Turning Wheel

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism

Building Alliances to Address Racism

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Guest Editorial

There is a story in the Khandhakas (part of the Pali Canon) about Mahapajapati Gotami, the Buddha's foster mother and the first woman to seek ordination from the Buddha. After she asked and was refused three times, the Buddha's foremost disciple Ananda advocated on her behalf three times and was also refused.

Ananda then reminded the Buddha of the debt he owed Mahapajapati for once being his caretaker, and the Buddha relented. However, he created eight extra rules for bhikkhunis (ordained women) and predicted that the true dharma would last only 500 years instead of a thousand due to the ordination of women.

This story shows that people with a high level of personal awareness will not necessarily be against patriarchy or other social oppressions like racism. Due to their social conditioning, they may not see the ways they unknowingly uphold privileges for some at the cost of others. How would the Buddha in this story have fared in an antisexism workshop? And what other oppressions might Mahapajapati Gotami face today as a woman of color from the Global South?

As a male ally to Mahapajapati, Ananda found a skillful way to advocate for her and thereby facilitated the entry of women into ordination. An ally is someone from a nontargeted group who will stand in the way of oppression, whether interpersonal, institutional, or structural. Allies will educate themselves and actively resist oppression as best as they can, not only for the targeted group but also because they see their own social liberation as connected to the liberation of others.

Several years ago I suggested the theme of "allies" for *Turning Wheel*. At the time, I knew of only one sangha for people of color in the San Francisco Bay Area. Many convert sanghas were and still are predominantly white, middle-class, and heterosexual in membership and culture. But over the years there have been diversity trainings, lobbying for greater financial accessibility to retreats, and discussions about making the teachings more relevant to social issues like racism. Today there are a number of people-of-color sanghas and residential retreats, and a rising generation of dharma teachers of color. These beginnings have only happened because of the hard work of people of color and their white allies.

As the authors in this issue demonstrate, socially engaged Buddhism can give us awareness practices to investigate our racial conditioning and to begin to take responsibility for its effects.

I'm pleased that this issue on "Building Alliances to Address Racism" has arrived. It builds on the wonderful work of previous *TW* issues on Black Dharma, Buddhists of Asian Descent in the USA, and Buddhism in Las Américas.

Black R&B singer-songwriter Sam Cooke wrote in 1963, "It's been a long time coming, but a change is gonna come." His lyrics express weariness but also hope. The economic, political, cultural, and mental effects of centuries of racism are still with us. Strong and committed allies are needed in the struggles to counter these effects. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." May this issue of *Turning Wheel* inspire wise thought, speech, and action. ❖ —*Kenji Liu*

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TURNING WHEEL

The Journal of Socially Engaged Buddhism

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We welcome your responses to what we print. Write to Turning Wheel, P.O. Box 3470, Berkeley, CA 94703-9906 or send us e-mail at <turningwheel@bpf.org>. Letters may be edited.

A Call to Action

Thank you so much for your "Call to Action" issue (Fall/Winter 2006), which was compelling and powerful. Most importantly, my anger over the Iraq war and Bush et al. taking our constitutional rights and putting more Americans into poverty had been making me feel that I'd fallen off my Buddhist path. The writers in this issue helped put me solidly back on.

—D.J. Delaney, Albuquerque, New Mexico

How do we bring about any positive changes in a severely corrupted society? There are never any easy answers. Yet Mr. Aitken is accurate when he states that Buddhists are anarchists. Failure to recognize that truth defies the dharma and unnecessarily complicates our lives and our societal connections.

—Gary Hallford, Vacaville Prison, California

As a woman, I confess that I'm a bit wary of anarchism. There are many American politicians who say they want to regulate government "until it's almost nothing." Without government, people with wealth take charge of communities. Minority religions can be easily attacked and their followers discriminated against in employment, housing, and public services. If Americans want to kidnap foreigners and put them in secret prisons, that too is possible under the current system. We have entered a new age of cowboy diplomacy in which the rich and powerful can do what they want and call it "globalization."

—Barbara Quinan, Providence, Rhode Island

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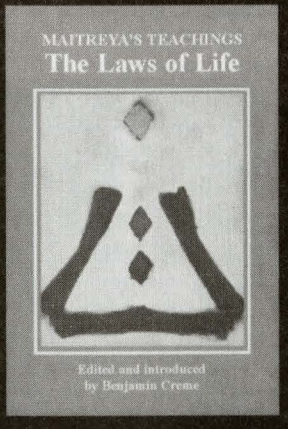

Benjamin Creme
will lecture in

New York
Los Angeles
San Francisco

July-August 2006

"Sharing and Justice, Brotherhood and Freedom

are not new concepts.

From the dawn of time, mankind has linked its aspiration to these beckoning stars. Now, my friends, shall we anchor them in the world."

With these soul-stirring words, **Maitreya – the World Teacher for this age** – calls all men and women of goodwill to build a new civilization based on these divine principles. Along with the Masters of Wisdom, a group of Enlightened Teachers, Maitreya will educate, inspire and galvanize us to make the needed changes. The 'voice of the people' will become the new politics, and supplying the basic needs of all will be our first priority.

Maitreya will also show us that **meditation and service** are the surest paths to realizing our true nature as divine beings — and living together peacefully as one human family.

In ***The Laws of Life,*** a compilation of his most recent teachings, Maitreya addresses all aspects of life in the modern world, and provides straightforward, non-dogmatic answers to some of life's most profound questions. Broad topics such as **freedom, awareness, and detachment** are coupled with specific information about the Middle East crisis, societies of the future, fundamentalism, and the Science of Light.

This remarkable book was compiled and introduced by British artist and esotericist **Benjamin Creme**, himself the author/editor of 10 other books about the World Teacher and the Masters of Wisdom — whose *open* mission in the world is about to begin.

In the image of the "jeweled net of Indra," found in the Avatamsaka Sutra, *the universe is represented as an infinite network of jewels, each of which reflects all the others. All our lives touch each other, as symbolized by Indra's net.*

"Election Sesshin"– A New Model for Buddhist Activism

Sometime in early September of 2006, I received an e-mail from Buddhist friends: Did I want to participate in an election *sesshin* [Zen meditation retreat]?—seemingly an oxymoron. Stan Dewey, Melody Ermachild, Ed Herzog, and other Northern California buddhists were organizing this Citi-Zen action. Richard Pombo, wealthy Tracy rancher and big landowner, had had the California 11th congressional district in a lock-hold for 16 years. Pombo, a Bush crony, was deemed one of the nation's biggest threats to the environment by the Sierra Club and had launched a vigorous effort to deconstruct the Endangered Species Act on behalf of ranchers and builders in his district. He had beaten his way to the helm of the National Resources Committee, which helps oversee the nation's forests, fisheries, and wildlife. He was also advocating offshore drilling for California and in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Pombo's seat was being challenged by Jerry McNerney, an unknown Democrat, who at first did not seem like he could possibly be a serious contender. McNerney is a wind engineer, with environmental sensibilities. His son Michael, who joined the air force after 9/11, asked Jerry to run for office because he saw that the men serving in Iraq were demoralized by lack of resources.

A band of engaged Buddhists set out to help turn the tide. Two houses in Stockton were donated to the Buddhist volunteers, one with a spacious studio apartment in the back yard that made a perfect Zendo. For the three weeks before the November election, a revolving group of people followed a disciplined schedule. The days were framed by Zen practice at either end with campaigning in between. At morning sittings, we recited the Heart Sutra and the Metta Prayer. At breakfast we laid out our three bowls in silence and prayed to benefit all beings. Like clockwork we carried out cleanup chores, and reported for the day's huddle with a bow. Midday, we broke into pairs and headed for McNerney campaign headquarters. We went wherever the enthusiastic 20-something organizers sent us. "Is it alright if we call you 'The Buddhists'?" they asked. They were as impressed with us as we were with them.

Walking the beat, door to door, with a list of likely McNerney supporters in hand, we encountered many responses: "McNerney *Who*?" "Whatever my church tells me." A Jehovah's witness: "I don't vote—I leave it up to God." A sweet old man in a nursing home was upset that he hadn't gotten his absentee ballot; I got it for him and took it back to the county office after he filled it out. Another resident there had campaigned for FDR. When we grilled a teen son about whether his mother had voted he exclaimed, "Dude!...She already voted!"

One morning Jerry McNerney appeared at our door, asking to join our meditation. Jaws dropped. Afterwards he stayed to chant the Heart Sutra with us—"wisdom beyond wisdom"—and horizons opened.

On the last day, we knocked on every door to "Get Out the Vote." Checking the list at polling places, we went back to kindly prompt those who hadn't voted yet. My precinct partner came upon a busy mother whose small children were playing on the floor. "I filled my ballot out," she said, and "I'm going to send it in."

"It's too late for that," he replied. "You've got just 30 minutes to get to the polls," and in five minutes he managed to pile the whole family into his SUV in order to take the mother to her polling place.

At last we headed back to the voting site for the final count. I was feeling frustrated and anxious that perhaps we hadn't made an impact, but in our heavily Republican precinct McNerney had won, two to one! We were ecstatic.

That evening a tired band of meditators rode the Stockton campaign charter bus to McNerney election headquarters in San Ramon for a victory celebration. We tried to practice "nonattachment to results" but we were shouting for joy, deliriously happy, riding the crest of the wave! ❖

—Elyse Mergenthaler

Campaign for the Right Not to Pay for War

Many Americans of all faiths follow the Buddhist precept of refraining from the taking of life, and nonviolence practitioners strive to remember the interconnectedness of all beings. Unfortunately, all people in the United States are compelled to support violence and warfare with our tax dollars. Currently, there is no legal alternative for taxpayers who are morally opposed to having their taxes fund violence. We need a legal alternative for conscientious objectors to military taxation just as we have for military service.

The National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund is lobbying Congress to pass legislation, called the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Act, that would enable conscientious objectors to pay their federal taxes into a fund designated for nonmilitary purposes only.

"In a usually divisive political atmosphere, we see this bill as a real unifier," said Alan Gamble, the executive director of the campaign. "It blends practical peacemaking with a fundamental freedom to practice one's faith. For those who believe that as taxpayers they are responsible for violence along with those who manufacture or use weapons, this bill offers a way to practice good citizenship without violating deeply held beliefs."

Similar campaigns are being pursued in other parts of the world. A group of seven British citizens are currently filing a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights on the grounds that their rights are being violated by a tax system which makes them pay for violence.

Campaign staff in the U.S. are currently seeking local organizers across the country to lobby for the bill and to publicize the need for increased religious freedom and civil rights. The campaign has also secured endorsements from several prominent figures including Noam Chomsky, Medea Benjamin, and Father Daniel Berrigan.

The campaign is working for passage of the legislation, but is dependent on grassroots support. With tax day approaching, this is a good time to get involved. To help, contact the campaign at 888-732-2382 or by e-mail at <info@peacetaxfund.org>. Visit the campaign online at *www.peacetaxfund.org.* ❖

—Chris Fretz

You cannot judge the quality of another's friendship...when things are going smoothly. It is only in the worst, most crushing of times—when we have plumbed the depths of life—that we can experience the joys of genuine friendship. Only a man of principle, a woman of resolve...can be a trusted and true friend, and have real friends in turn. People who come to your aid in a time of crisis are people of genuine compassion and courage.

—Daisaku Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International

Thank You, Diana!

Diana Lion came to BPF in 1998, to found and direct our prison program. For over seven years, we benefited from her devoted work, her passion, her humor, her commitment to people in prison, and her willingness to be present with what's going on, even when it's painful.

Photo by Alan Senauke

It would be impossible to tell you everything she did during her years with us—for individual prisoners, for the rights of prisoners in general, and to raise the awareness of all of us on the outside with whom she worked. But I can touch on some of her work.

Diana established the prison project's branches of advocacy and ministry. She networked with other organizations working against the death penalty, she taught meditation in prison, she trained volunteers, and she set up a prisoner correspondence project.

Under her leadership, BPF, in collaboration with San Francisco Zen Center, founded the Prison Meditation Network (PMN), which continues to bring dharma and meditation practice to many prisoners in the wider Bay Area. Prison meditation teacher Martha de Barros says of Diana, "She was the beating heart of the Prison Meditation Network." She is one of the people responsible for turning around the attitude toward meditation within the California Penal system and making it acceptable.

She was committed to working with people during the vulnerable time after their release from prison. She helped form Sangha X, a meditation group for former prisoners that met for a while. The broad community support such a group requires was not available at the time, but that bold move proved to be a kind of seed project for BPF's current Coming Home Initiative.

Diana has become an eloquent public speaker, courageously overcoming the anxiety she initially felt in that role. She traveled around the country leading workshops and speaking at vigils and demonstrations. She represented BPF and the prison project at conferences about the death penalty and at socially engaged Buddhist gatherings. On one occasion she even gave a presentation to prison activists in France—in French!

A certified trainer in Nonviolent Communication and a graduate of the Community Dharma Leaders program at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Diana brought valuable skills to the BPF staff. She is an excellent facilitator, listener, and organizer of meetings. I remember lots of BPF board/staff retreats that Diana helped to organize, where her sensitivity to process, her humor, her "light and lively" exercises got us through a long day of meeting with our sanity intact. Being Canadian, she brought an international perspective to us, reminding us that the U.S. isn't the only country in "America." With her experience as an ergonomic consultant, she helped each of us in the office adjust our work stations. She wrote regularly about her work with the Prison Project for *Turning Wheel*. (You can find one of her pieces in *Not Turning Away*, the *Turning Wheel* anthology.)

Diana was emotionally dedicated to her work. She brought us her own life. She was always ready to share her feelings, her tears, her gifts, her whole self.

A few years ago, Diana began to experience worsening symptoms of environmental illness and chemical sensitivity. She didn't want to stop working, but in August of 2005, at the urging of her doctors and her mentors, she went on medical leave. Our hope at BPF was that after a year of healing she would be able to return to the staff, but she is still too ill to come back to work, and BPF has not been in a position to hold a job open for her. Still, the work she did here continues to ripple outward. The BPF Prison Project, now called the Transformative Justice Project, is being continued by Bhante Suhita Dharma with a focus on the Coming Home Initiative for ex-prisoners. (See *www.bpf.org* for more information).

