



Pine Gate

Newsletter of the Pine Gate Sangha

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Pine Gate is the voice of Ottawa's Pine Gate Sangha, who practice engaged Buddhism in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. Friends of the sangha also contribute to the newsletter. Submissions are invited, articles of 500-700 words, poems and insights that reflect engaged practice and personal experience are appreciated. The Pine Gate Sangha has many leaders and the newsletter is an organic outcome of sangha insight. Effortlessly it appears.

Ian Prattis provides dharma talks and teachings that encourage practice through deep non-action, so that engaged practice (action) emerges from understanding and compassion. His wife, Carolyn,

teaches a regular Qi-Gong class at Pine Gate Meditation Hall as an introduction to mindfulness practice. The Pine Gate Sangha welcomes old and new members to its regular and special activities.

Deep Listening, River Freeze Ian Prattis

Several winters ago I went on a solo retreat at a place called Stillpoint on the Madawaska River, 100 miles west of Ottawa. During the five days of silence I watched the river freeze over as I listened deeply to the winter voice of Mother Earth. On returning to my university afterwards, a colleague who takes an interest in my endeavours asked me what I did for five days. My reply was that I watched and listened deeply to the Madawaska River freeze over. He then asked me what did I mean by "listening deeply." So I talked to him about the Fourth Mindfulness Training in Buddhism about mindful speech, and how deep listening was the key to understanding and putting it into practice. If one could not listen deeply then it is unlikely that speech would be compassionate and loving.

Fourth Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and to relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am

determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

I identified three levels of deep listening for my colleague. The first (and least significant) level of deep listening was intellectual, whereby I analyzed and scrutinized Buddhist literature on deep listening, gaining a conceptual grasp of what it meant within the corpus of Buddhist teaching. Although this was the least significant level of understanding, it was a starting place. Rather than just see it as an intellectual practice, I began to realize that deep listening was a fruit or consequence of mindfulness practice – this was the second level of deep listening.

Deep listening could not be there alone. I experienced a distinct improvement in my capacity for deep listening, as I realized that walking meditation, mindful breathing, mindful meals and other practices were the necessary ground out of which deep listening could arise – as a flower growing from fertile soil. When such a ground was not there, listening was largely to my own agendas and assumptions, and I would not be listening carefully to what was being said to me. So the simple insight that deep listening could not be there alone was an important one for me. This deepened as I investigated how it worked for me and directly affected my life – the times I was not heard and how I suffered from that. Also the suffering I had caused when I was not in a place to deeply listen to the concerns of those speaking to me, especially to my children. I think back to times with my children when they had really important things to say to me, but I was too busy. I did not stop to give them my full presence and did not really listen. Many years later, now that they are all grown up, I have said to

them individually; “I remember the time you said such and such to me and I did not really listen to you. I am very sorry.” They were astonished and deeply touched – as was I. The rifts and suffering between us could then heal.

That was it for deep listening, or so I thought, until I was plunged into a crisis with one of my sons caught in the drug underworld of Glasgow, Scotland. My eighteen-year-old son was studying at the Glasgow School of Art in Scotland, and my transatlantic phone calls had told me he was deeply in trouble with drugs. I arranged to spend time with him in Glasgow. We had not seen one another for a few years, so a visit was overdue, particularly since he had suffered deeply from a divorce that had spanned two continents. At the Glasgow airport I scarcely recognized him, as he now sported a multi-coloured punk hairstyle with all the required black accouterments. Yet he greeted me with a warm hug and a big smile.

On arriving at the place he was living I knew something was dreadfully amiss. There were no books or art materials in his room. His large rambling apartment was occupied, as I later discovered, by "The Tribe" - a shifting population of punks, drug users, and dealers. As I sat in Alexander's squalid room wondering about him, he left for a while. There was such an atmosphere of decay and hopelessness that for a moment I felt utter despair - I did not know what to do. I went into my own deep silence and meditated so that I could be clear and calm. I knew I needed support from all the tools of mindfulness I had - particularly deep listening - to remain steady and not be drawn into judgment and discrimination. It was a time to take deep refuge in mindfulness.

Several of the punks asked me one night if I would teach them walking meditation - they had obviously been talking with my son. I said I would be happy to, as long as they remained drug free for two days. They agreed and complied - quite an undertaking for them. Two evenings later at midnight my punk

friends chose one of Glasgow's finest private parks to do their walking meditation. They found a tree just outside the park fence, boosted me up and instructed me to crawl along a branch that overhung the park. For their part, they simply bounded over the fifteen-foot-high railings and then caught me as I dropped from the branch in a less than elegant manner. Once we had picked ourselves up and stopped laughing, I introduced them to the basics of walking meditation, slowing them right down with breath, guiding them to release their distress into the earth. I still smile when I remember this scene: my punk friends and I walking barefoot in the grass of one of Glasgow's finest private parks, breathing slowly and walking mindfully for more than two hours. We sat on a park bench, fresh with morning dew, and they began to talk to me. As I listened to them sharing heartfelt stories of how they came to be where they were, I encountered a level of deep listening never before experienced. I felt an all-encompassing energy embrace me, my young friends, the park, the lights, and night sounds of the city of Glasgow.

This experience totally changed my understanding of deep listening. I said very little and left intellectual understanding and personal suffering behind and entered a totally new territory. On that evening the carefully constructed sense of self just dissolved and the "I" of me disappeared in the moment I was deeply present with my young friends. "I" became like particles of energy, touching and engaging with the particles of energy in everything there – my young friends, the grass, trees, park bench, city lights and sounds, and beyond to a vastness that I cannot find the words to express. Space beyond space, time beyond time. In that stillness, the vastness of energy touched deep seeds of consciousness in my young friends as they trusted me with their confidences and secrets. We stayed there for hours in this zone of transformation, frequently silent, and walked back to their home just before dawn. From the smiles and embraces we exchanged I knew that something had changed in all of us: I had discovered a deep

listening I had never thought possible; my young friends and son had nurtured long forgotten seeds of hope within themselves.

