

April 29, 2019

Dear Sangha:

At Appamada's all-sangha meeting April 14, we somehow did not manage to get the meeting recorded. I've written up what I recall saying, and Joan will also send along a report on Appamada's financial well-being. I urge you to read both of these to get a sense of where our community stands and our vision for the future. We had some wonderful questions which unfortunately also did not get recorded. If you raised a question in the meeting and recall how it was answered, would you be kind enough to post the question and response?

I've attached my notes here and will also post them on the [Appamada website blog](#).

Appamada All-Sangha Meeting

April 14, 2019

First I wanted to express my deep gratitude for the work of the Board, and especially Joan Harman for the work they have done in support of Appamada. Joan has spend countless hours learning about Appamada's records and financial history and preparing reports both for the Board and for our meeting. I also thanked Appamada's council members for their dedicated efforts in support of the sangha, and our incoming dharma teachers, Joel, Laurie, and Todd for their deep commitment both to this path and to the sangha. Finally, I thanked the sangha members who turned out for the meeting. I asked whether they had brought any particular questions or topics and we listed those so that we could be sure that they were addressed. As far as I recall, we managed to cover them in our presentations and the question and answer period that followed. Here is what I presented.

WHERE WE ARE RIGHT NOW

We are a very active sangha with a wide variety of programs and offerings.

Our regular programs include:

- Daily weekday morning meditation, with opportunities for practice discussion with me as well as with Zen mentors and assistant teachers.
- Weekly Sunday morning (and for this spring Saturday morning) programs with three periods of zazen, a dharma talk, and informal brunch afterwards
- Sunday morning orientation
- Weekly Wednesday evening zazen programs with instruction, guided meditation, and informal tea following
- Saturday afternoon Depth in Practice group

- Sunday Women in Zen group
- Sunday Recovery Book Group
- Sunday Meditation in Spanish
- Sunday Sewing Buddha's Robe
- Weekly Monday evening Depth in Practice reading group
- Weekly Tuesday midday Inquiry
- We have launched an experimental online meditation Wednesday mornings and evenings
- Monthly potluck with film or Conversation Cafe

Intensives

We offer regular intensives, generally four per year, as well as one-day sittings. Our intensives include a one-week residential intensive, several full-time intensives, and integrated intensives.

Classes

We offer regularly scheduled classes, including Introduction to Zen and a one-year Precepts program.

Ceremonies

We offer ceremonies, including Precepts Ceremonies, an annual Jizo ceremony, Bodhisattva Initiation (formal Jukai), weddings, memorials, Head Student Entering and Completion, and baby welcoming ceremonies

Councils

I described what Councils at Appamada are and how they are formed, as well as how they serve our sangha. [You can read more about Councils and how they are formed here.](#)

Website

Our new website is up and getting glowing reviews, not only from members, but from the President of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association and the Abbot and President of San Francisco Zen center.

Recorded teachings

Our Soundcloud archives of Dharma talks, Intensives, Inquiry, Depth in Practice books, and classes has over 1,300 recordings, which have had more than 63,000 plays.

Sangha

We have an active, vibrant sangha which is becoming more diverse. We continue to plan for expanding diversity.

Teachers

The senior teachers are both formally trained and authorized in the Soto Zen lineage of Shunryu Suzuki, founder of the San Francisco Zen Center. Both teachers hold Ph.D.s and both are also householders now working full time as Appamada teachers.

Although Flint has moved to Hawaii, he continues to lead Practice Discussion groups, lead intensives at Appamada and affiliated sanghas, and support the work of the Board and Councils.

National Presence

Peg has led workshops at conferences of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association, Lay Zen Teachers Association, and the American Zen Teachers Association, on Right Use of Power and on Appreciative Inquiry.

She currently serves on the Board of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association, and is a founding member of LZTA and a member of AZTA.

