

GOING BEYOND BIAS DIVERSITY TRAINING IN SHAMBHALA BUDDHISM

Guiding Principles

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Purpose: This document is offered for practitioners in the Shambhala Buddhist mandala who are interested in presenting diversity training for our community members.

We've developed this set of principles as guidelines to assist in the creation of diversity workshops and classes. Rather than providing a set curriculum, we're encouraging each venue to design an approach that is sufficiently well thought out and cohesive, to suit each particular community. We also encourage the creative expression of trainers and honor their personal experience in providing this valuable service to the Shambhala Buddhist mandala.

Synopsis of Key Points:

- Diversity training should be seen in the same light, or cut from the same fabric as our basic dharmic teachings and practices.
- The workshops are most effective when they are experiential in nature.
- The workshops focus on the personal path of practitioner-participants, not on the "challenges" of others.
- The workshops are focused on the diversity within our community as it is currently manifesting, rather than on the greater world.

Articulation of Guiding Principles:

Diversity training in the context of the Shambhala Buddhist community is an integral part of the path of realizing egolessness, discovering compassion, and manifesting an enlightened society. It is related to the development of equanimity, the way of seeing all others as equal in basic goodness, although different in characteristics, styles and manifestations. Diversity training provides a skillful means for working with our tendency to pigeonhole ourselves and others. This training has an explicitly dharmic view, and can be seen as the "SHE" of "ASHE", how absolute nature is made manifest in the relative world.

Diversity training in the Kingdom of Shambhala is not a fad, or a crisis response to interpersonal problems arising in any given community, but an ongoing daily practice. It is a foundation both of our personal journey and the development of a good human society.

Because diversity training and practice is a fundamental aspect of our personal journey within a social context, it is essential that we relate to our own experience of bias towards others. We might experience this bias in terms of the categories usually addressed in diversity training, such as race, age, gender, or class. We might also experience this bias in terms of characteristics such as personality style, political view, or the length of time someone has practiced meditation. Regardless of the areas in which we experience bias towards those who are different from us, such bias is viewed as the expression of ego. Therefore, until we have fully stabilized a realization of egolessness, we will experience bias.

The biggest obstacles to successful diversity training are a false sense of politeness and an unwillingness to acknowledge one's prejudices. Diversity workshops can encourage exploration beyond the espoused values held by participants, to illuminate the blind spots we have regarding both the breadth of diversity present in our sangha and the extent of bias which exists. Focused, personal diversity work can help us see how bias has been operating in our community, and how it has impacted our community members. Participant sharing of having been pigeonholed, summed up, or dismissed can be explored, as well as its consequences for our community. Since we live in a community in which everyone has ego, or bias, everyone has been the object of that bias, and has suffered accordingly.

It is important that diversity training focus on how we can relate to our own bias. The work is practice oriented and personal. It is the practice of fearlessness, which begins by experiencing the cocoon of bias. Awareness of this cocoon includes becoming sensitive to one's defensive reaction when faced with difference. Only by touching our prejudice can the fearful mind that gives rise to it be placed in the cradle of loving kindness. The fruition, fearlessness, means we can use our bias as a stepping stone to look freshly at our fellow sangha members. This process of acknowledging bias, softening towards it, and opening our hearts to others is one of the key features of community as practice.

It is especially important to understand the wide range of experience within the culture of Shambhala International. In addition to providing a vehicle for personal work on our own bias, diversity training can encourage us to exchange ourselves for others in specific and concrete ways. By understanding the different ways in which others suffer, we'll become more sensitive to how our societal cocoons may have caused feelings of separation for others. Creative workshop leaders can facilitate the exchange by setting up situations that give participants a chance to "live" the experience of others for a period of time.

In addition to extending our own personal practice and raising the manifest sanity of our community, the benefits of diversity practice can create a warm and open invitation for others to join and participate in the Shambhala world. As we broaden our reach to those within our community, may we aspire to reach out and touch those who have yet to hear the teachings. By decreasing barriers to participation we can increase the accessibility for others to enter this excellent path.