



Pine Gate

Newsletter of the Pine Gate Sangha

Vol. 2 Issue 1: Winter - 2003

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.

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What If Nobody Shows Up...?

Ian Prattis

It happens. That unanticipated moment when you – the facilitator – are there, and nobody shows up. I remember with a mixture of anxiety and humor the first time this happened. One fall evening I had cleaned the meditation room, set the cushions in a neat semi-circle in front of the simple alter, meditated beforehand, and made sure the notes for the Dharma talk were ready. And nobody showed up. At first I thought friends were just a little late, but thirty minutes past the hour convinced me that nobody was coming. I was disappointed and remained so, until two beautiful beings caught my attention. My dog, Nikki, and my cat, Lady, were sitting patiently close by me in the meditation room, waiting for my attention. They were fully present, only I was not. When I did notice them, I smiled. Only then could I look deeply at my thoughts. What in fact was disappointed?

My ego, expectations, habit energies, and mental formations – these were all certainly disappointed. Yet the moment I smiled to my loving animals, the disappointment began to fade away. I was left with the insight that of the many elements necessary for a sangha facilitator, on this night it was Equanimity with a capital E that I needed most to nurture. After inviting the bell for Nikki, Lady, myself and absent friends, I meditated on the

Four Brahmaviharas: Love, Compassion, Joy and Equanimity – the Buddha’s teachings on Love - with a particular emphasis on the Fourth one – Equanimity.

The following evening, the doorbell rang at 7.00 pm and two friends from the sangha came in, followed by another three, then five minutes later by another four. I welcomed them with surprise at seeing them. They were puzzled by this welcome, then told me that this was our sangha evening. I had prepared for them the day before in error! We all laughed until the tears rolled down our cheeks when I told them the story. Our meditation and gathering that night became known as the *Night Of Warm Smiles And Quiet Chuckles*, as once again Nikki and Lady joined us. Not surprisingly after meditation, our discussion was about Equanimity. Of how we can so easily get caught in our projections and mental formations when Equanimity is absent. Also we shared at length our experiences of its interconnection with Love, Compassion and Joy – the remaining trio of the Four Brahmaviharas. To make this come alive we all knew that our practice had to become more skillful, drawing on one another’s support.



Ian & Lady

There are many things I could write about the Pine Gate sangha practice – our hikes in the forest, finding a quiet place for a Dharma talk, then on to a waterfall for a silent and mindful lunch. Of the generosity of sangha members as they take their practice out in an engaged manner. The sangha practices in the true spirit of engaged Buddhism with the introduction of mindfulness practice into city schools, and the formation of Citizen’s Coalitions to protect the city environment from inappropriate development, and to undertake peace marches to bring about an end to war. The other groups in these Coalitions are quite happy to find a meditation group at their core, and I do believe we assist them with our steadiness, especially as one sangha member created and monitors their website. There is so much more – yet for me the *Evening Of Warm Smiles And Quiet Chuckles* after the *Day When Nobody Showed Up*, provides a benchmark for the qualities actively cultivated as a basis for sangha practice. Whenever I talk about the Buddha’s Teachings on Love, usually at our Christmas gatherings, the sangha revisits this benchmark. There is a story about Equanimity that I would like to tell.

There was once a Rishi who lived in a remote part of northern India. Many people from the surrounding villages were drawn to this kind and compassionate holy man. They listened to the clarity and love in his talks, which were drawn from the universal wisdom tradition of the Vedas. His teachings and guidance became part of the fabric of village life and he conducted daily and seasonal prayers, and ceremonies, to honour the earth and sacred traditions he had immersed himself in since childhood. His spacious hermitage was set apart from the villages. It was the central hub of a great wheel, the congregating point for the surrounding communities. He was honored and revered for the gentle manner in which he brought people to their own deep quiet communion with God.

One morning a group of elders from the villages slowly approached, looking very grim and angry. They were accompanied by a young woman and she was visibly pregnant. Arrisa was her name. Arrisa had always brought flowers to the hermitage, and her soft eyes, laughter and elegant demeanour gave a special grace to the gatherings there. With downcast eyes and hesitant speech, Arrisa stated publicly, in front of the elders, that the Rishi was the father of her unborn child. The Rishi paused in what he was doing and looked at Arrisa with

deep compassion and love in his eyes. He was silent for a while, then simply said “Very well.” The elders left one by one, feeling deeply betrayed in the trust they had placed in the Rishi, and they and their villagers did not return. Arrisa stayed at the hermitage in a separate room, and not once did the Rishi rebuke her for her falsehood. She took upon herself household and garden responsibilities. At the time of her confinement, several women from her village came to assist with the birth. They saw the separate living arrangements, but brought neither offerings, nor respect to the Rishi. To all this the Rishi simply said “Very well.”