She serves as a consultant for Right Use of Power and Appreciative Inquiry for sanghas, including San Francisco Zen Center and in other schools of Buddhism including the Austin Shambala sangha. She is one of only three Right Use of Power teachers authorized to provide teacher training.

OUR PRIORITIES

I spoke about some of our current priorities for our sangha, developed with our Councils and Board, as well as Buddhist Action Now.

1. Our primary focus is on fostering a healthy sangha with warm connections among practitioners who practice together, share our lives, concerns, and experiences and learn about and practice skillful relationships. We aspire to create an environment for training in wisdom and compassion by providing a bridge between foundational Buddhist teachings and contemporary lives. A healthy sangha has a strong commitment to ethical conduct expressed in the Buddhist precepts, and to bringing healing and liberation to the world.
2. Another priority is ensuring the continuity of Appamada as its senior teachers are aging. There was a question at the meeting about succession. We are very happy with our model of fostering strong teachers from within the sangha. This began with empowering Councils of experienced and dedicated practitioners. The next step on the path is being chosen Head Student for a practice period, and taking on teaching, dharma talks, and meeting with sangha members one on one for tea. Among those Head Students, we decide together who feels called to teaching roles. There are many other ways to support and serve the sangha, so this is not an expected or inevitable calling. Below I outline our immediate plans for authorizing Dharma teachers.
3. Another priority is our initiative in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access. One measure of success will be when our sangha's demographics accurately

reflects our community's demographics. That is an ambitious target, but it does give us something to aspire to and evaluate as we develop our programs. There will soon be a survey sent out to sangha members about their perceptions of diversity in the sangha, and we urge you to complete and return it. It is an important starting point for our inquiry. We do have a nice range of ages and some cultural diversity already in our sangha. Sandra Medina Bocangel is leading the Spanish meditation program on Sundays, and we hope to see more participation there.

4. We also have a priority of establishing a strong family program. This initiative was launched with a delightful family picnic at Central Market last week. We hope to continue to develop the program, using the whole city as our larger zendo for families. There are so many family-friendly opportunities in Austin!
5. Finally, we have a priority of connecting our practice more deeply with the natural world. It is a source of nourishment and clarity and perspective. When we are immersed in natural environments, we are refreshed and spiritually renewed.

We engage with these priorities as our way of coming into alignment with our Bodhisattva vows of relieving suffering and liberating all beings.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Finally, I spoke about how we envision and plan for the road ahead for Appamada.

Succession of teachers

We are actively working with our emerging teachers, dedicated students of our Appamada way, experienced practitioners, and skillful leaders and mentors. In January we expect to authorize five Dharma teachers at the end of Appamada's winter intensive: Todd Bankler, Joel Barna, and Laurie Winnette from Appamada, Suzanne Kilkus from Madison's Open Door sangha, and Josh Gifford from the Nothing Special sangha in Sheffield, England. They have practiced and trained closely with us, have served as head students in their own sanghas, and offered practice discussion as Zen mentors. They have taught classes and co-led intensives, and have served on Councils with peers. They support the sangha when senior teachers are away, and help maintain the center and its forms. We have complete confidence in their integrity, preparation, devotion to the dharma and dedication to the sangha. We hope the sangha will appreciate the care and dedication they have shown for many years now and support them in their work.

Councils

Councils are another source of support for the sangha and the teachers, as well as a container for peer support and deeper training. Descriptions of Councils are on the website. This year each of our four councils will adopt responsibility for a major area in

support of the sangha; these responsibilities will rotate each year, so that each council learns how to manage and care for our space and our community. New Councils are formed whenever there are 5-7 Zen students practicing regularly at Appamada with a commitment to supporting the community. There is more information about the formation of Councils on the website.

Teaching

We anticipate that Appamada will offer more teaching this year, in classes, intensives, and special training such as the Right Use of Power and the integrated training curriculum Peg is developing in collaboration with San Francisco Zen Center. With new Dharma teachers being authorized, new classes and intensives are likely as well. There will be a new one-year Precepts class beginning in September.

