

Summary Report of Shambhala Diversity Alliance Interviews

Submitted October, 2008

The Shambhala Diversity Alliance came together over the last year to assist the mandala in our effort to make the Shambhala teachings meaningful and inviting to the broadest diversity of people. The following words best define our mission:

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche teaches that a key aspect of learning to live in harmony with each other is the discipline of the individual. The Shambhala Diversity Alliance has formed to make use of our shared discipline to help us all reach through our fear of the “other” and dissolve our sense of separation. We all suffer in this way. To acknowledge the suffering on all sides of our differences is to open our hearts to the basic goodness in us all whatever our physical, mental, or cultural make-up.

We invite all members of the sangha to join us in drawing on the Shambhala teachings, the writings of the Diversity Working Group, and all sources of fearless compassion to provide a forum and structure for this work. We want to enrich our sangha with the widest range of perspectives in order to encourage the broadest diversity of people to explore Shambhala teachings. In this way, we can exercise our discipline to create enlightened society.

The Alliance conducted twenty-nine interviews in the Winter and Spring of 2008 in order to help determine the need and/or desire for diversity training in Shambhala centers throughout the mandala. The interviewers included:

- Cortez Rainey – Baltimore
- Megan Kennedy – Seattle
- Laurie Wilson – Denver
- Shon Nu – Shambhala Mountain Center
- Annie Popkin – Portland, OR
- Michael McCormick – Portland, OR

The centers at which at least one person, sometimes two, and usually the center director or diversity contact person, were interviewed included:

- Madison, WI
- Milwaukee, WI
- Chicago
- Dorje Khyung Dzong, Walsenberg, CO
- Portland, OR
- Dallas, TX
- Juneau, AK
- San Antonio, TX
- Los Angeles
- Seattle

- Albany, NY
- Atlanta
- Baltimore
- Brunswick/Portland, ME
- Burlington, VT
- White River Junction, VT
- Austin, TX
- Boulder, CO
- Washington, DC
- Shambhala Mountain Center
- New York
- Lexington, KY
- Sonoma, CA
- Berkeley, CA
- San Francisco
- Denver
- Minneapolis
- New Haven, CT
- Philadelphia

We limited our calls to centers in the U.S. because the cost of calling outside the country would have been prohibitive for the interviewers.

What follows is a summary of the responses to each of the questions asked of the interviewees:

Question 1: Has your sangha seen issues of diversity or bias come up?

- Responses: 17 of the 29 centers interviewed have had issues come up. Most of those that haven't (10 of 12) were represented by an interviewee who was personally aware of some issues in their sangha. In one sangha, it was reported that people of color (POC) assume diversity there.

Question 1a: What are the issues?

- Responses: The issues run the gamut. The most frequent seem to be race, physical accessibility, and class.
- In no particular order, they include:
 - Families (including single parents) and children
 - Mental disabilities
 - Class
 - Educational differences
 - Age
 - Race
 - Physical disabilities

- Sexual orientation
- Political differences
- Gender
- Different spiritual needs and religions
- Safety/access to health care
- People with dogs
- Sexual harassment
- Language
- Ethnicity
- Immigration
- Transgenderphobia
- Body type
- Language of the teachings

Question 1b: If issues have not come up, why do you think they haven't?

- Responses: It appears issues have not come up mostly in and because sanghas (10 of the 12 where issues have not come up) are almost all white middle-class. Some said they have no vision or vocabulary to address diversity issues. One sangha feels they're very open. They think talking about issues makes things worse/draws attention to differences. In another sangha, it was reported that the mindset of the old guard is others will come to "us."

Question 2: Where issues have come up, have you worked on those issues in your sangha? If so, in what ways? How effective was it? What worked, what didn't?

- Responses: The vast majority of sanghas, 22 of 29, have made some effort to address issues; a minority, 11 of them, have made many efforts. The effectiveness of those efforts is negligible or unknown in many instances, and clear in some.
 - The most frequently addressed issues are physical accessibility and openness to and/or support of gays and lesbians.
 - Most sanghas have gay and lesbian members who appear to feel comfortable there and/or have formed Queer Dharma groups.
 - Several sanghas, at least 8, have specifically addressed race; some to good effect, some not.
 - This is clearly an ongoing issue.
 - Class or economic issues are most often addressed on a case-by-case basis.
 - Aside from the Shambhala Scholarship Fund, there is no overall, systematic means of addressing it.
 - Several trainings, at least 8, have been offered in different sanghas, mostly on diversity and race.
- The following is a list of all the efforts to address issues that our interviews revealed, the number of times each kind of effort was mentioned (if more than once), and an indication of their effectiveness if that was known or revealed:

