

DIVERSITY WORKING GROUP

Notes from

A Conversation on Diversity with Gale Young*

Gale Young, Ph.D., California State University, East Bay
Berkeley ~ San Francisco Shambhala Meditation Centers

Saturday, September 22, 2007,
10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Pacific Time

Teleconference for Shambhala Diversity Contact Persons

Teleconference Participants

Leal Abbott, Davis
Connie Anderson, Madison
Jessica Chasnoff, Bellingham
Suzanne Côté, Ottawa
Maria Dolores Diaz, Tucson
Kevin Finegan, San Antonio
Olivia Fite, Baltimore
Linda Francis, Baltimore
Ann Greenleaf, Albany
Nancy Grant, San Francisco
Ivette Guillermo, Philadelphia
Alice Haspray, Halifax
Rosalind Harris, Lexington
Nina Jones, San Antonio
Mike Keller, Tucson
Charlene Leung, Berkeley
Diana Lion, Berkeley
Sarah Littlefeather, St. Johnsbury
Michael McCormick, Portland
Andy Noel, Toronto
Cortez Rainey, Baltimore
Todd Russell, San Antonio
Maurizio Smith, Los Angeles
Priscilla Tannoya, Albany
Gale Young, Berkeley

Introduction

The conversation was led by Dr. Gale Young, who has been working with diversity in a variety of settings for 30 years. Dr. Young asked us to create a virtual circle; we imagined that everyone on the conference call was seated in a circle. Our conversation primarily consisted of a series of contemplative questions, each followed by brief sharing of our thoughts and experiences of those questions. We placed our shared thoughts and experiences in the middle of the circle.

In response to requests from members of the group, Dr. Young agreed to address the role of diversity contact persons in their centers and groups.

- The diversity contact role is a way to share what we each bring to Shambhala – tenderness, sharing, tension, joy, opportunity, bravery
- As a result of US vs. THEM karma, the diversity contact person can easily become a lightning rod that draws people's doubt in basic goodness.
- Tension is *always* found in doing diversity work.
- Although the role of diversity contact person may not be clearly defined – is relatively new – we are in a place of heightened sense of personal responsibility. We do this work as warriorship, bravery, we do not step aside.

We were encouraged to look at ways we can work with each other to make Shambhala more inclusive:

- Relationship of study to practice
- Dialog and conversations
- Organizational readiness to be open to diversity—is Shambhala ready? Are our centers ready?

Relationship of Study to Practice

Everyone wants multi-cultural inclusion. In response to Dr. Young's invitation, various participants placed into the circle cultural groups or aspects of diversity that they felt should be more included in their center or group.

- Race
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- Aging
- Class
- Language
- Religion
- Political Affiliation/Opinions
- Families and children

- Death and dying
- Emotional/Mental conditions
- Returning former Shambhala students

We were asked to look at our experience with these and other different cultural groups. How do their values play out? The diversity contact role is in part to be a leader in facing what we don't know about different cultural groups. What do we know about the values, attitudes and beliefs of people in cultures other than our own?

Dr. Young discussed the relationship of cultural studies to dharma practice:

- Diversity work is bound to meditative practice
- It's important to experience other cultures from variety of sources such as interactions, books, movies, plays, etc.

Is the dharma bound to our practice? The study of social-political reality (race, etc.) can provide useful scaffolding. The more we read, hear and engage the experience of cultural groups that are outside our comfort zones the more we will understand ourselves and others.

Dialog and Conversation

Diversity dialog by its very nature can bring out intense emotions regarding race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Such dialog can spotlight our own race, sex, sexual orientation, etc. To avoid that intensity, the default emotion regarding diversity is often politeness, or ignoring it, or changing the topic. In the United States a code of silence exists around race, as it tends to bring about heightened awareness of personal vulnerability. All of this is "good exercise" for Shambhala Warriorship – be brave and don't ignore it.