I finished speaking and looked over to my colleague and saw that he was smiling. He had understood.

Gardening

I was asked by a friend what have I been up to since retiring from the university.

I have enjoyed the time and space to play with Mother Earth as a diligent and slightly crazy organic gardener. The blaze of flowers at the front of the house is a testimony that I am doing OK so far. An experienced gardener would no doubt wonder what on earth I am doing in the back yard of the house. The back garden is surrounded by trees so it is as though one is in the middle of a forest. I plant vegetables in between flowers. Veggies have such a dull life struggling to poke their heads above ground, then taking in rain, sun and soil nutrients to end up on some human's plate. So to make them happy I plant them between gorgeous flowers so they have some jazz and elegance around them while they are alive. Just imagine a carrot waking up in the morning to see a beautiful pink hibiscus in full bloom on one side and multi coloured snapdragons on the other. They are bound to be happy and grow really well before they end up on some human's plate. And on it continues with beets, tomatoes, lettuce, arugula, swiss chard, kale, rhubarb, beans, asparagus, cucumbers, peppers, peas all planted between beautiful clumps of flowers.

There is also a herb garden in amongst the peony bushes. Some herbs are very nice and well behaved, but others are just downright unsociable. I had to separate a green basil plant from a red basil plant as they were always quarrelling. Now that they are at the opposite ends of the garden in their own solitary tubs – they are thriving. An experiment I tried was to move a small juniper tree from the front garden,

as it was dying there, to the back garden where there is a tall cedar hedge. I think it will be much happier in the back yard – cedar language is a bit different to juniper language but a lot like French and Spanish – so they can communicate a bit. I have welcomed the juniper into the backyard with much compost and water but will leave it up to the cedars to encourage her to live – and she has decided to do so and thrives in her new environment. And on it goes with much weeding and then much more weeding to keep both the veggies and the flowers happy. Sometimes I am not aware of the difference between a weed, veggie or a flower – so I just leave whatever it is to grow.

This is also a metaphor for the organic gardening I do in my mind. That blooms also – with the diligent daily watering of the beautiful seeds and the careful pruning and transformation of the weeds. Simple yet surprising! I thought you really needed to know this, if only to make you smile.



Morning Glories

Interdependence Thomas Berry

This appeared in Resurgence No. 241 March/April 2007

We cannot have well humans on a sick planet.
We cannot have a viable human economy by
devastating the Earth's economy.

We cannot survive if the conditions of life itself are not protected.

Not only our physical being but our souls, our minds, imagination and emotions depend on our immediate experience of the natural world.

There is in the industrial process no poetry, no elevation or fulfillment of mind or emotion, comparable to that experience of the magnificence of

the sea, the mountains, the sky, the stars at night, the flowers blooming in the meadows, the flight and song of the birds.

As the natural world diminishes in its splendour, So human life diminishes in its fulfilment of both the physical and the spiritual aspects of our being. Not only is it the case with humans, but with every mode of being.

The wellbeing of each member of the Earth community

Is dependant on the wellbeing of the Earth itself.

Rise Al Gore

This note on Climate Crisis appeared in Resurgence No 242 May/June 2007.

This crisis is bringing us an opportunity to experience what few generations in history ever have the privilege of knowing: a generation mission; the exhilaration of a compelling moral purpose; a shared and unifying cause; the thrill of being forced by circumstances to put aside the pettiness and conflict that so often stifle the restless human need for transcendence – the opportunity to rise.

When we do rise; it will fill our spirits and bind us together. Those who are now suffocating in cynicism and despair will be able to breathe freely. Those who are now suffering from a loss of meaning in their lives will find hope.

When we rise, we will experience an epiphany as we discover that this crisis is not really about politics at all. It is a moral and spiritual challenge.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings David Kroecker

On January 6, 2007 I received the transmission of the Two Promises at Pine Gate, receiving the dharma name “Tender Loving Sprout of the Source” from Ian. I liked the name. The Two Promises is a version of the Five Mindfulness Trainings that Thich Nhat Hanh offers to young people:

I vow to develop understanding, in order to live peaceably with people, animals, plants and minerals.

I vow to develop my compassion, in order to protect the lives of people, animals, plants and minerals.

To me, the Two Promises represent the positive intention of the Five Mindfulness Trainings. When I first became aware of the Two Promises, I felt a sense of peace and ease and acceptance that I didn’t feel with the Five Mindfulness Trainings. I felt I could joyfully and without reservation make the Two Promises an expression of my intention and commitment. That had not been my experience with the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

The Five Mindfulness Trainings (5MTs) are the ethical guidelines for Buddhist practitioners. Approximately once a month we gather at Pine Gate to recite them and to consider our efforts to follow them. For the first year of my practice, I was uncomfortable with the 5MTs. After a number of months of discomfort at every recitation ceremony, I decided to rewrite the 5MTs so that I would enjoy reading them. As I learned and practiced mindful breathing and mindful walking, my discomfort with the 5MTs eased and my skill at taking care of my discomfort increased. During the recitation ceremonies I was more able to focus on the positive intentions of the 5MTs. In December of 2006, I read ‘For A Future To Be Possible’ - Thich Nhat Hanh’s commentaries on the 5MTs. I further

revised my version of the 5MTs to include my insights from Thay’s book.

The First Mindfulness Training: Reverence for Life

Life is precious. My life is precious.

My life is deserving of protection and nourishment and support.

I cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants and minerals.

I value, respect, support and protect life, in my thinking, in my speech, in my actions, in my way of life, and in the world.

I gratefully accept the support and protection of my life.

