

Still Mountain December Community Meeting

December 14, 2014

Meeting commenced at 11:20 a.m.

-Introductions were done by all present in the seated circle.

-Su Hansen began with an update regarding board activity and announced board member names and positions (Su Hansen, president; Hugh Danville, treasurer; Anita Sherman Moran, secretary; Jim MacBain and Yair Rivlin, at-large members). Su explained that she sees the responsibilities of the board, teachers' council and community within dotted lines, leaving open the possibility for an ongoing exploration of how the teachers' council, board and community will interact.

-David Lawson read the names of those serving on the teachers' council (Hugh Danville, Erica Dutton, Mary Grannan, David Lawson, Bilha Rivlin, Peg Tappe, Jim Whiteside) and noted that they had met for the first time this past week. He stated that he was committed to ongoing teacher development, in terms of learning within the group and also through opportunities outside/from other sources. One goal of the Teachers' Council is to come up with a code of ethics and a grievance procedure. They will look at Spirit Rock guidelines as a model. New teacher training is slated to begin in the latter part of 2015, and will likely be a three-year training, finishing in 2018. It will be done by invitation.

-David also spoke of the importance of doing a needs assessment that will go out to the Still Mountain community members in order to ascertain areas of interest in Buddha-Dharma. He noted the importance of being able to provide on-going education for sangha members. Also mentioned was the possibility of introducing dharma talks as part of Sunday sittings.

-Still Mountain has the option of taking over the October reservation at Howell Nature Center (from Deep Spring, which has decided not to run their October retreat in 2015). A request was made for volunteers for the retreat committee and for someone to head up the committee. Sara Ahbel Rappe offered to head the committee. She will consult with Peg Tappe and Karen Mori who have had experience in coordinating retreats at Deep Spring Center.

-It was noted that Still Mountain still needs to make some decisions regarding email communication- official mail, generated by the organization vs. community sharing/notices of social events. Along with this it would be helpful to have a reciprocal relationship with other Buddhist communities in announcing/publicizing events.

-Simon was thanked for designing and having printed the Still Mountain postcards, more of which are now available.

-It was requested that board meeting notes be posted on the website, something that is in the works.

-The issue came up of Still Mountain holding another event (such as the Jason Siff workshop that took place in August). Members were encouraged to come up with ideas and communicate those ideas in the needs assessment, which Erica Dutton is working on and which will be made available on-line. When completed, the data will be collected and will go to the board and teachers' council and then come back to the community for

discussion/approval. It was pointed out that the phrasing of questions can affect how people answer, and determine which kinds of activities are emphasized (i.e. some have a strong interest in community outreach). Discussion also took place as to how the process would work in taking all the ideas from brainstorming and narrowing them to decide which ones will be selected. It was suggested that for larger events we would need to create a consensus, though for things like a special interest trip, it could be that just a small number of people might want to participate. Another option would be small study groups focused on a particular topic. Still Mountain would also have the option of working with other Buddhist communities in sponsoring larger events.

-Sara mentioned the idea of a New Year's retreat and that she would possibly be able to host one in her home. She will check with family members to see if this will work. It was noted that we may wish to work with other Buddhist organizations in doing a New Year's meditation retreat, though there are obvious time constraints with such short notice. Deep Spring is offering a Christmas day meditation and brunch at the home of Vicki Lawrence.

-David announced that he will be meeting with a Tibetan teacher in town who studied under Chogyam Rimpoche and who is interested in a possible collaboration.

-It was emphasized that Still Mountain should strive to be a diverse community (which is part of the written mission) and that this does not just happen by itself, but rather requires thought and effort to achieve. An article in the January 2015 Shambhala Sun describes a sangha in Brooklyn and demonstrates how they accomplished this. The Ann Arbor Friends Center was mentioned as a good resource with experience on matters of diversity/peace and social justice issues.

-It was mentioned that it would be helpful to create a link on the SM website to take readers to related articles and other resources- Spirit Rock was again suggested as a model for that.

-Another area of discussion was the need to limit the number of things Still Mountain has going on at any given time, so as to not spread resources too thin (better to have a few ideas that a number of people can get behind). Members present were reminded, however, that while it's good to come up with ideas, unless someone takes the initiative to carry it out, it won't happen. It was further noted though that even one person with a good idea and the passion to carry it out is sometimes all that's needed. Members were reminded we'll need to trust in the process and in decisions being made in an appropriate way.

-David explained that an idea from the planning committee was appointing advisors to Still Mountain in an ad hoc way, and that he would like to see a discussion of this at a later time. Names mentioned were Jason Siff, Ajahn Thanasant and Noah Levine (who would be a good resource on diversity, in particular). These would be external sources that would serve strictly as advisors and not be involved in decision making. It was noted that the advisory group should not have too much power/authority lest it exert too much influence on the organization. The exact role of the advisors would need to be determined, though they could help in addressing both spiritual issues as well as more practical/organizational/technical issues. Advisors names would be posted on the Still Mountain website and offer further legitimacy to the organization.

-While the board has the role of enabling things to happen, and the content of classes comes under the prevue of the teachers' council, it was hoped that members of the community might also be able to do some things

“freestyle”, without the involvement of the board or teachers’ council (whose role should be more one of allowing than restricting).

-A question arose regarding membership dues, but David explained that the SM planning committee had decided on a Dana model. Brief discussion ensued regarding the pros and cons of having some sort of “membership”. A compromise might be the idea of registering in some way, so there is a better sense of who wants to be actively involved, and to distinguish “who the audience is”. Even with official lists, it was pointed out, it is sometimes difficult to determine the degree of interest of those subscribed. If people decide they no longer have an interest in SM, they always have the option of unsubscribing. What is clear is that the core group is the group of people who regularly come to Sunday sittings.

-Members were reminded of the importance of knowing who has what skills within the organization. People should not be shy about letting others know their talents, or of noticing other members’ talents (as some people won’t be necessarily comfortable with coming forth and claiming expertise or skill).

- Finally, many positive thoughts were expressed. Though still in its early stages, it is exciting to see the ideas and energy being generated. Members should trust in being able to build a structure built on connection that will hold all, remembering the importance of finding spiritual authority within ourselves and within the group. Those present were reminded that the first year of an organization’s formation is mostly about learning and forming ideas, then honing in on what’s most wanted/needed and what is a good fit with the organization. Connecting the mission with the day to day functioning of the organization takes time. The importance of listening to others’ ideas without judgment and with an open heart was also mentioned.

-Linda Longo, Peg, Yair and Bilha were acknowledged and thanked for their contributions of food to the meeting.

-It was announced that the next community meeting will take place January 11, 2015. The meeting ended with a circle of held hands and 2-minute meditation.

-Meeting concluded at 12:32 p.m.