



# MONASTIC ACADEMY

FOR THE PRESERVATION OF LIFE ON EARTH

## CEDAR

COMMUNITY FOR THE  
EXPERIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF  
AWAKENING AND RESPONSIBILITY

2019  
**FALL**  
QUARTERLY  
REPORT

## LETTER FROM PETER PARK



Dear friends,

As I gaze outside, I see the skeleton of our zendo meditation hall under construction, its wooden exterior matching the beauty of practice within our community. The high rafters stretch up to the sky, inspiring our aspirations for awakening and service to the world. The zendo's promising path to completion signifies our progress this year in building strong foundations for what's next.

This September, we witnessed youth strike for the sake of the planet worldwide, inspired by 16-year-old Greta Thunberg's example. Crisis seems to strike on every level, from Brexit and the Amazonian wildfires to the opioid epidemic. Underlying issues like these, there is a meaning crisis: how do we make sense of what's happening?

At CEDAR, we are training powerful leaders of change who can make wise and loving decisions in this age of existential risk. We began offering this training in 2013 at the Monastic Academy for the Preservation of Life on Earth, MAPLE, in Vermont. In 2018, we launched the Optimizing for Awakening and Kindness, OAK, in California to expand the opportunities we offer.

This quarter, I am proud of our success in hosting two low-cost, collaborative retreats for college and graduate students. In partnership with Dharma Gates, a non-profit organization co-founded by a former resident of the Monastic Academy, Miles Bukiet, we hosted over 18 students from across the continent. Students came from a range of schools, from Harvard's Divinity School to Middlebury College in Vermont. For many, this was their first experience of meditation and monastic community, which allowed them a new way of connecting deeply to themselves. Many reported that they realized a pivotal moment as they experienced, with other young students in a sectarian context, being held in deep community in service to all beings.

OAK's summer partnership with Paradigm in Oakland, CA was a great success. OAK resided in an entire floor of Paradigm's building and was able to train a larger number of residents and apprentices. It regularly hosted events with standing room only. This quarter, OAK received substantial financial support, enabling it to seek a long-term location to continue this good work of cultivating trustworthy community and culture in the Bay Area center of power.

Soryu entered his annual deep solitary retreat this September at MAPLE. The importance of the inner work at our core propels and powers his dedication to his own continual awakening. The inner-transformation empowers us to lead the world towards peace, honesty, and care.

In friendship,

**Peter Park**

Executive Director



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## CALIFORNIA OAK

OAK, our budding Bay Area center, has had a big summer, and our experiment at the non-profit Paradigm Academy has been a resounding success. We made many new friends at events we hosted and attended, did deep training with new residents and apprentices, and raised nearly enough funds to pay for an additional full year of training at a location like Paradigm.

We've refined our sense of our mission in the Bay Area, thanks to many conversations we've had over the last few months. We've known from the beginning that we hope for OAK to be a compass for Silicon Valley, steering the vast optimization power it commands in the directions of Awakening and Kindness. We now have a better sense of how that may unfold. We've discussed this in talks available online and we're eager to continue this work.

In terms of attendance, this summer was highly successful; we kept a cadence of three events per week hosted at our location, and these were commonly full, meaning 35 or more people were in attendance. We also had five apprentices, three who stayed for a month or more. In addition, we practiced a morning schedule that included chanting, sitting, and meditation instruction from 5:30 am to 9:30 am, a difficult feat as we regularly ran up against space or time constraints in serving everyone. Because of our efforts, many more people now know our name, and many we've talked to are eager to train with us, confirming that our work is resonating with these communities.

We've successfully received donations to nearly cover another year of a program like the one we offered at Paradigm, including rent at a suitable location for it. Much of this comes in the form of a generous grant of \$100,000 from the Survival and Flourishing Fund, as well as some smaller gifts from individual donors. We're now just \$10,000 shy of our budget for a full year, and feel confident as we seek the donors who will bring us across the finish line.

