



Pine Gate

Newsletter of the Pine Gate Sangha

Vol. 5 Issue 1: Winter 2009

Table of Contents

This Moment Heals All Moments Ian Prattis	1
Separation	2
Wisdom of the Elders	5
Training The Mind.....	8
Consumption.....	10
Throwing Away	15
Organic Gardening In The Mind	16
Winter 2009 Study Session at Pine Gate:	19

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.

This Moment Heals All Moments Ian Prattis

This edition is devoted to Part Three of Failsafe: Saving The Earth From Ourselves. If you wish to order the book just go to:

<http://www.failsafebook.com/order.htm>

Albert Einstein asserted that if there was any religion in the world that could cope with modern societal crises it would be Buddhism. This warrants further investigation. We are certainly in a mess with the present ecological emergency and international war against terrorism. Yet the human journey has been nothing if not a travelogue through many crises in the fluidity of time and space. From threats of hominid extinction in the early days of evolution, to the Black Plague, Spanish Flu, and to World Wars to end all wars. Today it is Global Warming and International Terrorism. Although time and space provide different defining contours, a surprisingly similar human response is required for each crisis. What is always needed are mature, steady people who have done the internal work and found the skill to be there, totally in the present moment. Neither haunted by fears of the past nor traumatised by anxieties about an uncertain future, their clarity and steadiness are there to provide the essential credentials to deal with crises. At the same time, providing a capacity for healing all moments.

The point of being present is so the mind is not swept away by the hurricanes of fear and uncertainty and we can see clearly what needs to be

done. When we become overwhelmed by the ghosts of the past and the ghosts of the future the mind cannot focus with what is happening right now in front of us. It has already spun off into a hurricane engendered by a quite useless mindset. Useless, that is, for the present conditions we face. To be trapped in our ego narratives in times of crisis is a sure fire recipe for further disaster, as that entrapment entrenches all existing dualisms, separation and conditions created by the angst driven mind. To not get caught – we have to develop internal spiritual strength and learn not be enslaved by external forms. It takes steadiness not to be trapped. It takes a clear sense of dwelling confidently in our own sovereignty as a being sharing the planet with other beings – both human and non-human. This too provides the steadiness not to be trapped. The state of mind to aspire to is to be Truly Present in This Moment. The job is to encourage and guide others to the same location.

Presently we are collectively trapped by the problem of Global Warming. This is the wrong location. Global warming is not the problem – merely the symptom of a very slippery human mindset that has created the conditions for global warming to be an inevitable occurrence. That is the real problem. If we are serious about countering the impact of global warming we have to address the underlying mindset and find ways to change it. To address the symptoms without changing the mindset achieves nothing. Searching frantically for technological fixes while leaving the mindset intact is not a solution. Just what is it that we are looking for?

A candid look reflects back to us a totally unsustainable way of living on planet earth based on the clever organization of capitalist greed as the bottom line. This is well supported by individualistic consumer patterns and thoughtless lifestyles. The root causes of this life-plan are not a cohort of “evil capitalists” or gluttonous neighbors down the street. The root causes are our attachments to a non-changing reality - bodily pleasures, jobs, redundant “toys”, perceptions and

relationships. They are all subject to change yet we prefer things to be permanent – just as British imperialists assumed their Raj would last forever in India. As Gandhi so candidly demonstrated, big mistake by the Brits. The solution is simple – learn to become mindful instead of remaining mindless. Realize that certain things have to be thrown away from our minds before being replaced by mindful common sense. The Failsafe notion is a guiding means to address this matter, as all the components of Failsafe refer to attributes of mind. They are seeds of potential, buried deeply under a general amnesia and it is time to wake up the vast store of mindfulness that is right there in our minds.

The Failsafe that can alleviate Climate Change is buried in our mind. We must learn to tame our mental excesses so we can be still and access the stored mentality that does not lead to self-destructive mayhem. It seems, however, that major crisis is necessary before we become alert to this basic fact of life. The Buddha had a few recipes for developing mindfulness, so pertinent for our times that I fly them right in the face of our ridiculous sense of separation in the 21st century. Separation is part and parcel of the selfish individualism cultivated in order to be a “success” in our post-modern civilization. But, to thoroughly dispel this false notion of separation, allow me to begin with science before bringing the Buddha and the Wisdom of the Elders centre stage.

Separation

At the microbiological level we humans are certainly not separate selves or individual human beings. Only 10% of each one of us is comprised of distinctly human cells. The remaining 90% is made up of microbes that provide the energy to drive our cellular activity, brains, digestive and motor functions. Any sense of superiority is made absurd by this evidence. We should be humbled by the proven realization that we are mostly non-human bacteria on two legs! So the incorrect notion that humans are separate from the rest of nature has to be abandoned. Lynn Margulis (2000; 2001) has explored this microcosmic world for over forty

years and developed the concept of “endosymbiosis” to explain that our complex cellular structure depends on simpler microbial tenants, without whom we could not live. Our cells are in fact powered by structures called mitochondria that have their own DNA and we have more than one mitochondrial genome in our body, each with its distinctive DNA. Genetic science has long recognized that human cells, though bigger than bacterial cells, are outnumbered by the estimated 100 trillion bacteria that work to maintain us as functioning human organisms. In other words the human genome is only a fraction of what it is that makes us human, for the bacterial genomes contain 100 times more genes than the human genome. The humbling inference is that while the bacteria could survive without us, we would perish without the catalytic energy conversions provided by the collective bacterial genomes in our body. Our preoccupations with being a separate self, superior to nature, have now boomeranged into our faces with the Global Ecological Emergency - created by this particular view of human separation from nature. The consequences of these preoccupations endanger all of life. Science has clearly validated the insight that we are not a separate self, so it is long overdue that humans take themselves off the pedestal of being superior to nature. This notion has no validity either spiritually or scientifically.

Ecology and Psychology readily appeal to the modern western mind. Placed together as eco-psychology they provide us with a palatable 21st century science. They also open a doorway for some of the Buddha’s most cogent practices, as he was perhaps the first eco-psychologist. In the Diamond Sutra or to give its full name – *The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion* - the Buddha sets out a game plan. The “Illusion” is the sense of human separateness. “The Diamond” is the clear mind that sees through such illusion to the reality that humans and nature are totally interconnected, and if we want to look after humans we have to look after mother earth. Just as important is that if we wish to take care of mother earth we must also

take good care of ourselves. “The taking care of” is through meditation, the practice of mindfulness, the actualization of interconnectedness and being aware of the consequences of our actions. These aspects of meditation, mindfulness, interconnectedness and awareness with respect to the earth are found in many spiritual traditions, especially aboriginal ones. Yet neglect, ignorance and exploitation of the earth are the present order of the day whatever the spiritual tradition. The map of reality is that we are interconnected with everything. So if we wish to make a difference to the world, to care for it, we must also journey inwards and take care of our minds. That is the point of engineering the causes and conditions for a dramatic internal Climate Change. Once there, we will find the strength, wisdom and clarity to provide the new guidance required for 21st century crises. Being present with “That” is the foundation from which new leadership and management can emerge. We already possess a means to regulate planetary and universal affairs, but have simply forgotten to turn on the switch - Being Fully Present In This Moment. The journey to it is through meditation and mindfulness practice. These components of new leadership are slowly emerging.

