

**A Handbook for the Creation
of the
Buddhist Alliance
for Social Engagement
(BASE)**



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Buddhist Peace Fellowship

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INTRODUCTION

BASE is a Buddhist Peace Fellowship program that started in 1995 in the San Francisco Bay Area. BASE provides a community-based structure that integrates social action and social service with Buddhist practice. Participants spend six months or longer in a Buddhist-based support community while engaging in part or full time service or social action, either in volunteer work or in paid employment. The training component includes study, dialogue, and reflection around issues of socially engaged Buddhism, as well as Buddhist practice and retreat.

This handbook was designed to help BASE spread to other geographical locations in the United States and worldwide. It is intended for those who are interested in starting BASE programs in their area and provides information on how to do so. If you are interested in starting your own BASE group or want to learn more about BPF, please contact us at:

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I. WHAT IS BASE?

History

Since 1978 the Buddhist Peace Fellowship has been a leading voice in the movement for a socially engaged Buddhism through its educational programs, networking, chapters and affiliates worldwide, and aid for human rights in Buddhist countries.

In 1993, many individuals affiliated with BPF were calling out for additional concrete expressions to bring together social change with Buddhist philosophy and practice. Many Buddhists found a need for compassionate action arising as a natural result of their practice, but often did not find support for it within their practice centers. Few activist organizations were open to the spiritual dimensions of their work. Socially engaged Buddhists wanted to integrate spiritual practice and action, deepening their meditation practices while responding actively to the extraordinary levels of suffering on the planet.

Informed by the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and the multitude of faith based (predominately Christian) service communities and programs, the Catholic Workers movement, Christian base communities, and political consciousness raising and affinity groups, BPF asked why no such program existed for Buddhists and acted to address this absence.

BPF researched these movements and examined the need within the wider urban community for service and social action. BPF then spoke with many engaged Buddhists for wisdom and support, and created a proposal for a Buddhist-style volunteer corps in which theory and practice would come together in active communities. In 1995, the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE) was formed with the first pilot program in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Since 1995 there have been twelve BASE programs in the Bay Area, and in Santa Cruz, California; Arcata, California; Boston, Massachusetts, and others. Several groups with BASE principles have emerged as well such as a monthly meeting for Buddhist caregivers and a hospice support group.

Some BASE groups have centered around a theme such as prisons, homelessness, education and youth.

Various BASE Models

Internship Model

An internship program, based in the Bay Area, provides limited stipends for people to participate in BASE. Since 1995, there have been three six-month programs. Some interns receive a placement involving 30 hours a week of work in a social service or social change agency (see placement list, p. 23),

and are provided with housing and a stipend for food by BASE. Other members receive a 15 hour per week placement and work a part time job; they do not receive financial support. Some participants, already employed in social service or social action, pay on a sliding scale. Through a rigorous application process, BASE selects as diverse a group of people as possible. The group meets twice weekly and has monthly retreats as well as weekend or longer retreats at the beginning, middle, and end. The group works closely with a mentor, a local Buddhist activist, through ongoing interviews and teachings. The groups have been both facilitated by the mentors and by the BASE administrator, and are moving increasingly towards self-facilitation.

Local Models

Arcata, California

In 1995, members of the Arcata Zen Group formed a BASE program under the guidance of a Bay Area mentor. They were a pre-existing sangha of several years, many of whom were already working in social change jobs. They met weekly for six months to provide support for their work and to dialogue around Buddhism and social action.

Bay Area, California

BPF and insight meditation center, Spirit Rock, joined forces to create a BASE program primarily for those who were already working in social service or social action jobs. There was a formal application process to participate and a small fee was charged. Two groups met weekly and were facilitated by two mentors who increasingly delegated leadership responsibility. The groups came together for daylong retreats once a month and for beginning and ending weekend retreats. These groups chose to continue meeting once the six month commitment ended and have formed one ongoing group with rotating leadership and facilitation.

Santa Cruz, California and Boston, Massachusetts

Two groups formed a local six-month model for those already working in the field of social service or social action. These groups were completely self-facilitated and followed the structural components of other local models.

Philosophy/Key Components/ Principles

Each BASE group is a working model of the principle that social service and social change work is facilitated by an on-going community of like-minded people. BASE's intention is to bridge the gap between formal practice and community social action.

BASE is grounded in the five principles of 1) service/social action, 2) wisdom/training, 3) (dharma) practice, 4) community, and 5) commitment. New BASE groups are asked to reflect these principles:

- 1) *Service/Social Action (seva)*: The day-to-day experience of engaging with suffering is the heart of BASE. BASE participants work either in service or in social action jobs. Some participants have volunteer positions, others have regular employment. Participants work in diverse jobs such as hospices, community organizing, homeless chaplaincy outreach work, and social change organizations.
- 2) *Wisdom/Training (panna)*: BASE provides an opportunity to explore political, social, and environmental problems through group training in "Buddhist activism." As a group, participants explore the multitude of questions arising from service or social action work and their relation to Buddhist teaching and practice.
- 3) *Dharma Practice (samadhi)* In BASE there is a commitment to deepening Buddhist practice while deepening one's social change work. These two are not separable. The insight which arises through practice can lead to deeper understanding as one works to address the suffering of the planet.
- 4) *Community (sangha)* Ongoing work for change cannot happen without support. BASE is rooted in a community of shared purpose. Our hope is to create a growing national and international network of Buddhist-based activists working for change who are connected with each other and with local support communities.
- 5) *Commitment (adhitthana)* To be a part of BASE, one must take on BASE as a primary commitment for the allotted period of time, typically six months, much in the same way one commits to a spiritual practice. A commitment of time and intention provides spaciousness for the ups and downs of learning.

