



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.

The Two Per Cent Option **Ian Prattis**

Many years ago in India I had an audience with Sai Baba. I was visiting this sage's ashram in Andhra Pradesh with an Indian friend. As he slowly walked through the morning gathering, to my utter surprise Sai Baba stopped in front of me. He spoke to me for quite a while. Somehow he knew of my commitment to environmental concerns. I remember very little of what was said - except for one sentence that blazed into my mind and stayed there. Sai Baba said to me that a transformation in human consciousness required 2% of the population to meditate on a daily basis. I have no clue about the knowledge source for his pronouncement, but I do remember the "buzz" of energy in my mind and body when I heard it. I translated this wisdom into a 2% option. If only I, and others, could encourage 2% of the people we knew to change their lifestyles to one of voluntary simplicity then the environmental crisis could be averted. If everybody did so, then the planet would indeed be safe. This would involve conserving energy usage, being aware of the knock-on effects of consumerism and doing one eco-friendly action every day. This may seem rather naïve but to me the 2% option was readily do-able, within the grasp of everyone. The end result of a transformed consciousness would lead to different questions being asked and different solutions found. There would be a new mind-set to

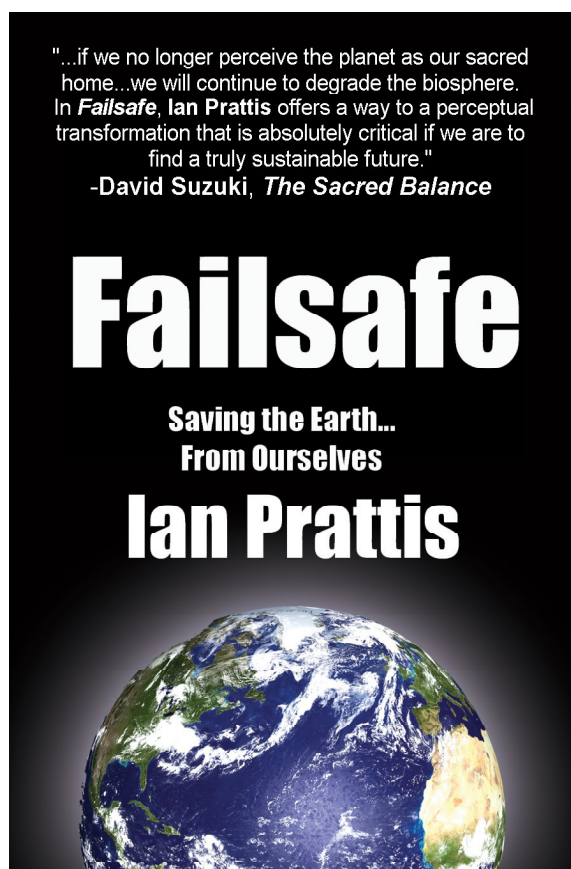
make the necessary decisions for change. This one statement from Sai Baba changed my thoughts about awakening. Not everyone has to “wake” up – just 2%. This spearhead would provide the strategic tipping point, for immediate change in planetary care.

But later on, other considerations rushed in. The crushing prognosis of climate change specialists is that we are still contributing to an environmental crisis that renders our location on the earth a precarious option. So why is something so obvious to my mind simply not happening? The New Age book “The Secret” hooked many people into the notion that intentions creating action would lead to a momentum for change. But the actions encouraged by “The Secret” fuelled the existing paradigm that was hurtling the planet into the abyss of instant decline. The intentions held by people had to do with getting more “stuff” – big houses, consumer goods, more money and easy jobs. The essential task of changing consciousness was bypassed. “The Secret” suckered them into contributing further to the mindless consumerism and attitudes that create environmental degradation. Only minor ripples were appearing on the surface, unable to combat the ruthlessness of the rich and powerful corporate sector. The cabals of powerful finance capitalists and institutions are both invisible and firmly established. Yet, they are driving the collective vehicle of humanity off the cliff. Everyone more or less just goes along for the ride, filling up their pockets in the short term. Even if this corporate empire were to fall, history teaches us that the fall of empires leave a vacuum filled by even more repressive totalitarian regimes. Is awareness even an option in these circumstances? Is it too expensive a ticket for the mass of humanity to ride, as they strive to acquire what western style civilization creates? Is it best to stop at Lao-Tzu’s enlightened pessimism? Is it now impossible to create a critical mass for consciousness change? My response is a resounding “NO” to all of these important questions.

An excerpt from “Failsafe” published by Manor House Fall 2008.

Failsafe Book

“Failsafe” is a book that provides understanding of global eco-crises. It issues a call to change the existing world order by arriving at a deep spiritual understanding of what needs to be done. Step by step methods to transform our existing mindset are laid out to usher in a new era of planetary care, social justice and peace.



Published by Manor House, publisher of fine Canadian books.

Release date September 30, 2008

To order: www.failsafebook.com

OR Contact the author: iprattis@cyberus.ca if in the Ottawa area.

Creating Failsafe

Many of the ideas expressed in *Failsafe* were presented to students – both at the university and in the meditation hall. Their feedback, helpful suggestions and sometimes boredom prompted me to refine the basic ideas. I first talked about a Failsafe in Consciousness in my 2002 book *The Essential Spiral: Ecology and Consciousness After 9/11*, drawing on the post Enron crash where financial analysts actually talked about responsibility and ethics. I also drew on the writings of E.O. Wilson - that despite all that was happening around us there was still an unmistakable link with nature's systems in the human psyche.

