
Sangha

Plans For 2021



open heart project

Sangha

Programs and Plans for 2021



open heart project





Dear Open Heart Project,

2020 has been the most difficult, confounding, enraging, hopeless, hopeful, terrifying, and, at times, oddly peaceful year.

Pema Khandro Rinpoche said, “the pandemic showed us our own mind”, and I find that to be so. If there was ever any doubt in the truth of interdependence, Covid, in particular, showed us there is no way around it: my exhale *is* your inhale. This is a truth. If I fool myself into thinking that what I do has no impact on you, I am a danger to you and thus, to myself. In 2020, we discovered yet again that there is no us and them—there is only us. No matter where we looked, we could not escape our responsibility to each other, this world, the truth of what lies in our hearts, and how it impacts the world we live in.

Pandemic. Racial injustice. Lockdowns. Fires. Political rage. Distrust in institutions. Loss of loved ones. Loss of livelihood. New livelihood options. Children at home. Massive uncertainty. Glimpses into a new way of living. A new appreciation of home, perhaps. A paring away of what is non-essential. More distress *and* more quiet. We learned things about ourselves, our relationships, our leaders, our countries, and the world. Some of it has been horrific. Some, quite touching. The world seemed to come together and fall apart over and over.

Many of us experienced it all largely from our homes, in a strange combination of interconnection and isolation.

Our need for Sangha (Sanskrit for community) was never more essential.

As you may know, the Open Heart Project Sangha is a community within the larger Open Heart Project. It is a fantastic group of smart, independent, deeply kind people all over the world who want to make a deeper connection to meditation practice and whatever else supports their unique spiritual journey. We have regular gatherings to discuss our practice (and our lives), online weekend retreats, peer-led accountability groups, and special programs, including a monthly dharma gathering with a guest teacher, a 3-hour Sunday Meditation Intensive once a month. The Sangha is a mindfulness meditation center that lives in the cloud.

Unlike meditation apps or pre-recorded programs, the focus here is not on using meditation to solve problems or “hack” consciousness, but on becoming the most courageous version of yourself and discovering more joy, peace, authenticity, and meaning in your life.

To follow, please find an overview of where we are headed in 2021. If you're interested in joining, there is information about how to do so at the end of this document.

May all the doors and windows open to a new day.

All my love, Susan



The Open Heart Project Sangha in 2021



Authentic Presence: A Year of Spiritual Warriorship

In the coming year, we are going to bring our practice off the cushion and into our lives, out from between our ears and into our speech, actions, decisions, and environment.

You may have noticed (or will) that as your practice takes root, you experience more moments of both gentleness and bravery. In fact, there is no difference between these qualities.

Through our practice, we soften, first to ourselves, then to others, and then to our world. To soften is to express courage. Normally, we imagine we can arm ourselves with opinions, beliefs, preconceptions, systems, strategies, judgments—and while some may be absolutely accurate, none can protect you from the vulnerability of being human, of being touched, disappointed, delighted, lost, uplifted, satisfied, shattered. We see that we can't actually predict or control our experience, that all is vulnerable. This is where warriors are born.

How do we recognize a warrior? Their presence is surprising. Listening to them, you feel like you just woke up. They are genuine and without aggression. Something magnetizing is happening and at the same time, nothing unusual is going on. You just know that you want to be

around them. Have you been able to sense these qualities in yourself? I have seen them in you.

A warrior has what is called authentic presence; that quality of being on the spot, paying attention, mind and body fully synchronized—all of which is cultivated quite directly through our practice.

When we sit, we are not trying to get someplace else.

We continually bring our attention back to right now.

Mind and body are synchronized on the wave of breath.

Thus, the path of warriorship unfolds.

In 2021, we will examine more closely that sense of being born into warriorship and how to apply the warrior's gentleness, bravery, and authentic presence in all the moments of our lives.

