

MANY HANDS AND EYES CIRCLE GUIDING QUESTIONS – Revised & Expanded

To: MHAE Circle
From: Roshi
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This is the revised and expanded version of the overview questions, which serves as our working document. These revisions incorporate our review of the initial document.

Introduction (*not changed from initial document*).

I offer a guiding question: Can we turn this situation into something meaningful, wholesome, and medicinal? To expand this a bit: What is the medicine of this situation? Can we be creative with this situation?

The MHAE Circle will address:

- What questions do we need to ask?
- How will these questions be addressed?
- Who will steward/link with the groups asked to address particular areas?
- What issues are deserving of continued collective reflection and engagement?
- What is needing to be seen/understood around the events of the Prison Project and stalker?
- Other?

I have been listening—sifting through emails, notes from the Teachers Circle, Board, Sangha Council and individuals, and conversations, culling through for main areas that need our attention. I offer this as a starting point for our work together, in no particular order of importance.

Outline of Main Areas for Consideration

1. Regarding “J”
2. Regarding our Sangha/Community
3. Regarding the Prison Project
4. Regarding Education
5. Regarding the Center
6. Regarding our Practice
7. Regarding Broader Areas of Reflection

MHAE Guiding Questions**REVISED AND EXPANDED – June 2008**

Topics are listed in no particular order of importance.

1. Regarding “J”

- a. What practice (and/or life) support will we continue to offer “J”?
- b. Can “J” remain a member of the community? If so, under what conditions?
- c. What guidelines or other support can we offer to members of the community about what they communicate to their children or others who may be frightened by “J”’s background and/or presence?
- d. What education about his situation and the community is needed? For example, legal liabilities around sex offenders, etc.
- e. What is needed from “J” himself? For example, questions raised have included:
 - i. How much disclosure does he need to make about his background?
 - ii. Does he truly have remorse for his past actions? What is the relationship between remorse and actions? Has he deeply reflected upon his actions?
 - iii. What kind of treatment has he had and is engaged in currently?
- f. What can “J” himself offer as guidelines for his being part of the community?

2. Regarding our Sangha/Community

- a. Sense of safety in the community
 - i. How can we address concerns regarding the physical, emotional, and psychological safety of sangha members?
 - ii. What assumptions do members have about these issues? What is the reality?
- b. Survivors of sexual molestation and abuse in our Sangha
 - i. What meaning (if any) do we make of the apparent pervasiveness of the experiences of sexual abuse and molestation within our community?
 - ii. Do these reflections invite or inspire any collective action within the community?
 - iii. What would serve the need of each of the survivors? For example,
 1. Is there a need for a ritual of healing?

- 2. How are survivors practicing with their experiences?
- iv. How are we to bear witness to the suffering of the victims and perpetrators, ones we know and ones we do not know?
- c. Are these events suggesting any broader guidelines or policies about:
 - i. What background information, such as criminal history, do we wish to ask new residents and/or new members to provide?
 - 1. What are the ethical considerations in asking for such information?
 - 2. What are the legal considerations in asking for such information?
 - 3. Are current Center policies “too open, easy, and fluid?”
 - ii. How do we evaluate and meet the challenge to the shared stewardship structure, in terms of
 - 1. Communication within the community?
 - 2. Transparency?
 - 3. How information is transmitted and shared?
 - 4. How newcomers are oriented into our culture?
 - iii. Stewardship/Leadership within our various projects?
 - iv. The roles of the Teachers Circle within our community?
- d. How can we use this situation as opportunities to:
 - i. Work with our various shadow energies?
 - ii. Understand trauma, projection, identification and other psychological/emotional/mental dynamics?
 - iii. Identify our leadership/stewardship strengths and weaknesses?
 - iv. Regain and grow in trust and confidence in one another, while accepting and acknowledging that there can be no perfect structure and no infallible people?

3. Regarding the Prison Project

a. The Project in the Prisons

- i. What is the project?
- ii. Do we choose to continue the project?
 - 1. If so, what would be the appropriate relationship to the Center?
 - 2. What is the mission, vision, and core values of the project?

3. How does this impact Center resources: staff, teachers, Abbot, legally, and fiscally?
 4. What group(s) at the Center are responsible for the prison project?
- iii. Are there any guidelines about the leadership and/or membership structures of the project that we want to consider?
- iv. What needs to happen to create a well-run project? For instance:
1. What is the role of the steward?
 2. Should the project consider co-stewardship, with an aim for gender balance?
 3. How are decisions made about which prisons? How many? How often? Are these shared decisions or unilateral?
 4. How can the project leadership/volunteers keep aware of the shadow parts—or just incomplete parts—of the project and of their work in the project?
 5. What is the education/orientation for volunteers regarding each facility?
 6. What is the responsibility of the PP and the Center in terms of former inmates who are not coming through our PP that want to practice here?
- v. How are the volunteers cared for? How will we address:
1. What is the appropriate training/education for volunteers?
 - a. What are the legal obligations that apply to volunteers?
 - b. How do we classify non-ordained volunteers who are doing “religious” work or pastoral counseling within prisons who are not licensed therapists or ordained priests?
 2. Debriefing from prison visits?
 3. Hero-helper syndromes and other dynamics of working in shadow environments?
 4. Education and training for volunteers?
 5. Identifying the ongoing needs for support and kinds of support for volunteers?

