As we develop our skills as master gardeners of our consciousness, we become deeply aware of how the quality of our lives is influenced by the seeds that have been watered. Everything that affects our consciousness enters metaphorically as a seed. The master gardener serves as gatekeeper and protector of the mind’s awareness.

According to Thich Nhat Hanh, “Our mind is a field, in which every kind of seed is sown—seeds of compassion, joy and hope, seeds of sorrow, fear and difficulties.”

Seeds refer to all the emotions and qualities that enter our awareness and get stored in our consciousness. Using this awareness, think of a typical day. What seeds or feelings are you allowing to enter your awareness through the media, the people in your life, and your everyday conversations? For parents and those who tend to the well-being of others, how do we protect the precious potential of the human gardens in our care?

Previous generations cultivate life’s seeds and pass them on through interactions with family, friends and the world around them. From the time we’re born, these seeds are nourished. They grow through every interaction and transform through mindfulness in every season of our lives. A grandmother’s happiness watered the seed of happiness in her daughter, who in turn nourishes that seed in her unborn child. A grandfather’s anger watered the same seed in his son, who continued with his own children. The process of sowing, watering, nourishing and cultivating the seeds of consciousness is an integral part of the life cycle supporting a healthy or unhealthy lineage. Mindful parents learn to rely on being happy and peaceful, transmitting the best gift we can give to our children. Like all living things, seeds go through cycles of birth and death. A cherry pit has the potential to produce a cherry tree—and eventually more fruit and seeds. All seeds require the proper conditions to manifest, just as a garden.
needs nutrients in order for plants to grow. Master gardeners apply their skills to the seeds that need watering (loving-kindness, joy, compassion and equanimity) and the seeds to be transformed (anger, fear, jealousy and doubt) to develop a beautiful garden.

Through the seed metaphor, we can deeply explore some of the causes and conditions that influence personal growth and development. “Seed language” is comparable to developmental psychology, which centers on the characteristics and changes that occur with time and maturity. Among the various lexicons used to describe relationships, seed language offers an overview similar to the “love languages” popularized by Dr. Gary Chapman. He suggests that each person has their own “language” to demonstrate love including words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. In a similar way, using a Buddhist paradigm, learning which seeds to water in ourselves and how to selectively water those seeds in others is the basis of understanding and love.

**Mind and Store Consciousness**
Our store consciousness, or the subconscious mind, is everything below the soil; our mind consciousness is everything above the soil. The garden illustrates the concept of the seeds being below the soil, in the store consciousness, and the flowers and weeds being above the soil, in the mind consciousness. Whatever we experience is a manifestation of our awareness of the present moment filtered through our mind consciousness. For example, this spring I was sitting on the shoreline of a small pond in a park, and I jotted down everything I was aware of: “I am aware of the blossoming trees, the warm sun on my back, and a variety of sounds, sights and smells. I stop and take a few breaths. I am aware of a cacophony of birds and the sound of a meandering stream cascading down some rocks in the distance. I am aware of some chatter and movement in the bushes behind me of small birds rustling through the dried leaves. The radiating sun warms my body.”

Mind consciousness is present-moment awareness — this is a beautiful day. Occasionally my mind drifted to happy experiences in my childhood, like playing in nature. In that intimate moment, I was aware of my thoughts, feelings, body, and the story I was creating about the moment, including how
quickly I reflected on similar stories or experiences from the past. The environment and my peace of mind activated memories in my store consciousness, which is also known as the root consciousness — an appropriate name to represent the place where all the seeds are stored in our garden.

**Seeds of Suffering and Seeds of Love**

Seeds of consciousness fall into two distinct categories — seeds of love and seeds of suffering. Consider what happens when we witness or experience someone’s anger, hatred, violence, abuse, jealousy or craving. The behavior is first noted in our mind consciousness. Immediately thoughts, feelings and perceptions arise and cause us to create a mental formation or story. We then experience this story in our mind consciousness — the part of the garden that we see — which simultaneously triggers a response in our store consciousness, underground. When the “seeds of affliction” are experienced or watered, our typical response is to avoid or suppress them by pushing them deep into the store consciousness. The same holds true when the seeds of love are experienced or nurtured. We don’t suppress them, but we do allow them to take root in our store consciousness. Thus we must become aware of and water the positive seeds of love and embrace and transform the negative seeds and afflictions that have been suffered.

Over the years, my experience as a prison volunteer has taught me how the seeds of affliction can dramatically impact a person’s life and happiness. In the prison I visit, one of the inmates (JR) is serving a life sentence with no chance of parole. Living in the small Intensive Management Unit with nearly twenty other inmates, he is constantly bombarded by the collective seeds of suffering that have been planted in the store consciousness of his “cellies.” During his own early years, the seeds of suffering — primarily anger, jealousy, fear, hate and violence — were watered by an abusive family, alcohol and drug abuse, and numerous attempts to assert himself in destructive ways. The soil and conditions for his life were already primed at an early age. Unlike this inmate, some children grow up in a family where love abounds and where they are nurtured and held by parents who recognize the importance of positive interactions for their beloved child. The seeds of joy, love, compassion and peace are visible in such families. Every smile is a celebration, every
cry an opportunity for compassion, and the overall home environment is peaceful. Family and friends support this child in loving ways. At school she is surrounded by other loving people who truly see her as a miracle and fortify her positive attributes or seeds. Her parents take time to “be” with her and convey that she is valued and important. It is easy to imagine what this child’s life will be like as she grows and learns. With such an upbringing, she will be less inclined to stealing, violence and/or self-medicating to avoid the pain of life. Despite the horrific life my prison friend experienced, he writes to me and shares that his mindfulness meditation practice has been a saving grace, a refuge to cope with the ongoing violence and verbal assaults that take place in the prison environment.

He continues to transform the seeds of affliction on a daily basis through his meditation and understanding of how to cultivate the garden of his consciousness. In a recent letter, he wrote, “Cultivate peace in the garden of your heart by removing the weeds of selfishness and jealousy, greed, anger, pride and ego. Then all will benefit from your peace and harmony.”

I often pause to reflect on the seeds that have been watered to lead me to this place in time, in which I have the opportunity to share these ideas. Likewise, I have learned through my own difficulties the importance of transforming the seeds of affliction that arise from my store consciousness. In every moment, I recognize that I have choices regarding people with whom I interact, the materials I read, the programs I watch on television and video, and the music I play. As every master gardener knows, you must tend to your own garden to have the skill to tend those around you.

Excerpts from _The Seeds of Love: Growing Mindful Relationships_ by Jerry Braz. Available at all leading bookstores and Awareness Place shops in Singapore.
What Scientists Say About Buddhism

Brain Training: The Effects of Meditation on the Brain

Is Seeing Believing?

Exploring the Garden of Our Consciousness
Jerry Braza tells us how we can develop skills to become master gardeners of our consciousness

What is Mind in Buddhism?