



open heart project
susanpiver.com

2012
ANNUAL REPORT



Table of Contents

Welcome	2
How did it go in 2012?	3
What worked?	8
What failed?	10
What about the Open Heart Project?	11
Goals for 2013	14

WELCOME

Dear wonderful readers, friends, and fellow practitioners,

2012 has been a year of very intense highs and lows for me. As it draws to a close, I've taken a cue from pal and source of inspiration [Jonathan Fields](#) to make sense of it by creating this Annual Report. It is meant to be an accounting of what happened and where I hope to go in 2013.

My intention this year was to make myself over as a writer who has successfully entered the digital age, who can publish easily by having a direct dialogue with her readers, who can extend that dialogue beyond the bounds of the book itself for vast mutual benefit, and who can actually *make a living by writing books*.

I want to write. I want to be read. I want to help. I want to express what is mine to say and I would like to be remunerated for it. That's basically it.

In 2012, I tried to lay the groundwork to do so. Some things went very well. Others failed. In all cases, it was interesting.

If that sounds in any way intriguing, read on. This Annual Report will let you in on what it has been like "behind the scenes" to create this foundation. Even though it is about me, I hope you will find it useful.

I offer this Annual Report to the [dralas of Iha, nyen, and lu](#). May they be utterly pleased by the display.

With love, Susan

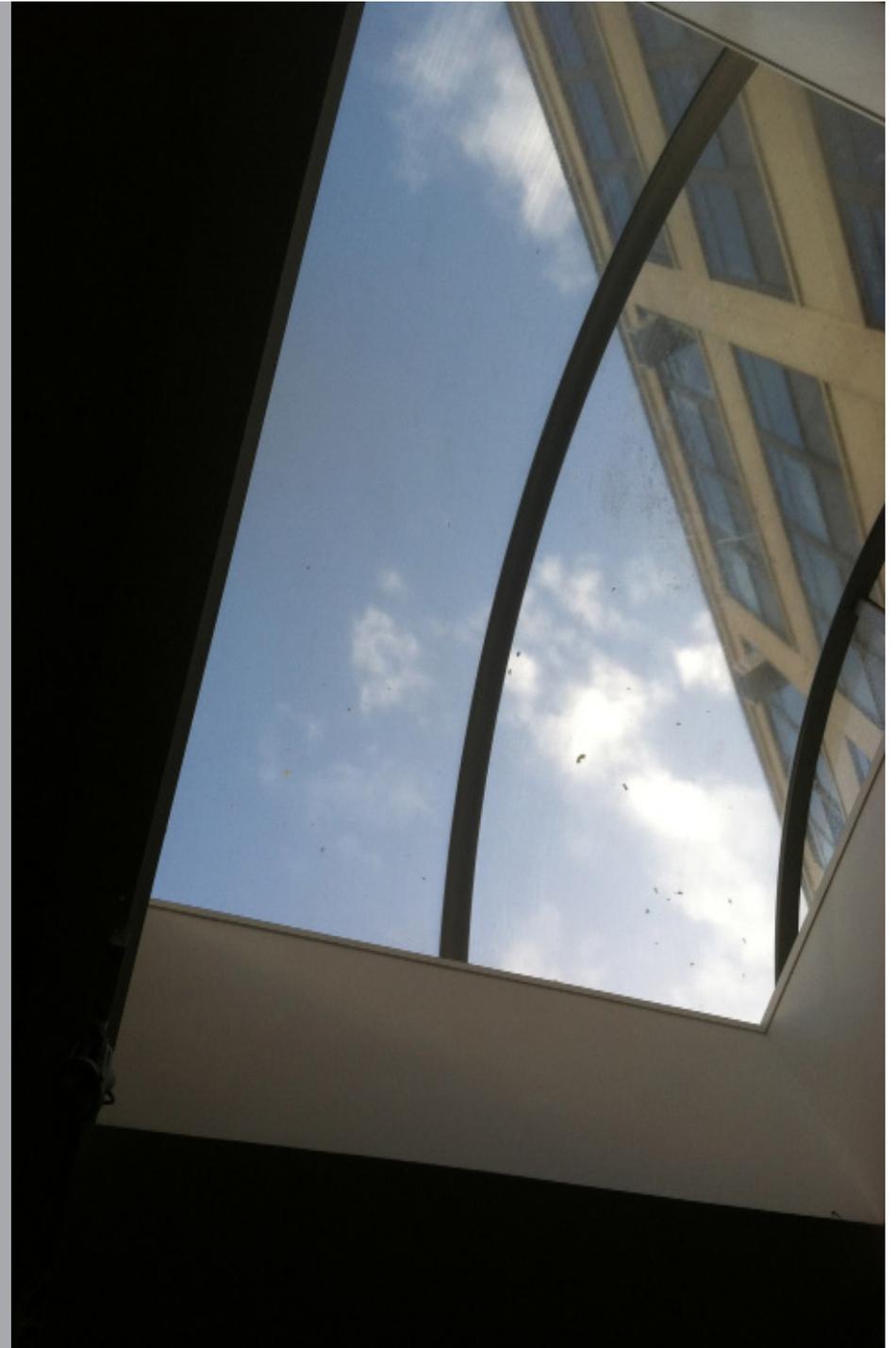
How did it go in 2012?

