

Practising an Inclusive Dharma: Lama Rod Owens with a panel of local practitioners

Transcript of event held at Friends' House, Euston, 23 April 2019, organised by London Insight meditation and Gaia House. Transcript prepared and edited by James Blake in consultation with the panel.

Lama Rod Owens: [recording begins shortly after Rod has started to speak] You may have read my *Radical Dharma*, some of the work that I've done. I've been very interested in inclusivity and diversity within sanghas, spiritual communities, and in the world in general.

So it's a pleasure to be here tonight supporting this space. I'm a facilitator and support for the voices that you will be hearing tonight and it's such an honour to be holding the space and to be with you all as well. Before we really get started with the programme, I wanted to have a few minutes of practice together, some meditation. And as we're sitting, really touching into the earth, touching into this quality of stability and foundation, and of letting the earth hold you right now.

We've all had a very long day. Some of you have been on retreat with me this week at Gaia House and you've come back to continue working, with me. We've been working on gratitude and deep compassion on retreat, and so for those of you who are just joining me this week, giving rise to a sense of gratitude, for anything. What are you grateful for? And allowing the earth to hold you as you give rise to the sense of gratitude.

[silence as people meditate]

And as we prepare to come back into the space to begin our dialogue, I wonder if you can give rise to an aspiration or an intention to sit and listen, not just with open ears but with an open heart as well, committing to being with whatever comes up for us in the moment as we hear these stories, these sharings. And if we can deeply empathise and connect to what we're experiencing again. Try to connect to what others are experiencing around us. And then from that deep connection to our experience and the experience of others giving rise to compassion. Just this wish to be free from the causes of suffering and from the actual experience of suffering as well.

[silence as people meditate]

[sound of bell to end meditation]

Thank you so much for your practice this evening, and I thank you in advance for the practice you will be doing for the next hour and a half or so, and we may drop into some practice throughout the evening, depending on how much the energy rises. If I'm around the energy will rise [laughs], so we'll come back into our practice at certain points throughout the night as well.

And again welcome to "Dharma and Inclusivity". I'm facilitating this event, and this is a space to begin a certain dialogue around what it means to practise an inclusive dharma in our communities. And by listening and opening up to the sharing of our panellists, whom I will introduce in a moment. The panellists will be sharing around a couple of key questions, and each sharing will be very different. But essentially the main question will be: what is your understanding of inclusivity? What have been your challenges practising in your community? What could be improved?

And to offer these experiences. Some of us, we actually have no idea of what some members of our community do - the kind of work that they have to do to be in the same space with us. The kinds of accessibility issues that some of us aren't really familiar with, because spaces are created for us to be in. Spaces around heritage and race and ethnicity. For many of us, coming into spaces that are very unlike our home communities where we grew up. Unlike anything that helps us to feel safe and nurtured and cared for. And much more. So this is some of the work that we have to do just to get into the room, let alone to get the teachings, to get the practice as well.

So I would like to introduce our panellists tonight. The bios can be found on the London Insight website as well. I'll briefly go through them just for you to have a refresher.

Immediately to my left we have Rehena. [Reads] "Rehena was born and lived in South Africa during the apartheid era and has been living in the UK since 1998. She is a lay member of Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing and has practised in that tradition since 1998. She practices with the Heart of London Sangha, London Insight and Colours of Compassion."

To Rehena's left, Stephen. Stephen writes "I am registered blind, and since 2012, I have been at regular meditation practitioner. I have attended silent retreats at Gaia House and Dhamma Dipa and have regularly attended a Central London sangha and my local Quaker meeting. I first discovered meditation through London Insight, finding spiritual support and learning at a number of their silent days. And so I am keen to advise on inclusivity, especially as I have done so in other fields such as in the arts."

To Stephen's left we have Sasha. [Reads] "Sasha is a trans woman who works helping and supporting people with a range of issues such as substance misuse, homelessness and mental health, using her training and experience in Buddhism and Buddhist practices as well as therapeutic models such as ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy)."

To Sasha's left, we have Esther. [Reads] "Esther is a black Londoner, mother of two, and has worked in the NHS for over thirty-five years with people with mental illness. She has a deep personal and professional interest in the science of discrimination and welcomes the emerging empirical evidence that Buddhist practice can help ameliorate the damage. She credits the practice and community for helping her to thrive and overcome emotional, physical and social difficulties and would like to share it with everyone."

And lastly on the end, and through the blessing and love of many beings helping her to get here tonight, Doreen. Doreen writes "As a child, I saw no colour, no sexual orientation, no disability, no race, and no class. I think they call this innocence. As a trainer, facilitator, befriender, intuitive I live my life happily and simply, in much appreciation and splendour knowing 'I Am Held' by the Universe."

So I would like to introduce tonight's panel to you. You can applaud them as well.

[applause from audience]

So we will begin with Rehena.

Rehena Harilall: I start with a traditional greeting. I'm starting with an African greeting. Sikhona. It says "I am here to be seen", and at the end you will say *sawubona*, "I have seen you". As Rod said, I was born in apartheid South Africa. I am considered of mixed heritage. I have both African and Indian heritage. I grew up in a family in a tin house in a very segregated area. It was predominantly Indian.

I only saw colour when I was growing up. I saw green trees, blue skies, and everyone around me was a shade of brown, so I only saw colour. I grew up fearing the colour white. I grew up wanting to be the colour white. Fear of a group of people that could take anything I wanted, who dictated where I lived, where I studied, and where I played. I also wanted to be like my doll: blue-eyed, blonde-haired, light-skinned. To be that would give me access to everything that would make me happy. All the privilege - I would have access to.

I was angry. This tension between wanting to be like something and at the same time resenting it for making me feel different. For not accepting me for who you are.

Channeled into two things: one, political activism. I wanted to be recognised, I wanted to fight for justice and I was prepared to die for it. And at the same time I so much wanted to be part of this group that I studied very hard to become, to be accepted, to be like, so that I could get access to all these things. And I studied why this would happen and my PhD thesis was: what does it mean to be black in the world?

I came from South Africa to the UK in 1998 because of the work I did post-apartheid. And in learning to be assimilated I gave up a lot of what I thought were my traditions so that I wouldn't be called kerriekop, curry head, a coolie, because that meant giving up my dress, giving up my language, rejecting my religious beliefs - all of that so that I could assimilate.

When I came to the UK in 1998 I had arrived. For the first time I saw, wow, people that clean the streets are white. I am privileged. I live in Richmond. I have arrived in the group that I belong to. No one sees colour here. That didn't last too long. I think racism, discrimination manifest in the UK in a different form. Maybe less overtly, less controlling, less in your face. And then I saw all these traditions that I was told were backward. The language, the yoga, these religious practices. Someone was selling it to me and they were white.

