

## **People of Color in Shambhala take next step forward**

Sixty people of African, Asian/Pacific, Caribbean, Hispanic/Latina, Middle Eastern, or Native American ancestry, from many Shambhala Centres in our diverse, global mandala, participated in a recent survey, working group, and/or conference call initiative of the Diversity Working Group. The participants are developing plans for supporting people of color on the Shambhala Buddhist path.

Many of them gathered via conference call on January 27 to present and hear reports on the status of their efforts. Following the below list of participants are notes of the conference call proceedings, including a transcript of remarks by Shambhala President Richard Reoch.

### **Participants:**

Susana Arriagada, Baltimore  
Lome Aseron, Berkeley  
Anyana Banerjee, Atlanta  
Raana Bastani, Tehran  
Lauryn Boston, Fort Collins  
Stephanie Briggs, Baltimore  
Eva Camarena, Berkeley  
Evelyn Cannon, Baltimore  
Victor Castro, New York City  
Bishu Chatterjee, Berkeley  
Da Choong, Vancouver  
Ernest Coston, Boston  
Mabinti Dennis, Toronto  
Lucia Edmonds, Los Angeles  
Ken Erskine, Victoria  
Yalila Espinoza, San Francisco  
Sarah Farash, Philadelphia  
Gaylon Ferguson, Acharya  
Laura Fielder, New York City  
Ivette Guillermo, Philadelphia  
Arawana Hayashi, Acharya  
Victoria Kaufman Hernandez, SMC  
Yana Kim, Seoul  
Mercedes Lawrence, Washington, D.C.  
Cece Anna Lee, Baltimore  
Charlene Leung, Berkeley  
Lilli Lewis, SMC  
Michael Lo, New York City  
Janet Logothetti, San Francisco  
Jaideep Mallick, New York City  
Yvonne McBurnie, New York City  
Ralph McClain, Milwaukee

Aba Cecile McHardy, Boston  
David McKeel, Karne Choling  
Joy Mickle, Durham  
Justin Miles, Baltimore  
Faith Miller, Berkeley  
Trevor Moo, Toronto  
Alicia Ohs, New York City  
Patience Paradox, Seattle  
Artemis Parvizi, Tehran  
Kitt Potter, Sky Lake  
Walter Quan, Victoria  
Shonu Quiana, SMC  
Cortez Rainey, Baltimore  
Richard Reoch, Shambhala President  
Nancy Rodrigo, New York City  
Ron Rodriguez, Washington, D C.  
Shakiyla Smith, Atlanta  
Sekayi Stringer, Atlanta  
Priscilla Tannoya, Albany  
Damien Taylor, New York City  
Pearl Ubungen, San Francisco  
Ed. Mitch Ward, Milwaukee  
Linda Watson, Washington, D. C.  
Karan Whiteman, Halifax/Fredericton  
Damaris Williams, New York City  
Pamela Williams, Philadelphia  
Traci Yamashita, Boulder  
Elaine Yuen, Philadelphia  
Patricia Zamora, San Francisco

Diversity Working Group

**People of Color Conference Call**

27 January 2008  
2:00-3:15pm EST

- *Welcome by Cortez Rainey*  
This is a special conference call because we all want to support People of Color (POC) on the Shambhala Buddhist path, and do so with less emphasis on talking and a greater emphasis on doing. Purpose of the call: To gather and hear what we're doing in the 4 working groups.
- *Supplication to the Shambhala Lineage*

- *Roll Call\**

- *Introductory Comments by Cortez Rainey*

Four years ago, by invitation of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, several hundred Shambhalian gathered for the First Shambhala Congress at which diversity was determined to be one of the most pressing issues needing to be addressed in the Shambhala community. In response, the Shambhala leadership established the Diversity Working Group.

The Diversity Working group was given 3 tasks:

1. raise awareness of diversity
2. raise awareness of diversity needs and issues
3. raise awareness of the need for all to look closely at our own biases

Over the past 5 years, the Diversity Working Group has undertaken/supported many projects in its efforts to address diversity issues in the community—including this POC Conference Call.

