

The Diversity Teaching Project

**Working with Diversity:
Perspectives from
Shambhala Buddhist Teachers**



Art by Victor Castro

A Project of the Diversity Working Group

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Preface

During his address to the Third Shambhala Congress, in Cologne, Germany, in May 2007—an event attended by individuals from 19 countries—Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche noted that Shambhala *is* a diverse community.

Indeed, Shambhala is very diverse. Our centres are located in different regions of the world—Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North America and Oceania—and reflect different nationalities, cultures, languages, ethnicities and races. In addition, people who come to our centres may have different religious faiths, follow different spiritual traditions or teachers, or have different paths of practice and opinions, including political views. They have different ages and genders, as well as different sexual orientations, and physical, perceptual and mental abilities.

One does not need to look far to see the diversity of our global mandala. And one need not look far to see that diversity poses challenges for everyone in Shambhala and the larger world. With this awareness, many in Shambhala are looking for frank, candid, direct and explicit guidance on how they can work with diversity issues they encounter in everyday life—within and outside Shambhala.

To support this inquiry, the Diversity Working Group supplicated Shambhala Buddhist teachers throughout our global mandala for short teachings that address aspects of diversity or difference— 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. How do specific Shambhala Buddhist teachings, practices or the overall view of the dharma speak to everyday diversity experiences?

The following teachings were received. They reflect diverse perspectives. Each has its own style, approach, richness and wisdom and supports Shambhala's aspiration to be open, inclusive and welcoming of diversity. Linda G. Francis proofread the material and in a few instances made editorial suggestions, most of which the contributors graciously accepted.

Many thanks to the Shambhala Buddhist teachers who responded when asked to offer a teaching on diversity. May all beings benefit.

—The Diversity Working Group

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1. Welcoming People Who Have Different Political Philosophies

By Ralph Asher

“The Buddha’s teaching is used merely for political purposes and to draw people together socially.” Sadhana of Mahamudra

I offer obeisance to my guru Chögyam Trungpa, who founded centers of Dharmadhatu openness where people could practice, effect real personal change, become free of samsara, and help others to do the same. This is true Engaged Buddhism utilizing neither violent nor nonviolent aggression.

If Shambhala is to be truly diverse it must welcome people of differing political philosophies. Diversity is impossible if we continue to allow the Vidyadhara’s vision to devolve into a Religious Left political action group.

I once asked two long time students how they would feel if the President of Shambhala were to write a letter to the UN decrying the annual worldwide killing of 46 million babies in the wombs of their mothers, if an Acharya’s spouse and other respected teachers were to get on the international Shambhala Day phone connection and insult liberal political leaders and causes that they personally espoused, if public talks at their center slandered liberal leaders by accusing them of unspeakable but unsubstantiated crimes, if their center’s bulletin board told of a protest march against the local abortion clinic that weekend, if their center’s newsletter advertised its weekly class on “Right to Life,” and if every Shambhala social event involved their having to listen to sangha members condemn causes and people that they deemed important and worthy of respect. They both immediately said that they would leave the scene.

I have witnessed every one of these in our scene and more, except that “abortion” becomes “war on terror/Iraq,” “Right to Life” is “Peace,” and the terms “conservative” and “liberal” are interchanged. And, of course, it is not the liberal leaders who are denigrated and slandered. Consequently, I have ceased attending Shambhala group practices, socials, gatherings, and dharma talks - including those done on the international hook-ups. I would never subject my conservative friends to such abuse by inviting them to dharma events. My personal affiliation is with Dorje Khyung Dzong, which is the one center remaining in Shambhala world where one can practice the teachings of Chögyam Trungpa in a “politics free zone.” That this hostile environment causes his teachings to force half the population of this country to feel unwelcome saddens me, of course. This emotion is especially poignant since I was present when the Vidyadhara emphatically declared that both the liberal and conservative doctrines were equally false and to be eschewed by our community.

I submit this teaching because it was requested and would not have offered it otherwise – not even under some misguided “editing” of the teachings on “Engaged Buddhism” by Thich Nhat Hanh. He did after all include in this 14 supplementary precepts: “Do not force others to adopt your views, whether by authority, threat, money, propaganda or even education” and “Do not use the Buddhist community for personal gain or profit, or transform your community into a political party.”

2. The Great Eastern Sun Is Coughing

By Stéphane Bédard, Dharma Translator and Ikebana Teacher

In my experience, diversity is natural for people who have developed confidence in themselves. Being afraid of difference or rejecting difference, or simply not being interested in another way of experiencing the world, in any another culture but our own, shows that we feel superior to others, whether we know it or not. Often we're not even aware of our hidden ways of expressing rejection. Always then, there is me and them.

Over the years, the two people I felt closer to for decades were not born in my culture. One of them was the Tibetan Master, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoché, who in 1978 was kind enough to ask a small group of us to translate some of his work into French. He certainly showed us how he enjoyed having students coming from all over the world, how he appreciated sharing his wisdom and playing with words in various languages and how he was never afraid to tell us, very often, how much he loved us. I recall a session he was leading with the translators who work from Tibetan into English, where he was explaining the profound meaning of a text by giving lots of details about the colors, the sounds, the hats that people wore in such period, their dances, etc. He was outlining the atmosphere of the text, which always includes much more meaning than words alone. He made us enjoy the richness of his own culture that he described with joy, simplicity and humor. We felt invited in this very human short story. He taught us that translation isn't just about finding the meaning of words and their equivalent in another language. With time, I understood that to really translate – building a bridge between two cultures – we have to be inquisitive, on a deep level, beyond conceptualisation, about the people who belong to the culture from which we translate and develop a true heart connection with the culture where our translation will be read. That inspires us to put a tremendous amount of precision, passion, playfulness and love in our art. It is then possible to bridge the cultural gap and to try to render this part of the teachings which is beyond words. The silence within the text: the space.

Seibi Watanabe Sensei is a Japanese ikebana Master with whom I have been studying for 25 years now. Again, the fact that she was born and grew up in a country and culture that is very different from mine has always brought richness and a sense of celebration to our relationship. When she moved to Montréal, 51 years ago, she didn't speak French or English (the two official languages spoken in Canada). She started to teach ikebana in Japanese with an English interpreter and over the years her students helped her to learn English. We may think that students from various cultures (English Canadian, Belgian, Québécois, Americans, French, Japanese, Chinese, Hispanic, etc.) wanted to study with her because of her ikebana mastery, but having had the privilege of assisting her for several years, I know that her mastery had a lot to do with having a genuine interest in people's lives, feeling her students' basic goodness and giving them confidence to believe in it. Leading our lives as an art implies letting go of us and them.

We have to feel our own richness to not experience diversity as a threat. There is a lot of joy and peace in the life of a warrior who chooses to remain inquisitive about various colors, shapes, tastes, languages, forms of art, dances, sports, political systems or ways to take care of the elderly. How much of a warrior are we when we're not on a familiar ground, and when our usual ways of conducting business are questioned by other cultures? Diversity offers a precious opportunity to explore our fixations, solid views and dogmas. In refusing to enter that dance, we create pain for others and we lose our connection with heaven. Then the Great Eastern Sun starts coughing behind the clouds and wonders when, on Earth, we're going to grow up.

3. The Warrior's Challenge

By Michael Carroll

From the forthcoming book *The Mindful Leader* (Shambhala 2007)

If we take a moment to look around, we notice that nothing is the same and everything is different. Opening to such profound “diversity” with all its wonder, shock and uncertainty is the warrior’s challenge; and opening to this in one another is how we build an enlightened society.

