

## Our Sangha: It's Future

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It may be slightly different than a normal Dharma talk. It is more about the *saṅgha* here, and the developments we have had during the last week. We filed papers for nonprofit status as a religious organization, so the Mid-Peninsula Insight Meditation Center will now be, well, have some way. I do not know how long the paperwork takes, nonprofit status. It is a small step, but a very significant one, in the development of our *saṅgha*, or development of our religious community here. And so I want to talk about that, and talk about what it means for our *saṅgha* to grow and develop, which it has a lot since the years I have been involved.

Interestingly enough, the *saṅgha*, this sitting group, started over ten years ago, I think, in Menlo Park at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. And the first teacher was Hōkyōn, who is coming down next Monday. So he drove down from San Francisco every Monday and took care of it for a number of years, until his schedule did not allow for any more. And then for a few years it was without a teacher, but had Howard and his wife Ingrid Noodleman, who were the mentors of the group. And then in 1990, Howard could no longer do it, and I was invited. I was asked to come in and be the teacher for the group, and it has grown.

Then from twelve, there were about twelve people in 1990 when I started. And what is kind of very happy, I think, is that a lot of those people, those twelve, are still around, at least half of them as I can easily count, and probably more, and a very stable group and committed people. It is the development of the *saṅgha*. And traditionally in Buddhism there are considered to be three important supports for Buddhist practice. And that is known as the Triple Refuge, the support of the Buddha, the *Dharma*, and the *Saṅgha*.

And what often happens in Buddhist circles, I think almost everywhere, but certainly in America, is that the Buddha and the *Dharma* often get emphasized, and the *Saṅgha* gets de-emphasized, not emphasized. It does not get as much press as the first two. But the

importance of *Saṅgha*, the importance of a religious community of fellow practitioners, is considered to be equal, on par with these other two, the Buddha and the *Dharma*. And in fact, they are considered to be the three legs of a tripod supporting the practice. And I understand that a healthy spirituality, a healthy Buddhist spirituality, involves having a healthy balance of these three aspects.

And the Buddha means many things. But Buddha as the inner experience, the inner state, the inner possibility of being awake, of being present, of being compassionate. The *Dharma* is many things. Again, its simplest definition is the teaching, the teaching which supports that inner awakening, and compassion, and love. But it also is, one of the definitions of *Dharma* is nature. It is the nature we find ourselves in, the nature of reality itself. And the *Saṅgha* is the people we practice with, fellow practitioners.

And one of the things I love about the definition of a *Saṅgha* is that by defining it as fellow practitioners, it is a very coarse and loosely bounded community. The *Saṅgha* does not have an institutional identity. It is never supposed to have an institutional identity, like, this is your *Saṅgha*, this is it. Many of us say, "This is our *Saṅgha*," but then what is "our"? Where are the limits of the *Saṅgha*? Well, it is very porous and open. There is no institutional identity. It is really not like membership, a really solid thing.

And I think that is true for all Buddhist groups, that the *Saṅgha* is a porous and loose body of people, the people who share a common intention and practice of awakening, of presence, of compassion, and love. And so I like that, because it is an informal definition, which allows for a certain kind of informality of coming and going. People come and go in and out of a *saṅgha* without any barriers, either in or out. And I feel that is the way we are as a *saṅgha* here in Palo Alto. I feel we are an informal group with really open doors, and people wander in and wander out.

And even though informal, one of the things that has been very gratifying for me over the years that I have been here is how much a sense of community has arisen in people who come here regularly. And it varies a lot from person to person how connected they feel. We do not have a lot of organized ways of helping people get connected, but just being around each other, a lot of friendships have developed, a lot of connections. And it has been, for me, a very happy thing to have watched. Sometimes I have seen some of you kind of becoming friends, and doing things together, and what about me, and I sit up here all alone, you know. It is very lonely, you know. Not really.

But at any rate, it is very, very gratifying to see the sense of connectedness I see in the room. That happens slowly, probably more slowly than it should be, because it is a hard thing to

come in as a stranger into a group you do not know. But if you have faith, if you are new, I think, you know, we should of course be more welcoming and have ways of making more connection, but we do not have a lot. But it just happens, just being together and practicing together.

