

MANY HANDS AND EYES GROUP  
NOTES FROM FIRST MEETING MAY 17, 2008 (REV)

In attendance: Roshi Wendy Nakao, Debbi Faith-Mind Thoreson, Nancy Marquez, John Heart-Mirror Trotter, Concetta Getsuren Alfano, John Daishin Buksbazen, Penelope Luminous-Heart Thompson, Katherine Senshin Griffith

The agenda for the meeting was:

- 1) To clarify MHAE's purpose and core values, in connection with the purposes and core values of the Center itself. Jifu, Heart-Mirror and Dharma-Lotus provided written comments for consideration.
- 2) To begin opening up Ingredients and Questions. Roshi provided a memo for us, setting out as starting points for consideration categories of questions arising from the circumstances we are addressing in connection with Jimyo, the Prison Project, support of abuse survivors in the Sangha, Sangha dynamics such as communication and transparency, implications for the Center as such, and more. (Roshi provided this memo as an attachment to her May 16<sup>th</sup> email to the group.)

The group began exploring issues in connection with our foundational (Dharma) values (for example, one of the Center's core values is to provide safety and security—but what is that? Physical? Emotional?) and our focus (Sangha) values.

Roshi pointed out that the Gate of Sweet Nectar service is usually done only once a year. There was considerable discussion of the Gate of Sweet Nectar as an invitation—how do we respond to the response to our own invitation? What is the feast we are inviting the hungry ghosts to? Life never fully reveals itself all at once—everything is not there to be seen at every particular time.

We then discussed Jimyo—the powerful effect on attendees of the first Sangha Council, hearing him share what the Prison Project meant to him, and the powerful effect on Jimyo of his first opportunity to hear how his type of behavior has affected other people. Group members articulated that we can't know all about anyone, can't know if we know all of Jimyo's offenses, or only those he got caught on. This led to discussion of prisoners in prison—that they are “in training” for getting out on parole, for impressing the parole board with their sincerity. But when they are released, so many challenges are thrown at them in terms of the basics of living—finding housing, getting work, relating lawfully to others. Roshi mentioned that studies have shown that some setting, context or community is essential to support former prisoners in not re-offending. She related an incident in which Jimyo, on his way to catch the Metro to come to the Center, encountered a fellow former prisoner who had had a good job in prison, a model prisoner. Now released, he was going through trash cans. Roshi said that Jimyo passed on by, knowing that if he engaged with him, he himself would soon be going down the same path.

So then the question surfaced—can we be of service in some ways? We recognize that we are not a social service agency. What do we do about prisoners who ask about coming into the Sangha when they leave prison? Can they have a place here? What would that look like? What information should we have about any newcomer? What can we ask, what are the implications of disclosures of criminal background with respect to other practitioners, what are the Center's legal liabilities?

And further, what would serve the needs of each survivor in our Sangha? In the course of discussion, Roshi pointed out that as a Sangha we are not so familiar with collective healing work and use of ritual. Our practice is not group therapy. In the first Sangha Council, some survivors—long term practitioners—commented on how surprising it was that all their stuff came up again. Roshi pointed out that that's the truth of Buddhism: life is not an event, it's an unfolding. Stuff does come up over and over again, and when it comes up, there you are. But the wound gets smaller each time.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Roshi pointed out that currently the group is in a phase of exploration, with our inquiry spreading outward, and that eventually more definition and specific directions will manifest.

At the next meeting, we will continue core values discussion by relating with our vision (Buddha) values and core practices.

The next meeting is Saturday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, from 1 pm to 4 pm in the Buddha Hall.

In gassho,

Jifu/