

Triangle Insight Meditation Community



An Exploration of TIMC's Values, Norms, and Structure
Saturday, June 23, 2018 - 9am to 4pm
Durham Friends Meeting House, 404 Alexander Ave., Durham, NC 27705

Minutes

Shared in advance (via newsletter):

- Updated TIMC timeline
- Current TIMC bylaws, conflict of interest policy and nonprofit attachment
- List of Shared Values that had been generated, popcorn style, by those present at TIMC on a recent Wednesday evening and other lists of values terms
- Notes from June 6th preparatory conversation, including group agreements and all-day exploration purpose, questions, sub-questions and considerations for inclusion and participation
- Offer for anyone unable to attend to send their comments to share to:
katherine@globalcitizenll.com.
- Suttas, quotes, and articles to read in advance or at the exploration

Working group: Cynthia Hughey, Francesca Morfesis, Gordy Livermore, Karen Ziegler, Mary Mudd, Phyllis Hicks, Robert Seyler, Ron Vereen and Scott Bryce

Facilitator: Katherine Turner, Global Citizen, LLC

Agenda:

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| 9:00-9:45 | Welcome, Introductions, and Framing the Conversation |
| 9:45-10:00 | Meditation and Intention Setting |
| 10:00-10:15 | Break |
| 10:15-11:30 | Vision, Values, Operating Norms, and Mission |
| 11:30-12:15 | Power, Privilege, and Oppression; Healing and Transformation |
| 12:15-1:15 | Silent Lunch and Meditation |
| 1:15-3:00 | Organizational Structure and Processes |
| 3:00-3:15 | Break |

- 3:15-3:40 Next Steps and Commitments
- 3:40-4:00 Lovingkindness Meditation and Closure

Minutes:

Welcome, Introductions, and Framing the Conversation

After the welcome and introductions, Katherine emphasized that drafting new organizational documents (e.g. mission statement, by-laws) would not be the purpose of the day's exploration, which was to be a process of gathering and synthesizing information and ideas. She established agreement that in this process, "everything is on the table," including alterations and additions to the working group that was formed to organize and make preparations toward today's exploration. She emphasized that today's exploration would conclude with clearly identified next steps.

Group agreements were reviewed:

- Begin and end on time
- Maintain a process that is in integrity with our own understanding of Buddhist principles and practices
- Speak our truth using "I" statements
- Maintain confidentiality
- Agree or disagree respectfully
- Listen with the intent to learn
- Take responsibility for our own learning
- Be aware of when judgments arise
- Accept different levels of experience
- Make space for each person's contributions
- Participate actively in our own way
- Take risks and stretch beyond our comfort zone
- Take breaks when needed
- Accept that this exploration is an ongoing process
- Strive to accept discomfort as part of the growth process
- Set an intention to remain for the entire conversation; if you feel the need to leave, try to let one person know what they can communicate to the group about your early departure.

We added the following two agreements:

- Speak up; and,
- Be lean of speech.

Katherine reviewed the goal, objectives and agenda for the exploration:

- Goal: An inclusive and welcoming community that operates according to a governance structure and processes that are in alignment with the stated vision, mission, values, and operating norms.
- Objectives: By the end of today's all-day exploration, we will have:
 - Reviewed the community's history that brought us to this point
 - Created a collective vision of our community's future state
 - Reached agreement on our community's values and operating norms that will inform the structure
 - Discussed how power, privilege, oppression, and -isms impact the sangha's operations and provided a space for healing and transformation now and in the future
 - Reviewed the organization's current mission, structure, bylaws and processes, explored alternatives and reached agreement on elements of our desired structure and processes
 - Agreed upon accountability mechanisms and next steps

Ron offered a brief history with the goal of elucidating how TIMC came to find itself at this point in time and in this process. There was discussion of certain aspects of TIMC's past and current leadership, which concluded with Katherine emphasizing the value of building provisions for ongoing leadership development and succession into the by-laws.

Katherine framed the day as a day of mindfulness practice with mindful speaking and listening as well as periods of silence.

We had a 15-minute meditation and set intentions.