Now, the balance between Buddha, *Dharma*, and *Saṅgha* is also a balance between individual needs and community needs, or community involvement. And this is one of the great tensions in many people's lives, between solitude or individuality and community and connectedness with others. And for some people, it is a tension, those two. And depending on how they look at any particular day, some people are completely frightened of organized religion of any form, because really what is important is their own practice, their own independent awakening and freedom. And they do not want to get tied up in anything. And other people feel that actually what is important is the community connection, the relationship, that maybe it does not make any sense to talk about freedom and awakening unless you are also talking about being connected in community.

And without connection in community, freedom maybe does not even exist. Even though in American culture the idea is freedom means you are out, you know, on your pony, on the plains, by yourself, under the stars, and no one within miles around you, and you can do whatever you want. In Zen Buddhism, there is a beautiful poem, the title of which is called *The Merging of Difference and Unity*. And rather than setting up a tension between difference or duality or separation and unity or connectedness, or rather than falling into one camp or the other, saying what is important is unity, and what is important is difference and diversity, what is important is cosmic oneness, and what is important is duality of the sacred and the profane, or all kinds of different ways people fall down on this equation, the Zen poem points at the merging of the two. How do we bring these two together so that they coexist in a balance, in a healthy way, difference and unity, solitude and community?

The *Saṅgha*, as a community of practitioners, supports and encourages us in our practice. And I know that from my own experience, and I think from many people, it is very hard to sustain a serious spiritual practice alone, either to keep the momentum going, the inspiration going, or to be willing to overcome or deal with or stay present for, hang out long enough to go through some of the difficulties and demons and all that might arise in spiritual practice. And having a community is a support and encouragement. And in the six years now that I have been here, I feel very, and I am the teacher in some sense, but who is the teacher after all, I feel very encouraged and inspired by all of you I sit with. And the fact that many of you come regularly and have a real commitment to practice encourages and inspires me in my

commitment to practice. And it probably goes around in circles, you know.

And hopefully I can be somewhat of an inspiration, encouragement to you. I think that is part of the role of a teacher. But then also I receive it back. And a *saṅgha* is also a community of people that, in some ways, mirrors us in maybe healthy ways. When I first taught, my first inspiration to go live or be with the Buddhist community was when I noticed that when I sat in meditation, a lot of the usual head trips, usual ego trips that I had, kind of quieted down for a while. And I felt a kind of integrity or kind of peace that did not involve all my ego trips and who I wanted to be in presenting myself, how I wanted to present myself to other people.

And I could see the difference between my meditation experience of myself and how I was in relationship to other people, where all my old trips came back, and I did not like the difference. I wanted to find a way to have that integrity in my daily life also. And I noticed that when I went to the San Francisco Zen Center to visit, that people there did not want to play those games with me that I was used to playing with my friends. And in meeting them, they were a mirror for me. I would act out, you know, and nothing happened. They did not play the game. They were not playing that game. So suddenly I was kind of bewildered, and I wanted to be around people who mirrored that for me, because I did not want to live those old games anymore. I wanted to have them shown to me.

But many things are mirrored in any kind of community, but certainly a spiritual community. Not only our trips, but also our beauty and potential for love and compassion and presence. The *Saṅgha* is one of the Three Refuges. It is a place we go for refuge, for support. And again, as I said, I think it is impossible to really do this kind of spiritual practice alone. Buddhist dogma, or whatever that is worth, teaches that unless you are a Buddha, it is impossible to do this path, this practice, alone, without the support of others.

The manifestation of practice, as a person, people become more mindful and more open-hearted, more present, less judgmental, less comparative in their relationship to other people. The tendency is for there to arise increasing amounts of compassion and a sense of connectedness with others. And then it is very useful to have a community of people who not only support you in practice, but then give you an outlet, a place to meet in that openheartedness, to meet in that connection. And I think that sometimes it is very hard in wider society to explore new ways of being, a new sense of openheartedness, the trustfulness of honesty, non-defensiveness. It is very hard to experiment with these ways out there in some areas in our society where people do not understand those ways of being. And so to come to a community where you can experiment with new ways.

And one of the ways I practiced in *Saṅgha* and community in my early years of practice was, I

understood that Buddhist *saṅghas* were incredibly forgiving. That is the point. If a Buddhist *saṅgha* is a place where people are practicing with each other, which means that we are kind of supposed to be honest and supposed to be working with the difficult resentments, the projections, the ideas that are going on. But more important, we are willing to hang out with each other. If there is conflict and difficulty, we are willing to hang out and not turn our backs on someone. So I got a sense of all that.