DAD DIED

First and foremost, 2012 was a year of profound loss. My beloved, beautiful, brilliant, gentle, funny father, Julius Samuel Piver, passed away on March 22. We were all together with him: my mother, me, my brother, sister, and sister-in-law. He died in his own bedroom with all of us holding his hands and longing for his freedom from suffering. He had a wonderful life, full of love and accomplishment. He had a good death.

I miss him without end. I'm still in complete shock.

Every day, I cry from missing him and, beyond missing him, simply loving him without recompense of form or object. Freed in this way, somehow love magnifies beyond the means to contain or identify it and, rather than blossoming into sweetness, explodes beyond all sentiment into something that feels like rage mixed with sorrow mixed with joy and whose primary consequence seems to be an unspeakable tenderness that shreds any semblance of you and any semblance of me until all that remains is something raw and without name.



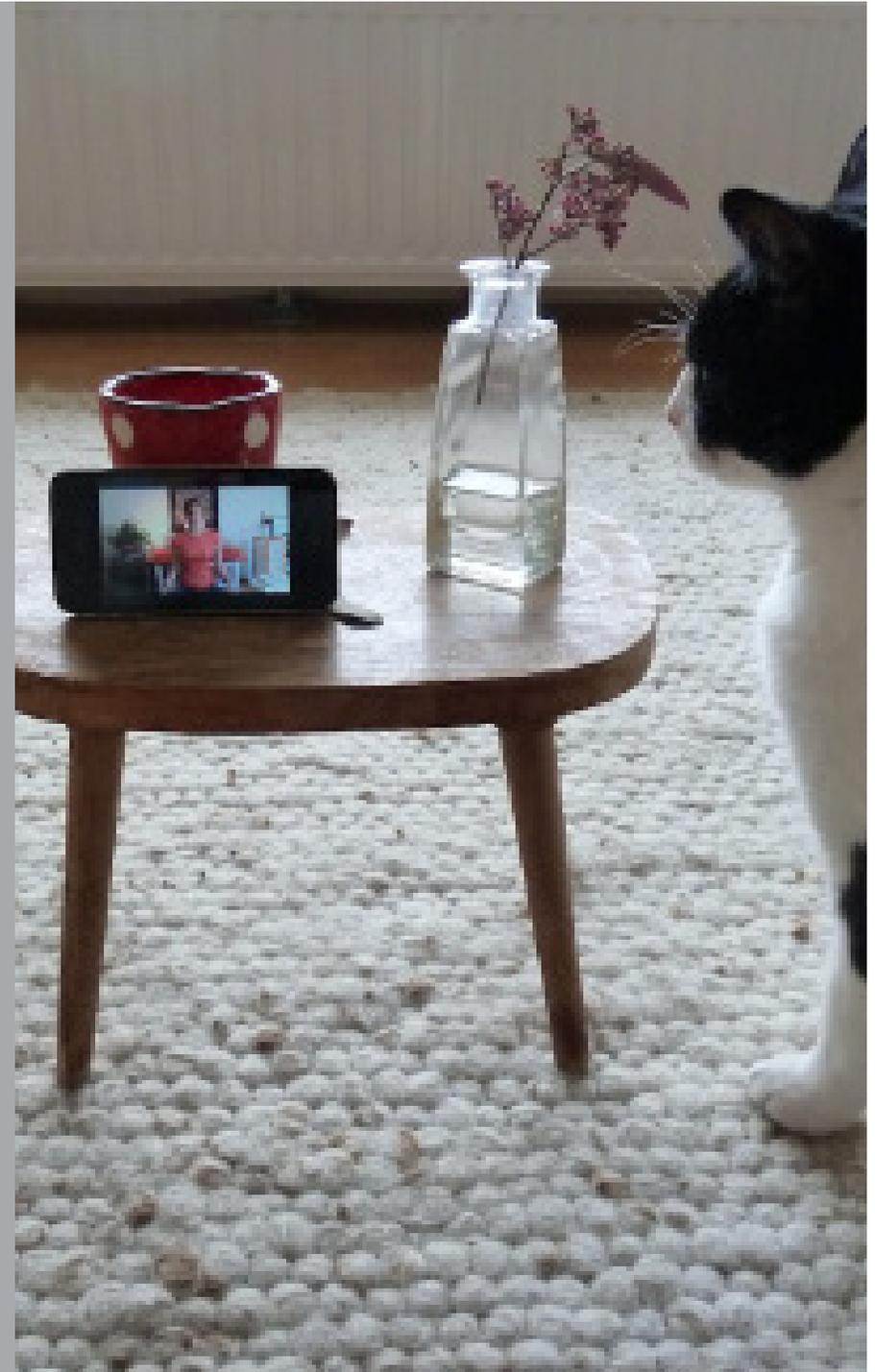
THE OPEN HEART PROJECT DEVELOPED LEGS

Professionally, this was a year where the new direction I had identified for myself as a writer and teacher appeared to be plausible. Meaning, my dream of becoming a self-sustaining writer through developing community with my readers developed legs. Though not yet probable, in this year, I saw that what I want to accomplish is *possible*. I saw that my subscription newsletter, the thing I invented to get the word out that I exist, “[The Open Heart Project](#),” could work.

It all began in this way.

My last book, “[The Wisdom of a Broken Heart](#),” came out in hardcover in January 2010 and paperback in January 2011. As far as publishing experiences went, it was a wonderful one. I love my agent. I love my publisher. I love my editor. I felt good about the book I had written. Those for whom it was meant seemed to derive benefit from it. Creatively, the experience was good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end.

The only thing missing? Money. Moolah. Cake. The ability to sustain myself and contribute to the wellbeing of my family, my work, and my world. When I divide my advance by the time it took to write, publish, and support the book, I failed to approach minimum wage.



Frowny face.

What to do? Whether I wanted to self-publish (and make more money from less sales) or continue with a publisher (with any hope of getting a decent advance and, trust me on this, for the great majority of authors the advance is all the money we'll ever see), I needed to build my "platform" as it is called in the publishing world which basically means the group of people who have given me permission to contact them via email.

But how? For several years, I had half-heartedly been taking email addresses via my website by asking people to sign up to receive "announcements" from me. About 800 people had signed up. But I had never made any announcements. What would I announce that didn't sound cheesy? Too, all my books are about different topics. The reader of "The Hard Questions" might have no interest in "How Not to Be Afraid of Your Own Life." I had no idea what to say that would be relevant to all.