Even though Diana is not yet well, she is writing (see article on page 37 and review on page 51), facilitating Internet groups for people with chemical sensitivity, and making a contribution to the world around her. In the monthly letters she sends out to her community, she shares her learning from her healing retreat. Last fall she wrote:

> The [activity] I've been engaging in during this (compulsory) healing retreat has been Stopping. No expensive equipment required. It is a true Samurai sport, as it takes more discipline than I've ever needed for anything else in my life.... Luckily I have many years of meditation practice under my belt or I'd have given up!... For a working-class driven Jewish over-achiever dharma activist gal, this *non-doing* stuff is hard!! This illness is a strict teacher.... Our world is desperately in need of stopping, and the wisdom that comes from that deep place.

The circle of care that has been supporting Diana both practically and financially is in itself an exploration of interconnectedness. Diana continues to need support and help with living and medical expenses. To donate money through Diana's website, send an e-mail to <David@VillageEconomics.biz> and you'll get an e-mail back explaining how to log on to her website. Or make a check out to Diana Lion and send it to Inbal Kashtan, 14 Alida Ct., Oakland, CA 94602.

I know I speak for the whole BPF staff and board in sending great gratitude to you, Diana, for all that you have given us, and warm wishes for your wellbeing. ❖ —*Susan Moon*

The Buddha Denounces Caste Prejudice

by Diane Patenaude Ames

Sunita was a flower scavenger, a person who barely stayed alive by salvaging and selling any reasonably fresh blossoms left over from religious ceremonies. He was thus practically on the bottom of the Indian caste system of the Buddha's day (roughly 540–480 B.C.E.). Probably dark-skinned by Indian standards, and virtually destitute, he was scarcely considered a human being. Although scholars are not sure whether people like him were Dalits ("untouchables") in the modern sense, convention already demanded that people of higher caste avoid contact with them. Thus when Sunita saw the famous sage we know as the Buddha walking toward him at the head of a procession of monks, he turned aside to avoid causing trouble. However, the Buddha turned to follow him. When Sunita turned away again, the Buddha asked, "Why are you avoiding me?" Then, seeing that the man was by now too frightened to reply, he asked, "Can you bear to leave this life?" Overjoyed by this, Sunita fell down at the Buddha's feet and became a monk.

Sunita's story was not unique. Since the Buddha made it clear from the beginning that there was to be no caste in the sangha, he welcomed Buddhist monks and nuns who had formerly been everything from princes and queens to slaves, with everything in between. Status within the sangha (seating order, etc.) was determined by seniority alone.

Otherwise, the Buddha was not primarily a social reformer. His mission, as he seems to have seen it, was to bring the possibility of spiritual liberation to all sentient beings. But that very mission required him to refute, quite explicitly, the Brahmin claim that liberation was possible only to light-skinned Brahmin men. Thus when he was asked whether one became a Brahmin (i.e., a spiritually advanced person) by birth or by deeds, he replied that since any rational observer must conclude that human beings are all of the same species, one could only become a Brahmin by deeds. He challenged Brahmin claims of "pure descent" by arguing that no one could be sure who his ancestors really were. And he flatly stated, "Those who are obsessed with the prejudices of race or caste are far from the moral life and the attainment of supreme spiritual insight."

Although the caste system survived the rise and eventual fall of Indian Buddhism, the Buddha's anticaste teachings did have social effects. At the time, they had a particularly liberating effect on the rising merchant class, many of whose members came from lowly castes. And in the 20th century, they inspired the Dalit activist Ambedkar (1891–1956), and after him hundreds of thousands of Dalits, to disavow Hinduism on the grounds that it sanctified caste, and to embrace Buddhism. ❖

Reaching Back in the Dark: Being Allies to One Another

by Mushim Ikeda-Nash

There's an old Zen story in which two monks are hanging out together and one says to the other, "How come the Bodhisattva of Compassion (Kuanyin, or Avalokitesvara) has so many hands and eyes?" His brother monk replies, "It's just like reaching back for your pillow in the dark."

When I woke up the other night, my pillow had gotten squashed down, so I groped around for another pillow. My partner, Chris, was sleeping with two pillows under his head and another one covering his face, which he does if I stay up late reading or if I snore too loudly. I took my pillow back and contentedly dozed off. A lot of times, our family life is like that. Chris notices his sock supply is low and finds his socks have migrated into our son Joshua's drawer. Josh says he needs cash for lunch at school, so I tell him to get my wallet and take what he needs. "Mine" and "yours" aren't distinct categories in our home, which is a tiny apartment in Oakland, California. We're a close-knit family by most people's standards, and our everyday family life is filled with varying amounts of irritation and affection for one another.

This is why, when the chips are down, I usually expect my family members to have my back. And being an interracial family—Josh and I are Americans of Asian descent and Chris is a white American—ups the ante in terms of what we need and expect from one another. Especially when we are dealing with my white in-laws and Chris's white friends, I want Chris to be my ally, and he has been, but it doesn't always work out perfectly.

Years ago, we were sitting in the living room of Arnold, one of Chris's best friends and former housemates, a mixed-race American who had married a white Austrian woman. They had invited us over for Christmas cookies and tea, when Arnold's wife Lena got up and reseated herself in a window seat directly behind me. Suddenly she began yelling at me for not having included her in my thank-you to Arnold for a donation that he had given to our son's school. I had assumed it was a donation from his business, and had left a voice mail for him expressing our gratitude.

"I'm really surprised that you didn't thank me, too. After all, you're always *so* politically correct," Lena said in a harsh, accusing tone. Although I offered a heartfelt apology for the misunderstanding, she refused it, and continued to berate me loudly from behind my back.

I didn't know these people well at all, and I felt I'd been invited in for Christmas cookies and then ambushed. I was in a target group in many respects. I am of Asian descent; Lena was white. We were poor; she had just finished showing us her sumptuous new home in the hills and new BMW. I couldn't help feeling that if I had been white and wealthy, she wouldn't have treated me like this.

Josh was still little, and he was sitting on my lap, so I circled him protectively with my arms and looked pleadingly at Chris, hoping for a sympathetic glance or supportive comment. Instead, he avoided my gaze and angled his body away from me. It was obvious that there would be no help coming from his quarter. Arnold tried to calm down his spouse by murmuring endearments in German, to no avail. The visit ended with us edging out their front door, while Lena's dogs growled at Josh.

"What the hell was *that* all about?" I said later that night.

"Arnold is my best friend but I think Lena has always disliked me," Chris replied. "I guess she was hesitant to attack me, so she took it out on you. That wasn't fair to you."

"No kidding!" I shouted. "And how come you didn't say anything? I was counting on you to be my ally, and you just sat there!"

I know that Chris loves and supports me. We were both confused and dismayed by what had happened, and I knew that we'd reached some kind of bottom line in the marriage. I realized I couldn't really trust him to be there for me in situations of unexpected conflict. But why? Some years and several thousands of dollars in marital therapy later, Chris was diagnosed with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) resulting from early childhood abuse. A sudden, angry attack makes him feel like a terrified little kid, who tries to survive by hiding. Now I'm more able to understand that he's doing the best he can.

Saying that we can only help and heal others' suffering to the extent that we've helped and healed our own suffering sounds like a cliché. But it's still true, and I need to remember it when my partner and I are at odds with one another. Even if we share pillows and socks and meals, Chris, Josh, and I are also separate people with our own individual paths and our own practices.

There's no neat solution to not trusting a family member to stand up with and for me when needed, no pacifying spiritual balm to apply when we hurt because of abuse and racism. Real love and true compassion are gigantic, messy, lifelong projects. Why is it that the Bodhisattva of Compassion has so many hands and eyes? Sometimes we reach in back of our heads in the darkness, and don't know what we'll find. ❖

The present moment
is not necessarily
a pleasant moment.

—Steven K. Steinberg

Steven K. Steinberg, Ed.D., teaches in the UCLA Writing Program. He is working on a book for educators.

The Power of Worldviews

by Stephanie Kaza

Conflicts between worldviews are at the heart of much of society's suffering. Worldviews shape families, economies, politics, and views of self. If they carry so much weight, it behooves us to study them with some attention. Basically a worldview is the set of assumptions a person or society holds about the world and how it works. This is foundational practice territory for Buddhists; we understand our minds as conditioned by such assumptions. In his new book, *Inspiring Progress: Religions' Contributions to Sustainable Development* (W.W. Norton, 2006), Gary Gardner takes up the role of worldviews in determining how we see our world and therefore how we choose to act, particularly in response to the environment. "Worldviews tell us what matters and what does not, what is more important and what is less so," he writes. They are constructed from the answers we give to the greatest mysteries of our lives. Who am I? Why am I here? What is my relation to you and to the world around me?"

Worldviews are often shaped by the basic challenges we face as a society—obtaining material needs for survival and figuring out how to get along with each other. Without a guiding worldview, we would be overwhelmed by the constant barrage of communication coming our way. We would find it very difficult to negotiate the constantly shifting social terrain, to make sense of complex human and environmental relations. Our most primary survival need is to orient our lives and activities to all that surrounds us. We do that with ideas, ethics, taboos, traditions—any way we can codify and communicate "what works" and what makes sense in the long run.

Gardner reviews how our modern idea of progress has been forged by Enlightenment thinking. In this view the world is seen as a collection of objects to be understood and manipulated for human good. The scientific approach to problem-solving reflects this dominant worldview in most of today's institutions of government, economics, and higher education. Such a worldview actively promotes rational thinking and material improvement. Where does a spiritual or religious worldview fit into this picture? Is it possible that mechanistic explanations and approaches are not enough to address the global-scale problems we face? Seeking a path to sustainability, Gardner names three trends that characterize our world today: escalating violence, widespread environmental abuse, and chronic human poverty. His book asks the question, how can religions respond?

This is a question Buddhists can and should take up, both as individuals and as members of societies. Like all religions, Buddhism provides some insights into human nature. If there is one thing humans hold in common, it is the tendency to form self-centered worldviews. Gardner feels that this belief in "progress" is perhaps the most dangerous worldview of all. With all the freedom and prosperity generated by the Enlightenment (at least for Western societies), Confucian scholar Tu Weiming suggests that "progress has degenerated into inequality, reason into self-interest, and individualism into greed." High rates of consumption are often associated with a high social emphasis on individualism. In the United States, self-centeredness has become central to our worldview, reinforced by the market economy and cynicism about the political system.

The Buddha's earliest teachings identified this central problem long ago. All streams of Buddhism offer practices for dismantling false views of self as a key to enlightenment. Out of this arises a role for Buddhists to play in addressing Gardner's three global challenges. It is quite straightforward: line up with efforts that downplay self-centered worldviews and efforts that promote socially responsible worldviews. In this way we will continue the venerable tradition of the ancient ones. We don't have to be capital-B Buddhists about all this. We can just proceed to do our work with a solid Buddhist philosophy underpinning our efforts. This is enough. We know that taking apart ego-centered views is core to relieving suffering. Whether it is work to address racism, poverty, or environmental abuse, we can consciously promote worldviews that include others and support nonharming as a fundamental practice. ❖

Just as in connection with this form, devoid of self,
My sense of "I" arose through strong habituation,
Why should not the thought of "I,"
Through habit, not arise related to another?

Those desiring speedily to be
A refuge for themselves and others
Should make the interchange of "I" and "other,"
And thus embrace a sacred mystery.

—Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*

Doing the White Thing

by Swan Keyes

As we pull into our driveway, I notice a young Black man walking down the sidewalk toward us with a paper bag full of flowers in his hands. I can see that he wants to engage, and I just want to go to bed. It's not been a fun evening and I'm extraordinarily grouchy. What is this guy going to want from me?

I step out of the car to hear him say hello. He extends his hand and introduces himself. Mustering up all the friendliness I can, I offer a weak smile and ask him if he is selling flowers.

"Uh, no," he says, looking surprised. "I'm here to see Alicia." Alicia is my neighbor of many years.

Ah. Now I notice that this young man is in a fine suit. I realize that instead of seeing him, I had just projected an image of one of the many Black men who approach me downtown selling *Street Spirit*, the local homeless newspaper, or asking for change for the bus. Considering that I've never actually met a homeless person selling *Street Spirit* in my neighborhood up in the Oakland foothills, how is it that instead of seeing this sharply dressed young man bringing flowers for his date, I am seeing some kind of salesman or beggar?

I start to backpedal, fast, hoping he has no idea what has just passed through my mind.

"Oh, I was hoping for some flowers," I stammer.

He looks embarrassed (probably for me) and asks if I want some from his bag.

"Oh, no, no, Alicia deserves them. Thank you so much. It's really great to meet you." I offer my limp hand and he shakes it, and we quickly part.

My partner, Kenji, who has witnessed the interaction, says hi to the man and we walk into our house.

"Damn!" is all I can say.

"Yeah," Kenji says, shaking his head.

Such a vivid illustration of how my mind has been trained to see a stereotype, rather than a person. Does this young man see how quickly I projected the image of a homeless person onto him? If so, is he hurt or angry, or just laughing it off?

Maybe he didn't even notice it, maybe it was a subtle mistake, surely one that anyone could make. But did he notice my silly attempt to mask that mistake? From what friends of color tell me, this kind of thing happens to them all the time—the erroneous assumption and then (sometimes) the attempted cover-up or overfriendliness.

I want to pretend this incident has no impact. But if it's no big deal, why is my stomach in knots? I feel like a jerk, anxious and ashamed, wanting to shrink into the floorboards. I am embarrassed even of the guilt and how small it makes me feel. I just want to purge the image of the beggar from my mind, eliminate the part of me that can see this young man in that way—the entwined racial and class training embedded in my psyche.

I don't want to be the guilty white person falling all over herself to be "nice." I want to be an expert who always knows and does the "right" thing, winning the respect and admiration of white folks and people of color everywhere.

