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*Making the Invisible Visible—Healing Racism in Our Buddhist Communities*

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## *Making the Invisible Visible— Healing Racism in Our Buddhist Communities*

Introduction to the first edition

For many years there has been a movement to shine the light of awareness on the difficulties encountered by People of Color as they try to participate in our Western Buddhist Sanghas. In many ways and with varying degrees of success People of Color and their European American allies have been trying to get the attention of the teachers and sangha members in order to face the underlying racism in our society at large and its manifestation within our Sanghas. This booklet, being offered to the “Buddhist Teachers in the West” conference from June 20 to 24, 2000, is another step in that ongoing process.

This booklet is a compilation of stories, thoughts, resources, and articles that are meant to be a glimpse into the personal experiences of some Buddhist practitioners of color and their allies. The voices you will read come from a wide range of cultural and ethnic origins, practicing in a great many of the lineages being represented at this conference. These voices come from your sanghas. You may be surprised by them; you may not agree with everything you read. But, please, understand that these voices and stories come from people who are already practicing in our sanghas.

The title of this booklet refers to the ongoing suffering which exists in our sanghas for many People of Color. The oppressive racial and economic conditioning of our greater society, whether intentional or not, manifests in our sanghas. Practitioners of color face many obstacles of access, as well as of attitude, when attempting to join Western Sanghas in order to develop and sustain their practice. It is extremely difficult and painful for people who are already marginalized in society to then be marginalized again in their spiritual community.

In American society it is very difficult for the European American middle-class mainstream to recognize and accept their participation in racial marginalization. White privilege is a fact of life in our society. Study after study shows that People of Color face institutional discrimination in economics, employment and housing; in the criminal justice system and in medical care. This institutional discrimination gives European Americans a “leg up” in society. For most white Americans this “leg up” is invisible; they aren’t even aware that they have it. Most European Americans seem to feel that there is a level playing field. Intuitively though, we all know that this is not true. There was a survey which asked White Americans how much money it would take for them to be willing to live life as an African American. For most the sum was in the millions of dollars.

What we, who are compiling this booklet, would like the teachers of the Dharma to understand is that these problems are faced by many People of Color who are already practitioners of the Dharma. It is not enough to rely on good will.

We ask that affirmative steps be made within all sanghas to address underlying racial attitudes and the lack of racial and ethnic diversity. California will very soon be a state with no racial majority, and the rest of America is following this demographic trend. If we don't take these steps, we run the risk of making the Dharma irrelevant to vast parts of our society. Section Three of this booklet will offer some suggestions to get the process started in your sangha.

The compilers of this booklet are all longtime, deeply committed Buddhist practitioners. We are racially very diverse, and the majority of us are people of color. Included in our committee are practitioners of Theravadan, Tibetan, and Zen Buddhism. We present this booklet to the Mahasangha with the confidence that if the problem of racial diversity in our sanghas is accepted and addressed in our practice, the sangha will be strengthened and the deep practice of Dharma will be available to all.

Before you begin reading the following personal statements we ask that you take a moment of reflection. Take some breaths and allow your mind to relax. Now imagine your Sangha, gathered in full, sitting and listening to a Dharma Talk. You are in the front looking out at a sea of faces. Who is there? What color are those faces? Do you see many faces of color? Do the color of these faces reflect the greater community in which your sangha lives? How do you feel about this? And how do you feel generally about people of color? Do you hold stereotypical ideas about some people of color? Do those stereotypes affect the way you deal with people of color? Please be honest with yourself. We do not ask these questions to encourage blame. We are all struggling with deep racial conditioning. By bringing light to this problem we hope to deepen the practice of Dharma for all beings.

submitted with great respect and gratitude,

Sheridan Adams, Mushim Ikeda-Nash, Jeff Kitzes, Margarita Loinaz, Choyin Rangdrol, Jessica Tan, Larry Yang

#### Introduction to the second edition

This second edition is reprinted in response to continuing requests for copies. Due to distribution and copyright issues, only one article is included in Section Six: Articles of Interest—"Modern Racism: New Melody for the Same Old Tunes" by Valerie Batts. [Note: The Batts article is not included in the electronic file of the booklet's second edition.] The articles previously included—"Visible & Invisible: Jan Nattier on the Politics of Representation in Buddhist America," "Outside In: Buddhism in America" by Lori Pierce, "Litany" by Russell Leong, and "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh, are notated in Section Four: Reference Materials.

#### Note on the third edition

The third edition is meant for electronic distribution and does not have any of the articles in Section Six included in electronic form.

## *Section One: Personal Statements*

*These personal statements were submitted by Buddhists of color and European North American Buddhist allies, in response to our invitation, which we extended as widely as we could with the resources available to us. Our intention has been to create a forum for all who wanted to speak, and to inspire dialogues in which many more voices eventually will be heard. Statements appear in the form in which they were received. Some have been edited for length and clarity, but no statement was turned away.*

Sheridan Adams

I am a European-American woman who has been involved in healing racism work within the Buddhist community for several years. The experience which inspired me to do this work was seeing the film, *The Color of Fear*. In this documentary film, a number of men of Color and two White men get together over a weekend to speak about race. While watching this film I experienced indescribable pain — the pain that our country has carried for so many years as a result of unhealed, unresolved racial wounds; the pain of People of Color who have been deeply and persistently dishonored and discriminated against in our country not only in personal interactions but also by so many of our institutions; and my own personal pain. I knew that on some level, even though I strongly held anti-racist values since I was a small child, underneath the surface, there was plenty of racial poison inside my own mind and heart. I began to understand that as a White person living in this country, no matter WHAT my spiritual and political values are, I have a very different experience than many People of Color have. I began to “get” the extent to which I can’t help but walk through this world wearing White shoes and look at things through a White lens. My being White means something. Over and over I read reports in the newspaper confirming that I am more likely to get better medical care or better treatment by the police or fair treatment in court should I find myself involved in a legal case.

Over time I am learning not to blame myself for my Whiteness or for the special skin color privileges which come with that. More helpful, it seems, is to sharpen my awareness of these realities. In order to go beyond a perspective that comes from being a member of the dominant racial group, I must first realize and own that I hold such a perspective. And knowing that my perspective as a White person is limited helps me understand that I do NOT necessarily know what a Person of Color, living in a White-dominated society, may be experiencing.

And I believe what European-Americans are being called on to do for starters is just this: to listen and be open to voices of Color. Put down defensiveness and ask “What is it like for a Person of Color to live in this society or to practice in this sangha?” or “What might this person go through?” Begin with a sense of not knowing, yet wanting — deeply wanting — to understand why so many Buddhists of color feel alienated from most Western sanghas.

Only from this openness and understanding can we all join together to act in ways that will create sanghas that are truly welcoming to all peoples.

Anonymous

As an adult child of Chinese immigrants who married in a Protestant church, I've come to Buddhism only recently, as part of a several-years-long attempt to learn more about my heritage. Even then, I initially avoided Buddhism because the local Buddhist big shots I heard about were all white and often had Jewish surnames. I was seeking "authentic" Asian Buddhism, not some culturally white version. I had (and have) no interest in being part of an affluent white Buddhist community. Yes, I did question non-Asians' ability to adhere to Buddhist principles. I thought, without knowing much back then, that any white adaptation of Buddhism would distort its purpose and meaning in significant ways.

I've since learned that there are many, many versions of even Asian Buddhism. But I did end up attending a Buddhist temple attended by mostly Asian-born Asians. Sad to say, I don't really fit in with these people either; many speak Asian languages and there's a lot of ritualized worship, bowing and chanting, something I tend to spurn. (I can deal with some ritual, but I'm definitely not into worship.) My experience with Buddhism somewhat mirrors my life as an Asian American — I don't fit in with first generation Asians, I don't fit in with white America, and so I have to find my own way. I'm not sure how to do that in the context of Buddhism in my area.

I have a difficult time with white Buddhists who love to talk. I know a number of them — people who go on for hours about various Buddhist topics. I can't get a word in edgewise. It's not that I don't like Buddhism being discussed and even intellectualized; it's that these people seem to love to hear themselves talk — there's a kind of ego-gratification thing going on, a "Here I am, the expert on this" kind of feeling I pick up. I don't like when Buddhism becomes a vehicle for this kind of thing. And this too mirrors my problem with white (and Western) society as a whole: too much talking and holding forth, not enough listening. Talking too often for attention and admiration, rather than to explore or resolve something.

I don't want to sound too critical. But Buddhism will become a long-term, meaningful path for me only if I find like-minded, culturally-sympatico people who are doing it and living it. I'm not hopeful.

Anna Barnard

Dear friends in the Dharma:

Why racial, ethnic and other diversity is needed in our Buddhist communities:

It seems intrinsic to our practice of being with what is and becoming aware of our illusions, that we work at seeing those illusions about who we are and who we see as different from us. And our awakening loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and wisdom will bring to our attention those illusions and the suffering we cause through them. Our national illusions about race and ethnicity can be seen to cause intense suffering; it takes more work to see how I and my sangha are causing suffering. When I look around my sangha and see that it is all white and that people of color visit but never stay, I need to look at what I do and don't do that causes that. We live in a very diverse community. This gives us an opportunity to examine the fears, phobias, aversions, stereotypes, and biases to which we as humans are so prone and that keep us chained and keep our sanghas segregated and impoverished.

I am a Buddhist practitioner in the Vipassana tradition and consider myself a European American Ally to Practitioners of Color.

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Sandy Boucher

In the Oakland neighborhoods in which I have lived since 1980, among my neighbors are African Americans, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Japanese, Philipinos, Mexicans and other Latin-born people, Middle Easterners — all sorts of folks. I'm used to being one of the few white faces on the block as I walk down the street. So that when I enter the room where my sangha meets, I do not have the illusion that these mostly European American people constitute the world, and I feel the inevitable distortion and loss in this situation.

Our sangha friends who are people of color are asking us to join with them to look at the assumptions, the settings, the requirements, the atmosphere in any particular Buddhist environment, that may cause discomfort and feelings of alienation. Let's do it! "Diversity work" is not a luxury, a side-issue, something to tackle next year or maybe sometime. It is a way of opening our hearts right now, of practicing metta on the ground where it's not always easy; it's a way of integrating our practice and institutions into the society in which we find ourselves, so that the Buddhist path can be available to all human beings who may benefit from it.

April M. Chartrand

I came to this practice in 1993 under the training of (German) Ruth Denison of Dhamma Dena Desert Vipassana Center in Joshua Tree, California. All of the women participants there were white, European or European American. I was the only woman of color in this 14 day silent retreat. I self identify as a tri-cultural woman who is African, Cherokee and Irish. I did not think anything of it at the time, but upon reflection, I was invisible and even an oddity to them. I remember one woman who had trouble looking me directly in the eye during one of our exercises. She turned beet red and her lips quivered during the exercise. I don't think she had looked a person of color in the eye before. After I left the retreat, I sat alone at home and though I tried to sit with other white groups, it did not feel welcoming at all. I stopped my practice for 6 years due to feeling invisible and not safe. The issue of racism was not discussed in the Sangha in any manner.

One day, sometime around 1993 to 1995, I read a letter to the editor of the Spirit Rock newsletter written by Jack Kornfield, in which he discussed the issue of Racism and White Privilege. I wondered what was going to be done about it.

Finally in 1999 I found the BOC (Buddhists of Color Sangha) and have been strong in my practice ever since. I feel visible, appreciated, and honored as a person of color. Most white Buddhists have not done their racial and white privilege work and it really is hard to sit with them. This ignorance level is not acceptable to me anymore. I can't deal and refuse to deal with them until they accept and start doing their internal investigation.

Sincerely,

April M. Chartrand

Cathy Cockrell

At a sangha retreat earlier this year, I had a powerful experience of how a formal "practice" can help a sangha address hurts and be a stronger, more inclusive community. Despite apprehensions, our sangha had decided to hold a "beginning anew" ceremony, as developed by Thich Nhat Hanh, during the retreat. In the first part of the ceremony (where people talk about things they appreciate in other sangha members) a European-American man made a comment about Cantonese as an "ugly" language, while another person praised a heterosexual couple as her model of a good relationship among members of the sangha.

In a later part of the beginning anew ceremony, participants are invited to express past hurts. This gave me an opportunity to speak immediately to the injury I felt in reaction to these two comments: the former in terms of my own hopes for an inclusive and welcoming community, and the second (with more inarticulateness and difficulty) on my own behalf as a member of a lesbian couple within the sangha. The aftermath was powerful. A woman who grew up with Cantonese thanked me strongly; she said she had felt strange at the time the Cantonese comment was made, but had passed over it. Having someone else articulate her

discomfort was very affirming, she said. (I later learned that Cantonese was the first language of another sangha member.) I had a good talk with the man who had made the Cantonese comment, who felt quite remorseful, and felt close to him afterwards. Several people were also very supportive around the gay issue: one validated my dis-ease with the couples comment; another told me a story about his father being gay; others thanked me.

What struck me about all this was that, however hard it felt to speak up, it was infinitely easier because of the beginning anew practice, which afforded a context in which to speak. I thought about the structure of many Buddhist gatherings, and how hurts of many persuasions could go unspoken merely for lack of a framework for a person — whether a member of the target group or an ally — to do so without breaking protocol. At both retreats of our sangha I have attended, we did beginning anew ceremonies. Both times I felt some knots inside, as I think many others did in anticipation, and both times I was very grateful, afterwards, that we had taken the risk.

—Cathy Cockrell, Oakland, California

#### On Being an Ally by Tova Green

Since I began sitting in the mid-'70s most of the practitioners and teachers I met at retreats and in sanghas have been Euro-Americans. This has become a source of increasing discomfort to me, a Euro-American, Jewish woman.

A few years ago, at a practice period at a Zen practice center, the single African-American participant asked me to be her ally during the practice period. She wanted to be able to talk with me if issues around racism arose for her. We met informally, nearly every day in the time when talking was allowed. One day, one of the teachers made a comment in his class that she thought stereotyped people of color. I agreed, and thought the comment also stereotyped poor people. In a practice discussion with the teacher I brought up how his comment had affected me. My friend spoke with him too. In the next class he publicly apologized. I felt that the incident was educational and empowering for all of us.

I would like my sangha to be more diverse racially and culturally. I think my experience would be enriched as we would all have an opportunity to sit together, learn about one another, and examine our assumptions about one another.

### Personal Statement by Robin Hart

I want to practice with people like myself. I feel comfortable around nappy hair and locks. Accented voices are soothing to me. Looking around at brown and yellow faces, I feel at home. Some may believe this to be an advocacy of separatism. Quite the contrary. In most of my environments — work, school, and social — I am the only African American present and, many times, the only non-white. I would prefer more diversity, but that is my existence at the present time. In my sangha, however, where I may reveal my innermost feelings — my joys, pains, and fears — I want to feel safe, free, and supported in a way that I don't yet feel within the dominant culture.

The racism of the larger society finds its way into sanghas. Although acknowledged, its eradication is difficult. While people of color must, of necessity, move beyond our comfort zones (and, therefore, evolve) in order to survive and thrive as minorities in certain environments, there is no such impetus for Caucasians. White people generally have no idea how it feels to be one among many, as most can choose to function in all-white settings. Even in the most amenable environment, a person of color may still have an awareness of being an “only.” For those raised among their own ethnic groups, adjustments and accommodations must be made in order to blend in. One must always be conscious of one's speech and mannerisms and the need to appear unthreatening. One's ethnicity must be submerged or moderated.

I searched for a sangha where I could let down my guard, no matter how like my own skin it had become. I found a group of women of color with whom I can enhance my awareness of my/our Selves. The facilitators, Margarita Loinaz and Marlene Jones Schoonover, teach through the use of appropriate texts and by sharing their experiences on the Path. I *know* their stories, not because I have lived their lives. I know on an empirical level, a tribal level, a spiritual level, an ancestral level, and, perhaps, on an ancient memory level. We're of One Mind.

I have been waiting to communicate with those who speak the same language as I, who have walked or will walk my same road. I want to listen to my sistahs whose lives are enjoined with my life through similar histories of oppression and colonization, through family patterns of struggle and limitation, but whose spirits yet rise again and again and again. I want to feel the strength of women who find some ways out of no ways, who keep moving on, sometimes step by step, inch by inch, going forward nevertheless. In the Group, we cry. We laugh. We know, sistah, we know.

The day that I discovered the Women of Color Meditation Group, I found myself in a room full of beautiful swans, just like me. There were Latinas, Africans, and Asians. For months I had drifted, searching for a place where I would not be treated as an ugly duckling. During my quests, I sought a refuge, a place of peace where I would be welcomed and where I could feel safe. I dreamt of a sangha where I would be among people like myself — people whose stories I understood and to which I related; people who, when I stated my pain, did not fall silent or

misunderstand or express guilt or denial. I wanted to be around people who were willing to be vulnerable, as was I, in the hope that this opening of oneself would lead to empowerment and healing.

For months after I began to practice Buddhism, I searched for a sangha in which to find support and guidance. Often, I felt like a colorful presence amidst a stark whiteness, treated with curiosity or disdain or simply ignored — the latter being worse because I had no one to explain the rituals to me. On one occasion, when the sitting ended, I remember walking out of the meditation hall before the abbot. When I saw the look on his face, it occurred to me that I had done something wrong; but, there had been no greeting, no smiles, no show of friendship or loving-kindness whatsoever. There was no sense of peace or joy. I did find sanghas which were “open to” integration and made up of “progressive” people. In these communities, I was warmly greeted and encouraged to participate. Nevertheless, I was the only one like me. In a few sanghas, the dharma talk was not relevant to my experiences. As with any situation, listening to others was educational, but I did not feel a bond or connection with them.

