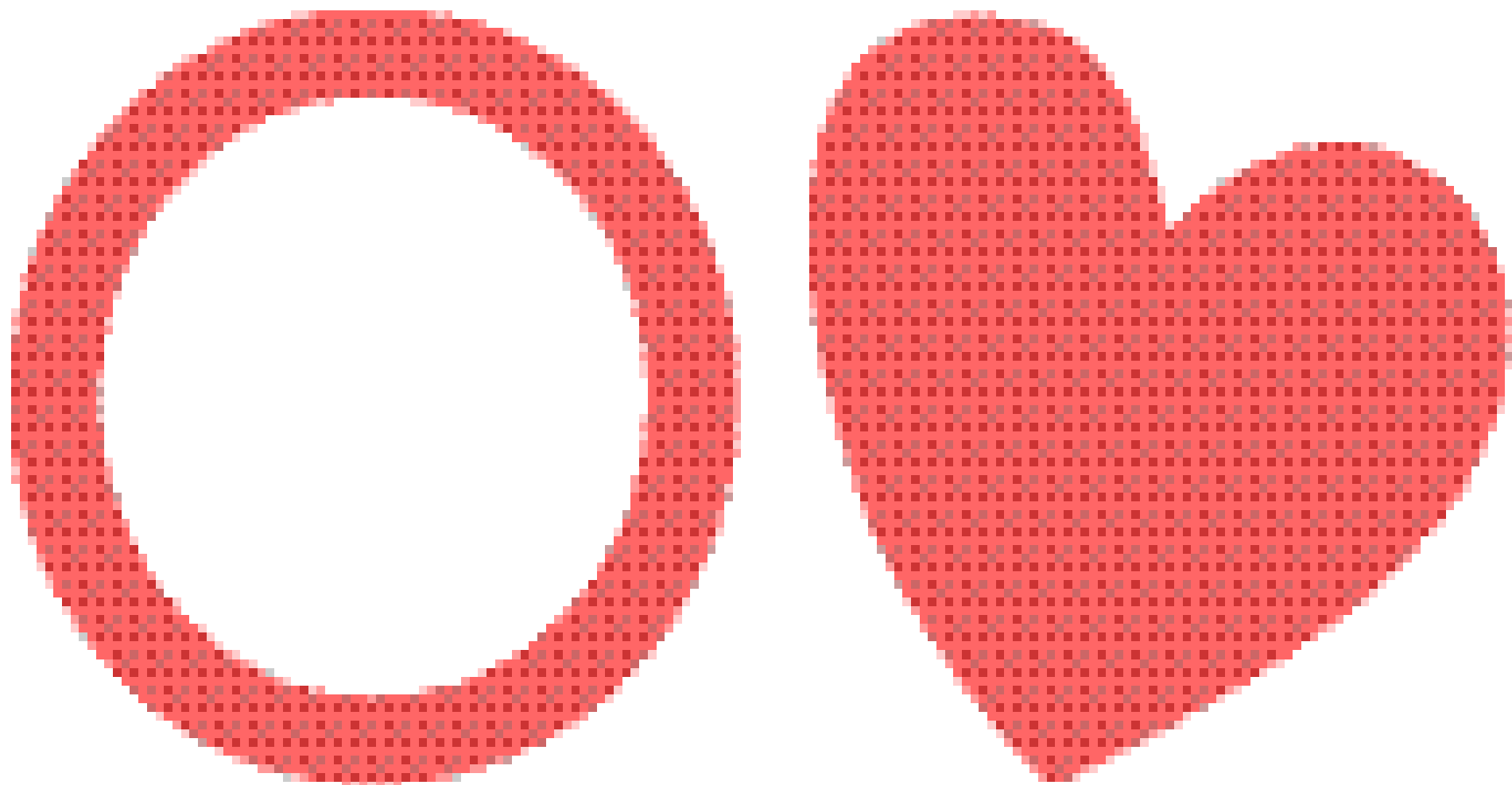


the open
heart
project

2015
annual report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome	3
What Worked?	4
What Did Not Work?	11
What is in the Works?	15
Aspirations for 2016	16
About	17



open heart project

WELCOME

Dear excellent members of the Open Heart Project,

It has been an honor and a privilege to work with you this year as you have learned to meditate, deepened your practice, found joy in it, struggled with its complexities, and generally discovered the mysteries of this profound, surprising, supremely interesting practice that is also a path. Thank you so much for your good intentions, focus, humor, doubt, and intelligence. All are greatly valued.