But I see that my white conditioning isn't just going to evaporate due to my good intentions. So disappointing. I wish intention were everything. Unfortunately, I know that my actions can have harmful affects even when my intentions are great. So my practice is to try to put the positive intentions into action by learning as much as possible about this racial conditioning and how it affects people of whiteness and people of color. Although I may not eliminate the mental conditioning that sees a young Black man as a nuisance, I can develop awareness of it and eventually learn to respond in better ways.

I see that my white conditioning isn't just going to evaporate due to my good intentions. So disappointing!

But I'm Not a Racist

I like to think of myself as a very open person, dedicated to social justice. Yet when that incident occurred with my neighbor's date, there were very few African Americans in my life. I had plenty of acquaintances of color whom I proudly called friends but very few truly intimate relationships. Living in one of the most diverse regions in the country, I socialized mostly with white people—at work, at home, at school, at my meditation center, at parties. At all of these places I could expect the majority of people to look like me. However, Kenji and other people of color tell me that for them there is often no choice but to interact with the white world, as the schools, banks, companies, nonprofit organizations, and other institutions are generally run by white people. On the whole, white people are the gatekeepers to privilege in this society.

My lack of close relationships with people of color meant that I rarely had to confront my racial condi-

tioning. This is one of the privileges of being white in U.S. society, as Peggy McIntosh and many others point out (see McIntosh's essay, White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack). For the most part, I can choose whether and when to acknowledge or address racism. I choose not to think about race a good deal of the time. I enjoy films, books, and other media that focus almost entirely on white characters without having to think of this as a racial experience. I go to restaurants, nightclubs, and beaches that are predominantly white without thinking about why it is that some spots remain so exclusive. I can see myself and other white people as the norm (as "human"), and see race only as an attribute of people outside of that norm. And I can live in a way where I rarely have to engage the "other."

I can say, "Why aren't there more people of color in this group?" and feel good about myself for noticing the lack of diversity, while doing nothing more. Or I can go one step further and try to recruit a few people of color to my organization, workplace, or sangha, without working to create a truly respectful and inclusive environment. But if I am concerned about social justice then it is my responsibility to investigate the full implications of the racial privilege I and all whites unconsciously benefit from.

I became a very nice girl. I left most of myself at the door in order to gain entrance to this world that I saw on TV, the world I craved so much to be part of.

So what is this white racial conditioning, or training, and how does it work in the U.S. today? White training is how people are taught to be white. People of all different European ethnicities come to the U.S. and, through a process of assimilation, accrue unearned benefits due to light skin color and other features that allow them to be considered "white." People often give up their ethnic identities (a struggle for many Italian, Irish, Polish, Jewish, and other immigrants) in order to blend into the mainstream white culture, which is dominated by Christian values and customs, and is the "norm" seen on TV and in movies, magazines, and billboards.

This white training tells us what it means to be "civilized": polite, rational, calm, educated, responsible. The training tells us who is outside of this norm, and bombards us daily with images of the "other" as strange, deviant, dirty, loud, ignorant, rude, lazy, sneaky, exotic, sexual, dangerous, either overly dominant or submissive, mysterious, soulful, musical, spiritual. The stereotypes are sometimes negative, sometimes positive, but are always a projection of the parts not recognized within the norm of the dominant culture.

Becoming White

When I was a child and my hippie father would take me to visit his working-class family, descendents of English Protestant early colonial settlers, I knew I did not fit in. Growing up on a commune with a Jewish mother, I was embarrassed at not knowing the social customs of this "normal" family. I knew my father had stepped outside the bounds of conventional whiteness (though I didn't think of it yet in racial terms), both in his counterculture lifestyle and in marrying my mother, who was too loud, too emotional, too intellectual, too opinionated, too expressive, too sexual, too much for a white Christian family to have any idea what to do with.

I learned that to fit in (to become like them—culturally white) meant to make myself very small. So I became a very nice girl. I spoke softly, observed their table manners, didn't talk about politics, religion, or sex, and generally left most of myself at the door in order to gain entrance to this world that I saw on TV, the world I craved so much to be part of.

In this mainstream white world, no one speaks up when they hear a racist joke. No one questions the images of Black people on TV, the demonizing of Arabs, the exoticizing of Asians, or the romanticizing of Native Americans. In the 21st century, most people in these households know it is impolite to use the n-word, and people may be proud to know a Black person by name, but there is no acknowledgment of systemic racism or white privilege. Most people in families like my father's think that racism is not really an issue today, and that the histories of slavery, internment, annihilation of Native peoples, the conquest of Mexico, or the Chinese Exclusion Act have little if any bearing on anyone's ability to succeed today. They think that people should be able to pull themselves up by the bootstraps à la Condoleezza Rice or Colin Powell. *Oy vey*. Yet it is precisely these histories of oppression that have created a system of unearned advantage for me, in a white-dominated society where I can almost unquestioningly assume that a young Black man in my neighborhood has no other role but to offer me something to buy.

Author Beverly Daniel Tatum compares this racial conditioning to smog. We do not choose to breathe in smog but we are nonetheless affected by it, even when we cannot see those effects. The conditioning comes through nursery rhymes, fairy tales, textbooks, teachers, family members, peers, the evening news, images of people in power and of people in poverty, images of criminals and CEOs. We take in these messages

daily—everyone does—white people and people of color, even those of us raised with liberal or radical parents. The training is part of the collective unconscious of U.S. society (see the book *Learning to Be White*, by Thandeka).

Along with the benefits of light skin, there are also many hidden costs. I used to feel terribly insecure in racially mixed groups, always afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing, or else wanting to say something radical to prove my worth. I have been immobilized at times by white guilt, feeling so much shame at the legacy of racism that I couldn't stand up against racism when I should have. I felt too small, too weak, too incompetent, which is what happens when we are not taught to see our racial conditioning and understand our place in the racial hierarchy. So I let racist comments go by.

I remember once as a teenager meeting an elderly African American man coming out of the health food store in my rural New England hometown of Shelburne Falls, Vermont. I saw that the man was upset and asked if he was ok. He told me he had just been informed by another customer that Blacks weren't welcome there. I felt so bad all I could do was tell him how sorry I was. In retrospect, I wish I had confronted the customer, or at least the owner of the store, whom I knew well, rather than sink into a sense of helplessness. At the time, I had no idea what to say or do, so I did what I was trained to do: nothing. And the cost was guilt, fear, and alienation. I had connected to this man in my grief and sense of injustice but the connection ended in my feeling stuck and ashamed, and I wonder if there might have been reluctance on my part to engage with African Americans afterward, wanting to avoid that feeling of inadequacy I had experienced.

The legacy of assimilation has also cost me a sense of connection to my cultural and spiritual roots, so that I have looked to the traditions of others—Native Americans, Africans, Asians, South Americans—for spirituality and culture, wanting to take on something of theirs to fill the void in myself. I didn't identify with my Jewish roots until I was in my early twenties, when an African priestess told me to study my cultural background. Up until then, I had successfully avoided acknowledging any cultural difference from my white peers of Christian descent (most of whom identified as Buddhist or Hindu, Sufi, Hippie/Raver, or otherwise "alternative"). My mother had cast off her Jewish identity like an old coat when she joined the commune, though this didn't prevent her from being scapegoated for being different. Decades later, she began investigating the riches of her heritage, finding books on Jewish meditation and Kabbalah. Buddhism spoke to something long lost in her own family's traditions.

Finding Sangha

When I finally decided that I wanted to learn about racism and racial conditioning, I had no idea where to begin. I wanted a place where I could speak honestly and ask some really basic questions. I had already seen that in mixed-race groups it wasn't always a good idea for me to speak my mind, partly because I was coming from a preschool level of understanding of race (like most white people) and required people of color in the group to be continually teaching and speaking to my level—exhausting and often not much fun (or safe) for them. I wanted to sit down with some other white people and lay my questions and stereotypes on the table.

John Yoyogi Fortes
Conformity

Such a group is hard to come by. Yet as soon as I put out this intention, Kenji came home with a flyer from a local library advertising the UNtraining, an opportunity for white people to explore what it means to be white and how we unconsciously participate in racism.

I called and talked for hours with the founder of the program, Robert Horton, a white man who had been

John Yoyogi Fortes is an artist living in Vallejo, California.

practicing Tibetan Buddhism for over 25 years. Having practiced vipassana since I was 16, I appreciated how his practice influenced every aspect of his work. This fit well with my affinity for socially engaged Buddhism, as it engaged the dharma while insisting that self-inquiry is not enough in itself—we have to take the awareness we develop and apply it to the world in the service of building more peaceful and just societies.

Robert's work was founded on the approach of Rita Shimmin, a woman of African American and Filipina descent whom he met at a weeklong international Process Work seminar in the early '90s. People of color at the seminar repeatedly requested that the white folks in the room get together and look at whiteness, rather than asking people of color to teach them about racism. At one point, Robert asked, "Why don't white people get together and do this?" to which Rita replied, "Why don't you?"

She began to mentor him in her spiritually based approach to anti-oppression work as he developed a program to help white people explore racial conditioning. In the UNtraining, we work with the parts of ourselves we most want to disown—including the areas where we see our racial training, as well as what Rita calls our basic "awesomeness," or Buddhanature. Just as we learn in meditation to observe our thoughts, feelings, and physical states as they rise and pass, so too can we become familiar with how our racial training works. It takes study, long-term commitment, and community, as we learn to overcome the individualistic white training that tells us that we can "fix it" all on our own.

In the hippie commune where I grew up, we considered ourselves all one. We believed that just because we were good, spiritual people we were somehow immune to social conditioning.

The UNtraining became my primary antiracism practice community in 1997 and I was invited to begin teaching the program with Robert in 2001. From body-oriented work to intellectual education to deep emotional healing to building alliances and planning actions to confront racism in our schools, workplaces, families, sanghas, and other communities, we work with a deep grounding in compassionate inquiry and practice of nonduality while struggling in an unjust, dualistic world.

Ways I Avoid Dealing with Racism (and Piss Off the People of Color in My Life)

One of the things I discovered early on in the work was that the way I was thinking about racism held me back from doing any real work around it. I thought there were two separate kinds of people: good people and racists. I didn't feel hatred toward people of color so I didn't consider myself racist. I was one of those people who might innocently state, "Some of my best friends are Black."

As Robert Horton pointed out, this fallacy that there are two types of people—the racist and the nonracist—is counterproductive. By acknowledging that all people have racial conditioning and no one chooses it, we stop trying to prove that we are the "right" type of person and we free up energy to develop nonblaming awareness of the stereotypes, fears, and unconscious prejudices we have learned.

I had to give up any attempts at colorblindness, which was a bummer since it's such a nice way out of dealing with race. In the hippie commune where I grew up, we considered ourselves all one. We believed that just because we were good, spiritual people we were somehow immune to social conditioning. We thought that our love was enough to free us from any accountability for the ills of society.

I liked the idea of not seeing race. But how could I deal with inequity in social position if I was seeing everybody as the same? How could I be an ally to a person of color who experienced something I did as racist if I was invested in not seeing their difference? Unfortunately, ignore-ance of issues doesn't make them go away.

As Kenji and I began to take the work we did together in our relationship out into the world, developing groups to work with racism, sexism, heterosexism, and class oppression, alliance building became my primary spiritual practice. As with my vipassana practice, the ability to develop compassionate awareness became a great source of liberation. Today, it is such a relief when I can see my racial conditioning and not hit myself over the head with it, but instead take the opportunity to go a little deeper in inquiry. ❖

Many thanks to those who have informed and supported my antiracism work over the years: Kenji Liu, Rita Shimmin, Robert Horton, Mushim Ikeda-Nash, Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ricki Sherover-Marcuse, Ruth Frankenburg, Richard Shapiro, Abba Zero, and many others, and to my parents and ancestors—the colonizers, midwives, ministers, artists, teachers, seekers, anarchists, and pogrom survivors: those who guide me and those I heal for. Thanks to Kenji Liu and Tova Gabrielle for their feedback and contributions to this article.

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Race and Rice-Drying

by Lynn Filiatreaux

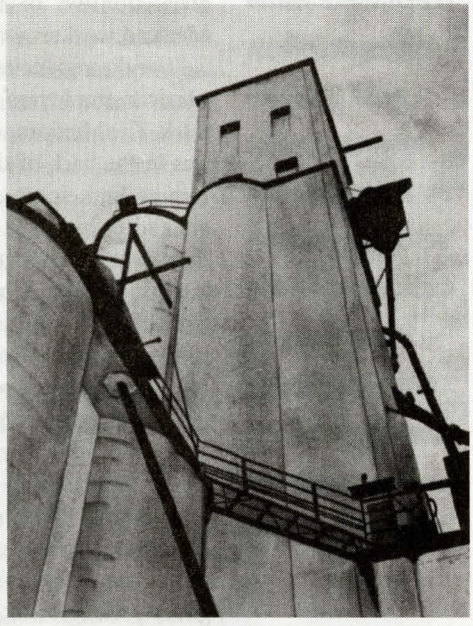
The rice silos, a hundred and one of them, loom large on the horizon. At one time, the Van Dyke family owned and operated one of the largest rice-drying and storage facilities in the nation. Van Dyke's Rice Dryer Inc. (VDRD) has been in business since the early 1930s and is located in south Sutter County, California. During the 1980s and '90s, VDRD annually serviced over 25,000 acres of rice farms. But when the general manager died suddenly of a heart attack in the mid 1980s after 50 years in business, the company began moving down a path toward bankruptcy.

The California rice industry is controlled largely by older men of European descent. Mexican American men, most of them legal citizens who self-identify as Mexican, are the people who provide the labor for the family farms and drying and storage facilities. They make the rice industry happen.

In 1986 I was the owner of a computer software consulting company. The owner of VDRD contracted with me to design and implement a custom database program. VDRD thought it needed a new, efficient computer program to keep track of the flow of rice in order to turn the company around and avoid bankruptcy.

After spending a year in this consultation role, I saw that the real financial problems had to do with relations among and between the employees as well as with the VDRD family. I presented my discoveries to the VDRD owner and he took the unusual step of hiring me, a 28-year-old woman from outside the industry, as the new general manager. He was a third-generation Van Dyke family member. He was the president of the board and had reluctantly taken over VDRD operations after the death of the general manager. He had no interest in personally addressing employee issues or his own family issues to try to make the company profitable. His plan was to hire me to do the things he knew had to be done but did not want to do himself. He hired me to be his hatchet man, but my idea was to implement radical changes in both policy and structure in order to get the corporation out of trouble.

