

Disembodiment of Long Term Decision Making Power

Structural Set Up

The By-Laws were structured to support a resident community where the majority of residents were continuing or caretaker members. This sub-set carried the long term vision and made the long term decisions as a steering force within the extended body of resident and non-resident members. All the power of implementation is given to those in residence. The only stated requirement of a non-resident continuing member (NRCM) is to attend annual meeting, OR send a letter to renew their membership.

The conceptual ideal of a continuing member is to live in residence at the Foundation, become a transmitter of “The Lama Way” and return to the world to do Lama’s greater work in service to the world. This is a functional set up only as long as there are multiple continuing members in residence which are either stable (3-4 yrs residence), or supported by a resident body with significant interest in becoming a continuing member.

How the Shift Began

Beginning in the early 90’s, the number of continuing members in residence began to decline. Committees were formed (physical plane, financial plane, social plane) that included NRCM’s and local trustees. In a sense, the core group function was expanded and reformatted to include non-resident members. Many local members got involved. This functioned to strengthen and support a resident body where participating members were the majority. Each summer, the resident body would shrink back to a handful, who would boldly take on up to 50% new members at fall meetings.

The “Lama Education” of each year’s new members was greatly supported by the variety of NRCM’s who were involved in Lama’s business through committee participation. Building the Community Center further expanded non-resident involvement by creating design committees and an off site fundraising office run primarily by trustees.

Meanwhile, a recurrent annual resident turnover of approx. 50%, began to shift the focus of seasonal meetings from long term planning to basic levels of integrating new members. Each year, more discussions around

“How to...

*be the watch

*receive visitors

*keep warm in the winter

*why practice together

...In the Lama way”

were necessary and less meeting time was available for introducing the various official documents (By-Laws, Master Plan). Reading them was always recommended and copies were available. Residents who got involved with committees or became caretaker members were expected to be familiar with them. The mission statement was presented at fall meetings and a discussion of what “the awakening of consciousness” actually meant usually followed. For those new to a traditional spiritual path, (usually almost a majority) it was too ethereal for them to envision how to embody or manifest it. Those that stayed beyond a year, and used their time to explore a spiritual practice, did begin to “catch on” in amazing ways. However, the turnover for 2 and 3 year beans was over 50%.

In order to keep the Foundation running smoothly, more responsibility was given to people who had been here for a short time. Summer Staff often had guardianships (masterships) and first year residents often had core responsibilities (planning Summer Program/Winter Intensives, Secretary, Kitchen, Seva, etc.) The watch became a catch all for the various community facilitation needs. Where there were no residents of Jewish origins, Shabbat became a watch function. Heart Club also became a watch function at this time. With a 50% turnover rate, every other watch is first time watch, someone who is at the center of the community, undergoing an incredible learning curve.

From 92 through April of 96, this format could be seen as successful because it did:

- *maintain a place where long term decisions could be discussed with multiple continuing members

- *provided enough support for the resident body to grow from 8 in '92 to 18 in '96

- *Resident continuing members used Annual Meeting to approve new directions (Permaculture Report, Site of Community Center) and made implementation decisions within the resident body, based on recommendations from the committees.

- *Allowed many long term decisions to be made by the resident core group

- *NRCM interaction with residents greatly increased the lama attunement in new beans

The Burning Gives Us More Transiency

May of '96 brought the fire and many drastic changes. The traumatized resident body surrendered the running of the Foundation to the Trustees, via the Santa Fe Fundraising Office. An additional off site office was established in Arroyo Hondo for the Coordinator. Most of the resident involved in administration lived and worked at this office for the summer of '96. The Lama Council was created to be a long term discussion and decision body that integrated Trustees, NRCM's, and Residents into a body that could meet monthly to deal with the large amount of long term decisions that fire recovery necessitated. The original intention was that the Council was a temporary solution to fill the gap until the resident body was stable enough to again carry the responsibilities of making long term decisions.