2015 was a great year for us. Growth was slow and steady, the best kind: we're not looking to shoot anything out of a rocket ship here, but to create something lasting, a way to go beyond the basics of beginning a practice to the interesting complexities and self-examination needed to *sustain* a practice.

It has been a year of growth, successes, breakthroughs, and failures—the best possible combination to grow together. Also, cats.

To teach meditation is to enter a sacred trust. It is something more than the latest life-hack, it is an intimate spiritual practice that introduces you equally to your brilliance and your confusion, both of which are extremely useful to know about. I wish to honor your experience and questioning as the most trustworthy beacons to guide you, while hoping also to give you the benefit of my experience as both a practitioner and a teacher. My greatest wish is to foster confidence in your own basic goodness and your unique, meaningful presence here on planet earth.

I am also trying to build a business that can support itself and grow in order to offer meditation instruction to anyone who may want it, no matter where they live, what language they speak, or what time it is in their country. Too, I want and need to support myself and my family. I long to be recognized for what I am offering and compensated for it in a way that makes both of us feel good. It is not always easy to figure all of this out, but in 2015 we made really good strides dharmically, creatively, and financially.

As your teacher, I try to keep the focus on you, but I am right here with you, finding delight, facing struggles, feeling positive some days and consumed by self-doubt on others. In this report to you, dear reader, I offer some details on the journey in the wish to bring us closer.

Love, Susan



WHAT WORKED

1. The vision became clear.

Early in 2015, the wonderful [Lodro Rinzler](#) and I started a new program called the [Daily Dharma Gathering](#), a 30-minute live practice session hosted by a variety of amazing Buddhist teachers, every single day. One night not long after we launched it, I was sitting in my apartment eating dinner when I realized that at that exact moment, someone was teaching the dharma via the Open Heart Project--and it wasn't me. I had the strangest sensation, like, oh, the Open Heart Project...it is its own thing. What kind of thing, I then wondered, and at that moment, although it seems obvious in retrospect, I saw exactly what we were creating together:

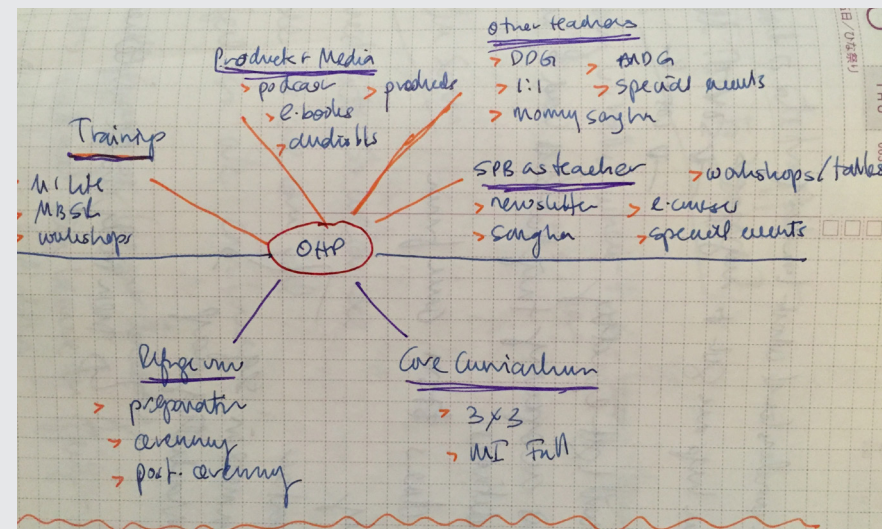
The world's first dharmaically robust, full-on meditation center that lives 100% in the Cloud.

We have everything that a location-based meditation center has: A founding teacher. A shared practice. Introductory programs. Advanced programs. Guest teachers. Special events. Retreats. The works. This is not a service, I realized. **It is a movement of people determined to live in a same world by expressing their basic goodness.**

I went in to my office and drew the diagram you see to the right. In the middle is the OHP. Above the horizon line are the outward-facing programs we provide to anyone and everyone. Some of the things listed are already underway and some are in the works.