The Women of Color Meditation Group is like a breath of fresh air to me. The dharma talks are guided discussions about ways in which our practice can be applied to the issues we face day after day, moment by moment. Women speak freely and fully, knowing that their words and feelings will be acknowledged and that they will receive support and words of wisdom. We can find solace in a womb of warmth and friendship. The sharing of women Buddhists of color strengthens and humbles me. The female energy is one of compassion and conciliation.

When we end the Sunday session, I feel calm and whole. Rejuvenated. Open. Light. Encouraged. Empowered. I am committed to meditate more regularly. I gain new tools to help me live my practice. I receive insight into myself and about others. It is in the Women of Color Meditation Group that I find freedom of expression and freedom to be who and what I am — in all aspects of myself.

Robin Hart is an attorney and writer living in the San Francisco Bay Area. She has an MA in Theology from the Pacific School of Religion, is a consulting editor of *Turning Wheel*, and has published articles on Buddhism and racism.

### The One-Hand-Clapping Black Zen Baptist by Connie Hilliard

It has been several years since that strange and powerful and beautiful insight descended on me. I had been sitting on the meditation cushion for what seemed like hours that particular morning. But of course the wall clock sadistically colluded with reality in an insistence that less than fifteen minutes had gone by. The discomforts — an itching left nostril, an aching left thigh, a mysterious pain in my right side (surely, my appendix was on the verge of rupture!) — were not merely physical. My distracted, wandering “monkey mind” demanded to know what I as

an African-American woman, raised in the black Baptist tradition, was doing in this ridiculously un-Baptist zendo.

And then in that instant I saw, with a clarity beyond words, that I had indeed come home. I understood, at the deepest level of my being, that the shouting, musical vibrancy of the black church and the contemplative stillness of the Zen monastery shared a remarkable family resemblance. Both emphasized the experience of religion rather than its intellectual or theological constructs. For the goal of these seemingly divergent traditions was not an intellectual one upmanship emanating from the disembodied thoughts and beliefs its trained theologians might espouse. It was rather to bring its adherents to a healing, joyful place of inner peace.

I have over the last several years come to appreciate the ways in which the experience of these two traditions, while in some ways similar, rely on two different states of consciousness. To accomplish its intended end, the black church experience creates for its adherents an emotionally liberating communal consciousness, employing the almost hypnotic rhythms of the pastor's intoned sermons, the mechanisms of call and response, the vibrancy of spiritual and gospel music. Zen, on the other hand, trains the individual to enter a state of mindfulness. This practice has taught me to wake up truly to life, to leave behind my fantasies for the future, and relivings of the past, in order to create an accurate perception of the here and now. Having grown up in the Christian tradition, I had learned how to get down on my knees to petition God in prayer. But through the practice of "mindfulness" I now know how to create the stillness of mind and body in my frenetic life, so that I can experience that all-loving, and infinitely wise divine answer.

Connie Hilliard, Ph.D., Associate Professor of African History  
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#### Personal Statement by Robert Horton

In Buddhism, mind is viewed as a series of discontinuous thoughts that arise and pass away. Ego is that which denies the discontinuity and instead convinces itself of a continuous self that has an ongoing identity. A lot of this convincing is done through dualities or polarities. "I exist because there is other." "I am this because I am not that." Our assumed identities have values and belief systems, core issues, etc. A corollary of this ego/identity is that we are separate from everything else—from people, from nature.

As we begin to examine the issue of race and to look closely at our white conditioning, we will find a powerful polarity. The polarity of "good white person" versus "bad racist person" is central to who we think we are. Imagine two baskets

— one labeled “good white liberal Buddhist” the other labeled “bad racist white supremacist.” We definitely want to see ourselves in the first basket.

Our white conditioning is a part of discontinuous arising of thought patterns that we picked up though growing up in this culture. As children, we did not choose to take this on. We merely absorbed from the environment, from our parents, peers, media, nursery rhymes, language, stereotypes, stories. This conditioning is how the white cultural ego defends itself against difference. Racism is not necessarily about believing in the stereotypes. It is being steeped in the cultural ego’s fear of other, without even being aware how deeply it is in us.

As we challenge where we place ourselves in the two baskets, we threaten our very identity. Ego becomes sneaky and we start squirming. We need to see ourselves as “good” because we have hearts, we really do care. But as we become more aware, as we begin to pierce the veil of ignorance, many difficult emotions will come up and we may begin to feel “bad.” At this point, if we do not connect with our inherent sense of unconditioned goodness, we strengthen ego by putting ourselves into the bad racist basket. So we must be willing to stand in a bigger awareness, outside the two baskets, and provide much compassionate space for our shame, guilt, etc. We need to feel these emotions completely while touching in with our basic goodness as much as we can. Only that seems to get us beyond the ego games. We can always do that. Just as in sitting practice we can always return to the present, to our breathing, to our body sitting on the earth. In this practice, we need to notice when we are trying to climb into either basket. That is a central part of our investigation.

Buddhism in America simply has not turned the focus of awareness on race. This says more about the subtle oppressiveness of our white conditioning in general than it does about Buddhism. Things are left out, not noticed, avoided, ignored, not mentioned, not spoken of, not seen. Differences are smoothed over. These are the forms of white liberal racism.

Joel Kovel in his book *White Racism: A Psychohistory* lists two primary styles of racism, one based on what happened historically in the South which he calls “domination,” and one based on the Northern way of life he calls “aversion racism.” The first is the direct acts of oppression — slavery, Jim Crow laws, overt discriminations, hate crimes, murders, rapes, etc. (Of course, these acts have not been confined to the South.) With the victory of the Northern way over the Southern, the second has become the primary and most insidious ongoing form of racism. “Aversion racism” is how we avoid living in neighborhoods with people of color, avoid having them for friends, avoid having sex with them, marrying them, avoid knowing that they live in a different world, avoid knowing anything about them. It is the racism of ignorance, of not seeing, of being unaware. It is subtle. And it is everywhere. It is the way we unconsciously create or manifest white environments, saying that all are welcome, but really only being comfortable with those willing to act like us, talk like us and dress like us. Then somehow we avoid even knowing that is what we are doing. Today, most people think only of the first

type of racism when they look for racism. That in itself is an example of aversion. “Don’t look here. It’s those awful people in Texas who drag black men behind their trucks. It isn’t me. No, not me.”

How could you apply your particular practice to:

- Tracking down your white conditioning?
- Dealing with emotions that come up around race?
- Attempting to place yourself and others in either basket?
- Provide space for the pain that people of color experience through racism?
- Provide space for the pain you and other white people experience participating in racism?

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### Taking the Path Together by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

In 1992 I was visiting a Buddhist friend, and saw a copy of *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry* (Shambhala Publications, 1991) sitting on the table. Intrigued, I picked it up and scanned the table of contents to see which American poets had been selected for inclusion in the anthology’s 358 pages. I remember dropping the book as though it had burnt me. It was an instinctive response, something I didn’t even think about or try to explain to myself at the time. After that I just purposefully forgot the book even existed.

It wasn’t until three years later that I understood why I had been so shocked. In the afterword of *Premonitions: The Kaya Anthology of New Asian North American Poetry* (Kaya Production, 1995), editor Walter K. Lew writes that “the 45 American poets [in *Beneath a Single Moon*]... are all Caucasian, and the book only mentions Asians as distal teachers, not as fellow members or poets of the sangha.... When one considers the relative obscurity of some of the poets included in the book, one wonders how it was possible not to have known of the Buddhistic poetry of such writers as [Lawson Fusao] Inada, Al Robles, Garrett Kaoru Hongo, Alan Chong Lau, Patricia Ikeda, and Russell Leong.”

I felt such relief when I read that list of names, mine included. Yes, I thought, we Asian American poets are here. Under the name Patricia Ikeda, I have become known as one of the “pioneers” of Asian American poetry — although there would be no need of pioneers if Asian American poets had been accepted as, simply, American poets, along with African American, Latino/Latina, etc. poets. Of course, this may sound merely like sour grapes on my part, but it is the *complete* exclusion of Asian American poets from *Beneath a Single Moon* that still fills my heart with grief and pain.

Another incident occurred in the spring of 1998. I was invited to be a speaker on a panel of “Asian and Asian American Women Buddhists” for the conference on North American Buddhist Women. Since one of the conference’s stated aims was to especially welcome Asian American Buddhist women, I was nonplussed when the program was printed and my name was not included on the

list of presenters. Although I am now convinced that this was simply disorganization, I inquired into it, and in the process was assured by one of the conference's organizers, a European American college professor, that I should not worry, because "many, many Asian American women are coming — Asian American women from Burma, from Thailand, from Nepal —"

"Excuse me," I broke in, "I'm confused! Are you talking about Asian American women who are living in Burma and Thailand, and coming home at the time of the conference?"

There was a silence on the other end of the phone. I was dismayed to realize that this American college professor did not know that Asian Americans are... well, we're American. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and though my grandparents came from Japan, the only language I speak besides English is French. I've never been to Japan.

Like many Asian Americans, I have been treated as an "other" my entire life. Not accepted as being truly American in my own country, I also know I would be extremely uncomfortable were I to visit Japan, where my American way of speaking, dressing, even walking or making eye contact might seem improper to the Japanese. Throughout my more than 30 years in the American midwest, I have also been "invisibilized" — a form of unconscious racism in which people simply look past or through you — and marginalized.

Things are much better now that I live in the Bay Area in California, and I'm happy that my husband, who is white, and I are raising our son here. My married name, Ikeda-Nash, reflects the combined heritages of our family; my husband has changed his surname to Ikeda-Nash as well. And there's been progress in the American mahasangha: a greater awareness of diversity issues is dawning (brought forward in many instances by courageous gay, lesbian, and bisexual Buddhists); healing racism in our sanghas work is being done in the Bay Area and elsewhere; and teachers of color like Ralph Steele and European American teachers identifying as allies are emerging. However, much of the journey still lies before us. I hope we can all walk it together.

Charles Johnson

My name is Charles Johnson. I am 3/4 African American and 1/4 Native American. Racism has had a negative impact on my participation in Buddhist groups. The following two stories will hopefully provide insights into my experience. Both relate to incidents that occurred at a recent retreat.

#### TEACHER DISRESPECT

In a recent retreat a teacher for whom I have a lot of respect was very disrespectful to me. This teacher asked me about discussing sometime in the future, my involvement in a training program that will be starting later this year. I enthusiastically informed him that I was very interested in pursuing it. He ignored

my comment and proceeded to comment about us talking in the future. Thinking he had not heard me, I again informed him of my interest and noted that I had discussed this program with one of the current participants and was very, very interested in pursuing it. He ignored me again. Why? I assumed it was because of my apparent eagerness, so I sent him a note (talking was limited at the retreat) noting I must appear like an anxious puppy, but my interest was genuine. He never responded to my note. Why? Whatever his reasons, he treated me like a non-person.

At the beginning of the retreat participants have to provide personal information on a form. Some of this information is a description of our current practice. I have been meditating a long time, more than 14 years. My current practice also includes Yoga and Tai Chi. Although we have never discussed it, my impression on a very deep visceral level is that this teacher believes that I am not telling the truth about my practice. Why? I do not know. Are my feelings real? I do not know that either, but they are very strong. Do I think this teacher is a racist? No, not in the slightest. I think I have a lot to learn from this person. However, I do think that as a product of our American culture, his view of African Americans is jaded. I think that on some level he realizes that. I also think that he has some perceptions of me, which he believes are accurate. I very much believe those perceptions are influenced by my race.

During the retreat, this teacher made a very impassioned and heartfelt comment about an African American baby's life being negatively impacted as a result of the color of his/her skin. Although I agree with his point, the approach is like saying someone was killed because they were in the way of a speeding bullet. In my view, a more accurate comment, and one that puts the responsibility where it lies, would have been that the baby's future would be negatively impacted by the racist and bigoted attitudes of some white Americans and the institutions they have developed.

#### KITCHEN HELPER JOB

At this retreat each participant was assigned a work meditation job. There were 6 food preparation jobs each morning. Four of these were as "veggie choppers" the other two were called "angels". All 6 were to get the veggie choppers set up at the beginning of the work period. Then the veggie choppers had to find out how the cook wanted the veggies chopped based on the meal to be prepared. The angels were assigned whatever the cook needed done in the kitchen that day.

On the morning of the third day of the retreat, the preliminary work was done, and I asked the cook what she wanted the angels to do. She immediately started verbally attacking me, not only by the words used but the tenor of her voice and scowl on her face. She was saying that by now I should know what my job is and should be working with the others on my team and should not have to ask her what to do...etc. etc. At that point, not wanting to get into an argument, I left and went over to the table with the veggie choppers. The other angel followed suit. The

cook soon joined the six of us at the veggie-chopping table and began chastising the entire group. Her words literally made no sense, especially to the others since they were not aware of the earlier event. At one point, stumbling over her words, she paused long enough for one of the veggie choppers to ask her what she was talking about. She responded by saying, “I am not doing a very good job of this am I?” and apologized. She then proceeded to tell us that we should be able to get things set up by now and started telling us where the cutting boards and other materials were. At the conclusion of her diatribe she proceeded to show the veggie choppers how to cut the food and then took the other angel and me into the kitchen to show us what she wanted us to do.

One of the choppers was Oriental, the rest of the kitchen helpers and the cook were European American. Was this incident racially motivated? That is how I took it. Had the cook opened her eyes, she would have seen that all of the preliminary work had been done well ahead of any of her angry words. And at the conclusion of her words she proceeded to do what I had asked in the first place. So why the angry words? Later, when she addressed the entire group I believe she did so only to give the impression that I was not being singled out for this ridicule. It was a vain attempt. Could this event have been motivated by other circumstances? That is also possible. Everyone has bad days. This was a very minor incident. However, it was hurtful. It kept me awake for a while every night for the rest of the retreat. At one point I was going to ask for a job outside of the kitchen. Each night I kept asking myself how the situation could have been handled in a more skillful manner that would have helped her and me.

What’s Your Name Again?...*Is Refuge for Everyone?* by Diana Lion

A friend of mine recently went to his first all-day session of meditation practice at a dharma centre on the East Coast. He was supposed to meet his buddy — a long-time dharma practitioner — at the door before sitting the day together. Unfortunately on this particular day the friend was sick and needed to cancel. So my friend entered the centre alone. He was nervous, as most of us were when we first started out. While standing in line to enter, he noticed that the woman doing registration smiled at each participant ahead of him and checked their name off on a list. However when his turn came, she looked at him and asked him his name three times and whether he was sure he was in the right place — even though he was on the pre-registered list. My friend felt unwelcome and left — hurt, angry, and disappointed. It had taken courage to attend that meditation day. As a former drug user it took all the remaining courage he had to stop himself from going off to get high to numb the old familiar pain.

Maybe you have guessed by now that my friend is African American. He happens to be a large man — 6’5” tall. He also happens to be a scientist, former professor in an accredited school, and son of a judge. He doesn’t fit *any* of the

stereotypes — either in the black or white communities. He is someone I have known for several years, and whose presence is a blessing in my life.

I am a Canadian woman who has lived in the U.S. for the last 20 years. I have been deeply saddened by the wounds that racism has created in both of these countries. There are the obvious devastating ones: the broken lives, families and communities shattered by the individual and systemic race dynamics which weave through all areas of life. And of course all the messages of personal failure — the opposite of knowing our Buddha nature — which people internalize as small children. These messages often continue to colonize people’s minds even after they “make it”. I see this in some of the black members of my own family, as well as the members of my (Latino) ex’s extended family. The latter and I remain close, and the pain of watching my step kids maneuver around the racist incidents of everyday life is heart wrenching. It’s hard enough to grow up without *extra* pain...

When my friend walked in the door of that dharma centre, and had the interaction I described above, he and the white woman registrar were not only acting as individuals. Because of the imbalance in the race demographics of western “convert” sanghas, they were each also (perhaps unknowingly) representatives of larger groups. The interaction happened between a representative of an institution that had been perceived as a place of refuge and someone perceived as a potentially threatening black man. The quality of the welcome was the symbolic gateway to contact with this new place. A suspicious, rather than warm, welcome not only harms the individual interaction: it harms the greater notion we hold together of refuge. We give out the message that refuge is offered for some, *but not for everyone*.

And of course there’s another toll that racism takes. That is the toll on us “white folks”. I hear some of my white friends’ guilt and shame about not having any friends of colour. And I can sense the contraction in them around that pain. I remember feeling that in my chest and the pit of my stomach when I first emigrated here from Canada: the fear of not wanting to say something that was politically incorrect, and the fear of being criticized. As someone who is dedicated to social change I hold a strong value around inclusion, but I wondered how I could connect with people so different from myself. In Canada, I had had a few friends of colour, but the race issues there had a different flavour from what was happening in the States. However, I didn’t want to stop with the helplessness: I felt determined to go deeper into this inquiry.

As I sat over and over with the tightness inside I realized that it covered various broken parts of my past — and shreds of images floated up. Remembering being left out in the schoolyard — the hollow bewilderment of that experience of being banished from circles where I wanted to be. Feelings of being frozen and tongue-tied in the face of jeering classmates — who were not even jeering at me. Remembering the smallness I felt, as I was silent when they made fun of another girl; and how relieved I felt that it wasn’t me. And how ugly I felt that I was too afraid to stand up for her and risk the same treatment for myself. Remembering

comments trusted adults had made about “those people”, and the internal editing and choosing I had had to do in order to keep my now-tarnished trust for those adults intact.

