

EMERGING THEMES FROM SANGHA COUNCIL APRIL 27, 2008

Forty-five members/spouses attended Council, plus Roshi, Koan, Nagy and Jimyo, all of whom spoke. Witnesses John Ott and Mary Rios spoke in check-out.

Of the forty-five members/spouses who participated, seventeen spiraled into the circle and shared. The sharing could be characterized as expressing or re-experiencing issues in individuals' pasts, surfacing concerns about the present situation and how we as a Sangha got to this place, and (less explicitly) what action needs to be taken to transform the present situation.

The following emerging and surfacing matters are not in order of importance or of depth.

Shadows and echoes of, and reactivity to, early sexual abuse and/or violence: Twelve participants (eight women and four men) shared that they had been sexually abused when young, or had been a victim of sexual violence or had a close relative that was abused, or had had shadow sexual thoughts toward a young child. In varying degrees the disclosure of Jimyo's past offenses had reawakened "pain, shame, guilt". One person said "I had to show up for myself", another said "that little girl [her young self] was killed", another said "complete shock--I thought I was healed", another said "I feel like something has died", another said "I have to practice with myself—peel it [shame] off somehow." One person said he had been told he had been abused, but has no memory of it. How can we bear witness to the suffering of victims and perpetrators both—the ones we know, and the ones we do not know?

Who knew of Jimyo's offenses? Who felt uncomfortable with him?: Four participants besides the prison project stewards (three women, one man) reported that they had known about Jimyo before the Sangha in general knew—Jimyo disclosed to three of them when they asked, one does not remember whether he asked or Jimyo volunteered the information, Koan disclosed to one when asked. Three other participants (two women, one man) reported that they had felt uncomfortable with him—"I betrayed myself by embracing him." One participant who knew said she did not feel uncomfortable, did not regard him as a threat—"You can't change the past, but you can change the person of that past." Three other participants (three women) said they wish they had known, or that everyone should have been told, so that they could make a choice. Two participants who knew about Jimyo's offenses and felt discomfort said that they avoided coming to the Center at times for that reason.

"I just assumed...":

- That Roshi knew and approved Jimyo's coming into the Sangha and coming to live as a guest resident;
- That the Teachers Circle knew;
- That the prison project stewards were taking care of things, knew what they were doing;

- That everyone else knew;
- That everyone else knew and was OK with it—“I thought my practice wasn’t strong enough, or something”.

“Why didn’t I ask?”:

- “The strategy of denial is so strong;”
- “I don’t know why;”
- “I didn’t feel that Jimyo was a threat;”
- “Puzzled—what brought this about?”
- “I hold myself accountable above anyone else” for not asking;
- “I don’t understand why I didn’t ask Jimyo”;
- “I knew, but why didn’t I ask who he molested?”
- “I thought I ought to, but I never did—I don’t know why?”
- “I wish someone had told me—I would have asked more questions”.
- “Do we think we’re special because we practice?”
- “I didn’t ask because I trusted—Koan, Nagy, prison project.”
- “Am I willing to look into my own shadows around issues of crime, criminals and victims, punishment, race?”

Anger and trust:

- Some participants expressed gratitude to Roshi and the Council process, trust in the process.
- Some participants expressed anger toward Roshi and the Teachers Circle for failing to be fully informed, to take proper responsibility, which was a betrayal of trust.
- “I don’t always know who is sitting next to me in the Zendo.”
- “The Center is a place of atonement. Jimyo should have his chance.”
- “Let Jimyo have his own practice—not so much looking after him but also not shunning him.
- “If I had known about Jimyo’s offenses, I don’t know whether I would have decided to bring [a child] to the Center if I’d had the choice—but I wasn’t given a choice”.
- “I’ve gone from reactive to sad.”
- “I don’t feel anger, only pain.
- “We must not stop at the level of emotions—it’s too big, too important, too much of a mystery.”

The prison project:

- Participants expressed respect, appreciation and support for the prison project, the prison project stewards and the successes of the project.

- Have the successes of the project allowed the stewards to become too self-congratulatory, unable or unwilling to see into shadow parts—or just incomplete parts—of the project?
- How do we support the project in coming to completion; that is, how do we evaluate how former prisoners can come into the Sangha, while maintaining the container?

Going forward: transforming anger into wisdom, and error into right action:

- How do we bear witness to perpetrators and victims—those we know, and those we do not know?
- Return again and again to Not-Knowing.
- How do we evaluate and meet the challenge to the shared stewardship structure, in terms of communication, transparency, how information is transmitted?
- How do we heal the container, regaining and growing trust and confidence in one another, while accepting and acknowledging that there can be no perfect safety (relatively speaking)?
- How can we preserve the opportunity for others to practice?
- How can we use this opportunity to identify our leadership strengths and weaknesses?
- How can we use this opportunity to work with our various shadow energies?