

NOTES FROM MANY HANDS AND EYES MEETING
SATURDAY, MAY 31, 2008

In attendance: Roshi Egyoku Nakao, Penelope Luminous-Heart Thompson, Katherine Senshin Griffith, John Daishin Buksbazen, Lorraine Gessho Kumpf, Jessica Dharma-Lotus Armstrong, DeWayne Gojitsu Snodgrass, Ellen Reigen Ledley, Margaret Jifu Gower.

Roshi announced that what the group would address and hopefully accomplish on this day would be to continue with addressing the scope of questions that had thus far arisen. In discussion, the group worked from two basic perspectives:

First, how the core questions initially put forth by Roshi might be modified upon further reflection and consideration.

In connection with the prison project within operating within prison, thoughts offered for consideration ranged from:

- Should we consider how we are perceived by prisoners, by prison authorities?
- Should we advocate for getting Buddhism and Buddhist chaplains recognized (and paid) within the prison system and what would we have to do to accomplish that?
- Are there protocols from other Buddhist and non-Buddhist sanghas and chaplains doing prison work that we can adopt or learn from?
- What is the appropriate training/education for volunteers, what is the lay of the land in each jail or prison?
- How do volunteer view their relationships with prisoners in jails, prisons and death row?
- What group or groups at the Center are responsible for the prison project(s)?
- Given that there may be a large population of ex-prisoners who met the Dharma through various prison projects, we are principally addressing those who come through our prison project—but what is the scope of responsibility of our prison project in this connection?
- How do we classify ordained or non-ordained volunteers who are doing “religious” work or pastoral counseling within prisons—which is not confined to licensed therapists or ordained priests?
- What are the legal obligations that apply to volunteers?

In connection with ex-prisoners coming into the Sangha, thoughts offered for consideration included:

- What is the expectation of the role of the Teachers Circle in evaluating ex-prisoners for membership in the Center, as non-residents, as residents?
- How do we respond to inquiries by prisoners (by letter or otherwise) who have been involved in a different prison project, who are coming “off the street”?
- How do we determine who might be approaching the Center through our prison project, and what would be useful to find out about them?

- What are the legal obligations that apply to the Center in terms of reporting and disclosures, for example of sexual abuse or child or elder abuse?
- What do we need to know, and who would we need to disclose to (e.g., Sangha members, residents, parole officers)?

In connection with *where do we go from here* Roshi will revise the initial questions for our working document. Roshi's revised document is attached.

Next, the group identified the order of importance and priority of addressing particular broad areas of concern.

1. **The Prison Project.** For example, Roshi observed that the prison project is “wounded” right now. It was noted that the prison project was originally initiated outside the Center and later presented to the Center. Now is the time to determine whether the Center wishes to have a prison project and what that project will look like.

Before we can concretely address the question of whether the prison project should be re-structured or even retained at all be the Center, and the relation of the project and ex-prisoners to the Sangha, we need the project volunteers first to hold council among themselves to surface issues and feelings, and then to address the issues that have arisen for and about the volunteers, with the help of people from outside the project who can create and maintain a neutral space, and with a view to re-formulating the project.

Then, these issues need to be communicated. Only then can we proceed to determine how the project, as re-envisioned, can fit together with the Sangha. Of course, this will be a process of feedback and reflection between the project group and the Sangha group. The prison project volunteers who are in the MHAE group—Faith-Mind, Gojitsu, Luminous-Heart, Senshin-- will initiate this inquiry and involve the other volunteers. Roshi will talk to Koan, and anticipates that this council and meeting project will occur at the end of June or in early July.

2. **Abuse Survivors in the Sangha.** Additionally, the issues of the abuse survivors within the Sangha must be addressed. Roshi observed that people coming into a religious group have certain expectations about boundaries, notwithstanding whether these expectations are expressed or disclosed.

The question arose as to whether we can make the Sangha safe, what that would look like, how we can be safe in an unsafe world? Thus, Roshi wants to meet privately with the survivors, in a closed space, not so much as a formal circle or healing circle as just to discuss their reality. Then,

the discussion might be widened out. MHAE members Gessho, Heart-Mirror, Luminous-Heart and Daishin will support this.

3. **Prison Project in the Sangha.** Thereafter, interface between the project and the Sangha may come down to a proposal by MHAE to the Sangha. We need to consider what that would look like, so we can think things through carefully. MHAE members Dharma-Lotus, Luminous-Heart, Daishin, Lynda, Gessho and Heart-Mirror will shepherd this aspect.
4. **Prison Project Communication with Former Inmates.** Further, issues involving communications with the prisoner project and information about ex-prisoners need to be discussed. Daishin and Jifu have placed this on the agenda for discussion at the next Teachers Circle meeting.
5. **On going ex-prisoner requests.** On an on-going basis, we will address (ex-)prisoner requests on an ad hoc basis. We will check with Koan and Nagy regarding who they anticipate will be getting out and making contact with the Center. For general inquiries, we will make a statement to prisoners that our project and procedures are in transition, so please bear with us while we go through our process.

Action Items:

1. Meeting with survivors – Roshi in June or July
2. Council for Prison Project group – Roshi initiates with Koan in June or July; along with Faith-Mind, Gojitsu, Luminous-Heart, Senshin from MHAE
3. Current, on-going requests from ex-prisoners – Jifu and Daishin
 - a. Center statement on current situation for ex-prisoner inquiries
 - b. Input from TC on how to handle case by case situations
 - c. Checking with Koan & Nagy about who is on their list of folks about to be released who will be making contact with the Center
4. Post update to Shared Stewards & revised Guiding Questions document.
5. **Other??**

The next MHAE meeting will be Saturday, June 21, 2008, from 1:30 to 4:00 pm.