

**Zen Center of Los Angeles
Final Report to The Angell Foundation
Organizational Spirituality Grant 2007-2008**

TO: THE ANGELL FOUNDATION

FROM: ZEN CENTER OF LOS ANGELES
WENDY EGYOKU NAKAO, ABBOT

RE: SPIRITUALITY INITIATIVE FOR ORGANIZATIONS
Final Report of Zen Center of Los Angeles

DATE: January 12, 2009
Transmission by E-Mail

On behalf of the Zen Center of Los Angeles, I extend my heartfelt appreciation for the Organizational Spirituality Grant given to ZCLA in 2007. As stated in our three- and six-month reports, our project, Under the Bones of the Master (Bones), was carried out over nine months from February through October, 2008. The impact of our nine-month inquiry into leadership in our spiritual organization continues to resonate individually and within our community and organization.

We submit this Final Report in response to the questions posed by The Angell Foundation (TAF). In addition, we have included the report for the last three months of the project, August to October, 2008 (Attachment A).

1. Please describe whether you completed the activities and achieved the goals listed in your proposal. Please explain any variances.

There were no significant differences from the original proposal. Since our inquiry was process-oriented, the process unfolded within the strong container (framework) based upon The Three Tenets (Not-knowing, Bearing Witness, and Taking Action), which was taught to the class and embodied throughout the inquiry (Attachment B).

The initial five-fold goals of the original proposal served as a jumping-off point for the process. We spent time exploring these, but allowed the inquiry to take its natural course. To review, the original goals were the following:

- a) to identify the principles of feminine and masculine wisdoms.
- b) to explore the differences among these wisdoms and their variations.

- c) to explore how our understanding of spirituality in organizations is influenced by these wisdoms.
- d) to recognize and evaluate how the Center manifests and incorporates these wisdoms.
- e) to develop a plan to incorporate new ways of working together.

The following are noteworthy:

- **The class became a laboratory.** During the first session, one of the participants called the class a “lab.” This captured the flavors of inquiry, exploration, research, and investigation both for individuals and the group journey together. The lab approach came to characterize the inquiry.
- **A parallel inquiry** occurred at the Zen Center. There was an unexpected and significant development at the Zen Center which paralleled the Bones lab. In February 2008, around the time the inquiry formally began, we learned that a person practicing at the Zen Center through our prison project had served prison time as a convicted child molester. This revelation resulted in a parallel inquiry for the entire community, not limited to, but including, all Bones lab participants.

Significantly, the parallel inquiry, by utilizing the container for the Bones lab, became a direct example of how the lab operated. The inquiry included Sangha-wide (community) councils and the formation of the Many Hands and Eyes Circle, which consisted of twelve members (most of whom were new leaders) who guided the Sangha through a very complex situation. This parallel process exposed the entire Sangha to the application of the principles of inviting collective wisdom and of collective awakening.

The unexpected revelation of sexual molestation understandably brought deep-seated reactions from the Sangha and threw us into a situation where it was unclear what to do. We made collective efforts within the lab container, which worked to realize the following:

1. We used the lab container to elicit needed information to the group, incorporating its questions into our process. We held a Sangha Council in which the Abbot presented the container; the perpetrator, prison project volunteers, and Sangha were together; and an outside witness was present. In the Council, the facts of the situation emerged, and about twenty Sangha members shared their histories of sexual molestation and abuse.
2. Those most closely involved with the situation shared their insights. For example, the prison project participants developed new insights into the nature and leadership of their project; survivors of abuse who thought their healing complete moved to a deeper level of wholeness over time, and the group learned directly that each person, including

the person in question, was an essential “hand and eye” for the health of the community.

3. We established a “many hands and eyes” approach by inviting all views to help discern appropriate action. This Circle came to be called the Many Hands and Eyes Circle. Its name signified major shifts in our way of working: the Abbot informed the Sangha that we had evolved to a place where one person could no longer hold and resolve complex issues for the many, that each individual’s perspective and experience is a significant hand and eye for the health of the whole, and that the appropriate responses would arise over time through the practices of the lab container.
4. We developed and continued to use Guiding Questions to frame our inquiry into every facet of this challenging situation. The use of Guiding Questions was also a shift in process for the Zen Center. This was a direct application from the lab. We have attached the questions to give a flavor of the process. (Attachment C)

We wish to emphasize that the success of the parallel inquiry is an example of how the Bones lab container worked. The training in the container process and the commitment of the Abbot and Sangha to the process enabled us to face this volatile situation.