Visioning, Values Clarification, Operating Norms, and Mission

It was acknowledged in advance that this gathering and synthesizing of information and ideas would be incomplete due to time limitations, as well as being a function of who is in the room during the process. It was noted that further reflection would be needed, and input would be solicited from the broader TI community.

There was some discussion of terminology at this point. It was noted that having "members" of our community has legal implications in terms of by-laws and tax-exempt status - not insurmountable barriers, but factors to be considered. Some other terms were brainstormed, including: attendees, community, Dharma friends, participants, and spiritual friends. The importance of choosing a term that conveys a clear sense of community was emphasized, and it was noted that the word "attendees," in particular, falls short in this regard. Further discussion of this issue was deferred, in deference to the day's agenda.

Visioning

Opportunity was provided for individual reflection, small group brainstorming, and large group discussion in response to the prompt, "Envision your desired future state for this sangha" and several sub-prompts:

- What does the sangha look like? Who is included? Who is not included?

- How are people interacting and communicating?
- What barriers have been removed and what is in place to ensure that everyone feels welcome and safe in the sangha?
- What does power look like and where does it reside?
- Who will make decisions and how? How is the community included in decision making? How can we create a balance between inclusion and efficiency?

Contributions that were voiced included, a sangha that:

- feels welcoming to all, particularly to newcomers;
- is diverse, in terms of teachers, participants, programming and perspectives;
- has its own space rather than having to meet on Duke grounds;
- sets up the space in a circular or U shape rather than classroom style;
- has a board that includes non-teachers, rather than a teacher-only board;
- rotates membership on the board and core groups/committees;
- has more groups;
- shares the workload currently done by the teachers;
- provides opportunities for more intimacy/connection, including in smaller groups, on Wednesday nights;
- provides a path for newcomers to learn about Buddhism and the sangha, and identifies contacts who can provide this information, including sangha history;
- supports ongoing study and practice of the Dhamma;
- has greater power-sharing, transparency about decision making, and oversight of leadership;
- makes public meeting minutes, suggestions, and concerns;
- emphasizes awakening;
- prioritizes stillness;
- offers a sense of safety;
- refrains from pressuring people to conform, or to behave in certain ways;
- regularly invites teachers of color;
- is financially sound and stable, with fiscal oversight;
- fosters enthusiasm for its purpose and programs;
- provides opportunities for voluntary involvement in anti-racism and other activism study and activities and also supports those skeptical of social engagement;
- brings forward teachers-in-training and others to give Dharma talks;
- provides leadership mentoring and training;
- serves the liberation of all, both individually and collectively;
- features leadership that is both stable and adaptive;
- is a place where the teachings of the Buddha are lived out;
- is a place where both power and contributions are widely shared;
- provides clarity regarding terms such as “insight” and “membership”;
- has mechanisms for ongoing feedback; and,
- is anchored in Insight Meditation/Vipassana teachings and practices.

Values Clarification

Katherine defined values, and then we had opportunities for individual reflection and brainstorming in eight small groups. Several lists of sample values were provided for reference. The one that primarily was relied upon was the list of Shared Values that had been generated, popcorn style, by those present at TIMC on a recent Wednesday evening. From that list, the small groups each identified 4 or 5 values as particularly important, then voiced

those selections into the room. They are listed below (with the number of group mentions in parentheses). Then, the Visioning list generated just a few minutes prior (see above) was consulted, and additional values were identified (values drawn from the Visioning list are marked by *). Values identified:

- Dharma teachings and learning (8)
- Kindness (6)
- Brave space that is both safe and challenging, with respect for all/Showing up with authenticity, and creating space safe enough for that to happen (5)
- Honoring and trusting that difference can teach (5)
- Support for being on the 8-fold path, individually and together, formally and in daily life (3)
- Joy & Gratitude (3)
- Honesty/Truthfulness (2)
- Courage (1)
- Open-Heartedness (1)
- Generosity (1)
- Lack of judgment (*)
- Compassion (*)
- Embodying the Brahmaviharas and the Paramis (*)
- Collaborative leadership (*)
- Allow expression of all aspects of Awakening (*)
- Embracing diversity (*)
- Transparency and accountability (*)
- Welcoming (*)
- Stillness (*)

Operating Norms

Katherine provided definitions of operating norms and suggested (and the group was in accord) that these would best be considered later, when we take up Power, Privilege, and Oppression. She asked us to think about what destructive norms have been operating.