So I endeavoured to improve on the ideas floated in 2002 and tried it out on my ecology class at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. I had the privilege of meeting two outstanding students – Eric Smith and Paul Schlissel. They took up the challenge of mapping my ideas into diagrams and re-arranged how I addressed the components of the emerging concepts. *Failsafe*, due to their promptings, became more than a set of ideas. It had substance and a design based on three interconnected components. These were Innate Earth Wisdom; Counter Culture; Tipping Points in Consciousness - all of which intertwined with consciousness transformation. Can we fix the planet? This is the wrong question. Our present values and patterns of consumption are the architects of the present global ecological emergency. The right question is can we transform ourselves? My point in addressing Climate Change and Global Warming was that they were not the problem. The real problem was the mind-set that created the ecological conditions for Global Warming to explode dramatically into the lives of every human being on earth. I needed a set of interconnecting variables to link into the really crucial aspect of changing human consciousness. I suppose it is an act of faith on my part, but I feel that once consciousness changes then different questions will be asked and different solutions found. Out of the transformation will emerge the

structures and institutions that can regulate global affairs without endangering all species – including our own.

Failsafe provides understanding of global eco-crises and issues a call to change the existing world order by arriving at a deep spiritual understanding of what needs to be done. Step by step methods to transform our existing mindset are laid out to usher in a new era of planetary care, social justice and peace. *Failsafe* is about hope and faith and the clear knowledge that we have the capacity to get things done. There is hope for future generations to occupy a healthy planet and faith in the human consciousness to change. There is faith that we beings can awaken to the miracle and beauty of all of life. *Failsafe* provides examples and guidance for transformation and change. *Failsafe* is a critical response to Lovelock's 2006 book "Revenge of Gaia" where he argues that the present self-regulating mechanisms of Gaia cannot be controlled by human agency. In the context of Global Warming and dire predictions for a habitable econiche for *homo sapiens* I present a Failsafe in Consciousness. I describe how consciousness expansion will be held in abeyance by wilful human ignorance until the global ecological situation deteriorates to a breaking point. This breaking point will then act as a catalyst, penetrating such ignorance and activating consciousness so it is propelled into expansion, deliberation and change.

I drew a lot on the new discipline of Neuroscience, the Wisdom of Aboriginal Elders and the teachings of the Buddha about changing the human mind. Taming the human mind was a major issue, because to change external circumstances with technological fixes still leaves a damaging mind-set intact. If our minds are not clear and at peace, we simply pass on our disturbance and selfishness to everything we create. In the final chapter – Taming The Wild Mind – I felt it necessary to include highly personal accounts to show that Taming the Wild Mind was not easy for me. My particular journey is not for everyone – yet some form of journey is absolutely necessary for all of us – one that takes us beyond

the superficial into the deep reality of our true nature. This is nothing other than old fashioned goodness, caring and wisdom coming out to play instead of the greed and negativity that stalks the mind of humanity.

I started to give talks to the most unlikely audiences about all of this stuff, and found to my surprise that most of the folks listening got the drift of where I was going. Their questions and requests for clarification enabled me to sculpt the Failsafe in Consciousness concept into a more understandable form. I want to reach every man and woman in the street, as the sheer necessity of a bottom up revolution in patterns of consumption and behaviour is necessary for the Failsafe notion to kick in. Failsafe is taken from engineering, where the term is used to describe a stop lever or valve that comes into action whenever the machinery is in danger of exploding or breaking down. As such, it is a useful metaphor for what is happening globally with Climate Change. I add to the Failsafe notion – particularly the idea of tipping points in consciousness. This is akin to the Hundredth Monkey syndrome, where once a critical mass is reached then behaviour changes across the board. In other words once a tipping point is reached there is a quantum leap of energy across the population. For humanity I set this threshold at 2% of the human population. If 2% can truly commit to changing their minds and altering their patterns in the direction of voluntary simplicity, planetary care and compassion – then this is the tip of the spear that lances through the problem of Climate Change. Let's face it – Climate Change is very dangerous to us continuing to inhabit the earth, and still we do all kinds of senseless things to not face this reality.

Failsafe is by no means finished. There will be bright minds who will take it further, find loopholes in it and re-fashion it. All this I gladly welcome. I look forward to the dialogue as it helps us move on. My hope is that you enjoy the book and share it with friends.

What They Are Saying About Failsafe

If we no longer perceive the planet as our sacred home, then we will continue to degrade the biosphere. In Failsafe, Ian Prattis offers a way to a perceptual transformation that is absolutely critical if we are to find a truly sustainable future. David Suzuki

It's brilliant, so thoroughly researched, eloquently written and, most of all, so needed. It's a wonderful book. Frightening to read while observing the band-aids and half measures being proposed in the US.
Peter Cutler

I am deeply impressed by this holistic treatise. His conclusions are encouraging, to see mother earth and ourselves with the healing hands of a Bodhisattva. A Lotus to him a Buddha to be! *Axel Traexler*

Ian's book respects and reflects on Aboriginal Prophecies about the Eighth Fire and care of the Earth Mother. He investigates the spiritual lack in the modern world and proposes sound means to guide the course of humanity. For this he draws on the Wisdom of the Elders. This is a book for our times. It has his experience of Taming the Wild Mind, serving the Earth and the cause of Peace.

Grandfather William Commanda, Algonquin Elder

In Failsafe, Ian Prattis once again clearly, passionately and sagely lays out the environmental crisis coursing through the earth, how it is directly linked to actions and inactions of humans, and more importantly, what we can do to set about

changing course. Drawing from an immense range of knowledge, concepts, and experiences, he gives us a route for dramatic and far-reaching change.
Professor Blair Rutherford

Earth Gathas

Thich Nhat Hanh

Gathas help us to practice mindfulness in our daily lives and to look deeply. Reciting these short verses will bring awareness, peace and joy to the simple activities we may take for granted, like eating a meal, washing our hands, or taking out the garbage. These gathas remind us that the Earth provides us with precious gifts every day.