Moving counter clockwise, there are the following categories: Myself as a teacher and what I can offer. Other teachers and their offerings. Products and media we could create. Trainings we could provide beyond the online context.

Below the horizon are the inward-facing offerings that began to emerge in 2015. "Refuge Vow" (see #2, next) is the ceremony by which one formally becomes a Buddhist and "Core Curriculum" refers to the program I'm developing to introduce the path. PS No one has to become a Buddhist!! This is just for those who are drawn to consider doing so.



2. We offered our first refuge ceremony

There is no way I can overstate how much this meant to me. **For me, it is the most important thing that has ever happened in the Open Heart Project!** PS No one has to become a Buddhist!! This is just for those who are drawn to consider doing so... :-)

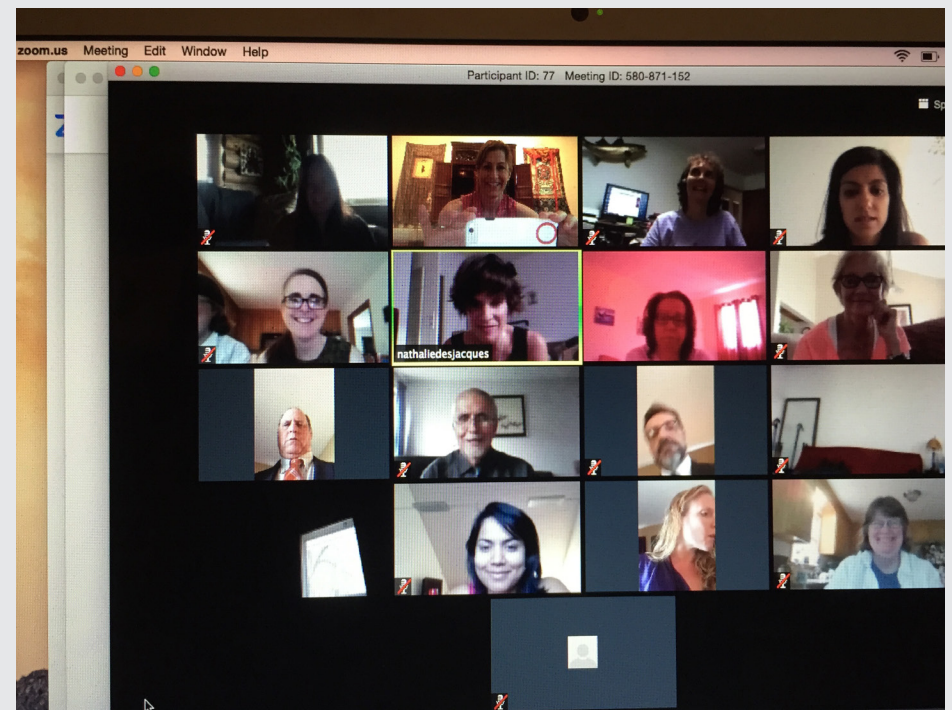
Over the years, some of you have expressed a wish to become a Buddhist formally, by “taking refuge” in the three jewels: the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. I was not able to help. I am not able to offer such a vow. Though I suggested that they visit a Buddhist center, most who wanted to do this simply did not live anywhere near such a place. This left me feeling unsettled and unsatisfied. I wanted to help.

A friend suggested the perfect solution! “Why don’t you ask your meditation instructor if he would offer refuge,” he said.

Brilliant! My meditation teacher (since 1993) is the person who gave me refuge. It would be such a meaningful way to deepen my connection to him and to you.

When I asked him if he would do this, he said, “Ask Tulku Thondup.” [Tulku Thondup Rinpoche](#) is a Tibetan teacher who lives in the Boston area. I made an appointment to visit him and asked if he thought it would be okay to give refuge online. “Why not?” was his immediate response. “If you can help someone, you should do it.”

And so we did. On July 11, twenty-six awesome individuals in Nebraska, France, Scotland, Alaska, the Caribbean, and elsewhere showed up with their excellent intentions and beautiful smiles and formally became Buddhists. Thank you for your patience!