2021 Themes

If there is one thing we've learned in 2020, it is the value of slowing down, simplifying, and focusing. In 2021, we will continue with regular themes, but instead of introducing a new one every week, we will

introduce a new theme every month to give ourselves more time and space to consider it.

On the first of the month (no matter what day of the week it falls on), you will receive an expanded newsletter from us. Each newsletter will contain the following:

- A video talk on our theme, followed by a meditation
- An expanded essay on the theme
- A new "Guru Guide" to introduce you to a great sage of the past or present
- An "Art for Contemplation" feature to bring in another way of relating to our theme
- A feature on an aspect of the enneagram (because we want to continue to weave this exceptional wisdom into everything we do.

We spent a lot of time considering what our themes should be for 2021. We wanted something that felt like a path, but that you could drop in to and out of as your life allows, without feeling a need to catch up.

We wanted it to be genuine and rooted in the wisdom of Buddhism while also being completely relevant to our everyday lives.

We wanted the year to feel like a journey into truth and magic in such a way that you feel even more connected to yourself, your unique wisdom and sources of guidance, and, of course, to each other.

The year will be broken down into four quarters according to the extraordinary teaching given by the Kagyu lineage master, Gampopa, around nine centuries ago. “The Four Dharmas of Gampopa” lay out the entire spiritual journey in four succinctly perfect lines:

Grant your blessings so that my mind may be one with the dharma.

Grant your blessings so that dharma may progress along the path.

Grant your blessings so that the path may clarify confusion.

Grant your blessings so that confusion may dawn as wisdom.

From January to March, the umbrella theme will be **My Mind is One With the Dharma**. We will explore and re-explore the steps one takes to get on the path altogether. We will go back to basics and revisit foundational concepts. Believe me, after 25+ years of practice, I can personally certify that one cannot return to the foundations too many times. “You can always go back to square one,” my meditation teacher has often told me, and, indeed, you should always go back to square one. Within this general framework of Dharma #1, we will explore the following:

January: Take Your Seat

A chance to revisit the foundations of sitting meditation practice.

February: Establish Self-Trust

The most important teacher is your own mind. How can you discover a way to hear that voice clearly and with confidence?

March: Not Afraid to See

From these important building blocks, doors and windows open, yet we may still be stuck seeing only what we want to see (or dread seeing). How can we cleanse the doors of perception, take back our projections, actually see our own lives, and inhabit our experience fully?

From April to June, our umbrella theme will be Dharma #2, **Dharma Progresses Along the Path**.

The awakened mind is said to have three qualities. It is fearless. It is compassionate. It is wise. All of these qualities arise from our sitting practice. How can we amplify the goodness we discover there and apply it in every aspect of our lives? We will explore how to bring the fruits of mindfulness-awareness meditation off the cushion.

April: Discovering Fearlessness

What is fearlessness? How does meditation make more of it? What could it mean to live in the light of our fearlessness rather than our fear?

May: Discovering Compassion

As many of you know, when we sit and explore the three jewels (our

own wakefulness, the path we are on, and the power of community), rather than becoming more impenetrable, we become softer. This softening is the gateway to compassion for self, others, and this world. We laugh more and we cry more. We feel more. Uh-oh! Now what?

June: Discovering Wisdom

Meditation is often called the practice of clear seeing, or of insight. How does this happen? We are just sitting there, doing “nothing”, after all. I think of it like this: Imagine that your mind is like a snow globe that is shaken all day, and, often, all night. The flakes swirl and swirl. When we meditate, we set the snow globe down. One by one, each sparkly flake settles to the surface and what is left is clear and spacious. We can actually see where we are. This is called wisdom. How can we recognize and abide within it more directly?

From July to September our general theme is **The Path Clarifies Confusion**, Dharma #3. Now that we have established a foundation and discovered the brilliance we have always possessed, what could this all mean in terms of our ordinary lives? In this period, we'll get very down-to-earth.