I knew that I wanted to build the list by offering something of value that I also felt genuinely happy to create. Meditation instruction was an obvious choice. There are so many people who want to meditate but don't know how to begin or, if they do, don't know how to *continue*. We all fall off the wagon. We all get lost in our practice. We all need support. Most people have no access to such support, either because they live in East Oshkosh or because it can be intimidating to go into some strange meditation center. So my idea was to offer meditation instruction as if I could come to your house and we could sit together for 10 minutes, twice a week.

Of course, if you wanted meditation instruction online, there were already many choices. Lots of teachers have uploaded instruction, mostly via podcast. But I wanted it to be real and fresh and so decided to record via video and create new instruction each time. This is what I offered to anyone who signed up for my mailing list which I called "The Open Heart Project." My emphasis in meditation practice is not as a self-help technique, but as a path to wisdom and love.

I didn't think too much further than that. I had some vague notion that if I could get up to, say, 5000 names, maybe I would experiment with a self-published book and see what happened. I really took to heart (and still do) Kevin Kelly's famous notion of "1000 True Fans," a formulation that says that this is the amount of fans an artist needs to make a decent living.

Could I amass 1000 such people? If I did, would that be enough to support me?

In March 2011, I announced on Facebook and Twitter that I was offering ongoing meditation instruction for free to anyone who wanted it. 100 people signed up. Then 200. Then 500. And so on. By the end of 2011, there were 3519 members of The Open Heart Project. I began receiving emails like this:

I just wanted to express my deepest gratitude to you... the Open Heart Project propelled me into regular meditation practice. I had only ever dabbled in meditation, finding it too unsettling to practice for very long. Your guided meditations were a wonderful introduction for me and since then I have extended my practice and reading. I am excited at this new path opening up before me and cannot wait to see where it takes me.

And this:

It's been a tough spell for me lately...your wisdom and your generosity in sharing it have provided me with the perspective I've needed to find some bits of beauty and softness along the way. Though we've never met, your candor and openness have left me regarding you as a friend I love and respect. No need to respond - just want to say thank you.

To receive such messages means everything and so I kept going. I reached 4000 and then 5000 and then 6000 people. Now, at the end of 2012, there are over 9000 members.

Quickly, this had turned into much more than a way to build a mailing list. It had turned into a full time job (that I loved)...for which I was unpaid. What to do? After much consideration, I launched The Open Heart Project Practitioner program, a more frequent and intensive mailing that I charged for. I offered it for \$108 for a year to the existing members of the OHP and thereafter charged \$180 a year for it (or \$15 a month). That happened in June 2012. Currently, there are about 400 paid subscribers. Though this is an okay start, it is not enough to support me. So as I enter 2012, I am wondering....

Did I do the right thing? Did I charge the right amount? Should I continue it as is, discontinue it, or alter it?

In the coming pages, I attempt to come to grips with these questions.



What worked?

In 2012, over 6000 actual humans signed up to receive meditation instruction from me, in addition to the 3500 or so who were already on the list. This is huge. Amazing. Wonderful. I am so honored. And it brought home to me the best aspect of the OHP business model: it is totally and completely scalable.

I conceived of and launched a paying version of the Open Heart Project called the OHP Practitioner program. I thought about what it should be for a really long time. I conferred with the smartest people I know. I was very nervous to do it but I knew that in order for the OHP to survive, I had to survive. In the first few days, several hundred people signed up, which was a great sign. In the words of Seth Godin, I shipped it!

And speaking of Seth, he mentioned me and the OHP in one of his daily emails as one of two examples of businesses doing online what typically had been done offline. (The other one was a guy who taught people how to play the bass guitar.) In the following days, about 2000 new people signed up for the OHP (the free version). That was completely fantastic. (And also pretty amazing—one little email in the great sea of emails! That is the kind of trust Seth inspires, and rightfully so). That giant boost in membership signified a giant leap in credibility and confidence, not just numbers. It was a watershed moment. Thank you, Seth.

