



# MONASTIC ACADEMY

FOR THE PRESERVATION OF LIFE ON EARTH

## CEDAR

COMMUNITY FOR THE  
EXPERIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF  
AWAKENING AND RESPONSIBILITY

QUARTERLY REPORT, OCTOBER

# 2017

## LETTER FROM CAMERON JOYNER



Dear Friends,

The last quarter was a whirlwind with many significant victories and many challenges remaining. The team continues to cohere as residents settle into their roles and learn to trust and support each other, stepping up without missing a stride in Soryu's absence.

Early in the quarter we developed a new system designed to allow us to host a much broader range of residents and guests. Unlike the residents who come here to dive deeply into service and attempt to relinquish all vestiges of ego, many guests simply need to "Rest and Heal." We've worked to make sure that our monastery is now welcoming to people seeking both of these options. This dual system is represented physically in two meditation spaces with different rules. In one the practitioner sits still and straight for the duration of each sit and must be totally punctual, in the other you are welcome to move, to lie down, to get comfortable. This allows us to meet guests where they are and provide them value without diluting the offering we have for residents. We will continue to learn how these two systems can mutually support one another.

Thanks in part to this new system we were able to exceed our projected numbers for guest revenue, a major accomplishment. In the last report we wrote about a shift in strategy whereby we would increase the number of guests to make up for guests staying for shorter periods and paying less than we anticipated. It worked. With guests staying for a total of 99 nights at the Monastic Academy in July, August, and September, we took in \$14,062, beating our expected revenue by over \$500 per month. Among the contributing factors was the launching of our solitary retreat option in our small secluded cabins. This proved both financially successful, grossing \$5,900, while also acting as a powerful way to build enduring relationships. We hope to continue to grow this program.

In mid August Soryu left for a series of strategic meetings in California with supporters followed by two months of intensive personal practice. He first spent a month with his own teacher, the legendary Shodo Harada Roshi, on a retreat in Tahoma, Washington and then returned to a small cabin in Vermont where he is currently in the midst of a solitary retreat. The long-term training program at the Monastic Academy bucks the trend of the modern world whereby not even a few hundred hours can certify someone to teach meditation. Soryu continues to lead by example in this respect as despite over 25,000 hours of formal training he still carves out time for long retreats. While we deeply support his own continuing education, we were concerned about how the center would function in his absence. I'm happy to report that the team has risen to the challenge impeccably.

Our first test was hosting a co-worker who paid \$1,900 for a three week stay. Without Soryu here to guide his practice the residents took over the teaching responsibilities. The experiment was successful and this co-worker hopes to come back again as soon as this fall. This demonstrates that the power of our community and the structures we've set up and maintained provide significant value to guests, and bodes well for the future. We have also moved forward with a series of



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renovations, welcomed a new resident, kept the monastery running in a punctual and harmonious way, and continued to pay our bills, thank our donors, and host guests.

Another test came in late September when we hosted twenty-two guests for a week-long retreat with Shinzen Young, one of the most respected and accomplished meditation teachers in America. Our many organizational challenges included marketing the retreat, running shuttles to Burlington for guests, buying and preparing food for over 600 meals, readying the buildings and grounds, structuring the retreat, as well as making sure that our guests were well cared for and that Shinzen's needs were met. On all fronts, it could not have gone better. The guests without exception reported positive experiences, the food was praised, and we grossed over \$20,000. Shinzen had a marvelous time enjoying the opportunity to use the our unique setting to integrate traditional monastic forms with his unified mindfulness system.

The end result was a retreat that was on par with or better than any of the top Dharma centers in the country, a testament to the power of our training. We hope to host many more of these sorts of retreats in the future, but cannot guarantee that this will be possible given Shinzen's schedule.

Despite these victories, many challenges remain. Firstly, our staff is still too small for the tasks at hand. This means that we didn't find the time to do basic and important things for the organization like improve our website and marketing or do outreach to alumni for resident recruitment. Finding new residents remains hard as the conversion rate between those who apply and those who visit is extremely low. Additionally, while our guest numbers were strong for the last three months we are concerned that the numbers may fall off in the cold months. We hope to mitigate this by creating winter offerings, but the strategy remains untested.