Lack of appropriate leadership for the 21st century has been displayed by two of this century’s most powerful leaders. George Bush and Tony Blair invaded Iraq because they said they suspected Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq. They ignore our civilizations’ creation of the biggest weapon of mass destruction – Global Warming. This is created by our collective greed, produced by our industrial processes and consumerist madness. The result is damage to the global ecosphere. The unprecedented heat wave in Europe of 2003 killed 20,000 people. 3,000 died in the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York. I do not diminish that catastrophe but point out that the rising sea levels produced by Global Warming will kill millions, displacing millions more thus creating an unprecedented crisis of environmental refugees. This weapon of mass destruction is far more dangerous than international

terrorism. It has the capacity to destabilize existing political and economic structures, which are totally out of synch with the earth's natural capital. Military threats to our security and wellbeing are totally eclipsed by environmental collapse. We must change our ways and make peace with Mother Earth otherwise we will not survive. Our patterns of collective greed, mindless consumerism, industrial pollution and government irresponsibility must change.

The 2004 tsunami in South East Asia, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 urge us to come to a stop and look deeply at the present condition of the human species as one component of Gaia. The human species and planet earth are components of one body – this is the basis of the Diamond Sutra. The earth is our mother yet we make our mother suffer deeply - this is the lament from aboriginal cultures worldwide. Every faith and spiritual tradition, not just Buddhist and aboriginal ones, must honour the interconnected nature of our species with mother earth and renew their ethics and responsibilities accordingly. I repeat that the solution is not political or economic – they are secondary. The primary solution is spiritual and requires an implementation of environmental ethics based on spiritual tradition. Yet still the reality of Global Warming is resisted and with it an outright denial of our separation from nature and reality. The nay-sayers need to tune in to the 22 million people rendered homeless in the 2007 monsoons in South Asia, who were subject to Himalayan glacial melt upping the volume of the monsoon season. Those displaced know from direct experience that global warming is not a debatable theory despite the amnesia in America produced by NIMBY - Not In My Backyard. This is quite absurd. Global Warming is here. The modern human mindset has been identified as the cause, so let us discard those components of the mindset that has created Global Warming. Separation is just the beginning of the investigation. It leads inevitably to recognition of our interconnected nature, and with alarm noting the lack of ethics and appropriate leadership in the modern world.

A different quality of understanding our interconnected nature is required in order to transform the leadership for our troubled times. This calls for corporate and political leaders to accept guidance from spiritual teachers so they can better manage resources and society for the benefit of humanity in keeping with the principle of our interconnectedness with all of life. Leaders who root themselves in a deep spiritual understanding of themselves and their interconnectedness are in a position to bring balance to their nation and to the planet, for they will see deeply into the morass of the current crises facing humanity. They may come to know that the solution is a spiritual one, balanced with the existential necessities of life. Such leadership can guide us, for they will have the experience and insight to show everyone the pitfalls of ignorance, cravings, myopia and selfish harmful pursuits.

Until this happens, we are faced with a general state of emergency in world affairs, which causes so much pain and suffering that re-education is crucial. The re-education I have in mind is through meditation, so that ignorance about our interconnectedness with all of life is removed. This need not only be regarded as a spiritual solution per se. Simply put, the basic necessities of life have not been taught to current generations in the west, whereas other cultures inhabiting the earth are remembering them. With re-education through meditation and mindfulness practice we experience the territory of the heart. We learn that love and compassion are a necessary part of our daily bread; that our service as leaders rests on these twin foundations interconnected with everything else. Without the quality of resting in our internal strength, we cannot take care of the world, whether this is our home, workplace, school, or the global ecosystem. We have to move from being stupidly mindless to being acutely mindful. Environmental ethics based on spirituality provide the way ahead. The alternative is that Mother Earth and Nature will provide the solution – only we will not be around to see it. James Lovelock's 2006 book is very specific

about what that solution will look like. It is more intelligent to take heed of the principles laid out in The Diamond Sutra and to place a sacred ecology back into our relationship with Mother Earth.

Wisdom of the Elders

Several years ago at the beginning of spring after a severe winter in Canada, I participated in a sweat lodge ceremony with respected elders from the Ojibway, Dene and Mohawk First Nations. It took place in a remote part of Ontario and we camped close to the newly constructed *inipi*, specially built for this sweat lodge ceremony. Inside the lodge the prayers offered were very moving. We made deeply personal and collective commitments to serve the Earth Mother, to do all that we could to heal her and ourselves. At the end of the final round of the ceremony we emerged into the pristine beauty of a late snowfall under a clear star studded sky. There had been a two-inch snowfall while the sweat lodge was in progress. We walked barefoot in silence to where we were camping. Quiet smiles, not thinking too much. My smile grew immense when looking back at our footprints in the snow. I gestured to my companions to stop and look. Words were not appropriate. We all smiled with the same recognition and looked at one another with new eyes. It was as though these were the first footprints witnessed on Mother Earth. Such a vision strengthened our commitment and resolve. Business as usual was no longer possible for us. Share the epiphany, as it is no longer possible for you either, dear reader.