Acknowledged Shambhala President Richard Reoch for his reliable and consistent efforts to foster diversity within the Shambhala mandala.

- *Comments by Shambhala President Richard Reoch (see transcript below)*

- *Working Group Presentations*

This January 27 POC Conference Call was originally to be a conversation of how to support POC on the path. However, with such a high response to the survey (60 people), a decision was made to split this large group of people into 4 working groups based on the individual's area of interest and to have these groups discuss these areas in the weeks prior to this call. The 4 working groups are:

1. Study and practice
2. Anti racism
3. Scholarship/mentorship
4. Outreach

**Study & Practice Working Group – Facilitator: Charlene Leung (Berkeley)**

Charlene acknowledged the participation of working group members and invited others interested in participating to join the group.

The communication of this working group was primarily via email with a conference call last Sunday. The group is excited about utilizing telecommunication to work together.

First project of focus:

Create mandala-wide list of POC at all levels (Shambhala guides, MIs, Shambhala Training Directors, Shambhala Training Assistant Directors, Shambhala Arts Teachers) to increase visibility and facilitate mentorship across the mandala. For

centers with no POC, we could facilitate long distance relationships via phone/email. These POC contacts would not replace the relationship with one's MI, but provide additional support. This list would enable small centers without POC to recruit POC instructors to teach at these centers.

Implementation plan:

- Expand the current POC list (*Profiles of People of Color* in Shambhala) (broadcast on sangha announce, article in The Dot, contact individual centers to recruit more POC practice instructors and teachers)
- Draft a vision statement describing how this list can be used (start with survey responses, create a draft, and email to the POC Study & Practice working group)

Other areas of interest in the working group:

- Support POC retreats and POC programs throughout the mandala
- Cultivate direct relationships and more contact with Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

Comments from group:

- This will be a list of all people across the mandala who can provide support even though a person already has an MI?
  - o Yes, to cultivate the connection.
- This is a doable project with a lot of impact.
- Centers have asked Cortez where they can find a POC MI. This list will help answer that question.

**Anti Racism Working Group – Facilitator: Victor Castro (New York City)**

Victor thanked President Reoch, Cortez and the members of the working group.

The anti racism discussion was conducted via email. Topics included:

1. Understand people's needs to be educated to the construct of racism
2. Understand the real teachings of Shambhala warriorship
3. Success to be found by working at the center-level

Implementation:

1. Organize an "Undoing Racism" workshop (conducted by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond) at one of our Shambhala centers or at a site out of the Shambhala center and encourage Shambhalians to participate in the workshop/incorporate what they learn at their centers
2. Those POC who complete the training could create open circles in their own centers
3. Those POC who complete the training could also be greeters in their centers

Comments/Questions from group:

- Which centers would the trainings be offered at first?
  - o Undecided. First step is to get the approval of the POC group.

- Center-level emphasis is important because the centers themselves are diverse in their own local cultures.
- Workshop idea would be helpful for both centers with a lot of diversity and centers with almost none.
- This work is at the heart of what we're trying to do in Shambhala all together.

### **Scholarship/Mentoring Working Group – Facilitator: Mabinti Dennis (Toronto)**

This working group met mostly through email. There was lengthy discussion about scholarships. Many group members were interested in developing a scholarship fund for POC to attend programs. But they were not aware that such a fund, the Shambhala North American People of Color Scholarship Fund (NAPOCSF), already exists. The fund was developed 3 years ago and has its own board members. It has received funds from the Shambhala Trust to create an endowment for the fund and is currently raising money for the endowment. The group was directed to view the scholarship information on the Diversity Resources webpage on Shambhala.org. There were a lot of ideas about fundraising and expanding the scholarship.