TURNING ON THE WATER

*Water flows from high mountain sources.
 Water runs deep in the Earth.
 Miraculously, water comes to us
 And sustains all of life.*

Even if we know the source of our water, we often take its appearance for granted. But water is what makes all life on Earth possible. Our bodies are more than 70 per cent water. Our food can be grown and raised because of water. Water is a good friend, a bodhisattva, which nourishes the many thousands of species on Earth. Its benefits are infinite. Reciting this gatha before turning on the faucet or drinking a glass of water enables us to see the stream of fresh water in our own hearts so that we feel completely refreshed. To celebrate the gift of water is to cultivate awareness and help sustain our life and the lives of others.

LOOKING AT YOUR EMPTY BOWL

*My bowl, empty now,
 Will soon be filled with precious food
 Beings all over the Earth are struggling to live.
 How fortunate we are to have enough to eat.*

When many people on Earth look at an empty bowl, they know their bowl will continue to be empty for

a long time. So the empty bowl is as important to honor as the full bowl. We are grateful to have food to eat, and with this gatha, we can vow to find ways to help those who are hungry.

SERVING FOOD

*In this food
 I see clearly
 The entire universe
 Supporting my existence*

When we look at our plate, filled with fragrant and appetizing food, we should be aware of the bitter pain of people who suffer from hunger and malnutrition. Looking at our plate, we can see Mother Earth, the farm workers, and the tragedy of the unequal distribution of resources. We who live in North America and Europe are accustomed to eating foods imported from other countries, whether it is coffee from Colombia, chocolate from Ghana, or fragrant rice from Thailand. Many children in these countries, except those with rich families, never see the fine products that are put aside for export in order to bring in money. Before a meal, we can join our palms in mindfulness and think about those who do not have enough to eat. Slowly and mindfully, we breathe three times and recite this gatha. Doing so will help us maintain mindfulness. May we find ways to live more simply in order to have time and energy to change the system of injustice that exists in the world.

RECYCLING

*In the garbage, I see a rose.
 In the rose, I see the garbage.
 Everything is in transformation.
 Even permanence is impermanent.*

Whenever we throw something away, whether in the garbage can, the compost, or the recycling, it can smell terrible. Rotting organic matter smells especially terrible. But it can also become rich compost for fertilizing the garden. The fragrant rose and the stinking garbage are two sides of the same existence. Without one the other cannot be. Everything is in transformation. The rose that wilts

after six days will become part of the garbage. After six months the garbage is transformed into a rose. When we speak of impermanence, we understand that everything is in transformation. This becomes that, and that becomes this. Looking deeply, we can contemplate one thing and see everything else in it. We are not disturbed by change when we see the interconnectedness and continuity of all things. It is not that the life of any individual is permanent, but that life itself continues. When we identify ourselves with life and go beyond the boundaries of a separate identity, we shall be able to see permanence in the impermanent, or the rose in the garbage.

Excerpt from Thay's new book: The World We Have, Parallax, 2008

What Shines Through Death? Carolyn Hill

My deep practice of Buddhism really began when I realized that my dad was dying. While he suffered in hospital for ten long months before passing away, I began to study the teachings of no birth/no death, impermanence, continuation and interbeing. I practiced and practiced. I needed to look deeply into who my dad was, to understand his life. I also needed to look deeply into myself as his daughter. Through my practice I was able to forgive and to let go of the hurts. I was able to remember all the good things, the special moments and to express my love for him.

A traditional wake and funeral gave me deeper insight into my dad and a far greater appreciation of who he was. The stories shared by those who paid their respects made me realize how little I truly knew him. I knew my dad to be one who readily helped others - something he instilled in all of his children. But I didn't know him as a friend, a colleague or even a neighbour. The hundreds of people who paid their respects paid tribute to who he was. I was so happy to hear how he touched the hearts of others, to know how loved he was, and at the same time I was saddened to think that I had

only known a smaller part of him. Through his death, I touched his deeper essence. Through his death I truly understood the meaning of interbeing, the meaning of continuation.

The grief of death can bring out the best in loved ones and family left behind; it can also bring out the worst - but always (in my personal experience) it sheds new awareness, a brighter light on the true essence of the dearly departed.

Seven months ago my brother, who had just turned 55 years of age, passed away - much too young to die, but also having had the gift of 55 years. He suffered a heart attack on New Year's Day. He went too long without oxygen and passed away twelve days later. He never regained consciousness. His body lay in a hospital bed, snoring loudly - it made what was happening seem surreal - he was sleeping and should wake up. Something within me knew that my brother was not coming back. I prepared myself not only for his demise, but also to help my mom and my siblings. They were struggling with grief and with anger. They wanted answers they could not have. They wanted to make decisions they could not make. What we needed was to be united so we could support his wife and daughter in the decisions they had to make.

Initially, we believed he would recover and we prayed for him to wake up. When the decision was finally made to remove all life support our prayers changed - that he would go quickly. A twenty-four hour vigil was established for two at a time to take turns staying with him. We read to him, prayed for him, laughed at stories, laughed at his snoring. But most of all we recounted his life, remembering stories from as far back as we could, talking to him as if he could hear us. Was there any consciousness or awareness? Perhaps not, but I take comfort in believing that his store consciousness would receive the memories and the love that was being expressed.

After his death I was asked to deliver the eulogy. My mom, brothers and sisters gathered together. We all knew different aspects of my brother, based upon our specific relationship with him, and we all had different stories, different perspectives of who he was. I took the bits and pieces and wove them together to create the eulogy. What emerged was the greatness of my brother, his love for his family, his charity work, his work in his community. He spent years coaching youngsters in various sports. He was considerate, generous and kind - always willing to help another - a direct continuation of our father. Over 500 people attended his memorial service - a testament of who he was. I learned so much more about him through stories shared by friends, neighbours and colleagues. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to see him through the eyes of others, to somehow get closer to him. But most of all, I realized that he was a bodhisattva in his own way - his true essence was revealed in his death - the consequences of his actions were worthy.