A final encouraging sign was that one of our lenders decided to forgive a portion of his loan for the Lowell property. We are very grateful because, starting next spring, payments on the loan will become a major organizational expense. To enable others to follow this lender's generous lead, we've included the letters that our attorney and accountant drafted for this transaction. The process is very simple. Miles Bukiet from our fundraising team will be contacting each of you about this process in case you have any questions.

On a final note, we are changing the name of the umbrella organization from the Center for Mindful Learning to CEDAR (Community for the Experience and Development of Awakening and Responsibility). We believe this better reflects the what, why, and how of our organization.

Thanks again for your support as we traverse the ups and downs of bringing a contemplative culture into the 21st century. The task remains daunting, the potential benefit remains vast. It's friends and supporters like you that make it all possible.

In friendship,

- Cameron Joyner (assistant director)



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## MAPLE: MONASTIC ACADEMY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF LIFE ON EARTH



The quarter began with the team brainstorming and implementing new techniques and structures to encourage and support the intake of more guests. In late August Soryu left for his own training and the residents took over all operations. The successful planning and hosting of a week-long retreat with Shinzen Young was a highly encouraging example of the team functioning impeccably without the support of Soryu. Outside of this large event the monastery continued to run smoothly as meditation and work progressed in an atmosphere of harmony and dedication.

### Progress:

- Hosted a week-long retreat with Shinzen Young (see special section below)
- Welcomed a new resident into the one-track-system who is now in his trial period
- Took ownership of the Burlington Community Sunday Sits with residents delivering eight talks
- Launched our “Rest and Heal” program by creating an additional room for meditation practice and delineating a new and different set of standards for people with different goals
- Hosted over 50 people for our summer celebration, deepening the sense of community
- Soryu traveled to California where he had 16 meetings with donors and friends of the Monastic Academy
- Hosted Darren Silver, a skilled facilitator of earth connection ceremonies, for a week-long Vision Quest with residents and a few guests
- Saw residents step up and successfully run the center in Soryu’s absence
- Continued training with a high standard for punctuality, engagement, and rigor





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## MAPLE: MONASTIC ACADEMY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF LIFE ON EARTH (CONT)

### Week-long retreat with Shinzen Young

Shinzen Young is one of the great meditation masters and thinkers of our era. While leading a week-long retreat here he continually mentioned how at home and inspired he was being back in a monastic environment. The residents, without support from Soryu, held the container immaculately.

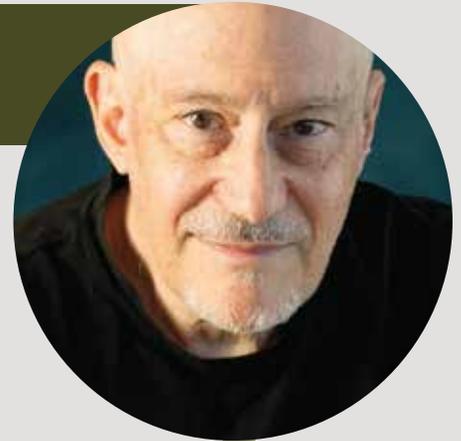
- Housed 22 guests for a week
- Cooked over 600 meals
- Grossed over \$20,000 from program fees
- Received glowing feedback from Shinzen and from guests
- Raised \$3,642 in donations
- Connected with many new potential donors and guests with whom we hope to maintain an ongoing relationship
- Demonstrated that we can host retreats at a level that rivals even the best Dharma centers in the country

#### Challenges:

- Finding new residents remains a challenge, despite many inquiries
- Failed to find the time to implement important strategies like outreach to alumni and the creation of better audio and video content

#### Intentions:

- Execute our new plan for recording and releasing short, accessible dharma talks
- Continue to nurture and explore our relationship with Shinzen Young
- Keep the guest momentum of the last few months going into the winter
- Host a week-long circling (interpersonal-meditation) retreat in October
- Find a way to prioritize non-urgent items like outreach and marketing



## LEADERSHIP EMERGES: PROFILE ON STEVEN DEE



Steven Dee demonstrates dedication, sacrifice, and vigor at a level that staggers and inspires those who know him. He leads the pack in keeping our container strong by relentlessly upholding the highest standards of conduct with the monastic structures and forms.

