be a strong urge to cover up, by abandoning the practice, or by thinking about the practice, or by trying to force certain results from the practice. And the meditator has to become aware of all these escapes and each time choose voluntarily to just stay with the mind as it is.

There is a further aspect to this. Be willing to practise choiceless awareness and allow negative thought processes such as doubt to arise and pass away. Through doing so you learn just to rest content in the moment with whatever comes up in that uncertain space. As a result you find that there is nothing you cannot look at. After all, there is nothing that arises in mind and body that you are not actually already intimately familiar with. All that is happening here is that we are opening a 'window' of mindfulness on the truth of our behaviour. It is this window of mindfulness that will also begin to show us the transient, unsatisfactory and selfless nature of all conditioned and conditioning phenomena. ■



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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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