Each of these old experiences had resulted in some disconnect from my heart, and an intensifying of my sense of “outsiderness”. I was then able to use this trail of disconnections as a path toward connecting with various friends of colour who had experienced their own disconnections.

As I continued, I also noticed the overall brokenness in so many “white” people’s sense of their own ethnicity, heritage and stories. In a class I co-led for white people unlearning racism about 10 years ago, I noticed that the only European Americans in the class with some sense of joy around their particular heritage were the Jewish participants. As a Jew myself, I have realized that the more I am able to connect with my own culture the more a sense of wholeness emerges. In fact Buddhist practice has actually deepened my appreciation and connection to my Jewish heritage. So, in addition to the previously mentioned commonality of disconnection, I have also been able to use my sense of deepened connection with my roots to connect with friends of colour.

It is important to me to diversify our sanghas — but not out of a sense of political correctness, which seems to be a synonym these days for disconnected guilt, shame, and obligation. Rather, I want to walk my (dharma) talk and sit the way I live: trusting in the interdependence of *all* things (including all cultures and beings) and knowing that the wholeness we seek comes from including all the pieces of the beautiful mosaic of life. Sangha is a true refuge and place of rejoicing for me when it includes the richness of the many cultures of my Canadian and American friends.

Diana Lion is the Director of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship Prison Project, and a woman of Jewish European heritage.

Lori Pierce

Everyone must be on the same page. This means understanding our fundamental dysfunction re race in this country. The current media vogue is to construe racism as something neo-Nazis, skinheads or other marginal bigots do. This absolves the rest of us from taking responsibility not just for individual acts of discrimination and bias on a daily basis, but for the ways in which White supremacy reinforces and guarantees White skin privilege. Racism in the U.S. is not primarily about individual acts of ill will. One can be benign, neutral, open, accepting and friendly to people of color and still be participating in the perpetuation of racism in this country merely by not actively working against racial hierarchies. A good working definition of racism comes from Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s *Racial Formation in the United States*. There, they argue that racial projects “create or reproduce structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race.” All

White people need to understand the multiple ways in which institutions in this country reproduce structures of domination in this country that are harmful, dehumanizing, or downright dangerous to people of color.

White people must make a commitment to working against racism on a daily basis. We all must be as committed to anti-racist work as we are to our daily practice. In fact, I believe that for American Buddhists, being committed to anti-racist work must be our daily practice. Our country is so fundamentally dysfunctional with regard to race, racism and racial ideologies that we no longer recognize the degree to which it structures and influences our daily life. This is especially true for White people who enjoy privileges and unearned advantages on a daily basis, and therefore effectively discriminate against people of color. It is not enough to be sorry or to go out of your way to smile and be friendly. Racism is not about personal feelings and therefore anti-racist work requires that we move beyond feelings and emotion to action and advocacy. We must constantly be vigilant and speak out about the root causes of prejudice and discrimination — racial structuring based on White supremacist beliefs and practices in our institutions.

White people must educate themselves about these issues. Racism in the United States is now and always has been a White problem, and therefore it is incumbent on White people to talk amongst themselves about how they propose to solve this problem. Waiting for people of color to enter White spaces in order to educate White people about their blindness to racism is arrogant, patronizing and disrespectful. Feminists have, for years, called men to task for not taking responsibility for dismantling patriarchy. The same is true for the responsibility White people must take for dismantling racial hierarchies.

Reading:

Michael Omi/Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*.

Ruth Frankenberg. *White Women Race Matters*.

Noel Ignatiev. *Race Traitor*.

Toni Morrison. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*.

George Lipsitz. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

Michelle Fine. *Off White: Readings on Race, Power and Society*.

Lori Pierce completed her doctorate in American Studies at the University of Hawai`i at Manoa and has been appointed the Owen Dunston Visiting Professor of History at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana. Her research and writing focus on the intersection of race, religion, and ethnicity in the United States and Hawai`i.

Tending the Well, Sharing the Water by Canyon Sam

I had just returned to the States after a year in China, Tibet, and India, where I studied dharma and lived and worked in Tibetan communities.

I started going to a Monday night sit an hour's drive north of San Francisco in a small church. One night the lead teacher brought up the topic of sangha. We left each Monday night to return to jobs, homes, families, but how might we stay in touch and help each other as a sangha on a more continuous basis, he asked. He looked out over the dozens and dozens of yogis, mostly Euro-Americans, cross-legged on their cushions on the church auditorium floor till hands popped up. Carpooling, one yogi said. Caring for the homeless on Fourth Street, another offered. Getting involved with the local AIDS program, helping the victims of last winter's mudslides in Corte Madera, said others.

“Yes, we need a sense of engagement and purpose as a community. Any more ideas?”

Though I was nervous to be around these people: they were all white *and* upper middle class, I knew I had to say something. I mean, I had just spent a year living in Buddhist Asia, the birthplace of this practice, and these countries were some of the poorest on the face of the earth. I raised my hand and spoke up.

I mentioned the exciting, historic convening of the first ever international conference on Buddhist nuns two months earlier, the appalling condition of refugee Tibetan nuns. How nuns were fleeing religious and political persecution in Tibet, and daring for the first time, after meeting nuns from other countries, to dream that they could obtain educations. Historically nuns were taught to memorize, and do menial chores, while monks were taught to read and debate and study. We could start a sponsorship program that would provide basic education and literacy. \$20 a month is not much, but it stretches far in India. It would be the chance for Tibetan nuns to read and study dharma for the first time in history.

The teacher rose off his cushion, waving his arms to cut me off with thin-veiled agitation. He took the floor again, steering the conversation to the *local* community, something that affected *our own* lives. It was precisely because since returning to the States I realized how self-absorbed Americans were that I thought this thriving sangha would like to build bridges with struggling Buddhist communities in Asia. After all, they were drawing from the well, shouldn't they be caring for it? The county we were sitting in was the richest county in California, and one of the wealthiest in the nation. Twenty dollars seemed not a lot of skin off their noses.

Another man broke in addressing the teacher by his first name:

“I think I understand what you mean. We can help each other, like in the days when farming families held barn raisers. The whole community got involved. Some things you can't do alone, everybody's gotta pitch and work together. Like, I've got a patio project I've been putting off for months, got the bricks and everything. The sangha could come over some Sunday, we could order pizza, and

people could help lay the brick patio around my swimming pool. We could have fun with it. Make it a day.”

The teacher broke in more strenuously and segued into a rap about how the community was getting cramped here and some of them had been looking for land. Soon the figure one point two million dollars tumbled out of his mouth.

Opening up the dialogue to the sangha was just his way, I suppose of trying to get the need to arise from the masses themselves, but it didn't quite work.

I had cajoled a friend to accompany me that evening. She was, like me, Asian American, a lesbian, and worked in the building trades. It was a step up from her small town upbringing in the central valley where her parents owned a small corner grocery. I had been trying to get her interested in Buddhist meditation, so I could have a buddy to do teachings with. It was everything I could do to keep her from bolting to the car. On the ride home she exclaimed that she labored on rich peoples' houses during the week for a living, why would she want to do it on the weekend “for fun”? Those people with swimming pools in Marin feeling sorry for themselves were not in any way, shape, or form her community. She was never going back and come to think of it wasn't as interested in learning to meditate as she thought.

Many years later, after His Holiness won the Nobel Peace Prize and Tibet gained more popularity this same teacher became very interested in Tibet. Every other sentence referred to the Dalai Lama saying this and such in Dharamsala, or Tibet something or other. Posters appeared on the community bulletin board sponsoring events benefiting or involving Tibet or Tibetans.

It was like Columbus discovering America.

Larry Saxxon

The Buddha's awakening entailed experiencing life and its interconnected parts as simply that which... *is at its both bare and complex essence*. As such, he consciously moved (through both his Teachings and his behavior) against the Brahman's posture of ranking, discriminating, and judging people based on their outer appearances, gender, and social ranking et. al. Thus, he simply BECAME and LIVED TRUTH

The Buddha was in short, socially engaged, and through his actions, revolutionary. Change through kindness and love.

What have Westerners learned from this *unchanged initial revelation*???

Nothing...

Many of the dominant practitioners in the West, the majority of whom happen to be of European descent, have cloaked themselves in the outer covering of the Dharma without going through the complete transformation process. Because...the onion/Path has a multiplicity of soothing and beautiful layers.

There are layers of change which far surpass the initial “Pop Culture Buddhism” which seems to be the prevailing hegemony in the West. The first few

layers are simply seduction and immobility....non-spiritual growth; even iatrogenic in many instances ...harmful

How anyone can come to intimately KNOW THE PATH and not, through their innermost actions, become also a social revolutionary...begs the question of Dharma. You suffer...I suffer...we suffer because there is no real disconnects between us. Selectively practicing the Path is simply a non-option. As has been stated in the Zen Path...You either DO...or YOU DO NOT DO...You DO NOT TRY...YOU DO NOT PONDER!

Ironically, the Western application of the Dharma has again placed the people of color, those who are not male gender, those who are not heterosexual, and those who seem Different... in the oft visited position of having to diagnose, prescribe the course of treatment, and most sadly of all...PROVE the state of the social pathology.

Many of us grow tired of having to delude the child with softness, comfort and patience while attempting to heal the child's illness in addition to mitigating and remediation of the social, environmental and spiritual damage that such a powerful child creates in the connected existence. Because the child does not know, from deep within, that all actions, thoughts and volition are external on such a large scale...the child simply continues to play the game of Behaviors By Rights of Entitlement.

As it is difficult to not despise the beginner...it is so with this dangerous child. Only the Path allows a clear vision of the child sitting in its own waste...and sadly...laying waste

Dharma... Whose Dharma???.....

The very moment in which one dares to assume the right to ask the "who" ...one has immediately missed the entire Path.

The onion is so very much deeper...starvation occurs on the outer layers only .....GO DEEPER...go deeper go deeper; and, we all go with you...

Metta

Larry Saxxon

### Vietnamese American Thoughts on Being a Buddhist in America by T. Liên Shutt

To begin with, I will clarify that my intellectual understanding of Buddhism is recent, based upon some book knowledge and almost two years of (mostly) regular sitting meditation. I was, however, born a Buddhist into a Buddhist society.

Therefore, this essay is, on one level, a personal exploration of what Buddhism means just to me. However, on another level, I offer these thoughts not only as a means to explain myself but because I know that my experience is part of a larger experience of Asians/Pacifics and Asian/Pacific Americans living in America who are, or *want* to be, practicing Buddhism with a community/sangha.

One commonality that many Asians/Pacifics in America share is a family history of Buddhism. Myself, I was born in Saigon in the mid-1960s. I was raised by a single mother. Though temple visits were not a regular practice, I still have vivid memories of my mother lighting long sticks of incense and bowing before an altar. At the age of eight, I was adopted by Caucasian Americans and have since lived in American cultural settings. As part of my “Americanization,” I was baptized and raised as a Presbyterian.

Though there are some similarities between Christian/American and Buddhist/Vietnamese values, these were not felt by me as I was growing up. One American value, which I never could understand, is the need to have everything legalized and written down: “signed, sealed, and delivered” is the expression, I believe. I have always had a deep sense of Right Speech through the Asian cultural value of honestly and truthfulness. A person’s word is obviously not worth much in the Caucasian American culture, was my thinking.

As mentioned above, I have not “practiced” Buddhism for very long; that is to say, in the “American Buddhism” definition. That is, I have not sat in meditation for very long. I have wanted to for a long time. I remember talking about meditation with a friend in college in 1983 but the only meditators we saw in North Dakota were White ones. When I moved to San Francisco four years ago, I lived down the street from a Zen center but once again, I was daunted because of its Whiteness. Yes, one can say that if my spirituality was sufficiently strong enough or devout enough, I would have persisted better. There is truth to this. There is also truth to the fact that, as a person of color, joining a mostly White group is always daunting, especially as meditation encourages one to touch and learn to expose one’s essential self.

On top of that, as a Vietnamese American, learning from White people teachings that I knew in my *bones* as having roots in my childhood in Vietnam, was hard to work through. Though there are strong Vietnamese Buddhist communities and many temples within the Bay Area, because I have lost my native Vietnamese, due to well-learned acculturation, I cannot attend these temples. This is ironic to me.

I would theorize that this is also true of many Asian/Pacifics and Asian/Pacific Americans. Therefore, my request is that the communities, which call themselves “American Buddhists,” make space for people like me/us. As I see it, “American Buddhism” is made up of non Buddhist born members who went to different Asian countries in the late ’60s and early ’70s, learned from Asian teachers there who, within Buddhist traditions, generously shared their understanding and love of the Dharma teachings and practices. I am not calling for the stopping of such exchanges. Love, compassion, and kindness are values that we *all* can use more of in our lives. However, by keeping sanghas and retreat centers most comfortable for and accessible to only/mostly European Americans or those who have best assimilated those values, “American Buddhism” remains, in my

eyes, yet another act of appropriation, taken from Asian cultures and used to exclude Asian/Pacific Islander people.

I know that some of my words may be strong. Always, my hope is towards Right Speech. I hope that I have done that here. I bow deeply to all. Metta.

—T. Liên Shutt

My name is T. Liên Shutt. I am an American of Vietnamese ancestry. I have been a caretaker of the Buddhists of Color (BOC) Sangha (Bay Area, California) almost from the beginning of its inception. While there are many reasons that bring people to the BOC, as a caretaker, I feel that my greatest responsibility is to hold space for the Sangha. To provide a refuge for all people of color and mixed-race people.

Thich Nhat Hanh in his book *The Heart of the Buddha's Teachings*, wrote that the Buddha in his last months of life taught that the Three Jewels are in all of us: "Take refuge in yourself, not in anything else. In you are Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha" (p. 163). However, in relation to Sangha, Thich Nhat Hanh also tells this Vietnamese story and teaching:

...when a tiger leaves his mountain and goes to the lowlands, he will be caught by humans and killed. When a practitioner leaves her Sangha, she may abandon her practice and "die" as a practitioner. Practicing with a Sangha is essential (p. 164).

Therefore, just as Enlightenment is possible to all of us but needs mindful practice for its cultivation, the Three Jewels are in us all, yet need the environment of a Sangha for the possibility of their expression.

For many people of color and mixed-race people, because of our individual and collective histories of disenfranchisement, the need to find Refuge in a sangha is especially important. While each of us work towards the ability to be safe and free wherever we find ourselves in this present world, having a place that validates our essential being on a racial, ethnic, and cultural front is a necessary step in the process. It is my hope as a caretaker, that the Buddhists of Color Sangha is such a place. A place in which all people of color and mixed-race people can rest on our path towards individual and collective Enlightenment.

Triscuit Wagner

My name is Triscuit Wagner and I am a 36 year old, white, queer man. I feel racial and ethnic diversity is very important for our sanghas. First, the dharma needs to be accessible to as many people as possible, so that individuals can decide for themselves whether it is something that appeals to them. In order to accomplish this, I think sanghas need to be multi-cultural in their approach. Allowing people of color and all ethnicities to have their interpretations of the dharma and how it is relevant to them culturally is important. I believe it would be unkind and unaware to assume that a white interpretation of the dharma is going to be appropriate for a clear understanding by non-whites. I recently attended the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered retreat at Spirit Rock and left with a very clear feeling and sense of why it is important for me to practice with the queer community. I believe we all have a fundamental need to be mirrored by others from our community. Through this mirroring I am able to have more access to my heart and ultimately compassion, and I also feel safer and more at ease. I imagine racial/ethnic groups must experience something similar when they practice culturally relevant dharma.

I appreciate the opportunity to express my views on this subject.

May all beings be happy

May all beings live with ease and in balance

May all beings be liberated

Sincerely, Triscuit Wagner

### No Color In the Room: A Question of Skillful Means

by angel Kyodo williams, ZPO (Zen Peacemaker Order)

My name is angel Kyodo williams and I am a student of Pat Enkyo O'Hara, Sensei of the Village Zendo in NYC. Enkyo was a student of both Maezumi Roshi and Bernie Glassman Roshi. I have, with support of Enkyo Sensei, written a book that introduces Buddhist/Zen principles to people of color, particularly black folks.

The book, *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace* will be published by Viking this Fall. The publisher has been very generous and supportive and I expect that by nature of its being a major publisher, the publicity campaign will naturally pique interest in buddhist practice across the board.

I came to write this book originally because I felt so discouraged that I do not see more people of color practicing within sanghas. Even in my own sangha, where I know my teacher to be open and accepting of everyone that comes, I am still the only consistent black practitioner after 3 years. I believe that this phenomenon goes beyond mere face-to-face racism and is indicative of a larger problem that must be addressed. Like the dharma, it is both very subtle and very profound.

As the publisher of eDharma.com ( <http://www.edharma.com/?POC> ) I field many different questions about why people of color are left standing on the outside door to practice of the buddhadharma, particularly when it comes to schools other than Nichiren Shoshu, such as Zen, Tibetan, and Vipassana.

While I understand some of the reasoning behind not allowing non-teachers to participate directly in this conference, it is my sincere hope that the organizers will see that it is this type of methodology that continues to perpetuate the problem as it stands. By this, I mean that it is so apparent that people of color will not be well-represented in this forum because there are so few of them that are recognized teachers, the matter of racism within the sanghas has the potential to become yet another discussion of ‘them’ (people of color) by ‘us’ (teachers, by nature of the circumstances, not of color) that does not bear witness to the reality of the situation and instead casts it off as words and ideas.