Sacred Ecology is not a term that indigenous elders would likely use. They quietly assume that the proper relationship between human beings and the earth *is* a deeply spiritual one. An elder is recognized as a holder of wisdom, the repository of a precise, well articulated earth science. Such wisdom is based on extensive investigation of how the threads of world order are woven together into one single brilliant tapestry. It may be understood only through the eyes of intrinsic humility and reverence for all of life. The knowledge passed on by elders about how to live a good life arose from

that essential spiritual relationship between a person, the earth and the cosmos. This venture was encouraged by a worldview that every item in the tapestry of life interconnects with everything else. The wisdom of the elders, expressed through ceremony and myth, provided the guiding means to care for the sacred balance that held earth, humanity and cosmos in harmony. The world view of the elders also encouraged a vision of looking ahead seven generations into the future by taking good care of these intricate inter-relationships NOW – in this moment. Lifeways evolved that were anchored in a sense of thankfulness for the garden bequeathed to us. Hunting and horticultural patterns relied on sophisticated and intimate knowledge of animal and plant interactions with habitat and humans. Respect and empathy were shown for the slain animals through rituals of thanksgiving that did not portray the hunter and horticulturalist as superior to the life form taken. Such an ethos of gratitude fostered care for a sustainable eco-system that was enough, as the hunter and the hunted, the horticulturalist and habitat shared a mutual awareness in the landscape that nature provided. The similarity of this wisdom across cultures was brought together by Knudtson and Suzuki in their 1992 book “Wisdom of the Elders.” The threads and premises of traditional ecological knowledge were due to the embodiment of a mythic landscape by elders located in different indigenous cultures worldwide. Knudtson and Suzuki drew on accounts by elders from Native America, Amazonia, the Australian Aborigines, Malaysia, Africa, Sarawak, Vietnam and Mesoamerica. The collective wisdom about Mother Earth as a living system, expressed uniquely by elders in different cultures, provides the framework for understanding and balance that we should listen to very carefully.

In contrast, our modern world has to a great extent abandoned all humility and sense of interconnectedness. With respect to a relationship with nature we have refashioned Reverential into Referential (Carpenter 1983), journeying from mythological space to the relentless drive of ego. Even if we have cultivated a respectful awareness

we still manage to smash through the threads of cosmic order as innocently as children running through cobwebs – simply because we do not know what is there. We remain unaware of the natural epiphany that is waiting. If we are lucky enough to somehow experience the epiphany there is no world-view by which we can understand its significance. Just marked down as an un-natural high! It is at great cost to ourselves and to the Earth Mother that we have ignored the repository of Earth Science from the Elders. In the 21st century we cannot replicate the conditions of indigenous culture, yet there is much we can learn about regenerating a commitment to planetary renewal from aboriginal ceremonies that unify peoples with their ecological insight. What can guide us? We can use instruments of mindfulness with their effect of freeing the human mind from suffering. Another way is to remember the Wisdom of the Elders and what our myths have been telling us from time immemorial.

Joseph Campbell in *The Hero's Journey* was adamant about the redundancy of the great religions of the world for the hero's task of transforming the planet and the world social order. The great religions are all complicit in the partisan fracturing of the modern world with outmoded expressions of cultural nationalism. The vigorous propagation of any religious form such as fundamentalist Islam or Hinduism, or fundamentalist Christianity or an outmoded Buddhism as "The Way" is totally inappropriate for our modern times. Their "monkey holiness" is not the stuff that can aid the hero. Cultural nationalism is a redundant force in the 21st century – an impediment to the task of transforming the social and ecological order of the world. However, the religious right in America and their identical twin - the Taliban in Afghanistan – and other religious groups like them refuse to recognise that they are obsolete, still appealing to the ignorant and fearful. The Jesus Camps run by the religious right in America and the *madrassa* schools organised by the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan have too much in common to ignore their similar intent of creating hatred and destruction towards all

unbelievers in their distorted vision of faith. Fortunately, the hero does have the "all" within him, within her and it is essential for humanity to wake up to that. Transforming the fabric of the entire social order asks world citizens to do the work of becoming spiritually responsible rather than remaining spiritual captives. This is to enable the revealed knowledge and wisdom gained from the Hero's adventure to be applied to society and the environment. Heroes and Heroines are certainly needed, though as I pointed out in Part One the task can be quite lonely. That is, until sufficient citizens "wake up," change the mind set and constitute a critical mass for dramatic change.

I have always had an intuitive sense that myths carry the wisdom of the ages and I find solace, courage and guidance in them. To me the world's mythologies are highly complex narrative forms that have kept alive the realities of creation and the manner in which light and life came to humankind. They also provide graphic insights into the way light and life can be lost. In a highly coded way these cultural accounts document the placement of humankind within the universe and upon the planet. The aboriginal shamans and seers I have worked with for over thirty years are myth-keepers and are called upon to be intermediaries between humans, the earth and the universe. Their task is to maintain a balance between the multi-dimensional levels of reality known to them, by ensuring that these levels can be experienced and integrated with respect. There is a body of myths worldwide that deal directly with environmental issues. The Tree of Life myths connect the planet, the universe and human beings in a template that is repeated with astonishing similarity in culture after culture. The constancy with which these sacred stories narrate the lessons of being, creation and transformation, provides overwhelming evidence that the distinctive style of these accounts is not a haphazard accident. These narratives lie outside of time and space, providing symbolic guidelines for an inner journey of personal transformation. In doing so, they provide insights about the interconnectedness of levels that can take care of the planet. This takes us

full circle back to the wisdom of the elders. The elders are the source of such wisdom, as well as being the keepers of it. If one understands the myths from the inside, as they do, and can discern the guidelines for the inner journey, one can then know what steps to take and what steps to refrain from.

The Jewish mystics, the Kabbalists, have the sefirotic Tree of Life central to their conceptions about creation. The divine tree, as the intermediary between the world of human beings and God, is composed of ascending levels of consciousness that sustain a balanced life with all of creation – planetary and universal. This same inexhaustible metaphor of levels appears in the Norse myth of the Universal Tree - *Yggdrasil*. The mighty ash - *Yggdrasil* - is centered as the *axis mundi* and connects the planet, humans and the universe, as long as human beings, represented as Gods, choose to locate at the center within themselves. Otherwise chaos and destruction ensue. All the cycles of existence are played out and orchestrated within *Yggdrasil's* domain. For the Lakota Sioux, the central pole of the Sun Dance lodge is known as the sacred tree, the center of everything, the connector, the Great Spirit. This kind of symbolism is found in *every* myth about the Tree of Life. What is it telling us?

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on the Tree of Life, placed at the center of the world and the universe. The four directions of the cross connect the earth, humanity and the universe in the most powerful symbol of our times. On this Tree of Life, Christ provided human beings with an example of boundless consciousness that speaks to every human heart, irrespective of particular religious tradition. Moyra Caldecott collected these and many other myths in her remarkable 1993 book - *Myths of the Sacred Tree* - yet the one that catches my attention more than any other is her account of *Siddhartha Gautama* and the *Bodhi Tree*:

*At Bodh-Gaya he sat under a tree
and did not move from there for
forty-nine days. Time passed and*

did not pass. He could feel the great tree drawing nourishment and energy from the earth. He could feel it drawing nourishment and energy from the air and sun. He began to feel the same energy pumping in his heart. He began to feel there was no distinction between the tree and himself. He was the tree. The tree was him. The earth and sky were also part of the tree and hence of him. When his companions came that way again they found him so shining and radiant they could hardly look at him directly... He could have said, "There is no distinction. There is no suffering once one experiences the wholeness of things. There is only suffering if we think in terms of separation: I and Thou, this and that, before and after, here and there. There is only suffering if we desire what we think is outside ourselves, not realizing that we have everything because everything is contained within the "I" He took a leaf from the tree and looked at it. In it was the whole essence of the universe. He held it out to his disciples. They saw it glowing with the same radiance that he saw.