4. Fearless Enjoyment: Exploring the Diversity of the Phenomenal World

By Ngakma Zr-m Dri'md

From the point of view of both the traditional Buddhist and Shambhala terma teachings, the cultivation of human diversity is a no-brainer. But of course, something stands in the way, and for practitioners, whatever stands in the way, in any situation, is the point of practice. What stands in the way is fear. In the Shambhala teachings, the root of fear is a reaction to the power and intensity of our own existence. We separate ourselves from that in order to try to hold on to it, get rid of it, or pretend it doesn't exist, and from that the entire panoply of the setting sun world billows forth. We create Me and Other, and the fundamental fear then becomes fear of Other, whatever we see as Not Me.

The Shambhala teachings also include the simple practice of fearlessness, and it is the most potent tool I know of for working with any situation where fear of Otherness is operating. It is deceptively simple: instead of moving away from fear, as is our habit, move toward it. Be curious about it, especially about the physical sensation of it. Drop the storyline of the fear and remain with the physical sensation. Fear is perpetuated by the thought stories that fear itself generates. If the thought story is dropped, even for a moment, the physical emotion has a chance to unwind.

This may seem too simple and too personal a practice to be useful in approaching the broad social issues surrounding human diversity. Among the documents on Shambhala's diversity web pages is a piece by Farid Esack, in which he discusses learning to live with ourselves and learning to live with the Other. He says that these must occur simultaneously, because self-discovery "runs too great a risk of degenerating into narrow narcissism."

I agree with Esack's point, but as a practitioner of the Shambhala teachings I have to question a rigid dichotomy between self-discovery and discovery of the other. Everyone has known spiritual practitioners to whom Esack's description might apply, but I would say that such people have misunderstood the principle and function of practice. The practice of fearlessness is like a rock dropped in a pool. If I take direct responsibility for my own fear of the Other, and make a practice of letting go of the thought stories that that fear generates, it immediately has an effect on everyone I encounter: on the street, on the job, in my sangha. It extends out beyond the human world and affects how I relate to the rocks, oaks, purple finches, fence lizards, mountain lions, and rattlesnakes I live with.

The Shambhala teachings say that when fear is allowed to unwind, then the entire phenomenal world becomes vividly present, and we continue the practice of open-ended exploration and appreciation outward. We are, as Trungpa Rinpoche said, "explorers of the phenomenal world." In San Francisco in the early 1990s, I was part of a shifting cast of Shambhala practitioners who called ourselves the Explorers of the Phenomenal World. We would get together and do things we had never done before, go to places to which we had never been. We went bowling. We went to a reggae concert. We went to a tourist attraction that none of us natives had ever visited. We went for walks in new places.

Although that group was short-lived, I have considered myself to be an explorer of the phenomenal world ever since. In the process of an ordinary human life I have found myself with many opportunities to discover new worlds, and I have coped well or badly with the experience. The process is always to move forward into fear and then outward in open-ended interest. It is a matter of enjoyment, not of grim duty, and one can never fail because one can always begin again. I think that any particular diversity initiatives undertaken in that spirit, and with openness even about the nature of the result, would have a high likelihood of success.

5. No Color, All Colors

By Acharya Gaylon Ferguson

Excerpted from: No Color, All Colors. In: *Mindful Politics*, Melvin McLeod, editor. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2006, pp 261-271.

My oldest friend in the dharma, Al, has just returned from his annual solitary meditation retreat. We keep in touch sporadically, and when he calls to find out how I've been, he asks what I've been working on lately.

"An essay," I say, "trying to find something helpful to say about Buddhism and the politics of race."

"Really?" he says, with evident disbelief. "What does the pristine, holy Dharma have to do with something as sordid as contemporary politics?" There's a long pause and a loud silence on our cellphones—we've clearly boggled each other's minds, at least for the moment. Here we go again, I think to myself: the crisp mountain air of retreat meets the warm blast of city strife.

"I always thought Buddhism was primarily about waking up," Al continued, "you know, coming into a new state of consciousness, that sort of thing. 'Dharma politics?'—it sounds like an oxymoron! And more than a little scary with the rise of all these righteous fundamentalisms in the world today."

"One can find many statements by the Buddha in the early texts about how human beings might live together in sane, harmonious communities," I replied. "There's an interesting study from the 1970s; it's just called, simply, *The Buddha*, by Trevor Ling, a British scholar of religion. Ling insists that the Buddha intended his teaching primarily as *social* revolution, not a religion in the narrow spiritual sense. That narrow sense of spirituality is a peculiarly modern invention, by the way, and goes hand in hand with the rise of materialism."

"It's just that I always thought that practicing sitting meditation and bringing about some change in my own state of mind was enough for one lifetime. Sure, I vote and send donations to worthy causes from time to time. But I never connected dharma, meditation, and awakening with issues like my neighborhood, or homelessness, or the national government, or war, or consumerism, or immigration policies, or for that matter, the tangle of issues around race. Everybody knows that discussing race and racism is like swatting at the proverbial 'tar-baby.' No one comes out of it clean."

"Well you're right about that—and isn't that a telling image to use for it? Back around the turn of the millennium, a group of New York Times correspondents did a series called 'How Race Is Lived in America.' Both the journalists of color and the white writers acknowledged that, unlike most stories they cover, they had a feeling of inadequacy in dealing with race. As one of them candidly admitted: 'I can do a business story or a science story or a legal story and figure out right from wrong, up from down. With a race story, it's tougher because there are no absolute rights and wrongs.'"

"Yeah—we've all been there, but that can be a bit of a cop-out, too. As Katagiri Roshi used to say: 'You have to say *something!*'"

We both laughed, remembering the ruthless compassion of Katagiri's stern, Japanese face. And then Al pushed on:

"So—what do you have to say, or rather what does the Buddha's dharma have to tell us, about the politics of race?"

"Well, examining the politics of race begins with understanding racism, a social disease that still infects the body politic at large."

"Yes, I can see that. Just look at last year's riots in France: At first commentators said this was all part of the famous ongoing 'clash' between Islam and the West. When I got back from retreat and saw the photos online and in the magazines, I had to agree with Fareed Zakaria: 'The pictures looked more like those of America's race riots in the 1960s than of Fallujah or Ramallah.' And we don't have to look far for some of the sources of that pent-up frustration: 'A recent French study showed that job applicants with "French-sounding names" had 50 times the chance of being interviewed as those with Arab- or African-sounding names.' Fifty times!"

"So that's the starting point—the truth of racism. It's a little like those commentaries on the four noble truths, the original teachings of the Buddha: the truth of suffering, its origin, the truth of the stopping (or cessation) of suffering, and the path to that goal. Some commentators have noted that the structure of this teaching is a lot like a traditional medical diagnosis. The disease is called suffering. There is a cause for

this disease: craving and greed and aggression based on ignorance. There is then—and this is the liberatory proclamation of all dharma—the third truth of the possibility of a return to health and basic sanity. But overcoming the disease and returning to good health doesn't happen automatically, just upon hearing the diagnosis. We have to take the medicine—the fourth truth of walking the 'eightfold path,' of which meditation practice, 'right mindfulness,' is one of the main 'folds.'"

"Yes, I've heard that model for understanding the path before. Sometimes they say we should regard our lives whirling around in conditioned existence (*samsara*) as a disease, the teacher as the physician, the dharma as the medicine, and practice as actually taking the medicine. Seems similar. So what's that got to do with racial politics?"

"Well, we've already started working our way through. The first step, the first truth so to speak, is acknowledging the existence of racism. As with suffering, things are only made worse by our denying this fact—pretending it didn't happen, that it doesn't continue to happen—bias, bigotry, racial discrimination, subtle and gross violence based on ethnic difference. It becomes an unmentionable presence in the room at certain moments. We perpetuate our imprisonment in neurotic suffering by ignoring it, by denial. Many people have mentioned the immense relief they felt upon first hearing the noble truth of suffering clearly and simply stated. Certainly that's what I felt when I first heard my own root teacher, Trungpa Rinpoche, teach on 'all-pervasive suffering.' It was painful and hilarious at once. Suddenly it was no longer this hideous little secret that everybody knows, yet we pretend it isn't here with us constantly. So too with racism—just acknowledging its presence and persistence is a step toward health. A necessary step—though not sufficient."