II. HOW CAN WE BUILD A BASE PROGRAM?

BASE programs can arise from within your geographical area in a form that is specific to your community's needs and the needs of the populations you will be serving.

THE EASIEST WAY to start a BASE group is to find a group of people (5-10 people) who want to participate. You can find members through your sangha, friends, co-workers, or by advertising locally and at other Buddhist groups. Each member must have a Buddhist practice. They must work or volunteer in the field of service or social change, which could be one kind of work (all hospice, for example) or all different (all kinds of service or social change jobs in one group). Finally, they must make a commitment to the group for a selected period of time, usually 6 months. Once the group is chosen, members will meet weekly for at least 2 hours to do any the following:

- Support each other in their social change work, through sharing stories, check-ins, active listening, group process work
- Practice together—meditation and other (primarily) Buddhist practices
- Study relevant readings (bibliography enclosed)
- Train in helpful techniques—such as nonviolence or conflict resolution
- Act together—attend rallies or vigils.

(Most groups focus on a few of these areas)

Through the process of meeting weekly, and with the addition of monthly daylong retreats, a small community is formed that supports each other in their activism and service work, trains in skills, deepens their practice lives, and explores the intersection of Buddhism and social change. Each group will be different!

Frequently Asked Questions About Creating a New BASE

How do we get started?

Find out where and if there is a need. Do you know people who want to be a part of BASE? How much time and energy are you and others willing to put in to make it a reality? Although there is a large initial time and energy commitment needed, the organizing commitment lessens over time. However, even if one person may have the initial idea and enthusiasm, it is important to form a planning group to get BASE off the ground.

How do we find participants? How do we form a group?

BASE members should be committed to Buddhist practice and to social action. They should be willing to make a regular time commitment for a suggested period of time. Members may already have a

job in the field of social service or social action, or they would make an agreement to find volunteer hours for the course of their commitment to BASE. Perhaps you know of a project that could use many volunteers and several people could work together.

A BASE group can come together in any of the following ways:

- a group of friends or acquaintances.
- members of a sangha of a practice center who are involved in or wish to be involved in social action work.
- through advertising. Some BASE groups have formed by sending out notices to a variety of different practice centers and mailing lists such as the BPF mailing list available for your area. Usually some form of selection process is needed. The BPF's BASE Coordinator can share past applications and processes we have used to select candidates for various programs.

If we have to select participants, what would be some qualifications of group membership?

Members should be willing to engage in a fairly intensive group process—to share their lives and thinking with others, to give and receive feedback, to be willing to shape and abide by the process agreed upon by the group. They should be familiar with the outlines of Buddhist teachings, be willing to observe the ethical precepts and have an established meditative practice. They should demonstrate a strong commitment to working for social change, and during the program should have ongoing social action or service work.

For how long should the program run?

We have found it useful to make it time-delimited in order to provide people with an initial structure. Generally we have chosen six months. At the end of that time we have evaluations and some groups have chosen to continue. The Bay Area internship model lasts only for six months.

What kind of weekly time commitment do members need to make?

Most BASE groups meet at least once a week and have monthly retreat days. They also typically begin with and end with longer weekend retreats. Commitment is also necessary for the social service or social action job. We have requested a minimum of five hours per week if it is a volunteer job, and those with paid employment obviously work part to full-time. In our internship model, volunteers work 15-30 hours per week depending on how they are participating in the program.

How do we house volunteers?

If you start a group in your area, presumably members will not need housing as they already live there. The Bay Area internship model is so far the only BASE program that has housed and stipended volunteers. We have primarily received housing donations from local Buddhists, but this has not been so easy to secure nor is it guaranteed. We welcome the possibility of BASE participants living and working

together in other forms such as a Catholic Worker model. You might want to start a collective house or farm for BASE.

How do members find placements/volunteer positions?

Finding placements for the Bay Area program was easily accomplished through a network of friends—Buddhists and activists in the area. We put out the word that we could offer a Buddhist volunteer to organizations, and this offer was welcomed. Currently we have files in our office that volunteers can peruse. We usually have interviews with each volunteer to discern their skills and interests and then we suggest placements in organizations that match their skills. Then we invite each person to check out the organization, visit, see if they feel comfortable working there, and if there is a person on site who will directly supervise them.

If you are coordinating a program in your area and are looking to place volunteers, we encourage you to begin by simply talking up the possibility within your community. Where is help needed? What are the interests of the people who will do BASE? Use contacts of people you know who are involved with different agencies and see where help is needed.

Some programs have asked participants to find their own volunteer work. In most towns there is usually a “volunteer center” where people can search out a job that fits their skills and interests. Even cold calls can frequently bring in volunteer opportunities.

We found it important to create a “job contract” with a clear designation of duties, hours, liaisons, and evaluation procedure.

If participants are using their own job to serve as the social service or social action component, how do we decide if they fit the criteria?

The main criterion is whether or not the participant is working in a field that engages with suffering, either directly through service or through social action (organizing, education, activism, etc.). In general, it is up to the local coordinators to determine if a job proposal fits these categories. In a written application, prospective participants can explain *why* their work fits BASE. This way they can think clearly about their intentions and show how these intentions are related to engaging with suffering. One guideline for “borderline” people is whether the issues that come up in their job will be similar to what the majority of the group will be wanting to discuss. As this question is tricky, we have included a job list of previous BASE volunteers so you can see the range of possibilities.