6. What are the institutional rules for prison work (and how these do not apply to former inmates coming into the Sangha, e.g., “don’t ask, don’t tell.”?)
7. How do the volunteers and teachers view their relationship with the inmates, former inmates, and any ongoing relationships?
8. How are the volunteers perceived by the prisoners, the institution officials, and other denomination chaplains (see Quaker notes)?
9. Are there policies and practices employed by other Sanghas and non-Buddhist religious communities that may be helpful?
10. What are the rules about prison advocacy (social justice actions) that volunteers need to know?

b. The Project in the Sangha

- i. Do we choose to continue the project?
- ii. If so, what is the project? What are there policies and procedures we want to put in place for the project? For example:
 1. Are there restrictions or guidelines we want to adopt about the kinds of prisoners we will engage?
 - a. 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”?
 - b. How do we determine who might be approaching the Center through our prison project, and what would be useful to find out about them?
 2. Are there restrictions or guidelines we want to adopt about who can be invited to participate in our community? For example:
 - a. Who are the specific people coming out of prison?
 - b. What are their circumstances and our own?
 - c. How has prison affected them?
 - d. What treatment have they received and are receiving?
 - e. What should we consider as they seek to practice with us?

- f. What are the project volunteers “promising” those in prison about Sangha involvement upon their release?
 - g. Should there be a “first step sangha” in which former prisoners are worked with outside the community for a defined period before entry into the community?
 - h. What kind of education is needed by the project leadership and Sangha before someone can enter into the community?
 - i. How involved do we—volunteers, staff, teachers—need to be in a former inmates’ life?
- 3. What are the considerations for a former inmate applying for residency?
 - a. How will the residents themselves be involved in these considerations?
 - b. Can the Center serve as a “half-way house” type of function? What is the expectation?
- 4. Are there guidelines we want to adopt about what gets communicated to the community about the prisoners we are engaging, and the timing and form of such communications?
- 5. What role should the community or a subset of the community play in orienting former inmates?
- 6. Are there any guidelines about the leadership and/or membership structures of the project that we want to consider?
- 7. What is the expectation of the role of the Teachers Circle in the practice of former inmates?
 - a. What about TC members not involved in the Project?
 - b. What is the role of TC in evaluating ex-prisoners for membership? For residency?
- 8. How does this impact Center resources: staff, teachers, Abbot, legally, and fiscally?
- 9. Are there policies and practices employed by other Sanghas and non-Buddhist religious communities that we can adopt and learn from?

c. The Project in the State of California

- i. Should the Center and/or project volunteers advocate for Buddhist chaplains (paid?) in prisons in the State of California (currently, not recognized by the State)?
 - 1. If so, what we have to do to accomplish this?
 - 2. What has been the work of other Sanghas in this?
- ii. Should ZCLA advocate for Buddhism to be recognized as a religion in the State of California?
 - 1. If so, what we have to do to accomplish this?
 - 2. What has been the work of other Sanghas in this?

4. Regarding education

- i. What kind of education and/or training are needed to address issues arising from our current situation for:
 - 1. Particular individual situations?
 - 2. The community?
 - 3. Teachers, staff, residents, leaders etc.
- ii. What education needs to be given to all teachers and stewards on violence/abuse of all kinds to develop greater sensitivity and understanding around these issues?
- iii. What other areas are we ignorant of and need to address?
- iv. How does the Center provide for this education and/or training?
- v. How does the community orient new members and at what point in their involvement with the Center?
- vi. What education do the teachers and priests need in terms of legal obligations to report such actions as sexual abuse, rape, homicidal threats, etc?

5. Regarding the Center (see also #2: Regarding our Sanga/Community?)

- i. What are the legal and fiscal issues around the prison project that the Center needs to be aware of and address?
- ii. Who will be responsible for information on various offenses and/or crimes, legal requirements for parolees, and the like?
- iii. How are we to assess the time and staff demands of the growth in the Prison Project?
- iv. What is the Center's legal obligation for informing the Sangha about its members' pasts, if any?
- v. What resources and experts within and outside the community can we call upon for guidance?

6. Regarding our practice

- i. What is wanting* to be known from this situation, both individually and collectively? (* “is wanting” = emerging? being uncovered? there to be seen, perceived? etc.)
- ii. What quality of space is wanting to be created within ourselves and within the community?
- iii. What do we need to learn to become bodhisattvas more fully and effect the change we wish to see in the world?
- iv. Where does this situation want to take us?
- v. What is the wisdom/medicine that needs to arise?
- vi. How are we to make friends with all that has arisen?
- vii. How are we to understand and live out inclusiveness and interconnectedness?
- viii. How are we to deepen our understanding of shadow energies, including that which keeps us from bringing things to light?
- ix. What are the forms through which we will explore these questions?

7. Regarding broader areas of reflection

- i. What meaning or connections do we make (if any) of the history of our founder’s conduct with women members of our community, of the appearance of a stalker in our community last year, and of the events surrounding “J”? Is there something now wanting to be seen or engaged?
- ii. What meaning or connections (if any) do we make of the practice of the Gate of Sweet Nectar (inviting and feeding the hungry spirits) and shadow work with the appearance of a stalker in our community last year, the suicide of a woman who briefly attended the Center last year, and of the events surrounding “J”? Is there something now wanting to be seen or engaged? How will this inform our practice and service?

Thank you.