- **Changes in Zen Center leadership.** One of the motivating factors for writing the original grant proposal was the question of the insufficient number of women leaders at the Center. During the year, there were significant leadership changes, most notably that the Board president stepped down and the first woman Board president at the Zen Center was elected. As various positions have been vacated throughout the year, many people are stepping into positions and roles that are new for them and, at present, nearly all of the lead positions are held by women.
- **Shift to collective awakening and wisdom.** In spite of the increased number of women leaders that occurred at the Zen Center during the Bones lab and shortly thereafter, the lab resulted in a significant shifting in organizational leadership away from a perspective of gender (masculine/feminine; patriarchy/matriarchy) to a collective approach. The resulting evolution to collective awakening and collective wisdom marked a major shift for the Zen Center.
- **Allies John Ott and Rose Pinard.** The skillfulness of John Ott and Rose Pinard as allies to the inquiry was a significant contribution to the Bones lab and to Roshi Nakao. Their wisdom and experience in collective work, their ability to frame and offer new metaphors and language, and their capacity to offer without attachment contributed to the success of the inquiry.

2. Have your plans, timeline, or approach changed from those described in your proposal or six-month interim report? If yes, please describe and explain the changes.

There were no major changes to our plans, timeline, or approach. This is most likely due to the fact that the Zen Center has undertaken inquiries in the past through which our forms and practices for sustained inquiry have evolved. We came to appreciate that a key strength of the Zen Center is the willingness of its members to commit to sustained inquiry into challenging areas.

Although the Bones lab was conducted within the original plan and timeline, the developments of the parallel inquiry show the way in which the lab work is continually adaptable to unforeseen organizational change. Developments such as the Many Hands and Eyes Circle move far beyond the Bones timeline.

3. What are the main lessons learned from this project? (For example, what did you learn about your organization? The population served? The problem or issue you addressed?)

The project was both a powerful learning and unlearning experience for everyone. Some of the key lessons are the following:

- **The capacity to face the bones.** The bones of “Under the Bones of the Master” referred to the shadows (unfinished baggage) of our organizational history. We have openly addressed these issues over the years, and the lab gave us an opportunity to surface some of this with a new group of people. During the inquiry, Roshi was also contacted by several individuals (bones) from the Zen Center’s past and had the opportunity to provide a healing space. The Zen Center today is well-positioned to respect and honor its traditions and create new forms for its future. The work with organizational shadow themes is ongoing with the natural shifting of the Zen Center’s membership.

A second key aspect of bones was the unpacking of key dynamics that inhibit wholesome and creative leadership. Specifically, we wish to note the following:

1. The dynamics of power-over/power-under was reoriented to power with (empowering together).
2. The dynamics of rigid gender identifications was reoriented to the fluidity and diversity of gender.
3. The dynamics of victim/perpetrator was reoriented to owning individual worth and truth.
4. The dynamics of reorienting towards the One Body (wholeness of the group) and Diversity/Differences (the worth of each individual).

5. The dynamics of reorienting the relationship between formal authority and “the power to create” (Ott/Pinard).
- **The power of the container.** The container or framework (Attachment B) of The Three Tenets of Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Taking Action enabled people to stick with the process and allow for personal and group growth. This was evidenced by the constancy of attendance, the participation in the e-group, and the community’s capacity to go through the parallel inquiry. Also significant was the deepening of our understanding and practice of The Three Tenets themselves.
- **The need for new language.** The restriction of language and the need to develop new language for expressing new concepts became apparent very early on when we began to create lists around how we viewed leadership and gender. The new concepts we explored around leadership also stretched us to find new language.

Specifically, we explored new language, such as:

1. leader-ful: becoming a conduit for wisdom to arise regardless of role.
2. collective awakening: the practice of individuals being awake in service of the awakening of the whole.
3. collective wisdom: continually inviting the deepest wisdom of the group to arise.
4. containers: forms, frameworks, and structures that bring forth the invitation for wisdom and compassion to arise.
5. empty-full: a new word exploring the inherent wisdom of Zen Buddhism, that each thing is both empty of a self and full of everything.

Deepened and broadened shared stewardship. The original proposal came about six years into our experiment of evolving a shared leadership model appropriate to our spiritual practice. The Bones lab opened this experiment to a new generation of participants by allowing them to learn the basic concepts of The Three Tenets container, find new ways for participation, understand the need to create new forms and language, and unlearn deeply held beliefs on hierarchy, power, and gender that impede the formation of a new model. Lab participants also noted that organizational history and personal history can come together powerfully in collective awakening.

