

CONTEMPLATION AND DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY

Purpose

This contemplation and dialogue is intended to help individuals in Shambhala to explore their own experience of bias towards others and ways they can be more open and inclusive. This module, which is designed so that persons with little knowledge of diversity issues can lead a dialogue on the subject, is actually less a dialogue than a reflective sharing and receiving exercise.

Participants in Dialogue

This exercise may be used as is or adapted for other programs, e.g. for Shambhala Buddhist teacher-training, and classes certifying Shambhala level directors, assistant directors, meditation instructors, and Shambhala guides or for use in Shambhala Buddhist seminaries, assemblies, enchainments as well as Buddhist Studies, Shambhala Training, and Nalanda Arts training programs. This process may be useful for Shambhala leadership training programs, center and group councils, Open House staff training or and community meetings to explore diversity issues.

Ground

"It's difficult and challenging practice to keep your heart and mind open. It takes a lot to be a living example of unbiased mind! ...I think it begins with the aspiration to connect with open heart, the knowledge that cultivating openness is how you want to spend the remaining moments of your life." Pema Chodron in conversation with bell hooks about racism.

As Shambhala Buddhists, we desire to keep our hearts and minds open. We have the innate wisdom to know when we are open or closed to others. Often because of certain privileges that society grants to particular groups of people, we may, unintentionally, close ourselves off to those we perceive as a different race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and/or socio-economic class.

Path

By honestly exploring our biases and real differences, asking heartfelt thoughtful questions, and listening to others, we can discover how we may close up to others and how this gets in the way of being more compassionate. Therefore we will:

1. Reflect on who we consider to be "the other";
2. Listen to others to understand their perspective and to increase our openness;
3. Speak honestly about what we know and don't know regarding issues of culture, race, gender and sexual orientation, etc.;
4. Ask heartfelt and thoughtful questions;
5. Engage in mindful dialogue around issues such as race, culture, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, class, physical or mental ability and so forth.

Fruition

Being open, inclusive and culturally sensitive to visitors and members of the sangha who are perceived as being different.

SUGGESTED FORMAT – FACILITATOR INSTRUCTIONS

Put cushions in a circle

Introduce the topic in your own words that include

Ground

Path

Fruition

I. AWARENESS ~ WHO IS OTHER?

A. Sit for 5 or more minutes

B. Read quotes to participants.

Ask them to observe their mind in relationship to the issues raised by the quotes

The American dilemma has been our resistance to ourselves, our denial of our immensely varied selves. But we have nothing to fear but our fear of our own diversity. Ronald Takaki

Everybody remembers the first time they were taught that part of the human race was Other. Toni Morrison

...the universal question of the coming century: How do we deal with Other? Carlos Fuentes

Like any deeply held delusion, racism [homophobia, sexism] abides in what is unsaid as much as in what is said, in what is unthought as well as what is thought. It is both inside and outside the realm of conscious intent. It chooses us as much as we choose it. But choices are constant, inevitable and they matter. That's a starting point. Andrew Cooper

The point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live your way some distant day into the answers. R.M. Rilke

Why are aboriginal people around the world demanding apologies and satisfaction for actions that go back decades and, in some cases centuries? Why are some black Americans obsessed with the idea of reparations for slavery? Why do people insist that memories of the holocaust be kept alive? The answer, of course, is that the past matters. It shapes the present no less than a mother shapes a child. Ellis Cose

C. Ask participants to write down thoughts they observed (writing is optional but allow time for reflection before initiating sharing).

D. Go around the circle and ask each person to contribute (give permission to pass):

- 1) One sentence/phrase that reflects what they observed about their own mind during the reflection on “the other”;
- 2) One question they have about the experience

Energetically they are placing their responses into the center of the room so that we can experience the diversity of responses.

II. AWARENESS ~ HOW DO I INTERACT WITH THE OTHER?

- A. Ask participants: To call up a time when they were involved in an intercultural interaction with someone who they perceived as culturally different because of race, culture, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, class, physical or mental ability, etc.
- 1) While placing their attention on the intercultural interaction, ask participants to observe:
- How did you act?
 - What did you say?
 - How would you describe your body? E.g., tense, relaxed, distancing?
 - How did the interaction begin, persist and subside?
 - How is this situation similar and different to how you interact with others in the sangha that you perceive as different from you?
- B. Ask participants to and to write down thoughts they observed (writing is optional but allow time for reflection before initiating sharing).
- C. Go around the circle and ask each person to contribute (give permission to pass):
- 1) One sentence/phrase that reflects what they observed about their own mind during the reflection on other;
- 2) One question they have about the experience.

Energetically they are placing their responses into the center of the room so that we can experience the diversity of responses.

- D. Pair up participants and ask each person to spend 5 minutes explaining the situation and their response to it (10 minutes total. Ring the bell at the 5minute mark)

Gently remind participants to engage in compassionate listening placing their attention on understanding the other person's experience.

- E. Assemble the participants back in a circle, then go around the circle and ask each person to again say (reminding them they can pass):
- 1) One or two sentences at most about that they learned or observed about themselves.
- 2) One question they have for themselves or the sangha

Energetically they are placing their responses into the center of the room so that we can experience the diversity of responses.

III. OPEN UP A DIALOGUE WITH TWO QUESTIONS.

- A. How do the participants imagine being more open and inclusive (for example, in their role as a Buddhist Studies teacher, Shambhala Guide, Center Council Member, sangha member, etc)?
- B. How did this process work for you and what follow-up would you like?