The Tree of Life in mythology is usually referred to as a sacred, symbolic vehicle of communication representing the Cosmic Axis, the center of the Universe. The esoteric traditions of the East use the Tree of Life to describe the *sushumna*, the central energy channel in the human body, the experience of which takes the devotee to higher levels of consciousness. It is the metaphor through which human beings connect to all worlds and dimensions - universal and planetary. The underlying motif views humankind as being physically grounded within the synchronistic heart beat of Mother Earth, for it is through this planetary vascular system that

humanity connects to the experiences of life-sustaining forces: seasons, growth, nurturing and creativity. On their own each of these qualities remains unfulfilled. It is the conjunction of the Universe – through humans - with Mother Earth that permits the harvesting of fruit on the sacred Tree of Life.

Trees in their majesty and beauty are used as metaphors for this state of being in our language and art. The Tree of Life is inside every being, grounded through the legs into the earth from the heart. The conjunction between the Universe and the planet is made through men and women who feel the metaphor of the Tree of Life within them as real and rooted. The Tree of Life motif is ever present in a simple message that the world's mythologies have delivered over and over again. It is the human choice and commitment to be at the center of one's being that creates balance between humanity, Mother Earth and the Universe. The Tree of Life myths also graphically represent the alternatives - chaos, destruction and breakdown. Yet they always hold out the possibility of re-creation given the same human choice to locate at the center of being. Our global 21st century civilization is mired in chaos, destruction and breakdown. The ancient Tree of Life myths are fresh and current, for they speak to us directly and guide us to return to our center of being in order to transform the current mess. How do we get from here to there?

Training The Mind

The elders have a plan to return us to sacred ecology. The Buddha has a methodology to change our mindset by showing us the way to being mindful and fully present, right here in this moment. To assist the process of curbing the excesses of the untrained mind a series of mindfulness trainings were offered to guide each person to muster the most compassion they were capable of in all aspects of their lives. It takes twenty one days to change a habit of mind and behaviour, which is not a long time - but it does take effort and concentration to practice new forms

of thinking and action. I will tell a story about my adventure with one of the trainings that has to do with the way we talk to folk and rarely listen carefully. This has to do with compassionate speech and deep listening. The other trainings direct our attention to violence and reverence for life; generosity and social justice; sexual misconduct and responsibility; and mindful consumption. I do not intend an exhaustive treatment of all these mindfulness trainings, as this is not a book about Buddhism.

How many of us care to note the nasty and hateful things that come out of our mouth in speaking with others and by extension, communicating to others through our writing, films and e-texts? All are different forms of speech. We cannot tame the mouth until such time as we have reined in the wild mind that runs the mouth. There is a Zen saying: "Open mouth, already big mistake." The three gates to examine whether a speech form should be allowed through are: Is it True? Is it Necessary? Is it Harmful? (Johnson 2006) Try spending a morning or even just one hour examining every speech form that comes out of your mouth. In retrospect see whether it would have been better to remain silent rather than have the ego run rampant over everybody we speak to! In this time of historic crisis it is better not to be driven by ego narratives, as that only multiplies the illusions we are collectively trying to pierce through. Training the mind to change speech habits so that we do not create friction and aggressiveness takes concentration and effort. Also insight – and the insight I offer is that if we cannot listen deeply then we cannot speak mindfully.

Several winters ago I went on a solo retreat at a place called Stillpoint on the Madawaska River, 100 miles west of Ottawa. During the five days of silence I watched the river freeze over as I listened deeply to the winter voice of Mother Earth. On returning to my university afterwards, a colleague who takes an interest in my endeavours asked me what I did for five days. My reply was that I watched and listened deeply to the Madawaska

River freeze over. He then asked me what did I mean by “listening deeply.” So I talked to him about the Fourth Mindfulness Training about mindful speech, and how deep listening was the key to understanding and putting it into practice. If one could not listen deeply then it is unlikely that speech would be compassionate and loving.

The Fourth Mindfulness Training

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and to relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

I identified three levels of deep listening for my colleague. The first (and least significant) level of deep listening was intellectual, whereby I analyzed and scrutinized literature on deep listening, gaining a conceptual grasp of what it meant within the corpus of Buddhist teaching. Although this was the least significant level of understanding, it was a starting place. Rather than just see it as an intellectual practice, I began to realize that deep listening was a fruit or consequence of mindfulness practice – this was the second level of deep listening. Deep listening could not be there alone. I experienced a distinct improvement in my capacity for deep listening, as I realized that walking meditation, mindful breathing, mindful meals and other practices about being present were the necessary ground out of which deep listening could arise – as a flower growing from fertile soil. When such a ground was not there, listening was largely to my own agendas and assumptions, and I would not be listening carefully to what was being said to

me. So the simple insight that deep listening could not be there alone was important for me. This deepened as I investigated how it worked for me and directly affected my life – the times I was not heard and how I suffered from that. Also the suffering I had caused when I was not in a place to deeply listen to the concerns of those speaking to me, especially my children. I think back to times with my children when they had really important things to say to me, but I was too busy. I did not stop to give them my full presence and did not really listen. Many years later, now that they are all grown up, I have said to them individually; “I remember the time you said such and such to me and I did not really listen to you. I am very sorry.” They were astonished and deeply touched – as was I. The rifts and suffering between us could then heal.

That was it for deep listening, or so I thought, until I was plunged into a crisis with one of my sons caught in the drug underworld of Glasgow, Scotland. My eighteen-year-old son was studying at the Glasgow School of Art in Scotland, and my transatlantic phone calls had told me he was deeply in trouble with drugs. I arranged to spend time with him in Glasgow. We had not seen one another for a few years, so a visit was overdue, particularly since he had suffered deeply from a divorce that had spanned two continents. At the Glasgow airport I scarcely recognized him, as he now sported a shaved head and wore all the required black accoutrements to define himself as a punk. Yet he greeted me with a warm hug and a big smile. On arriving at the place he was living I knew something was dreadfully amiss. There were no books or art materials in his room. His large rambling apartment was occupied, as I later discovered, by "The Tribe" - a shifting population of punks, drug users, and dealers. As I sat in Alexander's squalid room wondering about him, he left for a while. There was such an atmosphere of decay and hopelessness that for a moment I felt utter despair - I did not know what to do. I went into my own deep silence and meditated so that I could be clear and calm. I knew I needed support

from all the tools of mindfulness I had - particularly deep listening and being present - to remain steady and not be drawn into judgment and discrimination. It was a time to take deep refuge in mindfulness.