The gift of being able to use Paradigm Academy's space was instrumental in all of this. Paradigm allowed us to convert an entire floor of their building into a mini-monastery for the months of June and July. This location provided many advantages. Among the biggest were its proximity to Berkeley and Oakland, where many of the folks who have been involved this summer reside. Furthermore, the space had the capacity to host more guests and residents for evening events, retreats, and extended training periods.

Paradigm has been a kind host, friend, and ally through this period. Part of the project was an exploration of cross-pollination between Paradigm's training and our own; we learned and practiced some of Paradigm's techniques, and some of Paradigm's staff participated in our retreats and apprenticeship program. We're eager to see where this collaboration goes in the future.



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### MAPLE PHOENIX TRAINING

CEDAR is at a pivotal turning point. After many years, we are becoming a mature, stable community straddling both coasts with MAPLE in Vermont and OAK in California. At the time of this report, there are eleven residents and five apprentices training at MAPLE with new apprenticeship applications streaming in daily.

This July, with support from guest facilitators including Miles Bukiet and Mike Blas, we led our fifth Circling Social Meditation Retreat in Vermont with 17 guest attendees, our largest yet. The Circling training is a direct way we train the skill of love by relating to others with mindfulness, clarity, and equanimity.

This August, we hosted a Dharma Gates college student retreat. Dharma Gates is a new non-profit dedicated to making deep meditation practice accessible to young people of all backgrounds. The organization was co-founded by Miles Bukiet, a former resident here, and Aaron Stryker. The retreat brought 19 students from across the continent. We can see already in the Climate Strikes led by young people such as Greta Thunberg that it is the young generation leading the charge. We are proud and inspired to provide this powerful training to young leaders at many levels from subsidized student retreats to free short-term apprenticeships and long-term residency training. We look forward to continuing to share our practices and offerings with a wider audience so as to impact more mature leaders, from college students to monastic teachers.

This September, we held an Intimacy Workshop with Lynn Kreaden, and resident teacher, Peter Park, led a silent week-long meditation retreat. With Jōshin teaching at OAK and Peter teaching at MAPLE, we can offer meditation retreats in addition to those led by Soryu and Shinzen.

Consistently, those who train here even for just a few weeks report that they have developed and matured emotionally, spiritually, and professionally as a human. They directly experience a greater freedom to respond. They realize the dedication to committing their life to serving others. Embraced in a loving community, they are able to step out of victimhood by finding space to grieve their pains. Through a continuing practice, they create the strength to commit themselves to addressing the injustices of the world. Through mistakes, successes, and steadfast training they may, like resident teachers Jōshin and Peter, develop sufficient wisdom, love, and power to guide meditation retreats, lead communities, and run centers of their own.





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## MAPLE CONSTRUCTION

We have completed the renovations and reorganization of our kitchen in Lowell, VT. Our team worked hard on this project for several months, thanks to the generous support of one of our donors. With the addition of a new dishwasher, a second kitchen entryway, and beautiful, customized shelves, the kitchen staff can prepare meals more efficiently and effectively. It is a dramatically different kitchen.

We are very excited to announce that construction on our first zendo, or meditation hall, has begun. We began work on the zendo last year by developing the plans, securing permitting, and clearing the ground for the work. We expect it to be completed this fall.

This zendo, which is 41' in diameter, is part of a larger, multi-year project and vision. It will be critical to ensuring the quality of our training here. We have been using our main hall and converted bedrooms as our practice spaces. The main hall is also where we hold our meals and large group meetings. Unfortunately, it is next to the kitchen so that anyone in the main hall will pick up the sounds and smells of food preparation. Using the main hall for multiple purposes has not been ideal -- in fact, it is the main disadvantage of this property. Everything we have done, whether in our own small group or in retreats, has been done in our meditation hall despite its proximity to the kitchen. The eagerly-awaited completion of the zendo will open a new chapter in our practice of awakening at the Monastic Academy.

Regarding the village, we have completed the wetlands and wildlife survey to ensure that the site will have minimal impact on the surrounding environment and wildlife and it has been approved by state officials. We are now ready to continue with Act 250 and further steps. The village is part of our long-term plan to extend our community beyond the core of the monastic residents; this blueprint of community and culture will model a better way for the world. It will provide the possibility for community members to join us on the land and residents here to graduate into their own projects and create their own families here.