Mission

Katherine presented the definition and description of a mission statement. There was agreement that the statement currently on TIMC's Home Page is too long and needs changes. A working group will use this as a basis for updating. Many in the group felt that language like that in the **bolded** sections should be retained.

The mission of the Triangle Insight Meditation Community is to help support and deepen the practice of insight or *vipassana* meditation and related practices, and to explore a variety of topics relevant to the teachings of the Buddha. Our intention is to bring forward into this setting the insights we have discovered over many years of practice with our own teachers. In keeping with the Buddha's emphasis on "noble friends and noble conversations," we come together in a community within which to practice and learn about the Dharma, and the relevance these ancient teachings have for us in our contemporary lives. All levels of meditation experience are welcome, and we strive to end all discrimination based on race, religion, socio-economic status, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. All gatherings and teachings are offered free of charge, with donations accepted to help with costs for the facility and other expenses, and to support Dharma practice and study for the teachers. If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Power, Privilege & Oppression; Healing and Transformation

Katherine noted that addressing power, privilege, and oppression in the sangha will be ongoing work. Each person was asked to reflect on and then share one sentence describing their “most salient experience of power, privilege, and/or oppression in the sangha.” As people were reflecting, they were asked to consider how whiteness, heterosexuality, gender norms, ability, age, etc. manifest in the sangha and how our organizational structure, physical space, leaders, participants/members, and visitors act out and reinforce oppression, prejudice, structural racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, and other -isms.

People shared their responses and are quoted (based on contemporaneous note-taking by three people) below.

1. Over the past several years teachers and teachings are increasingly male, individualistic, scholarly, and psychological, which to me replicates the pathology of our culture and does not help me live in a way which embodies the Dharma in this time of crisis for our country and the world.
2. Apart from a brief window that opened up after the 2016 election, there has been little interest in or concern with the poor in general.
3. Power as expressed as a hierarchy does not facilitate my deepening process so much as power expressed horizontally, which can call forth my deeper truths.
4. My experience coming to the sangha was that the only way to be included was to have an already-existing connection to the teachers, which I did not, so I had a sense of being very alone.
5. With the best of intentions, those with power in the sangha made decisions without transparency, which I experienced as painful, rejecting, confusing and disempowering.
6. Through the teachings and talks and through discussions with my racial affinity group I am more aware of the manifold privileges I came into when I was born a white, straight, cisgender, tall, male.
7. As a brand new member, coming with every expectation that most people would look like me and be similar to me, nonetheless was a very scary experience; and with only a few exceptions, I was not approached after the first five or six meetings I attended.
8. I feel gratitude for how much support there was when I was being introduced to this practice, which was in part a function of privilege, in terms of access, and I’m feeling both the good fortune of that even as I recognize that access has been less available to those less privileged.
9. I feel privileged to be included and accepted in environment that promotes my learning and practice of the Dharma, but recently, and sadly, have come to see that privilege is not shared by all.
10. I feel the privilege of having been offered Dharma freely, and sadness that the way the Dharma is being offered is not being perceived as free flowing by all, due to systemic, structural factors.
11. Nothing has changed my life more than the Dharma, and this community has been crucial, but I am distracted whenever a gendered word is used to express a non-gendered concept, such as using Monks or Bhikkhus, rather than Practitioners or Listeners.
12. What may have operated out of necessity - decision-making that inadvertently led to a lack of openness - nonetheless, when KM groups were suggested, teachers quickly responded to the request, and I feel privileged to be in my KM group.