A healthy son was born to Arrisa, yet she was torn and tormented by what she had done. She took wonderful care of the hermitage, the farm animals and the garden, growing the most beautiful flowers ever seen in that region. She saw how the Rishi continued with his daily prayers and meditations. He diligently and joyfully conducted the seasonal ceremonies just as before. No one was present except for Arrisa and her son, or so she thought. Then she noticed how the farm animals would come closer to the hermitage, and sit nearby when the Rishi gave his teachings. He spoke to everything, to the birds gathered in the trees, the insects rustling in the grass, the whisper of wind and to the animals gathered close to him. His heart was full, just as before, and he was happy to be with whatever was there.

Arrisa could stand it no longer. One morning she told the Rishi that she was taking her son to meet the village elders, and tell them that the father of the child was a young man in a neighbouring village. He had left the region to join the army and be posted to a far away location. The Rishi looked at her with the same compassionate eyes and simply said “Very well.” Afterwards the elders and villagers began to return to the hermitage, full of apologies for their judgements, and for abandoning the teachings, saying how much they had missed his guidance and kindness. To all this the Rishi merely smiled and simply said “Very well.” Arrisa and her son continued living at the hermitage. The father of her child returned to the region and married her. He asked the Rishi if he could stay at the hermitage with his new wife and child, and serve the Rishi as his attendant for the rest of his life. The Rishi looked at the young man with the same loving and compassionate eyes that he had presented to Arrisa. And we all know that he smiled and simply said “Very well!” His equanimity had revealed the truth of everything.

To build and maintain a healthy sangha requires many elements and virtues, not the least of which is Equanimity. I think of this as a strong binding quality for the Pine Gate sangha, which directly and gently guides us to Love, Compassion and Joy. The Buddha’s Teachings on Love no less.

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Transformation At The Base: Verse Four

David Geary

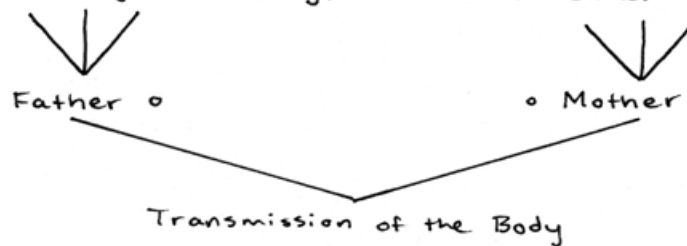
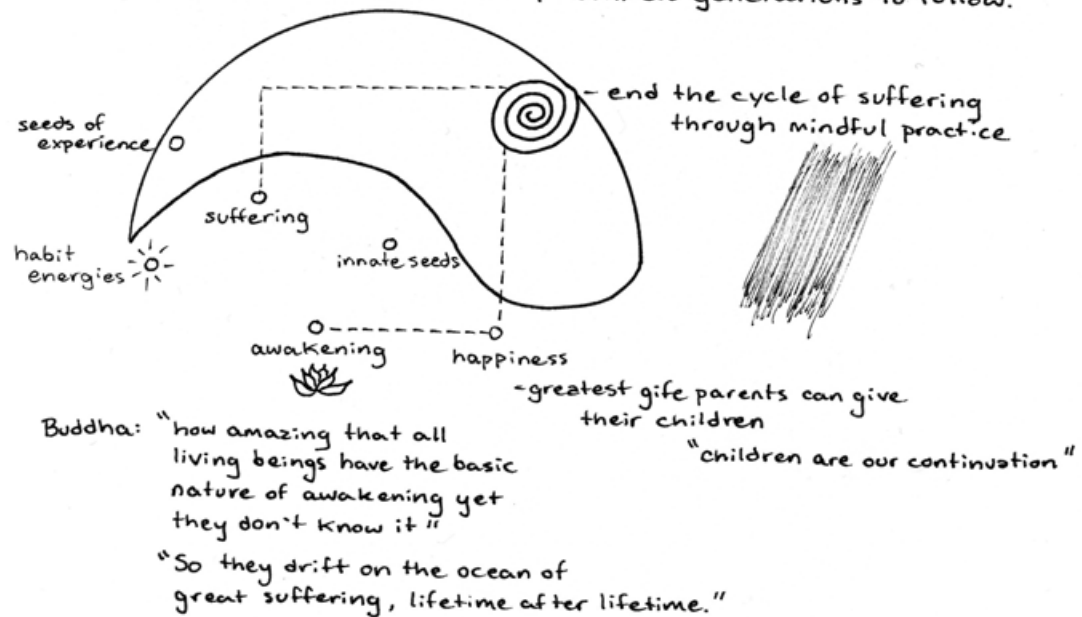
David is studying Pilgrimage and Consciousness for his Master’s degree in anthropology at Carleton University. His fieldwork in India includes the Footsteps of the Buddha Pilgrimage with Shantum Seth. His artistic and graphic talent is applied to Thay’s 50 verses.