- **Leap into collective wisdom and collective awakening.** Our leap into the concepts of collective wisdom and collective awakening at the end of the inquiry actually marks an era of new learning for the Zen Center. Zen practice in this country has focused on individual awakening, although the fundamental teachings are based on an all-inclusive collective vision. We are at the beginning of manifesting this exciting new exploration.

- **Intimacy, Trust, and Diversity/Differences.** Individuals disclosed very personal and meaningful experiences throughout our leadership discussions, both in lab sessions and in the e-group. It was clear that the container and the sincere practice of deep, deep listening to the many voices of the whole resulted in intimacy and trust and in experiencing ourselves as the “other.” Significantly, we learned that diversity/differences are, in fact, the strength of the group. We recognized that creating forms and practices that encourage rather than suppress diversity and the uniqueness of each person is fundamental to evolving both individual/community and organizational spirituality.
- **Openness to creating new forms and questions.** We continued to open the question of what forms serve spiritual practice, particularly in times of crises, and the necessity of practicing these forms on an ongoing basis. This became especially apparent when the situation of the parallel inquiry arose. As cited previously, a key learning here was to frame inquiries and situations in terms of guiding questions.
- **Small group discussions.** The group resonated with the small, break out group sessions and asked that these be incorporated into the Zen Center’s approach to Zen practice on an ongoing basis.
- **Connection and communication: the One Body and the many hands and eyes.** We relearned the significance of orienting ourselves to the whole and honoring our fundamental inter-being, or relationships to each other and the whole. We experienced how communication through intimate sharing is a key form of embodying this connection. We became more aware of our conditioned responses and found core beliefs challenged. Most importantly, the scallop principle as taught by John Ott and Rose Pinard underscored our Zen Buddhist metaphors of the One Body and Many Hands and Eyes. To summarize, each individual is a “hand and eye” that carries an indispensable perspective and capacity for action for the well being of the organization.
- **Becoming leader-ful.** There was considerable unlearning about how individuals held leadership and authority in formal organizational roles and how leadership can function on a situational basis regardless of roles. This opened up the concept of “the power to create” from moment to moment as an embodiment of awake living.
- **Being an ally.** Through John Ott and Rose Pinard serving as allies to our inquiry, we learned the value of the practice of “standing with” each other in challenging or new situations. Their capacity to stay present to the process, listen deeply, and allow their wisdom to emerge through their presence and direct observations contributed to the deep learning of the lab.
- **Taking spirituality in organizations seriously.** Spiritual organizations are not necessarily run spiritually—strange, but often true. A lesson reinforced was that the Zen Center’s ongoing efforts to run its organization along

spiritual principles are worthwhile and necessary not just for us, but for the lessons we can share with other organizations.

4. In assessing your overall project design and implementation, please explain:

a. What you believe was the overall impact (positive or negative) of the project?

- Unquestionably, the overall impact was very positive for individual participants, our community, and the organization. Individuals reported significant shifts toward “becoming a leader in their own lives.” We, individually and collectively, realized the enormous potential of living with the approach of being awake with the open invitation of allowing collective wisdom to arise.
- Many lab participants have reported incorporating the effects of the Bones lab in their workplaces and family life. Specifically, we became more accepting of diversity and more able to “not know.” This ripple effect of the work in the lab into other areas of day-to-day life has been effective and rewarding.

b. What participants/intended users thought about the project? What was most helpful or impactful to them?

- Lab participants reported that the following were among the most impactful to them: learning and practicing The Three Tenets container, the opportunity to delve into the topics of the inquiry within the container with a group of people, experiencing the One Body aspect of a collective group as being the diversity inherent in each person, and being thrust to a new level of collective wisdom and awakening.
- We site a few comments below, which are representative of the learning in the lab:
 1. “... [This lab became] an invitation to risk that my “eye” is valid and trust the process of discerning whether what is arising is my darkness, or if it’s the group’s darkness. The lab process led me into the expansion of tolerance and into the true nature of us all—this collective wisdom. The space created in the lab was just so valuable.”
 2. “ ... The lab process has been collective wisdom itself. I heard such wisdom from different people, and my whole way of looking at something often completely turned around. It’s had a huge affect on me. ”
 3. “... I learned that we’re just continuously revealing something that is already present. I’m examining this in my own life, not just in Zen practice, but in all sorts of many larger collective processes that I take part in. I recognize the significant difference between starting from

not-knowing and awakening together, and starting from a place rooted in knowing. This lab experience will resonate through me for many years to come.”