The Second Mindfulness Training: Generosity

Aware of the needs of myself and others, I cultivate loving kindness and work to support the well being of people, animals, plants and minerals.

I practice generosity in using my time, energy and material resources to help others.

I respect the property of others and I encourage others to contribute to the well being of humans and other living beings.

I gratefully accept nourishment, love and support when it is offered freely.

The Third Mindfulness Training: Responsibility in Human Relationships

Aware of the benefits of mindful behaviour, and the confusion, suffering and division caused by unmindful behaviour between people and in families, I practice ways to establish and preserve the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families and society.

I engage in all relations with kindness, care and respect.

To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I make commitments with care and I honour the healthy commitments of myself and others.

I protect children and other vulnerable people from injury or mistreatment.

I accept with gratitude the protection of my own person.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training: Mindful Speech

Aware of the power of speech to generate peace, understanding and compassion, or to generate misunderstanding, discord and division, I cultivate loving thought, loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to myself and to others and to relieve suffering.

I choose to speak truthfully, with words that inspire trust, confidence, joy and hope, in me and in others. I refrain from uttering words that are likely to water the seeds of confusion, anger, fear or division in myself, my family or my community.

I take action to reconcile and resolve all conflicts.

The Fifth Mindfulness Training: Mindful Consumption

To support and protect my life and the lives of others, I choose to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society, by practicing mindful eating, drinking and consuming.

I ingest items that nourish and preserve peace, well-being and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society.

I protect myself from exposure to toxic drugs, chemicals and foods, and toxic thoughts, images, words and environments.

I work to transform violence, fear, anger and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a healthy diet for myself and for society and by advocating mindful consumption in the world.

Commentary

I used the titles of the chapters in 'For a Future to be Possible', (Respect for Life, Generosity, etc.)

because they summarize the intentions of the individual trainings.

FIRST MINDFULNESS TRAINING

I changed the 1st MT to focus on valuing and caring for life and to specifically include myself, and my life. I removed references to killing and to the destruction of life because when I put my attention on the destruction of life, it is hard for me to stay connected with the sense that life is valued. I need to nourish my consciousness of reverence for life, to create peace and balance in my mind.

SECOND MINDFULNESS TRAINING

I replaced negative directions, e.g. 'not to steal', with positive directions. Negative directions focus attention on the negative behaviour. It is more helpful to direct myself toward positive behaviour. Oppression, injustice, suffering, etc, occur when people's needs for safety, respect, consideration, etc, aren't met. Speaking about unmet needs makes it easier to address people's needs and care for their pain and suffering without blaming an "oppressor".

THIRD MINDFULNESS TRAINING

I changed the title from 'Responsibility in Sexual Relationships' to 'Responsibility in Human Relationships' to address all our behaviour toward others. We need to learn to behave with kindness, care and respect in all our relations.

Mindfulness is organic. Given sufficient conditions, it will grow. Each of us comes from an environment where some conditions were present and some were not. We all need general support for our mindfulness to grow, and many of us need specific nourishment as well. I have changed the wording of the 5MTs to better water the seeds in myself that most need watering. It might make sense for you to make your own version of the 5MTs that better meets your needs for nourishment and support.

Maestro Anne Fleming

The Muse:

'Each man has an aptitude born with him. Do your work.' Ralph Waldo Emerson
Alessandro Taverna, on piano, playing
'Tarentelle di bravura' after La Mette de Portici
by Franz Liszt - Ottawa Chamberfest '07

Sitting in the loft overlooking the stage at Dominion Chalmers United Church during Ottawa's Chamber Orchestra festival, I experienced a virtuoso piano performance so overwhelming in its intricacy, precision, and passion, I could scarcely breathe. I was not alone. An audible rush of released air seemed to power each person in the audience, rising as one in thunderous applause. That performance was the culmination of a cultural heritage of musical development, focused direction by supportive parents and skilled mentors, many years of dedicated study and a lifetime of daily practice. But it was the passion, the inner fire, expressing itself through the man that was palpable. He was one with the piano – a handcrafted instrument; the expression of another's passion. I was struck by the realization that the two had been made for each other. This morning I was present to the creation of a work of great art.

We are all specially suited to some thing in this life. There is a natural affinity of the creative spirit within each one of us that attracts us to some activity, relationship, place, or tool. In the focused application of our unique passion we are each capable of such perfection. The spirit, the body and the opportunity to create beauty are always available. Sitting in that church pew I was aware of the importance of the environment, of which the audience was a vital part, to the creative act. The performance required a stage. Not only were the acoustics in that church superbly suited to the performance, there was also an attentive and receptive audience to hear it.

We are all uniquely prepared to appreciate beauty in its many forms. We only need to be fully present for the performance to become transcendent. Such as: the orchestrated movements of an experienced

cook in her kitchen and the spontaneous interplay of conversation among friends. A child's triumphant solo conquest of his new bicycle and the choreography of carpenters erecting walls. The poetry of laundry swaying on the breeze and spring flowers pushing resolutely through the barely thawed earth. The engaged compassion of a concerned caregiver and the peaceful greeting of a freshly cleaned room. A dog's exuberantly wagging tail and the focused concentration of a skilled technician. An infant's spontaneous expression of frustration and pleasure and the transformation achieved by earth movers on a road-building site.

This world and all its opportunities belong to each of us as a vital part of it. In serving our own unique genius, we are capable of appreciating life as a work of art. When we allow ourselves to be fully present to the passion that fires ourselves, we must recognize that same passion in others. Like love, there is no shortage of it. We simply need to open ourselves to it, and when it engulfs us with its presence, stand and applaud until our arms fall off!