I was angry and I turned - what I do and maybe other people of colour do – inwards - that anger inwards. Something is wrong with me. I have a chip on my shoulder. This is wrong. How can I, why can't I do? Let me try harder. Let me do more. Let me learn French. Let me wear designer clothes. Let me - how do I do this?

And I was destroying myself. And that's when I turned to look at various Buddhist traditions. And I practised in various traditions. As the Buddha says, we take what works for us, and I looked to Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monastic and teacher, because, one, he was a person of colour. He was like me. Two, he radiates peace, and three, he came from an area with similar politics that I came from - that had violence.

And for me that's the starting of my journey and the practice that he's brought to me, or that I've learned through the various traditions, is to look deeply To become inclusive in myself. To look to my body to recognise and accept my body and recognise that brown can be beautiful, brown can be happy. And to look at the practice of stillness to see how every aspect of my life has been permeated by exclusion, and that I look at life through an exclusion lens. I am making myself whole again And I look at the Buddhist community, and I think, OK, the challenges we have in society are the challenges we have in our community too. We do not stop race, we do not stop the socio-political context when we arrive on the mat. It comes with us, and we need all to look deeply and wholly, and holistically into ourself to make the peace within ourselves, to heal our body, our minds, and see that we have privilege, gratitude, injustice, discrimination in ourselves. And by healing ourselves maybe we can become more an inclusive society.

I don't know what an inclusive society is, I can only make myself inclusive. And the challenge for me is: how do we make our Buddhist communities more

inclusive? How do we generate this love so that we don't actually look to try and try open the doors wider to make it more accessible. That we don't look to break open those doors but we look together as we heal ourselves, looking at our ancestry that we contain race, discrimination, prejudice, in ourselves, and work towards building a better room, a different space.

And maybe then, on Trafalgar Square what we'll have instead of statues of generals that killed other people we'll have trees. And in the British Museum, instead of the remnants that we use to show our power, that come from other countries we will have the stories of all our people, and for me that's inclusion. Ubuntu. I am because we are. So inclusion is as strong as I am and as strong as you are, in our quest to find what this inclusion might be. Sawubona.

Audience: Sawubona.

Rehena Harilall: Sorry, I went over time.

Lama Rod Owens: It was lovely, though. Now we'll hear from Stephen.

Stephen Portlock: I'm Stephen, and I'm very grateful to London Insight for inviting me to give a talk today, it's wonderful.

And there's no irony when I say that I'm very grateful to London Insight. And the reason that I say that is - it's a sad thing to say - it is an observation that I have made that quite often on panel discussions we hear talk about less racist, less misogynistic, less homophobic, and I think, "Not anyone else you can think of?" Because too often it does seem to me that disabled people are overlooked in the work of inclusivity. And I would like to go back a little bit a stage, and say that another reason I'm so glad to be part of this panel, is that, on a personal level: obviously I'm blind, I also incidentally have OCD, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and my late wife was a Ugandan refugee, so that coupled with a couple of Asian friends of mine, means I have witnessed, or at least been aware of the experience of racism that they've experienced. And the damage to their self-worth and self-identity that it can create.

In terms of the area of disability, perhaps I can give a bit of my history to start. I have, at different stages of my life, been, quote, fully sighted, in as much as that term has a meaning, partially sighted, and today almost totally blind with light and dark detection and little else. I come from a C of E background, and one of the things that drove me to meditation, or at least to spiritual practice of this type, was a feeling of profound dissatisfaction with my life. Partly linked to my disability, but to a large extent not, or at least only indirectly.

I experienced a lot of bullying at school, and looking back on it today, the language was the language of disability. "Spastic", "mental retard", etc. I apologise if those terms cause offence, but they were the sort of language used. And so I had profound feelings of dissatisfaction. I come from a C of E background, went to church, felt a very real yearning for a sense of happiness, and that happiness was I think less to do with an external set of circumstances than a need for a spiritual calm.

I'd always had an interest in Buddhism, but it wasn't until I think about 2011 when I read Alan Watts that I first got an understanding of what meditation was about. And somehow, through a chain of events, a couple of acquaintances, a series of circumstances, including a Catholic friend who made a passing allusion to Alan Watts as well, and mentioned London Insight, that I first attended a London Insight event, and through there found other meditation sanghas. And I think that one of the things I found comforting, one of the things I found pleasing about it was that it was not about seeking hope, it was not about hoping for

something better, it was about developing a distance from one's narrative. Not letting go of a narrative, but developing an equanimous secondary place below that surface narrative. That was what I found helpful.

So from a position initially of praying to God each day for things to get better, I found it increasingly hard to pray, not I think out of a disbelief in God, but because of a desire to move into the now, to move into the present moment, and to embrace what is. One of the things that I find attractive about, I think one of the things that's pleasant, about Buddhism, is the notion of non-selfhood, and that it is very much rooted in the universal sense of God within all and all within God. That it very much moves away from a narrative of punishment, which can often be associated with disability.

That was very much what I found comforting, and it's probably exactly the same reason why I found myself very much welcomed into sanghas, both London Insight and the places like Heart of London Sangha. And I'll end at that point, but thank you very much.

[Applause from audience]

Esther Slattery: Where do I start? My name is Esther. I'm a black woman. Can you tell? [laughter from panel] I have lived in London most of my adult life. I was born in Kenya and had a great (ish) childhood. I might qualify that a little bit later. I was raised by my grandmother who taught me that God loved me so well he chose my particular colour and if you look at it you can see the sunshine underneath. And that I suppose was my reality. I am a Catholic, I went to a convent school. After O levels I came to visit a relative and for some family reasons ended up staying. Because I had been at boarding school I didn't notice the transition.

I had always been interested in Buddhism, because as a child I read the story of the Buddha in a children's magazine (called *the Rainbow*) which carried the story of the Buddha as a cartoon, and I rationalised that actually Buddha and Jesus would have been friends. So I didn't have any difficulty fitting it together.

When I started my nurse training in Surrey there were not very many people like me. It was a huge hospital, in the days when hospitals for people with mental health problems were segregated. It was on a hill. There were hardly any black people there. I had to socialise - I was 20 years old. So I did what the locals did to socialise, I went to the pub to socialise. But then I also found a wonderful Buddhist centre in Croydon which taught yoga and meditation. I had previously done some yoga and some TM meditation. That became my haven because when I felt isolated I would go there, and people were lovely, they accepted me and fed me. I contributed what I could when I could. And that has been a way that it has been weaved through my life.

When as a mother of two, my children came and practised, we have always been welcome. So that was the Triratna community. And I trained as a yoga teacher because I am too lazy to practise. I thought if I train to teach then I would have to do my practice. And after that I did my mindfulness training. And it was when I was at Oxford that I met John Peacock who introduced me to insight which was quite revolutionary, because I've always had a passion about inclusiveness. Discrimination is a really difficult poison because it's a poison that poisons from inside. And one of the things I find really interesting is that somebody doesn't have to experience discrimination. Just the apprehension, fearing discrimination can actually affect their whole mood, their sense of being, and stop them taking up opportunities that are there. So doors might be open but somebody may not be able to perceive the door is open because of their appraisals and perceptions.