13. Seating on Wednesday nights should be “first come, first served” and not saved/ reserved - it seemed discriminatory when I saw a person say to another, “No, you can’t sit there; it’s saved.”
14. As an upper-middle class, white, cisgender, hetero, male, I have felt at a loss to imagine how anything in the sangha does oppress, so I really want to learn about that, and address my blind spots.
15. My categories are similar [to those stated by the previous speaker]; I have felt welcomed, supported, and facilitated - despite the fact that I did notice, early on, that leadership is not democratic - and I feel grateful for the sangha’s functioning; strong leadership, when you see it, needs to be valued.
16. The most important thing at sangha is teachers conveying a depth and learning and behaving in keeping with the depth of their learning of the Dhamma. I feel sad that this community is starting on very difficult course, a very delicate process, that could kind of shatter things. I walk into sangha with a lot of privilege, but also with my own challenges - we all walk into the sangha with challenges, not just “isms,” and we all deserve to be met with compassion, which has been the case in my experience.
17. There are lots of highly educated and wealthy people in the sangha, and very few working class and lesser-educated people. I would like to see a change in those demographics.
18. Norms of individualism, of healing and awakening in silence or alone rather than in relationship; norms privileging the absolute over the relative; being taught suttas rather than feeling invited to investigate; feeling comfortable, not affected by the “isms” is the “isms” - that’s how they function, they remain hidden when things are comfortable.
19. I feel there is group tolerance for a level of agitation, expressed as anger, in response to individuals who bring up their experiences of pain and feeling overwhelmed by how to skillfully act during this time of state-sponsored hatred, white nationalism, and systematic oppression in our country. This has the effect of silencing those who feel called to speak and act, and makes for an unwelcoming community for those who do not conform to the dominant but unstated norms of the group.
20. Things do seem to be getting better. Over the past year, it has felt more like my sangha, my community. It’s good that there’s more discussion, because otherwise the agenda doesn’t allow for different voices and perspectives. Sometimes I feel I’m being talked down to when the emphasis is on scriptures - like Bible study. I love the psychological talks (I’m a psychologist).
21. Potentially, I could be subjected to lots of “isms” - around sex, size, ability - but I’m happy to say I have never experienced any sense of judgment, marginalization, or exclusion at the sangha; what I have experienced there is kindness and acceptance. There are ways my participation could have been fuller, but that has been my fault, not others’ doing. I feel grateful.
22. I have always felt welcomed. I really appreciate the thoughtfulness and accessibility of the teachers. I so appreciate having learned through sangha about racial equity courses and outlets for discussion.
23. I’m new, but felt at home from the first or second time, and I feel privileged for that. I tend to believe I am “captain of my ship,” but know the door is not always open [to everyone] and not everyone has a key. I have been learning more about how privilege operates.
24. I have had the experience not infrequently of encountering a particular individual who I feel is tracking me, and comes up very close, and has made me feel very

uncomfortable, and I don't know how to stop it. I thought I was the only one experiencing that, but I've come to find out I'm not.

25. As a person of privilege in several ways, I've had a direct experience of what it feels like, when acting out of my good intentions, for another to feel oppressed and controlled by my actions. This ended up causing both of us to feel harmed.
26. I have felt welcomed in the community, and also often feel uncomfortable when we talk about race. Like, we talk about racial affinity group; I don't have a racial affinity group. Discussions of race can make me feel separate and like my individuality and personal story is not seen. Ruth King was quoted, but Ruth King does not speak for me. I do feel confident we can do this work because we are anchored in the Dharma.
27. Having agreed to come on board as an addition to the stable of those giving Dharma talks, my most salient experiences of power, privilege and oppression have been my ignorance of and sorrow over the unforeseen implications of my role as a holder of power and privilege, and an agent of oppression.
28. I really couldn't come up with anything - I have not felt oppressed by sangha. For me the salience is in realizing that at times I must have oppressed others, so I'm becoming aware of privilege.
29. Over the past two years, I have been so grateful for the wonderful and welcoming Dharma community. I have learned so much from you, although I have been worried about: (a) the homogeneity of the group--not only in terms of age, gender, and race, but also in terms of SES, political affinity group, intellectual prowess and world view; (b) the somewhat hierarchical nature of the leadership; and (c) the inadvertent lack of transparency in decision-making. I would like there to be more leadership development/mentoring to expand the circle of power.
30. I could not think of a way I felt power and privilege, except that there is a person at the front of the room and a fixed agenda/structure, which I know has been unconsciously taken on from society at large. Overall, I've felt appreciation, but the agenda is the same most weeks, and I would like it to be able to change.
31. I sometimes felt disempowered by the structure for Wednesday evening programs. I feel that is changing.