"I agree that it's a difficult topic even to look at—much less to actively engage in *changing*. Why do you think it's so hard just to acknowledge the existence of racism?"

"Well, several reasons. First, the topic makes us all uncomfortable because there's a feeling of powerlessness, often mixed with contrary impulses toward both guilt and blaming: 'I didn't start this, so what do you want me to do about it? I can't undo centuries of oppression. I'm sorry, truly I am. People have to help themselves; it's their own karma, their own fault for lacking discipline.' The insight buried among these conflicting emotions is that racism is much larger than any individual's *personal* goodwill."

"Yes—it's daunting to face something so huge, with so much historical weight and momentum—from the genocide of indigenous peoples to the Final Solution, from internment camps during WWII to the continued exploitation of farm workers, from lynchings to the increase of racially segregated urban schools in America today. What's that old saying? 'History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awaken.'"

"You've got it. And the first step in 'awakening,' the goal of the Buddhist path, is recognizing that one is 'asleep.' If we don't acknowledge the prevalence of our habitual 'sleepwalking' state, how can we begin the path to waking up? Consider this: psychologist Beverly Tatum says that when she gives talks on 'the reality of racism in our society...in almost every audience I address, there is someone who will suggest that racism is a thing of the past. There is always someone who hasn't noticed the stereotypical images of people of color in the media, who hasn't observed the housing discrimination in their community, who hasn't read the newspaper articles about documented racial bias in lending practices among well-known banks, who isn't aware of the racial tracking pattern at the local high school, who hasn't seen the reports of rising incidents of racially motivated hate crimes in America—in short someone who hasn't been paying attention to issues of race. But if you are paying attention, the legacy of racism is not hard to see, and we are all affected by it.' Remember that story about how the media portrayed whites taking food and other necessities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as stalwart 'survivors' and blacks doing the same thing as 'looters'?"

"So, again, it's a matter of paying attention, being mindful and aware, not closing ourselves off in a little cocoon of denial."

"Yes—but some aspects of the first truth may not be directly visible to the naked eye; we may need to open the eye of insight to see them."

"Like what?"

"Like white privilege—the system of advantages that accrue to anyone with white skin. Tatum says, 'Most white people, if they are really being honest with themselves, can see that there are advantages to being White in the United States. Despite current rhetoric about affirmative action and "reverse racism," every social indicator, from salary to life expectancy, reveals the [socially conferred] advantages of being White.'"

"Hmm. Does she have any evidence of such honest self-reflection, in which whites actually become

conscious of white privilege? Somehow I have my doubts.”

“Well, yes, she cites an article by a Euro-American feminist scholar, Peggy McIntosh, called *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*: ‘McIntosh identified a long list of societal privileges she received just because she was White. She did not ask for them, and it is important to note that she hadn’t always noticed that she was receiving them.’”

“I suppose that accounts for the sense of unconscious, taken-for-granted entitlement we see so much of today—sort of ‘Isn’t everyone like we are?’”

“Exactly...”

“But we must move on now to the second truth—racism has an origin. That is to say, racial prejudice and the system of white privilege arise from causes and conditions. They aren’t decreed by a supernatural being; it isn’t simply a matter of fate. Racism is a learned mental model!”

“Is that the bad news or the good news?”

“Well, it’s both, my friend. Because racism is a set of learned attitudes and behaviors (just as no child is born speaking Italian, no infant is born racist), that means it can be ‘unlearned,’ systematically and personally undone.”

“Sort of like the Buddha’s twelve ‘links’ of dependent arising, the *nidanas*—where you work backwards from effect to cause and so undo your confusion? Working backwards, from grasping to craving to feeling to basic ignorance. Then, working forwards, if we eliminate ignorance, eventually we get to no grasping?”

“Yes, remarkably similar. Tatum notes that, growing up in more or less homogeneous, racially segregated neighborhoods, as most of us do, means that we gain little direct experience and information about those who are different from us—whether that difference is ethnic, religious, or economic. And the information we do receive is often biased and distorted, exaggerating negative traits and omitting positive achievements—or the reverse! This suggests that ignorance is a prime cause of racism.”

“What about the third truth—the truth of liberation, the truth of stopping the madness? Is it really possible to awaken from the nightmare of human history?”

“Well, we aspire to that. As Zen master Suzuki Roshi used to say, in Mahayana Buddhism we aspire to save *all* sentient beings not because we think that’s going to happen at some time we can foresee, but *because* it is beyond all our concepts of what’s possible and impossible. We make the aspiration to step *beyond* the petty dualistic mind that tells us what can and cannot happen. Who believed that the Berlin Wall would come down in our lifetime? Who believed, when Rosa Parks refused to stand up, that the era of segregated bus rides would come falling down?”

“So...it’s more like a vision, a vision of a truly egalitarian community—not based on gender or racial or class discrimination.”

“Yes, the third truth is like a true vision. It inspires us, like the brilliant warmth of the sun, to walk toward it: *that’s* where we’d like to live, in a sane society. That’s what we’d like for our children, and our children’s children, all of them. When we say, in the contemplation of loving-kindness: ‘May all beings be happy,’ there’s an implied universality: ‘*all* beings.’ It’s not, ‘May all being who look like me be happy.’ From the point of view of this contemplation, racism is a form of xenophobia; we’ve been trained, badly trained, to fear and distrust those beings who are not like us. It’s inspiring to me personally that many people have entered into meaningful conversations and transformative disciplines to counter that training, to ‘unlearn racism,’ or to re-consider, as men, our deeply internalized sexism. There are some really moving moments in Lee Mun Wah’s documentary, *The Color of Fear*, showing men of diverse racial backgrounds in honest and revealing dialogue with each other.”

“Right—a bigger vision of compassion is built right into the teachings: ‘May *all* beings be free from suffering.’ That reminds me of a saying from Sakyong Mipham: ‘The dharma is all colors and no color. The dharma is all truth and no truth.’”

“Yes, that could be one description of liberation—beyond fixation, all colors and no color, welcoming everyone and not fixating on color. In King’s still ringing words, we aspire to a world in which we would be judged by ‘the content of our character, rather than the color of our skin.’”

“So is that one description of this healing journey, from colorism to no color to all colors?”

“Possibly. This gets a little tricky. Some people use ‘no color’ to mean ‘our color’—you’re welcome

here as long as you act, dress, and pretend to look like everyone else here—but we don’t have any ‘color consciousness,’ so you shouldn’t bring that up, okay? Whiteness is often invisible. Law professor Harlon Dalton compares it to ‘the tick of a familiar clock,’ easily tuned out: ‘In settings where whites dominate, being white is not noteworthy...’ The challenge for white folk is to realize, even when they are not in the minority, that *their* race matters too. It establishes their place in the pecking order. It hangs over the relationships they establish with people of color.”

“That’s very similar to when the word ‘mankind’ was used to mean ‘humankind.’ If you asked someone, particularly a person of the male persuasion, about this unmarked gender bias, they would probably have said, ‘No, no! When we say “he,” it means “he” and “she.”’ After you stopped laughing, you would have noted that, in the same way, some people feel that ‘white’ means everyone is included. It’s a curious version of universalism. We’re all one, so don’t rock the boat by mentioning any differences. I’ve often heard a related question—why the need for people of color retreats? Isn’t that self-segregation? Isn’t it against the teachings of the Buddha to have retreats that exclude white participants?”