I thought to suggest that any conference on Buddhism in America and/or the West is severely lacking without proper attention to the glaring matter of No Color In The Room, but it seems the issue didn’t gain attention or cache early enough.

We continue to stoke the fires of elitism within this practice by focusing attention over and over again on a relative few “superstar” teachers whose schedules are so busy they are booked for these gatherings two years in advance, thereby shutting out the possibility of receiving any one or any thing new. I say this with *sincere* respect for the gift of their practice and teaching. At the same time, is this what we want to be our Way? The same names presented everywhere we go because that is what will draw and people will pay for? Each of those people morphing into experts on the subject du jour for as long as they continue to pull those that can pay \$65 for a one day retreat.

Very Western, indeed.

In all honesty, it would have been most prudent to create a special forum in which non-teachers would be permitted to join in this discussion just for the sake of balanced representation. I am of the mind that special matters deserve special action. Is this not what is meant by skillful means? At this rate, it will be a little while still before a representative number of people of color (non-Asian) become teachers, yet the problem to be dealt with has not waited and demands attention in this very moment, right now.

For how much longer will a large gathering of non-people of color sit about the table reading Our words and talking about what ought to be done about Us without Our being invited into *and* encouraged to be in the room?

There is a passage in the last chapter of the book in which I speak directly to Buddhist America, appealing to them to insist on diversity of their sanghas to be a main priority. (I realize we have dharma centers located in places in which there is a rare person of color to be found.)

I feel sure that this small passage, my own story and the book itself as a resource presented to the conference would be beneficial to the understanding of the question of race and Buddhist practice in the West.

Personal statement by Lewis Woods

For some time, it has appeared to me that the culture of the predominantly White, convert sanghas (in which I, as an African American, have practiced) is deeply marked by the experience of Whites from the '60s counterculture — an experience that differs greatly from that of most African Americans. As I understand it, the civil rights movement represented an extension of traditional Black culture, no doubt energized by the youth, but deeply connected with and rooted in the heritage of resistance to white supremacy inherited from previous generations. With respect to Black communities it would be absurd to speak of a “counterculture” in the 1960s. By contrast (and at the risk of over generalization), the White counterculture (activists, hippies, and enlightenment seekers) was marked by rejection of, and rebellion against, the mainstream, and a stereotypically American desire to start over.

The segmentation implicit in the countercultural rejection of the mainstream has had the result that many Buddhist centers seldom have much of an organic connection with a community beyond the walls of the center. In a number of cases, in fact, they resemble colonies of White culture situated in predominantly African American communities where real estate values are lower than average. Convert Buddhist centers tend to exemplify the lifestyle-enclaves discussed by Robert Bellah et al. in *Habits of the Heart*. (See Bellah et al., 1985; p. 72.)

Compare your “average” convert Buddhist center with your “average” Black church in the U.S. In the church one will often hear sermons about political races, police brutality, or public education — issues that affect not just members of the church but members of the larger Black Community. In the Buddhist centers, on the other hand, such topics are rarely the subject of a Dharma talk and when they are the speaker almost has to apologize for straying from the main purpose of the practice.

Black churches tend overwhelmingly to be embedded in larger communities. They are structured so as to mitigate the effects of individualism with an organic social engagement borne of the concrete situation of the members of the churches. Predominantly White convert Buddhist communities, however, tend more to resemble clubs, enacting a sort of corporate individualism in which the center is as alienated from public life as any 1960s commune was from mainstream society.

Thus, for Black folks, joining a predominantly White convert Buddhist sangha entails an immigration of sorts — a cultural border crossing into a land that is unsupportive of Black individuals and communities (to put it mildly). These convert sanghas are also thoroughly disconnected from the public concerns that

members of Black communities cannot help but bring with them, given the position of African Americans in the American racial hierarchy.

My hope, therefore, is that we will not view increasing diversity as a simple matter of assimilating African Americans and other people of color into existing centers as they are. Rather, I hope that we will seek ways to make the Dharma available to African American communities in an appropriate cultural and social idiom.

#### Personal Statement by Larry Yang

Practicing as a person of color in almost exclusively euro-american sanghas is difficult and often painful. The teachings describe that there is no hierarchy of pain or dukkha. However, I have found that when issues of race, class, oppression, discrimination, insensitivity, or not-being-seen arise in practice, people of euro-american descent generally are not aware of the complexities, are not sensitive to the issues, and cannot relate to the feelings. While this may not involve spiritual hierarchy, it does involve an interdependent experience of different kinds of suffering. This is especially important because the vast majority of western Buddhist teachers are caucasian. Thus, as a practitioner of color, I often do not get meaningful guidance in this area of identity formation and ego solidity, and how it relates to the Dharma. I do not hear Dharma stories that are similar to my own experiences. And I do not hear an interpretation of the Dharma that reflects non-euro-american experiences, values, and norms. While one's response to these conditions may shift as practice lengthens, this is a serious problem for beginning practitioners of color. Therefore, it is an obstacle to accessing the teachings.

Several experiential examples come to mind.

- (1) For years, I walked into the sangha where I sit, and was extremely uncomfortable; no one said hello; no one said anything to me, except to ask for dana; and no one expressed the hope that I would return. Whenever I walk into a space in which I am the only person of color, it becomes a statement (this is out of my control; the statement "becomes" all by itself). It was a statement to which this sangha was completely oblivious. This kind of denial further exacerbates obstacles to practice and affects how accessible I perceive the invitation into the Dharma. The idea of "invitation" is so crucial when approaching communities outside of the perceived mainstream. "Invitation" has very important cultural meaning and significance. Often, people who have been marginalized (whether due to race, orientation, class or other disenfranchisement) experience rejection, at best, and often abuse when walking into a space uninvited. Many of us have learned and been conditioned, not to go where the invitation is not explicitly given. Even when there is consent for inclusion, *if it is silent*, the consent is not experienced by those who need to be included.

- (2) For the feelings that arise from situations like the above, there is usually not the effort made nor concern expressed by teachers to guide a practitioner of color. In one metta retreat, teachers ignored my written request for help around being only one of three people of color in a room of ninety. In an extended retreat, a teacher would not read aloud my question about diversity during a Q&A session. My personal experience is that most caucasian teachers will ignore the issues, focus the attention back onto *my* practice and *my* response and *my* attachment to ego/identity, or ask me to drop *my* baggage at the door, and just talk about *my* practice. I have experienced all these situations and know that all of these strategies can deepen practice, and in fact all of these have deepened my practice. But I also know in my body and my heart that there are other ways to address hindrances and to present the Dharma.
- (3) Western convert sanghas have yet to create a safe container to absorb and process the volatile emotions that arise when diversity issues get raised. Practice containers have been created for the difficult and extreme emotions that arise around sexual abuse and betrayal, gender discrimination and inequality, and even abuse or violations by teachers. But I was told in one interview that “This is not the place to process this issue. That is why there are diversity committees and people of color retreats.” I would respond that as long as the issue is kept separate (as in “over there,” in a committee or segregated retreat or isolated program), people will feel separate and therefore will be separate. It is commonly described by teachers that every single issue will arise on the cushion. And yet, this seems to be one issue that does not receive assistance or guidance when it appears. There also seems to be confusion between the act of *naming* the nature of a condition and *blaming* a specific source. There are times that I have been treated as if I was blaming someone or the group, when I was merely stating the nature of an experience. There is an important difference.

Pain around the separation caused by identity issues, be they of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation, has not ameliorated simply because we are in a spiritual community with the best intentions. Intention is a sacred place to begin and apply our practice; *and* intention is a painful place to end, if no movement arises from that practice. Most faith communities in North America are still self-segregating. If Buddhist sanghas wish to have different karma than this, it will require more than merely not being “against” oppression and racism. It will require more than just being “for” diversity. It will require a joyous involvement and effort from all of our collective beingness. For me, in that shared beingness and movement is the possibility to transcend this dukkha.

Personal Statement by Rosa Zubizarreta

I share my story with you, for whatever benefit it may bring to all sentient beings.

My name is Rosa, and part of my experience includes being born in Peru to a Peruvian working-class father and a Cuban middle-class mother, and immigrating to this country when I was eight years old.

Another part of my experience includes being a voracious student of world religions from a very young age, with a particular interest in Eastern religions.

As a light-skinned Latina woman, raised in this country, I don't look identifiably different from your typical "Western" sangha member. If I wanted to do so, I could "pass" for white; as such, I know I carry the privilege of not being an identified target of unaware and/or racist behavior. I am also aware of many of the other privileges (as well as lack of privilege) that I have experienced in my life.

At the same time, I feel keenly the pain that my invisibility brings. Regardless of whether you treat me as "part of the group", there is in general little space in Western sanghas for who I am (in a relative sense, of course) to be seen, let alone welcomed. Because of my experience, I am also conscious of how many other "hidden diversities" are present in the sangha, how many others also do not feel truly seen.

It feels too facile to be told that my culture, my life experience, my family, my language, do not matter, are not "who I really am". This is especially true since the "difference" that I bring to my study and practice of buddhism has made me highly aware of how much our understanding and "view" is influenced by who we are, by the "lenses" that we ourselves bring to the teachings and the practice.

I don't believe that ANY group has a monopoly on truth. I'd love to contribute to an on-going exploration of how our many diverse experiences can help ALL of us generate a deeper understanding of the Dharma, and deepen our practice. Yet, in my experience, this has not yet been a high priority in most of the Western sanghas I've encountered.

After years of being a (mostly) solitary student and practitioner, I have worked along with others to help create greater opportunities for those of us in similar situations, as well as to bring a greater awareness of these issues to the larger buddhist community.

The Healing Racism in Our Sanghas event in the fall of 1998 helped catalyze an ongoing group of Buddhists of Color, as well as an ongoing Healing Racism group. And, the Mindfulness, Diversity, and Social Change sangha is a buddhist group open to folks from of all backgrounds and orientations — ethnic, race, religious, class, sexual persuasion, age, etc., where we use Council Circle practice, in addition to sitting and walking meditation, as a way to consciously explore the diversity of our sangha.

In closing, I celebrate the contributions of the many people who have been and are involved in these and similar efforts, and invite you to find your own way to join in the exploration of the gifts diversity can bring to our understanding and practice.

confronting the fearful demons

as humans living in the 21st century  
concerned with relieving the suffering of sentient beings  
and overcoming our own ignorance

learning about racism  
and how to transform it  
might be viewed as skillful means

\*\*\*\*\*

if we are not interested in learning about racism  
we may want to examine  
whether we are truly taking refuge  
in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Instead,  
we may simply be taking false refuge  
in our own privilege.

\*\*\*\*\*

the Buddha left his father's castle  
to learn about  
the suffering of the world.

How often do we  
extend ourselves  
outside the realms of our own privilege

in order to become familiar  
with the suffering of others?

\*\*\*\*\*

At the same time,  
paying attention to issues  
of racism, classism, sexism, and the like  
is NOT primarily about helping others.

As long as we ourselves  
are not able to feel completely close  
to all other human beings,

it is we ourselves  
who are living  
in illusion.

by Rosa Zubizarreta  
spring of the year 2000  
Santa Rosa, CA

## *Section Two: Personal Essays*

*The following four pieces (three essays and a Dharma talk) were originally submitted by their authors for Part One of this booklet. Because these writings could not be condensed to the suggested length due to their various formats, we are including them here as “personal essays.” All personal submissions in this booklet are held in equal esteem by the editors of this booklet.*

### The Road Being Traveled:

#### My Life and Times at San Francisco Zen Center (1990-2000)

by Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín

By the time that I arrived at my first zazen instruction at Green Gulch in August 1990, I was ready for Lou Hartman, the monk who was the first to hold open for me the Dharma gates of sweet dew. That day, Lou Hartman stole my heart when he said, “learning how to sit zazen takes fifteen minutes, practicing, however, takes a lifetime.” Right then and there, I threw myself completely into the ocean of Buddha.

On New Year’s Eve of that same year I was in the zendo sitting zazen. At around 11:30 p.m., Barbara Kohn, who was either the Ino or the Tenzo at the time, was inviting, mostly the newcomers, to join in ringing in the New Year with the 108 bells. The sound of the Densho was filling my heart. This simple act of standing in a circle of strangers, in the basement of an old building, participating in an ancient ritual, felt very familiar to me. I felt deeply at home. Yet, as I stood in a circle with other practitioners waiting my turn at the Densho, I looked around and noticed that I was the only Person of Color. I am Cuban of African and Spanish descent and identify as a Black Latina or as Afro Cuban. The joy of the moment became bittersweet with the sadness of invisibility. From that moment on I began to question: why is everybody white?

Having spent the previous ten years as a practitioner in the field of what in the ’90s began to be called ‘diversity’, I soon suggested to a couple of white senior students that they participate in a training workshop that looked at issues of racism. The response I received from one of them was “here at Zen Center no one is racist.” From that moment on I knew that SFZC was not going to be the place where I would find support for being a Person of Color. The practice of colorblindness ran deep, and the fear and discomfort of openly speaking about differences prevented any opportunities for growth.

In spite of a lack of cultural and institutional support around race, I found support at the interpersonal level around gender and sexual orientation within the very visible white Lesbian community that was part of SFZC sangha. And to this day I am convinced that my long conversations in Spanish with Idilio Cenicerros, who is Mexican American and who in 1990 had already spent several years within

the institution, kept me coming back. Idilio's deep knowledge of Dharma was like an oasis in what felt like a dry and distant environment.

There was a lot of talk about creating intimacy those days. For me, if we are spending time talking about it, then we are not doing it. It was evident, that the white cultural paradigm of individualism precluded true intimacy and interdependence.

Then one day, I don't exactly remember when or why, I got a call from Laurie Senauke, a member of the Board. She had an idea and wanted to know what I thought about it. I listened, and the rest is, as they say, history. This story is my personal statement.

San Francisco Zen Center's diversity initiatives began in 1993/1994 when Laurie Senauke, then a Board member, pulled together a committee to place the issue of addressing racism at SFZC on the Board of Directors agenda. I was a member of that committee. The result of this effort led to three outcomes.

The first was a series of trainings for staff and residents addressing diversity, racism and multicultural change. Workshops took place at each of the three SFZC sites: City Center in San Francisco, Green Gulch in Marin and Zen Mountain Center in Carmel Valley, and also the Board of Directors. I co-facilitated the training at City Center.

The second outcome was an article on *Racism and Buddhism* that appeared in the *Windbell* (1995), SFZC's biannual journal. The article was a transcript of a conversation of several Buddhists of Color facilitated by Sala Steinbach, an African American woman. The third outcome was the establishment of multicultural collections at each of the three sites' libraries.

In December 1996 I received lay ordination from Zenkei Blanche Hartman, Abbess of SFZC.

In the fall of 1997 the nominating committee of the Board asked me if I would consider running for an open seat. I laughed and teased them that there was no way I could be elected for I was too much of a revolutionary. I was told that yes, that is why they wanted me to run. I was also told to be prepared, that newcomers don't get elected the first time around. Although previously Sala Steinbach had been appointed to the board, it appeared as if this was the first time that a Person of Color was on the ballot.

I was elected by the membership the first time around. Soon after, I met a senior student that had been in residence for almost 20 years. As she shook my hand I introduced myself. She commented: "I voted for you because you were the only person I did not know." I was not sure what the statement meant, however, I just took it as a good thing.

Also in 1998 Tanto Teah Strozer and Outreach Director Paul Haller co-led the Fall Practice Period focusing on the teachings of the Sandokai (Merging of Difference and Sameness). During this practice period, Co-Abbot Zoketsu Norman

Fischer and City Center Director Mary Mocine gave Dharma talks during the Saturday public program on diversity and oppression.

In January 1999, Vipassana Teacher Ralph Steele was invited to SFZC. On Saturday the 30<sup>th</sup>, Ralph gave a Dharma talk to a packed Buddha Hall. It was the first time in almost 9 years of hearing talks in the Buddha Hall that seated on the platform was an African American Dharma Teacher. Ralph's visit also coincided with the first meeting of what has come to be known as the Buddhist of Color Sangha that met at SFZC on the last Sunday in January. He was present at that meeting.

In February 1999, I introduced to the Board of Directors a request to appoint a task force with a budget to lead a long-term initiative at SFZC. This initiative would take a multilevel approach to addressing diversity in educational development, policies and programming over a two-year period. The board did not take action on this specific request. However, it asked for a group of volunteers to study and research what was happening at each of the three centers in terms of SFZC leadership's view on diversity.

An Ad-Hoc Diversity Committee was formed immediately; however, it wasn't until late summer that that group began to meet. Although I was part of the group, I chose not to lead it for it's my personal belief, based on my professional experience, that white people must take leadership on these issues. In order to assess the climate and views on diversity, I designed a survey that was used as a guide in conversations at different levels of leadership.

In June 1999, SFZC President and Senior Teacher, Barbara Kohn, participated in the *VISIONS* 4-day training "*Modern Racism: A Personal Approach to Multiculturalism.*"

She became instrumental in moving the diversity agenda forward within the institution. The training, open to the public, was held at SFZC Conference Center on Page Street.

In September 1999 three new activities for People of Color began. In the first one, Paul Haller and I co-taught a class on Mindfulness Awareness and Stress Reduction for People of Color in the helping professions. This was the first time that I was teaching a class at SFZC and it was part of my training. Thus, Paul, a white man of Irish descent was one of the instructors.

The second one was the inclusion, in Spanish, in the Zen Center Fall catalog, of a full page detailing a series of classes of meditation instruction for Spanish speakers. Photographs of Idilio Cenicerros and I, who took turns being available, accompanied the text.