Employee fulfillment, which means helping employees become all that they can become, can significantly enhance an organization's performance by inspiring the soul, creativity, and full potential of its people. Employee fulfillment at VDRD was an area that greatly concerned me. I had read an article in *Fortune* magazine quoting a Gallup Management Journal Survey that found that three out of four Americans are dissatisfied with their jobs, causing low productivity and low morale. I believed that employee dissatisfaction and lack of employee fulfillment at VDRD were some of the the major factors contributing to the company's financial problems. I believed that making changes to improve employee morale would improve productivity and turn the company around. It appeared to me to be a simple solution.



Carol Wickenhiser-Schaudt
Rice Dryer

Job descriptions at VDRD included an unwritten racial component. White men operated the rice-drying burners and Mexican men did the labor-intensive work with the bulk product, shoveling rice and climbing into the confined space of the silo to check the product by hand. Mexican men worked mostly outside and white men worked mostly inside the rice-drying plants and in the maintenance shop, welding and fabricating machinery. I was told that this racial division was because Mexicans were not very good with machinery but they *were* good for shoveling, cleaning, and general labor. As a general rule, the Mexican workers carried out monotonous daily tasks of hard labor and routinely performed dangerous work. The white employees, who were hired to operate the control panels for the huge diesel -burning rice dryers, stood around, smoked cigarettes, and watched the Mexican employees shovel rice.

The Mexican employees were trained to operate the rice dryers as well, and during busy times of the year, they were sometimes offered the opportunity to operate them if no white man wanted to do it. But the newest machines, and the ones easiest to operate, were somehow considered a white man's job, while the old, dirty, and much more dangerous machines were the ones the Mexicans were allowed to operate. In general, when there was a dangerous, dirty, or very labor-intensive job to do, a Mexican worker was automatically called in because it was considered inappropriate for a white man to do that kind of work. Furthermore, if a second shift needed to be added in a plant, then a Mexican man would be asked to run the plant for that shift. I was told that this was in order to provide the Mexicans an

The white employees stood around, smoked cigarettes, and watched the Mexican employees shovel rice.

opportunity to get overtime pay. I was also told that the white men usually did not want to work overtime and wanted to get home to their families.

In general, pay was calculated according to race rather than job description, with the white men receiving more pay than the Mexican men, even though all the plant workers were at the same skill level. This difference in pay was taken for granted, and no explanation was given for it. Bonuses were given at the end of every fiscal year in July. Generally, the white men were given bonuses of $5,000 to $10,000 each, and the Mexican workers were given $1,500 to $2,000 each.

When there was a dangerous, dirty, or very labor-intensive job to do, a Mexican worker was automatically called in because it was considered inappropriate for a white man to do that kind of work.

The discrepancies between the white employees' and Mexican employees' working conditions at VDRD were stark. The Mexican workers were told to park their vehicles in the back of the compound, out of sight of customers. In their separate parking lot, the Mexican workers had fashioned a dimly lit, unheated lunchroom of their own with a dirt floor. Rat feces and cobwebs decorated the room. A makeshift door closed the room off from the rest of the old wooden building, whose primary purpose was to warehouse equipment. The Mexican workers brought in their own small refrigerator, microwave, hotplate, and table for a place to eat. There was not a working restroom in their area.

By contrast, the white workers parked in front of their shop building, close to the road, and ate in a small, clean break-room provided by the company. Their restroom was cleaned by a janitorial service and was in good working order. The company provided them with cooking appliances. According to theoretical business models, these issues relating to race were an obvious place to start to make changes to improve morale.

My initial goal was to increase profits and keep the company from bankruptcy. I wanted to modify the historical business model by stimulating workers' natural desire to do well. I implemented new policies at VDRD, including a pay schedule calculated according to new job descriptions; I provided one designated parking area for all employees, a clean break-room for everyone, and clean working restrooms for all workers to share; I encouraged all employees to work in teams; and I empowered each worker to make choices and contribute ideas. After I implemented this new model focused on improving the workplace for workers, the company's financial situation turned around and became sound. What this company had needed in order to survive was an end to institutional discrimination.

Another issue at VDRD needed to be addressed. Van Dyke family members considered that the Mexicans who worked at VDRD were at their disposal as laborers for their personal projects. The board chairman's parents, siblings, wife, children, cousins, and in-laws would come to me and ask to borrow "a Mexican" or "some Mexicans" because they needed some labor. The whole process was treated like a benefit to the chosen Mexicans. The most hardworking Mexicans were honored with an order to help with tree pruning, a dirty plumbing job at one of the family homes, heavy lifting, remodeling of a home, or other hard labor. It reminded me of a medieval fiefdom or indentured servitude.

Initially, I fell prey to the same temptation and participated in this use of VDRD labor. Customers of VDRD knew that we had a large supply of Mexican labor and would periodically ask for help with their projects as well. I could send some Mexicans over here or over there in order to gain favor with customers and seal business deals. But I came to a greater understanding about this through a quote from Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "If, in the face of injustice you are neutral, you are on the side of the oppressor." Not only did I stop participating but I actively worked toward reducing the inequities at VDRD. As general manager and then president of the corporation, I terminated the personal use of VDRD equipment or employees outside of corporate operations.

The next step was to implement procedures based on suggestions given to me by the workers. I believed that more democracy at VDRD would benefit everyone. I asked the workers to brainstorm new strategies for the efficient use of machinery and new directions of flow for the rice. The employees and I decided together which strategies worked and which ones did not—this was a kind of democracy in action. Soon, communications moved freely back and forth between the workers and me. The employees became enthusiastic about coming to their changed workplace. They saw that each person was important to the success of the whole facility. As the employees and I worked together as a team, the flow of rice became more efficient, which created a profit for VDRD.

At the same time that I was working to improve conditions for the workers, capitalism was working well for *me*. I was "successful" in traditional American business terms. For the next eight years, I received a six-figure income, bonuses, a company car, an unlimited gas card, free health benefits, and a generous retirement account. I had surrounded myself with all the indicators of what I thought would bring me happiness. In fact, I was very unhappy and felt empty inside.

Then I attended a national conference for the rice industry in St. Louis, where I met other rice dryer managers from Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. Many people said, "Oh, you're that girl from California!" and I felt a naive pride that my reputation had preceded me halfway across the country. I later learned that the California rice industry was working hard to eliminate me from my position at VDRD. Many of the competing dryers in California had begun having

problems with their Mexican workers because word had spread that at VDRD I was paying the Mexican workers the same as the white workers. This threatened the other dryers, who were trying to maintain the pay rates based on race, and the Van Dyke family had began to get pressure from the other rice-drying facilities to relieve me of my duties.

I also represented the California Rice Industry on the Board of the California Warehouse Association and served as vice president. According to the bylaws, the two-year term position of vice president automatically rolled into the two-year term position of president, but there was a movement by many of the members to revise the bylaws in order to keep me from becoming president. I found an attorney who wanted to represent me pro bono regarding this issue. She wrote the California Warehouse Association a letter threatening litigation on the basis of gender discrimination. As a result, the bylaws stayed the same and in 1997 I became the first female president in the association's 75-year history.

I was shocked and devastated that so many people were against the idea of racial equality. I thought that everyone would agree that providing an environment where people were not discriminated against based on race was the "right" thing to do. Besides, I thought it was good for business. What I did not understand was that institutional racism was viewed as economically advantageous for the white people. In March 1997, I was told to leave the premises of VDRD, and the Van Dyke family took back control of the operations of the company. I was anonymously harassed and stalked, and my life was threatened. One time I received a phone call from a person who was using a mechanical device to disguise his voice and he said very threateningly, "How does it feel to be the most hated woman in Sutter County?"

From an intellectual standpoint, I wanted to understand what had happened. I found some answers from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Through Freire, I learned that the status, power, and domination of the oppressor are not possible without the existence of the oppressed and that both are manifestations of dehumanization. I learned that critical consciousness is imperative to human action and social transformation. I understood that my actions to eliminate racism at VDRD, although they appeared to others as social change, were not truly changing the power balance. In addition, my attempt to humanize conditions for the Mexican workers was threatening to the other owners in the rice industry—I was upsetting the economic status quo.

After my termination as president, I was emotionally and physically exhausted. I was angry, unhappy, and alone. I realized that people had been treating me with respect only because of my power and position. Without that position, I was nobody. My self-worth and identity had been wrapped up in my title, my power, and my position.

This is where my practice of looking deeply began. My journey at VDRD demonstrates the depth of structural racism and violence in our culture. Racism is a social construct of attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and practices that is maintained by not understanding white privilege and not acknowledging an internalized sense of racial superiority. Racism is what needs to change, and combating racism is a re-education process. Racism depends on the collusion and cooperation of white people for its perpetuation. And so, we white people must unlearn our racist conditioning and re-educate and recondition ourselves as antiracists.

Recent findings of the Human Genome Project conclude that 99.9 percent of our basic genetic material is the same for all of us, regardless of so-called race differences. Undoing racism is challenging and daunting work and will demand significant personal commitment and time. As the African American freedom fighter Frederick Douglass said, "Without struggle, there is no progress." Both individual and societal change is necessary.

My white privilege had distorted my view. I was "helping" the Mexican workers, but I wasn't working for true equality or for deep social change. I was a "just do it" person. I was action-oriented and simply implementing an intellectual business model in order to increase profits, get the company in the black, and make a name for myself. I wanted to be a successful woman in a male-dominated industry.

A decade has passed since then. My Buddhist practice and my continuing education about racism have helped me to be more aware. Presented with the same situation, I would again stand up to fight. However, I would do it for different reasons and in a different way. I would provide information and education about racism to those for whom I worked and who worked for me. I would not personalize the events and think that what was happening was about me but instead put them into the context of a systemic lack of understanding about racism. Thich Nhat Hanh says, "True love is nondiscrimination and therefore no dictatorship." I understand that nondiscrimination means equal power. I also understand that personal change is not enough; it takes all of us making personal change and supporting each other in order to create policy and institutional change. ❖

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Many of our competitors had begun having problems with their Mexican workers because word had spread that we were paying the Mexican workers the same as the white workers.

Not Having to Worry About This One Big Thing

by Toni Lester

My student, M*, sits across from me on the other side of my desk. At 21, he already casts a compelling impression: steady, intelligent eyes, an articulate, passionate voice fluent in both the King's English"and the vernacular of his urban childhood home, and a calm yet forceful stance, especially when that forcefulness is called upon to put forth a position or an argument.

"I am tired of all these white people," he says. "Separation of the races—that's what we need. I say, let's go back to the days when whites and Blacks only interacted out of necessity, not out of some false notion about our common humanity, or the promise of it."

He is the best and brightest of his cohort. A verbal, mathematical, and intellectual Wunderkind. If he so chooses, he will go far in the white man's world. "Look into my crystal ball," I tease him. "In your future I see a large McMansion, a six-figure salary, and stock options. You, my friend, can have it all."

Mine is the generation of Blacks that was supposed to stand proudly in the halls of dismantled Jim Crow education and make our mark on the world.

"But at what cost?" he implores. We are talking about race—our favorite topic—and he is not happy.

"All that talk about integration and loving one another from the Civil Rights era, that was just a lot of BS," he says. "You know I don't mean to be disrespectful to Martin Luther King and those other guys, but come on—they had it wrong. What we need to do is stick with our own. Support our own businesses. Stay in our own communities. I'm willing to be cordial to some of them. Hell, even friends with one or two, but that's it. I'm sick of wasting my time trying to get *them* to feel comfortable with *me*. From now on, I'm all about being Black and for real."

My mind goes tumbling back in time to the days of my own coming of age during the decade that immediately followed the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Bookish and smart, puffed-up afro and patched-up hippie jeans, I entered the halls of the elite all-white university to which I had been admitted, ready and willing to apply myself and to be a credit to my race. You see, mine is the generation of Blacks that was supposed to stand proudly in the halls of dismantled Jim Crow education and make our mark on the world. Mine is the generation that was supposed to sit with assurance at inhospitable coffee counters and stand side by side with whites in offices and on the factory line—all the while reaching out with open hearts for reconciliation and forgiveness.

Many of my Black friends went to church to have that motivation affirmed and reinforced, in a place that brings comfort and support to most of us even today. While I started out there, however, church didn't end up being the place that nurtured my spirit. The cushion and the power of silence became my tools for salvation and liberation. Still, even on the cushion, I held on to dreams in which one day whites and Blacks would be able to coexist in compassion and understanding.

