

Clouds in Water Board Retreat

February 9, 2013

Members present: Karin Aguilar San Juan, Carla Breunig, Kurt Errickson, Sosan Theresa Flynn, Carol Iwata, Angus MacDonald, Byakuren Judith Ragir, Nathan Thompson, Rachel Vilsack, Elizabeth Wroblewski

Non-members present: Jennifer Billig (facilitator)

Jennifer called the meeting to order at 9:06 am.

I. Jennifer provided an overview of the day, with the following statements:

- To develop key structures that will move CIWZC towards action.
- To create guiding questions based on key structures that can be used to guide the board and staff decision-making.

II. Nathan provided an overview of the five beliefs/functions that will guide discussion.

- He expressed his excitement for the work we are undertaking.
- He said it was important to give credit for the work that we've done, which is reflected in his (board retreat) summary. There is not a lot of lack in this community, there is a lot of energy. Our job is to have a large vision, and then to use it. These are the floor boards we walk on to stay grounded. When ideas and/or decisions need to be made, this will be our framework.
- He said that this is a shared leadership model that upholds the sangha and teacher ryo in a new and different way, as a way to stay grounded in our practice and in the dharma.
- He noted that visioning has become community wide, which allows for more clarity as we start to make decisions.
- He expressed that patience in this process has been important.
- He said it is important to balance practical mind with big mind as we work through the day.
- He asked for initial reactions and discussion on five beliefs/function:

A. Belief: We value the core practice of zazen and the teachings of Soto Zen Buddhism.

Function: We respect the traditional forms and honor them by expressing them in ways that are accessible and appropriate to our culture.

- Byakuren mentioned that she likes that we are upholding traditions and encouraging the experiential.
- Elizabeth said that the word “core” is important; that’s who we are.
- Sosan feels like the first belief is a relief so we know what direction to point.
- Nathan noted that these are not proscriptive about a particular set of things, as a directive, but more of a guiding star.

B. Belief: We value the pursuit of spiritual growth at all stages of life.

Function: We produce training and its benefits as appropriate for all stages of life. The three bases of Buddhist training are virtue, meditative awareness, and wisdom.

- Byakuren questioned the word training and how it was discussed. Training relates more to practice, and not necessarily the classical Zen training (i.e. monastic). We as a community are transitioning or experimenting in a new way.
- Elizabeth mentioned that this really fits under the first belief and function.
- Byakuren supports the inclusion of the three bases being included in the function definition.
- Carol provided some context: these beliefs and functions should be taken as a whole.
- Elizabeth wonders if we are focusing time/resources/energy to “all stages of life.”
- Byakuren commented that we do engage in weddings, funerals, and Youth Practice.
- Nathan mentioned that it already tells us what we are doing, and provides a floor for us to stand up and make the intention/direction to work on a piece of this.
- Byakuren mentioned that we are not a monastery, in a sense we are a church and are working on all stages of life.

C. Belief: We value the great diversity of our culture, including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, creed, religious background, ability, income, family status and level of practice.

Function: We intend that there be no exclusion from our community or its training opportunities on the basis of arbitrary cultural factors. When it becomes apparent that there is an issue, we will address it.

- Nathan said that it was important to have this expansive definition of diversity, so its not limited to just a few things.
- Angus wondered if the list could seem to exclude some group.
- Carol added that the committee wanted to acknowledge the greater danger of limiting the work diversity to just a few key phrases, and that it was important to include ability, income, family status and level of practice.
- Karin added that while we might recognize that these are arbitrary cultural factors, it’s still important to list them because that’s the world we live in.

- Byakuren said that these values could require a lot of energy. She wonders if we could have the capacity to address an issue if there is an issue that becomes apparent to us. There may be times where we have to exclude people, because we are not a therapeutic community.
- Nathan said that having this list explicit does provide a sense of immediacy when we are looking at other issues; these provide a window through which we can look.
- Carla mentioned that these definitions are really about how we want to create a community. Do we want to include “to the extent we are able” or does that presume we have to note what we are not able to do.
- Sosan says that what the statement really says is we’ll address any issues - acknowledge and recognize - but not that we will resolve it.
- Kurt mentioned that the Youth Practice is much more diverse than the current sangha.
- Byakuren mentioned that the core belief of Buddhism is that everyone is Buddha and wondered if that could be included.

D. Belief: We place a high value on community as an expression of our interdependence.

Function: Following the Bodhisattva way, we nourish a community with a shared commitment to conscious, wise and virtuous action for the benefit of all beings.

- All members responded favorably. (Yeah!)

E. Belief: We value our inter-relatedness with communities of the larger world.

Function: We understand that our Bodhisattva vow commits us to actions that benefit the common life of the large community. This includes the neighborhoods we practice in, other Zen centers, and the civic communities of which we are a part.

- Byakuren said that this is a belief and function that the community is taking small steps towards, i.e. engaged Buddhism.
- Nathan mentioned that this also extends to the work we are doing with the Northern Warehouse and Lowertown; like how do our decisions in these arenas uphold this value.
- Carol mentioned that there might be some aspects included that are not immediate explicit, like environmental issues.

III. Group discussion reports

Belief A: We value the core practice of zazen and the teaching of Soto Zen Buddhism.

Function: We respect the traditional forms and honor them by expressing them in ways that are accessible and appropriate to our culture.