Intensives

We are committed to offering intensives at the rate of 4-6 intensives per year. Our intention is to continue to offer a one-week full-time residential intensive, two or three integrated intensives, and one or two shorter, full-time non-residential intensives. In addition, we plan to include more opportunities for one+ day intensives. Scheduling has not been decided for next year yet, as we are still making arrangements for the venue for the January intensive.

LONG-RANGE SUSTAINABLE FINANCIAL FOUNDATION

Appamada needs regular support in order to offer the programs and the space in the ways we currently do, and to provide for expansion in the future. Joan's report on our financial situation presently will follow.

A new financial model

What I talked about was an alternative financial model that I was able to observe on my retreat at Insight Retreat Center in Redwood City, led by Gil Fronsdal. This model is a "pay it forward" model entirely funded by contributions from participants. What does this mean?

When you register for a retreat there, you provide a fairly small deposit, which secures your registration. They typically hold a lottery for accepting registrations, because the demand is high. They do not cash your check or charge your credit card unless you cancel after the deadline.

You are told that you owe nothing for the retreat; it has already been paid for. You are welcome to leave a contribution which will go toward the cost of retreat for those who follow. You are immersed immediately in a field of generosity and kindness, and this is a very nourishing experience. It is also congruent with our Buddhist tradition of offering the dharma at no cost, on a dana basis only. I know that Gil and other Vipassana teachers and centers have successfully operated on this basis for many years. One effect I noticed was that the participants were very culturally and even internationally

diverse. There was a range of ages and obviously of socioeconomic backgrounds. There were no financial barriers to participation. Furthermore, 100% of contributions count as charitable contributions for tax purposes.

I found out several things following the retreat. The first was that this model of funding is a “break even” model; it seems to support itself evenly. The second is that in order to implement this model, Gil first did one year of fundraising, which provided the basis for the “pay it forward” approach.

This model fosters diversity, wide participation, and generosity, which are qualities we value. So naturally I began to wonder whether it might be a model Appamada could adopt. I believe it would be a wonderful expression of our shared connection and care for each other and for this sangha. But there are questions:

- Could this model really sustain us?
- Does it reflect our spiritual tradition and values in ways sangha members will understand?
- Would the sangha really step forward in support of the sangha?
- Suppose we make a principle of generosity as a reflection of mindful care?

Our current model

In contrast, our present model, where we charge a registration fee for classes and intensives, results in some challenges as well:

- the necessity for fundraising, now that we are growing
- the need to set prices on dharma teachings
- the fact that the present model does not adequately support the sangha
- the fact that the present model does not adequately provide for teachers, an especially important consideration for the next generation of teachers

Our current model was established very early, when Appamada was still quite small and offering a few classes and intensives informally. It was a way to provide some funds for teachers and for Appamada through charging for registration. Teachers were independently supporting themselves in their professional careers and later through retirement funding. Since then, we have grown and matured as a sangha, now averaging 28 programs per week.

What will we do?

Obviously the decision to adopt a new funding model or stay with our current one is not a decision to be made by the teachers alone, nor by the Board independently, nor by bookkeepers and accountants. Ultimately it is up to us, the sangha, to come to agreement once there is a deeper understanding of our current financial foundation. In the event a dana-only model takes a while to get established, we could consider plans that shrink our expenses and/or increase our income from various sources. But I hope

we can continue to inquire about the best way to support our sangha from the wisdom and compassion of the dharma. In spiritual terms, I do not want to create any barriers (financial, physical, or even mental barriers) for anyone to share in the dharma in the ways we offer it here. I would like to continue the conversation about adopting a straight dana-based financial system for Appamada.

Again I apologize that this meeting did not get recorded, and I hope this is a fair account of what I said. If anyone who attended has anything to add or recalls something I've forgotten, please send it to the sangha.