Sweating with my Daughter Johnson

Trish

My daughter and I experienced our first sweat lodge ceremony with the Pine Gate Sangha on July 28, 2007. The day began at home by drawing Angel cards that said 'birth' and 'awakening'. We excitedly took these as signs of the day ahead that we were about to participate in. We packed up water and food for the feast afterwards with open hearts and minds and more than a bit of curiosity about what we were going to experience and headed off to the lodge with Roy Barnes, a Lakota Sioux trained lodge keeper. We had no preconceived notions as to what to expect, or what this day might mean for us by its end.

In the first round, with Ian's prayer of intent focused on our awakening and connecting with Mother Earth, we began to understand what we were in for. As expected, it was hot, much, much

hotter than a sauna, and very dark. The heartfelt songs and prayers were immediately captivating and intense. In the prayers rounds, or “doors” that followed, we were infused with the heat from water on the rocks, the scent of cedar and other medicinal offerings and the power of the prayers, first by the woman and then the men. We were gifted with a sense of rebirth of ourselves and heightened awareness of our connection to Mother Earth.

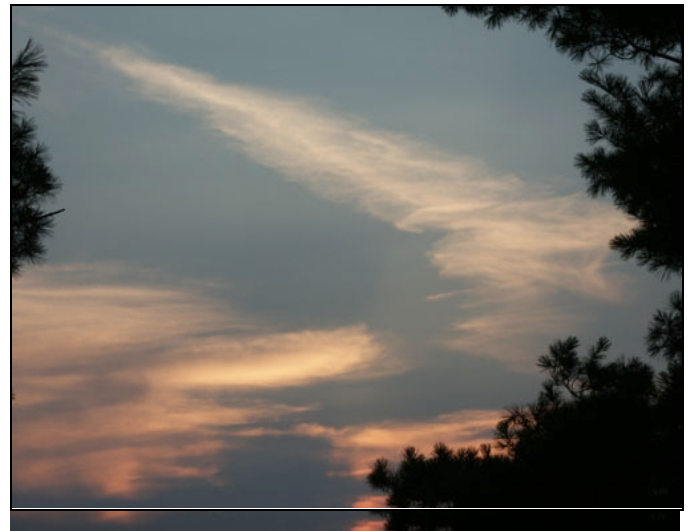
When we finally exited after 4 doors, red faced, soaked and some slightly muddy, I think we all had the sense that our prayers had been heard. While I have prayed for my daughter all of her life, I felt my prayers on this day for health, happiness and peace for the children of the world were sent into the ear of the Universe and the Creator had heard me. The sensation was unlike anything I had even remotely experienced before. I felt I had been absorbed in the womb of Mother Earth and had communication with Her on a level that I had not engaged in before, fulfilling, but not something easily put into words.

Later that nite, after the sweat & feast back at home in the bathtub, I heard the voice of my 12 year old daughter wafting in from her room. She was singing, “Jesus take the Wheel” in a wonderful, melodic, confident voice that came floating through the walls to serenade me. She talked with me about her sense of rebirth and noted she too, felt unexplainably renewed. I ask if she would like to do a sweat every year, she replied, with great enthusiasm “Every three months, it was so awesome!”

After blissful sleep, in the streaming sunlight of the following morning, I awaken with a heightened sense of well being as the experience is still sinking in. I feel the health, happiness and clarity of mind that Roy had spoken of in the circle talk while the fire did it’s work to heat the grandmother and grandfather stones. What I know for sure is that while it was our first sweat, it will not be our last!

Namaste

*I HONOR THE
PLACE WITHIN YOU WHERE
THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE
RESIDES.
I HONOR THE
PLACE WITHIN YOU OF
LOVE, LIGHT & PEACE
AND TRUTH.
I HONOR THE PLACE
WITHIN YOU WHERE,
WHEN YOU ARE IN THAT PLACE IN YOU
AND I AM IN THAT
PLACE IN ME,
THERE IS ONLY
ONE OF US.*



Sky Feather

The Window to the Sky Osho

The Master is only a window

The Master simply opens into God, just as the window opens into the sky. What you see in the Master is not the Master himself – he is no more. What you see through the window is not the window; it is the sky, the stars, the sunrise, a bird on the wing, the flowers. Whatsoever you see through the window has nothing to do with the window; the window is only an opening.

The Master is only a way

If one can surrender, if one can trust the master, one has surrendered to God, one has trusted God. And sooner or later, one is bound to come out under the sky. One will remain grateful to the Master forever because without the window there was no sky, there were only walls. But one has to go through the Master and go beyond. One should not cling to the window; the window frame should not become a hindrance.

Hence the perfect Master is one who helps you surrender through him to God, not to him. Of course, in the beginning it appears as if you are surrendering to the window because you don't have any other acquaintance with the sky; you may even start worshipping the frame of the window. This is what happened again and again in the history of human consciousness. Buddha is a window, so is Mahavira, so is Christ, so is Mohammed. But then you forget about the sky. You close your eyes and start worshipping the window. You have missed the point.

I am not to be worshipped

The real Master's work is to become gradually useless for the disciple. Buddha says: If you meet me on the way, kill me immediately. The Master would not like to stand between you and the divine, and if the Master wants to stand between you and the divine, he is not a Master at all. If he teaches you clinging, then he is teaching you the world; if he teaches you un-clinging then he teaches you God.

The Not Poem – tribute to Rumi Peter Abbs

Smash the wineglass and return to the glassblower's breath.

Not Christian. Not Muslim.
Not Buddhist. Not Zen.

I am not from the East
nor from the West.

Not out of the sea
nor up from the ground.

Not natural. Not super-natural.
Not descended from Adam

nor Eve.
Not the *Bible*.

Not the *Koran*.
Not the *Vedas*.

Not *Das Kapital*.
Nor *The origin of Species*.

Neither body nor soul.
I am not I.

I am my beloved
and –

The breath between us.

For All Of Us Bob Allen

Bob is the facilitator, with his wife, Pam of the Fish Lake sangha in Orlando, Florida. The poem was his aspiration for the Tiep Hien.