One of my very favorite events in the life of the OHP Practitioner group was our virtual weekend retreat in September. I was not sure how it would work. Could the “magic” of retreat be replicated when none of the participants could see each other? When, rather than leaving home and retreating from the everyday, they were retreating within their homes? By noon on Sunday when the retreat ended, I was gratified to feel that the retreat magic had indeed arisen. I could sense the feeling of longing that often happens at the end of a retreat, a longing to continue with the flow of comradeship and peace that come with retreat. I felt that the participants bonded with each other on some level. Feeling that an online retreat could be of spiritual benefit was a wonderful, hopeful thing to realize.

In non-OHP news, “The Wisdom of a Broken Heart” came out in Dutch and German. The same German publisher reissued a book that had gone out of print in English, “The Hard Questions for an Authentic Life,” which I revised substantially as the

original version was not what I had hoped. It was good to have the chance to revisit that work. Shambhala Publications here in the States reissued another out of print work of mine, originally published as “Joyful Birth.” It came out his past summer as “[The Mindful Way Through Pregnancy](#).” I spent a fair amount of time revising that material too. I also recorded an [audiobook](#) of “The Wisdom of a Broken Heart” for which I hold the rights. It just came out this month. I liked reading it. When you read your work aloud, you have to (or get to) revisit every decision you made during the course of writing. Sometimes you feel proud, sometimes not. I mostly felt proud of this one. I really like that book.

Together with the most wonderful designer ([Melanie Lowe](#)) and web developer ([Stephen Simon](#)), I undertook a ginormous overhaul of my website. It needed more functionality to work as a membership site to serve those who signed up for the paid version of the newsletter. It was very complicated and time-consuming but I’m happy with the result.

As much as I love to teach, I love to teach with others although opportunities to do so are rare. In October, I got the chance to teach alongside Charlie Gilkey and Jonathan Fields as part of Jonathan’s Good Life Project. I enjoyed this group so much but one of the highlights was the chance to spend time with Charlie and Jonathan, talking shop, life, work, creativity, and on and on. They are two cool gentlemen.

In November 2012, I decided to work with Charlie (of [Productive Flourishing](#)). This was a big win for me. Charlie is a coach who helps you aim super high, super pragmatically. In the month that I worked with him, he unlocked many mysteries of time-management and project planning for me. Thank you, Charlie.

Finally, in 2012, I did something completely new. I was invited to tell a story live in front of an audience in NYC as part of an event called the “How I Learned” series. My talk was on “How I learned...it was complicated.”

I’ve given a lot of talks but had never done anything remotely like a performance. I was terrified.

Turns out I am a [complete ham](#).



What failed?

I have had three primary failures* in 2012.

1. *I failed to put full credence in my talents.* While it is good to be unpretentious, it is not so good to feel like a perpetual outsider who must always prove herself worthy. The result is that I put many things above my work as a writer and teacher. In fact, I spend most of my time doing things that others could do and not enough time doing the things only I can do. Partially this is because of failure #2 (below), but partially it is a result of being afraid. Of what, I'm not sure. I persist in feeling that I just don't fit in anywhere. Hey, I'm just telling you what is. In 2013, I hope to leave this dynamic behind for good.

Please consider supporting me by hoping this for me too.

2. *I am still working on my relationship to money.* I have definitely not figured out how to derive income from the work that I do. That is a big problem. While I get tremendous payoffs in many ways, I do not in this department. It is quite painful. And also exciting. I have an important karmic lesson to learn here and I intend on doing so.

3. *I did not write anything major in 2012.* This makes me very sad. I feel like my main offering to the world is as a writer. I would like to write on many topics, including the enneagram and, my new obsession, communication. I haven't found the creative space to do this. I have been too engaged in creating my platform, the one I was building so I could sell works directly whenever I chose. But this has left no time to actually write such works.

These are not small problems. I am very invested in solving them in 2013...

*PS I have no problem with the word failure. I don't think that failing is a failure, if you know what I mean. Plus, we could be brave enough to use any words we like without superstition.

What about the Open Heart Project?

The Open Heart Project is a joy and a tremendous responsibility. When the project got to around 3500 subscribers, I was like, okay, this is very real. I am asking people all over the world to allow me to give them meditation instruction. They are actually following that instruction. I found that I loved doing this work and loved, loved, loved the people who found their way to the Project. It was turning into a community. It was becoming my FT job. As mentioned, I had to figure out a way to make a living at it because it had turned into much more than building a list of people who might want to buy my books.