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Transmission

Some seeds are innate,
 Handed down by our ancestors,
 Some were sown while we were still in the womb,
 Others were sown when we were children

Mindfulness → not only practicing for ourselves, but our ancestors
 & countless generations to follow.



"reality of the emptiness is that you are a continuation of your mother & father"

- ① one who transmits
- ② object transmitted
- ③ recipient of the transmission

My First Retreat With Pine Gate Sangha

Loretta DeSousa

My experience at my first Sangha Retreat was wonderful. Since I have Chron's disease it is important for me to live everyday in the present moment. I feel more confident when I'm making decisions at school or at work. During the retreat I learned to use my breath to stay in the present moment. I am able to deal more effectively with stressful situations that I have encountered because of being able to focus on my breath.

During my time at the retreat I felt very safe. The activities nurtured me mentally and physically. The mindful meals made me appreciate the food that I was eating. I was able to taste the food and realize the importance of eating foods that nurture my body. During the group discussions I felt safe to express my opinion. I felt that

when I spoke people were actually listening. What I said mattered. I could also practice deep listening when other people in the group spoke. I try to practice deep listening wherever I can. I want to hear what people around me have to say.



Gourmet vegetarian food served during retreat

I enjoyed the time I spent with my husband. Most of the time spent at the retreat was in silence. I enjoyed feeling the energy of my husband without having to talk to him. I just knew that we were enjoying each other's company. At home my husband and I enjoy being in each other's company without talking. I also will eat dinner with my husband with out us saying a word. The food tastes so much better. I feel a lot closer to my husband because I can just enjoy his presence. I am learning that the majority of

daily conversation is useless. In other words, conversation that doesn't nurture our body or mind. It is important to me to become very aware of the thoughts that are in my mind. Also, I want to be aware of my conversation to others. When I speak it is important for me to be mindful of my conversation.

My journey has just begun. I know that I want to be happy internally.

Living in the moment is important to me. Deep listening is a skill that I want to learn more about. The knowledge that I gained at the retreat has helped me to feel alive. Truly alive. I want to thank the members of the sangha for sharing this moment with me while I express my feeling and thoughts about how the retreat positively affected my everyday life.

A Place of Tranquility

Christina Marchant

For me, the annual Pine Gate sangha silent retreat was relaxed and peaceful, a place of tranquility, solitude, and rejuvenation.

In the past, I have experienced silence as isolating or excluding. This silence, by contrast, was soothing, relaxing, and inclusive. It felt like a golden bowl that held us all in its curved arms. There was space for tears, for laughter, for wonder, for now-ness, apartness, and togetherness. The inclusive silence was helped along by smiles, gentle touches, and loving intention.

Into the silence came, for me, a deeper connection with the noises inside me, a stronger compassion and patience for those people and noises around me, and a willingness to simply allow. The silent, mindful meals were very liberating. I felt freer to fully enjoy my food, and I felt closer to my companions than I often do with speech. The mindful, present silence created a foundation for more authentic connection when speech eventually became possible.

I enjoyed re-acquainting myself with my breath. Attention to breath carried me to a still space within, an oasis in the noisy chatter of the external world, and a place of wisdom from which my truth could begin to emerge. I have carried the heart meditation with me from the retreat, and I practice every morning. It centers me in my breath, and reconnects me to the flow of love and compassion that are always available. The stillness and attention to breath allow my emotions and reactions to flow into detachment and, ultimately, into love.

For moments at the retreat, I remembered that everything is impermanent. I remembered that suffering is impermanent, and that suffering is healed through mindfulness. I grappled – and continue to

grapple – with my commitment to justice and transformation within myself and in the world. How can I truly engage in what's directly in front of me without attachment to the outcome of that engagement? How can I bring loving attention to important social issues without forcing my will, my version of what I believe is right?

Silence, mindfulness

deep looking,

deep listening

in order to transform self, community, world.

The retreat helped to deepen my practice and my intentionality, both personally and professionally. It reminded me that I am not alone, that there are many beings committed to transforming ourselves and transforming the world, committed to peace.



“The Barn” Retreat Centre, Ste Cecile de Masham, Quebec

Healing comes from deep peace, and community binds healing. Peace begins with me.

Peace, peace will, peace will come and let it begin with me.

We, we need, we need peace, and let it begin with me.

Oh my life is all I can hope to control

Oh let my life be lived for the good, good of my soul

Let it bring peace, sweet peace

We need peace, and let it begin with me.

Buddha as Ecopsychologist

The Buddha could be considered the first Ecopsychologist, as this quote from the Dhammapada reveals profound insight about the consequences of our mind-sets:

We are what we think.