We were given one minute to reflect on what came up in the last half hour and to put what came up into the middle of the circle. Dr. Young asked us to consider the following questions:

- What is my relationship to the study of these issues and groups?
- How much do I know about these other cultures?
- What am I most drawn to?
- Which ones do I move away from, that make me squirm?
- What am I most uncomfortable with? Can I lean into it?

Next, we were asked to imagine ourselves sharing, conversing with someone who represents a group around which we are uncomfortable: Look at yourself, your shoulders, stomach, facial tension, notice your body, notice how your mind is interacting. How is your speech and listening with this person?

We were then asked to place in the circle one observation or reflection about the contemplation. Following are some of the comments about what came up:

- “We felt our vulnerability and openness”
- “We have a lot to learn from each other”
- “Strong emotions come up about race when talking with white people”
- “I prejudice people who are fundamentalist, but don’t see myself that way”
- “I am focused on their color, even though we’re talking about the weather”
- “I am irritated with Latinas who don’t speak Spanish; it reminds me of my struggle”
- “The issue of race comes up. Claustrophobia. Wanting to leave and at other times I want to stay and find a connection”
- “...at my deepest level, profound fear of people who make me feel uncomfortable”
- “I discriminate against people based on previous experiences”
- “Class, race, gender...I need to stay open, conscious toward everyone”

One woman shared that, as a Chinese American, she is a member of a group that is often silenced or ignored; after this contemplation, she stated her intention to speak out more strongly.

We acknowledged a feeling of vulnerability and openness. We have a sense of how much we don’t know; how much we want to know; that we have a lot to learn from each other; how much we long to dialog.

Organizational Readiness

Dr. Young suggested that we look at our Shambhala centers and Shambhala as a whole:

- The answer to HOW is YES
- An organization NEEDS a VISION
- Trungpa – “Vision is seeing where you are,” where it is
- Fruition – where an organization goes to by skillful means

From the literature analyzing organizations, Dr. Young said that the experience of diversity in organizations usually lands somewhere on the following continuum:

A	B	C
Ignoring diversity---“Add-on” (e.g., hosting a special “diversity event”)---Full Inclusion		

Dr. Young suggested seven areas for us to examine when considering diversity in our centers:

- 1) Look at people – just who is in our centers? Answers...different categories-majorities. Who is in power? Who is on the Council? Who is involved in Diversity? Answer...one or two persons or a committee? Is it inclusive?
- 2) Look at the center’s practices and climate of center – Where is there silence about issues, or attention? What are the processes in our organization for getting feedback?
- 3) What are our expectations about those who are culturally different, or do we have any expectations? Do we expect those who are culturally different to accommodate us? Do

we expect people of color to get other people of color into the center? Why doesn't the center take this on instead?

- 4) Is there outreach to underrepresented communities? How do you invite others in? Do you just expect them to show up?
- 5) Curriculum – are there examples of diversity in it? Culturally specific vs. general – all cultures (what do they do to get along?) For example, are whites concerned about People of Color workshops, do they ask why do they need a People of Color workshop? Are there only isolated courses focusing on diversity, or is diversity integrated into the curriculum?
- 6) Is there respect for our cultural knowledge base? We need to learn about all diversities.
- 7) Resources and institutional infrastructure – Time, energy and money. Where are we in these terms?

Participants then contemplated the question, “Where is our Center in relation to each of these seven points?” Following are a few responses:

- “We have a long way to go!”
- “I am only one to bring it [diversity issues] up...”
- “There has been some shift in the environment, some improvement”
- “What is a skillful means when leadership won't let go, or when the culture is resistant to change?”
- “What do we do when the leadership holds tight to power?”

Conclusion

Dr. Young closed the conversation by asking the group to think about what are the skillful means to include more diversity. She suggested the following:

- Write out those means that have worked and those that haven't
- Develop resources and a bibliography
- Brainstorm

The conversation can continue on Diversity-Talk and at the next conference call, which will be in February or March.

Still in our virtual circle, the group dedicated the merit.

**From notes taken by Maurizio Smith, Linda Francis and Cortez Rainey*

Teleconference Participants – Contact Information

Featured Guest

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