



Triratna Development ECA

## Racial Diversity Project

***The context for this letter, posted on the Buddhist Centre Online in June 2020, arises from a series of posts and comments relating to racial diversity, challenges, and discussions within Triratna. Viveka's original post, exploring empathy in the face of racial injustice, sparked significant online debate, revealing a range of perspectives and feelings.***

***If you have access, as an Order Member, you can view the post at:***

**<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/order-connection/threads/letter-order-group-black-and-asian-order-members-london>**

# ***A Letter to the Order from a Group of Black and Asian Order Members in London***



**By padmadhara**  
**17/06/2020 20:08**

Dear Friends,

We write as a group of Order Members who are actively engaged in welcoming Black, Asian and other people of colour into our movement. We are based at two centres in London where this work has a long history. The catalyst for this letter was our sadness in seeing such a polarised debate online following Viveka's article exploring her practice of empathy with those suffering racial injustice. In response we want to take the opportunity to make a general appeal for support, action and deeper awareness. While we know Viveka's original post was in an open forum, we are addressing this letter just to fellow Order Members, as it is with you that we share a deep commitment to the alleviation of suffering, and it is with you that we also enjoy spiritual friendship.

We, writing this, have all been deeply impacted by racial discrimination and violence. Many of us have found it a challenge to share this aspect of our experience fully within Triratna. We would ask therefore that when talking about race that we start from a position of being open to others' experiences and to what we don't know. As one academic, Reg Revans, writes, real learning comes from 'sharing your ignorance, not your cleverness'.

We found ourselves returning to the following reflective questions (I do not know, I do not have, I do not understand) in the spirit of our shared values as Order Members. We hope they are helpful for those who wish to engage more fully in this area.

### **Some Reflective Questions**

How many of us know the histories of Black, Asian and other people of colour in the US, Europe and around the world? How much of mainstream history represents the voices and actual lived experience of people of colour? How many of us have a friend who is a person of colour who has shared openly with us their experience of racial discrimination, bias and violence? How many of us have taken the time to understand how the current Black Lives Matter movement is impacting on people of colour now, within our sangha?

What impact might these kind of debates on The Buddhist Centre Online have on those who have suffered racial discrimination and violence? What impact might some of the exchanges have on a black or brown person just getting involved with Triratna?

What do we individually and collectively understand about our own reactions, views and triggers when the issue of race comes up? How do we take responsibility for these reactions and transform them for the benefit of all?

We believe that conversations arising from these sorts of questions will help move us, as a community, to greater awareness and empathy and will help us find ways of developing better listening and dialogue. We hope that suitable spaces for these important conversations can be created. We believe that the exploration of racial conditioning, by **all** Order Members can be a rich source of spiritual growth for all of us personally and collectively. As Order members we know the transformation that can occur when we are in a space of genuine curiosity where love and deeper awareness are the goal. Our aspiration is for Triratna to provide a positive role model for wider society in this area.

We believe in Triratna as a force of good in the world. We also believe that Triratna's potential as a movement to help all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering will not be fulfilled unless it is truly diverse, and inclusive

of all backgrounds, ages, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, classes, political persuasions and races.

We are deeply encouraged that the European Chairs Assembly, the West London Buddhist Centre and the London Buddhist Centre have placed racial diversity as one of their core priorities, as has the International Council in previous years. In doing so there is a recognition that personal attempts by Order Members to address this issue are not enough. These aspirations are encouraging and now need to be realised through tangible action so that a true difference can be made to the experience of black/people of colour within our community, or those wishing to join it. We cannot by ourselves as a group of black and Asian Order Members make Triratna a supportive space for people of colour. We therefore invite all Order Members to join us in understanding this area more fully and deeply for the sake and benefit of all beings everywhere.

Finally, we want to express our appreciation for the encouragement and support of all within our movement who have chosen to embark on, or deepen, a process of exploring racial injustice and the practice of anti-racism at this time. We appreciate your intention to develop deeper empathy and solidarity and your wish for our sanghas to be more inclusive. Thanks for reading and reflecting on this,

With much metta and in solidarity,

*Bodhilila, Jayakara, Maitrinita, Manjusiha, Padmadhara, Sujhayini, Suryagupta,  
Nandaraja*