All that we are arises with our thoughts

With our thoughts we make the world.

Speak or act with an impure mind

And trouble will follow you

As the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart.

We are what we think.

All that we are arises with our thoughts.

With our thoughts we make the world.

Speak or act with a pure mind

And happiness will follow you

As your shadow, unshakable.

The Grateful Daughter

Tricia Diduch

On a Thanksgiving Sunday about ten years ago, a mother looked into the eyes of her daughter and challenged her, “Are you not grateful for all that you have?” The girl wiped the tears from her eyes, feeling very misunderstood. “No,” she replied softly, “That’s not it at all. Every day I thank God for all that has been given to me – I just do it in a different way than you do.”

I am that same daughter, though a little older now and maybe just a little wiser. My mother posed the question when I replied negatively after she had asked if I would be going to Thanksgiving mass that evening. I had grown away from the church and simply didn’t feel comfortable participating in the mass, since I hadn’t been attending church on a regular basis. My faith had evolved in a way that my parents didn’t understand, but I certainly never lost the spiritual and moral values that they instilled in me. What my mother didn’t realize, was that I was still praying to the Creator/Buddha/Great Spirit who is the source of all things, just in a different way than before. In retrospect, I’m grateful that my Mom questioned me. It is right to give thanks and it is a special blessing to be able to share your gratitude within a spiritual community.

That’s why I was so honoured to take part in Pine Gate Sangha’s Thanksgiving celebration. That, and, of course, the wonderful array of foods provided by every member of the Sangha. Most importantly, however, the

gathering gave me, and all of us, an occasion to pause, take stock of the miracles that surround us every day and give mindful attention to the expression of our gratitude. Often we take for granted how fortunate we are. While we may acknowledge others' service daily with a perfunctory "thank you", our response is generally a reflex, rather than a truly meaningful acknowledgement. The noble silence observed during our Thanksgiving meal allowed us all to reflect deeply on the blessings that surround us and for which we are grateful. It also enabled us to contemplate the source of our prosperity, health and happiness. As members of the Sangha were called upon to share the things for which they are grateful, we were unified in a common purpose that helped strengthen our relationship as a spiritual community. While our expression was personal, the things for which we are appreciative we all have in common -- whether it's each other's friendship, the companionship of a pet, the earthworms that help to prepare the soil for growth, our family and life partners, our daily work which provides us with our livelihood, or our health and physical well-being. In each Sangha member's gratitude, we see our own, and are able to experience a sense of connectedness to each other and to the Universe, the source of our bounty.

Our expression of thanksgiving as individuals and as a community has a transformative power. Every time we acknowledge our prosperity and offer appreciation to the Creator, we are perpetuating the goodness that surrounds us, thereby recreating our environment. Melody Beattie stated it more eloquently than I when she said, "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

Since that day on which I gave thanks ten years ago, my life has grown richer and fuller – and I am, indeed, a little bit wiser. That is, at least I'm now wise enough to know that when it comes to giving thanks, we all do it in the same way. You were right again, Mom – thanks!

Homeschooling and Mindfulness

Shelley Welchner

We began our homeschooling journey 6 years ago when our oldest son was discontented with his junior kindergarten class. It was sad to see his enthusiasm to learn disappear. We investigated different alternatives in the city from private schools, other public schools and homeschooling and gave him the option. At 4 years old, he chose to give homeschooling a try.

At the time, some people thought we were crazy to let such a young child make such an important life decision. They didn't think he could possibly have the life experience to make an informed choice. And to be honest, I am not sure that homeschooling was my preferred choice. However, over those first four short years, we had developed a parenting philosophy that mirrors somewhat the Third of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings - Freedom of Thought. "Aware of the suffering brought about when we impose our views on others, we are committed not to force others, even our children, by any means whatsoever - such as authority, threat, money, propaganda, or indoctrination - to adopt our views."

For us, this has meant that while we share our views with our children about everything such as dietary preferences, political issues, approaches to conflict resolution, the importance of brushing your teeth, and what we consider to be an appropriate bedtime, they make the ultimate decision. In our house, this means that the kids quite often go to bed after we do, they can choose to eat meat although we are vegetarian, and they learn the subjects they are interested in. In the past, these "subjects" have included chess, aviation, humour, carpentry, dance, cooking, and astronomy. My kids seem to be learning their academic subjects the same way they learned to walk and talk. They learn to read, write and master math concepts through living life. It is beautiful.

As parents, we see ourselves as a support team tasked with showing our children the options for discovery available to them. In this way, the kids experience a level of freedom we did not. It has been a tremendous learning and freeing experience for us parents as well.