July: Enlightened Home

We are not monastics. We live in homes and have jobs, bills, partners, family, roommates, yards, elevators, meals to cook, and floors to sweep. These are not departures from practice, they are our practice. During

this month, we'll look at creating a sacred environment exactly where we are.

August: Enlightened Relationships

I was talking to someone just the other day whose friend is an ex-monk, now married. He said to her, “being a monk in solitude was so much easier than being in a relationship.” Ha ha! We know that! This is where the rubber seriously meets the road. This month, we will contemplate the twistiest of all the paths, the path of love.

September: Enlightened Speech

No matter how strong your practice or how detailed your study, no matter how committed you are to wisdom, compassion, and living life deeply, it can all fly out the window the moment we open our mouths. What does it mean to communicate wisely, well, truthfully, and fully, whether we are delighted, enraged, confused, or all/none of the above? To close out the year, from October to December, our general theme will be **Confusion Dawns as Wisdom**, Dharma #4.

The first three dharmas are relatively easy to make sense of. My mind is one with the dharma. Dharma progresses along a path. That path clarifies confusion. Though the mechanics may be mysterious, there is nothing confusing about this sequence.

And then we get to the fourth dharma, Confusion Dawns as Wisdom. Wait a minute, I thought confusion was bad, something to see through

and around, something to get out from under. Now you're telling me that it's not a problem? Yes. In fact, it's even a source of blessings. This theme launches us firmly into the territory beyond territory, into the realm of magic. As such, we will explore the openings that lead to the vast wisdom beyond conventional thought.

October: Sense Perceptions

The sense perceptions are the gateway to enlightenment. What does this even mean? How can what I see, smell, taste, and so on be the doorway to liberation? This will be our contemplation in October.

November: Creative Chaos (is Good News)

Chogyam Trungpa once said, "Chaos is good news," and in 2020 we had some serious opportunities to test this notion. One aspect of chaos, however, is that it can be very creative. To explore our confusion as a source of wisdom may feel chaotic—and therefore creative. In November, we will play with the mechanics of creativity, spirituality, and whatever synchronicities they may have.

December: The Wisdom of Knowing Nothing

T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" contains these lines:

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

We begin an exploration because we think there is something to find. We go on a journey. The journey ends where it began—with yourself. My interpretation of the final line, "And know the place for the first time," is this: We realize there is nothing to find. There is nothing to know. No journey ever occurred because there is no place to go and no journey-er. There is only here. Now. Now. Here. The path opens our senses so that when we realize there is nowhere to go, what we see is ALIVE with sensorial life force and, therefore, always new. To glimpse that is to glimpse everything. What a perfect place to end our year of practice!

Ongoing Programs

We will continue to offer a variety of programs, classes, and gatherings. Here are some highlights:

Monthly Dharma Gathering

As mentioned, this year, we want to go deeper with everything while continuing to give you the perspectives of a variety of deeply trained Buddhist teachers. Instead of a shorter weekly gathering, we will convene a longer monthly dharma gathering on the 3rd Thursday evening of each month with one from the same group of wonderful guest teachers. Each gathering will be an hour long and focus on that month's theme.

Creativity, Writing, and Art

We heard you: You loved the 2020 Creative Raves (day-long gatherings to do our creative work alone/together within a practice container) and the meditation and writing retreats we offered in 2020. In 2021, we will convene a full art-writing-creativity sub-community, to meet every month.

There will be three full meditation and writing/art practice retreats in 2021. In between, we'll meet for a Creative Rave every month. This way, whatever you begin in the retreat, you will be able to continue within community. If you have a writing/artistic/personal project you've been longing to start/complete/explore, 2021 will offer regular opportunities to do so. The retreats and Creative Raves provide seriously loving support and the gentle accountability of community, no matter what your project or intention.

