

NOTES FROM MANY HANDS AND EYES MEETING
SATURDAY, JUNE 21, 2008

In attendance: Roshi Wendy Egyoku Nakao, Penelope Luminous-Heart Thompson, Sensei John Daishin Buksbazen, Lorraine Gessho Kumpf, Jessica Dharma-Lotus Armstrong, DeWayne Gojitsu Snodgrass, Ellen Reigen Ledley, John Heart-Mirror Trotter, Deb Faith-Mind Thoreson, Concetta Getsuren Alfano, Lynda Golan, Margaret Jifu Gower.

Status of action items from our last meeting:

- Roshi reported that Sangha survivors of sexual abuse have been invited to a private meeting to be held with Roshi on Saturday, June 28th, at 1:30 p.m.
- Roshi has coordinated with Koan to schedule a council for volunteers in the prison project. The date and time are still being arranged. Roshi will attend if the volunteers invite her to do so.
- With respect to current and on-going requests from ex-prisoners, Sensei Daishin and Jifu raised the matter of criteria for handling case-by-case situations with the Teachers Circle. At the TC's request, Koan drafted a proposal for handling contacts with prisoners with whom prison volunteers have worked in the past and invited to practice at the Center. (As of June 22nd, that proposal has been circulated to Roshi and the prison project volunteers for comments and suggestions.) Koan has also provided a list of the four prisoners who are in this category. Of the four, two have already been released and made contact with the Center (Sean David Harley and Wendy Thompson), one has been released (Nick Daigan Granger), and one is near release (Sterling Grotweil). Koan has learned that Sean Harley is in a residential drug resistance program.
- The Guiding Questions document has been revised and circulated to MHAЕ, and an update was posted to Shared Stewards.

Summary of discussion

Roshi reiterated that taking care of the Sangha is the first priority.

Much of our discussion involved questions about the prison project, with two main focuses:

- The working dynamic and communication process among the prison project volunteers, and how the project might redefine itself; and
- How to deal with prisoners being released now and in the future, and new prisoners and project opportunities.

With respect to the first aspect, MHAЕ members who are prison project volunteers reported that sharing and communication is “vague”, decision-making has been “inconsistent”, they have had only one meeting and one council, and they are “not quite a group”. For example, one volunteer, who had been working for three or four years with one of the released prisoners identified above, was not consulted when he was released or when he contacted the Center. The volunteers talk informally among themselves about what works, but then tend to go off in their own directions. One volunteer mentioned that he thinks they would be more comfortable with more structure. Roshi pointed out that at this point, the prison project has grown out of the “big hearts” of the volunteers and they are now at a point where they can redefine what they want the project to be. Roshi will assist them in this process.

With respect to the second aspect, the volunteers said that their approaches to prisoners, and what they can offer them, depends in part on the institution. Inmates in prison are in for long terms, those in jail for short terms and those in Lynwood are awaiting sentencing. So in prisons volunteers can offer meditation instruction and if prisoners are interested, get into atonement, precepts, services. In jail the volunteers can work one-on-one and with call-out groups, and discussion is ad hoc. And--especially at Lynwood--it is largely bearing witness. Two of the volunteers said they have never invited a prisoner to come to the Center when released, but are aware that other volunteers have done so. One is operating on a case-by-case basis—with one person she has arranged to talk by phone once a week. The question of engaging with new prisoners as well as prisoners soon to be released is also being handled on a case-by-case basis.

So the question arises—how are the volunteers going to make decisions as they go along? In this interim period while vision and policy is being developed, the MHAЕ group asks that the volunteers share their decision-making processes with MHAЕ, and MHAЕ will share with the prison group. As we develop vision and policy together, Sensei Kodo has raised a point of reflection—are we a public or private space? Getsuren pointed out that the Center is unique—a hybrid.

We addressed the question of what to do if a former prisoner comes to the Center without previous contact and is recognized by one of the prison project volunteers. The group decided that, for now, the volunteer should tell a teacher, and that we should take responsibility for communicating where the Center is on this. It really is all about communication.

We agreed that, because the next Sangha Council will be a reporting council, it cannot be held until after the Prison Project Council, the survivors meeting and further discussion based on the outcome of the council and other meetings.

Action Items:

- Prison Project Council, reorganization and redefinition of prison project and project leadership—Roshi
- Prepare a clear statement of the Center’s position while we are going through our redefinition and redevelopment process, so that staff members and prison project volunteers can communicate it to inquiring prisoners—Sensei Daishin and Jifu
- Prison project—ongoing prisoner requests, taking MHAЕ concerns back to the prison project, and bringing prison project concerns back to MHAЕ—Gojitsu, Luminous Heart, Senshin, Getsuren and Faith-Mind; Faith-Mind will steward this effort
- Explore what other sanghas with prison projects are doing, develop expert resources and do internet research, and get this information back to the prison project group and MHAЕ—Luminous Heart, Getsuren, Dharma-Lotus, Gessho, Lynda and Faith-Mind; develop task lists—Faith-Mind, Dharma-Lotus and Gessho
- Prepare an educational presentation to communicate and consider the pervasiveness of sexual violence and abuse in society, what we as a Sangha need to know, what about perpetrators that may be in the Sangha, do we have any shadows—Sensei Daishin, Getsuren, Luminous-Heart, Heart-Mirror, Lynda
- Determine what life-skills training programs and other resources for prisoners are available in our community; communicate these to prison project--Reigen
- Survivors—Find out: how we can support survivors in the Sangha, are there Sangha members who have drawn lines, such as “if the Center does X, I won’t remain a member”, who is suffering post-traumatic stress disorder type symptoms, what they are willing for Roshi to share with us about their experiences and concerns (anonymously); what would “safety” and a “safe haven” look like--Roshi

Our next meeting will be Saturday, July 19th, 1:30 to 4 p.m.