And I'm also really interested in the different dynamics. Because of my work I witness middle-class white men who have less privileges than I have as a black woman, because

they've got mental health problems. And I've witnessed white women who experience horrendous discrimination because they've got a mixed race child, and people discriminated against because of disabilities. So I think it's so dynamic, it's not just about race.

So I feel coming here today I'm holding not just my perspective but the perspective of a lot of people I work with who experience these barriers that a lot of the time we might not be aware of.

I've got two children and both my children have long-term conditions. My daughter had quite severe eczema and my son had childhood epilepsy. It was really interesting: before he developed epilepsy he was getting invited to parties all the time. I started moaning about the expense. And then he developed epilepsy and nobody invited him to parties.

And I think sometimes we forget, colour is easier to see, but sometimes we forget how many barriers are there for people. I was chatting to someone and I was saying that there is no discrimination in the gay community and that's because, when I was younger, I used to hang out in gay pubs because they were just so friendly. In the eighties, to me there wasn't any racism in gay pubs. But he was saying actually, no, you do get horrendous racial abuse within the gay community today. And that has been really interesting because some of the things that I had no perspective on, are there. It's interesting that discrimination changes and evolves, which is why Stonewall has started a BAME pride. And I suppose there's this dynamic, and it's also when somebody has multiple identities which are discriminated against. There is a stacking up, a cumulative effect

And so I absolutely love the community and thanks very much for welcoming me because I can happily go to Bali, go to Kenya, go anywhere and I know I belong in that community. If we can smile and actually remember that unless you say "hello, we're here, come in", people may not see that the door is open, so we have to stand at the door with arms wide open. Thank you.

[applause from audience]

Doreen Blake: It is a bit of a challenge here to sum up so much in the space of five minutes. So, where do I start? I haven't prepared anything, that's a challenge to myself. I'm someone who used to prepare every little iota, cross the Ts and dot the Is. And I've decided that at this point in my life I'm not going to do that anymore. Whatever happens, happens.

I want to say thank you to Lama Rod and all those who have been involved in pulling this together. I feel really privileged and it's an opportune moment for me to be here. I've always had a thing about inclusivity. In my bio, which in a sense can be seen as maybe simplistic, but at the same time quite profound, I said yes, as a child I saw no colour, yes, my skin was this colour, and I played with other children and what have you, but I didn't see that. It was just another child, being with another child and the adults around them. But what did happen as I was growing up, I became really quite confused and I felt some questions were unanswered about certain receptions that I would get. Or certain ways that I would observe people being treated, and there was a lot of misunderstanding around that as well.

So I grew up with a lot of confusion. Yes, there were a lot of terms around as well, there were some mentioned around the table today. And for me there are lots of labels. There's a label for colour. There's a label for someone who's able or not able. When I first became involved in this event, for the sake of describing my life and who I am I said "I am a black female, 59 years old. I have an unseen, or invisible, disability". I'm in a wheelchair today so it's not quite as unseen as it was. Maybe those of you at the back can't see that I'm sitting in a wheelchair. And I made a point of saying "that's not how I would normally speak, it's just for sake of this event." So in my bio, other than seeing my photo, you wouldn't know that I had a disability, that I was a black person and so on. I mentioned labels. I'm not keen on the

term "disabled". Because I consider myself to be very able. And even though yes, at the moment I am in a wheelchair, and yes, I do need some support, for me it's about having what support structure - what support aids around me that I need, to be able to do the things I need to do. So I do not consider myself disabled. So that I see as another label as well.

That ties in with "who am I? yes, who am I?" I ask myself "who am I?" Often I find that when someone talks about who they are it's, you know, "I'm a mother" (I am a mother, one of my sons is here tonight, is supporting me), the kind of work that I do and so, but that doesn't define me and who I am. In my bio I mentioned the term innocence. Innocence for me is quite organic. I'm leading my life as an organic person. That doesn't mean to say even today I don't get those receptions and looks, and I know clearly that there are certain things that are being said and certain things that are being done because of who someone may see that I am. But I see that as not my problem. I see that as the person who's trying to project that upon me. But I'm quite comfortable with who I am and where I am, and where I am going. And I know that if I live my life organically that no matter what I want to achieve I will achieve it, whoever tries to put hurdles in my way. So that sums up a little bit, a lot in such a short time.

In terms of the inclusivity I mentioned, it's something that is very close to my heart. And it feels so interesting that in terms of communities trying to be inclusive, they become almost exclusive, because it's like "we need to pull together, we need to come together", and then you find that actually that's segregating as opposed to being inclusive. And so that doesn't really make sense to me. That's one of the other reasons I want to be part of this. I work for an organisation. I'm not going to name who they. [laughter from panel] It's setting up a group because we want to be seen as being inclusive, but then you're over there and the rest of the group is over here. How is that coming together and being inclusive? That's my view. And so, inclusivity is just for me being who I am and that's the best gift that I can give to myself. And my hope is that each person too can be their organic self, and that will be the best gift that they can give to themselves as well. I haven't said much in terms of meditation. I come from a Christian background and I had my first meditation retreat experience with Gaia House, it was a group retreat. There were about seventy participants. It was like "Woah!" I didn't know what to expect at the time. But what was interesting, I was the only black person, black female there, and it's happened a couple of times as well. So I think I am going to end on that note and thank you all for listening.

[applause from audience]

Lama Rod Owens: We're going to take just a short little grounding practice and then we'll begin a reflection and feedback process with the panel, after we read a short statement. So again coming back into our bodies, but more specifically connecting to the earth, feeling the earth under our feet, the weight of our bodies on the seat.

[silence as people meditate]

Allow yourself to breathe. Just noticing that breath, inhaling deeply, exhaling nice and long. Relaxing, offering space for everything that has come up for us to be there. And noticing everything as an experience. Giving everything lots of space.

[silence as people meditate]

[sound of bell to mark end of meditation]

So now I would like to read a statement from Salma Darling, who is a teacher in the insight tradition, who teaches in Brighton and who is affiliated with London Insight, has been affiliated with Gaia House in the past. I'll read the statement and then we'll have space for

our panellists to reflect on the statement. The panellists have not heard this either. And we consented to that. So this is not a surprise thing that I'm doing. For some of you it may be a surprise. So this is a statement from Salma Darling who asked this to be read out loud. She is unable to be here.

“As an East African Indian born and brought up in London I speak to the race issue in Insight meditation.