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

This experience totally changed my understanding of deep listening. I said very little and left intellectual understanding and personal suffering behind and entered a totally new territory. On that evening the carefully constructed sense of self just dissolved and the "I" of me disappeared in the moment I was deeply present with my young friends. "I" became like particles of energy, touching and engaging with the particles of energy in everything there - my young friends, the grass, trees, park bench, city lights and sounds, and

beyond to a vastness that I cannot find the words to express. Space beyond space, time beyond time. In that stillness, the vastness of energy touched deep seeds of consciousness in my young friends as they trusted me with their confidences and secrets. We stayed there for hours in this zone of transformation, frequently silent, and walked back to their home just before dawn. From the smiles and embraces we exchanged I knew that something had changed in all of us: I had discovered a deep listening I had never thought possible; my young friends and son had nurtured long forgotten seeds of hope within themselves. Past rifts between my son and I were healed by both of us being present in this surprising moment.

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

Consumption

How do we change our damaging patterns of consumption? Are we capable of being present with the knock-on effect of our modern day consumption? Perhaps if we became more aware of the consequences of our habits of mindless consumption there would be change. First of all we have to realize that most of our present consumption fosters violence - to our body, to other people and to the planet. If we are serious about stopping violence and bringing environmental degradation to a halt, we must obviously change our habits of consumption and refrain from creating internal violence to our systems - and to the planetary systems we interconnect with. Furthermore our children consume violence, fear, hatred and craving when they watch television or browse the internet. The high school murders in North American and European schools are there because society, parents and children did not pay attention to the necessity of guarding their sensory doorways and taking care of relationships and interconnectedness with all things. Clearly we have created a dangerous environment by allowing so many toxins to penetrate our children's senses. High school murders are not a teenage problem.

They are a problem generated by the systematic violence in society, which penetrates into the consciousness of young people through their sensory doorways.

For the most part the food we eat is driven by internal desires that have disastrous consequences, particularly for our connection to all living beings. Awareness about changing our consciousness around food consumption has yet to filter through to the North American mainstream, as the vast consumption of meat and alcohol constitutes a grossly excessive ecological footprint. Industrial animal agriculture, which is the norm in North America, is not really farming. Animals are treated solely as economic commodities and subjected to horrible cruelty. Over 90% of farm animals in Canada are raised in incredibly confined conditions. They have their testicles, beaks, horns and tails removed without anaesthetic. In cramped living quarters they are fed a diet of antibiotics, hormones and steroids. The stress, despair and anger generated in the animals are the energies we consume when they end up on our plate. We are eating their suffering and pain, taking it into every cell of our bodies and consciousness. Industrial animal based agriculture also pollutes the environment, decimating the tropical rain forests essential for the planet to breathe. It depletes the essential resources of the surrounding global ecosystem. In a world of endemic water shortage it is an astonishing statistic that it takes over 3,000 litres of water to produce 1 kg of U.S. beef. Furthermore animal waste contaminates drinking water systems, pollutes rivers, reservoirs and kills humans. The vast proportion of the global ecosystem's protein, carbohydrates and fibre are lost as feed cycles through livestock. It takes 16 kg of grain and soy feed to produce 1 kg of US beef, plus 3,000 litres of water. In Canada 77% of cereal crops grown in the country goes to feed livestock. 60% of the catch by the world's fisheries ends up as fishmeal destined to feed livestock. Twenty times more energy and 100 times more fresh water are required for meat production than for vegetables, fruit and cereal production. The ecological

footprint created by our dietary preferences is huge, costly and damaging. Furthermore it is not good for our health – physically, emotionally, mentally or spiritually. Although this is horrific – it is not the card I want to deal from the deck. There is a bigger card.

It refers to our dependence on livestock, which contributes enormously to Global Warming. FAO produced a scathing report in November 2006 titled *Livestock's Long Shadow*. In it, relentless statistics demonstrate how industrial animal agriculture creates more greenhouse gases than the entire sum of emissions from cars and trucks worldwide. The massive release of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and ammonia requires an equally massive shift in our dietary preferences. Vegetarianism is no longer just a healthy lifestyle choice. It is a direct and rapid means to restrain the livestock industry from damaging the planet beyond the point of no return. We can actually save the planet by not eating animal products. It is unrealistic to expect folk to go vegetarian in an instant, but scrupulous shoppers could do their best to buy free range meat and be vegetarian one week per month and move gradually to eating organic foods and less meat products. This change in a basic consumption pattern does far more than taking our car off the road. The present mindset that drives our consumption requires an essential planetary saving change. We are eating our mother – also our children, as we are depriving future generations of their chance to live. Our dietary preferences have to be called by their true name – cannibalism. The FAO report is more generous, though equally stark. It concludes that it is essential to reduce meat industry products by 50%. NOW! Consumers can make this happen by changing their minds about what and how they eat. This simple act can avert the impact of global warming.

The world we presently live in is full of hunger, malnutrition and 40,000 children dying every day from starvation. When we realize that the vast amount of cereals that could feed starving children are used instead to make alcohol and to feed

livestock, we must deeply examine the consequences of consuming alcohol and meat, especially once we realize that the world's cattle consume foods that could feed the entire human population on the planet. With awareness we can change our minds and patterns of food consumption. We re-educate and retrain ourselves mentally, as well as physically, and choose to support our body, consciousness and planet by shifting deeply ingrained food habits. We step more lightly on the planet when we consume with mindfulness and radically decrease those activities that pollute – air travel, meat consumption and consumerist madness. Furthermore, the chronic degenerative diseases common in western civilization find their origins in the toxic food we eat. Yet if we know how to eat mindfully, then we also know how to take care of ourselves, of others, and the environment. Mindful eating creates celebration as an alternate to violence. Before eating, simply look at what is there on the table, where it has come from, how it has been prepared, and whether it will truly nourish you, and at the same time protect the environment and future generations from harm. This advocacy around food consumption keeps compassion alive and creates the basis for joy and happiness. It means reducing as much as possible the violence, destruction and suffering brought to living creatures and to the planet. If we bring violence into our own biological system and consciousness, then we inevitably bring violence to the other systems – political, economic, planetary – that we engage with through our thoughts, speech, actions and senses. The steps to prevent this arise from being fully present with the consequences of our consumption.