1. Our core practice and teaching will have a resonance and be manifest in every program or offering.
2. Design programs and offer services that recognize the traditional forms and, as appropriate, extend innovations to fit our culture and society.
3. Every event or activity will include some framework that suggests our practice, which might include zazen, chanting, a gatha, or a ceremonial structure.
4. All our service work is grounded in the principles of Buddhism and the vow of benefitting all beings. (*Note: This may be an aspiration.)

Questions

- A. Can this element support our core value or zazen and Buddhist teaching?
- B. Could this element uphold one or more aspects of the three bases of training: virtue and the precepts, meditative awareness, and wisdom?
- C. Is the tone and ambience (feeling) of this element in alignment with the mind of the Buddha: kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity?

Belief B. We value the pursuit of spiritual growth at all stages of life.

Function: We provide training and its benefits as appropriate for all stages of life. The three bases of Buddhist training are virtue, meditative awareness, and wisdom.

1. As much as possible, we will provide stage of life specific programming for all stages of life.
 - Question A. Does this element support stage of life specific programming?
 - Question B. Given an activity we are already doing (i.e. practice period), can we integrate spiritual growth for all stages of life in that activity?
 - Question C. Are we supporting the independent initiative of sangha members' interest and energy in developing new ways to pursue spiritual growth at various stages of life?
2. We will provide spiritual practice for children and youth, through a formal Youth Program.
 - Question A. Does this budget, program, administrative directive, or work of the sangha allow for a formal Youth Program?

Belief C. We value the great diversity of our culture, including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, creed, religious background, ability, income, family status, and level of practice.

Function: We intend that there be no exclusion from our community or its training opportunities on the basis of arbitrary cultural factors. When it becomes apparent that there is an issue, we will address it.

1. Incorporate the value and opportunities of diversity into dharma teachings, guest teacher invitations, classes, and activities.
 - Question A. Does this element incorporate diversity?
2. In order to understand more fully the demographics and change over time within our sangha, we will regularly conduct a survey or other form of assessment.
 - Question A. Could this element incorporate an assessment tool?
3. We will provide a formal structure, including the Ethics and Reconciliation Committee (EAR), for addressing issues and grievances about diversity.
 - Question A. Does this element allow us to address concerns that arise?

(Note: There is an interest in better identifying a structure that identifies a willingness to be uncomfortable.)

Belief D. We place a high value on community as an expression of our interdependence.

Function: Following the Bodhisattva way, we nourish a community with a shared commitment to conscious, wise and virtuous action for the benefit of all beings.

1. Actively cultivate a welcoming and open-hearted posture wherever Clouds in Water is present.

Question A. Does this element incorporate some kind of training on how to be welcoming and open-hearted?

2. Develop ways to learn about and support sangha members' needs - spiritual, physical and emotional.

Question A. How visible are services to support needs of sangha members?

Question B. What can be done to make them more visible?

(Note: This structure needs work. Assess current status, study past efforts - what level of support (care) is necessary, develop an effective and sustainable model. May include a discussion with Common Ground.)

3. Actively uphold and support the dharma practice of our virtual community.

Question A. What are the practice needs of our online community?

Question B: How can we extend this element to our online (and wider) virtually community?

(Note: This structure needs work.)

Belief E: We value our inter-relatedness with communities of the larger world.

Function: We understand that our Bodhisattva vow commits us to actions that benefit the common life of the larger community. This includes the neighborhoods we practice in, other Zen centers, and the civic communities of which we are a part.

1. Investigate the establishment of an inter-sangha council to support each other and to explore sharing resources.

2. Sustain our current inter-relatedness with the larger communities. (Examples include Seattle Soto Zen, Hokyoki, and Compassion Ocean Dharma Center, inter-metro sangha guest teachers, National Zen Conferences and projects, lunch with other teachers, marriage amendment, engaged Buddhism class, Fleet Maull, prison sangha, Lowertown community.)

Question A. Does this element sustain or support our inter-relatedness with larger communities?

3. Create a project that engages a larger community once a year. (Examples include Fleet Maull, Urban Lay Temple innovation, Youth Practice conference.)

Questions

A. Will this element be mutually beneficial in terms of connection and renewable energy between the sangha and the larger community?

B. Does this element uphold the other four beliefs?

C. Are there community members who are excited about this project and willing to steward it?

IV. Review of Structure Statements

- General feeling that this is what we set out to do.
- Jennifer mentioned that the idea was to create a statement (structure) and create questions to operationalize the structure. She feels that belief A and B do this well. Some structures are work plan items, like establishment of an inter-sangha council.
- Jennifer mentioned that beliefs and functions should also be guidance for us to conduct joint events or collaborate with other groups. They may also inform marketing and fundraising efforts.
- She challenged us to identify a one-page of questions that would help to consider elements.
- Karin wondered if we will discover - as we filter elements through our questions - that some are missing.
- Jennifer added that the main questions should serve us well over the next several years, as they are based on a belief structure.
- Nathan mentioned that he has a list of items that we'll need to do, including identifying accountability groups for these beliefs/structures and extracting action items. We'll also need to look at the guiding questions of the vision committee work.
- Byakuren asked that we consider how we are going to share this with the community.

Jennifer called the meeting closed with a dedication of the merit at 4:09 pm.

Minutes submitted by Rachel Vilsack.