A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE WESTERN BUDDHIST TEACHERS MEETINGS
OF THE MAHA-COUNCIL OR GREAT GATHERING, MAINLY IN THE US.

Followers of the Way should get together
regularly in order to help maintain
a healthy and flourishing sangha.
From the Buddha

•1993: First meeting for ten days in Dharamsala with the Dalai Lama; 40 Buddhist
meditation teachers from many if not most of the traditions and from around the
world, Asian and Western. This week-long conference was repeated in 1994 and 1996.

○ See Stephen Bachelor report:
(…) Before our formal sessions with the Dalai Lama began, we gathered for a
preliminary meeting. “I’d like to suggest an exercise,” announced Jack Kornfield,
“Close your eyes and imagine the kind of Buddhism you foresee in 20 or 30 years
time. The practices, the centers and the world itself... What role does the Dharma
have in such a world?”(…)
Conclusion: Our days together, someone remarked, “had a bone-deep sense of
rightness” about them. The meeting with the Dalai Lama was compared to an
empowerment, an initiation in the true sense of the word. Above all it served as a
confirmation of something we had intuitively known to be true all along but had found
neither the courage nor the words to express. The connections we formed with one
another disclosed a whole new dimension of the term 'sangha' - spiritual community.
"Past is past," said the Dalai Lama on the last day. "What is important? The future.
We are the creators. The future is in our hands. Even if we fail, no regrets - we have

•The meetings moved **West** in different places in USA Mt. Madonna Center, at Green
Gulch Zen Center, in Boston, and elsewhere on a fairly ad hoc basis every year or
two.

•2001: at Spirit Rock with Jack Kornfield and the informal Western Buddhist
Teachers Network issued from the first meeting in Dharamsala, with the Dalai Lama
as senior advisor and nonsectarian Buddhist sponsor: 300 Buddhist teachers with the
Dalai Lama, Maha Ghosananda of Cambodia, several Tibetan lamas, Asian
Theravadin monks and nuns, and other leaders East and West met at Spirit Rock
Center in Woodacre, Marin County, CA, for several days in 2001.

•2003: at Kamalashila Dharma Center – Germany - instigated Lama Denys Rinpoche
president of the European Buddhist Union (www.e-b-u.org ) at that time. Around 50
teachers from the various Buddhist traditions teaching in Europe and Alexander
Berzin from USA. Meeting of Buddhist Teachers in Europe continued every year in a
different country (Poland, Hungary, UK, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, France, etc.) until now. As
Simon Child present it on the EBU website:
Each year since 2003, there has been a meeting of experienced Buddhist teachers in
association with the EBU AGM, meeting either just before or just after the EBU AGM
at the same venue.
This meeting is by invitation only. The reason for this is because the group itself
wants to be able to build relationships and have a sense of continuity and ongoing contact with the same group of people. New members are invited by the group as a whole, with the consent of the rest of the group. Hence the group does not claim to be representative of European Buddhism, though it does include a diverse membership, from many countries in Europe and from many traditions. Most years we have a theme for the meeting, though sometimes it is left more open. The meeting is not a ‘conference’, but an unusually productive sharing of experience between practitioners of the Dharma. - www.e-b-u.org/activities/buddhistteachers-europe –

•2011, at Garrison Institute – NY USA – Approximately 190 actually came to this MahaCouncil or Great Gathering, most leading, long term, dedicated, English-speaking and representative teachers spanning the entire spectrum of Buddhism in the West, while consciously including for the first time 45-50 young Dharma teachers (under age 45). Purpose:
1. To gather the pioneers and elders of American Buddhism and Buddhism in America and discuss the present and future of Buddhism here and in the world, and particularly its continuance, legacy, and special qualities for benefiting the world, while many are still alive, perhaps for the last time.
2. To discuss in a fairly informal and intimate setting, out of the public eye or the media watch, where we and Buddhism are at – or seem to be at – what it is, how it’s unfolding and evolving, and what if any kind of future near and far we can foresee and wish to help shape, for the benefit of one and all.
3. The intent to explore the passing on of the lamp (transmission) and mantle of teaching/mentoring to the next generation teachers, generally and specifically regarding those who might be present and ready, willing and able to uphold our lineage(s) going forward.

All in all it was very collegial, without much politics or hidden agendas, and harmonious. Some good things are already starting to come out of it, like the first nonsectarian gatherings of Vajrayanist teachers in the West, following long behind the Zen teacher and Vipassana teacher meeting tradition held almost annually over the past two or more decades. The absence of almost all of the invited notable Asian teachers long active in the West at the conference was somewhat disappointing, and may auger a new era and generation of Western Buddhism. I particularly missed their presence, though the cross-cultural issues are certainly there when we do get together and not everyone agrees they should and can be fruitfully included. However, it seems unfortunate that we don’t have their experienced voices, perspectives and traditional concerns heard among our teacher sangha right now, and it may auger ill for both us and them going forward in these turbulent and uncertain times. -

http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=6,10263,0,0,1,0 –

•For some more historical data see Western Buddhist Teachers By Andrew Rawlinson formerly Lecturer in Buddhism University of Lancaster, England - http://www.globalbuddhism.org/2/rawli011.html -

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