And before my brother, there was the surprise presented during the funeral of one of my neighbours. Glen died three months after being diagnosed with cancer. He was a long time resident on the street, his children having grown up in the neighbourhood. He was a good man. Always chatting with neighbours and helping others on the street. I knew that he loved to ski. I knew he was a jovial fellow. During his eulogy it was revealed that when he was off on a ski trip with his fellow buddies, they would find him in the snow at night before retiring to bed making snow angels! His wife and daughters revealed Glen from the perspective of a family man. His friends and colleagues revealed different aspects of Glen from their knowing and loving him. What touched me very deeply was listening to a friend of Glen's tell about how they got together once a week to read scriptures from the bible, and what was surprising to his family was a poem he kept within his bible - one of interconnectedness:

Do not stand at my grave and weep

I am not there; I do not sleep
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's
hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.

Death is the continuation of one's journey. Death reveals all aspects of the dearly departed - which brings such comfort to those who grieve.

Through the death of loved ones, I have found a deeper understanding life and love. Through death I became aware of the purpose of their lives - the consequences of their actions. One doesn't have to make momentous contributions to society to make a difference - it is the everyday acts of kindness, generosity, compassion and love generated through the ordinary lives of ordinary people that makes such a difference.

We live cautious lives, afraid to impose on one's privacy, afraid to be politically incorrect, afraid of being rejected, afraid to touch our deep feelings, afraid of revealing who we truly are, even to ourselves. Death is about living and I vow to live more fully, to open my heart as much as I can so I can love more deeply. In so doing I will unravel the layers that prevent my true essence from shining forth. In so doing my life's purpose will have new meaning.

Death & Dying in the West

Ian Prattis

In my family and culture there is very little discussion or clarity about death and dying, though as a child I did have an intuitive understanding. I remember that when my grandfather died I felt him as a tangible presence even when he was in his

coffin. I quietly whispered to this gracious, gentle being: "Go to Heaven now grandpa." I also remember at his wake how upset I became by my relatives drinking, arguing and being disrespectful to one another. In tears I sought out my grandmother and complained that everyone was making it hard for my grandpa to go to Heaven. She wiped my tears away and listened carefully to me before walking into the living room of her house and with quiet authority asked everyone to be quiet and to go home. It was much later in life, once I was exposed to Buddhist teachings on death and dying, that I realized I was not such a crazy kid after all, that I had cared for my grandfather's consciousness after his physical death. From that turning point I knew clearly for myself that preparation for death was also training for life, though I did not always pay attention to this insight.

The opportunity for liberation at the time of death was an intriguing notion and I could see that my obstacles of ego and habit energies were in the way of a sound preparation. I did want to be able to merge my consciousness with the awakened mind of the Buddha at the time of death, or if I got confused or fearful be able to receive guidance to do so. From my understanding of the *bardos* I felt that if my death was indeed an aware one, then in the *bardo* of "becoming" my consciousness would take a form that would serve all sentient beings. This refocusing and retraining of my mind was done fitfully, not in a consistent manner, until just before I left for India. There the preparation became a daily practice of being mindful and aware of universal consciousness totally prepared to merge with my pitifully weak and not-so-awakened mind. My leap of faith was that these understandings about death and dying were all in the mind. This meant that in everyday living I could use my mind to take the steps to prepare for that final moment of merging with the wisdom mind of the Buddha and just perhaps be able to do this while I was alive. Perhaps the "alive" bit is the whole point! The teachings about death and dying provided tremendous hope and inspiration for me to both live and die in everyday mindfulness.

Buddha's Last Words

Ananda notices that the Buddha is growing old and the question arises – to what refuge should the Buddha's followers turn after his death? The same reply is there for the question that arises as Thay now grows old and will soon experience death.

"Therefore, Ananda, be islands unto your selves, refuges unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge; with the Dharma as your island, the Dharma as your refuge, seeking no other refuge. And how Ananda is a bhikku to do this?"

"When he dwells contemplating the body in the body, earnestly, clearly comprehending and mindfully after having overcome desire and sorrow in regard to the world; when he dwells contemplating feelings in the feelings, the mind in the mind, and mental objects in mental objects, earnestly, clearly comprehending, and mindfully, after having overcome desire and sorrow in regard to the world, then truly, he is an island unto himself, a refuge unto himself, seeking no external refuge; having the Dharma as his island, the Dharma as his refuge, seeking no other refuge."

"These are the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four constituents of psychic power, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the Noble Eightfold Path. These, bhikkhus, are the teachings of which I have direct knowledge, which I have made known to you, and which you should thoroughly learn, cultivate, develop, and frequently practice, that the life of purity may be established and may long endure, for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, well being, and happiness of gods and men."

Then the blessed One said to the bhikkhus:

“So, bhikkhus, I exhort you: All compounded things are subject to vanish. Strive with earnestness. The time of the Tathagata’s Parinibbana is near. Three months hence the Tathagata will utterly pass away.”