I have been practising meditation since childhood and at Gaia House from 2000, including a year working there. I was often the only POC on retreat. I stopped going to Gaia House in 2011 after I was scapegoated by the staff and the then Managing Director whilst in a 6 month retreat, and my formal complaint was diminished and dismissed. I experienced what happened as racist. Since that time my retreat time has been at Spirit Rock (California) and Insight Meditation Society / Forest Refuge (Barre). I have now spent over 2 years in silent retreat and in monasteries. I have been teaching meditation since 2002 starting in the NHS, and established and have been teaching the weekly dharma group Brighton Insight Meditation. I approached London Insight a year and a half ago offering to lead a POC dharma group on a dana basis and teach Mindfulness and Diversity daylongs, as I have for Bodhi Tree Brighton and elsewhere. Although I am experienced, insured and mentored by Ajahn Amaro amongst other teachers, LIM have not taken up my offers as I'm not an 'approved' dharma teacher following, for instance, Gaia House ethical guidelines. So even though my psychotherapy registration requires more rigorous ethical conduct, LIM have not accepted it.

We need more POC teachers who have a lived experience of the culture of race in the UK, to speak to the issues that POC come to dharma with. This is a significant factor in what will bring more POC to dharma teachings.

Racial bias takes many forms, including expecting people of very different backgrounds and life experiences to fit into structures established by people whose experience of the world is mediated by white skin in a dominating culture. Like LIM's policy on who can teach with them.

White teachers speak to white issues, and don't necessarily understand POC issues, I have often been not understood.

I have struggled to get an Insight dharma teacher mentor, as racial bias exists on that level too.

Over the years I have seen Gaia House favour white, well-educated males to support into teaching.

There is a lot more I could say about unconscious racial bias and how it is enacted in Insight communities, and as a sangha we must start by recognising what is happening before we can respond appropriately. I had communication with LIM a year and a half ago about racial diversity, about the importance of my contribution to the discussion was not considered when setting up this event, and unfortunately right now I'm on retreat at Spirit Rock and can't be there in person to contribute.

Lama Rod is a great teacher on dharma and diversity, and his practice is not rooted in the Insight tradition, and I object to UK dharma organisations **repeatedly** bringing over US POC dharma teachers and thereby not giving attention to supporting and encouraging POC teachers in the UK.

Though the US conversations around race are far more developed than the UK, the US has different race issues / solutions to the UK, and I hope that UK Insight organisations can start looking inward to see how they are blocking UK POC teachers, and that by giving POC teachers support they would be valuing and respecting POC, and opening space for POC to participate in dharma teaching. From my embodied experience of being brown and living and practising in the UK, I'm teaching another Insight Meditation group in London in June open to anyone wanting to explore dharma together. Please give your name / email to LIM if you are interested in more details.

There are also a lot of resources on Dharma and Diversity on my website www.mindfulnessconsultancy.com

In the dharma,
Salma Darling”

[applause from audience]

Lama Rod Owens: Taking about thirty seconds just to sit with that, resting with that impact, and after the thirty seconds we'll allow our panellists to respond.

[silence]

[sound of bell to mark end of silence]

Lama Rod Owens: We'll just open up the space for any replies. And also just a little bit about my relationship with Salma. Salma is a friend and colleague and we've had these discussions before, privately. So, I do know Salma, around these issues.

Doreen Blake: Yes, there's a lot there. What was interesting is, part of what Salma was saying was really echoing what I had mentioned about being at Gaia House and being the only black, person of colour - again, for me these are labels. But yes, she very much echoed that. Salma, obviously she's shared her experience and I could identify with some of those experiences generally in my life. But also one of the things I'd said in briefly sharing with you is - I am going to say it this way, you can say it in a different way - whatever one's journey is it will begin to unfold, and wherever they need to end up along the line they certainly will.

And in relation to Gaia House: I know that Gaia House and London Insight work closely together. They are not the only body to practise with and doing what you need to do. I remember one time having a conversation. The word “famous” came up, and what is fame, what is famous, is it being on TV? Is it having your name in headlines? I blurted out this kind of explanation. “That’s really good!” -he took out his phone and said “say it again.” Mmm, I don’t like to say it. So – I don’t know if I’m digressing here – so yes, I think there are other ways in terms of making one’s mark, and this is not in any way being disrespectful to someone’s experiences, as I said I can identify with some of that. In the space of the few moments I had to speak I didn’t even put a dent in my own personal experience. So that’s what I’d like to say.

Esther Slattery: I’m so sad that that’s the way she feels and that’s the pain she feels and that’s the hurt she’s feeling. As a black woman who’s been to Gaia House – I love Gaia House, I make a monthly donation - I haven’t had anybody of colour teach me. But the compassion I’ve felt, the inclusiveness I’ve felt, has worked for me. And it’s really difficult to know whether I’m just such a shallow person that I don’t work on a deeper level, but all I can say is I’ve had to deal with really difficult issues and I’ve felt loved and understood. And the people - I can’t imagine a greater honour than to have Christina Feldman teaching me. And

when she has, it's felt that she hasn't sat in the comfort of a middle-class white woman, she's stepped outside to hear me and has heard me and has seen me and has heard my pain.

I do feel sometimes having somebody who looks like you doesn't mean they haven't internalised the biases, because people of colour, black people are biased. Ask any young gay man, he'll tell you that people of colour discriminate. So I do feel my story has been different - it may just be my experience – but so far I have felt included. I don't take my children anywhere they've experienced that, and I know I've taken my children to London Insight and they've been welcome and my 22-year old son is happy to come back, so I do think my experience has been different. But I do respect her perspective and her experience, and I'm sad that she has experienced that.

Stephen Portlock: Thanks very much. I'm acutely aware of being in a slightly strange position here, speaking as a white person on this issue. I want to bring up is a couple of points. As I said, my late wife was black, a couple of my very close friends today are brown. I know that my wife, and I know that my Asian friends, have experienced racism. I know that they've experienced it but I couldn't claim to understand it, because it's not something that I've been through. I also know that on occasions when I spoke to my late wife who was fully sighted, and certainly to a couple of my Asian friends who are also fully sighted, in as much as that term has a meaning, that they have got emotional about the discrimination that I experience on a very regular basis.

So I guess what I'm driving at, is that the prejudice which can be experienced is not always - the lack of understanding does not always come from a position of – the intention may be there to understand, it may just be that the barrier is one that is very hard to surmount. As I said, to draw the analogy, I can understand intellectually but not experientially the experience of racism. Just as somebody not disabled may have difficulty understanding – may intellectually understand but not experientially understand disability discrimination. And that is why sadly so often in fact in the world of disability discrimination, people's perceptions of disability, often in the media, are often so basically mistaken, so wrong.