I must know the fear of my neighbors
Most of whom have never been to another country
Who have seen and felt the unthinkable
Who have no model to rely on anymore
Who have been trained from birth that
This can't happen
But it is happening

I must know the frustration and the anguish
Of parents without enough to feed their kids
Who see how we who are materially wealthy live

Who are told that we steal the bread from their
mouths

Who, weary from ceaseless care
Turn to any voice that promises relief
And engage their anger and their hurt
Without benefit of any training

I must know the loneliness of a small, separate self
Who, confronted with the manifestation of fear
Confronted with the manifestation of worry
Confronted with the manifestation of doubt
Chooses to join others for comfort
In the seeming safety of dogma
National, Religious, Water-Cooler, Bar

I must know the fierce belief of the peace-activist
Overcome by the urgency of immediate suffering
Seeking a dramatic, and immediate way
Seeking the leverage point to tumble down
The houses of power
Who only appear to be the cause of war
Seeking to convert everyone
To such an obvious choice

I must know the heart of the military commander
In whose care the trusting lives
Of young men and women
Are put with ultimate faith
Believing that they can bring
A just peace
Not hating
Supported by the rigid binding of duty and honor

I must know the heart of the weapon-maker
Believing that the efficient means of destruction
Offered to the soldiers
saves lives
Saves even "the enemy" from
A broader, more indiscriminate
Kind of suffering

I must know the heart of the person of conscience
Feeling with compassionate wisdom that
War-making is the ultimate in unskillful means

Destruction of rainforest to raise hamburger is the
ultimate in unskillful means
Paving the wetlands for more houses is the ultimate
in unskillful means
Factory farming of meat-animals is the ultimate in
unskillful means

I must know that the same person of conscience is
likely someone
Who needs their military contract work to feed his
kids
Who needs her job at McDonalds to support herself
Who needs to use his skills as a carpenter to earn a
living
Who needs to work in the selling of that same meat
To put food on the table of her children
Is no less compassionate for it
But cannot risk speaking or acting out loud
Because of fear

I must know the anguish of a president, a prime-
minister, a king
Who is chained by perceptions, feelings, mental
formations
Who is not inherently cruel
Who has the same Buddha nature as all beings
Who is in a box
And must face the vacuous loneliness of leadership
With no unselfish help
Believing that there is no forgiveness possible
And no such thing as a Sangha

To practice effectively
I must practice diligently
I must learn first to stop
And only then to look
I must learn to ask "Are you Sure?"
Only answered, to take any action

To practice effectively
"The Middle Way"
Cannot be a story about the Buddha
It must be the determined effort
Of every breath
Really.

Celebration Svein Myreng

Svein Myreng passed away earlier this year. This poem, written in 1993, is a fitting tribute from a gentle and kind dharma teacher.

*I want to celebrate chaos.
I want to celebrate old worn-out cars,
Broken tiles, ever-shifting
Schedules, misplaced letters,
And nettles next to flowerbeds;
To celebrate toilets out of order,
As well as friends who will remind me
That mistakes are good, failure a success,
And that a pure heart may prevail
In the non-end.
I want to celebrate being left alone,
or assailed by talkers,
(or, disturbing others' quiet).
I want to celebrate gentle smiles,
Good intentions, and, especially,
One step after the other.
"If arrow number 100 hits the target,
how can you say the first 99 were failures?"*



Photo by Barbara White
(<http://www.thenatureofottawa.com>)

Dharma in a Nutshell

Do not commit negative actions
Perform abundant acts of virtue
Completely tame the mind.
These are the Buddhist teachings.

Buddha Shakyamuni

All formations are impermanent.
They are subject to birth and death.
But remove the notions of birth and death,
And this silence is called great joy.

This beautiful poem has only twenty six words, but
it sums up all of the Buddha's teachings.

Thich Nhat Hanh

The Great Prayers Thich Nhat Hanh

During the 2007 Vietnam tour, Thich Nhat Hanh created three Great Requiem ceremonies to Untie the Knots of Great Injustice. At Pine Gate a ceremony was created to coincide with one of the three day ceremonies. As one small hoop in the circle of life, we took part in creating the energy to Untie the Knots of Great Injustice. The Pine Gate ceremony began with the statement "Hatred and violence cannot put an end to hatred and violence – only love and compassion can." Sr. Te Nghiem's chant on the Discourse on Love was played; the sangha then did the Four Brahmaviharas meditation together with focus on transforming the energy that causes hatred and violence. Friends gathered for this occasion truly felt a great whoosh of energy going out from Pine Gate at that point. Then walking meditation to let it all sink in. Three bells were invited as sangha members took it in turns to read a paragraph from the Great Prayers with a bell between each passage read. The dharma discussion afterwards was deep and lovely. A deep bow of gratitude to Thay:

"The war has left many wounds within each person, and there has been no chance to reconcile the warring parties. This is a collective of healing. If we don't transform the suffering and the wounds now, they will be transmitted to the next generation. It's better to do something right away to transform the suffering and the injustice that we have experienced."

Dear Ones who have passed from this life:

You are our fathers and mothers; our aunts and uncles; our husbands and wives; our sisters and brothers; our sons and daughters, who have died during the war. When our country was on fire with all the fighting, you left us tragically, suddenly, forced to abandon your precious body. We have lost

you, dear ones. We know that you fought courageously for our nation without regret for your precious body and we are proud of you. But you lost your body in a very tragic situation, and the injustice could never be expressed. You died deep in a distant jungle or were lost at sea or in a dark prison cell. You may have died because of bullets or bombs, or from starvation or sheer exhaustion. You may have been raped and then killed with no way to resist. How many of you have died in despair, in injustice, the remains of your body lost somewhere in the ocean or the jungle where we who love you could not get hold of them. To fight for our independence and freedom, our country has had to bear great tragedy and injustice, and it is you who have shouldered the burden of the whole nation in your death.