That is where The Open Heart Project Practitioner program came from. It launched in June 2012 and has been a source of great delight and also some sadness at not having launched it more successfully. The frustration has nothing to do with the subscribers. They are kind, supportive, and responsive. But I felt that I didn't build it out very well, technically speaking. Also, I am not so great at selling my own work. It is just so embarrassing to do that.

When I announced the program, my goal was to get 1000 paying subscribers by June 2013. At that point, I would feel like I was earning a decent wage. But within 3 years, I'd like 10000 people to have signed up. At that point, the Open Heart Project will be a business and I'll feel that great incremental growth is possible. I will be so happy.

These numbers are not crazy. The cost of an annual subscription is not crazy. (\$180 or \$15 a month.) I truly believe that there are 10000 people who would value support for their meditation practice.

It is amazingly slow going however. It is not taking off as I had hoped. I'm not sure why, but here are some possibilities.

It's not the right offering.

It's not priced correctly.

I have built it out incorrectly; the features are not appealing.

It has not been promoted sufficiently.

It's not of that much benefit.

Depending on the insights I get into these issues, there are several options.

1. *Keep going*; it's barely been six months. Gamble on it as is.

2. *Revamp the content to be more appealing*. Certain features like the book club and monthly check-ins and online webinars have not been well attended. Maybe people don't want or need those? Maybe I've offered too much? Maybe I just haven't alerted people clearly enough? I don't know.

3. *Change the model and branding*. Rather than labeling it as a chance to go deeper with your practice (which it is), I could rename the Practitioner program. I could call it becoming a "member" of the OHP instead.

I got this idea when I was listening to The Moth on the radio. Anyone can listen to Moth stories (which are awesome). But if you become a member, you get some stuff in return, like tickets to an event and maybe a t-shirt or something. For the OHP, I could ask people to support it by becoming a member and get access to a greater variety of meditation practices and also advance notices to attend (free) webinars and so forth. Languaging it this way, it might seem more like a fun club to join rather than an arduous course of study.

Just the other day, I linked to something on Tricycle Magazine. In order to read it though, I had to "join" Tricycle. For just \$25, I would get like a zillion things, such as access to online courses, specially compiled ebooks, membership forums, and so on—much like what I included in the OHP. The problem was that I did not want any of those things. I just wanted to read the article. I would have paid \$25 to support Tricycle, but when I read that list, I felt like I had invited a new pal over for dinner and they were like, "I'll bring a fancy tablecloth and a special bottle of wine. Let's make up a special prayer to say together before we eat. I'm going to bring my whole family with me." Uh, never mind.

I opted out without paying the \$25.

Have I made potential OHP subscribers feel like I'm the over eager friend? GAH. I hope not.

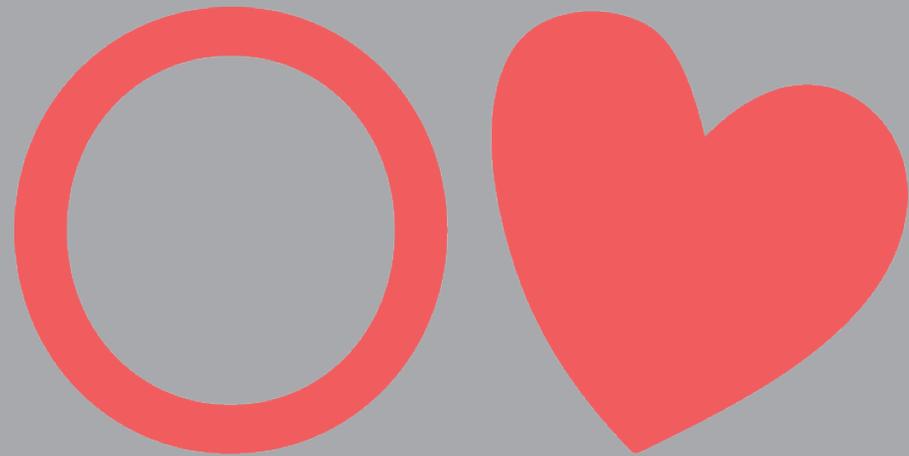
So the moral of this story is that in 2012, I did not establish the Practitioner newsletter as powerfully as possible. Being the introverted and serious sort that I am, I presented it as a course of study. But it is equally true to present it as a community with a variety of offerings that you could choose from (or not) as you touch in with the delights of practice.