The other point that I'd like to make when I hear about Salma's experience: as a blind man, I have experienced discrimination in the world of meditation. London Insight have been quite inclusive in terms of trying to accommodate my needs as a blind man. I think we could discuss, maybe later on this evening, ways in which things could be improved in other ways. But certainly there are other places which have not been. By way of example, other places have not been willing to provide a sighted guide for me. Now, for a lot of people, sitting for hours on end on a cushion subjecting their bodies to pain is not their idea of a perfect holiday. So getting somebody to join them on a retreat, getting someone to join me on a retreat is quite a challenge. At this stage it's not a barrier that I've overcome, going to those particular retreats. I spoke how as a spiritual practice Buddhism has got a better relationship to disability than others. But I am acutely aware that there are strands of Buddhism that still view disability, equate disability as punishment. So I guess what I'm saying, and it's, to reiterate I say this very much from the outside looking in, I can empathise with Salma in as much as I've had experiences of that discrimination, which may be made by people who do not see themselves as hostile to disabled people or who would not identify as racist. On a personal level, I do identify myself as a disabled person, partly because I have no choice, because other people would see it as almost wilfully perverse of me to deny it, but also because I have an ambivalent relationship with my disability. It's not my identity. Again I could talk about that later but I'll pass on, I think that's enough for now. Thank you.

Sasha Dettmar: Like Stephen, I might seem in a bit of a strange position to talk on this, being a white European trans woman, not black. And being affords me an amount of privilege, and I haven't suffered racism as such. I've witnessed a lot of racism and I've witnessed a lot of denial of racism, or gaslighting, both outside of dharma communities and within dharma communities. My experience personally, where I could relate to that, is being a trans woman and having transitioned over the last couple of years only, and seeing people's attitudes in dharma circles and sanghas change to me, very much so. When I came out as trans, when I started transitioning, whatever I said or did, with a lot of people didn't quite carry the same weight anymore. I wasn't treated as, for the lack of a better word as seriously, or considered as seriously. I'd have to very much make my point even better if I was trying to make a point, or I would have to prove myself more. And in some spaces was just not welcome anymore, was told basically I don't belong there, that I'm just not dharma. That's pretty much messages I got. That's my experience and, having moved about a bit in sanghas and dharma circles, I've come across a lot of that and again a lot of gaslighting of that when bringing it up. Not just around trans issues, but also working class. In a lot of dharma circles I've moved in, most of the time, what I've come across is people from fairly privileged backgrounds financially and materially, white middle class backgrounds, and very little working class representation. I'm not saying that there's none. When I've tried to bring up this as a debate in various arenas I've been told things like "Oh, it doesn't matter, in the dharma we're all the same", again more gaslighting. I've tried in some arenas to bring up this subject, this question: who are the working class dharma role models throughout history and now? Something I've been talking about with one of my good friends at the moment: who are the working class, who are the queer or LGBT role models, if any, who are the trans role models? When I've tried to bring that up in certain arenas, amongst practitioners, what I've mainly encountered is "Oh, that doesn't matter, leave that outside of here, don't bring that with you into dharma practice, into sanghas, we're not here for that." And I'm being told "Leave that outside of here". And that just makes no sense to me. That's what that brought up for me, listening to that, is that sense of "Just leave that outside, we don't want to know about that." Spiritual bypassing in a sense, or spiritual gaslighting, even "It doesn't matter, those material things etcetera, why are you focussing on that?" I find that approach unhelpful, and quite violent as well, quite abusive, emotionally violent. That's where I will leave it. Thank you.

Rehena Harilall: In the interests of time – I know you might like to ask us questions as well, so I'll respond with just offering metta to London Insight, to Gaia House and to Salma. Because I know from my own experience, when we get stuck with a craving, and sometimes when we look at things from a perspective of exclusion, everything can be magnified. And spaciousness sometimes can allow things to be resolved. I do agree that we have a lack of people of colour, dharma teachers, in the UK, working class dharma teachers in the UK. But not everyone who trains necessarily can transform and transmit the dharma if they trained as teachers. So I really can't comment about the grievances, I really can't comment about the situation and who was involved. I can see that London Insight is trying to be more inclusive, as is Gaia House. And we all come to our mat, to our practice, with a socio-political context. And when we sit on that mat we do not reach the ultimate dimension and we cannot, for me, until we work with the historical dimension. So it's for all of us to look at the seeds, our ancestry, all of the aspects of prejudice, race, discrimination, that we carry within ourselves, and make peace within that. Because when we are whole again we can relate to everyone in a holistic way. So I can't say whether Salma's a qualified dharma teacher, I can't respond to any of that. All I can say is that if she's meant to teach, there will be a way. And I wish her well, I wish London Insight well and I wish Gaia House well too.

[applause]

Lama Rod Owens: I'll just say briefly, I don't want really to get too involved in this, I don't like to create problems and trouble, even though that's what I do [laughter from panel and audience]. As a queer person of colour who's also a dharma teacher, what I've experienced is very severe discrimination, personally. As part of being a marginalised person, particularly growing up in the American context – it may be similar for people growing up here in a marginalised context – but in America, to beat discrimination, or to beat the ways in which you're devalued, as a marginalised person you have to be the best, at everything. Certain communities may call it model minorities, I don't know what we call it, particularly amongst the black community, but I just know, when I came into dharma specifically, that I couldn't be mediocre. I couldn't have a dharma authorisation that could be disputed or questioned. I had to be trained academically because being an authorised teacher wasn't enough. It's like "Who cares if you're an authorised teacher?" So I had to go to the best school in America to get a graduate degree in Buddhist studies. Because I was being really just ignored. And being oriented towards justice and being oriented towards the issues that we've been bringing up tonight I was equally ignored by dominant communities, by white dominant communities, upper class dominant communities who were very comfortable in the way that they were practising dharma, and only got involved in inclusivity work because it looked good, not because they wanted to. That's hurtful for me, and I have been in retreat situations, I've been in dharma communities, monasteries, where this kind of discrimination has happened. I've experienced this in monasteries in India, in my tradition, where the local anti-blackness within Asian communities is really astronomical. And that's another issue that we may not get to tonight, but this idea that black people don't do dharma, so "Who are you?" And that's been something I've had to confront, and I can be really pissed off about that. As a matter of fact I am. Really quite pissed off about that. But that's not where I come from. My experiences of being angry, where anger bites [1 word inaudible] but I choose to come from a place of compassion and love, knowing that my dharma is the communication of openness and spaciousness, to hold myself and others as well. Reading Salma's statement – I just got it this afternoon – I was reading through it and I was "Wow, I really agree with that", even that statement about me. I was like "Oh yeah!" Matter of fact, if you were on retreat with me this weekend, you know I've said the exact same thing. Did I not say that? Did I not say that we have to support teachers of colour in this country? I can come and help as I can, but I want to see teachers of colour. I don't know teachers of colour in this country, or marginalised, or a lot of – I do know queer teachers, and trans teachers, at Triratna too. I know that. But I don't know a lot of teachers of colour at all. [to a panellist] You know two? That's two more than I know. And so my question is, how do we support the teachers that we already have, how do we offer them this kind of support, because being a teacher of colour, being a marginalised teacher period, a disabled teacher and so forth, it's quite a burden to carry, and it's even harder when the communities that we reflect are not supporting us and helping us.