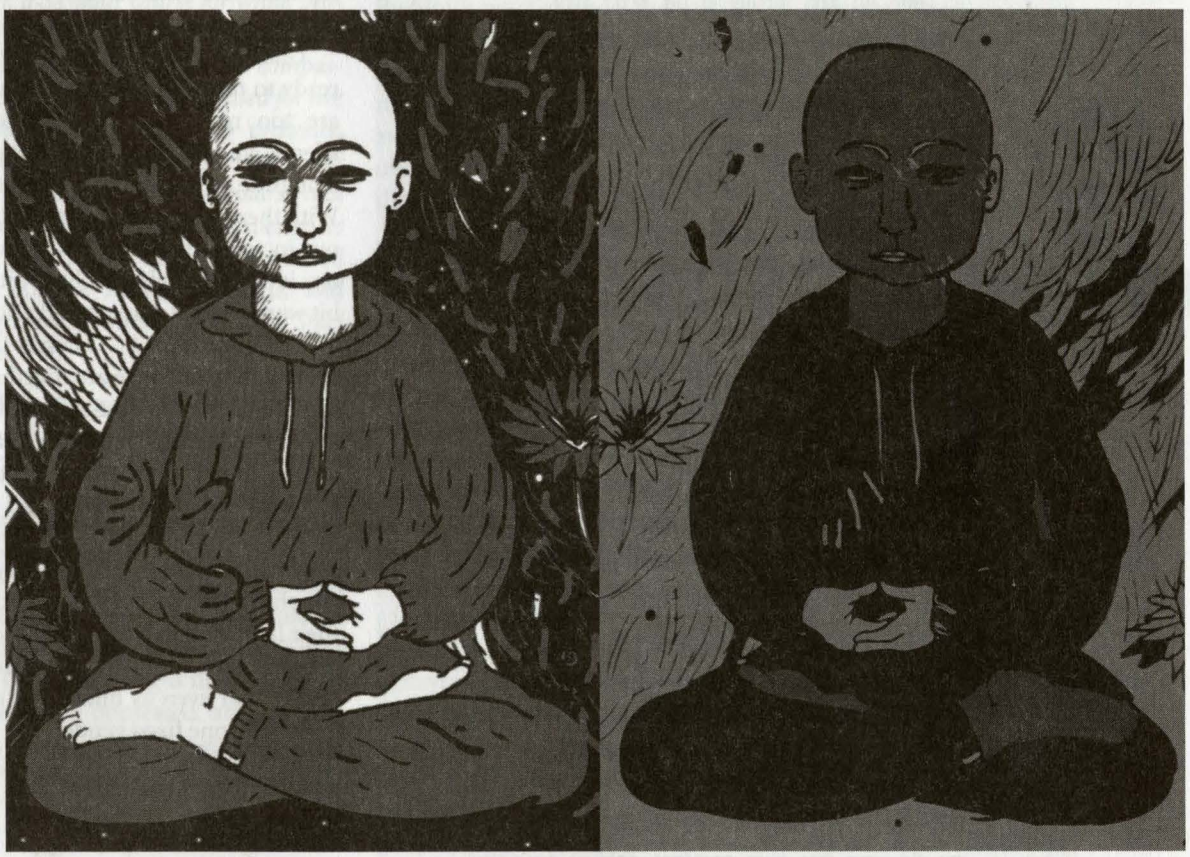
Yeah, I know I was naive. About as naive as any teenager could be, coming up in those times. Naive, but not stupid. So when I found myself being ignored by my white professors in graduate school even when I rose my hand to answer a question, when I found myself early in my career passed over for promotions in favor of mediocre white colleagues who had less experience but personal connections with my white superiors, when I saw myself reflected in the eyes of hostile white shopkeepers and waiters who could barely tolerate serving me, I knew that it was going to take a very long time for that dream to be realized—if ever. In the meantime, there was life to be lived, a career to be forged, partners and family members to love and lose, a progressive racial, gender, and LGBT consciousness to be awakened and nurtured, and eventually, even students to teach—students like the one here before me now, stirring up old memories of hope, reminding me of how vulnerable the young are and how easily hope can be dashed.

"So is this what it's come to?" I ask myself, as I listen to my student's protestations. "Will we ever find a way to break through the fear and distrust over socially constructed differences based on something as minor as the shade of our skin or the texture of our hair?" Now here, in the quiet space of my office, I see a glimpse of

the answer that this postmodern, post–Civil Rights era has produced: a young, straight Black male who has benefited from the fight for civil rights by getting one of the best educations possible, while also being subjected to the same tired level of ignorance and prejudice that his predecessors had to face. And what he is telling me is this: "Enough. I'll work alongside them. I'll sit next to them on the bus. But as for the rest—take it back. You can have it. I don't want it."

As we talk, I watch what arises for me: feelings of compassion for my student, sadness at the world's multitude of prejudices and intolerances, feelings of recognition for my student's struggle to be whole and healed in a world that would have it be otherwise, and indeed—feelings of déjà vu. For much of the dynamic he is complaining about is also present in another world I travel in, the world of mostly white American Buddhist sanghas that I have participated in over the years.

Like many people of color, I have come to these communities to seek respite and solace from the big and small daily slights and insults I have to deal with regularly because I am a person of color in a majority white society. Unfortunately, we are often met with the kind of racism (largely unconscious, I believe, but still extremely harmful) that drives many white Buddhists to approach us with fear, trepidation, and ignorance. Like the white woman who challenges me when I try to park in our meditation center's small parking lot because she assumes I am trying to illegally steal a parking space, as opposed to being the longtime member that I am. Like the white man at a mostly white-attended dharma talk who describes how his boss is a jerk because the boss "uses the word, 'nigger' all the time." Without any sense of how the use of the word will impact me and another Black friend attending the same talk, the white man uses it over and over again, as if he were trying to exorcise it from his consciousness, a consciousness that seems a bit too familiar with the term as well. Like whites who ask friends of color I know who were born in this country if they speak English, simply because these friends do not fit the majority-culture stereotype of what an English-speaking American is supposed to look like. Or the feelings of frustration I feel every time I hear a white teacher give a dharma talk in which application of the practice is totally divorced from any analysis of the way in which white Western Buddhist communities constantly ignore the systemic nature of racism and other forms of oppression or the ways in which those same communities may be contributing to the perpetuation of that oppression in their own backyards.



Hamlet Mateo
colornoncolor

Like my student, I too have grown weary of these kinds of experiences, and feel the need to separate myself from white people from time to time, at least the kind of white people who contribute to keeping this dynamic alive either by action or inaction. That is why I attend the wonderful people of color (POC) retreats that have blossomed on the West Coast in recent years. Here, we can come together and rest in the lap of the dharma without having to worry about, hear disturbing comments made by, or take care of white people. Here, we can sit in silence together and savor these moments of contemplation and community.

My romance with POC retreats is not as naive as my

Hamlet Mateo lives in Sonoma County, California. His work can be viewed at www.poemcomix.net.

Not Having to Worry About This One Big Thing

by Toni Lester

My student, M*, sits across from me on the other side of my desk. At 21, he already casts a compelling impression: steady, intelligent eyes, an articulate, passionate voice fluent in both the King's English"and the vernacular of his urban childhood home, and a calm yet forceful stance, especially when that forcefulness is called upon to put forth a position or an argument.

"I am tired of all these white people," he says. "Separation of the races—that's what we need. I say, let's go back to the days when whites and Blacks only interacted out of necessity, not out of some false notion about our common humanity, or the promise of it."

He is the best and brightest of his cohort. A verbal, mathematical, and intellectual Wunderkind. If he so chooses, he will go far in the white man's world. "Look into my crystal ball," I tease him. "In your future I see a large McMansion, a six-figure salary, and stock options. You, my friend, can have it all."

Mine is the generation of Blacks that was supposed to stand proudly in the halls of dismantled Jim Crow education and make our mark on the world.

"But at what cost?" he implores. We are talking about race—our favorite topic—and he is not happy.

"All that talk about integration and loving one another from the Civil Rights era, that was just a lot of BS," he says. "You know I don't mean to be disrespectful to Martin Luther King and those other guys, but come on—they had it wrong. What we need to do is stick with our own. Support our own businesses. Stay in our own communities. I'm willing to be cordial to some of them. Hell, even friends with one or two, but that's it. I'm sick of wasting my time trying to get *them* to feel comfortable with *me*. From now on, I'm all about being Black and for real."

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Soma

Teach me how to jump through this hoop
of fire; teach me how to run rings round
its rainbow colours. This gnosis, this gnosis
is fomenting like deities tripping over each other
over letters, over dwellings. I am mixing up
my silk ribbons - my white subdues
while his red calms me. The blue and green
are turning protective and possessive
as Yama, his eyes leering at my every step,
my every stir as if one false start might shatter
these states, these continents, these countenances.
I need to not wear black any longer, all nine
coats of arms like something needed to go away.
I need to go away; I need to go away into
his safe arms that will take me. I need his hand
to guide mine over the fire that will burn me
into renunciation. I don't even need a staff,
just something to help me walk after he's broken
my shin and snapped my knee caps. That is how
he makes me feel, do you see? That is how Soma
makes me feel. He's dressing me in stages like
a proper ordination, stripping me down to put
each of my three robes on again, and again,
and again. Then he drops my alms bowl,
so I bend over to pick it up. Then he places
my hand towel in my brass pot and starts
shaving my head and face. I am shaved into
dullness. I am shaved into discipline, meditation
and wisdom. He calls it love as he counts
the number of pleats on my garment, then
the folds of my body. He touches me, sieving
my old ways into pure countries, only to dissipate.
But I never dissipate as he takes me into more
and more snowy mountains with horizons lost.

—Desmond Kon Zhicheng-Mingde

A former journalist in Singapore, Desmond Kon Zhicheng-Mingde has edited 13 books and produced three audio books. His poetry anthologies include For the Love of God, *which was exhibited at the Prague International Poetry Festival.*

ideas were about racial healing when I was younger, however. Ours is a rich heterogeneous community of poor people and people of means, women and men, heterosexuals and LGBT people, Christians, atheists, and people of other faiths, youth and elders. Students and dharma teachers of color alike come from a vast array of diverse viewpoints and backgrounds. To pretend that we are all the same would be unwise and possibly even dangerous. As we continue to grow and thrive in our newfound communities of color, I hope we can learn from the mistakes of our white counterparts and find ways to honor these differences with open hearts by using a nonjudgmental beginner's mind of curiosity and respect for each other that does not replicate the mainstream systems of hierarchy and oppression that have damaged us for so long.

Unlike my student, however, I am also not quite ready to throw in the towel on all white people. There are too many teachers, mentors, former partners, friends, and fellow spiritual travelers who have worked alongside me for justice and equality for me to do that. With these white people, I will always be ready to reach out in solidarity and friendship. So I guess when the day is done, I am both a little bit optimistic and a little bit wary when it comes to all of this. I am thrilled to be able to sit with my POC family from time to time, and I know that when we are together there is at least one big thing that we do not have to worry about. I will also stay connected to my white allies, for whom I have a deep appreciation and respect, and while I can't do the work for them, I will send metta to those white people in our sanghas who are living in ignorance about race, in the hopes that they will one day embrace the challenge of seeing how racism plays itself out in their lives. And as always, I will continue to watch what arises in each moment, one breath at a time, remembering that even as others tell me I can only be one fixed race, one fixed gender, one fixed and unchanging thing in this lifetime, my liberation and the liberation of all beings ultimately lies in the falling away of all of these societally imposed identities. ❖

*The student's remarks are a composite of conversations I have had with many students of color during my 18 years of teaching.

Toni Lester is a writer, consultant, teacher, and activist whose work examines the connections between multiple forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. She is the editor of Gender Nonconformity, Race, and Sexuality: Charting the Connections *(University of Wisconsin Press, 2003). She serves on the board of the Astraea Foundation for Justice and has been meditating for 35 years.*

A Buddhist Way to Unlearn Racism

A Conversation with Vanissar Tarakali

by Urusa Fahim

Vanissar Tarakali received her Ph.D. in East-West psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies, and her doctoral dissertation focused on how to address three obstacles to white antiracist action: racial shame, denial, and isolation. In 2000, Vanissar created and cofacilitated "Compassionate Transformation: A Buddhist Way to Unlearn Racism" (CT), a 54-hour course for white people sponsored by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. CT incorporates community-building, education, compassion, and spiritual practices. Vanissar participated for five years in various intensive antiracist group processes, including the UNtraining, BASE (Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement), Visions, Stir Fry Seminars, and Todos. Vanissar combines insights from these experiences and Buddhist retreat experiences. Her chief spiritual mentors are Tsultrim Allione, Adzom Rinpoche, and Phyllis Pay. The Somatics and Trauma approach of Staci Haines also informs her work.

Vanissar Tarakali

Urusa Fahim

Urusa: I am intrigued by your research on unlearning racism using Buddhist practices. What brought you to this work?

Vanissar: A few streams brought me to the work. I experienced sexual abuse when I was a kid. It was an experience of having my options limited for a long time by someone with power over me. Ever since, I have hated it when power differences are covered over while people pretend that everything is fine. I know in my body what it's like to be oppressed, and it's very important to me as a white person to do whatever I can to dismantle racism, because I don't want to be a perpetrator of oppression in any way.

Another stream is that I've lost some significant relationships with people of color in my life because of my lack of awareness of white privilege. There's a lot of loss there that I regret. I don't want ignorance of white privilege to control whether or not I get to have close relationships with people of color.

I wanted to understand why I keep falling asleep about racism, forgetting that racism is all around me, benefiting me. So I exposed myself to antiracist concepts and political analysis, and yet I found that my behavior wasn't changing very much. So for example, I could be sitting on the BART train and maybe an African American man would sit down beside me and my body would subtly flinch and shrink away. And this, after years of knowing that I've been *trained* to think of Black men as menacing to me as a white woman. I *knew* that, but my body was still flinching. I felt paralyzed. I didn't know what to do.

Urusa: Are you saying that just knowing theories about what perpetuates racism is not enough?

Vanissar: Yes. After I became a Buddhist I started using Buddhist practices and meditations to help me stay awake about racism, and also to relax the shame I felt about white privilege. I noticed that the more I focused my Buddhist practices on racism, the more I could stay awake and listen to people of color without defensiveness. I could act more spontaneously. That was a breakthrough for me.

So those are some of the things that brought me to my research. I wanted to find out: If a group of white people were to use Buddhist practices to unlearn racism, would it help them the same way it had helped me?

In my research about what I call the "psychology of unlearning racism," I looked at three obstacles: shame, denial, and isolation. I picked these because they were really up for me.

I looked at racial shame more than at racial guilt. Guilt and shame are often confused. Guilt is about actions, whereas shame is about who one *is*. Racial guilt may come up if I realize I've said something racist. With guilt, I can apologize and change my behavior. But racial shame is more complex. Shame is feeling as if there is something inherently flawed about me that I cannot change. For a white person, racial shame can mean that I deeply believe that my people are, or that I am, inherently oppressive to people of color.

Denial is the second obstacle. I kept noticing I was falling asleep and not seeing how people of color were treated. Denial among white people is well documented. Denial of racism obviously stops white people from taking responsibility for racism.

And then there's isolation between white people. I noticed that I didn't want to have anything to do with white people who weren't actively fighting racism. I wanted to get away from them.

Urusa: There are many different theories and practices out there about unlearning racism. Why did you choose Buddhism?

With a Buddhist understanding of interconnectedness, I realize I'm getting harmed, too, even when I seem to benefit from the unequal division of priviledge that shortchanges people of color.