Last, also in September 1999, I began to lead an ongoing Sitting and Dharma discussion group for People of Color. The group is scheduled during SFZC Practice Periods.

Since then, every catalog has a page titled "The Color of Dharma" where activities for People of Color are listed so as to be easily read. (I want to thank my

dharma brother Larry Yang from whom I first heard the term “the color of dharma.”)

Also in the fall, Barbara Kohn gave a Dharma talk at a Saturday public program where she outlined SFZC’s intentions to address diversity issues at an institutional level.

In November 1999, the Diversity Ad-Hoc Committee presented to the Board of Directors a two-prong proposal: a) hire a person to manage this area; and b) establish a far-ranging, long-term commitment to make efforts to enable Zen Center to become a more multicultural institution.

In January 2000, at the invitation of the F. Felix Foundation, SFZC submitted a proposal requesting funding to operationalize the proposal before the Board of Directors.

In March 2000, SFZC was awarded funding by the F. Felix Foundation to begin implementing a comprehensive diversity initiative which will both foster diversity and multiculturalism within Zen Center, and challenge established racial and social boundaries in making the Dharma available to a wider community. SFZC is pursuing this initiative by: 1) establishing a framework for developing cultural competency within SFZC that takes into account the variables of attitudes, communication skills, institutional policies and organizational structures in order to build a truly multicultural Buddhist community; and 2) actively developing the scope and impact of our existing diversity outreach work, and responding to the needs of historically underrepresented populations with new programs.

In April 2000, the Board of Directors voted on a series of implementation steps that will meet the stated goals. Programmatically, these steps include: the implementation of an ongoing internal cultural competence skills training program for SFZC residents, staff, teachers, and Board member; the development of a Dharma Teachers of Color Residence Program; and the development of a Diversity Advisory Council to lead the full implementation of the initiative. There is a three-year timeline for accomplishing these goals.

In June 2000 *VISIONS, Inc.* will be conducting its annual public West Coast training at SFZC Conference Center once again. The training, called “*Modern Racism: A Personal Approach to Multiculturalism,*” is open to the public. In exchange for use of the facilities, members of SFZC Senior leadership are invited to attend the 4-day training. At this time it is expected that a couple of Senior Teachers will attend the training.

In August 2000 I will be celebrating my 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary at San Francisco Zen Center.

Today, I continue to raise the issues of differences, oppression and equity in my sangha in spite of making others uncomfortable. Again, I take this as a good thing. I have learned that institutional issues must be tackled with institutional level interventions. And I have shed tears of both sadness for the suffering that the denial of oppression causes, and joy at seeing what is possible, as when I give zazen

instructions on Saturday morning to dozens of beginners. There are now more shades of different colors in the Dharma wheel that is turning in our midst.

In December 2000 I will complete my 3-year term on the Board of Directors. According to the by-laws, I could run for a second term. At this time that is not a certainty. Whether or not I run, my life and times at San Francisco Zen Center will continue as I sew my *kesa* for priest ordination with Zenkei Hartman.

I offer this story for the benefit of all beings in the ten directions. May all beings be happy. May we all live in peace and safety.

### To Buddhist or not to Buddhist: Why We Need Ethnic/Racial “Diversity” in Our Buddhist Communities by Lawrence Ellis

#### Reframing the discourse from “embracing diversity” to “stopping the perpetration of violence”

One of the most insidious forms of violence is “cultural” violence: the beliefs, values, and habits of being that justify or legitimize direct violence, structural violence, and psychic violence.<sup>1</sup> For me, one of the foremost reasons why racial/ethnic diversity is needed in our Buddhist communities is for us to be true Buddhists — in particular, to honor *ahimsa*, to stop perpetrating violence against others. Let me be clear. I do not think that “diversity for diversity’s sake” is a compelling reason to “diversify” our sanghas. This approach often casts “diversity work” in terms of “choice” or “helping to relieve the suffering of ‘the oppressed.’” Choice often leaves people with convenient exits. The focus on relieving others’ suffering often puts at center a static view of who constitutes “the sufferer(s)” and who constitutes the one(s) in a position to relieve their suffering — which may more often serve ego than the Dharma. Don’t get me wrong. Choice has an important place in the scheme of things (sometimes). As for the value of *karuna*... for a conference of Buddhist teachers, I needn’t say much about this. Nonetheless, this framing of the issues fails to put at center compelling reasons for diversifying our sanghas. For me, one of the most compelling reasons goes something like this: one’s status as a practicing Buddhist gets called into question deeply if one knows one is perpetrating violence against others, and yet one fails to cultivate practices to transform being a perpetrator.

#### Liberal white racism<sup>2</sup> and “racial mindlessness” as perpetration (i.e., “cultural violence”)

In limited allotted space, I cannot adequately define the contours of or the nefarious impact of liberal white racism and of racial mindlessness (i.e., virtually no mindfulness of race and racism dynamics). So for now, I’ll share a few items that will hopefully somewhat cast these into relief.

- “... published in the New England Journal of Medicine. A carefully conducted study found that doctors were 40% less likely to order sophisticated cardiac tests for women and blacks who complained about chest pain than for men and whites with identical symptoms... concluded that the disparity in what are literally life-and-death decisions was most likely due to unconscious biases about gender and race... what this study shows is the extent to which subconscious racist attitudes still afflict even highly educated, humane white people who sincerely believe they do not have a prejudiced bone in their body” (from “Prejudice? Perish the Thought” in Time magazine, March 8, 1999). (It’s worth noting that the NEJOM is often considered the most respected medical journal in the US. It’s also worth noting that the Time reporter de-emphasized the role of subconscious sexism– in the section above and in the article in general).
- Questions posed by sexism/patriarchy are instructive and (along with other “ism”’s) challenge Buddhism to the core. Historically (and currently, I would note), how is it that (a) key individuals claimed to have been [somewhat] enlightened and were viewed by others as [somewhat] enlightened, and yet (b) were so opaque to patriarchal “formations” and ways of being in their own consciousness and living, and to systems of domination in Buddhist cultures that marginalized/oppressed half of the human population?<sup>3</sup> One clear possibility is that Buddhism ain’t all it’s jacked up to be in terms of providing tools and practices for generating deep insight, cultivating a profound sense of interconnectedness, etc. Another possibility is that Buddhism does provide, generate, and cultivate these. Nonetheless, sexism/patriarchy (and other ism’s) are so deeply entrenched in consciousness that even highly evolved beings have failed to notice — let alone transform — them.<sup>4</sup>
- Sexism/patriarchy and racism (and other ism’s) have differences. They also have similarities. One striking similarity seems to be that in many Buddhist communities in the West, currently many practitioners seem to be as opaque to racism as many men (and many women) historically were (and sometimes still are) to sexism/patriarchy.

### Impact and responsibilities of leadership

As teachers, you have formal leadership roles in Buddhist communities. On this issue, I would note two points:

- Decades of empirical research supports that leadership style tremendously influences climate (that is, the sense of what it is like to work, or practice, in a place).<sup>5</sup> So the data supports commonsense: y’all have tremendous influence on others.
- Racism as cultural violence leads to other forms of violence. Given strong prohibitions in Buddhism against direct violence, I would doubt that Buddhist cultural racism links closely with racist direct violence in the US. However, its close links with racist psychic violence are staggering (I have chosen not to

share stories of my experiences with racism in Buddhist communities (though I do have scores of them), but instead a perspective/framework for interpreting personal stories, individual and collective responsibility and accountability, etc. It is my hope that my sisters and brothers submitting papers will offer numerous stories that bear witness to racist psychic violence). Finally, how will we measure the links between Buddhist cultural racism and racist structural violence? Very challenging task. May I suggest that we look deeply at the ways in which our beliefs, values, and habits of being influence “the world”? Do they influence the policies and leaders we endorse — whether in our sanghas or in our elected officials? Are there people working in myriad fields who might be acting analogously to the doctors referenced in the study noted in Time. Are there members of our sanghas who have significant influence on decision-making in organizations, communities, etc. — which decisions get translated into norms, guidelines, policies, laws?

Racism doesn't “just happen.” There is the principle of dependent co-arising. At issue is not only violence, but also creating the conditions that allow for its manifestation. The solution is not diversity “perfection” – I've never met anyone embodying whatever this might look like, nor do I think I ever will. A solution is diversity “practice”. Unfortunately, diversity practice does not currently appear to be highly valued by many teachers in the West. I deeply appreciate your being on the leading-edge of changing this.

Aho. Asé. Metta.— Lawrence Ellis (African/Native-American)

#### Notes

1. Johan Galtung, often referred to as the parent of peace studies, articulated 3 types of violence: (1) direct violence, e.g., physical attacks (interpersonal, militaristic, etc.); (2) cultural violence, noted above; and (3) structural violence, e.g. institutional, legislative, and other forms of systemic violence. I add (4) “psychic” (i.e., intrapersonal) violence to denote deep feelings/thoughts/etc. of (a) shame, alienation, self-hatred, and the like and/or of (b) profound exclusion, invisibility, marginalization, and the like — both of which are often “fed” by the other forms of violence. The seeds that manifest in our minds as psychic violence are in all of us. We are responsible for transforming them. However, we also have a responsibility not to “water” these seeds in others. I thank Buddhist scholar and activist Sarah Laeng-Gilliatt for introducing me to Galtung's conceptualization, and for expanding his definition of cultural violence to include “habits of being.” See Johan Galtung's “Cultural Violence”, Journal of Peace Research, vol. 27, no.3, 1990, pp. 291-305.
2. For purposes of this paper I deliberately omit references to “lateral” racism (racism between different Peoples of Color), systemic racism in geographic contexts outside of “the West”, etc. Instead, I limit my comments to issues of

racism by people of European descent towards/against People of Color, which I believe is generally the most pressing issue of racism in the context of sanghas in the US (I cannot generalize to all of the West). Lastly, I am aware of claims by several researchers that the majority of Buddhists in the US are people of Asian descent. That Buddhists of Asian descent and other Peoples of Color (POC) choose to meet in ethnically-specific or POC-only sanghas (that is, without people of European descent) may have little to do with prejudice against people of European descent, “reverse racism”, etc. Instead, we often meet in such settings as a response to European-American racism. Such settings serve as places to preserve our linguistic and ethnic-cultural heritages; to find sanctuary/refuge from pervasive racism in US society in general and in predominantly European-American sanghas in particular; and to be able to interact with others who “get it”, who understand our experiences as POC without the constant need for us to have to explain or to educate about those experiences. Such places of refuge are vital — as are settings where European-American allies meet not for exclusionary purposes (conscious or unconscious), but to take responsibility for their own education of “unlearning” racism.

3. The data on/accounts of sexism/patriarchy in historical and current Buddhist communities and cultures is voluminous. Given restrictions on length of entries, I don’t have space to treat the interconnections between the ism’s. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that the other ism’s are alive and kickin’ (in Buddhist communities, as well as in society at large), that they are often deeply interconnected, and that addressing them is exceptionally important.
4. I am well aware of the stance that one can be [somewhat] enlightened, highly evolved, etc. and still exhibit unskillfulness in some areas, not be aware of *all* relative phenomena, etc. Still, patriarchy suggests such unskillfulness and unawareness as to call into question whether so-and-so was in fact [somewhat] enlightened — and if yes, then the very definition and merits of being [somewhat] enlightened get called into question.
5. “Managerial style overall is found to account for 53-72% of the variance in organizational climate variables” (from Stephen P. Kelner et al., “Managerial Style as a Behavioral Predictor of Organizational Climate”, (Boston: McBer & Co., 1994), p. 1). Given the nature of some teacher-student, master-disciple relationships, the influence of leadership style may even count for more in some Buddhist communities. For more information on climate research, contact one of the preeminent behavioral sciences organizational consulting firms, Hay/McBer: <http://trgmcber.haygroup.com>, or 800-729-8074.

Lawrence Ellis has been a meditator for more than 25 years. He has an MA in Philosophy with a focus on *Satyagraha* (Gandhian Truth-Force), received in 1986, while studying on a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford University. His “social identities on the margins” include: African/Native-American, disabled, gay/two-spirited. As a co-founder of the Mindfulness, Diversity and Social Change Sangha, he was active in the sangha’s formative stages. He sits with the Buddhists of Color

sangha in the SF Bay Area, and is the Buddhist Peace Fellowship representative to the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE) and to A Just Harvest (an interfaith clergy and lay-leadership organization supporting economic and social justice for farm workers).

### On Race & Buddhism by Hozan Alan Senauke

(A Dharma talk given at the Berkeley Zen Center, August 23, 1997. This talk was also given at the San Francisco Zen Center, and a version of it appeared in the first *Think Sangha Journal*.)

Zen Master Dogen wrote “Gourd with its tendrils is entwined with gourd.” This means we are all intimately bound up, wound up with each other. Truly inseparable. So this morning I would like to speak about the complexities of diversity, race, zen practice, and our community.

Something we’ve been talking about at Buddhist Peace Fellowship, San Francisco Zen Center, here at Berkeley Zen Center, and more and more around sanghas and centers in the United States. This is not just about “political correctness,” it is about practice and awareness. I must confess that my own thoughts are not entirely clear, but I will try my best not to mislead you. If I sound critical, it is a voice of self-criticism. My own efforts have fallen short and I think we need to work on this together. So I will leave some time for discussion at the end.

After six years of practice, homeless among householders, wayseekers, and teachers, the Buddha sat under the Bodhi Tree with the firm intention of awakening. After seven days of zazen he perceived the true nature of birth and death, the chain of causation and awakened to realization with the morning star. At that moment he spoke these words: “Wondrous! I now see that all beings everywhere have the wisdom and virtues of the enlightened ones, but because of misunderstandings and attachments they do not realize it.”

Allowing his understanding to ripen, allowing Bodhicitta, the mind of compassion to ripen, he took up the responsibilities of teaching, sharing his experience in a way that unlocked the mystery of our own experience. As the Buddha came to express it, “I simply teach about the nature of suffering and the end of suffering.” This is a radical teaching, true to the meaning of radical, getting to the root. His understanding that all beings everywhere have the wisdom and virtues of the enlightened ones leaves us with a great responsibility. As the wheel of Mahayana Dharma turned, our own Zen vehicle, that responsibility was further clarified by the Bodhisattva vow to save all beings. We constantly affirm this vow.

And yet this vow was there from the beginning. Why else did the Buddha rise from the comfort and joy of enlightenment and freedom to teach? Why else did he offer teachings like the *Metta Sutta*, where he says:

May all beings be happy.

May they be joyous and live in safety.  
All living beings, whether weak or strong,  
in high or middle or low realms of existence,  
small or great, visible or invisible,  
near or far, born or to be born,  
let no one deceive another, nor despise any being in any state;  
let none by anger or hatred wish harm to another.  
Even as a mother at the risk of her life watches over  
and protects her only child,  
so with a boundless mind should one cherish all living things,  
suffusing love over the entire world, above, below,  
and all around, without limit;  
so let one cultivate an infinite good will toward the whole world.

And true to that teaching, he offered refuge to everyone he met on the path. Kings and paupers, ascetics and householders, people of all castes, brahmins, outcasts, and criminals. After some strenuous convincing, he even offered refuge to women. That's a long story in itself, not unrelated to the issue at hand today, suggesting that patriarchy has deep roots running through many if not most cultures.

Taking refuge means committing your life to waking up, to taking on the problem of suffering and the end of suffering for all beings and ourselves. This is what zazen is about. Sitting upright in stillness means to see oneself in complete interdependence with all beings, with the rocks and trees and ocean and sky. The emptiness we so often talk about is not some kind of negative space. It is total interdependence. "Gourd with its tendrils entwined with gourd." True reality is empty of any one thing, empty of self, because all things, all people co-create each other.

Seeing through and beyond dualistic thinking is the direct experience of zazen. I underscore the word experience, because if it we are just caught by an idea or an idle wish, we slip back into the tide of duality. All of us have such experiences from moment to moment, time to time. A moment of merging with someone or something we love, a moment of doing something completely, a moment of losing oneself in just sitting. And at times in zazen we settle fully into the realm of nonduality and recognize that this is our true mind, our true state of being. All the great spiritual traditions express an understanding of this natural way of life.

But by habit we often see a world thoroughly conditioned by duality. Driven by doubt and fear, by a lack of trust in our true Mind, we see things as self and objects, as us and them, as other. It seems so hard to recognize the truth that Tibetan Buddhists preach: that every being was at one time my own mother. The root of racism is denial of this truth. It is about seeing people as other in a systematic way that is such an entrenched habit we are not usually aware of. I

would underscore the word systematic, because as ideas like a virus in society they have a power that goes beyond individual like and dislike. Racism is a system of domination that is economic and political as well as personal. It runs deep in the oppressor and the oppressed alike, though the damage caused is different.

Even though I have the privilege of a good education, middle class male upbringing, white skin, I find in myself deeply ingrained and systematic survival responses as someone born Jewish. Several years ago at a meeting of international Buddhist activists in Thailand I realized that in the first day I had figured out who — among the westerners — was Jewish. And even stranger I realized that all the Jews were doing the same thing and had “signified” to each other. We knew who each other was, and we were more comfortable for it. This, I am sure, is a pattern that goes back through centuries of being ghettoized, of being the other. It’s not a genetic thing. I can remember my mother telling me how to watch out for myself. That some people would exclude and threaten me just for being Jewish. It’s so deep that sometimes I find myself looking around the zendo and counting those I think are Jewish. Some of you may find yourself making a similar census. From talking with them, I know that people of color do this.