Another issue that arose with the OHP community in general was this. When I started the OHP Practitioner newsletter, I told the Basic (free) newsletter people that I was no longer going to create new content for them, but was going to recycle newsletters from the past since the majority had never received them. However, when it came time, I could not pull the trigger on this. I kept creating new content for both newsletters.

I created the entire OHP flow on intuition. “I think that today they need to hear about container principle.” “Today I think it would be good to remind people that they don’t have to stop thinking in order to meditate.” And so on. To me, the OHP is a living thing that requires fresh sustenance. Whether or not that is so, I simply couldn’t bring myself to send canned material. Crazy, I doubled my work load when I launched the Practitioner program. That was definitely not my intention.

I am currently engaged in establishing a particular curriculum for each newsletter. It is my hope that by doing so, I can create materials in advance for real this time and not be behind the curve.

I’ve found (thanks to Charlie again) that when I create the newsletters for a particular week before that week starts, all things are possible! So that is a big goal in 2013--to have a bank of newsletters ready to go and give myself the chance to actually write.



open heart project



What are my goals for 2013?

My goal for 2013 has a name and that name is “Benjamin.” In other words, sustainable revenue. 2013 has got to be the year that I create real income for myself, my family, and my community. I want this to happen for a number of reasons, not just the obvious: food, shelter, financing my old age, and so on.

I want my offerings to be remunerated.

I want to build the OHP into a large endeavor that can offer meditation instruction and spiritual support to as many people as possible.

I don’t want to feel alone. That is actually a big one. I don’t want to have to reassure myself all the time that I’m doing the right thing.

I want to break down the barrier between myself and abundance I feel it, see it, beat my head against it continually. I would like to stop.

Other goals:

I will focus on building systems into my business. Instead of showing up each day and figuring out how things work, I want to create work flows around my most common tasks. This may sound boring and small but it is HUGE.

I want to codify the OHP Practitioner program so that it is replicable and also builds energetically.

Getting ahead rather than playing catch up is a huge goal. Speaks for itself.

