



Pine Gate

Newsletter of the Pine Gate Sangha

Vol. 1 Issue 1: Winter- 2002

Welcome to the first issue of Pine Gate, a quarterly newsletter produced by the Pine Gate Sangha of Ottawa, Canada.

The Pine Gate Sangha welcomes old and new members to its regular and special activities, led by Ian Prattis.

Ian Prattis is a poet, scholar, peace and environmental activist, and a student of Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. He was educated at London, Oxford and the University of British Columbia. He has been a Professor of Anthropology and Religion at Carleton University since 1970 and currently teaches courses on Ecology, Symbols, Globalisation and Consciousness.

As a meditation teacher, he encourages people to find their true nature, so that humanity and the world may be renewed. He has trained with Masters in Buddhist, Vedic and Shamanic traditions. The meditation teacher is not separate from the professor or the global citizen. Along with his wife Carolyn, he leads the Pine Gate Sangha in Ottawa. You can learn more about Ian and his activities at www.ianprattis.com.

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THE PINE GATE SANGHA

with Ian Prattis, Meditation Teacher

The sangha, located in the west end of Ottawa, had very modest beginnings. Inaugurated in 1997 following Ian's return from teaching meditation in India, early gatherings featured Ian, his wife Carolyn, and their pets – Nikki the dog and Lady the cat. At first, the sangha was called "Rideout Sangha," taking its name from the quiet, tree-lined crescent where Ian and Carolyn live.

Since 1997, the sangha has grown and presently has over 150 members on the e-mail list. In the summer of 2001, major renovations took place to the lower level of 1252 Rideout Crescent, which contained a small meditation hall. From the dust and knocked-down walls emerged a new meditation hall - the Pine Gate Meditation Hall, named after Thich Nhat Hanh's story "Pine Gate" in the book entitled *The Stone Boy and Other Stories*.

The Pine Gate story is about a young swordsman who leaves his master's mountain retreat to go into the world and vanquish monsters and demons, not realizing that the biggest monsters were his own. After many years, he wearily returns to his master's mountain retreat, yet is unable to open the Pine Gate. He does not realize that his heart could no longer open it. It was impassable to all his strength, sword, and anger. Next morning, a younger brother who was pure in heart opened the Pine Gate easily while fetching water from the river and found his older brother on the other side. After their initial joy at discovering one another, they both came to realize, with a terrible shock, the monster that the swordsman had allowed to manifest within himself. The younger brother helped his older brother along the path, easily opening the Pine Gate for their passage up the mountain.

The homily from this story is that no matter what demons we struggle with, externally or internally, there is always a sangha member there to open the Pine Gate and provide sanctuary when we are overwhelmed and heavy burdened. The naming of the meditation hall after this story is in keeping with Taking Refuge in one of the Three Gems – “I Take Refuge in the Sangha,” which leads us to “I Take Refuge in the Buddha” and “I Take Refuge in the Dharma.”

During the summer of 2001, Ian and Carolyn were in Lower Hamlet, Plum Village, assisting with the Summer Retreat given by Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh. During that time, Thich Nhat Hanh provided a gift of calligraphy of *The Pine Gate Meditation Hall*, which now hangs on the wall for all to see. The new meditation hall is a sanctuary for many friends, one of whom proposed that the sangha change its name to reflect Thay's gift. In 2002, the sangha unanimously approved the new name of Pine Gate Sangha.

Sister Giai Nghiem, from Plum Village, conducted a beautiful Blessing Ceremony for the Pine Gate Meditation Hall on September 8, 2001. She was visiting her parents in Ottawa at that time. As part of the Blessing Ceremony, each sangha member read a paragraph from the Pine Gate story – so that the significance of the name would reveal itself.

Regular meetings for meditation and study take place every Thursday evening from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Qi-Gong classes and introductions to mindfulness practice are held on Tuesday evenings from 7.00pm – 8.30pm.

On the first Saturday of each month the Pine Gate sangha offers a gathering with meditation at 5.00pm, then a Dharma talk, followed by a pot luck vegetarian supper. Hikes, Days of Mindfulness, and meditation retreats are organized on a regular basis. The teachings are in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh.