Esther Slattery: I just wanted to support what you're saying, and something Sasha said about a lot of the time we see the colour, but what we are missing is the poverty and the class division in this country. So actually in a way if we are more inclusive - if you are a working class travelling person, taking time out, that time is money, if you're just about managing, even if it was free, we need to do much more outreach work. And once we reach out to people, including the poverty issue, then that's going to bring in more people of colour. So I think it has to be an active reaching out but also levelling out. And being clear that in being inclusive we don't start splitting because this is a wonderful thing, and places like Gaia, London Insight, were started out of love. And to a point, if we can grow within that love and be more inclusive then it's more likely that we're going to catch and have more people of colour coming in and have more people of colour being supported too. Yes. To be more inclusive.

Lama Rod Owens: Yes, absolutely. And just to say too, I wouldn't be here without rich white people. And upper class, and middle class affluent, wealthy white people funded my training.

And I'm very appreciative for that. And they funded my training, I think, partially because they knew that I would do this. And I think that's an ethic that we can develop. We need to think consciously about where our resources go. And to do outreach, because many of us do not have the financial resources to go to retreats and to do trainings. It costs a lot of money to do dharma in the world, and how can we support people with that financial help? So having said that, I would love to open up the panel for questions from the audience.

Audience member #1: I'm a complete outsider to London Insight. I wanted to find out, why did this meeting get called? Is it because of a specific issue that happened within the group? Because of Salma, or is it because of something completely different? What were you all hoping to get out of it?

Lama Rod Owens: Well, the purpose of this panel wasn't to respond to a specific instance. Salma's email came through just today. So I wasn't aware of any of this. And this retreat came out of a desire, by Gaia House particularly, from my understanding, to begin a conversation, and they reached out to London Insight to help co-host and co-sponsor this event. The purpose of the panel is simply to begin a dialogue around this. This is just one, the first. There are things that are happening of course everywhere. But to have this focussed time to put these issues out, so you know what you're working with. And then it's up to the community, it's up to our leaders, it's up to the role models and teachers to begin to put this work into further events.

Audience member #2: Yes, thank you so much, I am from Latin America, so for me it's amazing this space, because when I came from my country to here I was so excited to find different ways of thinking based on different things. And the majority of the people were white people talking about my experience, my heritage, my memory, and I said "What happened with them, because they don't go to my country, or they were just travelling and they have put together a creation. So for me this is so rich, so powerful, and for me it's so important to think of things from the historical and holistic situation. Because now, the majority of the people live in the [words inaudible]. And now for example with the climate revelation the majority of the activists are white people and they do not understand sometimes there are troubles in all countries, in all lands. So for this reason I feel so grateful for this space and for thinking very intersectionally. I run a charity just for Latin American women and I have training, and for me it's so important. And this is my question, because for example Doreen and Esther talking about the need for more inclusivity, said the labels are not important but in real life, in this country to be women of colour or people of colour is survival, because the white population is so, so strong. Especially in these migrant environments, bad situations. So what do you think about this inclusivity? Is it OK for example, in this spiritual way, or were you thinking as well, of safe spaces for people of colour to empower themselves. Where is this option and what is your opinion about this? Thanks so much.

Doreen Blake: Sorry, could you summarise the question?

Audience member #3: I guess the question was what do you think about safe spaces for people of colour in this context?

Audience member #2: Do you think it's important now, [words inaudible] white people with more privilege, or just continue in this way, [words inaudible], and empower a space just for people of colour?

Lama Rod Owens: Rehena, you want to go first?

Rehena Harilall: That's a question very close to my heart. I think the sangha tries to be inclusive as I said. When we come with our historic prejudices and discrimination – all of us – we bring it into the sangha and, for myself, sometimes it's not always easy to share my experience in a sangha that is mixed, because I get experiences of, when I share deeply, I don't often feel I'm heard. Because either someone doesn't understand it, or they share with me their experience: "When my father, when I went..., I saw this..." and I feel undermined. I feel I'm not heard. So I do feel we need safe spaces. Safe spaces to look at all aspects, because we have so many different dimensions of identity. To be able to heal that dimension. And so for me I do attend a Colours of Compassion sangha, which is addressed to people of colour, and it is not aimed at being exclusive in the sense – and it's exactly that, Colours of Compassion, because as part of my teachings I feel I need to heal myself, I need to identify and see aspects of myself that I've lost because of assimilation. And it's when I make myself whole that I can fully present myself.

That doesn't undermine that the sangha should still be inclusive, and I know that causes a lot of strong emotions because it feels like it's exclusive. It feels like we're creating a different sangha. But for me it's a space of healing and the idea is really that when I heal myself that I can present myself whole again, so that we can be together. And I think that's the journey that white people need to do as well because you too carry, are not necessarily being exclusive, you do come with aspects of discrimination as well as privilege, as well as other aspects that I carry too. And for us to heal ourselves, it's not just you extending a hand to me, it's not just giving me access, but it's also looking to heal yourself because in that space, in, through discrimination of all kinds, we've lost aspects of ourselves and we both, all need to heal, fully heal ourselves to stand together and until I - I cannot be until we are, until you are, I will never be inclusive, completely inclusive because we are community. And so that's my view but that might be different so I do feel that there is inclusion and again there is discrimination between the people of colour and within their sexuality, and those are aspects that need to be explored as well. So that's my response, thank you.

Doreen Blake: Where do I start? Because two hours is really not long enough to do this justice. And, as I said earlier, I've not even pricked the surface of my experience and what I have to say. But in response to your question, yes, I firmly believe there should be safe spaces for different communities, people who are experiencing sameness. But also, at the same time, in the wider picture, I think it's very important that if someone on a piece of paper, is saying we practise inclusivity, and we have an open heart and so on - I'm not particularly picking on any particular organisation or anything like that - then that's a whole different story altogether. Because from Salma's statement, and also me saying that having gone to Gaia House on two occasions I was the only black person there. So I'm not taking away - I think, yes, safe spaces are really important, people need to be able to connect and be open and speak and feel very comfortable about that and be in a very confidential space as well. So I think that's really, really important. But as I said before, two hours - this is just the tip of the iceberg. This is just the start, I think of something very, very monumental.