#### Implementation

1. The main tasks for the group at this time is to inform people of color in Shambhala about the already existing POC scholarship fund.
2. Since the NAPOCSF board members are already working on getting publicity out about the scholarship, they will continue work on the following:
  - Have a website up and running by Shambhala Day to provide details about the NAPOCSF fund.
  - Develop publicity materials to be circulated throughout the mandala.
  - Have a write up in The DOT about the scholarship.
3. Suggestion: Since the NAPOCSF exists with its own functioning board of directors, this working group may want to focus more on mentoring after item #1 above has been completed.

#### Comments/Questions from group:

- The website is a great idea, but word-of-mouth and posters on the walls are also effective.
- The NAPOCSF fund awarded 2 scholarships to help POC attend seminary last year.
- It's important to make sure the land centers understand how the scholarship works.

### **Outreach Working Group – Facilitator: Justin Miles (Baltimore)**

#### Methods:

1. Email introduction
2. Task at hand
3. Interests/projects
4. Conference call

#### Project:

Create a document that assists individuals and centers with outreach efforts.

Items discussed: Why reach outside of the mandala? What are the parameters? How to engage POC and other faiths? How to communicate with others? Where POC may feel most comfortable interacting. Analyze previous attempts at outreach across the mandala and note things that worked and things that didn't. Address 'inreach' – individuals who have been ostracized by leadership and who didn't feel there was a POC to turn to.

Benefits of this project:

- Lessen distance between self/other
- Cultural benefits
- Provide POC with an area of involvement to benefit others
- Provide awakened view

Comments/Questions from group:

- There is a Best Practices document in the members' area of the Shambhala website. We could pull from that document as a starting point for this one.
- Best practices will differ by community. Also, shedding light on other outreach efforts within the mandala is important because the energy is there, but the question is in the view and how to reach out.
- It would be helpful if there was a dialog among people already doing the work in their communities. In the history of the US, the Civil Rights Movement has developed many modes of interaction that could be helpful here. Important to identify leaders/representatives of the communities.

- *Cortez's closing comments*

Where do we go from here? It's important to stay connected with one another in terms of the Working Groups. After the conference call, the Group Facilitators will reach out again and provide direction for next steps.

If anyone is interested in switching Working Groups, please let Cortez know by the end of February because we need to report on our progress at that time.

Charlene: The Study and Practice Working Group will have a conference call next Sunday.

Victor: Requested that the people participating exchange telephone numbers and have some dialog by phone to encourage a greater sense of commitment and connection.

Anyone can use the contact information in *Profiles of People of Color* or the list [peopleofcolor@baltimoreshambhala.org](mailto:peopleofcolor@baltimoreshambhala.org) to communicate with everyone involved in this process.

- *Acknowledgements*

Cortez acknowledged the major contributions of Acharyas Hayashi and Ferguson and thanked the Group Facilitators, those who participated in emails and conference calls, the Baltimore Shambhala Center who allowed POC to use their listserv, Linda Francis for editing documents that were distributed earlier, and Traci Yamashita for taking notes.

- *Dedication of Merit*

Traci Yamashita prepared these conference call notes.

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*Transcript of Shambhala President Richard Reoch's remarks:*

Very warm greetings to everyone who has called in today. Not only do I want to thank each of you, but I particularly want to pay tribute to the work of the Diversity Working Group – the people who made this call possible.

The Diversity Working Group is the largest and most active of all the working groups in our mandala, established after the historic first Shambhala Congress. It has a tremendous number of link people and representatives in Shambhala Centres right across the mandala, and the extensive annual reports it publishes are truly impressive.

Much of this is due to tireless, often unsung, work by people all over our mandala, but I want to pay particular tribute, if I may, to the sustained, inspiring and dignified leadership of Cortez Rainey who has really devoted himself to raising this issue. Cortez has been an example of Shambhala warriorship to all of us -- not fearing the complexity of the challenge, holding his seat with great nobility, and being willing to open up dialogue in a way that has really secured the ground for moving the whole mandala forward to the next stage of deep inquiry and change.