In keeping with this tradition, the Pine Gate sangha has a major commitment to engaged issues – peace and environmental crises, quality of life issues, mindfulness practice in schools, as well as supporting selected charities locally and internationally. The sangha is part of two Citizen Coalitions in Ottawa to protect the environment and also to bring an end to war. The engaged nature of sangha practice is an essential defining feature of the Pine Gate sangha. The sangha offers Love, Compassion and Understanding in order to transform what is sometimes a cruel and exploitative world.

In a conversation with Thich Nhat Hanh, Daniel Berrigan quotes an Israeli civil rights activist:

“Remember that whatever they do to us is much less than what we do to ourselves if we do not resist. . . . This is what people don't think of: what we do to ourselves and our children and our communities when we give in.” (The Raft Is Not The Shore. Orbis Books, 2001, p 79).

The voice of the sangha can be heard through the quarterly newsletter – Pine Gate. A dharma discussion group on the Day of Mindfulness held on January 5, 2002 not only discussed a sangha newsletter, but formed a team to edit and produce one. The first edition will be available online by March 2002, at www.ianprattis.com/Pine.

The Dalai Lama's Visit and Tibet Week

The Dalai Lama, Tibetan political and religious leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner, will visit Ottawa April 28 – 30, 2002. The main reason for his visit is to encourage the Canadian government to urge the government of China to hold talks with representatives of the Dalai Lama's government-in-exile on Tibet's future.

On the afternoon of April 28, the Dalai Lama will give a talk, based on his new book entitled *Ethics for the New Millennium*, at the Corel Center. His talk will be followed by a question-and-answer period. Local singer-songwriter Alanis Morissette will act as Master of Ceremonies. His Holiness also will speak at an interfaith ceremony to be held at Ottawa's Christ Church Cathedral on Monday, April 29. The service's theme will be "A Celebration of the Spirit: Reconciliation Between Peoples and Nations."

The Canada Tibet Committee will hold a cross-Canada "Tibet Week" (April 22 – 30). Events being organized here in Ottawa include a birthday celebration for the imprisoned Panchen Lama, a photo exhibit by Brian Harris, testimonials given by Tibetans now living in Canada, and Buddhist dharma talks.

For updates on events and ticket information, visit www.tibet.ca or phone (613) 730-1723.



The Dalai Lama

Mindful Consumption

by Ian Prattis

In order to shift our patterns of consumption from a non-mindful state to a mindful state, we need a great deal of support. Part of that support comes from an awareness of the consequences of our consumption. We also need the support of friends, family, and sangha, so that we can shift from meat eating to vegetarianism, or from cooked food to raw food. It is helpful if pot-luck vegetarian meals are organized on a regular basis with friends, and that some mealtimes with family are conducted in silence, while everyone contemplates the nature of the food consumed.



Ian Prattis

For instance, when I am fully present with my food and look deeply into how it came to be on my plate, there are often wonderful surprises – especially in the summertime when I eat a bowl of raspberries. I slow down, breathing consciously in and out and, before eating these plump red berries, I look deeply into how they came to be there. I see raspberry canes, the elements of sunshine, rain and good soil. I see the gardener looking after the raspberries with weeding and composting, people picking them and placing them in baskets, truck drivers taking them to market, people buying them. Above all else, I see my grandmother.

As a little boy I believed that my grandmother had the biggest raspberry patch in the world! I would pick raspberries with her, some for bottling and jam, but mostly to sit down with my grandmother and enjoy eating them with her. My grandmother was very special. I would be sent to her house once a week by my parents to do gardening and chores for my grandmother, but she had other ideas. She wanted to spend time with me, her first grandson, and so she hired another little boy in the neighborhood to do the chores and paid him a shilling a week.