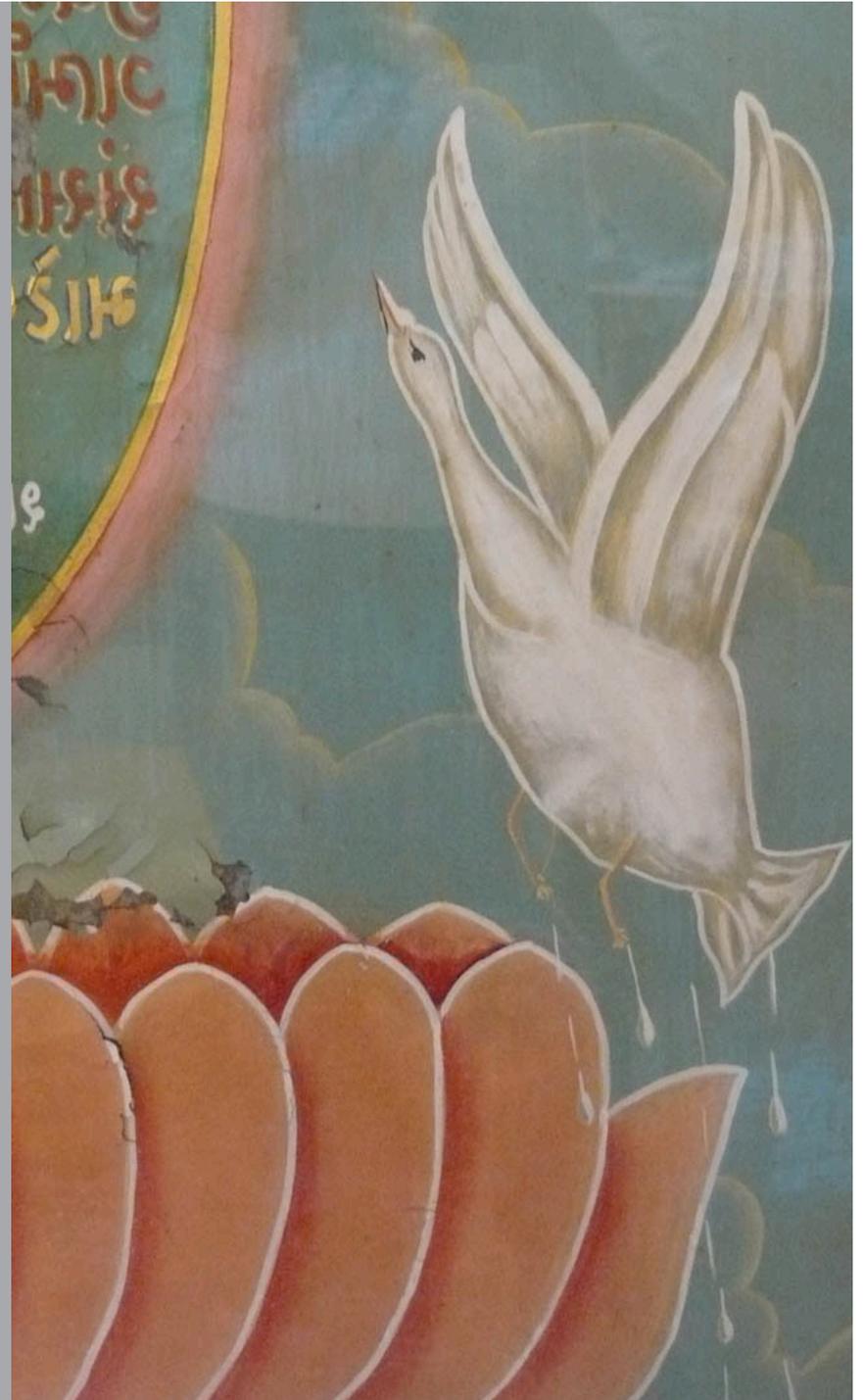
Have an editorial calendar for both OHP newsletters. Even though I want to be able to go by vibe when I create newsletters, I don't want to have to rely on it. There are now too many people for this approach. I feel a responsibility to let them know, especially the Practitioners, what to expect from our curriculum.

I want to reawaken and codify my personal blog through regular features. The OHP newsletters have become my blog posts. I want to write regularly on love, music, creativity, and so on and I want people who have no interest in the OHP to still find something of value.

Less travel. Although I love to travel and teach, in 2013, I'm not going to accept many gigs and I'm going to try to confine most of my travel to the first half of the year. If I want to write seriously, I just have to live more quietly.

In person OHP retreat. I would love to have the first annual weekend retreat open to all members of the Open Heart Project. It would be amazing to practice together face to face!

Finally, there are several topics I plan to focus on during 2013 and I'm very excited about each of them. Expect to hear more from me on the enneagram, magic, and right speech.



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Ebooks

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Emergiam

Books

to Buddhist idea

reviews

Blog

3 posts per week
- pro essay
- dharma teaching
- quote, boilder etc

Say It

ebook
workshop / speaking
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2 med video
2 dharmatalk video
2 other: quote
essay
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guru guide

4 webinars x yr
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2 virtual retreats
1 book club
1 live retreat (\$)
6 weekly writing prompt

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Jenna
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Kevin
Rebecca
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Systems

giggle
by mail
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script
video
audio
image
text

Media

Site / book + video

podcast
dharma
video
audio
text
image



Thank
you



for
listening

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