3. We grew!

We started 2015 with about 12000 subscribers to the free Open Heart Project newsletter and ended with just over 15000. This is with no marketing per se, or, I should say, the best marketing in the world: word of mouth. Your kind words and enthusiastic responses are what drive this community forward. I am so grateful Thank you.

The [Open Heart Project Sangha](#), the feature-rich program that I started to work with you more closely, grew from 200 to 300 members. I am thrilled to have the chance to work with these good souls who teach me every single day what practice is really about. Okay, my goal was to reach 1000 Sangha members, but in retrospect, it is really good this did not happen. We were able to connect and create a real community which would have been much more difficult with 1000 people. I became closer to some wonderful people and they became closer to each other. Truly, I believe that one of the best ways to make our practice sustainable is to have a sense of community. Whether you participate a little or a lot, being together has meaning and power. It creates lift-off. *I am delighted with the work you are doing, beautiful Sangha.*

In addition, our new courses seemed to provide what you wanted. From “Invoking Magic: Creating a Morning Routine” to “The Mindful Life Toolbox,” and “The Dharma of Writing,” we worked together to bring our practice off the cushion and into our lives. 3,080 people participated in programs this year.

The OHP schedule continues to become richer with each month. There is something happening every single day to offer you support, friendship, and inspiration for your practice and your life. I hope you will find something that inspires you greatly in 2016.



4. A new book was published and it was a happy experience

Yay!! [Start Here Now: An Open-Hearted Guide to the Path and Practice of Meditation](#) was published by the incomparable Shambhala Publications. It garnered 45 five-star reviews on Amazon within weeks and that made me feel very good. Thank you so much to everyone who read it!



If you've ever written a book, you will understand how much it means when I say: **This was a delightful publishing experience.** It began with a beautiful email from my beautiful agent, Stephanie Tade, telling me she was in love with the book. That meant so much to me and I started to wake up to what this book could be.

Writing a book is fraught with tremendous emotional ups and downs, periods of clarity and confusion, and a great battle with one's own self-confidence. And that is the easy part.

The hard part is the publishing experience. Bringing a book from manuscript to print can be kind of awful.

Publishers want to make their money back, which may cause them to view you as a commodity rather than a maker. When you come to them with your ideas and worries (if you ever do; increasingly rare), they are likely to hear “could make money” or “could lose money.” The ensuing conversation is rarely about the same thing for each party. I have been patronized mightily by publishing professionals who assume that I have no idea what I am talking about. I've been brushed off with platitudes. I've even been told, simply, “fuck you.” Yes, my friends. It happens. (At least it was direct.)

And I'm not sure what you imagine editors do. I imagined they talked to you about your ideas and made suggestions for how to get them across. This too is increasingly rare, actually. Acquiring editors don't want to be made to look stupid by you and often this is the overriding concern. This is sort of understandable. They take a risk when they purchase your idea or book. The process is fraught for them too and, for some, this colors the relationship utterly.

I've received manuscripts back with giant x-marks through certain pages, with no explanation. I've seen in the margins comments such as, “you're not Deepak Chopra!!!” and “NO.” Very confusing. Some editors put greater weight on their career while others, quite rare, place it on the careers of their authors.

I had just such an editor at Shambhala Publications. Beth Frankl saw my book as a thing of beauty and convinced me to see it that way too. Others were also a delight to work with. Agreements and contracts were made easily. The first iteration of the cover design was beloved by all. The book shipped well. Respect and big-up to Beth, Jonathan, Nikko, Sam, Hazel, Sara, Ivan, Jade, Ben, and on and on. Please know how rare you are!

5. Michele killed it

Michele Gare is my assistant and our community manager. A miniscule sampling of the things she accomplished in 2015:

>She spearheaded a complicated, time-consuming, detail-rich COMPLETE SITE REDESIGN. I loved and adored my old site, but it was created as an author site, not a membership site and in 2015, that needed to change. Huge thanks to the amazing team of [Renessa Ciampa](#) (the designer), [Mark Toce](#) (the developer), and, of course, to Michele, who led the charge.

>She created a system whereby our programs rolled out according to, well, a *system*, thus eliminating much chaos. Good news for me, you, and her.

>She devised a way to help me stay on track by posting my deliverables week-by-week. It actually works.

>She was always very patient with me.

