

Racial Justice Talk By Victoria Mausisa NorCal Sangha Facilitators--July, 2015

Gratitude...Awareness of this moment

I was asked to speak about “how diversity and social action can be modes of creating resilient sustaining sanghas.” There are many diversities, as we’re aware, even in this room. However, I will specifically discuss diversities of color, of who we are, at least what we might observe.

I want to begin with a story. When I was 7 years old in first grade, one of the students came up to me and said, “What are you?” And I had no idea what she was asking me. I thought, ‘what are you?’ And I recall looking at her, and—it scared me! I didn’t know what to answer! Was I going to answer the right answer, the wrong answer? What on earth was she even asking me? So I went home, and I asked my mother, “What am I?” because I didn’t know what the question meant! And she said, “Well, you’re Filipino!” And I thought, well, what is that?! And she said, “you’re from the Philippines!” She didn’t say, You were born here in America, even though I was. She said, “you’re from the Philippines.”

From then on, I noticed, Oh my goodness! I went to school and I noticed: My hair IS a different color! My skin IS a different color! I had no idea! And that’s when I realized that I am perceived as someone different. And I thought, “uh oh!” That means, I’m not normal? Does that mean there’s something wrong with me? That “others” are looking at me in a certain way and that I have to kind of adjust myself to that, **adjust** myself to perhaps how the majority of people in my classroom are, which meant, that that was one of the seeds in me, of course, right?

There’s many stories, of course...my mother coming from the Philippines and the discrimination that she faced; my brother, who was mistaken as a waiter; my sister—who had to fight in high school because of the color of her skin; me being yelled at as I’m driving, “get off the road _____!”... he thought I was of a different heritage....he used a derogatory word

So while I’ve been invited to speak on “how diversity and social action can be modes of creating resilient and sustaining sanghas”, I want to pause and share with you, and name, what is happening today. Although it’s always been happening....And that when I first read about the news of the Charleston tragedy, I felt completely distraught. Confused. Tremendously sad.

Especially the pattern which is so upsetting. I didn’t know who to call, frankly even within my own community. There were so many people around that were not as upset as me, and that even upset me more! Why isn’t anybody else upset about this! And as I read a little bit more, I started to get it a little bit more.

I am married to a white man, and even he wasn’t that upset! What is going on??!! These people are not upset! It’s a different view, a different perspective, a different way of not even, in the BODY, knowing, what it feels like.

And then I noticed, that it was **grief** that I was feeling. I couldn’t quite pinpoint, what the emotion was, but I noticed it was grief. And I was crying, and nobody else around me was crying! And then I saw some beautiful e-mails coming from the East Bay Meditation Center and I thought, why aren’t WE doing something, why aren’t WE writing to each other? Why do I have to ask? Why isn’t anybody else responding? Thank goodness that I have my breathing practice! Thank goodness!

Thank goodness that I have a husband, who even though he couldn’t understand, he asked me, “Can I hold you?” And I said, “Let’s do the hugging meditation.” And I showed that to him.

I still don’t fully understand my grief. There are still seeds that I know that I’m transforming. I just know that I have these moments of grieving, and I have moments of sadness still. Of rage. Of anger. And sometimes it comes up and I ask myself, why am I still so mad?! Of feeling not understood.

And I did sit with the People of Color Sangha at the East Bay Meditation Center which is a center in Oakland. The **entire room** was grieving! The entire room! I mean, I felt better! Goodness, it’s not just me! But I felt so sad...why is it that this entire room is grieving? —and nowhere else?

[Pause]

The entire room was grieving.

[Pause]

Thankfully I am grateful for our present moment practice, because that’s what helps to bring me back to ease inside.

[Pause]

Today, I come to you with an invitation and an inquiry:

"Diversity" is the easy word. The word I see in books we may have shared. The word I see in Sangha e-mails. The "safer" word.

I invite us to look more deeply...to be open, to be real, more true, more encompassing of the word "diversity". The words are: Racial justice. The words are: Economic justice. The words are: Race. The words are: Power. The words are: Privilege.

[Pause – Breath]

Now some of us may have started to begin this path of understanding privilege and I invite us to continue to look at that.

I mean, look around the room! I'm taking a risk—look around the room! Or as I look around the room—what do I see?
What do you see? (pause)
What do you not see? (BELL)

With the mind of love, with deep compassion, with loving-kindness...

I invite you to look deeply, to explore what you see in the room.

I invite you to look deeply, to explore what you *don't* see in the room.

I invite you to explore what you may not be able to see within ourselves, within our Sanghas, as collective Community of Mindful Living, as collective Order of Interbeing, in our community, in our world

[Pause]

What deep listening needs to be done?
What mindful and compassionate speaking needs to be said?
What conversations do we need to have?

[Pause]

What transpires in our world, transpires in ourselves and in our Sanghas...Do we notice this inter-connectedness and interdependence? Are we inadvertently remaining separate?

[Pause – Breath]

How will we act...how will we begin the work to transform ourselves, our Sanghas?

I can't fully answer "how diversity and social action can be modes of creating resilient, sustaining sanghas". Perhaps this statement may be more of a vision.

This is the invitation: I invite us all to answer together, step by step.

I invite us to look deeply at racism, racial justice, power, privilege.

I invite us to begin with understanding history and with healing history .

I invite us to look at the "root causes of suffering that produces disparity and disproportionality of the marginalized and disenfranchised".

"Healing history begins with truth telling."

It may be difficult.
It may be uncomfortable.

I'll share this story... Just recently, when the Couples Sangha met after 3 days from the Charleston event. I *had* to say something. How could I not? We normally discuss joy, happiness...all of us in our Sanghas are used to being peaceful. I knew my husband might be concerned and brought it up to me later...that I should not have brought up Charleston. I calmly said to him: "I stand by my actions." And after we watched together the Eulogy by Obama , he said..."I changed my mind. You were right to bring up Charleston."

I invite us **not** to continue as "business as usual".

With a mind of love, with deep looking at ourselves, with a practice of deep looking that no matter what the color of our skin is, we are all inter-connected (as in Thay's beautiful poem "Call Me By My True Names")... with deep and loving listening, compassionate and mindful speech, and with coming back to ourselves in the present moment...we address racial justice, economic justice, power, privilege.

Victoria Mausisa has meditated since 1993 and has practiced in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh since 2002. She is a lay member to the Order of Interbeing. She lives in Oakland, CA. She co-facilitated the Mindfulness, Diversity and Social Change Sangha for several years and currently sits with the Mindful Peacebuilding, Couples, and Hella Just Sanghas.

(Note: This document was transcribed from audio when the talk was given)