Do participants need to have a mentor on their volunteer site?

Initially we tried to connect people with Buddhist or faith-based mentors at the job site. Participants checked in professionally and emotionally with their mentor. If this is possible, it is a wonderful opportunity for the participant. However, it may not be possible. In any case, it is important that there is someone directly supervising the volunteer.

How easy is it to create a good placement?

Experience showed us that successful placements take work on the part of the volunteer (and/or with the help of the BASE organizer) to create. It takes some ingenuity and often involves working and reworking one's placement. Organizations with pre-existing volunteer programs work well. There needs to be persistence in finding a person who will act as a direct supervisor and in reaching clarity about exactly what the volunteer's tasks involve. This is why we recommend a job contract.

What do we do in group meetings?

The third section of this manual details the group meetings, with a curriculum, readings, resource guide, and description of general guidelines for how meetings have worked (see p.12 ff).

Where can we meet?

Meetings can be held in someone's home, or in rotation among several homes. Some practice centers have donated space for BASE meetings. Contact local centers to see if they might offer space. Many centers are very supportive of BASE and want to help.

How do we practice together if everyone has a different practice background?

BASE groups usually begin meetings with meditation. If there are many people from different practice traditions, settling on a specific practice may initially seem difficult. We have found that silent time works with each person doing his/her own practice.

On retreats, groups have experimented with blending different forms of practice styles. Also, one style may end up predominating. Some groups have had participants rotate leading practice from their varied traditions at the beginning of meetings. This is an exciting edge of the BASE program and requires creativity and inspiration.

How much Buddhist experience should participants have?

This really will be up to the group. Some past groups have asked for a minimum of two years of experience or permission of the facilitator. If you are new to Buddhism, a group with newer practitioners may be an exciting way to get to know the practice more deeply together. If you have been practicing in one tradition for many years, you may prefer more experienced practitioners in the group. Usually the groups are a mix of seasoned and new practitioners, which makes for diversity and growth.

Does there need to be a group facilitator/mentor?

Most BASE groups have worked well with a regular facilitator. Other groups have been self-facilitated, relying on each member to lead the group at a given meeting. We have been delighted by the bottom-up, non-hierarchical nature of the self-facilitated groups.

Having a mentor, an experienced, local Buddhist activist, can enhance the BASE experience but is by no means necessary for the group. He/she could offer interviews, teaching, and or facilitation through attending all or some of the meetings and retreats.

What if something problematic comes up that we can't solve on our own?

The BASE coordinating office is happy to help with problems that may arise. There are many people in our community who are skilled in mediation, counseling, organizational management, etc.

How do we set up a retreat? Is it necessary?

We have found retreats to be a fundamental piece of the BASE experience. They can take place at someone's home or at a practice center. Contact local centers to see if they are willing to offer retreat space on days the center is not in use. Retreats will be described more fully in the third section of this manual.

What is "group action"?

Experience has shown us that group cohesiveness deepens when members come together for a group action. In the past, groups have served at soup kitchens together, done neighborhood cleanups, and gone to rallies and protests. Preparation for an action, the action itself, and debriefing from it make a powerful opportunity to solidify the group, bring up vital issues, and make a difference in your community.

To charge or not to charge?

Some groups have charged a monthly fee for working participants either to cover some administrative costs or to offer a donation to facilitators. There are no set rules about this and we are still in the process of determining the best way to go about it. The BASE coordinating office can offer some start-up money; however, we expect groups to be self-sustaining. We also realize that very little money is actually needed to start a BASE group and we would like to maintain the low-cost, grassroots nature.

What's the easiest kind of BASE program to get started?

A self-facilitated group among friends or a pre-existing sangha or community of those currently involved in both social service or social action and Buddhist practice.

Are there other BASE models?

One BASE group meets monthly for a half day of practice, a group action, and a picnic/discussion. They are slowly building a group and deciding how to continue.

What if we come up with another BASE form you haven't described yet?

Great! We are excited to see models arising that follow the principles, philosophy, and intention of BASE.

What if we have more questions?

Please feel free to contact the BASE coordinator with any questions you may have at 415-643-8289 or base@bpf.org.

OK, We Want to Start a BASE Program, Now What?

If you are interested in starting a program, please begin conversations with the BASE Coordinator right away. When your ideas become more concrete, we have proposal forms available where you can outline your ideas. Once we receive that form, your proposal will be reviewed by the BPF's BASE committee.

What would be your commitment to BASE and BASE's commitment to you?

In the long run, the strength of BASE will come from its ability to be self-perpetuating outside the Bay Area. In practice this means that the BPF office will assist with BASE groups in communities outside the Bay Area where there is at least a small planning group who is prepared to put some time into starting a program.

We can offer our administrative support as well as past experience so that groups can avoid pitfalls that we have already learned from. We would like to include all BASE groups within an umbrella network of related, but autonomous groups. Through this growing informal network there is a feeling of being connected to a vaster web, the sense that we are not doing this alone. This network is the foundation for a spiritual practice of interconnection and is the underlying strength of BASE. Concretely, we keep BASE groups informed about other groups through *Turning Wheel*, correspondence, phone calls. We plan to have BASE leadership and facilitation trainings in the future.

If we were to begin a BASE program in our community, what would BPF and BASE provide?

- Ongoing support and contact in the form of phone, letter, e-mail correspondence, and personal contact during the initial start-up phase of your program.
- Curriculum material, bibliographic resources, and eventually a detailed BASE curriculum.
- Potentially, teachers could come to your BASE program to lead workshops.
- Financial support in the form of seed money.
- This manual.