>**She cared. Michele cared about me, you, the mission of the OHP, and about herself and the quality of her work.** This is what makes her exceedingly rare. If you've had the opportunity to interact with her, you know what I'm talking about.

This past summer, Michele came to Boston for a visit. We had never met in person. We had so much fun. (PS She's tiny, y'all!) She is the fuel that keeps the whole system running. Thank you, Michele "Gets it Done" Gare. Love you, Micheley!!



6. I asked for help

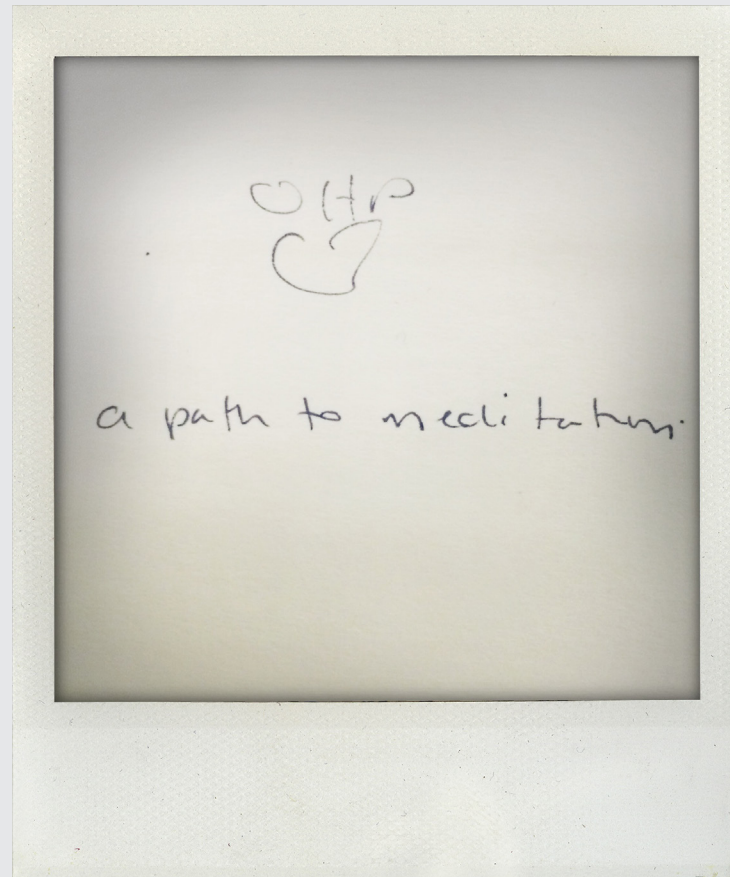
This one was pretty crazy. I have always assumed that I have to do everything by myself, otherwise I am a loser. Plus, who would want to help me? Wouldn't it be a horrible burden, an onus, cause for great resentment? Blah, blah. Well maybe, but as I was contemplating my diagram (see "What Worked" #1), I had one overwhelming, completely clear, and utterly terrifying realization: I could not do it alone--and not just because I don't have the energy and time of 10 men, but because I don't know how. Period. So I asked three amazing, accomplished friends who are also great dharma pals if they would be on an Advisory Council. They said yes. On December 11, we gathered at my house to plan the future. They opened my eyes, pushed me, helped me, supported me, and inspired me. **If I did anything intelligent in 2015, it was to invite them to the party.** Thank you for being my friends. Who are also soulful geniuses.

7. I moved to an office outside of my home



Which made me inordinately happy.

I walk outside of my apartment to the apartment across the courtyard and into 500 square feet of joy, inspiration, solitude, and sweetness. With a skylight. I walk in here in the morning and think, "is this really okay?" I feel so lucky. Also, I would like to write my next book in this very space.



WHAT DID NOT WORK

1. I continue to get in my own way

I am not being humble or self-deprecating when I say this. It is the truth. The growth of the Open Heart Project, while absolutely wonderful, also pings certain long-standing conflicts between me and myself. There is a part of me that simply wants to do the work; she loves it, you, the process. It is straightforward. *There is another part of me, however, that is very afraid of it all.*

What does this have to do with us? I hold back. I have a depressive nature which causes me to doubt myself. It constantly resets my inner default screen to “no one is interested in what you have to say.” It shifts my moods, sometimes from moment to moment. The older I get, the easier it becomes to feel kindly toward myself and thus not take it all so seriously. Still, this so-called moodiness has great impact on my physical energy, emotional balance, and creative knowing. One moment they are there and the next, they are not. It is so weird.