We consume much more than edible food. We consume with our senses, desires and cravings. This consumption feeds our consciousness, which “eats” everything we put into it. If we fill it full of toxins, violence and other negative energies, it will be this accumulation in our consciousness that drives us. On the other hand if we choose a mindful approach to consumption then a different energy will occupy the driving seat of our life, one

that guides us to live a life full of voluntary simplicity, understanding and insight into the reality of the moment we presently occupy. Each of our sensory doorways is bombarded with toxins that feed our consciousness. The advertising on billboards and through the media flood our eyes and minds with desire, greed and lust. Our children take in violence through videogames and movies of wanton destruction and cruelty. The often vulgar and demeaning lyrics sounding through sectors of modern music create homophobia and hate. The taste and smells of fast food create such greed that obesity in young people is now a serious medical issue – and not only in young people. Eating disorders are promoted by the unrealistic norms for women artificially set by the fashion industry. Manufacturers' cleverly design built-in obsolescence for the products we are encouraged to buy, solicited through vigorous advertising. The advertising corporations now target small children as well as the rest of the population to create a disposable society that has forgotten to re-use, recycle and even question the need to buy. If we do not guard each sensory doorway we will get sick. We must warn the six senses to consume mindfully, discipline them to avoid self-intoxication and guide them to scrutinize what energies are allowed to penetrate our consciousness. It is imperative that we actively cultivate this guardianship because misperceptions abound from all our senses. These misperceptions are not reality. We have colossal misunderstandings about how our mind works and continue to trust in our perceptions of reality rather than intuit the truth. Our sensory perceptions weave a tapestry of illusion that only mindfulness can penetrate and then guide us to a new level of consciousness – the Failsafe notion once more. Lest we forget!

Then there are the deepest desires that so often possess and overwhelm us. If vengeance and absolute power over others are our deepest desires, then terrorists are created; if rampant consumption is the deepest desire then we have a degraded planet. Valentine's Day, Easter, Christmas – these special days are targeted by the captains of industry

for optimal retail returns, and in the process mindless consumerism is fuelled to the max. At Christmas time we are far removed from remembering the significance of this spiritual celebration (Kumar 2006). Christmas products created by fossil fuel energy feeds consumerism and consumerism fuels Global Warming. The chain of interconnection is clear. Whether it is holidays, housing, transport, gifts and so on, our consumption requires the continuous use of fossil fuels. The mantra of western civilization – endless economic growth – provides a promise of expectations being met without any awareness of consequences for either our own health or the health of the planet. It is becoming clearer with every passing day that our current non-sustainable energy and economic systems are actually subsystems of a global ecology that is disintegrating before our very eyes. Yet even those few policy makers who recognize this, rush to find energy alternatives to fossil fuels without addressing the root causes of rampant consumerism – the major behavioural manifestation of western industrial civilization. Biofuels are not the answer, as their production will destroy ecosystems rather than replenish them. New energy technology is certainly needed, but if placed within the existing paradigm of current values and consumption habits then the same vicious downward spiral of environmental degradation would occur. Until such time as the underlying causes of rampant consumerism have been understood and changed.

Consumerist addiction and craving, fostered to keep the wheels of industry turning, can take over our entire life with disastrous consequences. It is a state of consumption wherein we cannot be happy without the object of our cravings. We are then driven to search for, strive and even fight to obtain that “something” we crave. This makes us suffer all our lives, as we are never happy or present with what we get or achieve, as there is always that “want” for more. We need the insight that this kind of consumption is in fact the obstacle to true happiness, for we also have within us the capacity to “be”, to live fully in the present moment. Yet

these capacities are obscured and covered up by habit energies, by acquired and inherited addictions. We must be prepared to release these obstacles rather than feed off and be held captive by them. We stop this process by meditating and looking deeply into the driving force of our deep desires. Then create an opportunity to transform them. Instead of lust, greed and fame we foster the desire to awaken at the highest level – to experience joy and happiness in the here and now - the desire to bring loving kindness to everything we connect with and the desire to alleviate all suffering. Just as addictive consumption provides food for our consciousness, the desire to awaken and be present is also a food for our consciousness.

Our ego takes its definition from the various false identifications and attachments that we wear as masks, hiding ourselves under carefully manufactured personas as a convenient statement of ourselves. The ego defends a restricted and separated view of self, one that creates catastrophes. Its logic is that of separation, the drive is manipulation and discrimination and the amplification is layer upon layer of delusion. The end result is suffering, filled with fear, craving and clinging as we continue to feed our ego demons. This is a pale, limited reflection of who we potentially are. In meditation we release the hold of attachment to identities and begin to experience freedom and interconnection. Simply because we have stepped away from the bondage of living up to a set of identifications that are false, that do not reflect back to us our full capacity as human beings. What takes place in meditation is the steady removal of false identifications, so that you are ultimately left with freedom to be yourself. From this point onwards you begin to make wiser decisions about yourself and the environment in which you are located.

It is easy to understand how our consciousness is reinforced by our patterns of consumption. This shapes our lives because we feed off it. It is the ground of definition for how our body, mind and spirit manifest and furthermore creates the

environment we occupy. If our consumption of edible foods, sensory inputs and cravings have loaded our consciousness with toxins and negative energies, then this is our life as it is and in understanding how it has come to be, we begin to understand that toxic overload destroys any possibility of congruence between our speech, thoughts and actions. By knowing how the different items of consumption contribute to the consciousness that feeds and defines us, we can begin to make clear choices about what to consume and what we must exclude.

Mindfulness is our protector. We must use it to distinguish consumption patterns that nourish our organism and spiritual well being, from those which do not. By eliminating toxins from our sensory diet we begin cultivating an alternative consumption based on wholesome nutriment – patterns of consumption that enhance mindfulness and compassion. But we cannot see deeply into the interconnection between consumption and consciousness until we first of all come to a STOP. That is the first meditative step – to stop running - before deep looking and insight help us to recognize the toxic nutriment that pollute our bodies and mind. We then cultivate the foods that nourish us in a positive and wholesome way. We resist by waking up, by knowing what to do and what to refrain from. Our harmful consumption is based on ignorance and inner hollowness, loneliness and despair that we often try to get away from through patterns of consumption that intoxicate and satiate.