4. “... I find myself kind in this very murky area of being a male leader in profoundly feminine, nurturing work. It is complicated to be a really potent receiver, or a really powerful listener, and seer. It’s very rich to be inventing this. It feels new. There isn’t a lot of sign posts along the way, you know fathers and elders that have really done this a lot, so it’s great to be in this conversation and the leadership side of all this. ... We can see the way council practice moves the leadership around, how just that practice itself transforms people to share more fully and openly. There’s something really transformative about that and being facile and being really mindful about how we hold leadership roles. I think it’s really key to empowering the collective.”
5. “... all the voices created a wonderful, creative field. I was thinking of all the word lists we started with and the story of the Center. I had some really important insights through the process. We’re in a practice of communal awareness; we are aware together. We communicate; we are creative together. When we had a crisis situation (the parallel inquiry), I learned that when you have a container, you have a place where creativity can bubble up. This lab was a beginning rather than an end point. It’s a very rich and fertile ongoing conversation.”

c. What strategies and/or activities were most effective? Least effective?

- **Most effective:** small break out groups, e-group sharing, The Three Tenets container, council process, use of guiding questions, class summaries, John and Rose as witnesses and allies, and experiential exercises on unpacking gender by riKu Matsuda and voice dialogue sessions on matriarchal/patriarchal voices led by Roshi Nicolee McMahon.
- **Least effective.** Large group check-out rounds often went overtime; at times we could have used more experiential exercises to punctuate our dialogue and brainstorming; and more time for small group sessions.

d. To what extent and in what ways did the project improve your organization?

To summarize:

- We recognized the need to create more clearly defined protocols for feedback on organizational changes and structures.

- We clarified important concepts and beliefs that often undermine our organization. Specifically, these were issues of power dynamics, relationship of the individual to the whole, the value of diversity/differences and its relationship to a healthy organization, the lessons of inclusivity and the so-called other, and the necessity of individuals to do their own spiritual work and to distinguish that from the work of the group.
- It brought new levels of understanding and respect for individuals in the group and for the opportunities created when a group of committed people engage in a spiritual practice together.
- We found that incorporating physicality in the exercises was very effective in moving us into embodying the work and moving us out of resistant or fearful mind sets. For example, the lining up exercise to experience gender spectrum, opening the sessions with movement or sound, drawing, writing, and so forth.
- It taught us the enormous potential of the group to evolve a new approach to leadership that incorporates tradition and history and to find the forms appropriate for this place and time.
- It taught us that organizational history and personal history can come together in powerful ways that enhance collective and individual awakening.
- We learned to trust even more deeply to invite wisdom to arise rather than to force a solution and to use guiding questions to keep open to the unknown. As reported, this was an especially powerful learning in the parallel inquiry and development of the Many Hands and Eyes Circle.

5. If you plan to continue this project in the future, based on what you learned, how would you improve or change it? How will the project be funded?

We plan to continue our inquiry into collective wisdom and collective awakening as it relates to leadership and our organization. The forward momentum cannot be stopped.

- **How would we improve or change it?** A key element would be to partner with another organization of like-minded explorers with which we can share and learn from each other. This became apparent during TAF's second Grantee Retreat at La Casa De Maria. There could be valuable opportunities for the Zen Center to learn from one or more other organizations that participated in the organizational spirituality initiative.

- **How would the project be funded?** We would like to apply for additional support from TAF and supplement it with support from our members.

6. How are you planning to share the results of your project with others?

- Since the project inception, Roshi has been asked to consult with two other Zen organizations, a center in Seattle and a group in Missouri, for help with organizational matters relating to leadership and practices that will support communication and collective wisdom.
- Because we are still digesting our experience, we are not quite ready to publish our experiences. However, as our process continues to unfold, we expect to write up our inquiry and disseminate the information. A significant part of this effort is the crafting of new language to describe our transformation.
- We are incorporating our new language and Shared Stewardship concepts and approach into our official documents.

7. Were the resources and support that the Foundation provided during the grant term helpful in implementing your project? How can we be of further support to you in the future? Do you have suggestions or recommendations for how the Foundation can structure the initiative in future years?

Were the resources and support that the Foundation provided during the grant term helpful in implementing your project?

