

DIVERSITY WORKING GROUP

Diversity Contact Persons – Conference Call

September 30, 2006

Meeting Notes

1. Background: On Saturday, September 30th, at 12 Noon, Eastern Daylight Time, a conference call was held with the Shambhala diversity contact persons. The purpose of the call was 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 at noon. Over 30 diversity contact persons were invited to join the call. The following persons called in.

Olivia Fite, Baltimore
Nancy Grant, San Francisco
Ivette Guillermo, Philadelphia
Hamish Maclaren, Boulder
Cortez Rainey, Baltimore
Kathleen Roberts, Brunswick
Miguel Sawaya, Los Angeles
Laurie Silver, Lexington
Maurizio Smith, Los Angeles
Karen Starr, Albany

2. Follow up from previous conference call: Acharya Spiegel made a presentation to the Acharya Council on diversity in August. He let the acharyas know that diversity contact persons need acharya help in developing persons of color retreats and other diversity training programs. It was decided that the best approach to getting acharya help is to ask any acharya for help. This approach would give every acharya an opportunity to relate to the diversity concerns of various centers, and reduce the likelihood that it would become the concern of only one or two acharyas.

The Diversity-Talk email listserv has not been created yet, in part because key people were on vacation this summer.

3. Recent developments: Carolyn Mandelker asked for ideas on ways diversity issues could be addressed in the new Shambhala Buddhist curriculums. The Diversity Working Group contacted several persons and asked them to send suggestions to her and the Curriculum Committee.

Mabinti Dennis (Toronto), Alice Dan (Chicago) and William Auerbach (New York City) are continuing to work on a scholarship fund for persons of color in North America.

The Diversity Working Group is presently looking at diversity from a global perspective, for ways to be more inclusive of sanghas in geographically isolated regions, e.g., Tehran, Seoul, Kyoto, Cape Town, etc.

4. Summation of introductory comments by contact persons: Individual centers are doing various things: taking note of the ethnic diversity that already exists in the community and exploring ways to invite more diversity; holding monthly meetings in which participants examine and discuss their personal biases and prejudices; hosting acharya-led diversity programs; developing diversity training modeled on the *Going Beyond Bias* program that the Sakyong's Council and Mandala Governing Council participated in last summer; trying to figure out how the largely white sangha can relate to a racially and ethnically diverse population .

5. Key observations made by contact persons:

- “Diversity” is defined in the *Shambhala Aspirations on Diversity, Accessibility and Compassionate Care* document that is located on the Shambhala Congress Online website under Diversity as: *religion, spiritual tradition or teachers, path of practice, opinions, class, nationality, culture, ethnicity, race, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, or physical, perceptual or mental abilities.*
- *Shambhala Aspirations* needs to be translated into other languages, i.e., French and Spanish.
- If we are going to address diversity and accessibility issues in all their forms Shambhala (Mandala Services) needs to have a budget item for translation.
- President Reoch will introduce the Accessibility Review Group during his tour of Shambhala centers in North America. The group will soon conduct a survey all Shambhala centers to identify accessibility needs. Although the American Disabilities Act (ADA) does not apply to religious organizations, the group plans to use an ADA-adapted survey instrument and would like for diversity contact persons in each center to use it to survey their center buildings.
- After the accessibility survey is completed, funds will be needed to correct deficiencies that are found in center-owned buildings (e.g., have ramps installed, etc.). Our centers may not be able meet this need. So diversity contact persons can help by looking for creative solutions to accessibility problems.
- Several funding sources were mentioned such as the Shambhala Trust and Casey Foundation and Light House for the Blind. Nancy Grant offered to use Dialogue—a database company with powerful search engine—to look for foundations that support community accessibility initiatives.

- *Awakening Freedom: Linking Spirit Across Difference*, a weekend meditation program for people of color with Rev. Hilda Ryumon Gutierrez Baldoqun and Acharya Gaylon Ferguson, was held in May at the Berkeley Shambhala Center. The program was wonderful, and it meant a lot to everyone who participated. There is an interest in seeing more programs like this happen in the Shambhala mandala.
- The merit of focused efforts to get persons of color to attend programs in our Shambhala centers was discussed. Although such efforts are genuine, it was suggested that perhaps a more useful approach would be to take Shambhala programs into other communities such as sangha member Mabinti Dennis is doing in Toronto. Or perhaps our largely white sanghas can devote time to simply building relationships with various segments of the communities in which our centers are located. Another approach is to learn how to be allies to persons of color in our sangha and in the larger community.
- People's Institute offers workshops that help white people to examine white culture and white privilege and learn how to ally with persons of color to dismantle racism. For example, a white ally would step up to the plate when someone makes racially offensive comments. Since being a white ally is about being fearless, the People's Institute's training would be ideal for Shambhala. The Institute does excellent work, although some white people have left the program, feeling that it's not "okay" to be white.
- Anyone who is interested in joining a conference call to talk about white allies should contact Nancy Grant: NCGrant@aol.com

Accessibility Working Group Assignment:

Hamish Maclaren will send the accessibility survey to the diversity contact persons.

Diversity Working Group Assignment:

Cortez will follow up on Diversity-talk Listserv, obtain information about the content and approach of the Berkeley POC retreat and see if there is someone who can translate *Shambhala Aspirations* into French and Spanish.

Diversity Contact Persons Assignment:

Nancy will look for foundations that provide grants for community accessibility initiatives and arrange for diversity contact persons to conference-call about white allies training.

Olivia will provide information about upcoming workshops sponsored by the People's Institute as well as an internet forum for exploring white culture with the intention of ending racism.

6. Next Conference Call: We did not set a date for our next meeting. However, we had decided previously that we will meet in December. The first and second weekends of

December are the most likely dates. Diversity contact persons will be surveyed to determine when most people are available.