What would BPF ask from us in return?

Our main request is ongoing communication. We would like some written description or documentation about how your program is going, who's involved, what issues you are working with, and so on. Perhaps this could be in the form of a log or journal. We encourage members of your group to keep journals and to take notes in meetings. You can write about significant issues your group has dealt with, or interesting approaches you have taken. We would also like copies of any publicity that comes out about your program. At the end of the program we request a final evaluation. Some BASE programs have collected donations from their members to give to BPF.

In addition we will be delighted to hear of new discoveries in your curriculum and elsewhere so that we can continue to learn, grow, and improve BASE programs everywhere.

III: MEETINGS AND RETREATS: PROCESS AND CURRICULUM

BASE groups have met either one or two evenings a week and about 1-3 full retreat days a month, initially over a six-month period, although some groups have continued beyond the six months. The nature of the process and content of these meetings and retreats has varied significantly, depending on the backgrounds, interests, and abilities of the group members. We would like to share with you both some of the constants and some of the variety of the different group experiences.

Regular evening meetings have typically begun following an initial weekend retreat. Some groups have also had information meetings, open houses, and “group interviews” prior to the beginning of the program, in order to give prospective participants a sense of the nature of the program and a hint of the actual dynamics of the group members.

The BASE program has a number of core intentions and the evening meetings and retreats have evolved in ways that further the following intentions (which have been differently emphasized in the different groups):

—giving support to members in their work in social service and/or social action: helping them to frame and give energy for seeing time at work as spiritual “practice”; helping to explore questions, dilemmas, and problems from work.

—studying socially engaged Buddhism, bringing in material from the core Buddhist teachings, contemporary social analysis and strategy, and other approaches to socially engaged spirituality.

—developing the small group as a support and inquiry community, exploring the group and group dynamics as a microcosm of social interaction, seeing the group time itself as a kind of “practice.”

—acting together as a group outside of the normal group sessions, through service and/or action, e.g., helping at homeless shelters, participating in demonstrations, and writing.

Conducting Regular Evening Meetings

Group sessions have usually lasted 2 to 2 1/2 hours, usually starting at 7 p.m. They have almost always begun with periods of sitting meditation (typically 20-30 minutes), followed by “check-ins” (usually a few minutes per person in duration). In the check-ins, members have been encouraged to communicate “what is happening” for them, especially in the light of the group intentions, sometimes in the context of a given theme of inquiry for a session. As the groups have grown in intimacy, the initial sharing has often deepened emotionally and spiritually. Some groups have used methods for timing these check-ins.

In the evolution of the several BASE groups in the last two years, a number of different general models have evolved as to what happens after check-ins. Some groups have had no explicit structure or agenda during most of the six months, letting the check-in tell the members what issues, themes, or needs have the most “energy,” and following that energy. Other groups have agreed to focus on particular

themes on a given evening, and have sometimes done readings and exercises (or practices) during the interval between meetings (see p. 24-25). Some groups have combined periodic emphasis on given themes with other unstructured meetings. One group that met twice a week alternated, as the group developed, between the two modes each week, focusing more on material generated by work and life in the first meeting, focusing more on particular chosen themes in the second meeting. Sometimes one theme was examined from many different perspectives for several weeks. Themes investigated have included:

- engaged Buddhist interpretations of the Buddhist ethical precepts
(can be a good beginning foundation subject for a group for several weeks)
- “right speech” and communication (an accessible topic related to precepts)
- giving and generosity
- mindfulness at work and in daily life
- working with anger and other difficult emotions
- “hindrances” of the socially engaged Buddhist path
- what is Buddhist social action?
- attachment to results
- despair and empowerment work
- nonviolence
- race, class, and gender and other oppressions
- understanding and responding to the polarization of rich and poor
- transformation of institutions and social structures and the relation with Buddhist practice
- understanding socially engaged spirituality in social and historical perspective
- discussions of particular writings (e.g., Dalai Lama, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Joanna Macy, Santikaro Bhikkhu, Sulak Sivaraksa, Thich Nhat Hanh, Robert Aitken Roshi, etc.)
- group dynamics

Most groups have tried to ground explorations of these themes *experientially*, in terms of referring to experiences at work and in the group, and to one’s own individual patterns of developing the *paramis* (or *paramitas*, virtues or perfections such as generosity, effort, mindfulness, patience, etc.). Some groups have explored their own family and social conditioning, and patterns of reactivity to difficult topics or group dynamics. At times, groups have decided to focus more on the study component on a given evening; one group scheduled a study evening one out of four meetings.

All of the groups have very much enjoyed more informal time together and have found pot-luck meals and parties very conducive to bonding and exploration. One group agreed to hold a pot-luck one evening a month before evening sessions.

Groups have sometimes invited members outside the group to lead sessions. Local spiritual teachers, those with much practical experience in engaged Buddhism, and scholars of engaged Buddhism have joined the group, typically for one or two evening sessions.

Group Dynamics

Attention to group dynamics has been crucial to all of the BASE groups, although such attention has been more central to some groups than to others. Making such dynamics visible early in the group helps to facilitate deeper bonding and sharing. It also encourages members to see group time as a special kind of “practice” particularly concerned with interpersonal interaction, communication, working with sometimes emotionally charged differences, and cooperative action. Given that our work and much of our social activism occur in the context of groups that are often consumed by conflicts and dysfunctional behavior, having a group that is more “conscious” about the life of the members can provide a valuable model about what is possible in groups.