Those of us who live and work with Steven are continually impressed by his powerful mind capable not only of immense computational capacity, but also deep and systemic thinking. He has consistently worked to yoke this power to change the world. Straight out of college he started coding for Google and has held a variety of jobs in the tech world since. His first nine month stint with the Monastic Academy (then CML) was in 2013 when he helped code the Modern Mindfulness in Schools software, which later reached tens of thousands of students. In April of 2016 he left a job at Interaxon (a company that builds neurofeedback software and hardware that supports meditation) to return to the Monastic Academy.

Last winter, when our move to the Lowell campus was still uncertain, Steven stepped up and became a hero. To support the growth of the Monastic Academy, he transitioned from a resident to a resident / co-worker hybrid. He now continues to train full-time while also working remotely for Triplebyte. From this work he is able to donate enough to cover many of the basic expenses for the community, and he has given us the runway we need to test our business model.

But it's not just impeccable practice and intensity that Steven embodies, nor is it simply brilliance of mind. He has recently taken on a variety of roles including Care (the Care person is responsible for making sure that the community members are thriving emotionally). This new role has showcased the emergence of a softer and more tender side of Steven. The rectitude and fullness that he brings as a student, donor, leader, and friend make him an indispensable part of our team and a powerful force for good in the world.

### INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN:

*Why did you join the MAPLE Mindfulness and Leadership training residency?*

Depends whether you mean the first time or the second time. The first time, it was a lot of things, but the main driver was that I thought I wanted to get enlightened and become a better programmer. I succeeded at the second, and realized I didn't want the first so much after all.

The second time, I realized that this training actually works. I did a month of co-working at MAPLE, and afterwards, my life was better in every way – my relationships were richer, my work was more meaningful and I was better at it, things felt clearer, brighter, and lighter. So if that's what a month of this training can do, what about a lifetime of it?

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

Hard to say! I'm still here, and it's sometimes hard to see the shifts from the inside. But friends and family consistently tell me that something has changed, that I'm kinder and more compassionate, that people are more at ease around me than before. I also find that my movement, my thought, and speech feel more natural with time, and that I don't have to be so involved in things anymore. More and more I'm watching things happen rather than making things happen.

*What has been your biggest challenge?*

Ill will and distrust, definitely. I was pretty smart as a child, and developed a pattern of thinking of other people as stupid, wrong, and dangerous until proven otherwise. This shows up often in my relation to the other residents, and even in my relationship with the practice. It's hard for me to trust something so simple.

*What are your goals/what are you looking forward to as you continue to train here?*

I want to become trustworthy enough to save the world. To me, this means things like not being swayed by any circumstances – any amount of physical or emotional pain, any amount of confusion. To find a way to do what must be done regardless of what the inside or the outside looks, feels, or sounds like.

And to do what must be done. I'm a geek at heart. I think it's important to bring this training to the tech world. We geeks are building the future that everyone will live in, so it's essential that we be trustworthy.



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## GUESTS: PREVIOUSLY CO-WORKERS

In the last quarterly report we indicated a shift in our guest strategy. We said we were hoping to increase the total number of guests to make up for the fact that guests seemed to come for less time and pay less money than expected. This quarter we proved that this strategy is effective by beating our target goals for guest revenue by over \$500 per month. This came as we reconfigured our guest options to meet a broader range of people and continued our process of constant improvement.

### Progress:

- Grossed an average of \$4,687 per month from guests during the quarter beating our projected estimate (from the prospectus) of \$4,167 per month
- Developed and launched a new offering of “solitary retreats” in our cabins with four guests exploring this option, bringing in \$5,900 of income
- Hosted a co-worker for three weeks during the time Soryu was away demonstrating that guests can benefit significantly from the community and the structure of our monastery alone
- The new “Rest and Heal” program allows us to accommodate a broader range of guests

### Challenges:

- Continue to find ways to reach more potential residents and guests
- Make fall and winter as attractive as summer

### Intentions:

- Keep the momentum going by bringing back previous guests and by finding new ones
- Encourage previous guests to write about their experiences and recommend friends
- Host our upcoming circling (interpersonal-meditation retreat)
- Create offerings that encourage people to come in the cold months





## GUEST NUMBERS

Below are tables showing the revenue from guests. We've added the new categories of "guest donations" and "guest payments" to reflect our new strategy of soliciting donations from guests. Keep in mind that our guest donations numbers are inevitably a bit lower on this table than in reality because some guests chose to donate anonymously.