The tools available for preventive and protective action are conscious breathing, walking meditation and other mindfulness practices. Mindfulness and spiritual ethics of practice are there to provide guidelines to restore our freedom. We do not analyze or compare too much. We just practice mindfulness to recover ourselves from the confusion and distortion offered by the different levels of our consumption. To assist and guide our practice we need authentic teachers, men and women who have navigated these waters and found

the way through. It is also why we need a community of spiritual practice - to embrace and share the practice as we rely on friends who are steady and can support us. A good teacher and a solid community of spiritual practice provide a safe vessel to cross the difficult and stormy waters created by the mind. Mindfulness practice is the most important food that we can provide for our changing consciousness. It brings us to the state of being fully present. There we can draw on clarity, wisdom and compassion without being diverted by strong emotions and wrong perceptions into initiating unwise and harmful actions. The latter blocks our appointment with life as it is and makes victims of us all, as illusion weaves its dreadful tapestry of distortion. Once mindfulness is developed, it is an energy that transforms harmful habits. Mindfulness gives us the internal strength to see our negativity just as it is, as part of us, then with the application of meditation and conscious breathing, it can transform our negative, harmful habits. It keeps us steady, clear and true by constantly providing a direction and method to bring about transformation of our worst patterns of fear, hate and anger. This is what the term “mindfulness” refers to. Meditation is there as a tool to cultivate the energy of mindfulness. It is a strategy to arrive at internal stillness.

We all have the capacity of awakening the mind and transforming it. If we do not access the capacity to awaken, then we become preoccupied with self-importance and attach yet more “things” to our separated self. The leap into freedom is through mindfulness practice so we can be free from all discrimination and attachment to a separate self. Day by day we must retrain our mind so that we enjoy a different manifestation from consciousness. There is a Zen saying that the goal of practice is to discover our true face. This is heart consciousness. Every time we are mindful we create an energy that cuts through the delusion and ignorance fostered by ego and intellect. This energy penetrates into our mind, directly nurturing the collective seeds of wholesomeness in our consciousness, which when activated creates the

conditions for our awakening. The mindfulness trainings provide the ethical guidelines to make this so. What is communicated to us in a very precise way is the ethical and moral basis of how to be with ourselves, others and with the planet and society at large. Once we understand the power of the energy created by the mindfulness trainings then something deep and very wholesome stirs in our hearts. From this initial experience the seeds of awakening are nurtured and distance is created between ourselves and the negative actions that can harm both humanity and the planet.

Take a moment to contrast this understanding with the current mindset of the politicians, corporate executives and terrorists who are making the decisions that shape our world. They have not trained their minds. Their minds are scarred, filled with ignorance, greed and vengeance, their hearts held hostage to corporate, ideological and electoral agendas. They all follow the same script, seeking similar justifications to advocate the misuse of power and violence. Trapped in history they offer no means of re-creating our world in a new and better way. The mindfulness trainings, however, provide a different road map for peace, a different view of politics, conflict resolution and planetary care. The implications of these teachings apply fully to the question of how to deal with the damage to our degraded environment and take steps to transform our consciousness. In the dark times facing us the mindfulness trainings provide protection. The practice of these values and ethics is the “real” medicine for our times and provides hope for the future. They provide protection and distinguish that which is good for our selves, for our minds and planet, and that which is not. It is possible to move in the direction of responsible and ethical living and make a difference to our society and environment.

Throwing Away

To come to grips with the necessity of throwing away the formations in our mindset that cause damage, I introduce one last thing from the Buddha’s teachings. His teachings are always about

transforming suffering. With sheer brilliance in his teaching about mindful breathing the Buddha starts with the body where the brain and consciousness are located. Progressively - through sixteen exercises based on mindfulness, concentration and insight - this teaching takes us through each avenue of investigation so we grow stronger to the point that we can begin throwing away our fears, anger, judgement, greed and consumption patterns. The emphasis on developing the necessary skills means that the exercises are not superficial – rather they constitute a systematic retraining of the wild mind. The exercise on Throwing Away is the one brought to your attention – *Skilfully breathing in and out, contemplating letting go*. It can be translated as either “Letting Go” or “Throwing Away Strongly.” Letting Go is actually a bit lame - for wimps and wusses – Throwing Away Strongly is when we have confidence and internal strength. While I like the idea of throwing away strongly, the following personal example is much closer to reluctantly letting go. It was the best I could manage at the time, clearly starting off this endeavour as a thorough wimp. Yet once the benefits were experienced it took on something of the character of throwing away strongly.

Since relinquishing my car several years ago, radical new horizons appeared, though there was an initial period of grief and frustration. Every time a winter green Subaru Outback drove past I would weep, especially if I was clambering over snow banks to get to a bus stop. I would often get on the wrong bus, discovering parts of the city I had no intention of visiting. I must also add that relinquishing my car was not quite as virtuous as it may seem. My car insurers refused to renew my insurance policy due to the frequent, yet small, crashes that had cost them oodles of money. The most notorious incident was when I collided with my neighbour’s mini-van. I still believe he was on the wrong side of the road, but just perhaps it was I. His insubstantial mini-van crumpled and buckled while my beloved Subaru Outback had minor damage to the front fender.

My neighbour cheerfully, and without realizing the risk, got into my car and I drove both of us to the nearest police station to report the collision. The police sergeant took our particulars and as I stood there looking somewhat sheepish, he put up his hand with an air of authority and said: "I don't want to hear anything from you – I will put this down as a no-fault collision." I was about to point out that "no-fault collision" was an oxymoron, when my neighbour said OK and hurried both of us out. He had to meet his daughter at a shopping mall and asked if I would kindly drive him there. Quite a risk taker he was, given the circumstances. I happily agreed and mused that just perhaps my absence from driving would make it safer for every other driver on the road, quite apart from the obvious environmental benefits. All this being said, I was not prepared for new vistas that were suddenly there when I became car-less in Ottawa.

I learned how well served my city of Ottawa was with bus and light rail services. Had I continued driving a car I would have missed out on one of the most hilarious and refreshing bus conversations I have ever had. Riding home one evening on the 117 bus from my university to Baseline Station, I noticed a young man with a twelve pack of beer sitting opposite, staring very intently at me, obviously three sheets to the wind. Finally he blurted out: "Hey, aint you the ecology guy on TV?" To which I mildly demurred that indeed I was - not really wishing to get into a conversation with this inebriated young man. But joyfully he exclaimed: "Hey, me and the boys have a pack of beer every Monday night when we watch your show. It's cool man." I felt immediately humbled by his openness and that surprisingly I was making a difference. As was he at this moment, as he chatted away about ecology and recycling until his bus stop. He proudly stated that when he and the boys went drinking in the woods, they always brought their empty bottles out for recycling! He offered me a bottle of beer before leaving the bus, which of course I accepted graciously. I did not drink it, leaving it in the bus driver's bin to dispose of.