This clever strategy was one I fully enjoyed. We would talk, have tea, and pick raspberries together. She used to make exquisite lace with a crochet needle, and one of my favorite memories is still that of curling up in her big armchair with a bowl of raspberries, while she sat in front of me making lace. I ate the raspberries very slowly, because I was so happy. She was my first teacher in mindfulness, although I never called it that – but that was its true name. She passed away many years ago, yet eating raspberries with deep looking reminds me that she is with me still, as I touch the elements and web of life that brings raspberries to my bowl. This kind of support is essential to bring about the shift in consciousness that enables us to consume mindfully with compassion.

To assist deep looking at mealtimes, or whenever we eat food, there is a simple exercise to do – the Five Contemplations. If we have a bell at home we can invite it twice before reciting it. If there is not a bell, a half-filled glass of water tapped with a spoon will do just as well. Once the bell has been invited twice, we recite the

Five Contemplations:

*This food is the gift of the whole universe –
the earth, the sky and much hard work.*

May we eat in mindfulness so as to be worthy to receive it.

*May we transform our unskillful states of mind
and learn to eat with moderation.*

May we take only foods that nourish us and prevent illness.

We accept this food to realize the path of understanding and love.

Then we eat in silence for 10 – 12 minutes, contemplating our food, the consequences of its production and consumption, and our connection to the cosmos. Part of that connection is to be aware of the millions of people around the world who are starving. As we eat mindfully, we may resolve to help alleviate the suffering of world hunger. After the period of silence, the bell is invited once again so that people can speak.

At home alone, I make a special effort to prepare and consume meals mindfully. It is such a joy because I have two assistants – my dog Nikki and my cat Lady. As I set the table, I tell them that this is a mindful meal and after the first two bells I cannot talk to them. I set a bowl of treats for each of them on the table and after I recite the Five Contemplations, I put their bowls down on the floor and I begin my meal. My two dharma pets always sit quietly after their treats until the bell brings the silence to an end. Then Nikki wants her ears scratched and Lady climbs up on to my lap. They bring such fun and joy to my mindful meals with them.

Reflections on Healing & Leadership Retreat

September 21 – 23, 2001

by Emily & Hendrick

Because we are students wanting to encourage the positive energies in this world, we decided that a weekend retreat to guide us in meditation would be good. We were not sure what to expect and so we opened our minds and our hearts to a new experience.

We learned a lot about the Buddhist faith and practice, as well as about the positive effects it can have on one's well being and the world. Ian and his wife, Carolyn, as well as others attending the retreat, greeted us warmly. An atmosphere of calm and quiet put us at ease, and a quiet hour of meditation gave us some new tools to work with in trying to stay focused in the present moment.

Breathing the fresh country air and listening to raindrops patter softly on windows and tent walls, we spent our first evening of silence together, learning to communicate with each other, and with the rest of the group, without talking. We shared the peace that such quiet mindfulness creates.

As we rose to the bell's ring, we eased our way into the first hour of daylight with the guidance of Buddhist meditations and teachings. Growling stomachs soon led us to wonderful dishes prepared with loving hands, which nourished us throughout the weekend. Mindful consumption – giving thanks, taking time to eat mindfully, acknowledging the work of nature, farmers, skilled cooks and the whole cosmos, and being grateful for one another's presence – gave us a new appreciation of meal times.

Going from meditation to Dharma Talks to mindful Qi-Gong exercises to silent walking in nature – all of these activities prepared us so that we were ready to share and listen to each other. The recent events of September 11th have shocked us all and resulted in many heavy hearts. It was healing to listen to each other's grief and to share in supporting one another with comfort and hope. We were encouraged by Ian's assurance that many other faiths, as well as Buddhism, are working toward a better world of love, forgiveness and mindful attention to the humanity in all of us.

It would take an entire novel to recount all that went through our heads and hearts during this three-day retreat. We are happy to say that we both came home feeling deeply thankful for this chance to learn about meditation and the great healing potential that it gives all of us.



The Alter at the Barn Retreat

Come

Love is who I am.
I remember.
I know.

It is who we all are,
Available for the remembering,
For the knowing of what is so.

Re-member and we are one,
Temporarily separated in the illusion of our reality,
Connected by our divinity within.

Able to share ourselves,
Without attachment to result,
With love unconditional.