Présent**Gerald Boucher**

Je n’avais point comme cible
D’atteindre l’illumination
Ni même de percevoir
Une vision révélatrice
Or, je demeurais inflexible
Face à mes anciens démons
Qui laissaient entrevoir
De vieilles cicatrices

Je ne recherchais pas
La vérité absolue
Et ne voulais atteindre
Aucun sommet
Je ne poursuivais
Que le simple but
De retrouver, en moi,
Ce havre de paix

Je n’œuvrais à aucune solution
Ni ne visais aucun achèvement
Je n’ai voulu que créer ce pont
Entre moi et l’infiniment grand

Grâce à une famille adoptive
Je suis devenu un disciple
Puisqu’il est rare que l’on arrive
À entreprendre seul un tel périple

Il n’a suffi que de taire
Certaines voix intérieures
De renoncer à hier
Et à mes plans ultérieurs

De loger dans une respiration
Toute l’énergie de la vie

De me fier à mon intuition
Et d’apprendre à dire : oui

La tâche s’accomplit sans effort
Et le résultat est surprenant
Qu’il est un doux réconfort
D’être ici, maintenant... présent

Il m’a fallu lâcher prise
Et accepter tout dénouement
De cette expérience acquise
J’aspire à ne plus être absent

J’ai approfondi ce parcours
Profité de ces enseignements
J’ai aussi connu l’amour
Et ses trésors abondants

Pine Gate To The Rescue**Peggy Campbell**

For a decade, I had the aspiration to become a Zen nun as a way, I thought, of being truly useful to all beings, and to that end I practiced at a training monastery here in Ottawa. Over time, I came to realize that although some of the training was excellent – I really did learn how to sit up straight and be aware of how I enter a room, take up my spoon, etc – there were many other aspects of how the students were treated and the teachings transmitted that I couldn’t continue to ignore. Reasons for leaving a sangha are always complex, I’m sure, but to keep it simple here, I needed to find a new sangha. A quick email to Ian Prattis to ask if I might attend a sitting at Pine Gate opened a door to a whole new way of learning and practicing the Dharma.

Walking in the door that first night, I was astounded at what I found. People smiled and introduced themselves. Ian and Carolyn greeted me warmly. There was music and a dog and chairs. People were quietly chatting. Ian then “invited the bell” and everyone stopped chatting and went downstairs. I had a choice of seating arrangements. The sitting began. A beautiful chant was played, and during the

sitting, small encouragements were offered to draw us back to the “quality of our minds”. Brief instruction was given in the practice of walking meditation, and we walked slowly around the meditation hall. I noticed that everyone walked a little bit differently – held their hands at their sides, or in prayer-like fashion or in various mudras that I guess had been picked up along the way. No one was corrected on his or her form; people weren’t told they were going too fast or too slow. No one was castigated for sloppy cornering. At the end of the round, and after bowing to each other, we were all encouraged to “gather round”. Ian offered a teaching with the Sangha, including the dog, gathered in a circle. We could see him as he spoke and he looked at each of us. One woman was hugely pregnant and she was invited to listen to the teaching lying down! Part of me was alarmed at the apparent laxness, which surely must indicate lack of mindfulness – right?? Another part of me was relaxing and actually listening, not distracted and overwhelmed by physical pain and concern about “getting it right”.

After the dharma talk, Ian invited us to ask questions or respond. Anyone sitting there could bow and speak. On my way out that first evening, Ian showed me the Sangha library and I borrowed a book by Thich Nhat Hanh. As I read this book, I hear a gentle voice speaking the Dharma in a reasonable, accessible way, saying “Here’s what you can do. Try this.”

I am happy to have found a sangha at Pine Gate. I know there is no perfect group of people out there. We all come together with our various skills, needs, expectations, and past experiences. Being gentle on others and ourselves as we learn is a very important part of what the Buddha is teaching us. Harshness and humiliation produce harsh, critical, wary people and has no place in this practice. Taking care of each other with true mindfulness and insight produce love, compassion and joy - a wonderful aspiration.

Bon Mots

If I cannot sing and dance in your revolution,
Then I don’t want to be part of it.

Emma Goldman

Even the fear of death is nothing
Compared to the fear of not having
Lived authentically and fully.

Frances Moore Lappe

Buddhism is not a religion, it is a science of mind
The Dalai Lama

We do not have to sink into despair about global warming; we can act. Urgent action must be taken at the individual and the collective levels. It is time for each of us to wake up and take action in our own lives.

Thich Nhat Hanh

The kind of breakdowns we’re expecting may force more collaboration and community on us, but I have to say, I haven’t seen it yet. As things break down, it’s either going to force us into community, or we kill each other more.

Margaret Wheatley

Four Song Poems

Gary Palen

Reflections from the 2008 Winter Retreat in Plum Village, France

THE DEEPLY FURROWED EARTH

the deeply furrowed earth
receives the vital rain
past growth and seeds
of future weeds
have been turned under into darkness
the brown field is silent
waits for spring
the farmer discs the broken clods

plants wholesome seeds
under the autumn moon
families rejoice.

ON THIS SILENT NIGHT

on this silent night
walking on earth
from the depths of space
less than a point
within us
the universe
the moon the stars
the life of the sea
the clouds drifting by
the birds that fly
oh what a wonder
hmm what a wonder

EMPTY MIND

empty mind
transparent thought
all ideas
falling away
opinions dropped
craving stopped
travelling light
walking free
luminous knowing mind
void of afflictions
clear of obstacles
oh happy day

YOU'VE NEVER BEEN APART

give me all of your anger
give me all of your fear
give me all of your worry
give me all of your tears
relax into the peaceful
love of your heart
from the beginning
you've never been apart
I know that you've been lonely

that there's been no one
to love you
and to hold you
precious daughter
precious son
i've been calling
i've been waiting
for you to return home
to this present moment
we'll never be alone
give me all of your anger
give me all of your fear
give me all of your worry
give me all of your tears
relax into the peaceful
love of your heart
from the beginning
you've never been apart

Meditation on the Five

David Kroecker

The First: Reverence for Life (Bell)

Life is precious and important. My life / Your life / Our lives are precious and important. My life / Your 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 (my life, your life, our lives), in my thinking, in my speech, in my actions, in my way of life, in my work, and in the world. I gratefully accept the support and protection of my life. (Bell, contemplate for several minutes)

The Second: Generosity (Bell)