I promise not to give you a whole synopsis of my psychology (which, more and more, simply seems like “thinking” rather than a crisis needing my attention), but here is a little insight into why this may happen.

While I was growing up, I was interested in things that others were not. Also, I had my own ways of doing things. I really struggled in school and was a failure at it from a very young age, maybe 6 or 7 years old. I didn’t get what was required. It wasn’t as if I didn’t try or was some kind of cool rebel. I literally did not understand what my teachers were saying or what types of answers were sought in various tests.

Still, I was very intellectually curious, but couldn’t really explain myself or my interests. So I developed the habit of hiding with my books, literally. I hid under my desk, behind my bed, in the closet. I felt stupid and weird. I started to have insomnia, nightmares, and headaches. I was really, really shy. No one knew what to do, although a lot of loving care was sent my way. Still, I only felt happy when I was hiding somewhere, free to pursue my own thoughts.

Which brings me back to the present-moment dilemma...I still like to hide, just not under my desk. It is not a coincidence that I work in a room by myself in order to connect with you all. It is not by accident that I don’t work with people one-to-one. I have developed work-arounds for my shyness, and, at this age, they are unlikely to change/I’ve stopped trying to be someone else. However, there is still a great deal of fear in showing you who I am. I still like to be by myself most of all.

In no way am I saying this so that you will try to make me feel better. I feel fine and am great at taking care of myself. In recounting the obstacles faced in 2015, it seemed important to include this one as, for me, it is the biggest obstacle.

2. You continue to get in your own way

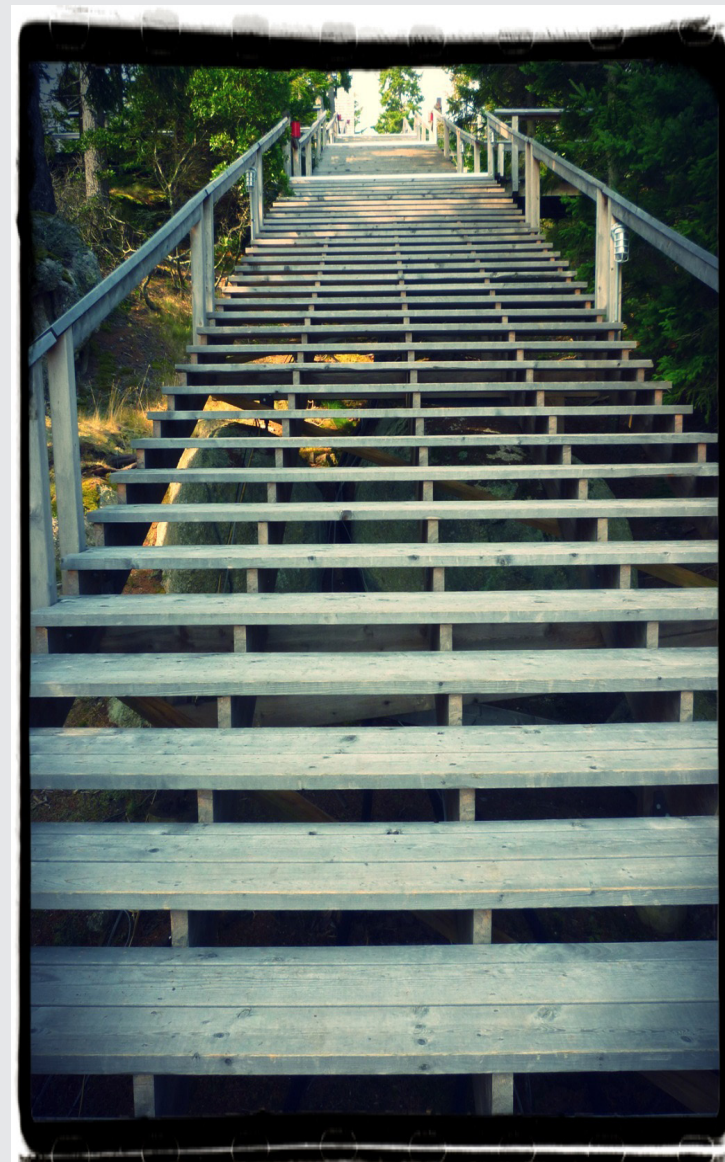
You guys!! No matter how many times I tell you to ONLY do what you are able to from among the videos, classes, and special events offered, many of you still feel compelled to do it all as a sign of your commitment and worthiness. Apparently, we all struggle from lack of self-esteem (Everyone!! Someone write a book about this!!), and think that if we don't do everything, we have failed and should simply slink away.