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## FINANCIALS

Thanks to the generous support of friends like you, we have had a good financial quarter.

As a national organization, CEDAR brought in \$196,369 for the quarter, spending \$163,095 for a net of \$33,246. In addition, we received loan forgiveness of \$26,500 for our Vermont property. These numbers reflect the combined budgets of our Vermont headquarters, MAPLE, and our growing Bay Area location, OAK.

The continuing gifts of our lenders for MAPLE help us to continue building our training centers to impact more people. We purchased the Lowell property in 2017 with \$1,366,000 in loans and gifts. Since 2017, we have been fortunate to have shrunken our mortgage to \$906,179 through a combination of loan forgiveness and repayment. We are on track to pay off the remainder of the loan. All of our Vermont guest programs this year have been profitable. Our largest expenses for the year are our capital campaigns, including the construction of our first zendo (meditation hall) and preparations for the Village for long-term housing of families and staff in 10-12 homes. The bulk of that cost will come in this next, fourth quarter.

Contributions to OAK played a big part of this quarter's success. OAK received a \$100,000 grant from the Survival and Flourishing Fund. OAK's continued existence has been made possible by California supporters who allowed us to use their home, in addition to Paradigm Academy's allowing us to use an entire floor of its building for a summer trial. The generosity of these and other supporters have enabled us to survive; now we are beginning to thrive.

### 3RD QUARTER

GUEST INCOME	DONATIONS	LOAN FORGIVENESS	*TOTAL INCOME
\$40,909	\$137,747	\$26,500	\$222,869

\*This includes more income than the three types listed

### 2019 YEAR-TO-DATE

GUEST INCOME	DONATIONS	LOAN FORGIVENESS	*TOTAL INCOME
\$110,407	\$261,023	\$76,500	\$480,570

\*This includes more income than the three types listed

## LEADERSHIP EMERGES: PROFILE ON ELIN AHLSTRAND



Elin is a student at Princeton University pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Neuroscience.

After her first year at university, Elin found herself completely disillusioned with the academic world and took off for two years to travel and work in various countries across Europe and East Asia. She has an intense drive to explore as many external and internal worlds as she can possibly fit into her lifetime.

Elin is deeply impacted by the modern Meaning Crisis and believes that monastic institutions and psychedelics will be crucial to the survival and evolution of humanity. Elin foresees a lifetime of working with and in altered states of consciousness, bending status-quo reality to increase experiences of adventure, play, beauty, and love.

### *Why did you join the MAPLE Apprenticeship?*

After my academic year ended, I was feeling frighteningly desperate. I didn't want to spend my summer in a laboratory or interning at one of those overhyped companies many of my peers end up at. And I had a toxic array of harmful behaviours and thoughts plaguing me. I was trying to escape a culture that I felt was broken and had the potential to take me down with it. I wanted to do something diametrically opposite to it.

For a long time, I have wanted to immerse myself in contemplative practices to train my mind. But I had never gotten around to consistently engaging with any forms of formal practice. I thought that the apprenticeship program at MAPLE would give me the benefits of training in the skills of meditation and leadership.

### *How have you benefited from your time at MAPLE?*

Previously, I saw my body as a nuisance. I now have a more equanimous and intimate relationship with my body and all of its sensations. When I tune into what is happening in various parts of my body, I find all sorts of interesting things to feel. Consistent meditation practice has forced me to face and overcome many hindrances. I feel more capable of encountering pain, experiencing its sting more fully, and then letting it go. I've also realized I am capable of much more than I had previously thought.

I participated in two special retreats while at MAPLE: the Bio-Emotive retreat and a Circling retreat. The Bio-Emotive retreat offered me a clear framework for understanding emotions in the body, and a powerful technique for processing them. As someone who has dealt with a lot of dissociation and emotional blocking, Bio-Emotive has given me a means to clear negative emotions from my system. With Circling, I have had several meaningful interpersonal experiences, and astonishing transpersonal experiences. These experiences have really shaken up my ideas about reality and have left me speechless.