Attention to group dynamics also seems to be a new edge of growth in terms of engaged Buddhism. What does mindfulness mean in the group context, or in terms of listening and communication? How do we work interpersonally in a dharmic context with the inevitable differences and occasional clashes of styles, desires, and backgrounds? How do we see our own experiences in groups in terms of our individual and collective greed, hatred, and delusion, as well as openness, generosity, care, and wisdom? How can we take our experiences in a BASE group as a hopefully very friendly “laboratory” for transformation? How can we unpack the social and institutional dimensions of our group life, seeing how the personal, interpersonal, and social dimensions are interwoven?

A first step in looking at group dynamics might take place near the beginning of the program. Several BASE programs have brought in initial reflection on groups as part of the first weekend together. One program, for example, left the Sunday morning session, after there had been considerable bonding earlier in the weekend, as a time for such reflection. After considering in some depth what has been learned from both negative and positive experiences in previous groups, in dyads as well as the whole group, group members reflected on the qualities and principles of a group that help provide basic “safety” as well as energize and guide one in disclosure, opening, growth, transformation, and “stretching” to meet challenges. That group came up with this set of guidelines, which were used after the initial retreat as guiding norms. These guidelines were tentatively accepted, open to revision and exploration to meet the needs of the group.

Sample Group Guidelines

Helping to create a space of trust and safety

- Maintain confidentiality.
- Make a clear commitment to be in the group and attend meetings.
- Use “I” statements and speak from the heart as much as possible.
- Intend to appreciate and respect the others in the group.

Being explicit about aspects of group process

- Identify group values.
- Clarify the role of the facilitator.
- Be aware of group dynamics, including conflict.
- Agree to air and attempt to resolve difficult feelings with another person, in the spirit of love and wisdom.

Developing communication and interaction skills

- Cultivate active listening.
- Make a commitment to learn from others.
- Give some space after a person has spoken, not jumping in immediately.
- Be willing to experience different group roles and sometimes roles that are new to you.
- Generally give advice only when another has asked for it.
- Share informal, unscheduled time together.

Being in groups as spiritual practice

- Intend to integrate our work in the group with our spiritual practice.
- Keep in mind our most basic intentions.
- Commit to practicing mindfulness in the context of the group.
- Be aware of and look deeply into one's own feelings and thoughts.
- Look deeply into our true nature.
- Be aware of the effects of one's words and actions on others.
- Be willing to detach from fear.
- Cultivate qualities of tolerance, gentleness, acceptance, generosity, and forgiveness in relation to others in the group.
- Cultivate patience in relation to others and the group as a whole.
- Cultivate qualities of being humorous and playful.
- Develop rituals and ceremonies (not necessarily always the same) for beginnings and endings of gatherings.

Other ways to develop trust and safety within the group involve sharing personal stories and expectations, basic intentions, and practice accounts of the group members. Some groups give “Way-Seeking Mind” talks in the initial period, in which each member describes how his/her life has led him/her to Buddhism and to this group. The group can also discuss what each member hopes to get out of the BASE experience. The group would benefit from a discussion of the following issues early on:

- Diversity among members—race, class, gender, sexual orientation.
- Leadership issues—will there be an identified facilitator, will that role be shared? How does the whole group take responsibility for its process?

—What does each member need in order to feel safe? What are individual feelings around confrontation, anger and vulnerability? What is each member's group history and how might this affect her behavior in the group? How will feedback operate in the group?

—How will the group balance the more reticent and the more talkative members? How will group time be distributed? Are there differences between some who prefer discursive conversation to more feeling-oriented conversation? How can the group work with this?

Group life, of course, has its own trajectory, and the growing trust, familiarity, and experience together generates its own history. More difficult material involving exploration of conflicts typically would surface after a few months in most groups, even if evident near the beginning of the group.

Retreats

Retreats have been especially precious in the development of the BASE groups, providing opportunities for considerable depth, learning, and bonding of group members. Retreats have varied in length between one and three days. Groups following the “intern” model have typically had longer retreats, while groups made up of persons mostly employed in full-time jobs have typically had weekend retreats every six months with one-day retreats during the other months.

Longer retreats have often involved a day or two of traditional formal meditation practice (usually sitting and walking), with some blending of the styles of different traditions (sometimes an interesting practice in itself!) interspersed with discussion and reflection. A one-day retreat might have most of the morning in silent practice and an afternoon inquiry into various concerns and issues related to our work and engaged Buddhism through discussion, exercises, and reflections. This has often been very rich, permitting an openness not commonly found at other times in our experiences. On one BASE retreat, for example, the group did contemplative practice for a full day and then, in the second evening moved to a spontaneous discussion of issues of “class oppression” catalyzed by the fact that the retreat was taking place in a wealthy and exclusive enclave. One-day retreats have often taken a theme for the day, sometimes continuing in more depth the themes mentioned in the list above.

In some groups, facilitation and planning of the retreats has been initially carried out by mentors and then increasingly given over to the group. In one program, there has been, later in the program, rotation of responsibility for guiding retreats, with retreat themes generated by the group a month or so in advance. Those planning the retreat have then brought their initial plans to the group for feedback some time before the retreat.

The initial retreat is particularly important in helping group bonding to occur, helping members to know more clearly whether they really want to be in the group (occasionally people decide against being in the group after the first weekend), in developing an initial “container” for the intentions of the group, and in modeling some of the values of a BASE group.

Schedules of some sample weekend and one-day retreats:

An introductory weekend retreat:

Friday

5 p.m. Arrive, unpack, signup for cleanup jobs.