- Participation in diversity phone calls – 2
- Outside consultation
- Scholarship Fund (POC and other) – 2 – Effective where implemented
- Outreach (brochures in public library, PR) – 4 – Mostly not effective or don't know
- Participation in prison program – 2
- Children's programs – 2
- Queer Dharma Group – 5 – Effective
- Diversity, Inclusion, or Outreach Work Group or Council Seat – 4
- Women and Buddhism Conference/Women's Retreat – 2 – Effective
- Accepting different religions
- POC or Diverse People in Leadership – 3 – Effective
- Making facility wheelchair accessible – 5 – Some attempts effective, some not
- Translation of materials and Interpreters – 2 – Interpreters effective
- Community Meeting/Discussion/Listening – 5 – Some effective
- Moved meeting place – Effective
- Celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Creating no bull-shit space – Effective
- Stressing accountability – Effective
- Class for 20-30 year olds
- Work/Study Program – Effective
- Deaf Meditation Workshop – Effective
- Spanish Meditation Workshop
- Created role of Protectress – Effective
- Safety Working Group
- Women's Support Group – 2
- Interpreter for Deaf – Effective
- Family Programs
- Hired diversity trainer – 2
- Designated housing for elders and people with physical disabilities and limitations
- Diversity Contact person or Coordinator – 4
- POC Group – 2
- POC Retreat - 2
- Teaching unconditional healing re: illness and disability
- Mid-Eastern Party
- Alcoholics Anonymous Group
- Men's Group
- Reader for blind man
- Group response to charge of heterosexism
- Posting sign re: scents and allergies
- Anti-racism training
- Moving center closer in

- Distributed/posted Shambhala Aspirations on Diversity
- Case-by-case conversations re: money/ability to pay
- Paying Ikebana artists
- Diversity survey
- Collected money to help member
- Community program on speech discipline
- Open door policy re: paying for programs
- Work with those with mental illness and remain open to them
- Program on inseparability of feminine and masculine principles
- Trainings on Space Awareness Practice
- Work with other Buddhist communities
- Diversity training

Question 3: Would you like to have a member of your sangha receive training (from a group of senior Shambhala teachers and professional diversity workers) so they can help you with diversity issues: for example, the member could be trained to use Shambhala principles in facilitating group discussions on diversity?

- Responses: Most, 22 of 29, said they want the training.
 - One said everyone needs training, especially the leaders.
 - One said their sangha can work on the issues themselves.

Question 4: Might there be a member of your sangha who has substantial experience working with diversity issues who might be willing to work with a team of senior Shambhala teachers as a diversity trainer?

- Responses: Many, 11 of those interviewed, suggested people, 18 in all, from their sanghas as trainers.

Issues for Shambhala Diversity Alliance to address and ask Shambhala leadership to address:

1. Does Shambhala want to do outreach? If so, to what end?
 - How would our outreach differ from proselytizing?
2. The invisibility of people who represent diversity and the individual and structural continuation of exclusion and lack of awareness.
 - Fear that focusing on diversity will make things worse
 - Target groups may not want it
 - Resistance to change
 - Not recognizing the issue of power inequities
 - Lack of information re: diversity and how to make change (skillful means)
3. Retention, or lack of it, of people representing diversity and reasons for it.

4. Lack of vision and vocabulary (and presence of exclusionary language in Shambhala teachings)
 - Developing Shambhala teachings and practice to address all relevant issues.
5. Making diversity training dharma specific.
6. Educating Shambhala leadership.
7. Educating current members.

Recommendations of the Shambhala Diversity Alliance to Shambhala leadership and Curriculum Committee:

1. Develop courses and exercises that encourage students to explore diversity in everyday life and foster enlightened society, and integrate these curriculum elements in existing Shambhala Buddhist trainings and programs at all levels.
2. Provide center leadership a general blueprint (similar to Diversity Training in Shambhala Buddhism located on the Diversity Resources webpage) for addressing a broad spectrum of diversity issues, as well as issues of particular interest and relevance to each sangha.
 - Include suggestions on how to begin the discussion, for example:
 - a. What is diversity here?
 - b. What's missing?
 - c. Why is there not more diversity in our sangha?
3. Provide directions and training for center diversity contact persons as well as teachers who will be responsible for education in diversity.