Yes, and specifically, we wish to note:

- The openness and encouragement of the Foundation staff regarding the challenges of undertaking this initiative into the new area of organizational spirituality.
- The introduction to John Ott and Rose Pinard, who have been exceptionally helpful.
- The 2008 Grantee Retreat, which was a terrific learning experience about organizational spirituality in action
- Mr. Perry Oretzky's visit to the lab, which brought new understanding of the work of TAF and of David and Lynn Angell.
- The financial support, which was essential in making this project possible.

How can we be of further support to you in the future?

- Continue to encourage and fund these explorations. There is great need for constructive new ways of working together in the world.
- Continue to introduce us and other organizations to people who are devoted to organizational development along “spiritual” lines.

Do you have suggestions or recommendations for how the Foundation can structure the initiative in future years?

- The Zen Center was fortunate to have an already-existing container of spiritual-organizational practices from which to grow our inquiry. The bedrock of our process is the container (Attachment B). To have such a container, formed through central tenets, which holds a process and incorporates leading questions would seem to be essential in doing the work of spirituality in organizations. Perhaps at the initial TAF grantee retreat, more concrete practices could have been shared with and between organizations as useful tools that can be adapted to their context.
- We feel that the hunger for and effectiveness of our small group work might be considered an important feature to look for in grant applications for future Angell Foundation spirituality initiatives.

8. What would you like the Foundation to know about your project that might guide us in developing future Spirituality initiatives or grantmaking priorities?

Specifically about our project, we note the following:

- The interactions with John Ott and Rose Pinard were helpful and significant to our process. We find it essential that such professional expertise be offered to organizations. For example, we needed help clarifying the various themes of the organization, creating new concepts and language, and having outside perspectives.
- The opportunity to focus on the spirituality of organizations needs to be encouraged. We found that the effect rippled throughout people’s individual lives and had impact on their family and work lives. Several participants reported that their approach to their organizations changed, and they have implemented some of what they learned in the Bones lab.
- The need to develop physical activities/exercises that create a space outside of analysis.
- The opportunity to realize that organizational structures and spirituality are not mutually exclusive. TAF can encourage this inter-relationship between structure and spirituality in their organizational spirituality initiatives.

We feel the following is also important to note:

- The Angell organizational spirituality initiative speaks to the hunger of individuals to work harmoniously and productively together to do good works. Specifically for organizations that are geared to helping others, *how* such organizations actually function day-to-day in a way that honors each individual within the organization calls out for examination and exploration. This cannot be overestimated.
- Collective spiritual inquiry work is extremely time intensive and intimate. It requires tremendous personal, collective, and organizational time commitments, including for the project leader. It also depends on a lot of face-to-face intimate sharing and exchange. This type of work is by its nature difficult to quantify and unfolds over time, and yet it requires a great many forms of tangible support. We suggest that TAF consider flexibility in length and amounts of grants to support this work and consider extending and/or expanding the grants as the unfolding continues.
- The initiative was helped by two key elements offered by TAF:
 - 1) Offer of consultants skilled in organizational work, such as John Ott and Rose Pinard. We suggest that TAF provide and fund continuing access to such consultants as we continue to develop and test the work. We find that we are testing and developing new concepts that require the support of people with such expertise.
 - 2) The gathering of all grantees in July 2008 at La Casa De Maria. Along these lines, we encourage TAF to continue to consider how it can further engage individuals from the organizations that have done at least one round of this work in a collaborative effort. For example, TAF might sponsor a program or retreat for leaders who embrace this work to participate together and continue the learning already in motion. This would supplement organizational-specific work with the building of a community of practitioners and further the ripple effect of this work.

9. Please submit a budget report that indicates year-to-date project actuals spent for each line item and explain any departures from the original budget. If the entire grant was not expended, please outline a proposed plan for use of the remaining grant funds.

The final budget report is attached (Attachment D). Variances have been reported earlier, but nothing significant. When we realized the value of John Ott and Rose Pinard as allies and witnesses, we made allowances for their support. Due to how the process evolved, we did not use as many guest presenters as we had anticipated at the outset of the project. The class members also made individual pledges for the inquiry totaling \$9,199.00.

10. Please explain whether The Angell Foundation grant helped you to leverage other grants or resources from other entities.

The Zen Center did not receive any other grants or resources from other organizations in support of this inquiry.

Attachments (as separate files):

A – Report on Last Quarter of Project, August through October, 2008.

B – Bones Lab Container (Diagram)

C – Guiding Questions for Many Hands and Eyes Circle

D – Final Budget

END.