Esther Slattery: Oh, that's a tough one. I've lived and worked in London and the home counties and Yorkshire. I've had racism thrown at me. As much as I've had racism, I've had a lot of support, a lot of love, I've had people stand up and fight for me, mostly white people, because of the environment I've worked in. I am very lucky, very blessed, I've had a good fulfilling career, I've got children who've gone to Russell Group universities. And I do struggle with, and worry a lot about, segregation because that's the same argument the English Defence League are using. And I do think we need to be really careful that we don't conflate "safe space" with "racially exclusive". Because first of all I need to find another person who might speak Swahili - there may be none. But actually I've had a lot of love and a lot of support. When you are racially abused, when you are abused, not just racially, when you are discriminated against, there is a sense of shame and sometimes when you experience that sense of shame and you have to go and speak to somebody else who may

look like the person who abused you, it's quite scary and what you tend to do is if you go underneath, you bury it. And we know from neuroscience, that that's doing so much damage in terms of creating mental illness, hypertension, even cancer, from that stress. So having safe space is really important. Do they need to look like me? I once went to my GP and the receptionists were bitching about me because of the implications of my surname, its Irish. When I reported to the visiting GP, he was a black man, he was an African man, he told me to grow up and get on with it. Now, I spoke to my GP when he came back, he's an Irishman, he was so lovely, he was so supportive, he was so apologetic. So I think we do need safe space, for whatever reason we're experiencing discrimination. And that's what I was saying: for people to know somebody is safe there needs to be welcome, it needs to be spelled out. Internalised barriers are so strong. So whoever is there to create the safe space just needs to be letting the person know that "I value you, I see you, I hear you, I love you, just the way you are" and in that sense it doesn't matter whether they are white, black, brown or blue, but they need to have that message so clear and so there. And that's my opinion.

[applause from audience]

Lama Rod Owens: Thank you. We have just a few more minutes for questions, so we'll take one more question.

Jo (Shraddasiddhi): Thanks, yes, I was interested in what Salma was saying about things being further along in the States, around race, and I know that some of the sanghas there are doing white allies or white privilege reflective days and stuff. And I suppose one of my experiences here in England is that all the sanghas are quite split up and it's rare that we all come together, but also it always feels like we just do these one-off events and then nothing really builds. And I'm wondering a little bit about what each of us could do, because we might be in different situations, like I run a gender-diverse sangha, and trans, non-binary, but I would love to do a day on white privilege. Which would obviously be exclusive, to white folks. I'm wondering about, rather than doing something always together - it just feels like, we have these pop-up events and it's going to be ten years or twenty years... So yes, I guess my question is: what could we all do individually, and together, but also whether Rod you have anything to say about the States and being further along, or any observations about how it is there.

Lama Rod Owens: So I'll mention briefly some of the things that I'm a part of, and if we want to go down the line, just briefly - thirty seconds. Each, including myself. Yes, there's a lot of stuff going on, I'm one of the leaders of the Radical Dharma tradition in the States and we have a lot of initiatives happening. Across many different teacher training programmes, particularly in the insight tradition, at Spirit Rock and IMS, which are the two main institutions of insight practice in the States, they are doing teacher trainings with a lot of focus on race and inclusivity, on including trauma and other things that we have to bring into the picture if we're talking about inclusivity, as well. The work around bringing these issues to the forefront, people are getting it more and more, and institutions, dharma organisations are actually hiring inclusivity officers or programme coordinators that actually make sure that programmes have all kinds of teachers being represented and all communities being reflected in their programmes. I can say that for Spirit Rock, I'm a teacher there, and they do a lot of the work around inclusivity, making sure all of their retreats, their team-taught retreats, have a certain number of number of queer teachers, teachers of colour, and so forth. And that's been really quite amazing.

Rehena Harilall: That's great. I think the more we work together, as Doreen has said, it's great that if we have a purpose by having special affinity groups or sangha and practice groups to help our healing, the better. For myself, in the UK we've had, in the Thich Nhat Hanh tradition, a people of colour retreat for three, four years now. Rod was there last year, we had a people of colour only event that he hosted and facilitated for us. So we're starting

that dialogue from people of colour, again with an intent of healing. There is also a white allies group, I know that started up in the States, and here in the UK. And it would be great, and I know Triratna has a day of mindfulness for people of colour, for white allies. So there's work that's been starting off here, but wouldn't it be great to demonstrate inclusivity if all the different traditions joined together and had these affinity groups. So, you have a great idea, we support you, we can send you names for your dotted line.

Lama Rod Owens: And I forgot to mention too that we had affinity group meetings at Gaia House, this week, which I guess was the first time that's ever happened. I was going to show up and just do stuff, but we had a queer and trans affinity group, we had over twenty people who identified as queer and trans in retreat. We had a people of colour group, we had over 15 people who identified as POC, and we had a white affinity group that was held by white facilitators on retreat. So we had those three groups, and of course other groups to support people's practice. That's something that has to be encouraged, on retreats, but particularly if you find yourself on retreat at a place like Gaia House and you're looking around and you're like "Why do I see so many people like me?", you want to talk about it. So get together in a group and talk about it. And now people are organising, everyone exchanged emails, and now they're on an email list, and so people are going to start thinking more about what they can do outside of Gaia House.

Stephen Portlock: I just wanted to make a few comments, not so much to challenge it, but to qualify it. Because it suddenly struck me I was drawing - I'm very acutely aware of coming from this position as a white middle class man, but also as a physically disabled person. And the world of mindfulness is a strange one, because a lot of people are doing meditation, because of wanting [words inaudible 1.44.01] and probably quite a proportion, a significantly greater proportion may have some sort of disability, if anyone would actually define themselves as, quote, disabled. And as I said, to a large extent, through force of circumstances I'm pretty much forced into a position of defining myself as disabled. Now, in 2014 I went on a Gaia House retreat called "Living with illness and loss". It was actually a mistake on my part, my wife died the year before and in my mind I'd recreated that as "Living with bereavement and loss" and thought it was going to be about no birth, no death. But it was in fact a retreat that worked with illness and loss. And I would say that about 90% of the participants there were disabled people, or were people who would probably be in a position where they be forced to define themselves with the big D word. And yet I found it quite an uncomfortable experience, in fact a deeply uncomfortable experience, because I was the only person there to have a sighted guide, as a blind person. And while I have no doubt that the intentions of Gaia House were sincerely good, I did feel, in quotation marks, "disabled among the disabled". And it was quite unsettling for me because a lot of the people found the retreat profoundly moving and I found it quite uncomfortable an experience. So I do, and to repeat, acknowledging fully that I am on the outside looking in on this, I fully support the notion of safe spaces but with a qualifier that of course, that within the parameters, whether it be with a disability, LGBT, class or race, that I think in general the panel would all agree that it's only one part of a narrative. And so there could still be a feeling of outsider-ness even within that safe space. I think that's the point I want to make.

Sasha Dettmar: Thank you. Yes, first of all I'd like to say that it's really nice to hear that you're running trans and non-binary groups and creating that kind of space here in London. I myself now live in a place called Portsmouth where there's not a huge amount of diversity, which is something some of us are trying to bring there. We're fortunate enough that Lama Rod comes and does teachings and day retreats there, which I think helps with a lot of that. About separate safe space groups, I think there is definitely a need for them, but within that intersectionality is really, really important, I think. We've recently, from our main sangha started to form another group for cis and trans women, and that seems to happen quite organically. There's definitely a need for that. What I do find in this particular country,

in the UK, is that often the divisions I see in the UK are very much again around class. That seems to be, in this country, which is probably quite different to the States in that sense, here the main divisive element, it seems to me - there are loads of others as well - is that class thing which is huge here and where I think a lot of the work needs to be done, and a lot of the work that we want to do, some of the people that I work with. Thank you.