And yet, let’s remember where our Buddhism came from. Our ancestors come from India, China, and Japan. In June I visited Suzuki-Roshi’s temple, Rinso-in and I walked in the graveyard where the old priests of the temple were buried. How amazing it is for Zen to leap oceans and cultures and be so generously offered to us. We should accept it humbly, recognizing the price of suffering paid to plant the Dharma seed here. And we owe it to our teachers and ourselves to share this practice with the same generosity and openmindedness. Keep in mind that most Buddhists even in America don’t look like me. They are Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, and so on. I come to Buddhism out of suffering. They come to Buddhism by birth.

So how does it feel to come to Zen practice as a person of color? And they will come; they do come. My friend Sala Steinbach says an African American woman at SFZC says, “If it is about liberation, people of color will be interested.” They are. The Dalai Lama draws stadiums full of people in Mexico. In South America there are Zen and Tibetan teachers with very strong lay sanghas. So I ask my Asian, and Latino, and African American friends about how it feels to come to come here, to San Francisco Zen Center or Spirit Rock. And I ask myself what feelings come up. Dogen suggests we take a step back to turn one’s light inward and illuminate oneself. What I see there in myself is then reflected back into the world.

The answer to how it feels to anyone largely depends on two further inter-related questions. First, does one feel safe and seen in the community? Are the conditions of your life acknowledged, welcomed, explored in the sangha? I suspect that this is sometimes yes, too often no. Thoughtless words can turn people from the temple and from the practice. I have seen this happen here and elsewhere. An

offhand comment is made about the white, middle class makeup of the community with people of color and working class friends sitting right there. Again, through the unintended eye of class and white supremacy — hard words, I know — people are made to feel invisible and uncounted. Maybe I should say something about white supremacy. It is a building block of racism, part of my blindness to my own privilege as a white man. It is at once personal and systematic. If one wants to see it, the practice of individual mindfulness, of turning our light inward needs to be blended dialogue with friends and sangha members who don't carry this very particular privilege.

The same kinds of painful things happen if you are homosexual, or if because of injury or fact of birth you can't get up the steps of the temple. These blindnesses hurt and turn people away. That's what it might feel like from one side.

On the other side, the Buddha's understanding is "all beings have the wisdom and virtues of the enlightened ones, but because of misunderstandings and attachments they do not realize it." This understanding is so precious that we are obligated to share it. I don't mean crude proselytizing, but the Buddha himself never stopped preaching Dharma. Now we have centers and institutions. To make zazen and Dharma available, we need to tell people they are welcome and invite them to practice with us. Already we are taking practice to jails and hospitals, to people who might not be able to come to us.

The next obvious step is to find ways to open our doors to those who can come to us. I hear that some San Francisco churches have created a kind of covenant of "open congregation." This means that in their literature and at their services, classes, and events they make it known that they welcome people of color, gays and lesbians, and so on. Being pro-active rather than passive on questions of diversity and inclusion.

This is necessary because in America, passivity means white supremacy. It is subtle and pervasive, conditioned by and conditioning our magazines, movies, tv, our clothing, all the things we buy. It is a virus infecting my own mind as a person with so-called privileges, and the mind of someone who might not have such privileges. Last week I was invited to talk about Buddhism and race to a diverse group of teenagers doing an interfaith social action internship in San Francisco. Now maybe I did a good job talking to them, but I was the first Buddhist choice that came to mind for the organizers. There is some irony in that. Buddhism in America gets defined as and by people who look like me. I have to watch myself carefully not to buy into this.

But the wonderful thing about what the Buddha taught, what we can experience in zazen, is that each of us can go beyond duality. It can't be done just by reason and talk. We have to get the reality of the world deep in our bones and then bring it back out again into the world. We must make a lot of mistakes. Maybe like this talk. Suzuki Roshi said giving a talk is making a mistake on purpose. Make

our mistakes, learn the lessons and go back at it. bell hooks, the African American scholar/practitioner bell hooks writes about this in *Buddhist Women on the Edge*:

In a culture of domination, preoccupation with victimhood and identity is inevitable. I once believed that progressive people could analyze the dualities and dissolve them through a process of dialectical critical exchange. Yet globally the resurgence of notions of ethnic purity, white supremacy, have led marginalized groups to cling to dualisms as a means of resistance....The willingness to surrender to attachment to duality is present in such thinking. It merely inverts the dualistic thinking that supports and maintains domination. Dualities serve their own interests. What's alarming to me is to see so many Americans returning to those simplistic choices. People of all persuasions are feeling that if they don't have dualism, they don't have anything to hold on to. If we are concerned with dissolving these apparent dualities we have to identify anchors to hold on to in the midst of fragmentation, in the midst of a loss of grounding. My anchor is love....

I like to think that love and compassion are anchors of my practice. But they depend on mindfulness too. Zazen is rooted in mindfulness, breath after breath, thought after thought. This kind of training carries over into life outside the zendo. I try to uncover my own thought patterns. This is sometimes painful and embarrassing, but it is the essence of saving myself and all sentient beings. It is amazing to see the stories one can make up about other people, and how these stories are conditioned by race, or class, or privilege. Check it out for yourself. When you meet someone you consider different from yourself, do you think you know something about them? Would you think you know the same kinds of things about another white person or someone more like you? This is a mindfulness practice, watching one's thoughts about race, or any kind of difference. And it is for our own sake. Not for the sake of political correctness. I think that this is a very personal practice.

Then we can take it further into our extended communities. Ask your friends of color how they experience the practice and the community. This is entering the realm of not knowing, a little risky, but completely necessary. In the wider Buddhist community, it might mean making some excursions and visits to Asian Buddhist temples. They are friendly places. The same Dharma resides there, though it may take some different forms. We think nothing of going to restaurants featuring Asian cuisine. This is just another form of basic nourishment.

Maybe when we have closely examined ourselves, and begun to look around and share our thoughts with others, then we have created the conditions for change. If our American society could take such steps, it would be the start of a wonderful, hopeful era. Could there be racial peace for the first time in history? This is no pipe dream. It is the Bodhisattva Vow, the working of our Way Seeking Mind.

If each of us and the sanghas we cherish could nurture this process of mindfulness, the change could come much quicker. Compassion and peace could blossom in very surprising ways. And zazen would be a golden wind blowing across a meadow of wildflowers. How can we take up this work together? I welcome your thoughts.

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### Reflections on the Five Precepts and Diversity by Sharon Smith

The following are some preliminary reflections as to how the five Buddhist lay precepts can be applied to the issue of racism against people of colour. The precepts are here being understood as training principles that enable us to transcend the mind-made dualism of ‘self’ and ‘other’ by encouraging the progressive development of greater sensitivity, awareness and compassion. For this reason, these reflections do not seek to construct a set of absolute moral rules around this issue nor can they be considered exhaustive. Discussion on the reflections and comments on further applications of the precepts to this issue are welcome.

1. I undertake the training principle of abstaining from taking life  
With deeds of lovingkindness, I purify my body  
Given that “hate crime” is one of the key issues around diversity, crimes of racial harassment and abuse have an obvious direct connection with this precept. We can seek to cultivate and encourage universal lovingkindness and tolerance in working against the attitudes that give rise to “hate crimes” in others and ourselves. Another aspect involves challenging tendencies to apathy or indifference about “hate crime”, affirming individuals’ right to life and celebrating diversity.

Another area that many will already be aware of is the need to uphold the conditions people need to sustain and preserve life itself, and seeking to address factors that undermine these. Action to combat environmental racism, the dumping of toxic waste in areas with a high population of poor people and people of colour, might be an example of such an approach.

2. I undertake the training principle of abstaining from taking the not-given  
With open-handed generosity, I purify my body  
One of the principal forms that racism has taken is appropriating others’ property/resources without proper permission and failing to respect these on the grounds that the owners are from an inferior race. Imperialism and colonialism come to mind as obvious examples of the breach of this precept.

In terms of the cultivation of generosity to all sentient beings — this might be approached by measures that encourage giving people what they need in a way that is relevant, sensitive and accessible to them, empowers them and upholds their dignity. For instance, many black people are under-represented as users of social services, such as care services for people with learning disabilities. In the UK where I come from, our Commission for Race Equality conducted a review of the care services people are entitled to. It found that black people are over-represented in services with a custodial element, such as mental hospitals as non-voluntary patients. However, black people are under-represented in those services with a greater care component such as counselling services and for elders, residential and day care. Making such services available in ways that black communities find equally socially and culturally accessible — for instance by having staff who speak languages other than English, providing culturally appropriate food and taking account of residents’ diverse religious customs/needs is a potential way forward.

Of course, describing such issues in terms of the cultivation of generosity is not to say that white people should see themselves as the “donors” and people of colour the “recipients” of “charity”. Firstly, that would be seeing issues within the context of ego. Also, too often there can be a tendency to undervalue the contribution that people of colour have made and continue to make to the wealth of developed nations while being consistently under-rewarded. However, the Buddhist approach would fundamentally seek to go beyond a notion of exchange to one that seeks to go beyond the duality of self and other.

3. I undertake the training principle of abstaining from sexual misconduct

With stillness, simplicity and contentment, I purify my body

The many cases of military rape in the Balkans and other ethnic conflicts is a sad reminder of how racism can give rise to sexual violence. Other factors people may be aware of are the negative use of racial stereotypes against African and Asian women for the purposes of pornography, sex tourism that exploits women and children, and the trafficking in women.

By removing purported negative links between ethnicity and sexuality, myths and negative stereotypes that deny the full humanity of the “Other” and which give rise to craving can be countered. In this way we can develop greater contentment because of being less polarised between self and other.

4. I undertake the training principle of abstaining from false speech

With truthful communication, I purify my speech

We can see the aspect of truthfulness in this area as functioning on two inter-related levels. The first is the factual one and the other on the emotional level of open communication.

In terms of the first aspect, we can make efforts to prevent mindless acceptance and repetition of various beliefs and generalisations about ethnic groups’ abilities, attitudes, behaviour, conditions and potential. This might mean, in

the spirit of the *Kalama Sutta*, not accepting things solely on the basis of the authority of the person presenting them, but questioning received authority whether this is based on science, or, the social/political/religious status of the person presenting the viewpoint. We can make efforts to ensure that our understanding of different ethnic groups is not based on stereotypes that misrepresent and dehumanise them. In order to do this we can try to become better informed about issues around race and the context in which these arise in order to develop our awareness and understanding.

One of the saddest things about racism as well as the violence it can generate is the way that racism can develop to a point that genuine and open communication between people of colour and white people is rendered impossible. Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* as well as others about slavery are good examples of how although black and white people had a high degree of proximity during slavery, real communication did not take place because one party simply could not accept the humanity of the other. In order to survive, people of colour have had to develop emotional strategies to reduce the potential pain they may experience in their communication with white people. Attitudes that are patronising, defensive, and extremely arrogant, which fail to appreciate the common human sensitivity that all people share have also hampered White people's communication with people of colour. Cultivating conditions that encourage mutual receptivity and openness in an atmosphere of kindness and awareness is therefore of importance.

5. I undertake the training principle of abstaining from taking intoxicants

With mindfulness clear and radiant, I purify my mind

The role of intoxicants in ethnic conflicts, while not perhaps immediately apparent, can be considerable. After all, one readily available intoxicant, alcohol, is commonly used to reduce inhibitions and is often associated with violent crime. The use of alcohol in contexts giving rise to inter-ethnic violence may be *ad hoc*, or can be more highly organised. Michael A. Sells<sup>1</sup> reports in *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Ethnic Conflict in Bosnia* that:

Serb army officers used alcohol to break down the normal inhibitions of the young men in their commands. Serb soldiers were kept drunk night after night, weeks at a time; military convoys were accompanied by truckloads of plum brandy ( *šljivovica*). In Sarajevo, there was an evening *šljivovica* hour during which Serb soldiers would get drunk and broadcast over loudspeakers, in grisly detail, what they were going to do to the Bosnian civilians when they got hold of them. Survivors of mass killings reported that once soldiers began drinking, the atrocities followed. (p. 74)

According to the Buddha, mindfulness is to be “valued everywhere”. After all, it is through cultivating mindfulness that we can be aware of others, of the opportunities available for us to act for the common good and in a spirit of

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<sup>1</sup> Sells, Michael A. *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Ethnic Conflict in Bosnia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

lovingkindness. We can also stimulate our awareness and sensitivity to these issues by taking steps to become better informed about them.

May this be of benefit.

#### ABOUT THE WRITER

I am an African-Caribbean woman based in the UK who has been a practising Buddhist for nearly ten years. I am very interested and concerned as to why so few black people currently become involved in Buddhism and Buddhist meditation groups and am currently researching this issue. I feel a strong commitment to contributing to the process and dialogue around developing more diverse and inclusive Buddhist communities and am very excited about the promising possibilities this holds for all of us in the Sangha. I can be contacted at [sharon@matilda-northiam.demon.co.uk](mailto:sharon@matilda-northiam.demon.co.uk)

#### Personal statement/essay from a 27-year-old Zen student

For the past 4 years, I have been practicing at the San Francisco Zen Center — in residential practice for the last three years and in full time work practice (i.e. both living and working at City Center) for the last two.

I didn't plan on being in a predominantly white environment at this point in my life. I spent much of my pre-college time in schools which were mostly white — dealing with people and curricula which were mainly European American and middle to upper middle class dominated. Luckily, I had a strong and flexible Asian American environment at home and the opportunity to travel and be in different places and cultures. Furthermore, there was college. For me, while difficult in certain ways, college was also this amazing immersion experience with other people my age who were not white. What was amazing was that despite many of our disparate backgrounds (our racial, ethnic, class, & gender differences, our degree of able-bodiedness, and our differences in sexual orientation & personality), there was a common sensibility re. what it was like to have grown up as non-white in America during the '70s, '80s and early '90s. This sensibility involved a common hurt and a common sense of responsibility. I did also connect deeply with a few white folks in college and to the tremendous breadth of their experiences.

What stood out for me from college was the richness and possibility of a way of life where white, European American, middle-upper middle class (as well as male, heterosexual and physically abled) was not THE PRIMARY frame of reference. After I graduated from college, I simply took it as a given that I would not be in a predominantly white environment — perhaps if I absolutely had to in school or work to get the tools I needed to live this life well, but not in my home and certainly not as I investigate and become familiar with the depths and crevices of my heart.

So, here I am living in this Buddhist practice center whose sangha members are 98% white and most of whom either come from or are currently in middle-upper middle class situations (including myself). For the first year I lived here, I was the only female under age 33 (though there are now a number of us in our 20s

and 30s). I would describe the culture here as most often white, middle-upper middle class, college-educated, politically liberal/progressive and to a certain degree queer friendly (though not being queer myself, I say this with a certain degree of trepidation).

In terms of race/ethnicity stuff, through my lens, I would say there are two main aspects that stand out. On the one hand, there are the subtle differences which “do not bring up much stuff.” I do not even want to necessarily attribute these differences to race/ethnicity, except to say that in my experience, the white environments I have been in, including this one, have tended to be like this and the Asian American environments I have been in have tended to be like that. For example, here, it seems that people tend to communicate/process things primarily by verbalizing and intellectualizing them and tend to use direct, in your face styles as the primary/default communication style, whereas in the Asian American environments in which I have been (specifically Chinese, Japanese and a few Vietnamese & Cambodian; multigenerational), non-verbal and indirect communication styles tended to be more prevalent. As I said, these differences don’t seem to jar me too much except for the occasional pining for the specific non-verbal dance that my family and I do and for the more general familiarity with non-verbal communication that I have noticed in many Asian Americans.

On the other hand, there are aspects of my experience here where “more charged stuff comes up.” In these situations, I’ve noticed that I usually feel as if differences have been ranked (as one better than another) and that dominance/submissive power positions have become manifest.

Examples experienced over the last 3+ years include:

- an older white female practitioner patting me on the head & petting my hair while speaking to me in what I perceive to be patronizing tones.
- interacting with an older white and African Am. male practice leaders and feeling as if they do not hear what I am saying unless I say it in business-like, direct and often ardent tones.
- interacting with my practice leader outside of practice discussion and sometimes feeling “put in my place” by his body language and by his telling me “what *you*\* need to realize is...” (\*my interpretation)
- encountering young white male guest students when they come to stay here and feeling stared/gazed at.
- hearing residents comment to me that my parents, who recently visited, are “sooooo cute” and feeling as if they are describing a teddy bear.
- hearing newcomers ooh and ahh over the Asian art in the building & the Asian spirituality they are exploring and feeling that they are exotifying these things.
- having friends of color come over & feeling that people are manifesting discomfort or a need on their part to categorize and/or intellectualize these people’s presence (particularly after recent incidents where items have been stolen from the building).

These types of experiences have provided much fertile ground for practice over the last few years. In some ways working with them has been like working with other “hurts” that have come to the fore in practice:

- there is the initial hurt (often having first manifest years or even generations ago)
- there are all of the reactions & habits that have been developed in relation to that hurt
- and, in the midst of it all, there is the intention and effort to be fully present and to manifest appropriate action.

For example:

- When I have felt like residents are putting down Asian people and things, how to be fully present for the initial fuzziness, the disbelief, and then the hurt and annoyance? How to make contact when sensations and remembrances arise of past experiences when Asians have been relegated to the category of sub-human (often in order to deny opportunities or resources) and to not get stuck or lost?
- When I feel like young men are looking at me through their stereotype pumped lenses, how to be present for the arising disdain and for the remembrance of other not so pleasant encounters I have had with certain men (being told such things as “you are so exotic. I really like special, exotic things”). How make space for the rising impulse to close off and become “all-business like” as well the deep desire to be open and to meet each person in the moment as human. How to be present for all of these things and neither suppress or over emote. And when I can’t do this, how to remember to just give myself a hug and to notice.