Aware of the needs of myself and of others, I cultivate loving kindness and work to support the health and well-being of people, animals, plants and minerals. I practice generosity in using my time, energy and material resources to help others. I gratefully accept nourishment, love and support when it is offered freely. I respect the property of others and I encourage others to contribute to the health and well-being of

humans and other living beings. (Bell, contemplate for several minutes)

The Third: Responsible Relationship (Bell)

Aware of the confusion, suffering and division caused by unmindful behavior between people and in families, I practice ways to establish and preserve the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families and communities. I engage in all relations with kindness, care and respect. I cultivate friendliness with myself, with my family, and with the people in my community. To preserve the happiness of myself and of 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. (Bell, contemplate for several minutes)

The Fourth: Mindful Speech (Bell)

Aware of the power of speech to generate misunderstanding, discord and division, or to generate peace, understanding and compassion, 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, powerfully, peacefully and respectfully, 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. (Bell, contemplate for several minutes)

The Fifth: Mindful Consumption (Bell)

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 community, 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 my community by practicing a healthy diet for myself and my community and by advocating mindful consumption in the world. (Bell, contemplate for several minutes)

These are the Five Mindfulness Trainings. By living in harmony with these trainings, I bring light and healing to my life and to the world. (Final Bell)

It All Counts

Ann Fleming

The Muse: – *‘I cannot know if knowing you has changed me for the better, but I do know I’m changed for good’*. Glinda/Elphaba duet, ‘Wicked’- NAC

Live theatre is a transforming experience. Because the stage is so small, we can see how every encounter counts. We acknowledge that every movement has meaning and that every action has consequences. As participants in the event, we are aware that the play progresses from beginning to end, over and over and over.

Sitting recently in the audience at the musical ‘Wicked’, I was struck by the unacknowledged forces that direct each and every life. Even when we consciously choose ‘exit stage left’, the play continues. Because we are not aware of the beginning, middle and end of each of life’s vignettes as we act them out, we cannot know how each takes place as within the constraints of a tightly polished play. We cast ourselves in the lead role in our own lives because we think we are capable of directing the action; but we are so intricately connected to every other performer interacting with us on the stage that is our life that there is no clear action to direct. We cannot know how each of our actions plays out as the future unfolds. Even with the best of intentions we cannot decipher the hidden clauses in every decision we make, or the impact the role we assume will have in the progression of time. It is only at the point of

removing 'me' from the equation, that the play of life can become visible.

The movement of each performer on a stage can only happen in carefully proscribed positions within the space allotted by the set and in consideration of all other action happening immediately before and after. Prompters, lighting and sound technicians, choreographers, stage hands, dressers, makeup artists, set and costume designers, musical coaches and orchestral support are integral to the performance. No one 'acts' alone.

As I joined the crowd exiting the theatre, I realized there is no beginning or end to the performance. There is only the flow of constant change.

On Love and Being Gay

Laurie Arron

"I believe that we all have the need to love and to be loved, and life without love is not pleasant, is suffering." Thich Nhat Hanh, Friday, July 13, 2007, Lower Hamlet

These are the words Thay spoke to me after I had asked about finding love and had clearly stated I was gay. Thay's answer was all about true love, and it demonstrated to me that he believes true love is possible regardless of sexual orientation. My path towards self-acceptance has not been an easy one. I first realized I was gay when I was thirteen years old. It was a terrible and frightening realization. At school, a "fag" was the worst thing you could call someone. But the fact was that I had a strong physical attraction to some of the boys in my class and none whatsoever towards the girls. My grim realization was indisputable.

I could not deny my sexual orientation, but I could keep it an absolute secret. I thought being gay was unnatural and desperately wished I could be "cured." I was convinced if anyone knew they would hate me, except my parents who would simply be devastated. I thought it would be better to

be blind or in a wheelchair. At least then people wouldn't hate me. I hid my sexual orientation from everyone until I was twenty-seven years old. Being "in the closet" was very difficult, and I turned to smoking marijuana to ease the pain and escape my reality. I did fine in school and work, but whenever I thought about having to live life without love I was consumed with despair. It wasn't until a close friend of mine (who wasn't gay) killed himself that I realized life was too short to waste. I decided to take a leap of faith and stop hiding who and what I really was.

I went to a "coming out" support group and there I finally started to accept my sexual orientation. I'm forty-five now and I've come a long way since then. I got involved in working for equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people when I was thirty-one and eventually became Director of Advocacy for Canada's national LGBT equality advocacy group. In 2005, Canada's federal government debated and passed a law extending civil marriage to include same-gender couples. I did many media interviews and was about as publicly "out" as you can be. But even being so comfortable with being gay, in public places I still had to ask myself whether it was safe enough to hold my partner's hand or give him a kiss when I greeted him at the airport after not seeing him for several weeks. These are simple acts that most people take for granted, but for gay and lesbian people they are not so simple. And that's in Canada, one of the most accepting and progressive countries in the world. In many countries, being gay is still criminal, sometimes even punishable by death.

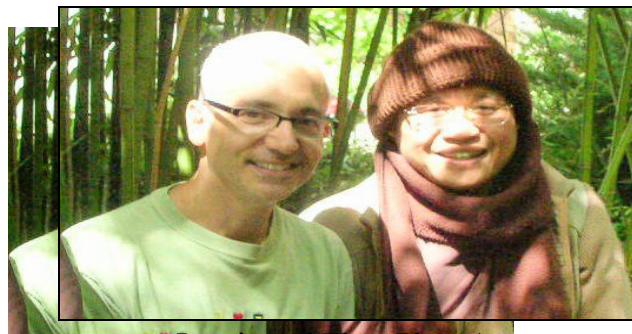
I look back and sometimes it feels like my youth was stolen from me. While my friends learned to date and to be in relationships when they were teenagers, I started from scratch at age twenty-seven. I find it particularly hard not to regret those lost years and wish I'd had more courage and come out earlier. My equality advocacy has been driven by my desire to make the world a better place for LGBT youth, so they don't have to go through what I did. The most difficult thing about the suffering I

experienced was not being able to tell anyone. I suffered alone and in silence, with absolutely no support. I think about how wonderful it is to have a sangha for support. Looking back on my years in the closet I realize that it was the exact opposite. The fact of not being able to tell anyone magnified my suffering a thousand times.