When Self expressed,
Love is joy and truth,
Experienced in the eternal moment of now.

Come share my love.
Come share our love.
Come.

by Steven Welchner

La Entrada De Pino

by Camila Reimers

On September 8, 2001, a gate opened the path of practice to a group of people that have a true determination to learn.

For years, Ian and Carolyn have provided a loving and safe place for learning and meditation in their home. This past summer, they decided to renovate the lower level of their house, which created an even better space and the new meditation hall.

Sister Giai Nghiem, from Plum Village in France conducted the formal opening ceremony. A beautiful gift of calligraphy provided by Thay with the words “Pine Gate Meditation Hall” now hangs on the wall of our new centre, reminding us of his presence and support from Plum Village.

After the formal ceremony, different members from the sangha in Ottawa read aloud the story of “Pine Gate” from Thay’s book entitled *The Stone Boy*. It is a story about a young swordsman who has left his master and gone into the world to do good and fight monsters and demons, not realizing that the biggest monsters belonged to him. He was unable to open the Pine Gate on his return. It was impossible. A younger brother fetching water was able to open the Pine Gate easily because he was pure of heart.



Pine Gate Sangha Opening

After reading the story, the group understood that no matter what we struggle with, externally or internally, there is always a Sangha member there to open the “Pine Gate” and provide sanctuary when we need it.

This is what the Pine Gate Meditation Hall is all about, a safe place to share and practice with your new spiritual family, a place to grow and be in the present moment. But most of all, it is a place to love and be loved.

We invite you to come and share this experience with us.

A SAGE FOR OUR TIMES

by Ian Prattis

Review of Thich Nhat Hanh’s *The Path Of Emancipation*, Parallax Press, 2000

I was fortunate to participate in Thich Nhat Hanh’s first twenty-one day retreat in North America in 1998. To retreatants, Thich Nhat Hanh is known simply as Thay – “Teacher.” Most place the word “Beloved” before that of “Teacher.” We return to everyday life with awareness that our true nature is that of Interbeing and that we share the same ground of being with everything else. His book, entitled *The Path of Emancipation*, describes this retreat. In reading it, I could once again hear Thay’s voice, guiding us to apply mindfulness to all aspects of our everyday life. The full force of his presence is felt on every page. His teachings contribute to our happiness, health and balance.

Thay gives a deep and compelling introduction to the Buddha’s Discourse on the Full Awareness of Breathing. He emphasizes healing and transformation, throwing away our cravings and wrong perceptions and establishing mindfulness and being present. Thay’s clear exposition charts the methods to transform our stored seeds of anger, fear and despair, with no separation between theory and practice. He shows that once mindfulness is

applied to our picture of our selves, then understanding dawns. From this liberating insight of understanding, healing and transformation begins.



Thich Nhat Hanh

The three “Question and Answer” sessions in the book reflect the daily cycle of mindfulness practised by four hundred participants to achieve deep peace, which then infuses daily life. Careful attention given to Foundation Teachings provides readers with a working knowledge of Buddhism to complement the comprehensive teachings. On the last day of the retreat, Thay offered a brilliant discussion of the Six Paramitas, to show how we can cross to the shore of well being from the shore of suffering. The tour de force in the last chapter captures the substance of each Paramita. Thay’s prose is dignified, elegant, and beautifully sculpted.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a sage for our times. During his forty-year exile from Vietnam, he diligently pursued the path of understanding and love. He presents Dharma to a Western audience in an understandable way, without losing any of its original essence and power. Complex discourses are presented skillfully in a straightforward manner, which show the relevance to everyday life. He conducts retreats worldwide, works for the reconciliation of war veterans from all sides of the Vietnam conflict, and supported UNESCO’s Manifesto 2000 – all to bring about a peaceful and transformed world. In his writings, there is openness to dialogue with other traditions. He teaches engaged Dharma and seeks to protect the wholesomeness of society and the environment. Thay is what he writes and he truly “Walks his Talk.” There are also signs that he is entering the mainstream of Western culture. The latest

film of “Hamlet,” with Ethan Hawke, is set in modern New York City. “Elsinore” is a Five Star hotel, and “Denmark” is a giant corporation, prone to takeovers, intrigue and murder. Before the famous soliloquy, we see Hamlet in his hotel room. He looks up at the television set and there is Thich Nhat Hanh on screen. Thay smiles and says: “To Be Or Not To Be – that is not the question. The question is to be aware of our Interbeing.” Thay continues for several minutes with a discourse on Interconnectedness. His cameo appearance alone makes this film worth seeing. His entrance into the mainstream of Western culture can only bring unlimited benefits.