We your relatives, your fellow countrymen and countrywomen, we come here---some of us are before our own altars at home---and among us there are those who still continue to suffer from injustice. Fortunately the nightmare has ended, the country is now at peace, and we are having the chance to rebuild the country, to heal the remaining wounds. Thanks to the merits and good deeds of our ancestors we have a chance to come together and offer prayers together to the Three Gems. With the support of the powerful Dharma, we request you to come back ALL TOGETHER to reunite with each other, embracing each other, loving each other like sisters and brothers in one family. WE will not distinguish between North or South, women or men, adults or children, by race, religion, party or ideology. We are all fellow countrywomen and countrymen, but because of the past bad fortune, we have been pushed to fight each other in our drive for independence, for freedom. Thanks to the merits of our ancestors we can now come back to each other, recognizing each other as siblings of a single family, to promise each other that we will not forget this painful lesson of the past now engraved on our hearts:

We vow that from now on we will not let the

country be separated again, not even one more time. From now on, when there are internal difficulties, we will not request the help of any foreign power to intervene with weapons and troops in our country. From now on, we will not start a war for any ideology. From now on, we will not use foreign weapons to kill each other. From now on we will use our best efforts to build a society with real democracy, to be able to resolve all kinds of disagreements by peaceful democratic methods and we will not resort to violence against fellow countrymen and countrywomen.

Respected Blood Ancestors, Respected Spiritual Ancestors, please bear witness to our profound sincerity. We respectfully make these deep vows before you. And we know that once we have sincerely expressed ourselves in this way, all the knots of injustice can be untied, and the deep wounds in each of us will start to be healed.

Today this Great Chanting Ceremony to untie ALL INJUSTICES EQUALLY without any discrimination starts here; but at the same time, countless Vietnamese and friends of Vietnamese throughout the world are setting altars in front of their houses too, to pray for you all. We touch the earth deeply to request the grace of the Three Jewels to carry to the other shore of liberation ALL OF YOU dear deceased ones, so that, dear ones, you can be carried by the strength of the Dharma to be able to understand, to transform, to transcend and to know you are free.

We your descendants, we promise to continue your aspiration. WE vow to carry you in our hearts, to build brotherhood and sisterhood and mutual love of fellow countrymen and countrywomen. We will remember that pumpkin vines and squash vines can share a single frame, that chickens from a same mother will never fight each other. This insight from our Ancestors will shine out its light for us now, and forever.



Photo by Renee Rojas <http://wyldrr.com>

Film Review Ashley Poole

An Inconvenient Truth

I have been convinced of the truth of global warming from the first time I became aware of the issue and saw the evidence several years ago. My understanding of global warming was greatly increased after watching the film “An Inconvenient Truth”. It solidified my firm stance to help our environment and to the severity of the threat we are facing and suffering from by global warming. Al Gore presents the argument in a convincing, powerful power-point presentation to a live audience. He covers the subject from all possible angles and addresses the counter-points, shows how they fall short and deconstructs them with vigour and in totality. He then shows what we can do to help bring us back from the point of no return but he warns and admonishes us that we are quickly running out of time.

This is a must see documentary whether you currently agree or disagree with global warming. If you see one documentary in your life or this year then make this one it. It may not be the most entertaining, but it is perhaps the most important movie to see in the current history of film. You will come away with a very solid understanding of the current threats facing our fragile and beautiful environment. Then after seeing this film, urge all of your friends and family member to see it. Even if

you still do not agree with global warming after watching this film I beg of you that we should take action. if for no other reason then it is better to be safe then sorry. After all, we only have one planet and we must take precautions and measures to help Mother Earth survive and support human life for generations to come. Do it for your children and grandchildren.

Gore's forecast is serious, but he knows better than to leave us in despair. There is room for hope. He insists that the solutions to the problem are within reach; we are only lacking the political will to do anything about what he calls a "moral imperative." Indeed: anybody who takes a long-term interest in the state of the planet--say, more than next hurricane season--would do well to see "An Inconvenient Truth". It would be a welcome surprise if this well-crafted and well-argued film actually started a national debate about the very real threat of global warming.

Do Not Despair Ann Fleming

Ruminations on a Day of Mindfulness at Pine Gate Meditation Hall, particularly the wisdom of one statement by Thay in the video of "My Life Is My Message."

The Muse:

‘ I do not offer myself as a Buddhist. I offer myself as a human *being*.’

‘ You could not experience the beautiful morning, because you were all here (*at the retreat*), so you will have to see it in me.’

Despair begins as a thought that walls off the present moment and its inherent possibilities. Despair's physical manifestations are disease, violence and death.

We are a necessary part of the ecology that supports all life. That ecology needs our life-presence and

life-focus as much as we need it. But we are continually waylaid by exploits of the past, hopes for the future, fears that the life we so dearly love will be extinguished and problems that need to be solved. We react to each of these conversational conclusions by thinking. We allow our brains to undertake tasks that they are ill-equipped to manage. We ignore the wisdom of the inter-connected nature of life, of which our brains are only a part. We allow that part to create an obstacle and an outcome. There are, in reality, no such things. There is nothing to be achieved, honored, despised or destroyed.

Thich Nhat Hanh softly admonishes us to ‘*not despair*’, to not lose faith that the on-going conversation of life that created us continues to contain the vital nutrients for our awakening. Awakening does not require peace in the world, pure water, clean air, a perfect body or a formal plan. These are simply thoughts that can disrupt the conversation. Awakening requires only a ‘no outcome’ offering of our unique focus to the endlessly creative process of living.