Doreen Blake: Yes, thank you for what you're raised. And indeed for me there are lots of questions that come out of this in terms of: what next, where to next, what do we do, where do we go from here? Because as I said this is just the start of things, and I think of a day or workshops or something, because I think we need to delve a little bit deeper in this, and I would love to say more in response to what you've said and what you've asked, all three of you. And I'm sure there are questions in the room which we don't have time for right now. So in terms of where to, what next, where do we go with this, and I think it is so important, I think you made an extremely valid point about is this going to be, what's the saying, a nine-minute wonder? One-minute wonder? Whatever it is, we have to do something with this, and put a bit more meat on the bone.

Lama Rod Owens: Yes, absolutely. So I have to wrap up now. You can stay and mingle after 9 o'clock but we have to come to a close. There are a few other things we want to announce, in terms of some of the stuff that we've been working on. One of the things that I've noticed coming back and forth so much to here is - if I could offer one piece of advice for the country and so forth, I would actually just suggest and encourage that teachers of colour organise themselves. Or queer teachers, disabled teachers begin to organise, find each other, not just in the insight tradition, across all traditions. And start supporting one another, start creating programmes and initiatives that can encourage the training and support of more teachers that reflect the communities that you come from. And that's the work that's been going on for a while in America. Particularly last year we began the dharma teachers of African descent gathering, we began last fall and we have a week-long retreat coming up at Spirit Rock this fall and we're gathering, all dharma teachers of African descent are coming and retreating for free. And getting support together and we'll dialogue together and do a couple of other things together. That's just one model you know. But you really need to - I keep hearing over and over again - as Selma's pointed out there are other teachers of colour here, and so forth in this country, why is Lama Rod always coming over? I just want to make one point: Lama Rod comes here because Lama Rod has students here. I don't come here because of the insight tradition, I come here because I have students here who want me here. So I just want to make that clear for folks. And secondly, I come because people know that I can talk about these issues in a way where I don't beat around the bush, as we say in America. I want to encourage other teachers to step up and get support and to take their stance. I want you to know specifically, I want to say specifically for marginalised teachers: do not get lost in this delusion that there are limited resources. Because that forces us to compete with one another, and we become each other's competitors. And that happens in America and I have a sense that it may happen here, I don't know. But work together, uplift each other, support one another, create more resources for one another in this country. And that's all I would say about that. In terms of moving forward this is up to you all, to move forward with and I know there's other things that the community has to work out as well.

So thank you all, tonight, for being here. This is just not enough time, we could talk about this for a week. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. But I want you to feel encouraged, and to take this work out of here and to organise and to do other things to support a more inclusive community as well.

I want to talk a little bit about dana. We are collecting dana for the panellists, not for me, I don't get any of the dana. But this is generosity for our panellists for making time out of their schedules to come and be here tonight to offer this, their words, their experiences, and

it's not been a comfortable situation, but they've been kind enough to be on this panel. And please show them support through the kindness of money [laughter from audience], not just kind words and prayers, which is fine - you can give me that, you can give me kind words and prayers, and you can give our panellists financial support for taking time out of their jobs, to come into London if they don't live in London.

And we have a couple of announcements too. And before the announcements I just want to thank everyone who helped make this possible, who put in a lot of work, James Blake with London Insight who was really instrumental in getting this done and several other people, Ruth as well and members of London Insight and Gaia House as well as Daniel Sutton-Johanson who's done a lot of work as my representative here in the UK, helping make this panel possible and to make my visit possible as well.

OK, announcements. So everyone come up, if you have an announcement come up to the front.

Jo (Shraddasiddhi): My name is Jo, or Shraddasiddhi, and I wanted to make a quick announcement, so thank you to London Insight. It's an announcement for a London Radical Dharma group. There was one a while ago apparently, and a few of us would like to get it off the ground again. It's a group looking at queer or LGBT+ and people of colour, spiritual practitioners and teachers and activists. It is looking at intersectionality but it is kind of exclusive as well, so it's mainly looking at queer and people of colour coming together. And we want to meet once a month and we want to particularly look at the intersection with the dharma world and then the whole world. We want to look at activism and actual social issues. And we're inspired particularly by Lama Rod, and angel as well, and we're basically inspired to come together, practise, and talk. And if you're interested there will be an email list on the table out the front. And if you put your name down then we'll take that away and we'll get back to you. That is all for the announcement, and there is some information about it out there as well. Thank you very much.

***To find out more:** as of May 2019 there is no website for Radical Dharma, but you can contact singhashri@radicalembbrace.org or visit www.radicalembbrace.org

[applause from audience]

Lama Rod Owens: The association, the group of dharma teachers of African descent is a worldwide organisation, not just an American movement. We do have teachers of African descent who come over to the States to participate in that programme.

***To find out more:** various blog posts on the internet, and this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWeOKjU9F6o&feature=youtu.be>

[closing announcement by Catherine Thompson, director of London Insight Meditation, including brief message from Rachel Davis, one of the originators of the idea of this event, on behalf of Gaia House, about looking forward to hearing the recording of the panel and continuing on the journey towards inclusive dharma].

Jassy Denison: I just wanted to respond to the suggestion around having an ongoing group/practice network for white people looking at this work around race. I've just started such a group but within my own sangha which is the Community of Interbeing. But I'd love to support that, I'd love to be a contact person, if that would be useful, for us all to do something across the sanghas. And perhaps to find some way of doing a regular group. At the moment the one that I'm starting is an online sharing group, like a kind of pilot. But I'd be very keen to do that. And I really respect that other people would like to do that and maybe have their resource somewhere else and are also working in other areas. So if it's possible to contact people through the mailing that's being done, I will do that, and hopefully we can set something up together.

***To find our more:** contact jassydenison@gmail.com

Milla Gregor: One final announcement. If you are involved in social change or social activism or environmental activism and you have a sitting practice and you'd like to sit with others who do both, then I'm part of a small group called DoSit London and you'd be very welcome to join us. So I'll put these little flyers out, and if anyone is interested in that, please join us.

***To find our more:** contact dositlondon@gmail.com

[applause from audience]

Renuka Bhakta: Could I make another announcement? So Rehena talked about the Colours of Compassion group. I just want to say that it's the practice that is gifted to us by Thich Nhat Hanh, so it's really in that tradition that we practise. It's every month, so if you're interested, it's the third Tuesday of every month and it's at the Friends' Meeting House in Westminster, which is just by Trafalgar Square. If you want to be on our mailing list, speak to me or Rehena, and Jude's over there. And also we've got a WhatsApp group.

***To find our more:** contact coloursofcompassion@gmail.com

[applause from audience]