We now live in a day and age when kids' time is typically very scheduled and managed. For us, homeschooling lends itself naturally to a more mindful lifestyle. For example, every morning my daughter wakes up naturally, and very slowly. She has always been a slow riser and insists that I lie down with her for about 20 minutes in silence as she drapes her arm over me and adjusts to wakefulness. I love to listen to her breathe, feel her warm skin, watch her face when she doesn't know I am looking, and wonder what she is thinking.



The Welchner Family

There are challenges. Our children are born into a world with more "stuff" available to kids than I could have imagined as a child. One of my children is very interested in video games... many of which have a violent theme. And I sometimes wonder if they are learning what they need to reach their life goals. As I meet other families who have taken similar paths before us, I am comforted.

So, we continue the dialogue of life, sharing ideas, and watching our three children discover who they are, and how they fit into this very different world. It is a joy.

"Happiness and suffering are dependent upon your mind, upon your interpretation. They do not come from outside, from others. All of your happiness and all of your suffering are created by you, by your own mind."

-Kyabje Thubten Zopa Rinpoche

The Vipassana Experience

Julie Oliveira

I recently participated in a 10-day Vipassana course at the Quebec Vipassana Meditation Centre in Sutton, Quebec. This course is based on S.M. Goenka's teachings and can be taken at any of the hundreds of Vipassana centres worldwide. It was a gruelling experience, both physically and mentally, but the effects were extremely beneficial.

The schedule was demanding and sometimes difficult to adjust to. We began a vow of silence after dinner on the first night and maintained that vow of silence until mid-morning of the 9th day. This vow helped us fully concentrate on the techniques we learned and helped us keep our emotional and mental states at a calm and controlled level. We awoke at 4:00 each morning and sat in meditation from 4:30 until 6:30, either in our rooms or in the meditation hall. Breakfast was served at 6:30. This was followed by a compulsory sitting from 8:00 to 9:00. After that, we had another sitting until 11:30, at which time lunch was served. At noon, we had the chance to meet with our teachers to clarify any concepts and ask questions with respect to the practice or Goenka's teachings. At 1:00 p.m., we sat for another two hours and then met again for the compulsory sitting until 5:30. Tea and fruit (the last meal of the day!) were served at that time. We sat again for another hour from 6:00 to 7:00 and then "relaxed" to watch Goenka's discourses on video. This was the most enjoyable part for me as Goenka incorporates much humour and clarity in his teachings. He delivered the Buddha's concepts and discourses in such an effective manner that I felt the truth of his words resonate deep within me, both intellectually and emotionally. This was a very successful and much-needed "recharging of my battery" every evening, and is, essentially, what kept me going to the next day, to then start everything all over again! However, it was not all hardship. We were encouraged to use our free time to walk the many trails in the woods surrounding the centre. We had no access to radios, televisions, or even a pen and paper. This time reinforced the peace and stillness that was becoming a part of me.

Goenka's course is very practical and it is the student who does all of the work. We were given brief instructions on a regular basis, as well as refreshers, but the majority of the time consisted of hard individual and often solitary work. By the third day, my mind finally became quiet and the constant chattering and noise went away. However, with this silence came pain, first at a physical level, and, later, at an emotional and mental level as the attachments of the mind (cravings and aversions) were brought to the surface, slowly but surely (provided the student practises the technique correctly). With time and perseverance, these attachments rise to the surface and a sense of lightness results. This, however, is also only temporary, and then the pain and frustration returns as one realizes that feeling good can also become a craving! This is Vipassana! It is not glamorous. It is not a magical experience of enlightenment. It is simply sitting in meditation with only the breath as a companion and tool and constant mental and physical effort to stay still and concentrate, concentrate, concentrate. Despite all of this, the sense of relief from knowing that one is that much closer to dissolving attachments and suffering is enough of a reward.

Since returning to the "real world", away from the coziness and serenity of the centre and its breathtaking view of mountains and forest, I have found it difficult to maintain the recommended sittings of one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. I still struggle to fit it in my hectic 9-5 schedule. This is a reality with any practice and must not be regarded negatively. It is a challenge, but the student must not get discouraged and create even more aversion, and thus, suffering. The key is to remain gentle with oneself and have the sincere intention to do it, step-by-step, day-by-day. The Vipassana course is an invaluable experience and an inspiring adventure into myself. I will gladly do it again!

Developing Compassion to Cool the Flames: Four Brahmaviharas Meditation

The Buddha's teachings on love were first given to a Hindu Brahman, who asked the Buddha to tell him how he could be with Brahma, the universal God. The Buddha replied with a practice devoted to cultivating Love, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity in each moment, and he expounded with great clarity on the nature of these four components, all of which are interconnected. They are also known as the Four Immeasurable Minds, as the potential expansion of each one is infinite, each one can embrace the entire world and universe.