I think you all know how strongly I feel about this myself, and I want to assure you of the strong support we have from the Sakyong. I sometimes find it helpful to remember that we are a community headed by a person of colour. Our lineage is a lineage of colour. And I know that Rinpoche has personally experienced what its like to be part of a minority – racially, culturally, linguistically and politically.

Just the other day he was talking to Carolyn Mandelker, the Director of our Shambhala Office of Practice and Education and Acharya Adam Lobel, about how we can address the question of diversity in the development of our new core curriculum – for example, in bodhichitta practice around diversity, and how we need to move forward with diversity training for our meditation instructors, teachers and other leaders in Shambhala. This has to be more than lip service to a general notion of inclusiveness: we have to be willing to look at the unspoken, unacknowledged barriers that need to be addressed so that we can fulfil the aspiration to be a genuinely diverse and truly multicultural community.

One of the great things that our Diversity Working Group has done has been to identify this issue and put it on the table, in a way that links this challenge unmistakably to the heart of our Shambhala Aspirations. If you walk into any Shambhala Centre these days, you are supposed to see posted prominently, a one-page statement: **The Shambhala aspirations on diversity, accessibility and compassionate conduct.**

I have it here in front of me. It opens with these words:

*The teachings held by the Shambhala mandala challenge us as individuals to recognize and dissolve barriers that separate us from others. As a community of practitioners, we strongly encourage understanding of and respect for the basic goodness inherent in all individuals, social groups and cultures.*

*We strive to foster a welcoming atmosphere free of prejudice... and to develop an inclusive and enlightened society... everyone is welcome at our centre regardless of 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.*

The task ahead of us now is how to implement this in a way that really makes a noticeable difference and that changes everyone's experience – so that we all have a lived experience of being part of a genuinely diverse and truly multicultural Shambhala.

A lot of people are thinking about how to work on this now. We have had a excellent, heartfelt programs at a number of centers: People of Colour Weekends, some led by Acharya Gaylon Ferguson who is with us, Diversity weekends – and I'm delighted that some of the wonderful images from those programs feature in the opening slide show of our new Shambhala website. The Sakyong's Council itself has undertaken a diversity training program, led by a team headed by Sangyum Agness Au, titled "Going Beyond Bias". Also, a very important development is programs that help Caucasians look more deeply at what it means to be a white person in society.

We need to build on these initiatives and make all this more systematic. I hope you all know about the creation of the North American People of Colour Scholarship Fund. The purpose of the fund is to support Shambhala's aspirations related to diversity by making financial assistance available to people of colour who aspire to attend programs that will enable them to contribute more fully to Shambhala society and to be of benefit to people who share their backgrounds. The Sakyong's Council was very much involved in supporting this, and I am hopeful that we can make a good contribution towards the endowment fund that will sustain this.

The Diversity Working Group has made a wide-ranging set of recommendations that would dramatically increase the support we give to new groups and members who are establishing themselves in regions throughout the world into which Shambhala is expanding. That includes radically increasing the volume of material that is available in

languages other than English. This is imperative, not only for the global development of Shambhala, but also in order to make the Shambhala dharma available and accessible to people in countries, like the United States and Canada, with diverse ethnic communities speaking a wide range of languages. Again, I am hopeful that we can begin providing some level of funding for this now.

The Diversity Working Group has also pointed out the importance of training leaders, meditation instructors, teachers and others who come from a wide range of backgrounds. That would really start to transform the experience of people from those backgrounds who come to our centres. We are going to work on integrating this into our training programs, and thinking about this internationally.

I've also been thinking about other steps we might take to raise the profile of this issue and thereby deepening our collective understanding. One could be to have an issue of the Dot devoted to the theme of Diversity, and the other would be to have a Shambhala Diversity Conference that would bring people together from all over the mandala, just as we had the extremely productive children and families conference two years ago and really magnetized a lot of energy around that and helped people really move forward.

So, again, with warmest wishes from the Sakyong, I want to thank you all for being on the call today and to thank Cortez and his team for really laying the ground so brilliantly for us....