A big source of suffering for LGBT people is the exclusion from marriage. Only the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada and South Africa have equal marriage. The state of Massachusetts permits same-gender couples to marry. Israel also recognizes our marriages, but they must be performed in another country. Marriage is about many things, including love, commitment, intimacy, companionship, emotional support, financial support, children, and fidelity. Some people argue that marriage is essentially about procreation, but many opposite-gender couples don't have children and many same-gender couples do. According to the Canadian Psychological Association, studies show that children of same-gender couples do just as well as other children and are no more likely to be gay or lesbian themselves. Simply put, marriage is the central and most prominent way in which society recognizes romantic love and commitment. Since being gay is defined by who you love, the exclusion or inclusion in marriage sends a powerful signal about our place in society. Exclusion says our love is inferior to the love between a man and a woman. This message does us great harm, both in affirming anti-gay attitudes and also in telling LGBT people that there's something wrong with us. Inclusion in marriage sends the message that we are not flawed because of our sexual orientation. It says that we are equally worthy of respect and consideration. This is especially important for LGBT youth.

Although I've accepted being gay, there's still a voice in my head saying there's something wrong with me. Sometimes I despair. But my mindfulness practice helps a lot. Most of the time when I'm feeling despair I am aware of this feeling. I identify it as despair, or perhaps a mix of despair, sadness

and grasping, or whatever feelings I can identify. I observe my in-breath and out-breath. I remind myself that this is just a feeling, and that feelings come and go. I have learned that feelings are not only in my mind, but also in my body. I find the feeling in my body and I describe it to myself. Perhaps the feeling is a tension between my shoulder blades, or tension from my neck extending outwards to each arm. I observe that this is how despair is manifesting in my body. When I release the tension in my body, the feeling also dissipates. Sometimes this happens quickly, sometimes it takes a long time. Sometimes I don't have time to wait because I'm too busy at work and I just live with the tension until later.



— Laurie and Thay Phap An

I've noticed that underneath despair is joy. I have experienced this hidden joy many times. When I release my despair, I find joy. Sometimes I can even find joy without having to go through despair. If I just look around my body, I can almost always find somewhere that's experiencing joy. For much of my life I learned to suppress my feelings and to cut myself off from my body. But that did not end my suffering. If anything, it made the suffering worse and prevented me from taking positive action. My practice is helping me to re-connect with my body and to become whole again. My deepest aspiration is to understand my suffering and to transform it. I was told at Plum Village that most of us spend much of our time struggling with one particular issue, one that is based on a misperception of reality. This misperception acts like a prism, distorting how we see the world and causing us to suffer. Covering up this misperception

is a block of pain that has been built up over the years.

My block of pain seems to revolve around my desire to find true love and my belief that I won't, perhaps because there is something wrong with me, or perhaps because I am simply fated to be alone. I have had many small insights about the source of my suffering. Slowly, slowly, I am connecting the dots. I am chipping away at the block of pain that exists deep inside me. I believe I still have a long way to go to get through the block of pain, and to see and penetrate the misperception that lies beneath it. I don't know if I will ever get there, but I know I am on the path, and I have faith in that path. I have observed many times that the more diligent my practice, the happier I am.

I have also observed that I need my sangha to support my practice. It is so easy to practice at Plum Village, but so difficult to practice in the world, with the pressure of work, friends and the dominant western culture. My sangha helps motivate me to be diligent. Thanks to my practice, I know that even if I never do completely transform my block of suffering, I can still enjoy life.

Engaged Practice and the OI

Ian Prattis

This is the summary of a dharma talk given at Blue Cliff Monastery, August 2, 2008

My understanding of the Order of Interbeing charter and the transmission ceremonies is that they presented me with the heart of the Buddha and the heart of Thay. In my experience of the transmission ceremonies with Thay - the 14 Mindfulness Trainings and the Dharma Lamp- I certainly felt Thay's love and encouragement but also felt his steel. For me, this was never an invitation. My direct experience was that I was authorized by Thay to teach the dharma, build sangha and skilfully engage with the wider society and environment. In

engaging with creativity, experimentation and skilfulness, I felt that

I was actualizing the spirit and the letter of the OI charter. Thay gave me a driver's license and the keys to the car and I drove it as far and as fast as I could. There was plenty of creativity and experimentation though I was initially lacking in skilfulness. In my sense of urgency I kept the gas pedal to the floor and went flat out at high speed – this was not wise. I quickly learned that action followed consciousness, not the other way round and so I eased up on the gas pedal – a little bit anyway!

My grounding was in Pine Gate sangha, founded by my wife Carolyn and I in 1997 after my return from teaching meditation in India. Sangha life was a subtle ebb and flow through a series of concentric circles. At the core was the practice of Carolyn and I, the next circle was senior OI members and aspirants, then a circle of sangha members committed to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, then a circle of sangha members young and old, and then extending to a vast circle beyond the boundaries of Pine Gate to the wider community. The ebb and flow between concentric circles breathed us in and out and the energy generated became the basis of action. A good alternative to keeping the pedal to the floor!

