

Who Are We? A Day of Inclusion
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Early last year, my dharma sister Marlene Jones passed away suddenly. We had not been in touch in quite some time and I was shocked. She was a year younger and I was overcome with grief. Floods of memories came pouring in of our early days working so hard to see if a diversity program could take hold at Spirit Rock. Sitting at her beautiful memorial, I noticed who was there and who was not. So much has been accomplished by so many people in these past 17 years and there is still so much to be done. The deep changes in our hearts which come through understanding make love and appreciation possible. These changes are the hardest to achieve and don't always happen.

I had not taught much in the past 10 years which turned out to be a period of integration of some deep shifts in my practice. With the support of my Dzogchen teacher, I had lived in semi-retreat for several years. Marlene's death, however, put a fire under my seat and I knew I had to step out and offer what I have been given. At the memorial I was asked if I would teach a daylong at Spirit Rock and I was grateful for the opportunity.

Like a blessing, early one morning I awoke with the title and entire content for the day coming into my mind. "Who Are We? A Day of Inclusion". This title seemed pregnant with meaning in different dimensions. It seemed to point to an inclusion so vast that it could possibly return us to the state of oneness with all there is. It was clear from this guidance that to look deeply at what we actually are and understand the barriers to knowing our true nature, we all had to be present at the circle. The outreach effort carried out by many people was aimed at making sure that there were representatives of all groups resulting from the social cleavages along the lines of race, class, gender, sexual orientation and physical ability. Although the total number of people was smaller than we had hoped for, there were representatives of each group.

We began the day by making offerings of water (Liwa) to Mother Earth and honoring the Coast Miwok people who had lived in harmony with the land for thousands of years. We then dove deeply first looking at how our ego structures develop, taking us away from the essential openness and oneness we are born in. We then explored how the preferences inherent in our ego structures get instituted as the societal structures we are immersed in. Because there is no equal access to the design of these social structures, the preferences of some are imposed on others and oppression comes into existence. As we go on living divorced from the recognition of our oneness generation after generation, we exist within a culture of domination that oppresses not only specific groups of human beings, but the Earth itself and all the other beings that share this precious biosphere with us. With the recent understanding about neuroplasticity and brain structure we explored a meditation to help our egos relax enough so that we could have access to what was underneath.

The afternoon was devoted to an exploration of our essential nature. Through

meditations with movement and space, we looked into the teachings of the Prajnaparamita including the play of feminine and masculine primal energies inherent in all phenomena. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form is a deep direct insight that can arise spontaneously when the barriers of our ego structures are seen through. Some of those present had an experience of emptiness for the first time.

We concluded our day with two concentric circles where we had the opportunity to see the unique expression of each being and the boundless quality of awareness itself. A beautiful Tibetan bell was rung in memory of Marlene with the prayer that there will always be access to these teachings of liberation to all who seek it. Two women from the original Women of Color Sitting Group that Marlene and I led in the late 90's were present and we walked together to place the bell in the Gratitude Hut.