### *What has been your biggest challenge?*

I have been prone to bouts of anxiety and depressive moods throughout my life. It has always been difficult to manage my emotional system, especially in relation to other people. Dissociation from my body and social isolation have been my main coping mechanisms for years. At MAPLE I have had to learn to ask for help while being vulnerable, clearly expressing my boundaries and needs. Opening myself up to people, trusting them and allowing both the hideous and the wonderful little bits and pieces of myself to be loved and to love has been remarkably challenging.

### *What are your goals as you return to Princeton University?*

When I return to university, I have no choice but to implement a consistent, serious daily meditation practice. If there is only one thing to take away from my apprenticeship it is this: meditation is the most important thing I could be doing with my time. I want to keep practicing, to keep finding deeper levels of concentration, exploring my body and experience, and cultivating love.

I recently asked myself at MAPLE – “Am I ready to be a student leader when I return back to campus?” With a sense of relief and even pride, I could actually confidently say – “Yes, I am ready to lead.” If I had been asked the same question at the beginning of my summer, I imagine the response would have been a regretful “No, but I wish I could say yes.” I feel called to lead my student group from a place of power and with an open heart, with the capacity to handle criticism and setbacks.



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## MOVING FORWARD

In this next quarter, we will shift our focus back towards our intensive winter period of awakening. In the past two quarters, MAPLE has focused a great deal on expanding our Phoenix program as a complement to our Dragon program. The latter is for those dedicating themselves to awakening first and foremost, whereas the Phoenix program is for those seeking healing and recovery. We've also laid the foundation for college students to participate in residential retreat programs. With these programs firmly established and a great team in place, we can dedicate more of our time and energy this winter to deep practice and awakening.

The zendo will be completed in the next quarter, allowing more participants to attend our retreats and enable us to host and run more events. This dedicated space optimized for practice will enable and empower new depths of training.

In October, meditation expert Shinzen Young will be returning for his third year of leading week-long retreats at the Monastic Academy. We draw on Shinzen's system of Unified Mindfulness as the foundation for our ecology of practices. We also eagerly await Soryu's return in November to further lead us in our efforts to go beyond our own perspectives, to realize what we have not yet realized, and to see what we have not yet seen.

As our OAK branch has hit a major milestone this past quarter in becoming self-sustaining, it will focus energy on its potential for growth, meeting the needs of people in the Bay Area. Peter "Pan" Williams will be joining OAK as our most senior resident to support Jōshin's heroic efforts while Autumn will return from her five months at OAK to MAPLE to resume her good work here. This collaboration between centers with cross-training and migration of senior resident leaders is an example of communities working and competing together.

At the end of our discussion meals, we repeat a Lakota saying, "Mitákuye Oyás'ıŋ," roughly translated as "All My Relations." This saying is a remembrance that we are all interconnected in one tribe, one family, one life. From all people regardless of gender, sexuality, race, species, or other category, this ecology of life is one. Likewise, this community of awakening and responsibility is alive and connected with you.

Thank you for your efforts, trust, and support in nurturing and empowering this trustworthy community of future leaders. Thank you for courageously investigating the world's troubles and for investing in a better, more sane way. May we remember and realize that we are all connected, and may we, together, make this planet a home for us all for many generations.



## FALL SCHEDULE

**October 18 - 25**

Shinzen Young Monastic Meditation Retreat

**November 15 - 22**

Silent Meditation Retreat with Soryu Forall

**December 13 - 20**

Silent Meditation Retreat with Soryu Forall

**December 27 - January 3**

Circling Interpersonal Meditation Retreat

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## JOIN US

You are always welcome to visit for a day, a week, a month, or longer.

**Our address is:**

**751 Page Rd**

**Lowell, VT 05847**

If you'd like to come, or to be in touch for any reason, please email at [info@monasticacademy.org](mailto:info@monasticacademy.org) or call at 802-540-0820.

Thanks again for your support. Together we are growing a new, trustworthy culture.

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