### ACTUAL GUEST NUMBERS (FROM JULY, AUGUST, & SEPTEMBER)

# OF GUESTS	TOTAL NUMBER OF NIGHTS GUESTS SPEND HERE	REVENUE FROM GUEST PAYMENTS	REVENUE FROM GUEST DONATIONS	TOTAL REVENUE FROM GUESTS	REVENUE PER GUEST PER NIGHT
18	99	\$9,277	\$4,785	\$14,062	\$142

### PER MONTH AVERAGE GUEST NUMBERS (FROM JULY, AUGUST, & SEPTEMBER)

# OF GUESTS	TOTAL NUMBER OF NIGHTS GUESTS SPEND HERE	REVENUE FROM GUEST PAYMENTS	REVENUE FROM GUEST DONATIONS	TOTAL REVENUE FROM GUESTS	REVENUE PER GUEST PER NIGHT
6	33	\$3,092	\$1,595	\$4,687	\$142

### ANTICIPATED AVERAGE MONTHLY GUEST NUMBERS FOR YEAR 1 (BASED ON THE PROSPECTUS)

# OF GUESTS	TOTAL NUMBER OF NIGHTS GUESTS SPEND HERE	REVENUE FROM GUEST PAYMENTS	REVENUE FROM GUEST DONATIONS	TOTAL REVENUE FROM GUESTS	REVENUE PER GUEST PER NIGHT
.83	175	N/A	N/A	\$4,167	\$238



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## PROPERTY

We continued to improve our property with renovations of our buildings. The winters are hard and long up here and there is much we will learn in the coming months about how our facilities operate in the winter.

### Progress:

- Brush hogged over a mile of trails through the lower fields
- Began renovations on our buildings, creating more storage space, weatherizing, and improving the look and feel of the main room
- Created a room for one-on-one meditation instruction
- Built a campsite and sweat lodge in the forest

### Challenges:

- Prepare for the winter

### Intentions:

- Continue to maintain a high standard of cleanliness and good repair of all facilities
- Complete the first round of renovations
- Buy critical equipment including a tractor and an ATV
- Create a network of trails through the woods for cross-country skiing



## BUILDING PROJECTS

With these projects, we aim to increase the scope and effectiveness of our operations.

**Trail system:** We are in the midst of planning, scouting, and building a world class trail system that will allow access to the nearby peaks of Mount Hadley and Mount Norris, connecting us directly to one of the most extensive trail systems in the state, providing running, skiing, biking, snowshoeing and walking trails for endless exploration.

Estimated cost = **\$20,000**

**Meditation Spaces:** As mentioned in our first two quarterly reports, we are raising funds to complete a soaring meditation space that will vastly increase our capacity to host both residents and guests. After discussions with different contractors we've determined that the total cost is somewhat higher than originally anticipated. We will wait until next spring or summer to build these spaces. Each space is connected to the others in a single complex.

Projected Costs (including excavation, construction, tools, labour and materials)

Large Hall (capacity 40+) = \$132,072	Medium Zendo (capacity 25+) = \$106,653	Teaching Space = \$86,127
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Total estimated cost = **\$324,852**



## MOVING FORWARD

No one ever said that creating a contemplative culture for the modern world would be easy. And it's not. The team at the Monastic Academy is nevertheless determined to continue driving the organization forward. Thanks for your support along the way. Financially you've provided the food, electricity, and buildings that literally make our lives possible while psychologically you've provided the inspiration, solace, and connections that make our lives meaningful. We look forward to many more years on the path together.

## JOIN US

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

**Our new 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@monastic.academy](mailto:info@monastic.academy) or call at 802-540-0820.

Thanks again for your support. Together we are building a whole new culture.

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