So I started experimenting when I first started hanging out with a Zen community, because I did not know how to really be in relationship to other people in this new mode of being, coming from this integrity, coming in a way that did not have all these trips involved. And so I experimented with, I tried for a while being really silent, not speaking to anyone. And, you know, it was a safe community to do it in because they were so forgiving. And, you know, it was okay if a week later I came and started speaking and did not stop speaking. They would forget the fact that I was silent for a week, and would not hold it against me, and I would try that. Sometimes I spoke all the time.

I remember once, working at the Greens restaurant, I was kind of serving. I was one of the cooks, and dinner was being served incredibly fast, and all these waiters and waitresses and all these busboys, and busgirls, bus people, who were coming and going by. And I tried the experiment of having a continuous conversation with every one who passed by me. And I tried to remember each conversation because they were always coming and going, and I did not remember where the conversation left off. And I picked it up there, and it became a tremendous game, you know, of conversation, keeping the ball going. So anyway, part of what a *saṅgha* allows a person is a place to experiment with being different in how you normally are at work, or in normal social scenes.

Our *saṅgha* in Palo Alto, as I said, started ten years ago by Howard and Ingrid Noodleman at ITP. And Howard then, in 1990 or so, was diagnosed with cancer. And so part of the history of this community is that one of the main people then died of cancer. And it was very moving for many of us, and painful. But it was at the same time, because he was no longer able to be the mentor, and they wanted someone to kind of lead it or be a teacher for it. And that was exactly the same time I was starting school at Stanford. It coincided almost exactly, by the week. He called me up and asked if I would come down and be a teacher, and I came.

And for many years, I felt very shy about my role as a teacher, and I would try to call myself the mentor, or call myself something different, or really try not to take a leadership role, but really kind of listen to what the community wanted, what the *saṅgha* wanted, and try to be responsive, because I felt I had been invited in. But as the community grew and grew, it

became increasingly awkward and cumbersome for me to maintain that kind of stance or position, that I was not exactly a teacher, I was not exactly the leader. And so I feel now that over these five or six years, in some ways I have become a teacher and have become a leader of sorts. But what that means, we are all working out together. But I am not so shy exactly as I used to be around at least those kinds of names, what it means. I am shy about it still, but that is what I feel the whole situation has asked of all of us. And if you have different ideas, I would like to hear them.

So in 1990 I started. There were twelve of us, and it slowly, steadily grew. And as we grew, there became new needs for the community, or new desires for doing more practice, more things together. And one of the first needs was the need to offer beginner's instruction, because the people who came just came, they knew how to practice, and new people would come and they did not have a clue what to do. So I started offering beginning instructions, and that was the next kind of expansion of sorts. And then there was a desire, or perhaps the need, the possibility of doing one-day retreats. So then we started doing one-day retreats.

And also we did, back then, for a while, for about a year, we did half-day retreats periodically, and those were very nice. So we started doing retreats for a while. We still do one-day retreats, but we used to do them maybe two, three, four times a year, and now we do them almost every month. We do one-day retreats. And then there were occasional potlucks and kind of get-togethers. And then we grew and grew, and I was so in awe and amazed. There were twenty people who had come to this stuff. It was, wow, you know, we had really grown a lot.

And then it got to be thirty. Oh Jesus, and thirty-five. And then the room got really tight, and, you know, sometimes it was so crowded that basically I felt I was giving a Dharma talk to the person sitting in front of me, two feet away, or someone facing me. And, you know, that was the person I spoke to. But there is face to face, and we got really crowded. And then Gregg, who is a friend who belongs to the *saṅgha*, the Quakers here, he sits with us. And because he was a friend, he knew about this room, and he came in, and I suggested we move over here, and so we did.

And the same week that we moved over here, we jumped from something like forty people to sixty people. Somehow the news of the move just kind of generated all this interest. So we were all kind of amazed. Where did all these people come from, three years ago? And then we started doing monthly potlucks because we felt the need for more community and connection. And then some people felt the need for more chance to discuss and hang out with each other in a more *Dharmic* way. So it was Foster who started the book club, which still

continues. And then there were some attempts to try sitting groups, sitting times on other evenings, Wednesday and Thursday, and there were some other kinds of sitting groups that kind of split off from this one, small ones that I think continue to this day.