The three years after the fire were very intense. The land drank energy from all those who poured out their hearts to help. Many NRCM's became actively involved, and many got drunk dry by the experience. In the midst of trauma, tempers can be short and basic courtesies forgotten. Many gave and gave, only in the end to depart with unpleasant feelings.

During this time, the Council began to re-define its parameters with the intention of shifting more responsibility to the resident body. First, (1998) it was redefined as only a decision making body. Recommendations were to be discussed by resident body or committee and brought before the Council for decision. Due to the aforementioned turnover rate, a NRCM body that was in recovery from being stretched to the maximum, and reduced committee activity, there really wasn't anyplace to discuss a potential long term decision that was not directly related to the physical rebuilding of the Foundation. By 2000, the Council again re-defined its parameters to only 2 things, siting buildings and expenditures over \$5000. The number of Council Meetings necessary declined to 1 or 2 per year.

Out of the fire, and into a Stagnant Form

From 96 to 2000, the annual turnover rate was over 50% during this time and necessity was the primary director of actions. The momentum of re-building the physical plane became the primary focus with integrating the new beans a close second.

The continuing members and caretakers in residence at this time had never experienced the model of a core group in residence. Nor had there been time or inclination to discuss issues at length. The post fire business model was pretty much an individuated process. Guardians were empowered to run their responsibilities as they say fit. No longer did changes or new ideas necessarily need to come to weekly business meeting, and not all residents chose to attend them. Those staying a second winter were strongly encouraged to become caretakers, regardless of whether or not they were embodying or in support of maintaining a traditional Lama curriculum. How seasonal meetings were done last year, became "how they were always done" with no option to adjust the model. Continuing Membership was seen not so much as a deeper level of residence, but something you applied for if you wished to retain membership after departing.

Since '92, the maximum number of continuing members in residence at any given time has been 2. Since the fire it has often been 1. The transition rate has held steady at 50-75% annually. More responsibilities have been shifted to newer beans. To use an analogy, Pre-fire, we were asking summer staff if they'd be willing to "man an oar" on an ongoing boat. Post-fire, we ask the summer staff if they're willing to "man the steering wheel". All summer staff and sometimes visitors have guardianships. Sometimes they do a watch. Of the 6 new residents this winter, all of them were carrying what I would refer to as a caretakers responsibilities before they were members of the Foundation. More important to me than being "members" they (and many before them) have been asked to "steer a ship" before they had a holistic experience of how the ship is supposed to run.

It is clear to me that the model being presented to the current circle will only result in the continuation of transiency, simple because it's so systemized into the form at this point. The 9 current residents are a Beloved circle steeped in traditional practice and with an intuitive capacity to work with the Spirit of Guidance to bring forth new ideas and inspiration. They do not legally have the decision making power to back up their ideas. In the midst of steering a ship they're not certain how to run, and manning all the oars on that ship, discussing and implementing a new idea can easily become an overwhelming task. The continuing member body which does have the decision making power is dispersed around the world, has no communication system to keep abreast of the current Lama "news", and can not be present on land for long enough to move a decision through the 3 week process. The focus of Annual Meeting has also shifted to tuning in NRCM's. It is unrealistic to believe that in 2 days, NRCM can be tuned in, take care of all the membership stuff required by the By-Laws, be presented with new ideas, discuss them, and make a decision. In the midst of all the business, there's reuniting with Beloveds, unfinished curriculum surfacing and minimal energy to come together outside meeting time to do practice together. Will a quorum be in attendance is also a recurrent question. This year the answer was no.

Post note

Please remember as you, inshallah, contemplate this view point, it is the structure or model of Continuing Member that I am saying has become dysfunctional within the model. There is no blame intended toward any individual or resident circle. NRCM's have been participating in the course they signed up for and have, in times of need, shown up in incredible and supportive ways. Each resident circle has carried the intention of slowing the transiency rate. I hop I have made clear why it hasn't happened.

In Prayer,
Surya