I had discovered that between Baseline Station and my home, there was a kilometre walk along Pinecrest Creek that constantly stunned me with its beauty. As it was a bicycle path the snow was ploughed in winter, which made walking that much easier. To have mother nature dance in such unexpected ways led to my often carrying a camera, with stale bread and grain for the mallard ducks that wintered there. The sunsets over the ice rimmed creek and snow covered field leading up to it would take my breath away. They could not possibly be there in the middle of a busy city!! As were red foxes, one lonely coyote, song birds, owls and the occasional pedestrian. My walking meditations between Baseline Station and home made me smile as I slowed down and hummed Pooh Bear type hums. If I had a car this wonder would have been denied to me. I also relocated essential services close to home, finding doctors, dentists, eye specialists (and camera shops) within walking or biking distance. They had been there all the time, just waiting to be discovered. I now re-arrange appointments locally within bicycle range, rarely going downtown unless absolutely necessary. Driving a car, I could not stop to be fully present with moments of stunning beauty for as long as I liked; or say hello to rabbits that boldly appeared; or leave contented ducks well fed on bread and grain murmuring their approval of the two legged who listened to what they wanted.

The bus drivers on the 117 bus route have come to know me and younger passengers offer their seats to the greybeard with the jazzy umbrella and funny black hat. Would I go back to driving a car and lose all this? Well, talk to me about an affordable, environmentally friendly Mercedes and a kind insurance broker, then perhaps we'll see – only kidding!

Organic Gardening In The Mind

Stillness and inner silence is a necessary part of taming the wild mind. We have to find a way to create the conditions for this to happen. Yet, in our modern world of fast paced lifestyles we rarely stop

running. There are so many distractions that we quickly become outwardly dependant, un-centered. We fail to find the time or discipline to access the store of mindfulness just waiting to be cultivated. The external restlessness amplifies the internal restlessness in a feedback loop that ignites our wild mind. The problem is that we have closed the doors to taming the wild mind due to wrong perceptions, ignorance and continual suffering. Also because our hearts are not fully open and the tapestry of our consciousness is limited. When our consciousness is narrow, we hold on tight to all our self-imposed dramas and suffering – slamming the door shut on our internal strength and keeping our dysfunctional habits well fed and alive. And so we remain wounded, driven by our scars, anger and fears; suffering all our lives. The remedy is, however, within reach. We can unravel the knots of suffering through the practice of mindfulness and move from being mindless to being mindful. The knots of suffering are then not so tightly held once the tapestry of our consciousness expands and we can truly throw away strongly. This is brought about by organic gardening in the mind.

When I retired from teaching at Carleton University in the summer of 2007, a dear friend asked with some concern just what was I occupying my mind with these days. Here is my reply to her:

I have enjoyed the time and space to play with Mother Earth as a diligent and slightly crazed organic gardener. The blaze of flowers at the front of the house is a testimony that I am doing OK so far. An experienced gardener would no doubt wonder what on earth I am doing in the back yard of the house. The back garden is surrounded by trees so it is as though one is in the middle of a forest. I plant vegetables in between flowers. Veggies have such a dull life struggling to poke their heads above ground, then taking in rain, sun and soil nutrients to end up on some human's plate.

So to make them happy I plant them between gorgeous flowers so they have some jazz and elegance around them while they are alive. Just imagine a carrot waking up in the morning to see a beautiful pink hibiscus in full bloom on one side and multi coloured snapdragons on the other. They are bound to be happy and grow really well before they end up on some human's plate. And on it continues with beets, tomatoes, lettuce, arugala, swisschard, kale, rhubarb, beans, asparagus, cucumbers, peppers, peas all planted between beautiful clumps of flowers.

There is also a herb garden in amongst the peony bushes. Some herbs are very nice and well behaved, but others are just downright unsociable. I had to separate a green basil plant from a red basil plant as they were always quarrelling. Now that they are at the opposite ends of the garden in their own solitary tubs – they are thriving. An experiment I tried was to move a small juniper tree from the front garden, as it was dying there, to the back garden where there is a tall cedar hedge. I think it will be much happier in the back yard – cedar language is a bit different to juniper language but a lot like French and Spanish – so they can communicate a bit. I have welcomed the juniper into the backyard with much compost and water but left it to the cedars to encourage her to live – and she has decided to do so and thrives in her new environment. And on it goes with much weeding and then much more weeding to keep both the veggies and the flowers

happy. Sometimes I am not aware of the difference between a weed, veggie or a flower – so I just leave whatever it is to grow before taking any action. My garden is a still place, yet buzzing with life and joy.

All of this is a metaphor for the organic gardening I do in my mind every day. That blooms also – with the diligent daily watering of the beautiful positive seeds and the careful pruning and transformation of the negative and harmful weeds. Simple yet surprising!

I thought you really needed to know this, if only to make you smile.



Winter 2009 Study Session at Pine Gate: January 2009 – May 2009	
Thursday Jan 15 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Five Mindfulness Trainings Recitation Ceremony
Thursday Jan 22 7.00pm – 9.00pm	EckhartTolle “New Earth” Disc 4 Part 1
Thursday Jan 29 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Joe Kennedy “The Camino Pilgrimage”
Thursday Feb 5 7.00pm – 9.00pm	EckhartTolle “New Earth” Disc 4 Part 2
Thursday Feb 12 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Deep Relaxation and Touching The Earth With Carolyn
Thursday Feb 19 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Eckhart Tolle “New Earth” Disc 5 Part 1
Thursday Feb 26 7.00pm – 9.00pm	EckhartTolle “New Earth” Disc 5 Part 2
Thursday March 5 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Q & A with Dharmacharya Ian
Thursday March 12 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Eckhart Tolle “New Earth” Disc 6 Part 1
Thursday March 19 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Eckhart Tolle “New Earth” Disc 6 Part 2
Thursday March 26 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Film Night At Pine Gate
Thursday April 2 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Eckhart Tolle “New Earth” Disc 7 Part 1
Thursday April 9 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Eckhart Tolle “New Earth” Disc 7 Part 2
Thursday April 16 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Chanting and Sound Currents with Carolyn
Thursday April 23 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Eckhart Tolle “New Earth” Disc 8 Part 1
Thursday April 30 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Eckhart Tolle “New Earth” Disc 8 Part 2
Thursday May 7 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Teachings on Death & Dying I With Dharmacharya Ian
Thursday May 14 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Teachings on Death & Dying II With Dharmacharya Ian
Thursday May 21 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Teachings on Death & Dying III With Dharmacharya Ian
Thursday May 28 7.00pm – 9.00pm	Beginning Anew Ceremony

Directions: Take Queensway to Woodroffe S. exit; Go to Baseline Rd; RT on Baseline; RT on Highgate (next lights); RT on Westbury; LT on Rideout Crescent and follow it round to 1252 Rideout Cr. – home of Pine Gate Sangha. **Contacts:** 613 726 0881; iprattis@cyberus.ca Chill.Carolyn@gmail.com Attendance is by donation according to means. Ball park: \$5 - \$10. Teacher: Dharmacharya Ian Prattis, True Body of Wisdom