Prepare for meditation by sitting comfortably with the spine erect. Bring your concentration and focus to breath on the In-breath, and breath on the Out-breath. After ten or twenty breaths, whenever you feel calm and stable, begin by bringing each of the components – Love, Compassion, Joy, Equanimity – into yourself.

In-breath	I bring Love
Out-breath	to myself.

You can say your own name silently if you wish. Feel the energy of love fill you from top to toe and register with the energy for several breaths. Then continue in the same way with:

In-breath	I bring Compassion
Out-breath	to myself

In-breath	I bring Joy
Out-breath	to myself

In-breath	I bring Equanimity
Out-breath	to myself.

Then think of a wise and loving teacher that you respect and whose qualities you admire, and do the same for this teacher, so that you may touch his steadiness, her spiritual strength.

In-breath	I bring Love
Out-breath	to Thich Nhat Hanh (or to the teacher who appeals most to you)

In-breath	I bring Compassion
Out-breath	to Thich Nhat Hanh

In-breath	I bring Joy
Out-breath	to Thich Nhat Hanh

In-breath	I bring Equanimity
Out-breath	to Thich Nhat Hanh.

Then think of someone you love. It may be your partner, friend, child or neighbor. It is important to focus on the first person who comes to your mind, so that you remain totally in the moment with this meditation. Repeat the whole process bringing each of the four components to someone you love.

Then think of someone you are neutral about. This could be your students, people travelling on the bus with you, or homeless children. Whoever comes first to your mind, then proceed in the same way as before.

Then think of someone you are having difficulties with, who you dislike or even hate. The person you are having difficulties with may be someone you love, or it may even be yourself. It may be someone who has recently hurt you, or who subjected you to harm in the past. Whoever your consciousness delivers to your attention, that person is your focus. There may be surprises, as often the person we have the most difficulties with is oneself! Identify the difficulty if you can, so that negative energy around your perception of the

situation and person can be healed. Then do the whole fourfold process of bringing Love, Compassion, Joy and Equanimity to the person you are having difficulties with, or whom you dislike or even hate.

Finally come back to yourself, even if you have just been dealing with personal difficulties. This last time, think of the four components of this meditation as embracing you in such warmth and kindness, celebrating all the best things in you, nurturing all the positive seeds. Know that a deep healing has taken place. At the end, just sit for a while and breathe in and out of the wonderful energy you have created for yourself and others. This meditation nurtures all the wholesome seeds in the store consciousness, bypassing our intellect, obstacles and ego. It enables us to grow internally stronger.

Meditation: A Voice from India

Aruna Shankar

“Meditation” - the very word itself makes one think that it is something to do with the control of mind, which is a complicated thing. I was one among those people who thought meditation is not for me, because I would have to concentrate on one thing for hours together and that was an impossible task to do. Well all that was changed for me by my teacher Ian Prattis, who taught me meditation in India through a tradition called SSY (Siddha Samadhi Yoga).



Aruna & Abinow

It all happened in Bangalore, India while I was in my 6th semester of engineering in the year 1997. I was introduced to the SSY program by my parents who had just finished it for themselves. They were keen on me and my sisters taking up this pranayama and meditation program. Myself and my sister Asha enrolled and we had the best of time learning the meditation teachings from our teacher Guruji Ian Prattis. My other sisters Anu and Amrutta also became his pupils in later courses. We became his Indian “daughters” and would often take fruit and sweets from our mother to the ashram where he lived and taught.

After learning to meditate, it is the daily practice that made me enjoy meditation. Initially it seemed a little difficult and boring but gradually I learned to enjoy it and the more I enjoyed it the more the benefits of it increased. I could do well in my studies and it helped me keep my mind sturdy and calm during my exams.

Time and again it has brought my mind to focus whenever I was tensed, be it my job interviews or taking up exams or any day to day tensions. Many a times just sitting down calmly and concentrating on my breath has helped me make better decisions with respect to my reactions to certain unpleasant issues in my life.

I practiced meditation whenever I got some time off in the evening after my office hours more so when I am stressed out or under lot of tension. It has helped me a lot. What I really miss out in India is the Pine Gate sangha. Thanks to Ravi, my beloved husband, whose job brings him to Ottawa on contracts; I get to visit my teacher here in Ottawa once in a couple of years.

I really enjoy meditating with Guruji and his wonderful sangha. It brings back the joy of practicing meditation as a sangha. It inspires me to build a sangha back in India and do good things for our community. My experience here in Canada has been the most wonderful one. I cannot explain in words the joy that Guruji and Carolyn bring to me and my family. I feel peaceful and spiritually enriched in their company, and that in turn rejuvenates my mind and body so I can take care of my baby in a better way. I feel that my baby has been really blessed to get all that positive energy from the sangha every time we are able to make it to the Thursday gatherings, Saturday potlucks and special festivals at Thanksgiving time and Christmas. It is a joyful experience and definitely enlightening every time I get to meditate with all those wonderful people.

