

REFCON5 - State of the State
July 13, 2019
Amy Reed - Recovery Dharma statement

First, I just want to honor what everyone is feeling right now and convey my compassion for everyone in this room and all of our sanghas back home. Many of us in this community have experienced a lot of extra suffering over this last year and are feeling all sorts of emotions right now—loss, grief, hurt, anger. Many of us right now are also feeling a sense of relief and excitement about the future and new possibilities. Some of us have felt very harmed by this situation, and some of us have felt old, deep wounds reopened. I just want to say that all of these feelings are valid and true, and it's important to honor them and meet them with compassion. For ourselves, and for each other.

Speaking for myself, recovery communities have been a home for me over the last ten years, often feeling like more of a home than the dysfunctional one I grew up in, and Refuge in particular in the last three has provided exactly that, a refuge—it is a place I go to feel safe, a place that I want to feel stable, and that feeling of stability has been really challenged for me, and for a lot of us.

Throughout all of this, I've found an opportunity to really deepen my practice, to understand the truth of change and impermanence, and to ask myself what it is I value and what it means to live in integrity and wise action and service. To really investigate my reactivity and my resentments, and to try to cultivate compassion and forgiveness and equanimity.

I think the metaphor of the lotus is really relevant now. It's a flower that needs a lot of mud to grow. And we have had a lot of collective mud over this last year. But all of that has been food for these two flowers that are starting to blossom now. It's given us all an opportunity to really ask ourselves what it is we want in our recovery community, in our sanghas. To ask ourselves what we value and what we can build based on those values, and how we can live in integrity as a group, how we can live in integrity as two groups who share the same essential mission—to help people end the suffering of addiction.

It's become very clear that Noah has a different vision for Refuge Recovery than some of us have. And he will be able to build that vision his way, and many people are excited about that and will follow him as he develops Refuge Recovery World

Services. And there are some of us who maybe had a different vision for Refuge Recovery and are eager to start something new, a truly peer-led and grassroots movement, which we are calling Recovery Dharma for now. We aim to be an organization built from the ground up, defined by the collaborative efforts of the autonomous individuals and sanghas who are doing the real work of recovery in their communities to relieve the suffering of addiction. We will follow no leader, but trust in the wisdom of the Dharma and in each individual's own potential for recovery and awakening.

Ultimately we believe that recovery is about finding your own inner wisdom and your own path, about finding your own personal relationship to the three jewels of the buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. We can trust in the wisdom of our sangha of wise friends, we can learn from them when we do not yet have the answers for ourselves. We can learn from dharma teachers and attend retreats of our own choosing, based on where we find wisdom and inspiration. That is very different than following a leader who is built into the foundation of a program. We believe recovery and practice are about empowerment. Following a single leader has the potential to take away our power.

We will work together to build a democratically elected leadership, and we will make financial integrity and transparency a priority. The purpose of the leadership will be to serve the community and support what's happening at the ground level, to provide an infrastructure so that we may share resources, communicate, and grow together. We will learn from the wisdom of recovery programs that have come before us, who have experienced longevity because of their dedication to being truly peer-led and not-for-profit. Toward remaining truly not-for-profit, we acknowledge that it is not our role to provide treatment resources for our members, while also recognizing the importance of these resources to individuals recovering from addiction. We will develop and publish our own literature, and every cent earned from sales will go back directly into the organization to serve our community.

You have all received a draft of the first book developed by the current literature committee. It was co-written and edited completely by volunteers, by your peers, as a humble act of service to this community. Early drafts were reviewed by several dharma teachers, therapeutic professionals, and people who work in the recovery field, and several other members of the community. The authors names will never be on the cover. None of us will ever receive any money, and neither will a giant corporate publisher. It will be open-source and the ebook will always

be available for free or by donation for anyone who needs it. This is literature by the community, for the community, to benefit the community.

What you have now is just a draft, and we want to integrate community input in a revised version to be printed as a physical book. But you are free to start using this version in meetings now if you'd like, and it is available on our Recovery Dharma facebook page and will be available for download on our new website when it goes live in a few weeks.

