



Monastic Interreligious Dialogue

Sponsored by North American Benedictine and Cistercian Monasteries of Men and Women

[Home](#)

[About MID](#)

[Bulletins](#)

[News](#)

[Events](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Links](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Support MID](#)

[Benedict's Dharma](#)

[Gethsemani I](#)

[Gethsemani II](#)

[Gethsemani III](#)

[Abhishiktananda
Society Bulletins](#)

Search MID [Help](#)

Introduction: Creating the Dyads

Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, OSB, Judith Simmer-Brown

from *Benedict's Dharma*, September 2001

[\[Click here for a printer-friendly version of this article\]](#)

Mary Margaret Funk: We wanted to set up this conference immediately so you would have an experience of dialogue, not just interactive in a group like this, but one-to-one, where you listen when someone speaks and you share from the heart, hear their heart in the light of what you've heard here, and see where it goes. We're going to set up dyads, meaning two partners. We'd like you to keep the same person until you leave. That's the first criterion, a stable dyad. Now, again, if the crowd changes and a person doesn't have someone, make it a triad. Still, a stable dyad is the first recommendation. Second, we'd like it to be someone you don't know, so you really have to listen. There are plenty of people who don't know each other in here, so try to find somebody you don't know—that's the second criterion. The third criterion is to find a match for you. On page four of *Benedict's Dharma* there's a quote from Judith Simmer-Brown about the Mandala Principle. Could you tell us a little about that? Now, listen up because you're going to be one of these colors.

Judith Simmer-Brown: The Mandala Principle in Tibetan Buddhism is a principle of sacredness and diversity going together. That is, that in any complete world there are people and situations that are radically different in the way they are set up, but each of them have a very special quality of wisdom about them. So, in the Mandala Principle as it is taught in Tibetan Buddhism there are what are called five Buddha families—five styles of enlightened wisdom. Each of them carries a neurotic side—that is, a way in which this kind of wisdom can get fixated on ego and cause a great deal of pain for oneself and others. But the purpose of practice in Tibetan Buddhism is to liberate the



Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, OSB, was the executive director of the MID board from 1989-2004. She was prioress at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana and is the author of a number of books, including *Thoughts Matter* and *Islam Is . . .*

**All articles by or about
Sr. Mary Margaret Funk,
OSB**

wisdom within one's most painful lifestyles and thought and emotional patterns so that one brings that particular quality out as a gift to the world.

Meg called me up and started picking my brain about the Mandala Principle and wondering whether we might pair people up around the diversity of these five Buddha families. I'd like to describe each of the families and we would like you to begin to try to figure out which one might most describe your predominant style. In the Mandala Principle and the way it has been taught in our community, there's a sense that you have several other traits but there is one that is more dominant and more obvious, especially to your friends and family. [laughter] At a certain point you will be given the choice of choosing a card that goes along with each of these families and their distinctive color. So as I describe them, please note your color and that will be the color of the card you will choose. At Naropa University, we do a great deal of work with these five. In fact, the five competencies that we train our students in are in developing all of these traits. Also, we do practices in five colored rooms and work with the students in identifying their particular areas of blockage and how it is that by practicing and contemplating and cultivating mindfulness they can bring out the wisdom of each of these five families.

So, I'll begin with what is known as the **blue** which is spoken of as the Vajra family or the thunderbolt family. This is the family that in its neurotic style tends to be picky and critical but in its wisdom style is oriented toward precision and order, and intellectual clarity. So, as one brings out these qualities, there's a sense of greater clarity about the details of one's world. But if one is clouded by ego then it can become pickiness and complaining.

The **yellow** is the Ratna family or the jewel family, known in its neurotic style for being overly bossy and domineering, but in its enlightened style as extremely resourceful. Yellows may take a situation where nothing is really happening and enrich it with a sense of excitement and interest and curiosity in everyone in its presence. So that's the yellow.



Judith Simmer-Brown is a professor in the religious studies department at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado.

[All articles by or about Judith Simmer-Brown](#)

[Browse the Archive](#)

- [By Category](#)
- [By Author](#)
- [By Article Title](#)
- [By Bulletin](#)

The third one is the **red**, which is the Padma family or lotus family. This is the family that in its neurotic style is overly concerned with relationship and with what other people think, and has a tremendous need, almost a clinginess, in the area of emotional intimacy. But in its wisdom side red has a tremendous ability to create close relationships and to support the development and blossoming of another person. There is also a tremendous ability to make friends with anyone one encounters and to draw out the richness of that person. That's red.

The fourth one, **green**, is the Karma family or the action family. This is efficiency and in its neurotic element has a tremendous sense of speediness and always needing to do something. But in its wisdom side, there is a tremendous ability to accomplish things, a "cool under fire," energy and efficiency and practicality of being able to get things done.

The fifth one is **white**, known as the Buddha family or the awake family, which in its neurotic element can be very cloudy and spaced out and seems not to really ever have an opinion on any subject. But in its wisdom side, white has a tremendous ability to accommodate or adapt to any situation and has incredible powers of listening and touching the wakefulness in every life situation.

The basic Mandala Principle in Tibetan Buddhism is that we all have all five of these kinds of wisdom but we have one of them especially, and we tend to feel that it's a problem and we want to get rid of these qualities. But if we can liberate the wisdom energy in each of these, there are tremendous gifts we can offer any particular group situation or larger situation. So, the purpose of meditation practice is to liberate the ego-clinging out of these neurotic tendencies so they become wisdom gifts to the world.

Mary Margaret Funk: Thank you, Judith. Well, did you find yourself at all? Some are shaking their heads.

Judith Simmer-Brown: I'll do a quick review and I'll present only the enlightened qualities because I know in this room we only have the enlightened qualities present [laughter]. Blue is precision and intellect.

Mary Margaret Funk: Wait a minute. Let's stop there. Do you know anybody here that's blue, Judith?

Judith: I told Brother David this evening that he had to take blue. He didn't know what it was but he was blue [laughter]. Yellow is resourcefulness and richness. Red, intimacy and relationship. Green is efficiency and accomplishment. And white is accommodation and listening.

Mary Margaret Funk: Now we're going to let you self-define. We're going to circulate these cards among you and you can even ask the person next to you if they can help you find your card. We'll just take the time now until everybody has a card. We've got plenty of cards.

By way of conclusion on the dyads, we need to tell you how you're going to find your partner. I'm going to ask Judith to be my partner. Now we know each other a little, but I've taken green and we're different colors. I just want to focus again on what the partner is. It really is both just the practice of dialogue—it could be anybody, so if you love 'em, that's great and if you hate 'em that's great, because the practice is listening and changing in the light of the other. That's why we have to stay with the same partner to go to the deeper level of hearing and listening, hearing and listening.

The second thing I'd like to ask you is to consider continuing this dialogue beyond Sunday. Try to see if there is some common thread that will continue. It isn't so much the talking, it's to reflect on acting through this. In other words, our life has changed and we won't notice it unless we name it. And we can't name it unless we name it to someone who understands it. So it speeds up change and transformation. Dialogue is the practice of conversion and monastic way of life and practice. So Judith and I are going to be partners. We would say in our tradition, believe that God has already got it all arranged, you're just going to find this person that's going to help you grow and Father William is going to tell you how that's going to happen. Thank you.

Continued in **Introduction: Compline (Benedict's Dharma, September 2001)**

Website by **Booklight, Inc.** Copyright © 2010, Monastic Dialogue