

APPENDIX F

buddhists for racial justice

may all beings be free from harm

Call to White Buddhists

This is a call to white Buddhist teachers, leaders and practitioners to engage in the healing of racism as an essential part of our journey of awakening.

Racial awareness as spiritual practice

Our Dharma practice calls on us to leave no stone unturned in investigating racism and white dominance. And our practice can support us profoundly as we encounter the challenges of this inquiry. These four areas provide a framework of inquiry and action:

1. Commit to ongoing self-education.
2. Engage in facilitated group work.
3. Promote structural change within our Dharma communities
4. Build collaborative relationships with people of color.

Racism – part of a bigger picture

As Buddhists we realize the interdependence of all of our experiences, and we believe that understanding our privilege as white people can actually support our liberation as women, queer, working class, and/or other marginalized identity/experience. Likewise, awakening to our racial privilege can give us insight into how our participation in a dominant

group as men, heterosexuals, and/or members of an affluent class also comes at a cost to ourselves, our relationships, and the loving community we long for.

We are not asking you, or ourselves, to focus exclusively on racism. Rather, our hope is that understanding dominance through our position as white people can help us better understand the interrelated nature of multiple forms of social inequity. With this understanding we can work – according to the Buddhist teachings and practices we uphold – towards liberation in the largest sense.

Building collective wisdom

If this call resonates with you, we urge you to engage in this course of action with us, and to promote these suggestions among other white teachers and practitioners. We in no way feel the resources or approaches listed here are exhaustive – only a place to start. We welcome your feedback, and hope to build collective wisdom with you and with the teachers and practitioners of color who practice in community with us.

1. Commit to ongoing self-education

The first step in change is understanding. Without engaging in self hatred or self blame, we can compassionately look at the ways in which we have not received an adequate education about much of our country's history, the daily struggles of indigenous and people of color who are our neighbors, nor the extent of our own privilege.

We encourage you to seek out professional training and expertise from within and outside of our Dharma communities (resources for this type of training are listed in the following section). And we acknowledge that ongoing learning is vital. There are many books, videos, articles, and other sources of information through which we can begin this process immediately.

Good places to start:

- [Race: The Power of An Illusion](#)

(<http://www.newsreel.org/video/RACE-THE-POWER-OF-AN-ILLUSION>) (California NewsReel): Watching this three part documentary with teachers and/or members of your spiritual community can be a powerful way to begin to understand how racial dominance has been established and maintained in the United States.

- The recent publication “Why It’s So Hard to Talk to White People about Racism” (<http://imcw.org/Resources/Article-Detail/ID/244/Why-Its-So-Hard-to-Talk-to-White-People-About-Racism>) has been eye-opening in deepening awareness and understanding of impact. In this article, Dr. Robin DiAngelo explains the concept of white fragility and offers wise insights and important guidance for White individuals and White group inquiry.
- You can also find resources, and Dharma-based support for developing a racial awareness program, on the website: whiteawake.org (<http://whiteawake.org>).

Within our Dharma communities valuable resources in inquiring into racism and white dominance include these relevant talks:

- “Beloved Community” (<http://imcw.org/Talks/TalkDetail/TalkID/812>) Tara Brach (IMCW 6/17/15). In this intimate talk, Tara explores the often hidden expressions of racism that fuel separation and violence, and pathways toward healing and freeing our collective hearts.
- “Exploring Our Belonging and Kinship” (<http://imcw.org/Talks/TalkDetail/TalkID/760>) Ruth King (IMCW 2/4/15). In this talk Ruth explores the “relative” reality of kinship, compassionately names patterns that harm, and then offers specific mindful exercises that we can use in personal or collective practice to heal and bridge separation.
- “Reclamation of the Sacred” (<http://dharmaseed.org/teacher/178/talk/27138/>) Thanissara (Spirit Rock 5/5/15) This important talk recognizes causes of collective dislocation, naming colonial devastation and ways towards tenderness.

There are many teachers, of all different lineages, who have made offerings of this nature, and whose interviews, articles, books, and/or recorded talks are available online. These include:

Larry Yang; Rev angel Kyodo williams; Lama Rod Owens; Gina Sharpe; Arinna Weisman; Jan Willis; Rev. Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, PhD; and others.

Another source of Dharma and ongoing social critique from a Buddhist lens is the Buddhist Peace Fellowship's online platform: Turning Wheel Media (<http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/our-work/turning-wheel-media/>).

A helpful resource from outside the Buddhist tradition is the essay "Not Somewhere Else, But Here" (<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/btwwda/workshop7/166216.shtml>) (by Unitarian Universalist minister Dr. Rev. Rebecca Parker).

2. Engage in facilitated group work.

While learning can take place informally, we encourage you to enter into some kind of facilitated group process.