And then Monday started again to feel full, and an introductory course. I would do Mondays from 6:45 to 7:30. But that meant all the beginners would be here at 7:30 when all of you came. And it looked like it could get out of hand because we had more and more people come for the beginning course. So we moved the beginning course to Thursday, and so I could do a more thorough job, as now instead of forty-five minutes, we have an hour and a half for beginner instructions. But then once we had the starting instructions going, we kind of just continued having beginner's evenings on Thursdays, and took some of the pressure off Monday. And that has worked very well for a long time.

But we keep growing on Monday, and Thursday keeps growing, and with this current introductory course, I think there were eighty people the first night, and seventy, I think, the second, which was Thanksgiving or something. And I think ninety the third, and then seventy again last session. I do not know why it changes the way it does. But anyway, a lot of people should be glad they do not come on Mondays. And then we started the weekend retreats for ourselves up in Jikoji, which we do, usually we try to do twice a year, Memorial Day and some weekend in August. And then we did a senior students series for a year, which is a good idea to continue, but we are not doing it right now.

And then we did for a while, and we will start up again at some point, we did the Happy Hour, which we did in the afternoon, 5:30 to 6:30. We did a loving-kindness gathering for doing loving-kindness meditation, which I think is very important for us, because it is very important for some people to do loving-kindness meditation. There are some people for whom I think it is actually a more suitable practice than mindfulness practice. And I feel a lack that we do not offer it again. But we will at some point. And then we do yoga now twice a month. And now the idea may be to try doing a children's program once a month.

And, you know, there are all these requests, a lot of ideas people have, because it is natural, I think, as a community grows, and as people invest more of their life in the practice. They want to include more of their life as part of the practice. They want to include more of their life. And they want to go deeper and do more, deeper kind of practice, for deeper study and involvement. And so I am sitting here both receiving the requests from people and trying to respond. And also part of the role of a teacher is to have some sense of what the potential, the possibility of the students are, the practitioners are. And so, in a very gentle way, allow for that kind of opening, or kind of provide for those opportunities to allow that potential to

grow.

So for example, offering one-day sittings, offering longer retreats, I feel like a lot of people here are ready for doing one-day sittings. And so I did not tell anybody they should do it, but we just offered it. And when you are ready, you come and do one-day sittings. So I see there is a lot of potential for us to go deeper and be more involved, and so I get a lot of requests. So how do we respond to that? There are more things we want to do.

Part of the problem we have is we do not have space to do it in. The Friends have been extremely generous hosts, letting us use this room as often as we do, but they get other requests from other groups now more and more, and we have been told that basically we cannot use it much more than we are already, which is probably more than they use it. So we can imagine they get a little bit nervous. And finding other places for doing one-day sittings or other kinds of special workshops or retreats has been very hard, and they are expensive, and finding suitable places. And Allison has done a tremendous amount of work looking for places we can use. And she has canvassed all over Palo Alto, I think, and I have looked at various places.

So the sense I have of us is that we have kind of outgrown our shoes, but we cannot have new shoes yet to step into, so we are kind of cramped. That is the feeling. And maybe many of you do not feel it because it seems like a nice thing to come on a Monday, and we sit together nicely, and it is a little bit crowded. But I feel it much more because of the position I sit in as a teacher, because I hear the requests. I talk to a lot of you. I see the potential and need. And also because I have a wonderful vision, which I hold and I see.

There is a tremendous opportunity here in the Mid-Peninsula for doing a lot more than we already do. There are a lot of insight students, let alone Buddhist students, in this area, for whom there are a lot more activities we could do, that could be done, that would support their practice. And I would like to have as a vision, this dream of being able to offer that, and set up something here very solid and stable that can really take advantage both of the opportunity and of the need and the possibility here in this area for making a very strong, valuable center of Buddhist practice in this area.