People. My dear, wonderful people. This is not a transactional situation. It is an opportunity to learn, practice, experience, and love. There are no tests and there will be no grade at the end..

To enter into a practice situation is to enter into your own heart of hearts. No one can tell you what you will find there.

There is no external measure of value that has any meaning. The rules and strictures of the conventional world, including what you ought to accomplish and whether or not you measure up to others, are simply irrelevant. This is an entry into the deeply personal, so personal that no one can mark the terrain but you. The bad news is, you have to figure it out by yourself and no one but you will really ever know what this means or how it feels. The good news (besides the fact that wisdom and compassion are real and support you at every turn) is that you understand what is really important and become fiercely genuine. The meaning and potency of advanced degrees, money, and appearances do not apply here. Rather, the currency of the realm is your own brilliance. How you spend it is up to you and the most powerful, important, effective gesture you can make is to relax. The more crowded and speedy the practice atmosphere, the less potent, and the more likely you are to miss the next rock across the stream.

So I say it again: Only do what *you* can. I'm not suggesting this because I'm nice but because it will serve you best to do so. Try to accomplish less rather than more. This is actually a very sophisticated practice. Simplify. Slow down. *Relax*.



3. We have not yet figured out how to mix money and dharma

This is a very interesting one.

There is some idea that those who teach the dharma should do so for free. I'm not sure where this idea originated. (Perhaps someone can point me to a source?)

In days of yore, as I understand it, the dharma was taught by monks and nuns who had devoted their lives to its study and practice. Which is awesome. However, someone or something--patrons, the community, the lineage itself--supported them with food, shelter, and clothing. Somewhere, currency changed hands.

Or, perhaps, the dharma was taught by wandering mendicants, crazy-wisdom holders who gave up conventional life to wander the forests or sit in caves. They taught students who happened along (or not at all) and, in exchange, their students supported them. Again, some form of currency was exchanged.

Now, we come to our situation in the West where students think that the teachings should be free because that is noble or because if money is involved the situation becomes impure. Okay. Maybe it should be that way. However, the ancient corollary--teachings are free and in exchange, we offer something to the teacher--is very foreign to the Western mind where exchanges are viewed as transactional.

I have had conversations with students in the OHP Sangha (which costs \$27 a month) who have said they have to unsubscribe because they just weren't taking advantage of everything that was offered and felt bad. (See "What Didn't Work," #2.)

I say, well, just do what you are able. The \$27 enables access to an unbelievable variety of teachings and teachers. Some months, you will be able to take advantage of it and some months will be harder. That's okay...

Having a community is an important part of the path; without it, we all stumble. Just knowing it is there for you is supportive...

Also, your payment is a way of thanking and supporting your teacher and the teachings so that they may continue for yourself and others.

This last reason resonates with almost no one. The transactional approach to teachings (i.e. services exchanged for monetary value) applies to the student who expects to receive commensurate value for her investment according to the consumerist code, but not to the teacher, who should live according to the ancient (and imagined) monastic or crazy-wisdom code.

Charities notwithstanding, it is strange for us in the West to purchase something in order to support it rather than for ourselves alone. So, what is the model here? Is the Open Heart Project a charity, then? A business? Both? What role does money play vis-à-vis learning the dharma? I actually think this is an incredibly important--and exciting--issue for spiritual practitioners to reckon with.

When Buddhism arrives on foreign shores, it transforms the dominant local culture and is transformed by it. It is very tofu-like in this sense. Broadly speaking, when it arrived in China, it met and blended with Confucianism and Taoism. When it arrived in Japan, it met and blended with Shinto. When it arrived in Tibet, it met and blended with Bon. (I'm not a dharma scholar, so, if you are, please correct any errors I may have made.)