The Enneagram

There will be three enneagram gatherings this year: two "Introduction to the Enneagram" workshops and one "Enneagram 2.0" designed for those of you who have taken the intro program and want to look more deeply into the system. We will focus on talking styles and how the enneagram can be used to improve relationships to self and other. In addition, each monthly newsletter will have a separate feature on the enneagram. BECAUSE I CAN'T SHUT UP ABOUT IT.

Sunday Meditation Intensives

We're really excited about this one. Many of you have expressed interest in opportunities to practice for longer, more formal periods. The wonderful teacher, Maho Kawachi, has offered to lead a retreat on the second Sunday of every month from 10a ET to 1p ET. This will be three hours of full-on practice. Shorter sessions of walking meditation will be alternated with longer sitting sessions. Thanks, Maho!

Special Programs

Lending a Hand: Avalokitesvara and the Art of Mind Protection

Michael Carroll will be back to teach another immersive program, beginning in early April. (Exact dates to be determined.) "Lending a Hand: Avalokitesvara and the Art of Mind Protection" is about protecting others and, like his last program, it is bound to inspire, challenge, confound, and delight you. Thanks, Mikey!

Five Buddha Wisdoms

Kevin Townley is working on a book about art and the Five Buddha Wisdoms or Families. This body of teachings describes five primary forms of wisdom. Insight into this teaching goes very well with, well, everything, but particularly with Michael Carroll's program on Mind Protection, as well as knowledge of the Enneagram—all three could be considered an *upaya* or form of skillful means necessary to bring more compassion and fierceness into the world. In 2021, Kevin will offer two full retreat days on the Five Wisdoms. Thanks, Kevin!

Refuge Vow

In 2021, I'll offer two opportunities (in March and December) to take the refuge vow, for anyone who is interested. (This is the vow one takes to formally become a Buddhist. No one has to do this! Just for those who want to take this step.) When we get closer to the dates, I'll send out additional information. If this vow interests you, we will schedule time to discuss it one-to-one.

Practices for Grief and Loss

In April, the wonderful teacher, Emily Bower, will lead a full day retreat to teach and explore Buddhist practices for death and dying.

Also

We will continue to offer our acclaimed Meditation Instructor Training Program, beginning in March. And our weekly Mommy Sangha is an ongoing lifeline for moms of all ages. Jenna Hollenstein is instrumental in both offerings. Thanks, Jenna!

In addition, our daily live meditation gatherings will continue at 9a ET and 6p ET, you will still get a daily audio meditation via email, and a chance to get together with me on Fridays at 3p ET for a weekly sangha check-in.

We, you and I, are co-creating something unique in all the world, a meditation community rooted in real dharma, focused on helping you

source *your* wisdom (not that of a teacher speaking from a removed position), at once very personal while still in accord with ancient principles, no hoops to jump through beyond what one senses within, all held by an ambient sense of ever-present community. Thank you, thank you for being on this journey with me and with the dharma. You are truly pioneers.

All my love, Susan



The Community Is Our Body

Community building is the most important action of our century. As individuals, we have suffered tremendously. Due to the predominance of individualism, families are breaking down, and society has become deeply divided. For the twenty-first century to be a time of spirituality, the spirit of togetherness must guide us. We should learn to do things together, to share our ideas and the deep aspiration in our hearts. We have to learn to see the sangha, our community of spiritual support, as our own body. We need each other in order to practice solidity, freedom, and compassion so that we can remind each other that there's always hope.

When we have a community to practice mindfulness with, we can sit in meditation together, and it's very powerful. In life, people produce food, objects, and technology, among many other things. In a sangha, we also produce things. We produce the powerful energy of peace, the powerful energy of mindfulness. People can go to the supermarket to buy food or lightbulbs. But to produce mindful energy, we need to be with our community, our sangha, and produce this energy through our sitting, walking, and peaceful and joyful living.

This takes practice and training. I invite you to think deeply about practicing mindfulness as a wonderful way of providing spiritual food for yourself and your community. You can nourish the world with that energy. When you see that this practice provides nourishment for the world, then you will feel very joyful, because you are connected with all of life in a real way, and you are serving life.