“Yes, I was part of a People of Color Retreat at Spirit Rock Meditation Center—and afterwards heard that same question several times from some well-meaning Euro-American Buddhist practitioners. (We are touching on aspects of the path here.) The spiritual journeys of people who have been wounded by white supremacy may usefully include times of retreat with others of similar backgrounds and experience. There have now been Asian-American and Pacific Islanders dharma retreats, African-American retreats, People of Color retreats, and Gay/Lesbian retreats—at least in some of the more progressive sanghas. This is not unlike women’s retreats and men’s retreats, is it? This can be all part of establishing a ‘safe container’—temporarily free from unintended or unthinking harassment. In such settings, meditators are often able to open to themselves in new ways, freed for the moment from the chronic need to defend and be on guard from the next attack. Then, as with retreats from time immemorial, practitioners can return strengthened to the challenges of daily life with work and family.”

“So are you going to suggest that Buddhist practice in itself frees one from racism and all other social ills—classism, sexism, homophobia? Is that the fourth truth here, the truth of the Buddhist path?”

“Definitely not. As they say, most definitely not. It seems quite clear that, whatever the brilliance of the teachings of the buddhadharma, individual practitioners can continue for years, perhaps lifetimes, with these prejudices left largely untouched by meditation practice. One may even learn to use dharmic concepts like ‘karma’ to reinforce separatism and indifference to the suffering around us. Why engage in outreach efforts, since, if those people had a ‘karmic connection’ with the dharma, they would already be living in the same neighborhoods as we do?”

“Yes. The white supremacist thinking in my own sangha and community is so deeply entrenched that it does not see itself. ‘What, we racist? Surely you’re kidding.’ Yes—what of the path, the fourth truth, in this case, the way of undoing racism? What do you recommend?”

“Well, there’s no generic prescription here. We enter this work from very different identities and locations and histories. The path to undoing will be very different for descendants of immigrants and those of us whose ancestors arrived here enslaved, for those of us who grew up materially comfortable and those who grew up impoverished, different for historically privileged WASPs from the Upper East Side than for a straight Latina from Spanish Harlem, for middle-class Midwesterners from the suburbs than for a working-class, Irish Catholic gay man from Dublin. We all have different entry points, different sets of insights and blinders to our own internalized oppression and privilege. Different paths for different folks. According to some traditions, these were the Buddha’s last words: ‘Work out your liberation with diligence!’ Or, as another, more recent buddha put it, ‘Jolly good luck!’”

“And the politics part? Do we work with other people to engage the dharma politically—and in particular the politics of race?”

“Yes—and that’s the other part of the forth truth of the path. Since ‘race’ is largely a *cultural* construction, a matter of *social* definitions, we cannot undo racism alone. The word ‘politics’ is from *polis*, the ancient Greek city-state. Politics has to do with our lives together, in cities and communities and societies. It’s where we get the word ‘polite’—how we can live together with decency and gentleness. So a cultural politics of race needs to involve group work, community activities. It cannot be a matter of an isolated individual’s practice and exploration alone. Bondage and collective liberation are both born in social life, our humanly

vibrant, lived experience with others.

“An example is Bhimrao Ambedkar, born an ‘untouchable’ or dalit, in the caste system of India. To read his experiences growing up—when he was beaten for drinking water from a well and thus ‘polluting’ it—reminded me of the many brutal stories of segregated life in the pre-Civil Rights era South. Later, Ambedkar was educated at the London School of Economics and Columbia University, where he studied with John Dewey. Ambedkar had many energetic exchanges with Gandhi and helped draft the constitution of modern India. In 1950, he resigned from his position as the country’s first minister of law when President Nehru’s cabinet refused to pass the Women’s Rights Bill. In 1956, renouncing the caste system that had abused him for his dark skin for decades, he ‘went for refuge,’ in a large public ceremony, committing himself to the ‘three jewels’ of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Joining him, in a great gesture of collective liberation, were 380,000 dalits, women, men, and children, who also formally became Buddhist.”

“Wow, that’s an amazing story; I’d never even heard of him. Still, as inspiring as Ambedkar’s life and journey were, I’m left wondering: what’s that got to do with you and me and the situations we find ourselves in today?”

“Yes you’re right. As ‘words don’t cook rice,’ there’s much good work remaining to be done. Shall we continue our dialogue another time?”

6. Equality, Exchange, and Aspiration: Three Steps to Inclusion

By Alice Haspray

This past autumn I heard the Venerable Khandro Rinpoche teach in New York City. At that time she articulated three steps to help us manifest kindness to others. I have heard Khandro Rinpoche say many times—*If there is not kindness in the heart of the meditator, of what use is all of this anyway?* Good question. For me, the following three contemplations act as a gateway to acceptance of myself and to inclusion, openness, and kindness toward others. Try it out.

The following can be done as a contemplative exercise. (The sentences in bold are from my notes of Khandro Rinpoche's talk in New York City. The paragraphs following those sentences are some of my thoughts on her teaching.)

First, begin by looking at every person you encounter as being equal to you.

Literally—equal. We are not better or worse than anyone else. We are not higher or lower. All of us are equal in our basic humanity and basic goodness. Equality. We all share the genuine heart of sadness. Let the notion of equality penetrate to the marrow of your bones—let it hit you on a very practical level. The Buddhist teaching of equality is a profound key to understanding why we are afraid of diversity—of why we might be uncomfortable with someone who is different from us.

Second, exchange yourself for others.

We are all suffering. No one wants to be excluded, unhappy, poor, homeless, sick, hungry, dying, mistreated, ostracized, condescended to, ignored, rejected...no one. No one wants to suffer. Think of that. Think of how it feels to be looked at as if you don't exist. Feel the hearts of others. Feel that. Exchange yourself for them. We all share a wounded heart. For me, it helps to literally visualize myself in the skin of another person. What is that person feeling in that moment? Feel it vividly—let it in.

Finally, rouse the aspiration to cherish others as being more important than you are.

This is a radical shift in perspective. Usually we are so sure that we are the center of the universe. But, we can let go of this constant cherishing of "me," and we can open completely to others. We can notice our opinions, our biases; our assumptions. We can—if only for a moment at a time—let go of our defenses and selfishness and be fully present for another. We can serve others and offer our genuine heart without expecting anything in return.

7. Kitchen Sink Diversity

By Ashley Howes

"Genuine inspiration is not particularly dramatic. It's very ordinary. It comes from settling down in your environment and accepting situations as natural. Out of that you begin to realize that you can dance with them."

From "One Stroke" in *Dharma Art* by VCTR

Diversity is the sort of issue that makes one cringe because it is often part of a 'liberal' totalitarianism that, in the interests of being unbiased, shies away from acknowledging differences. This sort of 'politically correct' approach is not only stifling and unnatural but also anti-diversity, a secular form of monism. Who doesn't appreciate different races, cultures, ethnicities, neighbourhoods, individuals, atmospheres, cuisines, vegetables, snowflakes, moments; who doesn't like women, men, children, locals, tribals, Christians, leaders, followers, tall or short people to be what and who they are?

Any simple backyard garden involves an infinite number of interpenetrating yet different systems or *mandalas*, such as solar and planetary influences, sky, trees, soil systems, air, gravity/location/density matrices, seasonal rhythms, microbes, insects, animals, and of course humans, each one of which is yet another diverse interdependent matrix, or mandala. Such diversity is the sine qua non of any natural organism or system. Similarly, human life is a complex, multi-level, interpenetrating affair in which each of us inhabits multiple inter-related collective identities, or mandalas. In the context of a spiritual community the challenge involves not falling into the monistic trap of believing that 'we in Shambhala' are that one true higher spiritual mandala above all others such as family, friends, work, region, nation, hobby, race lest in so doing we set up an arrogantly exclusionary relationship with anyone not 'we'. Indeed, with this sort of cultish outlook even family members can become 'they'.