Vanissar: Buddhism works for me. And practice is a very Buddhist idea. I need to see unlearning racism as practice so that I can be OK with making mistakes. I need to practice staying kind to myself when I think a racist thought. It's all about practice: practicing listening to people of color, practicing talking about racism, practicing interrupting racism—practicing these things so much that they become embodied. Then I can behave in a spontaneous way. And I need to have the humility of knowing I'm not going to finish. I will always carry privilege, and I need to keep practicing.

Another connection with Buddhism is interconnectedness. With a Buddhist understanding of interconnectedness, I realize I'm getting harmed, too, even when I seem to benefit from the unequal division of privilege that shortchanges people of color. When I see injustice happening, I can realize that the person who is suffering is me.

It's difficult for white people to see institutionalized racism because of our habitual focus on the individual: What am *I* doing? What am *I* not doing? There's such a focus on *me* that the ability to see the larger picture—the institution and the collective—is impaired. Buddhism is a powerful antidote to that tunnel vision.

Urusa: Which Buddhist practices relate most directly to your work?

Vanissar: Awareness practices are useful—being present with yourself. The more white people can be present with their thoughts and their emotions and body sensations, the more we can notice when racist assumptions inform our behavior and the more we can choose how we want to act. So awareness practices are really key. At the same time, it's important to infuse those awareness practices with kindness towards yourself.

If I become aware of my racist assumptions and immediately chastise myself, I will probably stuff down that awareness because I want to see myself as a good person. So the awareness must be a compassionate awareness, so that I can say, "Oh, this is what's here, and I'm going to treat myself with kindness." The more compassionate I am towards myself and towards racially naive white people the more I will be able to stay present to notice racism in myself, and the more I will keep questioning those assumptions and breaking down those automatic racist behaviors.

It is essential for white people to practice speaking up about racism. There are not many environments where it's OK for white people to talk about racism, so we don't get a lot of practice. We don't have the vocabulary and it's not a comfortable thing to do. But how can white people educate each other about racism if we can't talk about it? So practicing talking about racism, naming it, making it visible, those are really important, and that's a practice. It also prepares white people to not freak out every time a person of color talks about racism.

At first, we practice talking about racism in community with other white people. The sangha is really important. Each individual is not only practicing kind awareness of what's going on with them, but also extending that kindness to each other. Instead of sitting in judgment on each other, you're actually cultivating kind awareness for whatever comes up, so it *can* come up, and so it can air out. It helps to have a space where there is a feeling of mutual trust and respect in order to talk about these things, a space where people can make mistakes. It doesn't mean not challenging people, it means doing so in an atmosphere of compassion.

When individual white people start becoming more aware of racism and wanting to do something about it, it's common for them to think, "I'm the good white person, I'm trying to do something about racism, and you over there, you're the bad white person, you just said something racist, and I want to get really far away from you." So it's important to realize that all white people have been conditioned together, and we're going to get out of this together. Because racism is a collective system of oppression it's going to take a lot of white people together to own up to it and dismantle it.

If I recognize that all white people have this conditioning inside us, then who am I to judge other white people? When a white person who cares about racism avoids other white people, a divide is created. People get competitive about who is the most enlightened white person.

And it's a profound obstacle to coming together as a collective, healing each other, and working through all this conditioning. How can we get together when we're busy saying, "Get away from me; I'm not like you!" Isolation is a profound obstacle to white people taking collective antiracist action.

The third obstacle to white antiracist action that I look at is shame. Shame fuels denial and isolation.

Urusa: How do you define racial shame?

Vanissar: Racial shame is the sense that I'm bad because I'm white, or my people are bad because they're responsible for horrible things like genocide, slavery, internment camps, and so on. I come from these people, so I'm bad. And that racial shame can amplify any other shame I might have.

For example, I might have shame from a past trauma. Shame is a natural reaction to trauma, so any personal or social trauma I might have in my history, such as the personal trauma of family violence, or the

social trauma of sexism or homophobia, leaves a residue of shame in the body.

There can be many streams of shame percolating inside us, and all these sources of shame bleed into each other. I may be benefiting from white privilege because my ancestors had a chance to gather wealth by financially exploiting people of color. And I feel not just guilt, but shame. And there is plenty to fuel that shame: as a white person I benefit from racism every day. If I face that and I already have shame from other sources, it can be overwhelming and paralyzing.

Urusa: How do people cope with shame?

Vanissar: I've learned in my research that shame is unbearable. It is difficult to hold in conscious awareness, so people have many strategies to cope with it or avoid it, such as going into denial, getting angry or defensive, blaming others, self-isolating, becoming self-absorbed, or looking for absolution. And all of these coping strategies get activated by racial shame. When a person of color tells me, "What you just said excludes me," or "erases my experience," shame might make me become defensive and rebuke them, or tell them they need to transcend their reaction.

Urusa: I find myself being embarrassed by that shame, so I often try to make things OK for the white person, even though I know it's not my job to do so.

Vanissar: What do you pick up on?

Urusa: It comes from living in the margins. I have to pay a lot of attention to dominant groups so I can adjust myself accordingly. So when I pick up on the shame, I feel as if I am responsible for doing something about it.

Vanissar: That fits right into another coping strategy for white racial shame: seeking absolution from people of color. I might go up to a person of color and confess something, and hope they will absolve me. You can get "absolved" all you want but it doesn't mean you aren't white and aren't participating in racism. That "absolved" white person is living in a delusion. Racial oppression is something people of color have to survive every day, and when you say, "I want you to absolve me," that's like someone battering their partner and feeling remorse later and saying, "Honey, remember all the things you love about me?" instead of making amends or taking responsibility.

Another way of avoiding shame is self-absorption. Everything leads back to "me." The conversation about racism gets turned back to white people: what about *my* pain?

Urusa: Yes. Recently, I heard someone saying "People of color keep talking about their pain but what about my pain? What about the abuse I've suffered? No one cares about that." What do you think about that?

Vanissar: That kind of self-absorption will continue until shame is dealt with. And the appropriate context in which to do that is with other white people.

Urusa: So the way for white people to erase racism is to work with other white people? Why is that?

Vanissar: It's white people's responsibility that racism exists, but it will take a collaboration between white people and people of color to dismantle it. For white people to be able to work with people of color authentically, we need to work through that shame. That involves white people saying a lot of stuff that people of color don't want to hear. It can be very wearying for people of color to sit in a room listening to white people share their misconceptions about people of color. But those things need to be brought to light if they are going to be addressed. There's stuff that white people need to say, but it could be re-traumatizing for people of color to have to listen. It's often inappropriate for people of color to be in the same room while white people are doing that.

Guilt and shame are often confused. Guilt is about actions, whereas shame is about who one is.

Urusa: What is the role of white allies in this work?

Vanissar: The ultimate goal is collaboration between people of color and white people. But it has to be genuine and authentic collaboration, not a quick "we're all interconnected, everything's fine, so let's collaborate." We *are* all connected, but most white people aren't ready to dialogue with people of color.

The ultimate goal is multiracial collaboration and alliance building to dismantle racism. But the initial paths to that goal of collaboration are different for white people and people of color. For people of color, healing from internalized oppression is critical. This is not my area of expertise, but I have heard that it is rarely safe for people of color to do deep racial healing in the presence of white people.

In order to heal from internalized oppression one needs to express anger and rage and tell it like it is without censoring oneself. But if that expression happens in the presence of white people who are just starting to deal with their racial shame, they take it personally. They get upset, and want to be soothed. That doesn't work for anybody.

It is important to create compassionate all-white

spaces where white people can get healed enough, and resilient enough, that they can hear the anger of people of color. Then, instead of getting defensive, they can be open and expansive, they can listen and dialogue and take action.

And it *is* possible. I have found myself increasingly able to stay present with whatever people of color need to say to me about racism. I am less and less defensive, and it's directly related to working through my own shame, racial and otherwise.

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The goal of my work is to enable white people to take responsibility for racism. People of color shouldn't have to try to teach us about racism. They shouldn't have to do this work. What if a lot of white Buddhists were so spacious about issues of race and privilege that we could simply say, "OK, I hear you"?

I feel passionate about making space for white people to do that work, but I want to be very clear about what the end goal is. It's not about making white people feel better or letting them off the hook about racism. It's about building this robustness to be able to respond when people of color point out things that are racist. And to respond proactively to racism without having to be told.

Urusa: And to challenge each other?

Vanissar: Yes. And to welcome challenges from people of color.

The last thing I want to say is that there are interventions for racial shame. Shame is a key obstacle to white antiracist action, and if you deal with that you are dealing with a lot of the other obstacles.

Urusa: What kind of interventions?

Vanissar: First, you need to respect the fact that it is profound and well hidden. Accessing shame is difficult because if you access it, it calls up other deeply buried emotions, such as abandonment or despair. Not fun. So to address racial shame, you have to use sophisticated tools.

You can tell people that racism is not their fault. But that's just talking. And shame isn't on the verbal level. Trauma studies tell us that shame is deeply embodied. If someone has a personal or social trauma in their current life or in their history, it's important to get help with that. Therapy, especially somatic therapy, is good for that. And doing that healing work will help you become resilient and elastic enough to face racial shame. But you don't want to *only* do your own personal healing work. You want to look at racism simultaneously as a system. You need to work with that, too.

Urusa: You're saying it's important for white people to do their own work because racism happens on a systemic level. It's the people in privileged positions who sustain racism so when they become aware they can do a lot to dismantle the system.

Vanissar: Absolutely. Other things that really help with racial shame are developing a strong white antiracist community that holds you in compassion and holds you accountable. It helps to practice mindful compassion for yourself, and to educate yourself about how racism is not chosen but conditioned. That makes some room for forgiveness. And working on racial shame through the body, through embodied practices and expressive arts, helps heal racial shame. Identifying with some positive aspects of being white also helps, such as learning positive things about your ethnic identity or your family, or if that doesn't work for you, learning about antiracist white people in history whom you admire and reclaiming them as your spiritual ancestors. Finally, engaging in antiracist action helps undo racial shame.

Urusa: What does it mean to be an ally?

Vanissar: To me, being an antiracist ally means listening to people of color, believing them, respecting their experience. It means educating myself about institutional, individual, and cultural racism and white privilege. It means noticing white privilege and racism in my daily life, and in the world around me, and speaking up about racism when I see it. Being an ally also means supporting the leadership of people of color. In the long run, being a white antiracist ally means engaging in white collective antiracist action and participating in authentic multiracial alliance building and collaboration. ❖

Urusa Fahim, Ph.D., is the diversity and outreach coordinator at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and adjunct faculty at California Institute of Integral Studies and St. Mary's College of California. Her doctoral research is on the development of cultural sensitivity in individuals.

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(with thanks to Mushim Ikeda-Nash)

How to Be a White Ally to a Person of Color

✻ **LISTEN DEEPLY** without interrupting or telling your own story. Don't analyze or interpret what you hear.

✻ **BE AWARE** of your own reactions, thoughts, and feelings.

✻ **VALIDATE** by repeating as accurately as you can, "What I heard you say was _____."

✻ **ASK**, "What can I do?" or "How can I be your ally?"

Guidelines for Being a Strong White Ally

by Paul Kivel

What does an ally do? Being allies to people of color in the struggle to end racism is one of the most important things white people can do. There is no one correct way to be an ally. Each of us is different. We have different relationships to social organizations, political processes, and economic structures. We are more or less powerful because of such factors as our gender, class, work situation, family, and community participation. Being an ally to people of color is an ongoing strategic process in which we look at our personal and social resources, evaluate the environment we have helped to create, and decide what needs to be done.

Times change and circumstances vary. What is a priority today may not be one tomorrow. What is effective or strategic right now may not be next year. We need to be thinking with others and noticing what is going on around us so we will know how to put our attention, energy, time, and money toward strategic priorities in the struggle to end racism and other injustices.

Here are some general guidelines compiled from people at workshops.

• Assume racism is everywhere, every day.
One of the privileges of being white is not having to see or deal with racism all the time. We have to learn to see the effect that racism has. Notice who speaks, what is said, how things are done and described. Notice who isn't present. Notice code words for race, and the implications of the policies, patterns, and comments that are being expressed.

• Notice who is the center of attention and who is the center of power.
Racism works by directing violence and blame toward people of color and consolidating power and privilege for white people.

• Notice how racism is denied, minimized, and justified.

• Understand and learn from the history of whiteness and racism.
Notice how racism has changed over time and how it has subverted or resisted challenges. Study the tactics that have worked effectively against it.

• Understand the connections between racism, economic issues, sexism, and other forms of injustice.

• Take a stand against injustice.
Take risks. It is scary, difficult, and may bring up many feelings, but ultimately it is the only healthy and human thing to do. Intervene in situations where racism is being passed on.

• Be strategic.
Decide what is important to challenge and what's not. Attack the source of power.

• Don't confuse a battle with the war.
Behind particular incidents and interactions are larger patterns. Racism is flexible and adaptable. There will be gains and losses in the struggle for justice and equality.

• Don't call names or be personally abusive.
Since power is often defined as power *over* others—the ability to abuse or control people—it is easy to become abusive ourselves. However, we usually end up abusing people who have less power than we do. Attacking people doesn't address the systemic nature of racism and inequality.

• Support the leadership of people of color.
Do this consistently, but not uncritically.

• Learn something about the history of white people who have worked for racial justice.
We have a long history of white people who have fought for racial justice. Their stories can inspire and sustain you.

• Don't do it alone.
You will not end racism by yourself. We can do it if we work together. Build support, establish networks, work with already established groups.

• Talk with your children and other young people about racism.

Paul Kivel is an educator, activist, and writer on issues of violence prevention and social justice. He is the author of Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice *(New Society Publishers, 2002). You can contact him or access his work and other resources at* www.paulkivel.com.

Perpetual Foreigners in Our Own Land

by Patricia Wong Hall

As a lifelong resident of San Francisco and longtime Buddhist peace activist, I am continually stunned by the question, "What country are you from?" A large European American man at an interfaith spiritual gathering asked me this question recently. He thought I was from Tibet, even though I have an American accent and was not wearing anything Tibetan. My usual response is to say that I am an American—an Asian American—or that my family has lived in the U.S. for five generations. But this question puzzles me. I guess I am tired of having to answer it every month or two, my whole life.