Someone asked the Dalai Lama, "Why didn't you fight back against the Chinese?"

The Dalai Lama looked down, swung his feet just a bit, then looked back up at us and said with a gentle smile, "Well, war is obsolete, you know."

Then, after a few moments, his face grave, he said, "Of course the mind can rationalize fighting back... but the heart, the heart would never understand. Then you would be divided in yourself, the heart and the mind, and the war would be inside you."

The Five Mindfulness Trainings and State of the World

Ian Prattis

It is evident that the life support systems of the planet are severely threatened by the accelerating greed, materialism, and waste of the current global paradigm. Our ignorance and neglect is destroying the Earth, because we do not know how to behave in an aware manner with respect to ourselves, to others, and to the planet. Unless we create a drastic shift in consciousness there is no possibility of peace and balance, environmentally or socially. There is no remedy for terror, or a reduction in violence, without a commitment to mindfulness practice.

Thich Nhat Hanh does not see a way out for our modern civilization other than practicing the Five Mindfulness Trainings – or something like them. The trainings are not there for us to be in judgment of others, to bludgeon people with a misplaced self-righteousness. They are there as an internal compass to the heart of every individual; so that as individuals we wake up to love and compassion, and take heed of the directions in which the Mindfulness Trainings guide us. Practicing the trainings with an open heart strengthens and develops our compassion and loving kindness, and builds our awareness of interconnectedness as we move in the direction of the trainings' intention. Practicing the trainings nourishes "boddhicitta", which the Buddha referred to as the "Mind of Love." The trainings are not a coercive design for conformity, they simply assist us to be more aware of what is going on, around and within us. The energy to practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is that of compassion and understanding, not fear or anger. Thich Nhat Hanh refers to their practice as the medicine for our times, as the hope for the future. They provide protection and enable us to distinguish that which is good for ourselves, our minds and the world and that which is not. It is not necessary to be perfect in the practice – that is not possible. But it is possible to move in the direction of responsible and ethical living and make a difference to our society and environment. By doing this, then we can transform global terror and environmental degradation. We created the present situation, yet there is a clear way of transforming our creation. If there is "this", the Five Mindfulness Trainings, then there is "that", a balanced and peaceful world.

Yet violence and terror are there, in the world and within us. We must recognize this clearly and call it by its true name. Do we exorcise violence and terror with a renewed application of the same? Or do we step back and deeply consider these teachings from the awakened mind of the Buddha? The politicians, generals and terrorists making the decisions that presently shape our world order do not have awakened minds. Their minds are scarred, filled with ignorance, hate and vengeance, their hearts held hostage to corporate and electoral agendas. They all follow the same script, seeking similar justifications to advocate the use of violence. Trapped in history and hate they offer no means of re-creating our world. The Buddha does. The implications of his teachings on the Five Mindfulness Trainings apply fully to the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Our world needs guidelines like these to live by.

Yet I personally encounter obstacles within myself. Across North America in 2002, there were many instances of children being murdered at the hands of parents and guardians. This deeply distressed me. Teenagers volunteering as suicide bombers in the Middle East left me stunned. How could things have ever got to this state? If I did not have my practice to stay steady and look deeply, I could be overwhelmed. But I do have my practice of meditation and take refuge in the Five Mindfulness Trainings on a daily basis. I am convinced more than ever before that the world needs a universal, non-sectarian code of ethics. The Five Mindfulness Trainings fill this void. Their counterpart is found in the Ten Commandments, in the Great Law of the Iroquois, in the Sattvic code of Hinduism and Jainism, and in the ethics of the Sufis – Islam's mystical face. The Trainings provide explicit guidelines that resonate fully with other religious traditions. I do not bring them forward to praise Buddhism. I offer them to demonstrate that the Buddha's awakened mind does not discriminate. The guidelines are for all peoples and faiths. UNESCO's Manifesto 2000 encapsulates them in six principles for the world to live by.

With the Mindfulness Trainings as a guide and protector, we can see clearly what is unfolding within and around us, and know the direction we must take to create a healthy and a balanced world. We must deliberately cultivate the positive attributes in our store consciousness and shine the light of recognition and mindfulness on our suffering, so that we can become steady and full of resolve to live differently. The Five Mindfulness Trainings provide us with a template to do exactly that, as we consciously choose to nurture patterns of behavior and habits that are wholesome and generous. In other words we make mindfulness practice our new habit! This is the only way to deal with the potential terrorist that lurks deep within everyone's consciousness. To unravel the insidious internal knots caused by generations of ancestral habits, created from ignorance, vengeance and separation – this is the work of the new revolutionary of the 21st century, transforming terror and violence. It is not a political or intellectual exercise, not a matter of compromised treaties or cease-fires. It is an internal transformation of consciousness at the very core of our being. It takes mindfulness to do this and the Five Mindfulness Trainings provide the starting gate, a guidance system and a deep well of internal ethics to live by. Without them.....?