Perhaps the underlying issue is aggression, that which uses differences to fuel the 'us-versus-them' dynamic whose ultimate destination is hell. By solidifying territory, often with rigid approaches from which come animal realm fear-based prejudices like racism, we fail to acknowledge how all collectives are cultural art forms. This does not imply they are not 'real' any more than the doctrine of egolessness implies that we do not exist, simply that they are not solid since all mandalas are infinitely inter-penetrated with multiple other mandalas each of which is in continuous flux and thus all are inherently non-existent. Aggression imposes its own definition onto all other mandalas and in so doing hardens territory into an artless, humourless struggle of this versus that, aka samsara.

So in terms of working with 'diversity', it seems the main issue is how playful and intelligent we are individually and collectively, both as non-existent living art forms and as strong characters and cultures. This involves both accommodating and appreciating differences, the strength of which comes from openness rather than the narrowing rigidity that comes from the illusory solidity of aggression.

Insofar as this might relate to our Shambhala Community, some scattered thoughts:

Feminine Principle:

As an overall cultural space Shambhala is 'feminine principle'. Along with 'masculine' skilful means therein, we must allow the spontaneous blossoming of more open, formless, fluid and flexible approaches wherein atmosphere, not content, is 'the juice'. Atmosphere means prajnaparamita, direct insight or knowing, awareness, the meaning not the words, nowness, the fourth moment, auspicious coincidence arising. One day in 1975 I walked into a small Dharmadhatu shrine hall on 6th Avenue in NYC and joined four or five people who just happened at that time to be sitting during their lunch break. They left at the scheduled time a few minutes after I stumbled in from the urban void, but the umdze Jim Torbert - to whom I am now indebted for lifetimes - invited me to stay simply asking me, on his way out, to extinguish the shrine candles before leaving. Not long afterwards in the empty vestibule, I picked up a Naropa Institute brochure and a few short weeks later I was in Boulder with an entirely new life unfolding.

Group Activity:

The quintessential manifestation of our community lineage is group sitting, which is open-hearted feminine

lineage transmission of naked, prajna-awareness in action. And yet how often is such a space and time available in our hundreds of centres worldwide? Most of what we offer is for restricted populations on specific occasions. Shambhala Training, our main outreach vehicle, is restricted after the first introductory Friday evening - a glaring flaw in logistical design; moreover it has essentially eliminated regular weekly nyinthuns. In every centre worldwide we should be offering nyinthuns open to everybody every Saturday and Sunday from 9-12 and 2-5. Meanwhile, any scheduled program, including Shambhala Training levels, should work around that, with talks before and after and participants sitting with non-participants during the sitting sessions.

Part of the reason we don't do this is our seeming addiction to intense 'container principle' programming, which heightens the difference between ordinary life and practice, inner and outer mandalas, teachers and students. (Maybe another part is simple fear of spaciousness, of the ordinary, of boredom, of dignity, of ourselves.) However, since open nyinthuns accommodate several populations at once, including beginner and advanced, programs need not undermine community continuity nor accessibility to the random 'newcomer walk-in' principle; even restricted tantric programs could begin with the Open Nyinthun before narrowing the population to participants only. In this way, the entire sangha participates in the energy which in turn radiates out into the larger community.

The main point is that a common space and time, open to all and with little overt agenda or content, is offered every weekend no matter what, with or without programs and visiting teachers. Less hassle, more practice, more social interaction, more teachings, more spontaneity and auspicious coincidence. Imagine a world where in every town all over the world, there is a place and time for group sitting meditation; every town; every weekend; larger centres also have daily morning and evening sittings, with the latter being used by those staying on for classes. Simply having the meditation hall with doors open at regular times and access to basic sitting practice is all-victorious already. It would be great if several Shambhala Centres could experiment with such Open Nyinthuns for a while.

Individual Activity:

For those who identify with particular race, ethnic or other cultural identities such as being a Texan, prisoner, cancer patient, neighbour, Chinese, male and so on, we can share dharma with people in any of our multiple mandalas without arcane vocabularies or imported authorities and formats. Such institutionalized rigidity comes partly from respect for the preciousness of the lineage which has given us pith esoteric teachings such as the Shambhala termas which cannot be shared overtly in mundane situations, but also because we ourselves have been taught in structured program 'containers' that heighten the difference between the sacred and mundane.

We have a long way to go in terms of developing authentic outer level kitchen sink diversity, not creating yet another counter-culture cult but rather flourishing authentically within our diverse local and regional cultures. Our direction should be outwards, going into, taking root and growing from within local communities; not recruiting small numbers of locals into one larger para-local identity who then find themselves estranged from their own families and local cultures.

Doing this requires a different way of viewing dharma transmission: less from above and beyond the local community, and more on a peer level as it was during the Buddha's lifetime as told in many stories where he taught fellow refugees who did not know who he was because they had been taught by other refugees (in those days any refugee could inspire anyone to take refuge).

As VCTR said in one of his last teachings: 'Never forget the Hinayana!' The Hinayana speaks in the language of conventional outer level reality, within which context basic sitting practice is an experiential language that all human beings understand instinctively - the non-verbal gossip of feminine lineage wisdom. Group sitting practice is a uniform organised affair, but the inner experiential content is free-form, natural, wild.

When weekly nyinthuns are available in local communities, individuals 'teach' simply by sharing their state of being with friends, family and co-workers and then, when appropriate, they can also bring people along to a nyinthun or simply invite them to pop in any Saturday or Sunday. Simple.

Essential Farming

By nature the vast majority of ordinary people throughout the world have their hearts in the right place. Just as nature is naturally fertile, so also do human beings naturally tune into the Three Jewels because awareness, method and community exist primordially in all past, present and future human societies. We see them everywhere: in villagers singing together as they sow and harvest the crops and gather around the fire afterwards to celebrate, or simply the everyday family dinner table.

Just like farmers, despite the considerable effort involved with sowing and harvesting and otherwise cultivating the immediate, local situation, in fact we create nothing; rather we husband the inherent creativity of nature by providing a space and time within our conventional communities in which the self-existing Three Jewel principles can be acknowledged as reflections of quintessential human nature. Indeed, the degree to which awareness of this basic nature is fostered is the degree to which a society can be called 'enlightened'. Thus offering regular group sitting practice enlightens local and national cultures by helping this natural tendency to grow and blossom; it's that simple.

Speaking of farmers and outer level diversity: one interesting local initiative would be for Shambhalians to launch food cooperatives (Masanobu Fukuoka's 'One Straw Revolution' methods come to mind), membership in which would be open to all. In trying times we could not only feed ourselves but also serve as a local resource for others to do the same.

And of course there would be nyinthuns in the barn, and afterwards dancing....

8. On Diversity

By Cynthia Kneen, adapted from *Awake Mind, Open Heart*. New York: Avalon Publishing Group, 2002.

Appreciating diversity is the basis of parenting, mentoring, friendship, and any communication of decency, dignity, and love. It is the result of an inner process. You see beauty in others, because you have realized beauty in yourself. When you realize basic love or maitri, your mind is transformed. Now you have a mind that is able to fall in love with what it sees. Now your activity can be generous. This is good news.

Generous activity is like the full moon or the sun—energy is released without a sense of audience. It doesn't project a sense of demand. The sun or moon doesn't say, "I'll shine on you if you give me something in return. Give me your attention. Give me your praise. Sign up for my beliefs. Love me." Your being is an open gift. It just does what it does. Warmth is released without a reason, without a goal in mind. It's part of you relaxing your being tremendously, and doing your thing. Without exception we need to be generous in this way. It takes generosity to work with our relatives, our friends, our enemies, our kids, our boss, our spouse, fellow employees, the person we pay our bills to, and the lady up the block.