Teaching Ethics to Students Rebecca Taft

Following one of Ian's dharma talks, I was inspired by the sangha discussion surrounding the lack of ethical guidelines taught to young people today. This is a topic that I have been very interested in researching, as well as a subject of discourse in a paper concerning flaws in traditional public school systems. Reflecting on the issues mentioned that night with the sangha, I was surprised that I had not considered ethics when I was brainstorming issues to examine in my assignment. I had never considered how the lack of ethical training in schools could be detrimental to the futures of younger generations. I feel lucky to have been exposed to the mindfulness trainings, and I think that these teachings could have a profound impact

on the futures of younger generations if ethics are given the same credence as science or gym.

It is evident that the concept of ethics is not being instilled to young minds. It is every parent's responsibility to teach their child to abide by a code of ethics, but it is also important that teachers and peers become cornerstones of this practice, and reinforce positive behaviour. There should be systems in place to ensure that every child knows what ethics are, and why they are so important. Just as school children sing the national anthem, or recite the pledge of allegiance before their first class, they should also recite a code of ethics each day. Unfortunately, as Ian mentioned, neither parents nor teachers are currently teaching direct ethical guidelines. Many people are under the impression that the only consequence of committing a crime is getting caught.

I cannot remember learning a code of ethics beyond the Ten Commandments that were taught to me in Sunday school, and I am reasonably sure that many friends who are my age do not fully grasp the implications of their unethical behaviour. In our society, people seem to defend unethical behaviour because they believe that their actions make no difference on a grander scale. For example, I was speaking with two friends recently about issues of violence towards animals, one friend was a vegetarian and he was explaining how he could not ethically support an industry that treats animals as commodities. I was very shocked by the response of my other friend when he said that he was not even going to consider changing his habits because it would not make a difference, animals would be killed no matter what actions he chose to take. It was interesting to observe how easy it was for my friend to justify unethical acts so quickly and adamantly.

Before joining Pine Gate sangha, I did not think that I would have given this subject so much consideration. I feel as though I have learned a great

deal from the Buddhist teachings, especially from an ethical perspective. Without the guidance of the mindfulness trainings I do not think that I would have the strength to stand up for issues that are important. I used to think the same way that my friend did; I was convinced that my actions were ultimately inconsequential, but I am determined not use that as an excuse for my actions anymore. I always considered ethics to be an innate aspect in making decisions, but if people are never taught ethics then their decisions to act are weighted differently in favour of doing wrong. There are ways of changing people's habits, and the best way to do this is to teach them ethics from a young age.

The Great Undoing

Tricia Diduch

Anyone who has ever tried to unlearn a habit knows how difficult it is to do. Sometimes I think living our lives backwards would be marvelous. We'd be returning to our pristine state, where only possibilities exist – everything wide open for the taking.

Although it's not a glamorous task, that's kind of what picking up litter is like. When the Sangha put out the call to participate in the Ottawa River Clean-Up, I hastened to respond. Only a few weeks before, I had participated in a similar activity, helping to clean up the landscape surrounding the Rideau River. While it sometimes irritated me to realize how irresponsible we can sometimes be about taking care of our environment, I also enjoyed just being outside on a beautiful day and doing what I could to give a tiny gift back to our Earth Mother.

Mother's, including the Earth, teach us a lot of things. Perhaps the most important is to clean up after ourselves. Do you remember how good it felt to come back from holidays to find your place just as you had left it? Everything was in its place, just where it should be, undisturbed. It instilled you with

the comfort of coming back to what you know, to what is familiar. Well, that's perhaps how the earth feels when we bother to put our wrappers, pop cans, and various waste materials in the garbage, or make the effort to purchase items that aren't over-packaged. Can you imagine what it would be like if we'd all be able to keep Mother Earth exactly as she was when we entered this world?

While it may be difficult to conceive of, I believe that's what we're called to do. After learning how to consume, making it the rule we live our lives by in a capitalist society, maybe we need to unlearn it and value leaving earth exactly as we came into it. And that will take a monumental shift in values. But that's all it will take – a shift in perspective. Economies function by putting a value on needs and wants – and it's all completely arbitrary. Except, of course, that's it's based on supply and demand. If all of a sudden, Ms./Mr. Consumer wants a clean environment, reflecting a change in values, then we can simply channel our resources there. And as we begin to once again value our rivers and streams as much as we've embraced our desire to keep up with the Joneses, protecting and caring for the earth, then we'll be the millionaires of tomorrow. In fact, if we consider it more closely, we'll realize we're already rich with the wealth earth offers us everyday.

In a world valuing the earth, the water and the air, we'd also by extension be more connected with our fellow human beings. Nature is, after all, what connects us all. It's the food we eat, the stuff our bodies are made of, the land we live, love, work and play on. We'd take care of each other as much as the Earth, recognizing our common source and living in harmony with all sentient beings.

So here's to the great undoing! All we have to do is undo all we've done. And, I don't know about you, but sometimes, I believe just doing what I want to do -- being outside, honoring the sun, the sky, the earth, the wind and the rain – responding to my own natural instinct and nurturing myself is the first step towards the undoing and towards healing the planet.

So celebrate life and all the beauty of our earth. Dance, sing, drum, feel and let the spirit move you to a higher ground where we can all surrender to the great undoing.



Leaf Floating

Global Warming: Nuclear Option Ian Prattis

We must think seven generations into the future about the consequences of every industrial production process – a lesson from Native American wisdom. A massive global citizen response will certainly elicit an equally massive government and corporate response, as the bottom-up movement and top-down strategies for drastic change meet and integrate. There is not room in this Global Ecological Emergency for separating into “US” and “THEM” categories. We are totally interconnected whether we realize it or not. We will all live together or we will all die together. An intelligent and all encompassing green ideology embedded in everything we produce and market is a means to bridge competing agendas. Our dependence on fossil fuels reduces because we have become aware of the deadly consequences, for ourselves, of our addiction to oil and coal. The

transition to a reasonably emissions-free global energy system over the next few decades will be costly and require a massive response from government and corporate leaders to initiate the second industrial revolution. This is necessary to blunt the impact of climate change and is a huge global industrial project that governments and corporations can bring about due to citizen pressure to “Make It So!” There is hope as “Eco-Tech” is the next big global industrial thing. The public are aware of this, as the consequences of global warming have certainly gone Main Street. It just has to extend to Wall Street, the White House and the World Trade Organization.