So two years ago, I began to feel that I was doing more and more as a teacher, and it was becoming more and more of what I did most of the time, was take care of the *sangha*. And for me to keep doing things and commit more of my life and make a decision that this is where I would put the primary focus of my life and my livelihood into, this kind of situation here was rather unconventional, without the community being conscious of it. You know, if the community as a group was unconscious of the developments in my choices and involvements,

I felt a bit funny about that. So we had a meeting anybody who was invited could come to at Lelaine's house, and some twenty-five people came. So we discussed the different ideas people had about the future for the *sangha*, and visions and stuff.

And some people missed the old days when we were really small and intimate, and some people wanted to see us develop and arrange. And they asked me for my vision, and I told them I was reluctant to tell them my vision because I did not see much. I felt I was reluctant to kind of bring out my vision because I thought maybe my job was more to listen and then respond to the requests rather than put out a big vision, which is easy to do, to be visionary, to dream. But they asked me, so I told them, which involved having a center, our own property for ourselves, a place where we can do as many activities as we want without having to ask for permission and requests and schedule problems with other people.

And then it was really realized that in order to do that, we had to incorporate as a nonprofit. And so a group of people started that process, and I was feeling still that I really wanted the community to come together and organize itself in a sense. So I stayed out of those meetings for a long time, for incorporating, for coming up with bylaws and stuff. And then at some point, I was invited in. I came and joined the meetings. And it was very difficult, actually, for grown people to decide on bylaws and how to organize themselves. And we spent basically two years working out the process, and not always so successfully, our group process.

I apologize, somewhat sad to say, we did the very best. Everybody did the very best. And the end result is now that we did it the simplest way we could do it. We kind of streamlined the whole process in the simplest possible way. We kind of came up with bylaws and sent in papers to the government for filing. And how I understand this nonprofit status we have now formed is that it is the equivalent of acquiring the Buddhist alms bowl. In Asia, the Buddhist monks go out for alms, and their sustenance, their life, their substance for life, comes from what is given to them in their bowl. And in America, the equivalent of that in some kind of institution is this nonprofit status.

And once we have that bowl in place, something can happen. We are available for something to happen. Without that status, we are not available for something to happen of any kind of serious degree. And, you know, the story of Ajahn Sumedho in England. Ajahn Sumedho was a Californian who went to UC Berkeley in the mid-sixties. He went to Thailand and became a Theravāda Buddhist monk. And then in the late seventies he moved to England, to London, to be a teacher there. And he was a forest monk, and forest monks every morning go out on alms round with their begging bowl.

And no one in London had a clue what this guy was about, you know, in orange robes and his

big bowl and shaved head. But he would go out on his alms round anyway, and occasionally someone would know, or they would stop and ask him or something. One day this guy was jogging by or biking by, and he stopped and said, “Who are you? And what is your story? What is going on here?” And Ajahn Sumedho explained to him that he was a Buddhist monk, and it is the custom of Buddhist monks to go out every day to collect whatever food people want to give them, so they could have food for that day. And that is what he was doing. And the fellow said, “Oh, so you are a forest monk. Can I put a forest in your bowl?”

And he had been given, or had, this big forest someplace outside of London that he did not particularly want anymore. And so I suppose Ajahn Sumedho went through the paperwork and got a nonprofit status in England, probably the equivalent of what we have to do here. And then they were given this useless forest, which then I think they sold pretty quickly for another property nearby that was more suited. But that was how, you are a stranger, and you just came up, someone did not even know about Buddhism there. So we now have this status. Well, we will have it shortly. So who knows what will come into the begging bowl. I have a tremendous sense that I want to get us a big bowl.

And when I think of what we have to offer our community here, I think that needs to happen. It is, I think, a tremendously wonderful and healthy and useful and important thing to happen, to be able to have a Buddhist community meditation center for this community here. I think it is a great offering, and it should happen. So I believe in that. But when I think about the price in Palo Alto for such a thing, then I get discouraged, because the prices around here are phenomenally expensive. So I do not know how it is going to happen. My faith is that it will happen within twenty years, but I do not want to wait twenty years. That is too long.

Yes, I have thought of it a little bit, and I have thought of it and looked into it a little bit, and I will do it more. But still, the problem is, as soon as you go into some other people’s space, we are limited in what we can do because they are using it also. So part of my vision is to have a community meditation center that allows us to have a regular schedule of meditation sessions in the morning or maybe the afternoon, a place where we can do evening classes like this, maybe even like a Sunday morning thing, which they do at some places, which is very nice. More classes during the week of other various kinds that other people can teach besides me, other kinds of events and weekend retreats. Maybe longer retreats, maybe small retreats of twenty people, but for maybe ten days, to have all those things coexist in some healthy way for this community, to create a sacred space.