—Thich Nhat Hanh

My Mind is One with the Dharma

Dharma Progresses Along the Path

DATE/NO.

	January	February	March	April	May	June
	Talking Your Seat	Trust Yourself	Not Afraid to See	Discovering Fearlessness	Discovering Compassion	Discovering Wisdom
1	21-day meditation challenge begins					
2						
3						
4						
5		Sangha check-in	Sangha check-in			Sangha check-in
6						
7					Sangha check-in	
8	Sangha check-in					
9	Sunday meditation intensive				Sunday meditation intensive	
10						
11				Sunday meditation intensive		Sangha check-in
12		Sangha check-in	Sangha check-in			
13						
14		Sunday Meditation Intensive	Sunday Meditation Intensive			Sunday Meditation Intensive
15	Sangha check-in			Monthly Dharma Gathering	Sangha check-in	
16				Sangha check-in	Retreat w/ Krista Towner: > 5 Buddha Wisdoms < ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ pt. 1	
17						Monthly Dharma Gathering
18		Monthly Dharma Gathering	Monthly Dharma Gathering	Grief + Loss Retreat...		Sangha check-in
19		Sangha check-in	Sangha check-in	... w/ Emily Bower		
20		Meditation + Writing Retreat	<u>REFUGE</u> <u>VOW</u> <u>CEREMONY</u>			
21	Monthly Dharma Gathering				Monthly Dharma Gathering	
22	Sangha check-in				Sangha check-in	
23			med instructor training begins...			
24				Sangha check-in		
25				Creative Rave Day		
26		Sangha check-in	Sangha check-in			Sangha check-in
27			Creative Rave Day			Meditation + writing retreat
28						
29					Sangha check-in	
30	Sangha check-in				Creative Rave Day	
31	Intro to the Enneagram			Sangha check-in		

Jan
2021
Jan

NOTES

Michael Carroll course begins: Dates TBA

TITLE [The Path Clarifies Confusion] [Confusion Dawns as Wisdom] DATE/NO

	July	August	September	October	November	December
	Enlightened Home	Enlightened Relationships	Enlightened Speech	Sense Perceptions	Creative Chaos... is Good News	The Wisdom of Knowing Nothing
1				Sangha check-in		
2	Sangha check-in			Introduction to Emegran		
3						
4			Sangha check-in			Sangha check-in
5						Creative Rave Day
6		Sangha check-in			Sangha check-in	
7						
8		Sunday Meditation Intensive		Sangha check-in		
9	Sangha check-in					
10			Sangha check-in	Sunday Meditation Intensive		Sangha check-in
11	Sunday Meditation Intensive					
12			Sunday Meditation Intensive			Sunday Meditation Intensive
13		Sangha check-in			Sangha check-in	
14					Sunday Meditation Intensive	
15	Monthly Dharma Gathering			Sangha check-in		
16	Sangha check-in		Monthly Dharma Gathering			Monthly Dharma Gathering
17			Sangha check-in			Sangha check-in
18			Retreat Day w/ Kevin Touhey		Monthly Dharma Gathering	
19		Monthly Dharma Gathering	& Buddha Wisdoms pt. 2		Sangha check-in	Refuge Vow Ceremony
20		Sangha check-in		Monthly Dharma Gathering		
21				Sangha check-in		
22						
23	Sangha check-in					
24			Sangha check-in			Sangha check-in
25			Creative Rave Day			
26						
27		Sangha check-in			Sangha check-in	
28		Creative Rave Day			Creative Rave Day	
29						
30	Sangha check-in			Sangha check-in		
31	Creative Rave Day			Meditation + Writing Retreat		Sangha check-in

Jul
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The OHP creative hub

Membership is \$27 a month or \$270 a year.

Learn More, Sign Up **Here.**

Questions, Comments, Suggestions?

Don't hesitate to let us know.

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