In the Buddhist tradition there are three kinds of generosity. These are practical ways to help another being. Each is a kind of wisdom we can realize. Each expresses unconditional appreciation for diversity.

The first type of generosity is to give others what they need—a smile, a drink of water, a helping hand, freedom from hassling, honesty, forthrightness, hope. Whatever it is, this not something you have to reason out. "Hmmm, let me think about this. Maybe they really need to hear about the Iraq war." "They want a glass of water from me, but hmmm, maybe they really need to pull up their socks." "They need human kindness, but hmmm, the more I think about it, they really need to join my crusade." Don't think about it! Just be generous. Give them what they need!

The second type of generosity is to take out fear. Immediately after the World Trade Center in New York City was destroyed, Mayor Rudolph Guiliani told New Yorkers, "Go about your life. Go out. Don't be bound inside. We are going to open as much of the city as possible. We need to understand what's happened. Don't turn on your neighbors. We are a city of diversity. Don't be afraid." People felt a sense of security and stability from his presence.

The third type of generosity is to help others realize the truth without losing heart. This isn't just about external things. It's at a subtle level, too, which is harder to see. When you help others connect with their situation as it is, and how they might need to grow, and the wisdom they themselves already have to deal with things, you are being generous. You are giving what others need, taking away their fear, and giving truth.

No one of us can just jump into benefiting others, doing good, and creating benefit. That's very rare. There is a whole process you have to go through of learning how to handle yourself in real situations, gaining experience, making mistakes, gaining wisdom, establishing presence from which to communicate, demonstrating fairness, gaining credibility, developing authority, being able to provide a perspective for others, and so on. A lot of things have to happen, and then finally, presto, there you are. Once Trungpa Rinpoche said, "This will take you about twenty-five years." The process begins with inner peace and harmony. Then you are able to see things as they are, make a home in basic goodness, and warm up to yourself. Then you can lift your gaze, look around, and have the courage to help.

In order to benefit others, we have to be willing to sail into deep waters—at least a little bit! Accumulating merit alone won't do it. We need wisdom. For wisdom, we need to incorporate life's subtleties. We need to abandon fixed beliefs. We need to appreciate diversity. The enlightenment of ourselves and others can't be separated. We are in this together—without exception, all of us.

9. Shy People in Shambhala

Linda McHenry

I would like to consider a type of diversity that doesn't readily fall into all the usual categories and one that I have personally found to be difficult to work with. This is shyness.

As long as I can remember I have suffered from shyness, especially talking to groups of people. This manifests as extreme stage fright and freezing of mind. I can remember this from kindergarten show and tell. That was 55 years ago and it shows little sign of abating, which suggests to me an inherited trait. On one hand, being in Shambhala has been very useful in working with this condition – confidence, fearlessness, gentleness, working for the benefit of others are large components of Shambhala that we work with everyday. On the other hand, it is obvious that being outgoing, excelling at and actually enjoying performance, and giving eloquent toasts on the spot are all greatly prized and encouraged in Shambhala. I must confess to envy as well as to appreciation of people who have these skills.

A meditation student of mine has stepped back from Shambhala partly because of her shyness, but also from her perception of Shambhala as being anti-science (but that is another essay). I think that Shambhala Training discussion groups were especially difficult because of her experience/perception that there was a problem about her not participating, “holding back.”

One of the results of shyness is the projection onto shy people as being unapproachable, arrogant, aloof, and even deceptive in the case of not communicating feelings, which can cause confusion about where we stand. So there is a picture of the shy person totally unintended by that person.

There are some ways I have found to work with shyness, not the least of which was asking the Sakyong once whether shyness was a problem in Shambhala. Knowing that he had been very shy as a young person, I was hopeful that I would receive an answer that acknowledged and appreciated the struggle of shy people. He did acknowledge the possibility of innate shyness, but also the need to look carefully to see if it is hiding your basic goodness. Right on the dot as usual.

I have hoped that devotion would be a way of working with shyness. I have skittered away from situations of taking the stage so often and felt that I let the Sakyong down so often, broken my samaya, and yet he always has a smile and is so patient. As my devotion grows I supplicate him daily to help me serve him better by taking occasional leaps and honoring my basic goodness.

The Mahayana teachings are a treasure trove of aspirations and practical tools to help shy people get up and do what has to be done. The bodhicitta practices encourage our aspirations and paths of becoming more available to others, more permeable, softer and less addicted to “it’s all about me.” The “no privacy” aspect of the bodhisattva vow has given more than one person cause to temporarily retreat and question their readiness, and then be encouraged to take the leap. Courage – coeur – heart.

I think the main thing to remember is that many shy people are capable of taking a leap every once in awhile, but just understand that it takes tremendous energy, courage, and comes with the cost of great stress. So please don't ask them too often.

Creating enlightened society is big and challenging, and there are plenty places for shy people in Shambhala. Librarians of the world, unite—quietly.

10. The Challenge of Being Genuine in Diversity

Tomasz Pietrzykowski

The subject of diversity is becoming more and more popular these days. One should not be surprised: we have well entered into the dark ages, the era of extremes, particularly extreme opinions. That brings the idea of diversity into the forefront: we try to avoid situations where differences could become a target of possessiveness, pride, envy, aggression or ignorance. There are many theories and approaches to this issue and obviously it is not up to me to analyze them. However, even in the limited scope of this contribution, it seems possible to focus on potential problems which may emerge even if one's intentions are good and pure. They all stem from the single source: fixation on the concept of how things should be. As a result we may be tempted to utilize various fashionable ideas, theories and techniques which float around. The danger of such an approach is fundamental: we are putting ourselves in a situation in which *we* are *dealing* with issues of diversity. Problems can arise from both: "*we*" and "*dealing*". Diversity is a fact of life and we are a part of that, we do not "deal" with it but we "live" it.

The only way to avoid such traps is to return to our natural, innate capacities: our basic goodness, awareness, intelligence and compassion. It may sound very naive or somewhat dogmatic but to the contrary – it is much more pragmatic than most attempts to conjure some psycho-sociological techniques, no matter how honest and well meaning they may be.

I have some experience with issues of diversity in the context of teaching dharma as well as living everyday life in a number of very different countries. What I have learned is that: whenever I have attempted to use some strategy or technique based on concepts of how one should "deal" with diverse situations, it has sooner or later backfired. *Sooner*, because people are incredibly intuitive, clear and sensitive to any form of manipulation and ingenuineness. *Later*, because even if the strategy seemed to work at the beginning, eventually it provoked even more serious reactions when people discovered that I had deceived them by not approaching them simply as fellow human beings but rather as a *special* group that I must be very careful to avoid hurting or insulting. However, when not being so conscious of not hurting or attempting to behave in some special appropriate manner, when I was just myself with all my baggage of faults and faux pas, genuine communication would happen.

This doesn't mean that there is nothing for us to do while experiencing diversity and our reactions to it. There are many teachings we have been given: exchanging self for other, contemplating the suffering of beings, seeing the inherent purity and goodness in others, being aware of one's own habitual patterns: prejudices, desires, pride and aggression, to name a few. However all these practices point to the same thing: we are inseparable from each other and what we all want is the same, to be happy.