In working with these phenomena, sitting and formal service & kitchen practices have all been helpful as have regular practice discussions and (some) dharma talks. I often feel a tremendous nonverbal resonance with certain practice leaders and practices done here and that has been extremely helpful.

What has been difficult, however, has been 1) the lack of others going through similar stuff, 2) the lack of familiarity of practice leaders and sangha members with this particular form of hurt, and 3) just being in this environment day in and day out. It is difficult to spend a day working with all this stuff and then to sit down at meal-time in the large dining room and sometimes hear (what I perceive to be) certain people’s lack of knowledge re. the history of race, class and privilege in this country. It is difficult to hear (what I perceive to be) a lack of awareness or forgetfulness that there are people down the street who don’t have enough money at the end of the month to adequately feed their families and who seem not to know that the privileges that many of the residents experience here (including myself) are in some way linked to the oppressive history of this country. It is difficult to go to some (though definitely not all) dharma talks and not relate to the examples given.

What has sustained me has been checking in with two close friends here (though they recently moved out) and sitting with and participating in the Buddhist and Women of Color sanghas. Each time I have heard a dharma talk at these events the specific form of what they talked about rang true. Maintaining close ties with my family and friends back East and with members of the Buddhist Peace

Fellowship BASE (Buddhists Allied for Social Engagement) group in which I participated in 1997 have all been helpful. Also, I find the presence of art from my cultural heritages (so often denied in the past) helpful and keeping up with feminist, anti-racist, anti-classist, ablist, and heterosexist/homophobic, thinking often quite clarifying.

Finally, what has been extremely helpful — in fact, essential — in being able to remain more or less engaged in practice here has been the willingness and commitment of nearly all the practice leaders to look at these issues in the open and to engage with them explicitly. This is in no small part due to the tremendous work done by people of color and white ally sangha members over the years as well as, I assume, to the extensive sitting/examining ego practices that the practice leaders have done. When I first brought up Asian American issues, I was met with defensiveness and denial. However, many were able to look at their reactions and then come back and have discussions. Now, many practice leaders here are much more aware of the realities and consequences of racial and social conditioning. They (as well as many sangha members) seem to catch themselves before or as they make generalizations and they are more willing to see their stuff simply as dependent co-arising phenomena and not as some deadly mistake/sin. On the institutional level, SFZC has committed to and begun to explicitly address issues. *So, fellow PoCs, structures are being put in place to support us, and the energy and resources do seem to exist to implement things that we feel need to happen.*

I do worry, though, that as certain American Buddhist institutions transform/adapt their forms and rituals from their current Asian encasings, they will replicate the cultural hegemony and oppressive dynamics that has occurred repeatedly in white dominated institutions over the last 400+ years. I also worry that the currently middle-upper middle class white populated institutions will become defined as “THE American Buddhism” and that the other Asian American, African American and other Buddhist groups will be relegated to the margins or considered nonexistent.

Personally, while I tremendously value sitting practice, I am increasingly noticing the desire to be in a place where there are more Asian Pacific Americans and other people of color for a while — either in home, work or school. I still hope to remain practicing here — either as a resident or outside sangha member — and do foresee doing some intensive sitting at Tassajara in the future.

It has been my observation that when a group of people — no matter how well intentioned — get together and when no effective interventions/efforts are put in place to specifically address mainstream conditioning with regards to race, class, gender, sexuality and physical ability, all the same problems arise. Despite the fact that the sangha members here manifest some of the most honest, open, tolerant and heartfelt behaviors I have ever seen and despite the strong sitting and precepts practices done here, I have seen white supremacy/racism, patriarchy/sexism, classism, heterosexism/

homophobia and ablism all arise. If practice leaders wish to create environments open to all interested in the dharma, I highly encourage them to make contact with this arena of their experience, with that of their sangha members, and with the realities of those living outside the mainstream cultures of their centers.

I think of the White/Latina woman who lived in a transitional shelter down the street and who expressed an interest in coming on Saturdays and asked about child care. I think of my friend, an Asian American, who came to the Saturday program — but left 30 min into the sit because she felt looked at and didn't feel comfortable sitting with all of those white folks.

I think of Sokoji, a Zen temple in Japan town, where White Americans were asked to leave by the Japanese American members after they had been inhabiting the temple for a while and of how I, a yonsei, came to be find out about Zen Buddhism through a “predominantly white Zen Center” rather than through a “local Japanese American temple.” I think of the Latina mother of a former student who, even if she could get child care and could take time off work, could not afford to pay the \$40 towards the cost of a one day or multiple day sit and who has no time to volunteer to offset the cost. I think of an African-American male guest student, a regular sitter, who stayed here for an extended time and felt he was having conversations that he had “waited his whole life to have” — but who then left — in part because he could not find a job to support a standard of living in SF and also in part because he did not want to be in a city where black middle class folks were increasingly non-existent.

Lastly, I wonder. I wonder if my fellow activist/community work friends (whom I value and cherish so much, and many of whom are people of color and spiritually secular) might find some use in these teachings and practices in their life. I wonder whether the youth I worked with — who were just out of juvenile hall or other forms of detention — might find this of use. I wonder whether that bus driver I spoke with last month — an African American male — who upon finding out I was studying Zen proceeded to tell me about his spiritual journeys and then ask for posture and meditation suggestions — I wonder whether he will show up one day (either physically at the building or in his own community) and I wonder whether there will be a dharma center ready to greet him.

## *Section Three: Practical Suggestions and Strategies*

*This section was written primarily by European American practitioners from varied Buddhist traditions with feedback from Buddhist practitioners of color. One intention was to acknowledge that work in Diversity and Racism is the joint responsibility of European Americans and Communities of Color.*

We believe that many European Americans in predominantly White sanghas are interested in increasing racial and ethnic diversity. However there is often a lack of awareness of what may be off-putting to People of Color and what needs to be done to address this problem. The objective of this section is to offer practical suggestions and strategies to help sanghas create environments which are more welcoming to people of color.

One view we have heard from some sangha leaders is the following: “our sangha is open and welcoming to people of all races, but People of Color don’t come; I guess they are not interested in Buddhism.” This view unfortunately is a dead-end. It doesn’t lead to further inquiry and it assumes something about People of Color without hearing what they might have to say. We believe there are many steps sanghas can take to create a more inclusive atmosphere. This can be an opportunity for Western Buddhist sanghas to take leadership in healing the painful wound of racism by becoming aware of how it is manifesting in their own communities.

These suggestions are based on what we know from information in some sanghas located in Northern California and on ideas which have emerged from a group called “Healing Racism in Our Sanghas.” “Healing Racism in Our Sanghas” has been meeting once a month in Berkeley, California for approximately a year and a half. We also received much helpful input from various Buddhist practitioners of Color. We offer here a broad range of suggestions. Some may fit for your sangha more than others. (For more reading related to this topic, we refer you to “Outside In: Buddhism in America” by Lori Pierce in [Buddhist Women on the Edge](#), ed. Marianne Dresser.)

Hold Healing Racism workshops or trainings in your sangha

Ideally these would be held for all groups within the sangha: teachers, sangha members, staff and board members. Living in the United States, and perhaps in other Western countries as well, we cannot help but be impacted by the racism which has been a part of our society since its beginning. These workshops are geared not toward the racism of neo-Nazis or Klansmen but toward the often unconscious racism of well intentioned, good hearted people, who may consider themselves anti-racist. It is often very uncomfortable for People of Color to interact with European Americans who have not done the work of exploring their unconscious racism, their unearned White privilege or the guilt related to benefiting from this privilege. In addition, those who have not done the work may incorrectly

assume that the way White middle-class folks interact produces a neutral environment in which people from all races and classes can feel at ease. These trainings cannot be limited to a one day event, but need to be part of an ongoing commitment to face racism and to liberate ourselves from its destructive impact.

Acknowledge the existence of racism &  
include examples of racism in Dharma talks

Hearing their own daily struggles used as examples of how to apply Buddhist practice in Dharma talks is often very meaningful and helpful to students. It helps them to feel seen and included. When a Person of Color struggles with racism every day of his or her life and never hears even the fact of racism acknowledged in Dharma talks, this lack of acknowledgement can feel extremely alienating.

Buddhist teachers speak a lot about the First Noble Truth: life is suffering. The racial wound that exists in the United States is a tremendous cause of suffering for both People of Color and European Americans. Ask any racially mixed group to speak from their hearts about how racism affects them and the racial wound becomes painfully evident. This kind of suffering can be included in talks.

Dharma talks often point out how we need to examine and go beyond our assumptions and views. Some of the most destructive assumptions we hold are our conscious and unconscious assumptions about people who are racially different from ourselves. Including examples of these assumptions in Dharma talks can encourage students to use their practice as a means to becoming aware and letting go of their deep-seated racial conditioning. It is also meaningful and helpful to include the wisdom and writings of people from various cultures and races in Dharma talks.

Identify individuals who have progressed on the path  
of unlearning racism as possible allies to people of color  
who come to your sangha

An ally is someone who does not share a particular oppression but who stands beside the person who does. An ally offers friendship and support and will speak out on behalf of that person if necessary. People of Color, when coming to virtually all-White sanghas can experience a variety of highly uncomfortable feelings: lost, clueless, alone, self-conscious, anxious, fearful, alienated, invisible and so on. Knowing that there are allies available to be called on, if wanted or needed, may help mitigate some of this discomfort.

A very ambitious example of ally work can be found in some Episcopal churches. These churches have declared themselves as OASIS churches to gays, lesbians and bisexuals. There is a whole process of education and experiential training in unlearning prejudice that must go on before a church can designate themselves as an Oasis church. This education and training is not only undertaken by the priests and the congregation but also by the board members and church staff.

Thus when a gay man contemplates attending an Oasis church, he can count on at least some level of understanding and sensitivity regarding his sexual orientation.

Develop a diversity strategy for your sangha

This strategy may look different for different communities and sanghas. Some sanghas may decide to form a diversity committee to set clear diversity goals. Others may integrate the value of diversity into all the different levels of their existing structure.

Spirit Rock Meditation Center, for example, has a mixed-race Diversity Council. This council recommended and received initial funding for a retreat scholarship program for People of Color. In September 1999, Spirit Rock held its first residential retreat for People of Color. In contrast, the San Francisco Zen Center has developed a strategy that infuses diversity work into a number of existing programs and offerings. SFZC also offers practice groups, workshops, and sesshins to people of color. (See Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín's essay detailing the development of diversity at the SFZC in Section Two, Personal Essays, of this booklet.)

In a holistic approach, diversity goals would be reflected in the Mission, Vision, and Values of Buddhist communities. They would also play a part in key organizational strategies (for example, governance, growth, fund-raising, and outreach strategies). If diversity training or unlearning racism workshops are implemented as the sole solution to diversity issues, without integrating diversity into the other aspects of the organization, there may be a risk marginalizing diversity work. For example, those who undertake the training may find they do not have a supportive environment in which to exercise what they have learned.

Facilitate People of Color to take on teaching, administrative, board and staff positions

Facilitating people of color to take on teaching roles may involve some kinds of affirmative actions and mentorship. It can also involve allowing for different levels of teachers so that students get to hear a variety of voices, not just those of the lead dharma teachers. Another option is to offer a related activity such as a martial art or yoga at retreats which could allow you to include a teacher of color in these practices.

When bringing People of Color onto administrative, board or staff positions, try to avoid bringing on just one Person of Color. It is extraordinarily difficult "being-the-only-one." Even if the environmental and social factors seem to be supportive, the internalized responsibility that arises with the condition of "being-the-only-one" produces a great deal of anxiety, and sometimes frustration. While a person of color may feel qualified and confident about the message that they have to say, it is not their responsibility to be the only one to say it.

If you do not have diversity in the various roles mentioned above, it will be important to look at your systems of recruitment, hiring and retention to see where there might be missed opportunities.

Exhibit a willingness to accommodate different needs and cultural sensibilities

This can be difficult for European Americans. Because they often are so predominant and associate with just each other, European Americans can lose sight of the fact that they operate in some variety of White culture. It then becomes more difficult to understand that not all peoples feel at ease in that culture. Ways of interacting, levels of acceptable affect, and dietary needs may differ according to one's culture. Just being aware that White culture is neither neutral nor universal can go a long way to increase the sensitivity of European Americans to the ways of other cultures.

Hold retreats and events for People of Color

European Americans involved in healing racism workshops often have a difficult time understanding why People of Color need to meet separately, for at least part of the workshop. There are various reasons for this. It may be too wounding for People of Color to be present as European Americans unearth their toxic conditioning regarding people of other races and manifest various resistances to owning up to their own racism. Also, People of Color have their own work to do in healing their internalized oppression — a process that would feel unsafe in the presence of European Americans. Additionally, often People of Color don't want to continue to be in the position of teaching White folks about White racism. It is a responsibility that European Americans need to take on themselves.

Ironically, one of the most welcoming things you might do for People of Color is to provide them with an opportunity to meet together.

Be explicit about welcoming People of Color in your outreach material, including your newsletters

If your sangha has formed a Diversity Committee or has made a commitment to working on unlearning racism, you can state this in your outreach material. This can also be a part of your mission statement. You might also consider advertising in places where people of a variety of races might read it.

Being explicit when you are inviting participation is crucial when approaching communities outside of the perceived mainstream. "Invitation" has very important cultural meaning and significance. Often, people who have been marginalized (whether due to race, sexual orientation, class, or other disenfranchisement) experience rejection, at best, and often abuse when walking into a space uninvited. Many have learned and been conditioned not to go where the invitation is not explicitly given. Even when there is consent for inclusion, if it is silent, the consent is not experienced by those who need to be included.

Consider having some kind of system for welcoming and orienting new members

Many folks new to a sangha can feel rather lost and at sea. There is a way things go (for example, meditation follows chanting which follows bowing), certain rituals, certain expectations of students, etc. A person of color might feel especially awkward in this situation. Does your sangha have a guest master or a person to call who can orient the new student to the ways of your sangha?

Below is an example of how Berkeley Zen Center explicitly extends welcome to all peoples. This Affirmation of Welcome is posted on the main zendo bulletin board.

Affirmation of Welcome

Walking the path of liberation,

we express our intimate connection

with all beings. Welcoming diversity,

here at Berkeley Zen Center the practice

of zazen is available to people of every race, nationality, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical ability.

May all beings realize their true nature.

Create a forum in your sangha where practitioners can express their views and feelings on what it is like to be a part of your sangha

A forum such as this allows all voices to be heard, including minority voices who may have special views and needs. It is important to create an environment or container which feels safe, so that deep feelings and truth can emerge.

One form useful in creating a safe container for expression of different voices is The Way of Council. This is a form borrowed from Native American tradition. Participants sit in a circle around which a talking piece is passed. The person who holds the talking piece has the opportunity to speak from his/her heart without interruption or to remain silent. When finished, this person passes the talking piece to the next person in the circle. Those listening are encouraged to listen openly and receptively, without judging or arguing with the speaker, even silently. Commenting on what has been said by other participants is to be avoided. The goal is to accept and honor different expressions and perspectives.

Do everything you can to make the practices of your sangha accessible

Something to ask when considering accessibility issues is “How might our sangha be inaccessible to certain people — people who are not able-bodied, White, and middle-class?” Location, accessibility to public transportation, child care and costs of retreats may all be of issue here.

Sliding scale fees, financial assistance or a scholarship program might be considered as ways of making retreats available to those who cannot afford regular fees. Another possibility is to provide a way for new and used Dharma books and materials (including tapes) to be donated for use by practitioners with limited incomes.

## *Section Four: Reference Materials*

*Listed below are articles and books which are thought to be useful. Please note that this list was generated through a grassroots call for recommendations and is far from comprehensive.*

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Ethnic Notions. California Newsreel: 415-621-6196.

Follow Me Home. Speak Out!: 510-601-0182.

Lockin' Up. Women Make Movies: 202-925-0606.

Skin Deep. California Newsreel: 621-6196.

Slowly this. Third World Newsreel: 212-947-9277.

The Color of Fear. Stir-Fry Seminars: 510-419-3930.

This Way Home. Day Distribution: 1-888-367-9154.

When You Think of Mexico: Commercial Images of Mexicans in the Mass Media. Carl Heyward: 415- 285- 7815.

#### “A BROADER AND DEEPER VIEW”

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Home of the Brave. Cinema Guild: 212-246-5522.

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Rabbit In the Moon.

Sewing Woman. NAATA: 415-552-9550.

Who Killed Vincent Chin. Filmmaker's Library: 212-808-4980.

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Pulido, Laura. Environmentalism & Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest (book)

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Lady Marshall. Women Make Movies: 212-947-9277.

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## *Section Five: Resources for Buddhism and Diversity*

*The following list of resources, mostly in the Bay Area of San Francisco, California, is incomplete, and meant only as a starting place for those of you who are interested in examining issues of racial and ethnic diversity in your Buddhist communities. If you are doing similar work in a sangha that is not mentioned here, we would very much like to hear from you. In addition, we invite you to network with others by using any appropriate Internet e-groups or "bulletin boards" at websites listed below. Perhaps a central "clearinghouse" for this information can be established in the near future.*

<http://www.egroups.com/group/blackbuddhists>

Buddhism is quickly becoming one of the fastest growing religions within the African-American community. Our online discussion group provides a means by which Black Buddhists as well as Christians, Muslims and others can come together and explore the ways in which Buddhist teachings and meditation can illuminate our spiritual journeys and help us to lead more satisfying, meaningful and skillful lives. This group will also provide an opportunity for African-American practitioners of Buddhism, who oftentimes find themselves isolated and scattered throughout the country, to come together and chat with like minded brothers and sisters. This forum is open to those engaged in all Buddhist practices,

whether Zen, Hetep Dhamma, Theravada, Tibetan, to Pure Land, and others.  
Founded September 11, 1999.