Now, it has arrived in the West. What will it meet and blend with? What will it transform and be transformed by? I posit to you that it is not Judeo-Christian religion because that is not the dominant culture. Rather, the values that dominate our culture are the values of consumerism. It is possible that Buddhism will be transformed by consumerist culture. However, it may also transform it by investing it with values of wisdom and compassion. This could be extremely cool.

First, we should stop being afraid of money ourselves. This fear takes three forms: grasping (feeling poor; always wanting more), aggression (taking for oneself by force), and ignorance (pretending money doesn't matter). What are the other options? This is the question we could try to answer.

Here is how I feel. I don't want to be shamed or flamed for charging money for my work. I don't want to be judged as suspiciously usurious by people who don't even know me. (If you know me and this is your judgment, that is different. We should discuss.) I want to be appreciated as a teacher. I also want to be successful financially because I don't want to worry constantly, and also I love beauty and supporting my family and having options in this life. I want the Open Heart Project to work and that takes a tremendous amount of focus, skill, and smarts. I want it to triumph! I want it to mean something. Also, I don't want to live outside when I'm old.

Traditionally, there are three ways to practice the dharma. As mentioned above, you could practice as a monastic or a wandering mendicant. In both cases, your money worries are over. However, with the third way, the path of the householder, money is part of your practice, as are home, food, family, work, the yard and your laundry. This third way is not a layman's path, but a way to become enlightened, just as the other two are.

Here, the so-called conventional world is our sacred teacher. To enter it well, we could work with our bills, accounts, and investments as practice. I am trying this too, right alongside you.

WHAT IS IN THE WORKS

1. A meditation instructor training for life coaches and yoga teachers to enable them to teach the practice
2. A full 8-week online MBSR training program
3. “Mommy Sangha,” a weekly gathering for moms who want to practice for themselves and their children
4. Inviting new teachers to the Daily Dharma Gathering
5. The 4-8-4 Program: Three in-depth trainings for those who would like to study the dharma more deeply
6. An intensive life-study program to train you to become a teacher of both the practice *and* the path of meditation
6. Ask Susan: A new podcast to answer your questions
7. New courses, including “An Introduction to the Buddhist Path”



ASPIRATIONS FOR 2016

1. Curate and offer you more resources to live with health, wisdom, and balance.
2. Expand our reach and build our community to serve beginners and those who wish to go deeper by constantly encouraging everyone to rely on their own brilliance and kindness.
3. Bring more gentleness and fierceness into the world by being more gentle and fierce.
4. Help all sentient beings to become enlightened.



About the Open Heart Project

[The Open Heart Project](#) was created in 2011 to provide anyone, anywhere with support for their meditation practice. There are now 15000 members worldwide and it is the first full meditation center that lives solely in the Cloud. We're pretty sure.

The Open Heart Project provides what any meditation center would:

- Access to a teacher and teachings
- A shared daily practice
- Connection to a community
- Introductory programs
- Advanced programs
- Retreats
- Special events
- Guest teachers

It also offers what location-based meditation centers cannot, namely 24/7 access to meditation instruction, teachings, and community. No matter where you live or what time it is, this meditation center is open.

The Open Heart Project was founded by Susan Piver. Susan has been practicing meditation in the Shambhala Buddhist lineage since 1993. In 2004, she graduated from a Buddhist seminary. In 2005, she completed further training to become an authorized meditation instructor.

Susan is the New York Times bestselling author of many books. Her latest is *Start Here Now: An Open-Hearted Guide to the Path and Practice of Meditation*, published in September 2015.

She teaches workshops and speaks all over the world on meditation, spirituality, communication styles, relationships and creativity. Her work has been featured on The Oprah Winfrey Show, Today, CNN, and in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, TIME, Money, and others.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is sitting cross-legged on a large beige cushion on a patterned rug. She is looking towards the camera. The room has a vibrant red wall. Behind her are three Japanese-style folding screens (shoji) with wooden frames and white paper. To the left, there is a large, ornate green and gold vase. To the right, a camera on a tripod is visible, pointing towards the woman. The background also includes a small table with various items, a fan, and some plants.

Thank you
for your practice.
Thank you
for practicing together.

[questions/comments? info@susanpiver.com](mailto:info@susanpiver.com)