Immediately, we must abandon carbon dioxide producing fuel systems, develop alternative power sources and at the same time examine Lovelock’s controversial contention that at present the nuclear option is necessary for the short term (Revenge of Gaia: 2006). Lovelock argues that nuclear “phobia” is not well founded, particularly as in the immediate future new “pebble bed” reactors are being built that use graphite instead of water to control reactions and are thus much safer. In the foreseeable future, nuclear fusion power will be available – considered to be an absolutely safe energy source. Lovelock states his case in terms of the immediate crisis of global warming and maintains that nuclear energy is a central piece of the energy sources portfolio – for now. Although “for now” implies “not for the future”, I do not favour Lovelock’s view. For him it is a question of time, as he feels that there is simply insufficient time to bring the alternative energy sources to the point where they can meet present human energy needs. There is conflicting evidence around this point.

George Monbiot in his passionate book “Heat” closely examines the potential of alternative energy sources in the UK and comes up short. Yet his radical proposal for an “energy internet” has much promise, as it rests on the premise of localising self-sufficient power sources – the microgrid notion

promoted by Greenpeace. Such a proposal depends on a radical restructuring of transportation and trade systems. The change in consciousness that would drive the political will to institute such steps has to be created and fostered – and rests on the “Failsafe” notion – see www.ianprattis.com/failsafe.htm

I propose two realistic considerations for our reflections at this time. First of all human energy needs must be drastically curtailed through collective action in the direction of Voluntary Simplicity. Secondly, if the transition to efficient alternative energy sources is too slow, then it is essential to speed them up with massive investment in solar, wind and tidal power. And combine this with an equally massive conservation ethic that is mandatory in terms of regulating energy efficiency and the selective harvesting of renewable energy. Lovelock’s pragmatic option that nuclear power is required at the moment, as it interferes the least with Gaia’s capacity to sustain a habitable ecosystem, overlooks the fact that greenhouse gas emissions are created by uranium mining, industrial processing and the construction of nuclear power plants. My reservations about Lovelock’s option have to do with nuclear waste and how it can be safely disposed of without a later planetary destruction. There is, in my mind, a correlation between nuclear power and its direct association with weapons of mass destruction. There is also a moral issue of responsibility to the future health of the earth system and all species upon it. Lovelock’s pragmatic solution relies on a rationalized logic rather than ethics – and amounts to a Faustian bargain that entertains earth destruction. The Earth has sustained our species but as we are presently at war with Gaia it cannot continue to sustain us. This is a very simple insight. Also a deadly one as it condemns the neglect brought about by the current paradigms that regulate our relationship to the Earth and to one another.

| PINE GATE FALL STUDY SESSION 2007 | |
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| SATURDAY SEPT 1 5.00pm – 7.30pm | Dharma Talk by Dharmacharya Ian Prattis Potluck Vegetarian Supper |
| Thursday Sept 6 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Five Mindfulness Trainings Recitation |
| Thursday Sept 13 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Foundation Teachings Dharmacharya Ian Prattis |
| Thursday Sept 20 7.00pm – 9.00pm | 2007 New Year Dharma Talk: Part I Thich Nhat Hanh CD |
| Thursday Sept 27 7.00pm – 9.00pm | 2007 New Year Dharma Talk: Part II Thich Nhat Hanh CD |
| Thursday Oct 4 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Walking Meditation DVD & Meditations |
| SATURDAY OCT 6 10.00am – 1.00pm | Fall Hike in Gatineau Park |
| Thursday Oct 11 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Flow With the Sangha: Part I Thich Nhat Hanh CD |
| SATURDAY OCT 13 10.00AM – 4.00PM | PEACE PRAYER DAY OTTAWA CITY HALL |
| Thursday Oct 18 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Flow with the Sangha: Part II Thich Nhat Hanh CD |
| Thursday Oct 25 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Reprogramming Store Consciousness: Part I Thich Nhat Hanh DVD, Scientists's Retreat 2006 |
| Thursday Nov 1 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Reprogramming Store Consciousness: Part II Thich Nhat Hanh DVD, Scientists's Retreat 2006 |
| SATURDAY NOV 3 10.00AM – 1.00PM | Day of Mindfulness |
| Thursday Nov 8 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Consciousness - Subject & Object: Part I Thich Nhat Hanh DVD, Scientist's Retreat 2006 |
| Thursday Nov 15 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Consciousness - Subject & Object: Part II Thich Nhat Hanh DVD, Scientist's Retreat 2006 |
| Thursday Nov 22 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Manifestations of Body & Mind: Part I Thich Nhat Hanh DVD, Scientist's Retreat 2006 |
| Thursday Nov 29 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Manifestations of Body & Mind: Part II Thich Nhat Hanh DVD, Scientist's Retreat 2006 |
| SATURDAY DEC 1 5.00PM – 9.00PM | Pine Gate Christmas Party |
| Thursday Dec 6 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Scientist as a Practitioner: Part I Thich Nhat Hanh DVD, Scientist's Retreat 2006 |
| Thursday Dec 13 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Scientist as a Practitioner: Part II Thich Nhat Hanh DVD, Scientist's Retreat 2006 |
| Thursday Dec 20 7.00pm – 9.00pm | Chanting with Carolyn |
| MONDAY DEC 31 9.00PM – MIDNIGHT | 14 MINDFULNESS TRAININGS RECITATION CEREMONY Pot luck snacks and whooshing into the fire! |