Our intention in this book was to provide a clear outline of a Buddhist path of recovery from addiction, based on the four noble truths and eightfold path, including the five precepts, the four heart practices, and the four foundations of mindfulness, with a strong emphasis on finding wisdom and support in the sangha. We aimed to stay close to the Buddha's original teachings, not rewriting them but exploring how they naturally relate to recovery from addiction. Each truth and aspect of the eightfold path has corresponding Questions for Inquiry that will help us see our addictive behaviors, and recovery, more clearly through the lens of the dharma. We've provided a new script template and meditations that meetings can adapt as needed. We aim to be deeply inclusive of process-addictions and trauma-informed language, and to emphasize the holistic and compassionate approach to recovery that we feel is inherent in the Buddhist path.

This book is new, but the wisdom is very old. None of us in this room authored Buddhism, nor did we invent recovery, but we are all already practicing both in our own ways. We are in a time of transition at the group level, there's no denying that, but we can find equanimity and steadiness in our individual practice. Recovery Dharma is still grounded in the same basic Buddhist principles as Refuge Recovery—we believe that understanding the four noble truths and practicing the eightfold path can lead to the end of the suffering of addiction, and the suffering of being a human in this world. What is different is our vision as a collective, and our freedom from someone else's vision.

Each meeting and sangha is in a position now where they may want to make a decision in how to define themselves. It is our hope that that decision is made as democratically as possible, with as many members of your community being informed and voting on how you collectively want to proceed. In an effort to democratically build and scale this program, we will be sending out a survey in the coming days to get community feedback about what people want to see as we

move forward, and we are planning to have a series of zoom calls for group discussion. Once it goes live, our new website recoverydharma.org will continue to have new resources and information added, so please check it regularly and sign up for the new mailing list. The Recovery Dharma facebook group, launched just last week, has already shown itself to be an incredible place for support and the enthusiastic exchange of ideas. I'm incredibly moved by the excitement, compassion, and wise speech people are expressing there, and how many people are stepping up to volunteer.

Throughout all this change, I hope we can all remember that the priority is always our own individual recovery and practice. And I hope Noah would agree that there's no requirement for anyone to choose sides. Some of us will, because that's the decision that feels in integrity for us, and it will be a boundary that feels necessary in supporting our recovery. But you are free to be a member of both Refuge Recovery World Services and a member of Recovery Dharma if you choose. Or neither. What matters is that you find the path that's right for you, and a sangha where you feel supported and cared for as you do this brave work of recovery and healing.

I'm a conflict averse person by nature, so sitting up here right now is really uncomfortable. Being on the board for the last few months has at times been really uncomfortable. But something I've been learning through my practice is how to lean into discomfort, because it's there that I find my practice really defines itself. Transition can be uncomfortable. The unknown can be very uncomfortable. But it's also there where we can find spaciousness and possibility and freedom. Right now we are at the beginning of building something brand new, together, defined by us. It's going to take work, but we are people who have committed to understanding wise effort and wise action. We are people who understand generosity and lovingkindness, not just as concepts, but as actions. And we know that community, that sangha, is the place where we heal from the isolation of addiction.

I am so grateful and honored to be walking this path with each and every one of you, and to be building this movement together, founded on the principle of developing our own personal relationship to the buddha, the dharma, and the sangha, where we trust in our own inner wisdom, our own potential for waking up. This is a path that does not require us to believe in anything—not a higher power, and not a guru. This is a path of empowerment, not powerlessness. And we are empowered now to build something from the ground up, defined by us, as

a collective of beautifully flawed and suffering human beings. We have all made mistakes, and we have all caused harm, to ourselves and others. But we are also people who are capable of the most profound compassion and healing and transformation, who are doing this brave work of recovery every single day. We are showing up on our cushions even when our minds feel like battlefields, we are choosing to forgive and listen deeply, we are choosing to do the right thing even when it's hard, we are showing up to meetings and reaching out to newcomers and building community, and we are saving each other's lives. I am grateful to be walking this path with you and I thank you for letting me be of service.