White Affinity groups: We highly recommend that white teachers and practitioners find ways to organize themselves into ongoing learning communities. There is a need for all-white spaces that prioritize our process as we gain new awareness, confront the social training we have received as members of a dominant group, and support one another in our commitment to ongoing inquiry. We encourage you to consider developing and maintaining white affinity groups (self facilitated or facilitated by a trainer you trust), and commit ourselves to this practice as well. Whiteawake.org (<http://whiteawake.org/>) is a strong support to white affinity group process.

Within our Dharma communities there are talented, committed trainers who integrate various elements of Dharma practice directly into this work.

- Teacher Ruth King (<http://ruthking.net/>) offers her "Mindful of Race Retreat: a Stimulus for Social Healing and Leadership" (<http://ruthking.net/leadership-development/mindful-of-race-2/>) to groups and organizations upon request
- Teacher Arinna Weisman (<http://arinnaweisman.org/>) has

long served the Dharma community with workshops and teachings that focus on healing the suffering of racial privilege

- Practitioner Eleanor Hancock (<http://whiteawake.org>) (primary author of this “Call”) is working in collaboration with teachers and practitioners of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington (IMCW) to bring forward a body of work called White Awake (<http://whiteawake.org>): an integration of mindfulness and white affinity group work
- Teacher Mushim Patricia Ikeda (<https://mushim.wordpress.com/>) is a diversity consultant and meditation center community coordinator whose clients include Spirit Rock and San Francisco Zen Center
- This list is not exhaustive!

There are many well-established training programs that support an inquiry at the community level, including: The People’s Institute (pisab.org); UNTraining White Liberal Racism (untraining.org); Dismantling Racism (dismantlingracism.org); and Training for Change (trainingforchange.org); to name a few.

3. Promote structural change within our Dharma communities

We recognize the ways in which our own Dharma communities have mirrored the broader society in patterns of exclusion, inequity, unseen bias and privilege. We commit to wise action to transform our sanghas into welcoming, diverse, and beloved communities.

What might structural change look like within our sanghas?

One resource for this is the booklet, Making the Invisible Visible (<http://www.spiritrock.org/document.doc?id=9>) (full PDF available on the Spirit Rock website). Making the Invisible Visible provides stories that sensitize us to the presence of racism in our sanghas, and includes practical suggestions for changing these dynamics, such as: addressing racism through dharma talks; developing an organizational strategy for inclusion; and working to bring people of color into teaching, board, and staff positions.

There are Buddhist communities we can look to who model an inclusive community culture, for example: New York Insight (which has a beloved community monthly sangha and training program); Brooklyn Zen Center (see Jan, 2015 Shambhala Sun article “Open Hearts, Open Doors” (http://www.lionsroar.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/SS-129-JAN-15_36-45-BZC.pdf)); and East Bay Meditation Center (which has woven social action and multiculturalism into the community structure from its inception). You might explore entering a mentoring relationship, or exchange of ideas, with such communities as you begin to focus on change within your own.

4. Build collaborative relationships with people of color.

One aspect of white social conditioning is the tendency to want to ‘help’ in a way that continues to reinforce white superiority. Our desire is to meet our siblings of color in authentic exchange, listen non-defensively, share our own truth, work together to shine the light on social dominance within our communities, and replace this with a more inclusive culture – for everyone’s benefit.

It is our hope that the process of self education called for here can provide a basis for authentic exchange and inter-racial dialogue within our sanghas. This may in turn lead to the creation of equity and inclusion councils with diverse representation to guide change within our communities. We understand that in many instances, frustrations may have built up over time and will need to be aired and addressed in order to move forward effectively.

Engaging in partnerships with communities/organizations of color outside of our Buddhist centers is another way to address structural racism within society. A significant resource for fostering authentic and collaborative relationships is the online article “Building Accountable Relationships with Communities of Color: Some Lessons Learned” (<https://paxchristiusa1.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/buildingaccountablerelationships.pdf>) (Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team). The Pax Christi team, which

identifies itself as primarily white, emphasizes the values that are called for in order to develop relationships in which true power sharing and collaboration can take place.

Conclusion

We hope that you will join us on this journey of deepening awareness of white dominance, racism, and our own often unexamined privilege. Our prayer is that we can join hands to bring the wisdom and compassion of our Buddhist practice to alleviate suffering and pursue collective liberation in ways that benefit all.

WhiteAwake.org (<http://whiteawake.org>) has an expanded list of resources to accompany this Call to Engage and can host your suggestions and comments as we continue to grow together. If you would like to be added to the White Awake mailing list, click [here](http://whiteawake.org/about/join-our-mailing-list/) (<http://whiteawake.org/about/join-our-mailing-list/>).

7 thoughts on “Call to White Buddhists”

1. *anne_w*

JULY 1, 2015 AT 5:36 PM

Thank you for this.

Like

Like

REPLY

2. *(Ayya) Tathaaloka Bhikkhuni*

JULY 1, 2015 AT 8:36 PM

Dear beloved community,

Thank you so much for these acts of care.