11. Cosmic Breath: Interdependency as a Stepping Stone to Get Rid of Judgements

A Contemplation by Josje Pollmann

If we would really feel our interconnectedness, our interdependency in this realm, we would not be so judgemental. The following is an attempt to get this message across in a very simple way, just pointing at some of the phenomena where we forget to be whole and are losing ourselves in diversity:

1) It might be helpful to start contemplating from the most separate, maybe dark and negative aspects of ME, or even from a most exalted state of ME. And, if “normally” you don’t feel like this, flashes of recognition can occur:

How you are feeling split from the world around, lonely, arrogant, feeling cut off, depressed, dualistic, not understood, not seen, alone at the top, poverty stricken, so consuming, not accepted, panicky, irritated, self conscious, scared, criticised, stuffed, introverted, groundless, heavy, black, screaming, too full of passion, burdened, incompetent...

2) Then contemplate, remember, feel, see how you are judging the OTHER as:

Arrogant, stupid, ignorant, territorial, elitarian, authoritarian, cold, wild, uncivilised, popular, cheap, rough, superficial, intellectual, artsy, folksy, left wing, right wing, stiff, poor, sloppy, dirty, greedy, fundamentalist, revolutionary, rich, young, loud, drunk, old, narrow minded, ugly, exclusive, selfish, smelly, ordinary, noisy, paranoid, sophisticated... Labels and more labels...

3) Then from glimpses of space, from irresistible gaps of basic goodness, windhorse running astride, little flashes of insight will occur, some realisation that all beings are interconnected, everything IS hanging TOGETHER, one big organism, this realm.

Realize more and more, imagine, from empty space go deeper:

Listen to the sounds of the world nearby and far away, have a direct experience of eyes meeting, strangers smiling at you, find yourself moving through crowds with ease, with fun waiting in a line, feeling everything in its right place, some connection with everybody and all having their own functioning in it, their own spot, yourself in it, on your spot.

ONE big organism: drifting, changing, pulsating, vibrating, decaying, growing, crowded, dying, blossoming, fruitgiving, moving, speedy, quiet, rich, noisy, spacious, so pure.
Vitality, impulse, energy, wind. Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch.

Indeed no judgements are needed anymore, feeling so sad and good, feeling so curious and interested in this our world:

A M A Z I N G D I V E R S I T Y, so different all, so connected, so one...

12. Emptiness Hurts

By Esther Rochon

I remember a grand conversation in a car. It was 20 years ago, just after the Vidyadhara had died. We were three in that car, traveling from Karmê-Chöling Meditation Center in Vermont, to Montreal, where we lived.

The driver and myself, two French-speaking Quebecers, we got high on emptiness. “It is so obvious that it makes no difference whether you are a man, a woman or whatever else! It is so clear that it does not matter what country you are from, what are your values, what is your culture! Your roots, your family, loves, friends, what your maternal language is, this has no importance whatsoever! We have nothing to hang on to! We could switch from one system to another, from one group of people to another, from one body to another almost, like changing roles in a play, or changing clothes, because gender, culture, language, family, country, none of that is solid. We don’t own anything, can’t hold on to anything, we are refugees—have always been, and always will be, whether we see it or not, want it or not! Hurray!”

We were speaking in English, because the third person in the car was an American woman living in Montreal, and she did not speak French. And she was scared by our enthusiasm and certainty.

She is not on the Buddhist path anymore.

Twenty years on, that driver, like myself, is teaching Shambhala Buddhism, in English and in French.

But my enthusiasm for emptiness I keep more to myself. And this is not really a success story.

When you teach, you have to listen a lot.

Many people don’t understand.

When I have empathy for people who don’t understand, when I begin to think like them, I get angry. I remember the English bullies on my street when I was a teenager. I remember feeling excluded from conversations at Karmê-Chöling. I remember crying, as a child or as an adult, over language-related issues, and feeling excluded and not understood; I do not expect that to be over. It is easy to be respected when you are a teacher. It is not easy to be respected when you are just someone who does not talk as fast as the others, who misses the innuendos, who does not recognize accents or styles, who gets people to laugh without having meant anything funny. It is easy to be respected in a one-to-one exchange. It is easy to feel forgotten in a group.

I am not attracted by that picture on the Diversity home page. They all smile. They all look grounded and happy. That is not diversity to me.

It is so obvious it makes no difference whether you cry, or for that matter whether you are balanced. No need to finish with some sweet, wise ending. Emptiness is grand, dignified, and all inclusive.

And it hurts, too.

Feeling rejected because of difference – in color, culture, language, gender, age, social class etc—is quite common. Accordingly, the way to work with that feeling as practitioners is well documented. You can discuss what you are going through with other practitioners, with an instructor, with a teacher, have role models, or contemplate teachings from books—your choice. What works too is keeping cheerful, learning to let go, practicing patience, having a sense of humor. These are well-known, because they usually give good results.

So when we feel rejected, rightly or wrongly, we can actually use that as a steppingstone on the path, gaining an experience we can share with others. Excellent. But this is not the whole story. This is the beginner’s story. Beginners are meek (in the sense of “timid”).

After a talk, those meek beginners who misunderstood half of it because it was not in their own language will have the tendency to say, “Yes, I understood,” although they may have missed many points. Something was whispered to them but they could not catch half of it. They say, “Yes, this was an interesting experience.” They do not desire to attract attention; they realize others are busy, and they do not wish to complicate their lives. But other practitioners might speak up: “I don’t know what I understood and what I didn’t. Is this it? I’m sure there are others like me. I thought enlightened society meant something else. If you want me to trust this organization and give it my long term support, you need to address this issue. There are other Buddhist groups on the scene.”

This relates to the integration of minorities into a society. The meekness of the beginner is normal behavior when you come to a new place where you wish to be accepted. It is not the whole path for that person, or that group. We have to mix with other cultures, other ways of thinking, of seeing society and interactions, and not merely make friends with one foreigner or take a language course. It goes both ways, transforming both the majority and the minority.

In terms of language issues, the answer might be to encourage practitioners to learn English, and also to organize translation and study groups and train teachers and interpreters in the other language. This works well, up to a point. It involves an enormous amount of voluntary work. Also, language issues are the vanguard of cultural issues, which are highly complex and subtle. Questions of pride, of nurturing, come up. In a sense, a culture is less mature than an individual.

At the individual level, though, feeling different will often help practitioners to grow; it is workable despite any possible fireworks. But at the group level, majority group as well as minority, delicate issues are raised and not easily resolved. This is what we are working on here, and am I ever glad about it. It is not just about having happy practitioners from many backgrounds. It has a lot to do with Shambhala itself.

13. Diversity and Our Common Ground

By Irini Rockwell

The particulars of religious, cultural and sociopolitical differences are based on concepts that serve to divide us seeing “other” as a problem. Our concepts and feelings are deeply engrained and therefore we believe them to be “true.” However, we also have a common humanity that is basically good. Moreover, it is the true nature of all sentient beings, making us equal. We are all equal but different.

In being caught up in our differences, we create a dualistic world. Our tendency is to see the differences, creating a barrier between others and ourselves. Whereas concepts divide us, energetic exchange or resonance joins us. Having resonance with another is experiential; our whole being joins with another in energetic oscillation. We experience this when we open our heart to someone, when we love someone. Based on this energetic exchange, we can step into their world and see it their way.

This takes a willing suspension of our protective shield. How many excuses do we have daily, on a moment to moment basis, not to open to another? “I’m too busy.” “I’m tired.” “Let someone else relate to her.” However, we could come to realize that others, both their wellbeing and our relationship to them, are profoundly transformative. Only then can we understand and rejoice in the rich and amazing diversity of humanity.