Retreat with the Sage of our Times

A wonderful opportunity awaits anyone wanting to attend the upcoming retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh from August 12-17, 2002 in Boston, Massachusetts. The cost is estimated at approximately \$650 U.S. for double occupancy.

The retreat is “Healing our Hearts and Global Community: the Path of Non-Fear and Compassion.”

For information or to register, contact Green Mountain Dharma Centre –

phone (802) 436-1103 or fax (802) 436-1101 or email: mfmaster@vermontel.net

Two members of the Pine Gate Sangha – Danny Kane and Camila Reimers – will be ordained into the Tiep Hien, receiving the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings transmission of the Order of Interbeing. Other friends are encouraged to take the Five Mindfulness Trainings transmission from Thay, as this is a wonderful opportunity. Car pools will be organized for this event.

A Day of Mindfulness, January 5, 2002

by Lydia Dixon

After the frenzy of Christmas preparations, activities and indulgences, I decided to give myself a gift in the New Year. Rather than the rhetoric of resolutions, I chose a day of mindfulness.

On January 5, 2002, about 17 people arrived around 10 a.m. at Rideout Sangha on Rideout Crescent in Nepean. After introductions, we settled on our cushions in the Pine Gate Meditation Hall, and Ian outlined the day's schedule. We chose partners for an exercise of "Who are You?" whereby each person asked the question "Who are you?" to their partner. The respondent was required to give a different answer each time the question was posed. I was surprised to discover many different facets of myself. It was helpful to identify those particular aspects that held more meaning for me.

Ian's dharma talk on "Mindful Consumption" reminded me that we are accountable for the effects of what we choose to fill our bodies and minds. The thoughts, feelings, words and actions that we embrace create future effects. If people judged others harshly or thought negatively, then their choice would affect how they felt about themselves and their perceptions about what others felt towards them. His words reminded us that if we nourish our consciousness with loving kindness, awareness, openness and giving, then we would feel connected to, and energized by, our environment and relationships with other people.

After the talk, I felt determined to be more disciplined in making healthier lifestyle choices – more meditation, exercise, thankfulness, and awareness practice in the days ahead.

Participants enjoyed a mid-day meal, consisting of a smorgasbord of delicious and filling vegetarian dishes. The meal – reflecting the combined generosity of everyone who had come for the day – was eaten in silence. Everyone gave thought to all those things that had contributed to the meal before them – for example, the natural elements of earth, water, and air that helped the fruit, grains and vegetables grow; the farmers or producers that gathered the produce; the shopkeepers that made them available; and the person who shopped for the ingredients and prepared the dish. The atmosphere was one of gratitude and pleasure.

And what could be more appropriate after such a sumptuous meal than a meditative walk through the neighbourhood's nature trail – feeling the fresh cool air against one's cheeks, hearing the water gurgle in the creek, and appreciating the beauty of snow-laden trees in a pleasantly mild temperature for Ottawa in January. Everyone appeared refreshed and ready for more upon their return to Pine Gate Meditation Hall.

Small group discussions followed, from which was born the idea of a sangha newsletter as a forum for sangha members to voice their dharma-related experiences. The suggested newsletter name of "Pine Gate" sparked the idea that "Pine Gate" would be a great name for Rideout Sangha. With the entire group's enthusiastic approval, Ian declared, "We'll be 'Pine Gate Sangha' as of today."