Following these individual statements, Katherine invited us to broaden and deepen the work through group discussion. We discussed how we can support healing and transformation in our sangha.

Several people noted how supportive and healing they felt the experience of sharing had been. One person said they felt a deepening of their sense of trust and confidence in this process. Another said they felt some heaviness given the problems to be overcome, but also a sense of excitement and possibility. One person, noting that positive experiences had been reported in addition to negative ones, emphasized the importance of holding onto the aspects of TIMC that are working well. Others experienced the process less positively. One person, noting that many sanghas are grappling with similar issues at present, said, "I am not feeling optimistic right now." They described a sense of urgency, saying, "I cannot sit through one more Dharma talk that I don't feel directly relevant to this time for me." Another person, endorsing this sense of urgency, said, "the process feels like Truth and Reconciliation work - and that's what's needed." This person also expressed the concern that our sangha is offering teachings of great value, while simultaneously creating barriers to those teachings being received, because relative safety and empowerment are necessary to be able to receive ultimate teachings. The discussion ended with an articulation of the need for continued willingness to keep turning toward the suffering.

Silent Lunch

During lunch, everyone was asked to:

- Review current TIMC bylaws, Conflict of Interest policy and NonProfit Attachment
- Read and reflect on suttas, quotes, articles, and excerpts

After lunch, Katherine invited reflections on the morning's discussions, which included:

- Someone described being pleasantly surprised by the process so far;
- Someone noted that the word "urgency" is associated in their mind with "clinging," and expressed the value of patience;
- Someone expressed appreciation that different, even divergent, perspectives were being shared with respect and gentleness;
- Someone spoke to the challenge of creating a felt sense of safety for those who, in fact, aren't safe;
- Someone expressed wanting to offer clarification around their felt sense of urgency and agitation, saying that things were at a breaking point, and that "if the Dharma can't help us figure out how to take awakened action then I despair";
- Someone, noting impermanence, said "as soon as you create perfection it changes, so we're not trying to create the perfect sangha here";
- This person also said that accepting differences includes differences in how people see their spiritual path and what they need from it;
- Someone expressed valuing the experience of sangha as a refuge given the dreadfulness of world events;
- This person also expressed the view that the sangha may serve some purposes better than others, and that it may not be the best vehicle for addressing some things;
- Someone spoke of sharing a prior speaker's sense of agitation, and wishing both to honor that a process like this gets "super messy," and also to apologize if anything they had said previously had caused harm;
- Someone expressed the wish to re-focus the discussion on the purpose of this gathering, which they expressed as "envisioning and designing a spiritual community";
- This person also spoke of having felt very alone during the silent lunch, "and coming back to the group only reinforces it."

Prior to turning toward the next item on the agenda (Organizational Structure) Katherine affirmed that healing and transformation would be an ongoing process, and that there would need to be a continued commitment to this.

Organizational Structure

Bylaws

Katherine asked the group to reflect on the current TI bylaws and list what elements they would want to keep and their concerns. People voiced the following concerns:

- Directors for life
- Board member qualifications, selection process, terms, diversity requirements, etc. Decide if designated seats on board for people of color, etc.
- Decide if unanimous decisions by the board are needed, or by quorum (if by quorum, consider defining by percentage of board rather than a number).
- Increase number of board members; decide total number; include non-teachers; have balance of teachers and non-teachers (minimum number of seats for each?).

- Board should be reflective of TIMC mission, vision, values, and norms
- Clarify purposes of the annual board meeting and get community input.
- Stipulate required number/frequency of additional board meetings.
- Decide if board meetings will be open/have periods of public comment.
- Stipulate that board meetings can be closed under certain specified conditions such as confidential matters.
- Publish board meeting minutes.
- Publish budget and financial reports.
- Community input into board member selection process.
- Increase number of teachers; expand definition (e.g. not all teachers give talks).
- Consider multiple teacher positions, i.e. guiding, guest, affiliate, associate, practice leader, etc.
- Decide who makes decisions about adding new teachers (i.e. teachers or the board). Community input into teacher selection process.
- Have candidate teachers give guest talks as part of process.
- Candidate teachers to be anchored in Insight Meditation/Vipassana teachings and practices.
- Consider increasing honorariums for teachers; revise deficit provision (in section 7).
- Consider teacher committee/council separate from board (but with some overlap).
- More communication with community about bylaws.
- Committees in bylaws? (Dharma talks, KM, Programming, RA, Shramadana, Welcoming, etc.)
- Consider affirming commitment to *dana* basis rather than fees.
- Community is informed about any changes to the bylaws or structure.

