

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Letter from the Spirit Rock Board of Directors

March 16, 2016

Dear Spirit Rock Community and Friends in the Dharma,

Last spring, we announced a groundbreaking effort within our 25-year history of teacher training that's vitally important in serving our sangha: a joint Spirit Rock/Insight Meditation Society (IMS) Teacher Training Program training a majority of Teachers of Color.

Months after making this announcement, and amidst the excitement of 40+ potential trainees nominated, Larry Yang, Gina Sharpe and Lila Kate Wheeler withdrew as core faculty from the Teacher Training Program. In their resignation, they pointed to the need to understand and challenge the form that unconscious racism takes at Spirit Rock, IMS and in our larger dharma communities.

As Spirit Rock's Board of Directors, we share in their distress and hold ourselves accountable. We ask forgiveness for unintentional and intentional harm done in thought, word or action that contributed to this situation. We are deeply appreciative of Larry, Gina, Lila and other members of our community who have raised their concerns, helping us to see there is more to be done in our diversity and inclusivity work.

It is essential that we respond with clear intentions and firmly grounded in our dharma practice. We are committed to acting thoughtfully to learn lessons that need to be understood and deeply integrated throughout the whole ecosystem of Spirit Rock. We must demonstrate our learnings experientially and at every level of the organization — Board, Teachers, Staff, Sangha and Dharma.

All of this means commitment and care over time, while simultaneously acting with urgency — working at both longer-term planning and immediate actions that will have meaningful impacts:

Organizational learning:

- Accountability needs to be practiced both culturally and structurally for our work to match our intentions;
- Identifying and transforming the informal and formal power dynamics that have prevented People of Color from being full partners in the Dharma at Spirit Rock;
- Clarifying and bringing structural transparency to our decision-making processes.

Systemic Change:

- Taking ownership of the lessons learned, values and goals embedded in our recently Board-approved **Spirit Rock Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan** developed by our Diversity Working Committee with the support of sangha members and an outside consultant;
- Building, communicating and utilizing that plan to transform our teaching and our cultural, organizational and governance conditions around diversity, equity and inclusivity at Spirit Rock.

Community Engagement:

- Rebuilding our relationship with Larry, Gina and Lila by coming together for a facilitated two-day trust, power and accountability meeting together with founders and leadership from Spirit Rock and IMS;
- Listening to and learning from our sangha, especially through engagement with teacher training nominees and participants in our Community Dharma Leaders and Dedicated Practitioners Programs.

Teacher Training:

- Continuing forward with our commitment to training a cohort of Teachers of Color;
- Finding the most skillful form for that training to take place.
- We are prioritizing, challenging and changing the cultural conditions that cause suffering for all of us and fall particularly heavily on People of Color. This is the truth of interdependence. This work will have a profound impact over time as we clarify responsibility and accountability, and integrate diverse perspectives into our commitment to systemic change.

Thank you for being here. May we create an environment where all practitioners wake up together.

Spirit Rock Board of Directors

Hearts Breaking Open: Mudita & Karuna — A Message from Michelle Latvala, Executive Director

(Published in the Summer 2016 Spirit Rock News & Schedule of Events)

Spirit Rock is in the midst of an incredibly transformative year.

Externally we are happily increasing our dharma offerings as we open our new Community Meditation Center this summer.

Internally we are rigorously working on changing the conditions, structures and processes that have limited teachers and practitioners from Communities of Color from thriving at Spirit Rock.

The mudita (sympathetic joy) of the external transformation of the new center lives side by side with the karuna (compassion) of our internal transformation around race and equity issues. Both are ultimately about access to the Dharma — Spirit Rock's core mission — and deserve central focus in all of our efforts and conversations with you.

- **Mudita:** Many of you have been following our progress with the lower campus build-out — envisioned nearly three decades ago, fundraising starting almost ten years ago, and construction actively underway these last two years. Our teacher village, resident staff housing and administration building opened last fall. Thanks to all of your support! We are already seeing the benefits of having more dorm rooms available for retreatants, as our retreat teachers now reside in our teacher village, as well as the benefits of the increased integration of staff on the lower campus. We eagerly find ourselves in the final homestretch of completing and opening our new Community Meditation Center this summer, with three dharma spaces and a variety of programs to support your practice in

daily life. We thank you for your tremendous support in bringing this vision to bear and look forward to welcoming you to our new sangha space together!

- **Karuna:** Many of you have also been following our progress over the years with our diversity efforts — from the first People of Color (POC) Retreat in 1999, to expanding POC scholarship support for long retreats, to our commitment for our next Teacher Training to train a majority of Teachers of Color. We had a major shift last fall when core faculty for the program resigned, pointing towards foundational issues around race, equity and governance at both Spirit Rock and Insight Meditation Society that needed to be addressed for this groundbreaking Teacher Training to succeed. Those of us in staff, teaching and Board leadership are accountable for our own actions and inactions, and the actions and inactions of those around us, that led to this resignation.

We are engaged in a multi-leveled reckoning to better understand and learn from this opportunity in order to transform the conditions at Spirit Rock to better address inclusivity, race and equity. Karuna is a practice of turning towards suffering, and in this case we are turning towards better understanding racial suffering on a systemic level at Spirit Rock, amidst a whole country that is turning towards race and equity issues.

These efforts towards transformation — externally on the lower campus, internally towards how we are wired — are essential for Spirit Rock's ongoing health and relevancy in supporting the Dharma and part of our ongoing path to organizational maturity. As with all efforts, it takes a sangha! And as Spirit Rock is committed to being a learning community, we are grateful for your engagement, your input, your holding us accountable and your partnership as we move forward in transformation together with mudita and karuna — hearts breaking open to see more clearly, together.

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