I choose not to go there, as my commitment is to actualize these trainings in my life, and in the lives of others, to the best of my ability. That is my dance.

This is from Ian's book "The Essential Spiral: Ecology and Consciousness After 9/11" published by University Press of America, August 2002, pp 240 – 242.

My Reflections in Twelve Steps of Mindfulness

Danny Kane

In the fall of 1996, I had been part of a twelve-step community for about 14 years. At that time, many changes had taken place in my life. That year I worked towards establishing a healing community that could further understand a transformation process based on the twelve steps. This was done in a lecture format. The following excerpt was written while preparing a talk to introduce the entry stage for this transformation process.

We may arrive searching, we may arrive desperate. We may arrive hurt or we may arrive sick. We also may arrive angry and lonely. Some may seem to stumble in by accident.

Emotional states of fear, anger, loneliness or resentment may vary but the common bond is the discomfort in one's life.

The anxieties we experience are confusing to us. We try to make sense of many of our constantly changing emotions, but deep down we are truly unaware of their true causes.

Many times our confidence can skyrocket only to come tumbling down into seemingly deeper states of confusion and doubt.

The first few hands that are held out may cause many to withdraw, while many are at once feeling a sense of safety.

Because of our patterns of holding onto any sense of comfort, some may remain in this suspension for long periods. Many may become bewildered at this seemingly slow progress, but others that have experienced these periods in varying lengths of times come to understand and maintain a loving and caring atmosphere.

An effective and caring environment will begin a process of properly administering the necessary ingredients for change.

We begin, slowly learning that our perceptions of what brought us here are misunderstood. We are introduced to looking at our main symptom of discomfort, but further searching leads us to ourselves.

The warm fertile ground we may find ourselves in allows a part of ourselves to sense something is genuine or right.

The initial understanding of our discomfort and the new found strength in a way, brings us to a decision or willingness to accept further possibilities of untangling the numerous webs we have created by our own frailties.

In dealing with our fears and other human conditions we begin to generate understanding.

Once the process of understanding begins, relief appears. The level of understanding is directly proportional to the relief.

This may seem small and insignificant, but the simple initiation is far from insignificant. As a simple spark can cause a huge forest fire, these seemingly tiny moments of change are planting seeds with great potential.

We begin looking at old problems with a new understanding. This new understanding supplies a new freedom therefore generating additional courage to carry on.

This new understanding also applies to our dreads and fears for our future.

January - March 2003, PINE GATE SANGHA SCHEDULE

Thursday January 9 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Mindfulness and the 12 Step program
Thursday January 16 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Doing Time; Doing Vipassana – Film
Thursday January 23 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Beginning Anew Ceremony
Friday January 24 7.00pm – 8.30pm	14 Mindfulness Trainings Recitation Pine Gate Meditation Hall
Thursday January 30 7.00pm – 9.00m	Pebble in Your Pocket – Part 1. Thich Nhat Hanh Aug 14, 2002 Dharma Talk from Stonehill Retreat
Thursday February 6 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Pebble in Your Pocket – Part 2
Thursday February 13 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Pebble in Your Pocket – Part 3
Thursday February 20 7.00pm – 9.00pm	5 Mindfulness Training Talk - Video
Thursday February 27 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Footsteps of the Buddha Pilgrimage
Thursday March 6 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Five Mindfulness Trainings Recitation
SATURDAY March 8 10.00am – 4.00pm	Day of Mindfulness Pine Gate Meditation Hall
Thursday March 13 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Touching the Earth Practice
Thursday March 20 7.00pm – 9.00pm	No Birth, No Death – Part 1. Thich Nhat Hanh Aug 15 Dharma Talk from Stonehill Retreat
SATURDAY March 22 10.00am	PEACE SONG CIRCLE Parliament Hill – Centennial Flame
Thursday March 27 7.00pm – 9.00pm	No Birth, No Death - Part 2
PEACE WALKS 10.00am - Noon	Elgin & Catherine Third Sundays: January 19, February 16, March 16

DIRECTIONS: Take Queensway to Woodroffe S exit; go to Baseline Rd; Right on Baseline: Right on Highgate (next lights): Right on Westbury: Left on Rideout and follow the Crescent round to 1252. All gatherings are in The Pine Gate Meditation Hall, 1252 Rideout Crescent, Ottawa, Ontario, K2C 2X7. 726-0881.