

Relationship Building: Connecting the Dharma with our Current Pandemics and Building our CIMC Community

In Buddhism the three poisons, greed (craving, attachment), hatred (aversion) and delusion (confusion, ignorance) refer to the root causes of suffering. The delusion of race, the hatred generated by racism and the craving for domination are societal poisons that distort our ways of seeing, being and communicating with each other.

While the idea of race and practices of racism condition the particular ways we learn to view each other, we absorb the general poison of "better than" and "less than" judgments, ascribing value and worth to our various differences. These poisonous judgements apply to many other identities including gender, sexuality, ability and age. A culture of ranking and domination (with a powerful racial component) emerges, impacting every aspect of our relational lives. It underlies the unraveling of community.

In the spirit of our mission to attend to matters that sustain and care for all members of CIMC's Sangha, and to create more spaces and avenues for relationship building and communication across identity groups and individuals that gather at CIMC, we want to share some of the ongoing thinking and inquiry about practices that can support this mission.

Holding a Sangha Circle: Strategy and Rationale for Preparatory Sessions

Unless they are explicitly named and examined, the norms and influences of dominant identities (white, male, straight, able-bodied, educated, middle class, citizen, and other identities that are represented as the norm) can and have silenced the experiences and voices of people with marginalized identities (People of Color, female, LGBTIQ, child or elder, people with disabilities, working class, undocumented, and other identities not represented as the norm). To invite all voices to be heard, it is helpful to craft conversations which investigate and loosen these norms that dominate.

In building a CIMC community that is welcoming and inclusive for all, there is a benefit to connecting intentionally in groups within and across particular identities. The journey towards individual and collective liberation involves both understanding and working more skillfully with our own conditioning and cultivating greater understanding and compassion for ourselves and others. Developing awareness and creating guidelines for cross-identity communication can be facilitated by engaging in shared-identity or mixed-identity groups.

For some, meeting in single shared-identity groups, especially People of Color and white people, can create comfort, safety, and critical space for exploring conditioning. For those who hold dominant identities, meeting in affinity around that identity, even if it is uncomfortable, provides an important container for skill-building and exploration, that can ease the harm that may occur when those with marginalized identities are asked to participate in or witness this work.

For some, meeting in mixed-identity groups can help one gain a wider perspective and promote better understanding of those whose experiences of the world are different than one's own. Each person finds a balance that both stretches and supports their journey.

Join Us for Sangha Circles

On Friday, February 26th, from 6:30-8:30pm, CIMC will offer a community-wide Sangha Circle. To support our conversation across conditions, we will offer three "preparatory meetings" on Saturday, February 13th from 1:00-3:00pm. Please check back for information on how to join us. We look forward to being in conversation with you.