Though my family has lived in the U.S. for several generations, like many Asian Americans, we are still treated like "perpetual foreigners" in our birth land. Rick Fields spoke of this strange phenomenon in his article "Confessions of a White Buddhist" (*Tricycle*, Fall 1994): "[Asian Americans] are still vulnerable to the psychic ambush of some chance acquaintance remarking blandly one fine Sunday morning that they sure do speak English well. This racism has been the nightmare squatting at the heart of the American Dream since the very beginning."

As a human being, I am given countless opportunities to choose how I am going to react in any given situation.

Many Asian Americans have roots here dating back to the 1800s or earlier, with the California gold rush and railroad projects, so it surprises me when I still get asked where I am from. It makes me feel like I don't belong here. Asian Americans are always foreigners; to be an "American" means to be white. The repetitive nature of this question is so painful to my spirit. And these days, the prevailing anti-immigrant sentiment intensifies the effects of these questions for many people of color.

I have experienced racism on the individual and institutional level from strangers, friends, relatives, institutions, companies, in stores, in restaurants, on job interviews, and elsewhere since I was a child. Years ago, my religion and race were both ridiculed simultaneously. It will take years to heal from such a toxic experience. These experiences are an assault on the life essence or the core of a human being, not just on his or her identity.

When European Americans tell people of color that they do not want to hear sad stories about racism anymore, this is white privilege. This option is not available to people of color. Expressing our emotions is healthy, not something to be feared or avoided.

When people of color share their stories about racism with European Americans, they are only hearing about the harm that has been done, while people of color have actually had to live through the pain.

European American allies or others can support people of color by standing with us in our pain and by not leaving when the stories are too tough to bear. Stories about racism by people of color are healing and help build compassion within us all. European Americans can simply listen and not judge or criticize as people of color speak truth to power. As people of color, we can teach European Americans how to be allies. And European Americans with extensive experience in diversity training or anti-oppression work can teach other European Americans how to be effective allies to people of color.

I have been and continue to be an ally to African Americans, Latinos/Latinas, whites, and others. There is a feeling of comradeship when this occurs. We can all benefit from learning to share the limited resources and power that exist on this planet. What is required is mutual respect and trust, being accountable for our actions, rejecting racism, and understanding how white privilege interfaces with all of these issues, especially at the institutional level. Lessening our collective critical spirit and working for greater unity among peace activists would benefit the movement globally.

My roles as a peace activist, artist, author, and diversity consultant are challenged continually, as is my compassion. As a human being, I am given countless opportunities to choose how I am going to react in any given situation. I realize that I am experiencing the other's ignorance. Nonetheless, the pain is still there. I try to take responsibility for my actions, as I hope others will. ❖

Patricia Wong Hall, M.A., has coauthored a book on bias crimes, Anti-Asian Violence Against Asian Americans and Asian Canadians in North America. *She is a lifelong Buddhist, writer, poet, visual artist, and diversity consultant, and runs a business called Image Consultants. She gives talks on race and gender issues and has worked as an organizer and director for several multicultural nonprofit groups.*

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

by Susan Moon, with Maia Duerr and Mushim Ikeda-Nash

It's Martin Luther King Day, 2007, as I write this. I'm at my desk at the Buddhist Peace Fellowship office, an organization that works for social justice. Martin Luther King Jr. is one of our heroes, our bodhisattvas.

In the summer of 1964, I was in Mississippi helping with voter registration for African Americans. Another white college girl (we still called ourselves "girls") from the North and I stayed with an African American couple in the little town of Moss Point (now ravaged by Katrina). Mr. and Mrs. Matson took a big risk by participating in the Civil Rights movement and making room for us in their tiny house. Once during that summer they went away overnight to visit relatives, and before they left, Mr. Matson took me into their bedroom, lifted the mattress, and showed me a rifle. "I want you to know it's there in case anybody gives you any trouble," he said. At that moment I grasped the danger in which they lived their lives—all the time—because of racial hatred. Years later, I still have to remind myself, as a white person, that people of color are physically endangered by racism.

In December 2005, a piece of hate mail was shoved under the door of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship office, bringing with it a chain of suffering, mistakes, and learning for our small organization. The karmic unfolding still continues—we are not through with it yet. This article is part of that unfolding, a coming-out story of sorts about a painful episode in our life at the BPF office. I was on sabbatical when the initial events occurred, and so, taking neither credit nor blame, I hope to speak without defensiveness.

Mushim Ikeda-Nash and Maia Duerr have both collaborated with me on the writing. We share our experience with you in the hope that others can learn from our mistakes and become better allies to one another.

What happened

On Friday, December 9, 2005, Maia Duerr, BPF's executive director, returned to the BPF office in the afternoon after a trip to the post office. She picked up a flyer from the floor of the entryway into the building. It was evidently from an African American woman in the neighborhood, whom I'll call "B," saying that her father used to have his home and music store several doors down the street from the BPF office. You had to study the page crowded with bold block letters to figure out that B's father had lost his home, in this increasingly gentrified neighborhood. Apparently some of the people with the development company that took over the property were of Asian ethnicity. The flyer, which could be described as a rant, included the following statements:

"JAPS ARE NOT WELCOME IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD."

"MAKE THEIR LIVES DIFFICULT."

"THE JAPS AND WHITES WOULD KILL A BLACK MAN BEFORE THEY WOULD LET THEIR PROPERTY GO TO A BLACK MAN. WE MUST DO THE SAME."

The word *Jap* was used 12 times.

A name and telephone number was at the bottom.

I pause here to speak about context and karma. Our office is in the historic Lorin district of Berkeley. I learned from Melody Chavis's book *Altars in the Street: A Neighborhood Fights to Survive* that the first residents of our neighborhood were Ohlone Indians. In the 1820s Spanish ranchers settled here, and the gold rush brought white squatters; the Ohlone were pushed out. In the 1920s, Japanese immigrants came here to farm, soon followed by African American sharecroppers from the South. At the time, local laws actually prohibited people of color from living in the white areas of Berkeley, but they could live in rural Lorin. In 1942, all the residents of Japanese descent were sent to internment camps, losing their homes for good. War workers, mostly poor African Americans from the South coming to work in the shipyards, moved in. Lorin prospered for a while, but in the last 40 years the residents, most of them African American, have suffered from drug wars on the one hand and felt the squeeze of gentrification on the other. Our story is part of a long history of race-related suffering.

The idea of bringing an ally as your supporter and friend to a meeting like this was new to me. It was an object lesson.

The flyer, we learned later, had been left at other offices and homes in the neighborhood, so apparently it didn't target any particular person, but Mushim Ikeda-Nash, who was a member of the BPF staff, is Japanese American.

Maia showed the flyer to the other two staff members who were in the office that Friday afternoon—Mushim was not there—and the three of them decided not to take any action at that time. Having little faith in the police's ability to respond in a positive way, they felt that contacting the police might further upset the African American woman, who sounded unbalanced and was in a target group herself, and that calling the police might make the situation worse and even increase the potential danger for Asian Americans in the neighborhood and on our staff.

They decided to discuss the flyer at the next staff meeting, four days later, on Tuesday, December 13. Maia

"How to Spot a Jap" (1942)

Comic strip published by the U.S. War Department as part of a booklet distributed to U.S. soldiers in China during WW II. Art by Milton Caniff, who did "Terry and the Pirates."

didn't call Mushim, thinking there was little that could be done, and that it might "ruin her weekend."

Maia writes:

> This was a critical decision, and in retrospect I see that it was a serious mistake. At the very least, I should have notified Mushim right away and asked what she needed to feel safe in regard to the situation. I should have given her the option for the police to be contacted and followed up on that immediately. I should have considered the possibility that she might come to the office over the weekend and be the victim of this woman's anger.

Some people came to that Tuesday staff meeting tired and already upset about something else. It was the day after Stanley "Tookie" Williams's execution, and several BPF staff members had been part of the vigil at San Quentin State Prison until after midnight the night before. In the preceding weeks and months, BPF had been working hard against this execution, and everyone was sad and discouraged.

This was the meeting at which Mushim (and several other staff members) saw the flyer for the first time. The purple sheet of paper was passed around the circle, and without warning, Mushim saw in her hands the words, "KICK OUT THOSE JAPS OR/AND MAKE THEIR LIVES UNPLEASANT," and other such phrases. She says, "I felt dizzy and confused, and at first I couldn't take it in." In a state of shock, she passed the flyer on without speaking.

There was some discussion about whether or not the police should be called, but nothing was decided. No one acknowledged that Mushim was Japanese American and was herself in the group targeted by the flyer. No one acknowledged that her safety might have been compromised. She was shocked and dismayed, not only by the flyer itself but also by what she experienced as a lack of empathy from the staff. She herself had to be the one to say, "You know, I'm Japanese American, and I find this frightening."

Because of the holidays, there was no staff meeting for several weeks after that. In January 2006, I returned from my sabbatical and learned about the hate flyer. An extended staff meeting was planned for January 10 to discuss further the BPF response to the flyer. Mushim asked if she could bring an ally to the meeting and we agreed.

In the meantime, at Mushim's suggestion, Maia contacted the Japanese American Citizens' League (JACL). Alison Satake from that organization came to the office and met with several of us about developing solidarity in the neighborhood. This in itself was an important piece of learning for me—I had never even heard of the JACL or of their excellent civil rights work (*www.jacl.org*).

In the first week of January, on her way to work, Mushim walked past the address mentioned on the flyer, where B's father had had his home and music store. A woman in the house across the street shouted repeatedly out the window, "God is watching you!"

The following day, Alison Satake and a white man from the JACL went to the address in question to see if Japanese nationals or Japanese Americans were living there and needed support. As they were standing at the door, a woman came out of the house across the street, yelling profanities at them and shouting, "Get out! Go away!" It seemed likely that the woman yelling was B, author of the flyer.

I called the telephone number on the flyer several times and left a message that I wanted to hear about B's concerns, but nobody ever called me back.

We learned later the unsettling information that the company that purchased B's father's building found a number of guns among the belongings that had been left behind.

(A year later, the empty building has a "For Sale" sign on the door. Through the storefront window, you can see into a room containing nothing but an old upright piano covered with bits of fallen plaster.)

On January 10, Mushim's friend Larry Stephen came to the meeting with her as her ally. He's white, and an old friend and compatriot in antiracism work. He drove from a class he was teaching two hours away in order to support Mushim, and right after the meeting he had to drive all the way back to resume his teaching. The idea of bringing an ally as your supporter and friend to a meeting like this was new to me. It was an object lesson, exemplifying one of the many ways a person can act as an ally. It was also a sign to the rest of us at BPF of how unsafe Mushim felt coming into the office at that point.

At the meeting, we discussed the hate flyer, and several action items resulted having to do with planning a diversity training for the staff and clarifying our organizational relationship to the police and security.

Maia writes:

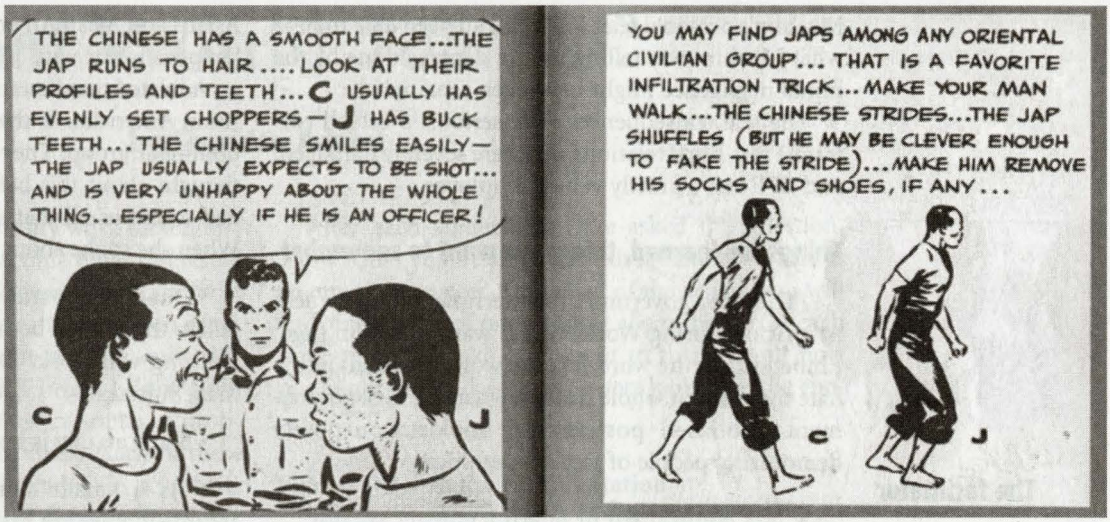
> Over the next two months, we tried to do various things to rectify our mistakes. Many of the things we did came directly from Mushim's suggestions, who remained engaged in the process despite the pain she was experiencing. We looked at our personnel policy and realized there was no provision for this kind of safety issue, so we worked with our board to draft a

basic protocol to follow in case of this kind of event. We had a staff discussion about relationships with the police. We set up a diversity training for the entire staff. I had many conversations with staff members to hear their concerns and confusions, and to share my own understanding of how we might be allies for Mushim, even if we didn't fully understand what was going on.

Through all this, Mushim clearly expressed her anger and her hurt. I tried my best to be open and to understand why she was so angry, why she felt so betrayed by us. And yet, I felt defensive. Wasn't I doing the best I could to deal with the mistakes we had made?

I began to realize that this is where the rubber meets the road. I had been part of diversity trainings before, and I thought I had some awareness of multicultural issues, but never had I been so deep in the thick of it, and never, as far as I know, had I made such a big mistake. It's like the difference between reading about Buddhism and sitting your first meditation retreat.

Over and over, I had to swallow my pride and defensiveness, and practice coming back to the realization that I had absolutely no idea what this must feel like for Mushim. I had never had the experience of having people of my ethnicity be systematically persecuted and killed. (In fact, members of one side of my ethnic heritage, Germans, were once perpetrators of such horrors.) The closest I could come was relating through my experience of being a lesbian.