6.:30 Dinner

7:30 Sitting

8:00 Introductory Go-Round

Saturday

6:30 Wake-up

7:00 Sitting, walking

8:00 Breakfast (silence)

9:00 Sitting, walking, movement

11:00 Talk on engaged Buddhism, discussion

12.30 Lunch (break silence)

1:30 Communication of basic intentions and structures of the
BASE program.

3:30 Free time, group hike for those interested

5:30 Sitting

6:00 Dinner

7:30 Sharing of individual stories and intentions

Sunday

6:30 Wake-up

7:00 Sitting, walking

8:00 Breakfast (silence)

9:00 Exploration of group process experience of members,
development of tentative group norms (facilitated).

12:00 Lunch

1:30 Practical information about the BASE program, questions and
answers, logistics, etc.

3:30 Clean up and leave

A one-day retreat, focusing on “Working with Anger”:

- 9:30 Sitting, introduction, brief check-in, some guiding questions and perspectives, further sitting.
- 10:10 Walking
- 10:35 Sitting
- 11:10 Walking
- 11:30 Talk and discussion: “Working with Anger.”
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:45 Sitting
- 2:00 Guided exercises and inquiry related to anger, sitting/walking.
Connect with work situation.
1. Large-group role-play.
 2. Individual inquiries.
 3. Reflections.
- 4:00 Walking
- 4:30 Sitting
- 4:45 Loving kindness meditation
- 5:00 Close

One Day Check-in Retreat

(half hour segments in which group members spend 10-15 minutes discussing current work/life/practice issues and receive feedback and questions from the group)

- 7:00 Sitting
- 7:40 Walking
- 8:00 Breakfast
- 9:00 Sitting
- 9:30 3 individual check-ins
- 11:00 Walking
- 11:20 2 individual check-ins
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Sitting
- 2:10 Walking
- 2:30 3 individual check-ins
- 4:00 Sitting
- 4:40 Closing ritual

IV. A BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISTS

*indicates excellent first texts to be read.

A. Socially Engaged Buddhism

1. Engaged Buddhism: General and Introductory

*Eppsteiner, F. (Ed.) (1988, 2nd ed.). *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Jones, K. (1989). *The Social Face of Buddhism: An Approach to Political and Social Activism*. London: Wisdom Publications.

*Kotler, A. (Ed.) (1996). *Engaged Buddhist Reader*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Kraft, K. (Ed.) (1992). *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism and Nonviolence*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

*Nhat Hanh, T. (1987). *Being Peace*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

*Nhat Hanh, T. (1991). *Peace is Every Step*. New York: Bantam Books.

Nhat Hanh, T. (1992). *Touching Peace*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Rothberg, D. (1992). "Buddhist Responses to Violence and War: Resources for a Socially Engaged Spirituality". *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 32 (Fall): 41-75.

2. Twentieth Century Engaged Buddhism in Asia

*Aung San Suu Kyi (1995). *Freedom from Fear & Other Writings* (rev. ed.). London: Penguin Books.

*Dalai Lama (1990). *A Policy of Kindness: An Anthology of Writings by and about the Dalai Lama*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.

*Khong, C. (1993). *Learning True Love: How I Learned and Practiced Social Change in Vietnam*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

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Nhat Hanh, T. (1967). *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. New York: Hill and Wang.

*Nhat Hanh, T. (1993). *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

*Queen, C. & King, S. (Eds.) (1996). *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Rahula, W. (1974). *The Heritage of the Bhikkhu: A Short History of the Bhikkhu in Educational, Cultural, and Political Life*. New York: Grove Press.

*Sivaraksa, S. (1992). *Seeds of Peace*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Sivaraksa, S., et al (Ed.) (1990). *Radical Conservatism: Buddhism in the Contemporary World: Articles in Honour of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's 84th Birthday Anniversary*. Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development/International Network of Engaged Buddhists.

Sivaraksa, S. (Ed.) (1993). *Buddhist Perception for Desirable Societies in the Future*. Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development/Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation.

Sivaraksa, S. (Ed.) (1994). *The Quest for a Just Society: The Legacy and Challenge of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu*. Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development/Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute.

3. Some Contemporary Western Approaches to Engaged Buddhism

*Aitken, R. (1984). *The Mind of Clover: Essays in Zen Buddhist Ethics*. San Francisco: North Point Press.

*Aitken, R. (1992). *The Dragon who Never Sleeps: Verses for Zen Buddhist Practice*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Badiner, A. (1990). *Dharma Gaia*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.

Chavis, M. (1997). *Altars in the street: A Neighborhood Fights to Survive*. New York: Bell Tower.

Dresser, M. (Ed.) (1996). *Buddhist Women on the Edge: Contemporary Perspectives from the Western Frontier*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.

- *Glassman, B., and Fields, R. (1996). *Instructions to the Cook: A Zen Master's Lessons in Living a Life that Matters*. New York: Bell Tower.
- Gorin, J. (1993). *Choose Love: A Jewish Buddhist Human Rights Activist in Central America*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Gross, R. (1993). *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Kaza, S. (1993). *The Attentive Heart: Conversations with Trees*. New York: Fawcett Columbine.
- *Macy, J. (1983). *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.
- Macy, J. (1991). *World as Lover, World as Self*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- McConnell, J. (1995). *Mindful Meditation: A Handbook for Buddhist Peacemakers*. Bangkok: Buddhist Research Institute, Mahachula Buddhist University/Spirit in Education Movement/Wongsanit Ashram/Foundation for Children (\$20 from BPF office).
- Nhat Hanh, T., et al (1993). *For a Future to be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Snyder, G. (1990). *The Practice of the Wild*. San Francisco: North Point Press.
- Titmuss, C. (1995). *The Green Buddha*. Ed. G. Farrer-Halls. Totnes, Devon, England: Insight Books.