At the event's closing at 4 p.m., participants agreed the day had been well spent. I felt luxurious – the kind of feeling that comes from being pampered at an expensive resort or spa, but for a fraction of the cost. The day was a well-deserved rest from busy-ness. I anticipated changes in my daily life because of seeing things from a different perspective. I realized the importance of community and the support that comes from sharing with others.

In general, the participants expressed feeling well-fed, relaxed and positive about the days ahead. Instead of New Year's resolutions or the crowded frenzy of January sales, Saturday's event appeared to be a satisfying alternative for those of us who attended Pine Gate Sangha's day of mindfulness.

On the road again ...

On Friday, February 15, 2001, Ian gave a talk and mindfulness retreat (in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh) at the Temenos Retreat Centre in West Chester, Pennsylvania. On Friday evening, Ian talked about the face of violence and terror, in particular the violence to the earth. The evening included opening and closing meditations and clips from Ian's film, "Voices on the Environment." The retreat's theme was "Healing and Leadership in the 21st Century."

Meditative silence helped retreatants to become more present while they examined the root causes of violence in our world. Ian offered methods to deal with healing anger and suffering as well as guidelines to engage in a different and more positive way with our natural and cultural environment. Throughout the retreat, Ian's clear, gentle instructions guided friends without a meditation background as well as experienced meditators.

The program was then offered to the Knoxville Mindfulness Community in Tennessee the following week, with a talk on Friday, February 22, and a Day of Mindfulness the next day. The mindfulness road program continues to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia and to Vancouver, B.C. later in the year.

Closer to home, there is a Day of Mindfulness planned for March 23, 2002 in Ottawa at the Pine Gate Meditation Hall. The Pine Gate Sangha's annual fall retreat is scheduled for September 27-29, 2002.

INVITATION TO MEDITATION

– OPENING CHANT

Stably seated under the Bodhi tree

Body, Speech and Mind are One

In Stillness

Free from views of right and wrong

When I am focused in perfect mindfulness

The path is illuminate

The shore of Confusion is left behind

Noble Sangha

Diligently bring your mind into Meditation

Namo Shakyamuni Buddhaya

Namo Shakyamuni Buddhaya

Namo Shakyamuni Buddhaya

SANGHA OUTREACH

Four members of the Pine Gate sangha are establishing mindfulness practice groups in their communities and workplaces. Vivian (613 258-6806) has started a weekly meeting at her home on Monday evenings at 7.30 pm in Heckston, a village south of Kemptville. Bernadett (613 742-0403) is co-ordinator of a Tuesday lunch-time group in her unit at Health Canada. Danny (613 825-6633) is extending his facilitator work with the 12-Step Program in Ottawa to include a mindfulness practice gathering on Sunday evenings. Camila (613 237-3162) is introducing mindfulness practice to the students and staff at her language school.

The sangha supports and encourages these wonderful endeavours in a very concrete way. Sangha outreach also includes support for the newly formed sangha at St. Ann's Health Care Center in Cape Breton and the Vancouver Mindfulness Practice Community.

MARCH – APRIL 2002, PINE GATE SANGHA SCHEDULE	
Saturday March 2 5 p.m. – 7 p.m.	Dharma Talk: Mindfulness, Drugs and Young People Pot Luck Vegetarian Supper
Thursday March 7 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.	Right Livelihood & Buddhist Economics Small is Beautiful – E.F. Schumacker
Thursday March 14 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.	Five Mindfulness Trainings Recitation Ceremony
Thursday March 21 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.	Doing Time, Doing Vipassana Inspiring film of Meditation in Indian prisons
Saturday March 23 10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Day of Mindfulness Pine Gate Meditation Hall
Thursday March 28 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.	The Five Contemplations Mindful Snack Together
Good Friday March 29 7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.	14 Mindfulness Trainings Recitation
Thursday April 4 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.	Full Awareness of Breathing Sutra – continuing study
Thursday April 11 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.	Voices On the Environment Film of Ottawa Citizens Transforming Their Ecosystems
Thursday April 18 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.	The Sage of Aranachala The Life and Mindful Times of Ramana Maharsi
Thursday April 25 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.	Touching the Earth Practice

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.