An unusual set of circumstances led to a particular form of engaged action. This is not a blueprint or a formula – just what arose from the depth of sangha practice in the midst of global crisis – the international war against terrorism and Global Warming. The beginnings of Friends for Peace began with the outbreak of the Iraq war in 2003. Friends from across the city of Ottawa came together and organized candlelit vigils all across the city prior to the outbreak of war. Over 3,000 people responded to this hastily put together initiative. We also organized a Peace Song Circle on Parliament Hill, the seat of Canadian government, to send a strong message that mindful living was an alternative to the warlike alternative. Pine Gate sangha members provided the nucleus for this

nascent movement. Organization of this event was left in their care as Carolyn and I left for two months in India just before the event took place. It was in highly competent hands. On a cold, wet March day in 2003 a sea of multi-colored umbrellas adorned the grounds of Parliament Hill. Choirs from all over the National Capital Region were there to give their hearts for peace. Earlier that morning I had received news of the shock and awe bombing campaign of Baghdad – and was filled with anger and grief. This was not the appropriate mind state to lead this event, so I took refuge in the sangha – in Carolyn. She took care of all the final arrangements, while I did walking meditation in Pine Gate Meditation Hall to calm and look deeply into the causes of my anger and to let it go. Then I could be peace.

The incessant rain symbolised the tears of Iraqi children, your tears, my tears. Young, old, multi faith and diverse – the faces in the rain moved me deeply as people sang, danced and stood up for peace. The NOWAR group was due on Parliament Hill after us and they had a more violent agenda. I had talked to their leaders and requested that they join us on the Hill but without noisemakers and slogans. They came with anger after burning effigies of George Bush and Tony Blair outside the US embassy. We felt the anger of their demonstration as they joined us, then it suddenly calmed and dissipated as they sang and danced with us in the downpour. The Sufi Universal Dances of Peace group organized 5,000 people to do a dance, chanting “May Peace be With You and With You be Peace” in English, French, Hebrew and Arabic. When the rain came down like a monsoon – nobody ran for cover. We danced and sang for peace together. The NOWAR group meditated with us in silence at the end.

From the response to these events Friends for Peace was created and registered as a non profit organization with a mandate for peace, planetary care and social justice. It has a charter and a mandate. All parts of the mandate are active with respect to outreach, support and action. The first

thing put into motion was an annual Peace Prayer Day every Fall, which was a celebration of all that we stood for. It had the feeling of a country fair with lunch kitchen, activist tables, Silent Auction, great entertainment and Peace Awards to prominent citizens who delivered their often very edgy Visions for planetary care, social justice and peace. This day has now grown into the final bookend of a two week Peace Festival in our city of Ottawa. The growth and enthusiasm is there because there are tangible results from each area of the mandate. There is a new six storey apartment building for low income families downtown that we supported, there is a pristine watershed – the Dumoine River – that we helped to get protection for, there are direct results from our support of aboriginal rights in the apology from the Government of Canada to First Nations, there is the annual Peace Camp Canada bringing Palestinian and Israeli teens to Ottawa for a peace camp. And much more that is unfolding.



Ian at Blue Cliff Photo by Joseph Emet

The consequences of engaged practice for the sangha are confidence, clarity and skilfulness. Friends for Peace now comprises a loose coalition of over 45 groups throughout the city – activist, environmental, peace, business, faith, cultural, schools, government – and they are a force to be reckoned with in a good way. The former Mayor of Ottawa has described Friends for Peace as the face

of the city he wants to see in the future. That future is now! The confidence from doing all this has led to the sanghabody jumping into the river of the Buddhadharma and kindly carrying me along with them. This is all due to deep internal practice and intelligent engaged practice. The home of Pine Gate is undergoing a major eco-retrofit – solar panel to heat the hot water, low flush toilets, energy efficient furnace and wood burning fireplace, energy windows and doors, solar blinds on south facing windows, insulation, rain barrels and so on. The neighbours and sangha are watching very closely and enquire about cost, rebates and results – and several are thinking of following suit. Our money is where our mouth is, as this is a planetary care project right at the heart of Pine Gate sangha, which is also the heart of Friends for Peace. And on it goes all the way back to the hearts of Thay and the Buddha.

I have also planted an apple tree on the front lawn, so that as the fruit ripens passersby and neighbours with their children may just pick them and eat them. There are many ripe fruits on the sangha tree, especially young people. They are storming the barricades, transcending boundaries and breaking down barriers. I ask only one thing of them, that they hold out their hand and wait for me - because I am going with them.

Pine Gate 2008 Fall Study Session	
Thursday Sept 4 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Five Mindfulness Trainings Recitation
Saturday Sept 6 10.00am – 1.00pm	Fall Hike in Gatineau Park Meet at Parking Lot #7, Kingsmere
Thursday Sept 11 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Sangha Council
Thursday Sept 18 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Deep Relaxation and Touching The Earth
Thursday Sept 25 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Sutra Reading
Thursday Oct 2 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Eckhart Tolle's New Earth Disc 1
Saturday Oct 4 10.00am – 4.00pm	Peace Prayer Day Ottawa City Hall
Thursday Oct 9 7.00pm – 9.00pm	New Earth Disc 2
Thursday Oct 16 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Book Launch for <i>Failsafe</i>
Thursday Oct 23 7.00pm – 9.00pm	New Earth Disc 3
Thursday Oct 30 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Sutra Reading Thay's Earth Gathas
Saturday Nov 1 5.00pm – 8.00pm	Dharma Talk Pot Luck Supper
Thursday Nov 6 7.00pm – 9.00pm	New Earth Disc 4
Thursday Nov 13 7.00pm – 9.00pm	New Earth Disc 5
Thursday Nov 20 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Weather Report
Thursday Nov 27 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Chanting with Carolyn
Thursday Dec 4 7.00pm – 9.00pm	New Earth Disc 6
Saturday Dec 6 5.00pm – 8.00pm	Christmas Gathering Pot Luck Supper, Christmas Carols
Thursday Dec 11 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Beginning Anew
Wednesday Dec 31 9.00pm – midnight	14 Mindfulness Trainings Recitation Aspirations and Whooshing Into The Fire!