4. Journals on Engaged Buddhism

- Seeds of Peace* (Available from International Network of Engaged Buddhists [INEB], P.O. Box 19, Mahadthai Post Office, Bangkok 10206 Thailand, tel/fax: [66-2] 433-7169, ineb@ipied.tu.ac.th, suggested minimum donation for three issues per year: \$15)
- Turning Wheel: Journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship* (Available from Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Box 4650, Berkeley, CA 94704, tel.: 510-655-6169, bpf@igc.apc.org, www.bpf.com/bpf)

B. Other Resources for Socially Engaged Spirituality

- Berryman, P. (1987). *Liberation Theology*. Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone Books.
- Branch, T. (1988). *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- *Cooney, R. and Michalowski, H. (1987). *The Power of the People: Active Nonviolence in the United States*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.
- Coover, V., Deacon, E., Esser, C., and Moore, C. (1978). *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.
- [Good introductory material on group process.]
- Green, T., Woodrow, P., and Peavey, F. (1994). *Insight and Action*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- *Ingram, C. (1990). *In the Footsteps of Gandhi: Conversations with Spiritual Social Activists*. Berkeley: Parallax Press.
- Lerner, M. (1996). *The Politics of Meaning: Restoring Hope and Possibility in an Age of Cynicism*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- *Merton, T., (Ed.) (1965). *Gandhi on Non-Vioence: A Selection from the Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*. New York: New Directions.
- *Puleo, M. (1994). *The Struggle is One: Voices and Visions of Liberation*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- [Good introduction to liberation theology and base communities in Brazil]
- *Ram Dass, and Gorman, P. (1985) *How Can I Help? Stories and Reflections on Service*. New York:: Alfred A. Knopf.
- *Ram Dass, and Bush, M. (1992). *Compassion in Action: Setting out on the Path of Service*. New York:: Bell Tower.
- Reuther, R. (1992). *Gaia& God: An Eco-Feminist Theology of Earth Healing*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Starhawk (1987) *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority, and Mystery*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

*Titmuss, C. (1993). *Spirit of Change: Voices of Hope for a Better World*. Alameda, Ca: Hunter House.

Wallis, J. (1994). *The Soul of Politics: A Practical and Prophetic Vision for Change*. New York and Maryknoll, NY: The New Press and Orbis Books.

Washington, J. (Ed.) (1986). *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* San Francisco: Harper & Row.

V. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

PAST VOLUNTEER PLACEMENTS AND JOBS

- Caregiver at Zen Hospice Project, Maitri and other local hospices
- Cook for homeless shelters in Sonoma County
- Instructor in Drama and Conflict Resolution at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in Berkeley
- Doctor at clinic for low-income patients
- Resident dramaturg/director at A Traveling Jewish Theater in San Francisco for a play concerned with social issues.
- Facilitator of a support group for sixth grade girls at a Berkeley middle school.
- Support counselor to marginalized Latina women at Arriba Juntos, a center in the Mission district in San Francisco.
- Support counselor in a group home for severely emotionally disturbed pregnant and mothering teenage girls
- Support counselor at a home for teens at risk
- Educator with urban public schools attempting to reform themselves around issues of equity, diversity, and powerful learning
- Founder of an urban community garden project, environmental educator for children at risk
- Organizer for Livermore Laboratory Conversion Project
- Volunteer Coordinator at Women's Cancer Resource Center
- Program Director of the Seaturtle Restoration Project of Earth Island Institute.
- Social Work Assistant at Compass and Tom Waddell Clinics for the Homeless
- Night Chaplain for homeless people
- Special Education Teacher in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District
- After-school drop-in program leader at the Concord Teen Center.
- Support group Leader for a prison hospice
- Meditation teacher in San Francisco Jail

"PRACTICE" (WALKING LIKE A BODHISATTVA) IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Continue to work with Thich Nhat Hanh's precepts; some kind of daily reading or even recitation of these precepts can be very helpful.

Bring attention to how you are being and acting within some specific social setting, such as that of work, family, community (social and/or ecological), or the larger social, ecological, and political contexts. For the next week, inquire into what it would mean, to be in such a setting with the spirit of Dharma practice, with the spirit of a Bodhisattva. Make a vow to be a Bodhisattva in this particular context during this time. Taking notes on your experiences periodically can be very helpful here. These questions may also be useful:

1. What does 't mean for you to be a Bodhisattva in this particular setting?
2. What fears and habits prevent or hinder you from being a Bodhisattva? (Is it hard for you to see yourself as a Bodhisattva?)
3. What practices, remembrances, reflections, etc. are most important for you? How have you been creative, developed practices, understandings, "skillful means," etc.?
4. What does it mean to be "mindful" or "heartful" in this context?
5. What are your different intentions in this context, and how do they relate to the intention to be free and help others be free?
6. How do you work in a social context where the dominant framework is not based on spiritual principles? How might there be a shift of these contexts or institutions toward spiritual principles?
(Shantideva, the author of the eighth-century text, Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, writes: "One whose mind is attuned in this way/Would enter even the deepest hell/Just as a wild goose plunges into a lotus pool.")
7. What are the problems of being a Bodhisattva, particularly in difficult circumstances? How do you work with impatience, negative judgments, despair, arrogance, loneliness, and so on?