I think our society, I believe our society, has a great need for sacred space. And because of the great pain, the suffering and fragmentation and violence that exist in many parts of our

culture, in our corporate culture, wherever. And I think Silicon Valley needs a contemplative place in the middle of this kind of valley, as a balance, as a place to go, a refuge if nothing else, as a reminder of another way of living, and other kinds of values. That is so easy to forget when we are busy and active lives.

There is a title of a book edited by Thích Nhất Hạnh about Buddhist precepts. It is an anthology of different writers, and the title is called *For a Future to Be Possible*. And it is a beautiful title. And now, when we teach mindfulness meditation or Buddhism, we tend to focus a lot on here and now, right, paying attention, being in the present moment. But I think part of being in the present moment, the deep present moment, is to actually have a relationship to the past and the future that does not involve getting lost in it, but really understanding it well. And part of understanding the future is to see our connection to the future and understand that in order for the practice, spiritual practice, for Buddhist practice, for Buddhism to continue, we have to pass it on to the next generations.

We cannot just simply practice for ourselves, you know, in our own little practice, and just be quiet. It requires the *saṅgha* itself to take responsibility for the continuity, a continuity in the development. And so part of this vision, then, is for a future to be possible, for the future for us, for our community, and many generations to come. So I do not know how this is going to happen, but this is kind of one of the beginnings, or, you know, a very important milestone for us.

The function of such a thing. We have a vision statement, which was very beautifully done up, and when we finish, maybe you can put half of them out at the door, and half of them can stay here, and anybody who wants a copy of the vision statement can read it. But it is written here that this community meditation center that I would like, we would like to have, is supposed to have three intertwining functions:

- to provide a simple and quiet environment where the contemplative life can be developed and protected amidst the complexities of city living;
- to offer those teachings, practices, and practice opportunities which complement insight meditation in supporting a balanced spiritual life from a Buddhist perspective;
- to be a place where people can come together to cultivate and express their practice in and through their family, social, and community life.

And then there is more here. So I do not know what the next step should be. Well, that is the big question for me, what to do next in terms of this. So how is it for you all to hear all this? What do you have to say? Besides, that is not the next step, to put out the bowl, to solicit

contributions, manager for Rob. I suppose that is one of the next steps, is to somehow do fundraising.

One of the things I am concerned about is the exhaustion that can come around fundraising. And I have kind of vowed, maybe more to myself than anyone, that whatever way all this happens, it has to happen, hopefully, in a way that none of us gets exhausted, that we keep our inspiration, and because it comes from a sense of surplus, a sense of abundance from us, rather than a sense of tiring us out. I have seen many groups get really tired because of the strain of fundraising. So maybe it means it slows the process, or maybe it means it is fast. I mean, what would happen if we suddenly found a place, a perfect place, and it was put on the market, and we had to raise something in three months? Could we do it suddenly? I do not know.

Being galvanized around something sometimes raises more money than kind of a amorphous fundraising for something in the future, but I do not know how it is going to be. I guess probably it can be amorphous, or maybe a combination of it, or I do not know what is going to come in the bowl. You see, it could be, you know, it could be a forest. Some of you might have a forest somewhere. Some of you might, you know. Or some of you have done—now, sorry.

Yes, I think your sentiments are very important for me. And I have a lot of trepidation or apprehension about this project also. I was actually reluctant to spend Monday evening talking about this, because I feel like Monday evening is kind of special and sacred, and we just keep it in the really simple thing we do, sitting and a Dharma talk. And I did not think a lot of you would even want to hear about this kind of stuff. But I felt the responsibility, and also we felt it was important at least to present at this point what we are doing.

And what I hope very much is that people will come, like you, and find a place that will support you in what you want here, and not feel at all like you are being pulled into something you only partly want to be part of. And you find it is a refuge, a place you can sit. And that does not involve a lot of us, you know, busy fundraising activity or pressure, all the things you might expect. I want the porous and simple informal feeling to continue throughout whatever we develop, where anybody feels they can come, they can get nurtured, and then go home without any pressure or demands on them. So that what happens as we develop arises from within each of us as our inspiration, rather than group pressure, whatever.