Other Organizational Structures

We reviewed our shared vision, values, operating norms, and mission and in relation to the bylaws and processes.

There was some discussion about how other insight meditation communities like East Bay Meditation Center, in Oakland, CA, are structured. Katherine suggested we talk about specific wants and see where common grounds are. Some other ideas from group on structures:

- Can we afford paid staff?
- A larger board will be more expensive requiring a larger meeting space, more learning, etc.
- Think about committees before forming them - What need does each fill? Do we have someone committed to lead it? Should it be ongoing or time limited?
- Some teachers could be on the board, but not all teachers need to be on the board.
- Should we create spaces for special communities, such as people of color, LBQTQ+?
- What happens on Wednesdays? How do we use that opportunity to build community?

Following these nut-and-bolts considerations, a period of broader discussion ensued, focusing on the presence of divergent views within TIMC regarding its intent and purpose. Some described seeing the tension between these divergent views as potent enough to raise the possibility of fracture. Others described feeling confidence that the community can continue to hold this tension, faith that “we’re up to this.” Still others expressed a lack of clarity regarding the precise nature of the tension. One of those expressing a wish for greater

specificity said, “maybe it’s a big tension, but maybe it’s not as great as it sometimes appears.” Another person, saying “I barely understand” the tension, endorsed taking steps to “define the differences and to hold them in an open-hearted way.” Katherine recommended that we make space in the future for a facilitated discussion of people’s specific experiences of the tension.

As with the discussion preceding the lunch break, the centrality of turning toward suffering was noted. Two people expressed how painful it can be when Dharma talks are given without reference to people’s current experience of suffering. One of these people noted some talks “do not even mention what happened that week - and the systemic suffering of those in the room;” and the other person, noting the suffering of immigrant children and families, asked, “How can we *not* speak of it?” Several people affirmed the wisdom of turning toward suffering, while at the same time honoring the uniqueness of each person’s path and practice. The discussion concluded with the suggestion that guidance could be offered to those giving Dharma talks regarding the suffering that is present on a given Wednesday night, whether in the room or beyond it.

Next Steps and Commitments

Francesca, Mary, Scott, and Katherine agreed to type up and compile their notes and share them with participants for edits before sharing them with the entire community.

The group agreed to form working groups to prepare draft documents on Vision, Values, Operating Norms, Mission, and Bylaws. The group also agreed to form a working group to establish a Welcoming Committee. Finally, the group agreed that the need for other potential committees, including Dharma Talks and Programming, would continue to be assessed. Individuals volunteered to meet and create drafts to share with the entire community for input, as follows:

- *Vision, Values, Operating Norms, Mission* - includes Francesca Morfesis (lead), Cathy Cole, David Hughey, Daya Breckinridge, Mary Mudd, Cornelia Lee, and Scott Bryce. Katherine will provide facilitation and guidance.
- *Bylaws* - includes Karen Ziegler (lead), Jean Hamilton, Cynthia Hughey, Gordy Livermore, Ron Vereen and Phyllis Hicks. Katherine will provide facilitation and guidance.
- *Other structure components*
 - *Create a Welcoming Committee* - includes Robert Seyler (lead), Bree Kalb, Glaeshia O’Rourke, Lynn Shapiro, Sara Tillis, Donna Rabiner and Marian Place
 - Other committees to be considered in the future:
 - *Dharma Talks Committee* - will include Alan Stern (lead), Ron Vereen, Jack Narayan
 - *Programming Committee* - could evolve from current Shramadana Project Committee and will include Mary Mudd and others (?)

Katherine advised groups to begin meeting right away to maintain momentum.

We ended with a lovingkindness meditation and closure.