14. Diversity and Difference and The Other View

Craig Schneider

I have been contemplating the talks given by the Vidyadhara: *Glimpses of Space, The Feminine Principle and EVAM*. We are challenged to 'take off your roof'; I can only imagine what that is really like. But it strikes me as removing that which limits our vision, our understanding of how things really are. As with all of the Vidyadhara's teachings there are relative and absolute realities of experience available. The experience that struck me about this idea of diversity and difference was my experience of *other*. How totally pervasive and seemingly fundamental the idea of *other* has penetrated our lives. It is like the seed syllable of an endless myriad of differences. And these defined differences, this otherness, separate us apart. The teachings within *Glimpses of Space* challenge this limited view. The explanation gives us E and VAM, but the word/understanding is EVAM.

The work environment is one of the ripe teaching grounds available to us. I work in a college environment with $\frac{3}{4}$ women, $\frac{1}{4}$ male teachers; and probably 95% (if not more) female students. Most of the students are in their early 20s while the staff is in their early 50s with some in their early-mid 30s. There are several Chinese and a few people of color. It starts to get stranger and stranger for me as I define by appearance who makes up the school. I am probably wrong about most of what I just said. Do they consider themselves black, are they really Chinese, who really is 50 rather than looks it? The whole group becomes a 'them'. 'Them' of course is a form of 'other'. This is how we define things but what is the word that brings them together?

The other day I caught myself in yet another conversation with my-other-self about a particular co-worker who I believe does not support what I do, how I do it and what I think is important. It is a whole fertile ground for paranoid thinking and the projection of blame and the cultivation of feeling justified for not engaging and cultivating a positive relation to any degree, one that might express some basic compassion and consideration. My whole incriminating language was focused on how she was not communicating, never asked how I was, would walk by with hardly a nod. I could feel her gossiping in some catty way about what she thought I was doing or not doing.

And then of course it struck me. I was having this gossipy, catty, negative conversation with my-other-self, justifying why I won't bother to do more than barely giving her the time of day and won't inform her on what I'm doing and just generally avoiding any involvement with her. And when it came down to it, I really didn't have a clue what was going on in her mind. OK, let's say, for a minute, that I am sensitive and perceptive enough to pick up on the subtle communications that surround us all and I'm right. She doesn't support me, etc, etc. But what do I know? What do I know about her, about how or why she views the world, and me, the way she does?

Just in that moment when I shifted from a view at the center of things to a view that wondered how she actually looks at the world, and what experiences brought her to that place, a little roof came off. I was just marginally acknowledging that there was another experience, another view. It's small, very small. Relative experience. But it is one spot of experiencing the split. That moment of splitting this into me and other and solidifying it and justifying it.

We have a lot of teachings that talk about this split, this seed of self and other. Thankfully the relative reality of diversity and difference encourages us to see this.

15. The King of Diversity

By Bob Sonne

I had the great opportunity to study and practice with the most diverse spiritual teacher of the 20th century. When I first arrived at his meditation center in Vermont (appropriately named "Tail of the Tiger"), I was welcomed with laughter and open arms, and immediately shown to the sewing room where there was an abundance of beer, cheap wine, and lots of cigarettes. My first impression was, "If these people are so open and joyful, then what is the teacher like?" I had dinner and was given a place to sleep. Word quickly spread that I was a carpenter, and this being a very old farm house, my talents were immediately in demand. I had to wait almost six months to meet my teacher, spiritual friend and vajra master. What a shock!

In those early days I was terrified, in awe, and totally in love. It was, in some ways, very difficult to relate to the mucky mucks. Rinpoche's teachings were beginning to spread like dry brush in the California sun. There was no shortage of faces trying to be recognized. With Rinpoche's encouragement to be slightly cynical, and at the same time join the mainstream, the Board of Directors was born. In itself, that wasn't a bad thing.

As I started to grow in my spiritual path, and mature in my mind of minds, it wasn't as polished as some. I found that the best thing for me was to try and get a good understanding of the guru's teaching. The best path for me was to practice, and not be to overcome by intellectual understanding. I found a great deal of people putting me in pigeon holes because of my lack of education, and a propensity to be frank and speak my mind.

The main point, I found, was to look in and discover what mind is. There are always going to be people trying to protect territory, show their face, and proclaim the way. I have found it best to just practice with the attitude that I am really insignificant. This is the most profound teaching that I have learned from my guru - The King Of Diversity.

16. Diversity and Richness

By Mary D. Thomson

Thank you for the opportunity to consider the issue of diversity in the Shambhala community. I must admit that I was a bit surprised to be asked to be part of this project, as I have not taught in several years. Perhaps what I have to say here comes from having taken a step outside of the community as a whole to deconstruct and reconstruct some of the relationships and view points upon which I had based my own life.

That the Shambhala community is looking at just who and what we are is a sign of intelligence and bravery. I sense some concern that the community is too white, middle class, etc., that we all basically look, act and think the same, that unity equals sameness. I believe that initially our experience of the wealth of our practice and of our innate worthiness to manifest the teachings is the ground of openness. We have something to share that is based on the cultivation of our basic humanity, the flowering of a tender heart, that is the longing of all human beings. If we begin to experience some anxiety about this birthright, that is okay...for about 5 minutes. It is poverty mind that makes us clench and grasp at our hearts as territory to protect, that can actually chip away at our confidence to simply open to the world and dive in, wholeheartedly. Our human richness can open us to the possibility that “they” do not have to join “us” for we are all already “there.” Genuine openness can lead to developing the forms and situations that will make the experience of the dharma accessible to all.

This may entail literally dismantling and rejuvenating any form, institution or teaching style that has become irrelevant or restrictive or simply stale. I am often struck by the realization that most of the world is careening on a mad path of spiritual extremism. Most of the world does not even know that Shambhala society can be a reality. Are we willing to consider that we have spent far too much time and energy psychoanalyzing our own quirks and discomforts to even begin to understand the heart of a suicide bomber? It is simply not enough to learn to pour the perfect cup of tea, compose an elegant poem or place a flower just so in an arrangement. We must not just invite all sentient beings to an inspiring Friday night talk if we cannot also find a way to fearlessly and genuinely proclaim to the suicide bomber or the rape victim in Darfur that their heart of sadness is our own. In softening to the world around us, let's not become so squishy and squeamish that there is no dirt under our nails or sweat on our foreheads.

Being a diverse community is more than looking around the shrine room and seeing more black people or gay people or young people. Diversity arises from active inquisitiveness about the larger world beyond our own four walls and a willingness to drop our assumptions about anything and everything. Diversity is at once cosmic and grass roots. The “journey” across the street to meet our neighbors is the same as the journey to a slum in India and just as revealing. There is much to give and much to learn all around us if we open our eyes and hearts. Each of us can diversify, and thus enrich, our lives and, ultimately, the lives of others, by simply stepping beyond what is familiar and safe.

When we practice, let it be with honesty and willingness to transform our own ignorance into wisdom. In the postmeditation experience, let us engage the world with exuberance and gentleness. Let us laugh and cry in the same moment.

All individuals have a place in Shambhala society. There should not be a sense of outer and inner, but rather a sense of being included in the compassionate embrace of heaven and earth.

—*Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche*
Treatise on Society and Organization

Whenever we experience separation in any form, look at it and try to understand it. How can we *include* our feeling of separation into our practice? What is there about that other situation we want to separate from, and what can we learn from that? The goal is not to homogenize everything. Everything has its distinct, vivid, diverse quality. How can we just accommodate all of it – “accommodating” meaning “to allow space for” – and still maintain the view, to allow space for whatever we may encounter, be it setting sun or Great Eastern Sun, confusion or wisdom?

—*Agness Au*
Going Beyond Bias

When we take the Bodhisattva vow to save all sentient beings, no matter how numberless, we are making an inconceivable commitment to diversity and accessibility. No one is left out of this aspiration. Thus the commitment to finding ways to make the Shambhala Buddhist path and society available to others is at the heart of Shambhala Buddhism itself.

—*Dan Hessey*
Notes on Diversity and Accessibility