

## **DIVERSITY WORKING GROUP**

### **Diversity Contact Persons – Conference Call**

June 24-25, 2006

#### Meeting Notes

**1. Background:** During the weekend of June 24-25, two conference calls were held between Cortez Rainey and Shambhala diversity contact persons. The purposes of the calls were to allow diversity contact persons to talk with each other about their center/groups diversity initiatives and for Cortez, on behalf of the Diversity Working Group and Sakyong's Council, to find out what support they need.

The calls were held Saturday and Sunday at noon. About 30 diversity contact persons were invited to call in. The following persons met.

Ed Colon, Minneapolis  
Linda Francis, Baltimore  
Nancy Grant, San Francisco  
Ivette Guillermo, Philadelphia  
Hamish Maclaren, Boulder  
Patience Paradox, Seattle  
Ashutosh Raina, Baltimore  
Cortez Rainey, Baltimore  
Lodro Rinzler, Boston  
Karen Starr, Albany  
Linda Watson, Washington, DC

**2. Updates:** Cortez updated the group on the following developments in the international mandala. (a) Sangha members in Toronto/Chicago/New York are developing a scholarship fund for persons of color. (b) The New York City Shambhala Center is planning for a person of color retreat in December or early 2007. (c) Members of the Sakyong's Council are developing guiding principles for persons interested in doing diversity training. (d) The Diversity Working Group is preparing to develop recommendations for creation of an international scholarship fund.

**3. Summation of introductory comments by contact persons:** Several tools and processes (surveys, contemplations, discussion groups, diversity courses, and casual conversation, etc.) are being used to find out how sangha members are experiencing inclusion and diversity and to facilitate exploration of their individual experiences. Contacts indicate varying levels of training and experience working with diversity matters. Everyone seems to need help.

#### **4. Key observations made by contact persons:**

Saturday, June 24<sup>th</sup>

- It would be helpful if senior vajrayana practitioners were more available to support efforts to develop diversity programs.
- There are a lot of people who want to help foster greater openness and inclusion of diversity in Shambhala—but they don't know how to go about it. They need help. They want to make sure they are in harmony with the view and with Shambhala culture.
- It is commendable that Shambhala's people of color are participating in people of color retreats. It would help if white Shambhalians also got together and talked.
- Friends of people of color—white allies—have expressed an interest in having a retreat for whites, a forum/process for raising their awareness of their whiteness.
- Although our programs define who we are as a Shambhalians, it would help if our local sanghas would gather often talk about who we actually are as a community—when it comes to our views on race, age, class, political issues, etc.
- Meditation is an individual process; however, as a community we need to explore what it means to meditate together. Is there room for us to discuss or contemplate our shared experiences?
- We need a team of people who can help us develop diversity programs—not just acharyas of color. We need white acharyas to help; maybe one of them can partner with Acharya Ferguson. Perhaps there could be other partners who can help with other diversity groups: gay, lesbian, etc.

*Diversity Working Group Assignment:* Ask the Council of Acharyas to assign a couple of acharyas who would be willing to serve as advisors to sangha members who are trying to develop diversity programs such as retreats, courses, groups, etc.

Sunday, June 25<sup>th</sup>

- We should support people of color who wish to have their own retreats, as well as opportunities for them to practice with the larger community.
- There are only a few people of color in Shambhala—and for this reason it is reasonable that we would provide them the resources they need to become a more integral part of our community. When more people of color are integrated in Shambhala, there will be less need for separate retreats.

- Diversity is such an important issue for Shambhala, it would be helpful if there were a place one could go in Shambhala to receive diversity training.
- It's most important to find out where people are with respect to diversity. The approach should *not* be "We know what's wrong, and here's how to fix it."
- Diversity awareness training is not something that is separate from the Shambhala Buddhist teachings, rather it is integral part of the dharma—it is what basic goodness, cocoon and warriorship are about—relating to what comes up for us in different or uncomfortable situations and extending ourselves.
- One approach to fostering an atmosphere of greater inclusion is to begin by starting where people are—start by exploring their experience of being included and their experience of being excluded. Then encourage them to open up and talk about those experiences and any issues they identify.
- All of our diversity awareness activities should incorporate the values of Shambhala Buddhism—the contemplation, *Diversity and The Warrior's Heart* (located on the Shambhala Congress Online site under Diversity), is one example of this.
- In addition to diversity training, we need to simply learn how to work with people and ourselves, and have a willingness to sit with each other. We already have resources to open ourselves up. We need courage.
- Sangha members who feel they are open don't feel that people are excluded. But people of color, gay and lesbians are saying they're not included.
- For people who don't feel there is exclusion, it may be helpful create situations where they can experience what exclusion feels like and allow them to talk face to face about their experience.
- There is not a lot heard about *outreach*. Nevertheless, we need to have a discussion about it, how to do outreach.

*Diversity Working Group Assignment:* Arrange for an exclusive e-list to be set up that diversity contact persons can use to communicate among themselves about their center and groups diversity initiatives, activities, issues. Also provide them with periodic bulletins that contain information about diversity-related news, programs, resources, and issues in Shambhala.

*Diversity Contact Persons Assignment:* Share the processes or tools that are being used by your center and group with all of the diversity contact persons. For example, Ashutosh will send questions that were used for contemplation/discussion and the material on Council practice. Nancy will be sharing some ideas soon too, and Ed could share the questions he's been using to survey the Minneapolis sangha.

**5. Next Conference Call:** Getting diversity contact persons together for a conference call every 6 months is okay, but it was decided that it would be helpful at this point if the group met again sooner—in September. Cortez will arrange.