### Buddhists of Color Sangha

Part meditation group, part support group/watering hole, the Buddhists of Color Sangha emerged from a people of color caucus group held in Nov. 1998. We meet 1x per month in either San Francisco or Oakland to practice together and to support each other's practices. In addition to sitting and/or other Buddhist practices we often have a dharma discussion. Past topics have included: working with internalized oppression, engaging with hurt, outrage and anger, working with violence, and maintaining balance in our everyday lives. For more information call (415) 789-8359.

To access the Buddhists of Color eGroup mailing list, first go to the home page of eGroups at URL: [www.groups.yahoo.com](http://www.groups.yahoo.com). If you have never become a member of eGroups, follow the instructions to register (it is free, and you specify your own password). Then go to the following URL and subscribe to the Buddhists of Color eGroup mailing list: [buddhists-of-color-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:buddhists-of-color-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

### Compassionate Transformation: A Buddhist Way to Unlearn Racism

*Compassionate Transformation: A Buddhist Way to Unlearn Racism* is a program for white people who are interested in exploring a Buddhist way to unlearn racism. This 12 week, 54 hour program emphasizes: Community, Compassion, Education, and Spiritual Practice, and incorporates Buddhist antidotes for guilt, denial and isolation. Sliding scale. Shorter workshops are available. Will travel.  
Contact: Vanissar Tarakali, 469-49<sup>th</sup> Street, Oakland, CA 94609  
Phone: (510) 594-6812 E-mail: [vanissart@ciis.edu](mailto:vanissart@ciis.edu)

### Healing Racism in Our Sanghas

“Healing Racism in our Sanghas” meetings are gatherings primarily for European Americans from all Buddhist traditions, held on the first Friday of each month from 7:00 - 9:00pm at Empty Gate Zen Center, 2200 Parker St (at Fulton) in Berkeley. We have been meeting for a year and a half. The following are our objectives: To become personally aware of our racial conditioning and to heal the injuries that are a result of that conditioning; To increase teachers' and sangha members' awareness of racial issues that are present within the sanghas; To understand more deeply why People of Color often do not feel comfortable or welcomed within the sanghas; To do what we can to transform ourselves and our sanghas so that People of Color feel comfortable and welcomed.

To contact Jeff Kitzes or Sheridan Adams: (510) 845-4990 (press 3)

E-mail: [metta@dnai.com](mailto:metta@dnai.com)

Website, with bulletin board: [www.buddhismandracism.org](http://www.buddhismandracism.org)

### Mindfulness, Diversity & Social Change Sangha

Our group meets every Monday from 7:00 - 9:00 PM at the 1st Unitarian Church, 14th and Castro in Oakland, California, and includes periods of sitting and walking meditation, dharma readings, and discussions on various topics. Please bring your own cushion to sit on if you have one.

Also, please do not wear any scented products, as some of our members are chemically sensitive.

Our practice is based on the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh and other mindfulness practitioners. We welcome people of all faiths who wish to explore mindfulness practice as a way to help heal the interconnected forms of injustice and oppression, from global threats of militarism and environmental exploitation to everyday, habitual forms of racism, classism, sexism and other “isms” which cause such painful separations in our human society.

For more information about the sangha and directions, call Don at 510-530-1319, Olga at 510-540-0141, or Kym at 547-1254.

### RainbowDharma.com

A loosely organized group of Buddhist people of color on the Internet sharing views regarding the boundless nature of the Buddhadharma. Founded by Choyin Rangdrol in response to feeling deep compassion for those lost in the habitual samsara of racism in shanghas. Rainbowdharma.com is a beacon for those lost in the sea of secret turmoil. The only services provided are heartfelt prayer, lovingkindness, and a few humble comments for those seeking comfort from the storm. “Only through realizing chains of gold and rope are equally binding can one become aware how fire and water manifest dependent on different circumstances yet from the same gem whose boundless nature is unnamable.” — Choyin

Website, with bulletin board: [www.Rainbowdharma.com](http://www.Rainbowdharma.com)

Choyin Rangdrol

Rainbowdharma

369-B Third Street #119

San Rafael, CA 94901

### Spirit Rock Meditation Center — Diversity Council

In 1997, the board of directors of Spirit Rock formed the Diversity Council to expand efforts to create accessibility of the Dharma to all communities. Since its formation, the Council has been committed to finding and implementing ways to make Spirit Rock’s contemplative practice accessible to all — particularly to those who have been historically marginalized or disenfranchised. Within the stated objectives of the Diversity Council are [1] to “promote a commitment to uproot attitudes and behaviors that reduce the humanity of any person(s) or group(s),” and [2] to “inspire the investigation and transformation of assumptions of the dominant culture (conscious or unconscious), that cause separation and suffering.”

The Diversity Council meets for three hours approximately once a month. Members include participation from the board of directors, teachers, staff, as well as sangha practitioners. The Council oversees the administration of the People of Color Scholarship Fund as well as participates in developing practice opportunities and programs for People of Color. Dialogues have begun to create possibilities and opportunities for diversifying the demographics of the Board, Staff and Teaching communities. Communication with Communities of Color and other practice groups having Diversity experience are also important to the process. These are some of the methods by which the Diversity Council continues to advocate and remind the Spirit Rock community of the necessity of Diversity consciousness in spiritual practice and how it is inexorably congruent with the teachings of the Dharma.

In October, 2001 the Board of Directors and the Teacher's Council passed the Diversity Initiative at Spirit Rock, which addresses governance, strategic planning, programming, and infrastructure issues. Diversity programming at Spirit Rock, including: POC residential & daylong retreats, LGBT residential and daylong retreats, culturally-specific, multi-lineage residential retreats over four years, mixed daylongs for POCs and their Allies, and daylong retreats with a focus on unlearning oppression. Contact Spirit Rock 415-488-0164 or [www.spiritrock.org](http://www.spiritrock.org) or Charlie Johnson: 707-446-1367; [ctjohns@pacbell.net](mailto:ctjohns@pacbell.net), Leonicia Castro: 510-985-8493; [leonicia@earthlink.net](mailto:leonicia@earthlink.net), Ruby Grad: 415-488-4853; [rubygrad@earthlink.net](mailto:rubygrad@earthlink.net)

#### The Color of Dharma

The following events take place at San Francisco Zen Center on an ongoing basis. The address is 300 Page Street (at Laguna), San Francisco, CA 94102. For further information, please contact:

Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín, E-mail: [wildzen@msn.com](mailto:wildzen@msn.com)

or call the SFZC City Center office at 415.863.3136.

All events are listed in the SFZC catalog and at the Website: [www.sfzc.org](http://www.sfzc.org)

#### Instrucción en Meditación Zen

Instucción en zazen (meditación sentada) se ofrece en español para familiarizar a nuevos estudiantes con los detalles elementales de la práctica Sota Zen. Para mas información, llame al 415.621.0557.

#### Tarde de Meditación Para Personas de Habla Hispana

Date to be determined.

#### Sitting and Discussion Group for People of Color

Thursdays 7:30 – 9 p.m. Call for current dates.

One-Day Sitting for People of Color

Call for current dates.

Mindfulness Awareness and Stress Reduction

Seven evenings and one weekend day. Dates to be determined.

The Way of Intimacy: Celebrating Differences as Everyday Practice  
with Barbara Kohn and Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín

Four-Day Workshop, Sept. 4-8, 2000, at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center

From Zen teachings we learn that “to not know is most intimate.” From Multicultural Change theories we learn that it is not possible for us to be intimate without stepping on each other’s toes. Let us step into these streams and wade into the unknown in a journey of self-discovery, creativity, reflection and fun as we explore who we are in the context of our multiple identities as a primary step to becoming cultural bridges for others and ourselves.

*Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín*, M.A., came to City Center in 1990, received lay ordination in 1996, and has worked in the fields of multicultural organizational change, conflict resolution, and race relations since 1980.

*Barbara Kohn*, M. Ed., was ordained by Reb Anderson in 1988 and received dharma transmission from Abbess Zenkei Hartman in 1999. She leads traditional Zen retreats, sometimes incorporating psychology, movement awareness, and improvisation with Zen practice.

Cost: \$200 plus room fee. For reservations please call (415) 865-1899. For more information, call (415) 865-1895, or e-mail to [road2zmc@pacbell.net](mailto:road2zmc@pacbell.net) You can also visit our website at [www.sfzc.com](http://www.sfzc.com)

Women of Color Sitting Group

Started in January, 1998, this Vipassana meditation and discussion/support group meets twice a month in Marin City, California. It is cofacilitated by Marlene Jones-Schoonover and Margarita Loinaz, both graduates of the Community Dharma Leaders Program of Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Phone/Info: (415) 488-0164 x314.

—*The following unlearning racism resources were submitted by members of the greater Bay Area Buddhist community*—

Providing Alternatives to Violence

(PAV) is an umbrella organization offering Jump Start, a densely layered violence prevention project teaching young people skills to work out conflicts instead of fighting. Jump Start, begun over 11 years ago, focuses on unlearning racism and deconstructing cultural biases. It is designed for children, teens and the adults who

teach and care for them.

Contact: Lorie Hill, Director

2955 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94705

Phone (510) 486-8088

UNtraining White Liberal Racism: how does unconscious racism affect your spiritual growth?

The UNtraining is a forum for white people to explore what it means to be white and how “white training” affects people of whiteness and people of color. By focusing on the training in ourselves while maintaining consciousness of our basic human awesomeness, we are able to better understand the world around us and we are empowered to create change, both within ourselves and in the world at large. The UNtraining is based on the diversity work of Rita Shimmin, and the ongoing work Robert Horton has done with white groups since 1994. Small groups meet once a month for 6 months in a challenging but highly supportive workshop format. Contact: Robert Horton, phone (510) 235-6134, E-mail: [roberth@lanset.com](mailto:roberth@lanset.com)

VISIONS, INC. (Vigorous InterventionS In Ongoing Natural Settings)

VISIONS is an international non-profit, educational corporation established in 1984. Among its founders were three African American women from Rocky Mount, North Carolina, who were raised and nurtured by a cohesive community in the midst of an ongoing struggle for civil, cultural and economic rights. As they entered various professions, these founders and their colleagues developed VISIONS as a way to pass on what they had learned from their elders in this small southern town. In particular, they sought to honor a legacy of respect for group and individual differences and faith in the potential of creating just and equitable institutions.

VISIONS defines multiculturalism as the process of recognizing, understanding, and appreciating our own and others’ racial and cultural heritage, as well as the impact of those differences. The organization’s mission is to eliminate all forms of “Isms” and Internalized Oppression. VISIONS provides multicultural services in the areas of consultation and training, organizational assessment, program planning and development, executive coaching, technical assistance, research and evaluation, and psychotherapy.

545 Concord Avenue, Suite 1, Cambridge, MA 02138 U.S.A.

617.876.9257 (voice) 617.876.5118 (fax)

E-mail: [visions-inc@worldnet.att.net](mailto:visions-inc@worldnet.att.net) Website: [www.visions-inc.com](http://www.visions-inc.com)

Valerie A. Batts, Ph.D., Executive Director, Cambridge, MA

Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín, Senior Consultant, San Francisco, CA

*If you and members of your Buddhist community are interested in opening a dialogue on issues presented in this booklet, you might find it helpful first to seek*

*out general diversity trainings and workshops such as those provided by the groups listed below. (See also, the above listing.) Diversity training can provide valuable models, tools, and formats that you can bring back to your sangha and adapt to your community's needs.*

*The following brief list of Bay Area organizations is not meant in any way to be comprehensive, but to provide you with a starting place, if you need one, to look for similar organizations in your area. These days there are many groups offering diversity trainers representing a variety of approaches to this work.*

#### Oakland Men's Project

Multiracial, community-based violence prevention program, operating since 1979, dedicated to eliminating men's violence and promoting cross-gender and cross racial alliances. Through education with youth and adults and through community organizing, OMP reaches high school and junior high adolescents and teachers, parents, social service professionals, and religious, civic, governmental, and correctional organizations throughout the State of California and across the country.

1203 Preservation Park Way, Suite 200, Oakland, CA 94612

Tel: (510) 835-2433 Fax: (510) 835-2466

#### StirFry Seminars & Consulting, Inc.

Workshops and training programs on human diversity issues for corporations, non-profits, government agencies, colleges and universities. Specialize in long-term customized training programs as well as effective facilitation of the documentary *The Color of Fear*, organization director Lee Mun Wah's best known film on race relations.

3345 Grand Avenue #3, Oakland, CA 94610

Tel: (510) 419-3930 Fax: (510) 419-3934

E-mail: [stirfry99@earthlink.net](mailto:stirfry99@earthlink.net)

#### Todos Institute

The mission of the TODOS: Sherover Simms Alliance Building Institute is to help individuals and groups heal from the effects of oppression, build cross-cultural alliances, and create environments where youths and adults from all cultures are honored, valued, and respected. Our approach involves the elimination of racism, sexism, anti-semitism, classism, and other forms of social oppression and the building of cross-cultural alliances. TODOS provides workshops, trainings, and consultation on multicultural issues and conducts programs for youth.

1203 Preservation Parkway, Suite 200, Oakland, CA 94612

Tel: (510) 444-6448 Fax: (510) 835-2466

E-mail: [todos@igc.org](mailto:todos@igc.org) or [hugh@color-of-fear.org](mailto:hugh@color-of-fear.org)

## World Trust

This organization offers educational and transformation workshops on race, gender, and class. The filmmaker, Shakti Butler, uses her film, *The Way Home*, as a catalyst for dialogue on the above issues. She will travel to various locations to conduct workshops. You can also order a video of the film which comes with a conversation guide to help facilitate dialogue amongst viewers.

5902 San Pablo Ave., Oakland, CA 94608

Phone: (510) 595-3322

E-mail: [info@world-trust.org](mailto:info@world-trust.org) Website: [www.world-trust.org](http://www.world-trust.org)

Compilers of this booklet

Sheridan Adams is a practitioner of Vipassana and a board member of Buddhist Peace Fellowship. She is one of the original members of the Buddhism and Racism Working Group which organized an event in Berkeley in 1998, “Healing Racism in Our Sanghas.” She continues to pursue her interest in using Buddhist teachings and practices to help heal racism within the Buddhist community as one of the organizers of monthly gatherings of the same name — “Healing Racism in Our Sanghas.” E-mail: [metta@dnai.com](mailto:metta@dnai.com) Voice: (510) 845-4990 (ext 3).

Mushim Ikeda-Nash is a mother, writer, and Buddhist practitioner. She helped organize the Healing Racism in Our Sanghas workday held in Berkeley in November 1998 and is a member of the board of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. E-mail: [pikedada@dnai.com](mailto:pikedada@dnai.com) Voice: (510) 428-9198.

Jeff Kitzes is the Abbot and Guiding Teacher of Empty Gate Zen Center in Berkeley, California. He is one of the original members of the Buddhism and Racism Working Group which organized an event in Berkeley in 1998, “Healing Racism in Our Sanghas” and continues to help organize monthly gatherings of Buddhist practitioners continuing this work of healing Racism in our sanghas. E-mail: [metta@dnai.com](mailto:metta@dnai.com) Voice: (510) 845-4990 (ext 3).

H. Margarita Loinaz, M.D. co-facilitator of the Women of Color Sitting Group is a member of the Spirit Rock Meditation Center Diversity Council and Community Dharma Leaders Program. She also teaches mindfulness within the medical setting.

<Rainbowdharma.com> is a loosely organized group of Buddhist people of color on the Internet sharing views regarding the boundless nature of the Buddhadharmas. Founded by Choyin Rangdrol in response to feeling deep compassion for those lost in the habitual samsara of racism in sanghas. The only services provided are heartfelt prayer, lovingkindness, and a few humble comments for those seeking comfort from the storm. “Only through realizing chains of gold and rope are equally binding can one become aware how fire and water manifest dependent on different circumstances yet from the same gem.”

Jessica Tan is a 26 year old of Japanese-American and Chinese descent. She currently practices with the San Francisco Zen Center and the Buddhists of Color Sangha. E-mail: [jesstan@hotmail.com](mailto:jesstan@hotmail.com)

Larry Yang, LCSW, is clinical supervisor and coordinator of diversity and multicultural services at San Francisco General Hospital's outpatient psychotherapy clinic. As a gay man of color who is training in the Theravadan Buddhist tradition, he is on the Diversity Council of Spirit Rock Meditation Center and is part of their Community Dharma Leaders and Dedicated Practitioners Programs. E-mail: [LYang55@aol.com](mailto:LYang55@aol.com)

Many blessings and thanks

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Empty Gate Zen Center

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The Ikeda-Nash Family

Margarita Loinaz

Rainbowdharma

Canyon Sam

San Francisco Zen Center

Larry Yang

*May the awareness of the needs of diverse communities continue to be recognized and to grow in all sanghas.*

*May these sanghas, to the best of their abilities, attempt to do whatever it takes to eliminate cultural, ethnic, and economic barriers to practice.*

*May this work on issues of diversity, race, and oppression heal the experiences of separation and show us all, the commonality of our nature, for the benefit of all beings everywhere, in all directions.*