And one of the ideas I had was, at some point in a few months, maybe in January, we could have a meeting on some other night of the week, maybe a Sunday evening or something, and invite anybody who wants to come and talk about what the next steps might be. And for

the people who want to be part of this in whatever way, both in terms of conversation and in terms of doing something, there have been a lot of people involved already. There are the current people who were involved in the last stage of the process, kind of final signing of the documents and coming to the last meetings, just about maybe seven or eight people. And not all of them are here, but I think I would be all right in asking any of them if I could do this. But maybe a few of them can just stand for a moment, and then any of you who want to talk to people who are coming up on the board or kind of involved with organizing so far, you could talk to them and tell them your fears and your inspirations, because rather than, you know, I am not all of it. It is difficult to get all the focus on me.

So if you do not mind doing that, maybe Elizabeth and Bernice and Marty. Is Marty here? A lot of people are not here too. Cheryl and Bernice and Elizabeth and who else? They are all not here today. All this hard work. And Richard and Bill and Steve.

Yes, I think your concerns about these issues are very important too, and I am committed to trying to find a way to do it that can keep us in the spirit that we have had already, can do that and live on, and that will all be part of the trick. But, you know, my sense is that, my understanding is that all groups have group process and phases they go through. It is inevitable. You cannot expect a group to stay static, even if we want it to be that way. And groups evolve through stages, which are sometimes, you know, there is the honeymoon stage, and the difficulty stage, and the stability stage, and, you know, all kinds of stages they go through, like any kind of relationship.

But I myself do not know how to avoid change in this context. Something has to happen. I mean, many things could happen, many directions that something can take, but something has to happen. One of my motivations for this is that I feel very responsible to all of you, and I would like to see something here that not only lasts into the future, but that takes responsibility to offer something in a responsible way for all the commitment and interest in it you all have. If it just continues, if I just continue the way we are, you know, on Cowper Street, or we continue in a small way, I do not know if it is sustainable. I do not know if it is sustainable for me that way. I do not know if it is sustainable, all the pressure I feel, all the people who want something different, want something more, everything. So I feel actually sometimes a lot of pressure from many different directions, including within me, that change has to happen.

One of the changes that happens with groups, the fifth stage according to some people, of five stages of group development, is either growth or disbandment. That is a possibility. That is actually one possibility. You know, if we stay exactly the same, I do not know if I would stay for years and years. But however long I stay, and the bigger we become, I feel the more

commitment I make to staying. But also, at some point, I will leave, or I will die, or something will happen to me, right? And I feel that I want to get it large enough so that two things can happen.

One is large enough so we can invite in another teacher to teach with me, because I think it is very healthy for us to have two teachers. And so there is not just all this focus on one person, and so that there is team teaching and they support each other. And so we become large enough that we can support two teachers. And then large enough so that if something happens to me, that it becomes a place where some other teacher either can grow up out of the *saṅgha*, or another teacher we can invite in. But if we just stay at twelve people, or stay at forty people, or stay at sixty people, or stay where we are right now, I think it is very hard for me to cast out across America for all the different Dharma teachers floating around, and happen to find one who is willing to move to Palo Alto. But if we have a more established—

And I hope that as we go through this, that if at any point anybody is uncomfortable with anything, that part of what a *saṅgha* means is it is a place where you should feel safe to say you are uncomfortable. If you do not feel that you can say you are uncomfortable either to me directly or to someone else who is kind of in the *saṅgha* or to the whole group, then you probably should not stay in the *saṅgha*. Actually, you should go away or figure out some way you can say it or find something. Do not stay in this group with feelings of discomfort without saying it. And if we can state that, then hopefully whatever way we develop, one can be respectful for everyone, and we can do it in a healthy way.

And so I will end with, if I may quote by Scott Peck:

A healthy organization, whether a marriage, a family, or business corporation, is not one with an absence of problems, but one that is actively and effectively addressing or healing its problems.

I think that is probably a more realistic attitude. After all, the First Noble Truth, right? So those of you who want to just check out what the vision statement is, you can either pick it up at the back door or there are some up here. And I hope that this is inspiring for enough of you. And I hope enough of you share also my fright.