Some further reading:

Shantideva, Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life

Thich Nhat Hanh, Being Peace and other works

Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, Seeking the Heart of Wisdom: The Path of Insight Meditation, pp. 159-170 (on the path of service)

Ram Dass and Paul Gorman, How Can I Help?

Fred Eppsteiner (ed.), The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism

Catherine Ingram, In the Footsteps of Gandhi: Conversations with Spiritual Social Activists

Joanna Macy, World as Love, World as Self

Christopher Titmuss, Spirit for Change: Voices of Hope for A World in Crisis and Freedom of the Spirit (collections of conversations with those linking spirituality and social concern)

Turning Wheel: Journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship

"RIGHT SPEECH" IN THE CONTEXT OF BUDDHIST ETHICS AND PRECEPTS

Read Thich Nhat Hanh's formulation of the precepts (or "ethical guidelines") of the "Order of Interbeing" (Tiep Hien Order). These precepts are a contemporary interpretation of the traditional Buddhist precepts, including application to our social and political relationships.*

In (at least) the Heek before our gathering, look carefully into your own experience in the light of these precepts. Make a real commitment to follow the precepts closely for this period of time, and take notes, if helpful, on whatever insights, questions, reflections, or ambiguities occur to you. (Some people find it very helpful to read and reflect on the precepts every day, perhaps after sitting meditation.)

Give special attention to your approach to right speech, reading the excerpts on right speech from H. Saddhatissa's Buddhist Ethics and from Thich Nhat Hanh's Being Peace, as well as the enclosed poem by Rumi. Many people find it very useful to carry out pen and paper and take periodic notes about their experiences and insights. Your inquiries may also be helped by working with the following questions:

1. What is your understanding of right speech?
2. What aspects of right speech are most challenging for you? Why?
3. In what situations do you experience confusion about what is right speech?
4. How often do you find yourself conveying falsehoods in speech, even in subtle exaggerations? What are the roots of such speech? In what ways, do you not tell the truth to yourself?
5. What helps you to be more conscious in your speech?
6. What mental and emotional states do you find associated with "wrong" speech? With more skilful activity?
7. How do you respond to speech that seems to express racism, sexism, and other modes of prejudice, discrimination, and domination (both through the content of what is said and through the form and power dynamics of speech and communication)?
8. How would you extend application of the precept on right speech from the context of interaction in more personal circles of family, friends, friends, and fellow workers to involvement in wider social and political contexts of communication?

*The traditional Theravada ethical training begins with undertaking the precepts to refrain from (1) destroying living creatures, (2) taking that which is not given, (3) sexual misconduct, (4) "false" speech, and (5) intoxicating liquors and drugs that lead to carelessness.

Zen Hospice Project
INTERNSHIP CONTRACT

This Contract provides the basic outline of the Internship at the Zen Hospice Project for Henry Wai. This Internship fulfills Henry's placement requirement for the BASE Program of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship..

The Internship will serve to provide Henry with a comprehensive introduction to the spirit, organization, and activities of the Zen Hospice Project. Henry will commit 30 hours per week from April 12 to August 20, 1995 to applying his abilities for the needs of the Project.

The Zen Hospice Project will provide Henry with the orientation, training, support, and supervision as appropriate to his abilities and responsibilities.

The trainings that Henry will take part in include:

Meditations on Dying Workshop (April 30)

Volunteer Training (May)

Volunteer Support Meetings (ongoing)

Advanced Volunteer Training (July 8)

Cultivating Compassion Workshop (August 4-6), computer training, and other training opportunities where appropriate.

Frank Ostaseski - Director, Zen Hospice Project will provide the overall guidance and supervision of Henry. Frank and Henry will meet about every 2 weeks to review progress, discuss what has come up, and to plan next steps.

Diana Winston will be the liaison with the BASE Program. She is the Coordinator of the BASE Program and can be reached at 415-776-3259.

For his 30 hour per week commitment, Henry will spend about 10 hours caring for the clients at the Laguna-Honda and the Guest House Hospices. The remaining 20 hours will be devoted to completing organizational projects related to the needs of the Zen Hospice Project as agreed upon with Frank. Time off during the Internship will be allowed for Henry to take part in BASE Program related activities.

Frank Ostaseski
Director,
Zen Hospice Project

Henry Wai
BASE Program,
Buddhist Peace Fellowship

Date:

FROM BASE APPLICATION

In order to give you a sense whether or not BASE is for you, please consider and reflect on the following list of questions. These questions come out of our experience in the 1995 pilot program and are what we have been examining and struggling with during the year. They are meant to help guide you in a process of investigating what you want from the program and how you might relate to the BASE experience. No written response is necessary here.

-What equips you to tolerate the discomfort, agitation, and other emotions that may arise when someone else has a different opinion or way of being in the world? Consider your willingness to be open to multiple points of view and ways of relating.

-What is your experience with silence and contemplative practice? Do you have other forms of spiritual or political practice that can be shared? What aspects of your practice(s) do you find most essential?

- How do you understand the function of precepts related to ethical conduct in your life... such as the Buddhist precepts concerning non-harming, not taking what has not been offered, not using sexual energy in a harmful way, truthfulness and right speech, and avoidance of substances which cloud the mind -

-What has been your past experience with groups? What do you need to feel safe in a group? Do you value group process? Are you willing to articulate and share experience with others as well as take responsibility for personal responses?

-How has clarity and compassion developed for you through your work in the world?

-How do/will you handle the often intense emotions which arise through doing social service or social action work?

-How do the political, social, spiritual, and personal interrelate for you?

-Are you willing to make BASE a primary commitment for the time you are involved?