In February, an experienced facilitator from the Todos Institute for Unlearning Racism [see Resources, page 46] presented a training in diversity awareness for the staff. He was an older white man whom Mushim had recommended to us. We had only two hours for this training. Toward the end of the meeting the facilitator invited anyone to speak out about having been targeted. He encouraged us to say "what we never wanted to hear again." There was a long silence, even though we had just been sharing "what we never wanted to hear again" in dyads, and the room had been filled with lively talk. Then Mushim stood, and told us again how frightening the word *Jap* is to her.

Mushim writes:

> I felt like "the elephant in the room." By saying nothing in this final exercise, the other staff members placed me in the position of being the only person "speaking out" about having been targeted. After some deliberation, I chose to speak rather than remain silent, but it was a painful experience of being once again separated from the rest of the staff rather than included in a community process.

This was a teaching moment in how difficult it can be to act as an ally. I remember wanting to make space for Mushim to express her feelings about what had happened. I thought it would be self-centered to mention any experience of mine in the face of Mushim's much more urgent experience. As Maia said, "We didn't realize that by remaining silent we were once again placing the burden on Mushim to educate us about the hatred that Japanese Americans have faced in this country. We didn't realize that our good intentions were actually compounding the isolation she felt."

In April, after further meetings with Maia and the board, Mushim resigned from her job. In her letter of resignation she wrote:

> The word *Jap* has signified racial hatred, oppression, fear, imprisonment, being illegally deprived of civil rights, being seen as an enemy, being regarded as un-American, and many other negative things to me. Being called a "Jap" or threatened as a "Jap" is one of the worst things I can imagine. I never imagined that others on the BPF staff would not understand this; instead, I had assumed they would express this understanding by immediately offering to be my ally if I were threatened and to protect me as a valued part of the workforce.

We as a group at BPF did not take seriously the threats to one of our staff member's safety that were posed by the flyer. Nor did we honor her emotional safety. None of us asked Mushim the simple question: "What do you need?"

Mushim never got validation that she was in danger and that she had reason to be afraid. We finally said, "I'm sorry you were hurt, I'm sorry we didn't take better care of you," but not "I'm sorry you were in danger." It was more like, "I'm sorry you *felt* in danger." If we had all known and remembered what the word *Jap* meant in the past, we would have been more likely to respond to the danger as danger, not as

Mushim's personal fear. If we had all been able to hear what Mushim was telling us, the damage done by the initial negligence might have been repaired.

The real consequences were serious: a valued colleague was hurt, relationships were severely damaged, and BPF lost a greatly valued employee.

Things we learned, things we want to remember

The U.S. government's internment of Japanese Americans during World War II was not so long ago. Embedded in the word *Jap*, the word repeated on the hate flyer, is that whole history, when the U.S. government published posters and booklets purposely demonizing people of Japanese ethnicity.

The facilitator invited anyone to speak out about having been targeted. He encouraged us to say "what we never wanted to hear again."

• Hate crimes against Asian Americans continue. They are shockingly common.

I have an Asian American friend whose nine-year-old child was teased by his Oakland schoolmates at recess with taunts of "Ching Chong Chinaman!" He hid in the bushes and wouldn't come out until his teacher came to get him. And just the other day, an Asian American man I know was driving on College Ave. in Berkeley and was called a "fucking Chink" by a young white man on a bicycle who felt crowded by his driving.

• American Buddhists owe a huge debt to Japanese Buddhist teachers. Many of the staff at BPF have been practitioners in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, the Japanese Soto Zen priest who came to California in the '60s and founded the San Francisco Zen Center.

• Of course we should also be concerned about racism against African Americans. The structure that has dispossessed African Americans from the start is the same structure that sent Japanese Americans to internment camps.

• The emptiness teachings of Buddhism can be misused to rationalize all kinds of injustice, including racism. In our most enlightened moments we understand that there is "no Black or white, no Asian or Western. We all have Buddhanature." But we live in the relative world most of the time. Enlightenment won't get you across the Golden Gate Bridge by itself; you also need $5.

• Another misunderstanding of Buddhist teaching is the idea that we must not get angry, and must always be smiling and loving. But Buddhism teaches us to practice not turning away from the suffering that's in front of us. Better to connect, even if it means getting upset, than to maintain a frozen calm.

• Racism may manifest as different stereotypes for different racial groups. The stereotype of the "inscrutable Oriental" goes along with the idea that Asians and Asian Americans are unflappable; whatever happens is fine with "them"; "they" will just adapt.

A related manifestation of racism toward Asians and Asian Americans is that they are often invisible to the dominant group. They are not seen at all. I had never thought about this before; Mushim was the one who had to tell us all that she was tired of being invisible. When she spoke about it, I could see that it was true.

• Out of fear, paralysis can set in. We think, "I can't talk to this person because I'm afraid of offending her. Nothing will work." But allies need to be willing to make mistakes.

• Being an ally is hard, and allies need allies, too.

• As a small "spiritual" nonprofit, we tend to assume that we are making ethical choices. It's hard to admit our own mistakes because we are invested in the idea that we are "socially engaged."

* * *

How can white people come to understand that there *is* such a thing as racial fear? How do we practice exchanging self for other?

Some might say that the concept of learning to be an ally is itself not useful in combating the oppression of racism because it focuses too much on solving the problem at the individual level. But I'm *not* saying that when enough white people take enough diversity workshops, then we'll be finished with racism. We need to address the institutionalized racism on which our society is based and we also need to learn to be better allies. The two are connected.

We made mistakes, and we learned some important lessons. Here are three of them:

➤ **Listen carefully and with an open mind to the person who is targeted.**

➤ **Ask what you can do.**

➤ **Don't make assumptions about what it feels like to be in someone else's shoes.**

It was the hate flyer incident that made me decide to focus an issue of *Turning Wheel* on "allies," a suggestion made years ago by Kenji Liu (see guest editorial). Mushim offered to be a coeditor for this issue, and I have learned a great deal from our ongoing dialogue. Both Mushim and Maia worked with me on this article. The hate flyer incident was obviously extremely painful for Mushim; it was also painful for Maia and everyone else on the staff. I appreciate both of them for having the courage to keep thinking, talking, and writing about it, hard as it has been. They have done so with courage and generosity and the hope of making a contribution to the healing of racism in our world. ❖

What Would *You* Do?

by Sheridan Adams

As a result of doing diversity work for a number of years, I have become quite interested in how white folks (even liberal, activist white folks) and people of color often experience their interactions with one another quite differently. About three years ago I began asking both people of color and white folks for examples of problematic interactions across racial lines. Many of these interactions or vignettes are included in a website *(www.learningdiversity.com)* that I developed in 2006.

In this article I offer some of these vignettes, to illustrate scenarios that provide opportunities for white allies to intervene in various ways—sometimes acting in support of a person of color, other times challenging white friends and colleagues to examine their assumptions based on race. These vignettes are based on actual experiences that people reported to me. Most of them are not about obvious acts of bigotry; they focus on the more subtle kinds of assaults that many people of color live with day in and day out. They include statements that are made by well-intentioned white folks who consider themselves nonracist.

After each vignette you are asked the question, "How could you be an ally in this situation?" There is no one right answer. At the end of the article, you will find an example of one possible ally response for each vignette. Please take a moment to think about how you might respond as an ally *before* looking at the end.

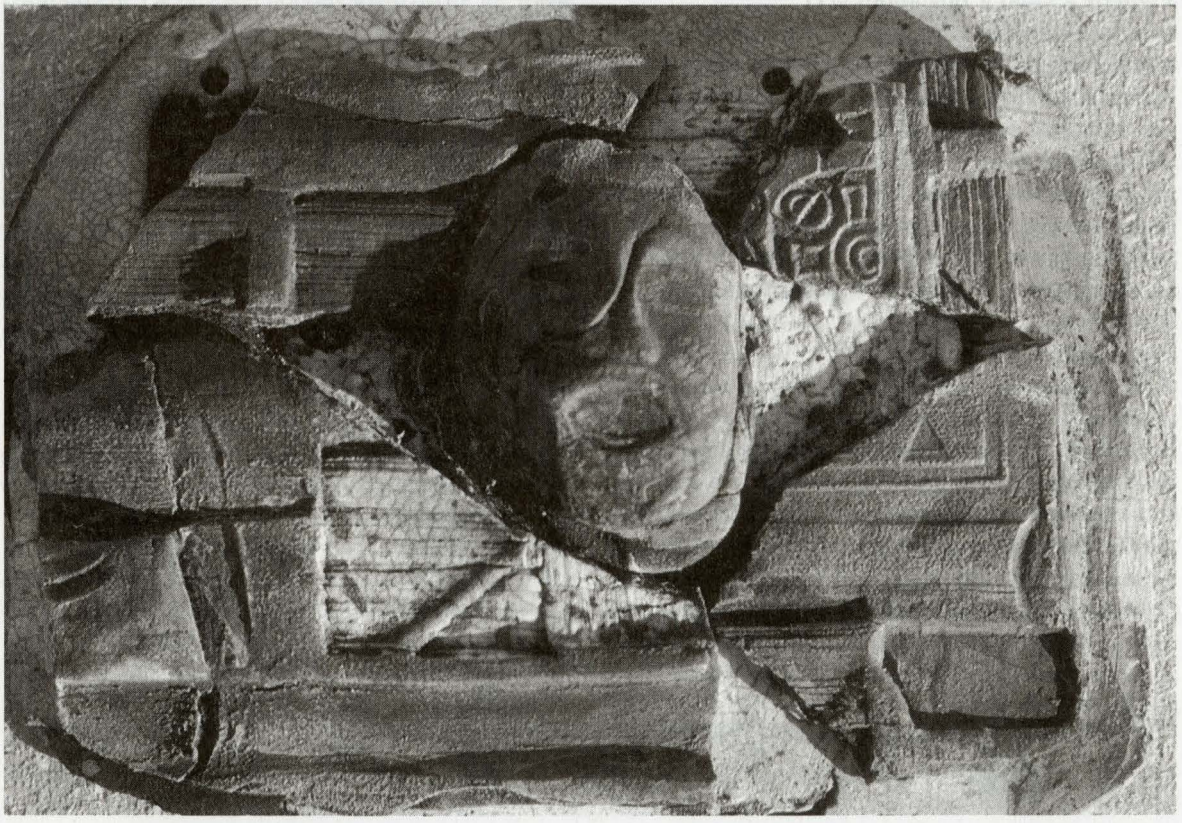
* * *

Vignette #1—At the Nurse's Station

You are visiting a friend in the hospital and want to find out her discharge time. You go to the nursing station to talk to the white charge nurse. There is a man of color standing in front of you attempting to convey to the charge nurse that there is an error in the paperwork she has given him. The man speaks with an accent.

Although you have no difficulty understanding his words, she apparently cannot make out what he is saying. Rather than ask him to repeat what he said she simply turns to you, a familiar-looking white face, and asks, "May I help you?"

How could you be an ally in this situation?



Jan Eldridge
Mask

Jan Eldridge is an artist living in Vallejo, California.

Vignette #2—In the Clothing Store

You are shopping with a white friend in an upscale clothing store in a racially mixed urban area in California. You are looking through a rack of blouses. Noticing the high prices on the tags, your friend says to you, "I don't see how Black people can afford to shop here."

How could you be an ally in this situation?

Vignette #3—At the Company Dinner

You are sitting with a white co-worker and a Black co-worker around a table in a restaurant after your annual company dinner. The white coworker asks Jon, the Black co-worker, "So, where do Blacks stand on the issue of Barry Bonds's alleged steroid use?"

How could you be an ally in this situation?

Vignette #4—On a Buddhist Retreat

You are attending a retreat at a Buddhist center. All of the practitioners are white, as far as you can tell, except for one Japanese American man, Paul. During the morning there is a discussion period in which Paul takes part. He speaks with an American accent. As the group is eating lunch together, the dharma teacher asks Paul, "So when did you come to this country?" Paul's body freezes and he says nothing for several seconds.

How could you be an ally in this situation?

Vignette #5—At a Talk about 9/11

It is three weeks after 9/11. A Muslim leader, born in Indonesia and a resident of the U.S. for 25 years, has been asked to give a talk at a weekly Buddhist sangha gathering. He explains how Islam is a religion that places a high value on peace and that most Muslims are horrified by the 9/11 attacks. During his talk he makes several disparaging remarks about Arabs, including the statement, "Arabs are not trustworthy."

How could you be an ally in this situation?

Vignette #6—On the Subway

You and your white female friend are sitting together on a subway. A woman wearing a scarf on her head has just exited the subway car with two small children. Your friend says, "I guess Muslim women are forced to wear those scarves on their heads even when they're in this country. God, I wouldn't last with an Arab guy for two minutes."

How could you be an ally in this situation?

Possible ally responses:

Vignette #1—Point to the man and take a step backward so as not to cooperate with the charge nurse's dismissal of the man of color.

Vignette #2—Point out to your friend her assumption. "You're assuming that all Black people are poor. There are plenty of middle-class Black people."

Vignette #3—Rather than waiting for Jon to have to respond to the question, you could speak about the unreasonableness of your white co-worker's expectation. You might check in with Jon first: "Is it ok with you if I say something here?" If Jon agrees, you might say, "It seems like you're expecting Jon to speak for his entire race. It would probably sound pretty weird if he asked you 'Where do whites stand on the issue of Mark McGuire's alleged steroid use?'"

Vignette #4—"It sounds like you're assuming Paul wasn't born in the United States. It's hard for Asian Americans to be treated like perpetual foreigners, as though they don't belong in this country in the same way white people do."

Vignette #5—When called on to ask a question, a sangha member says to the speaker, "It seems like you were saying that all Arabs everywhere are not trustworthy. I think it can be harmful to make large generalizations about any racial or ethnic group, and my hope is that we can respond to these attacks without vilifying *either* all Muslims or all Arabs."

Vignette #6—"Hey, I think you're making a few assumptions here. How do you know that she's with an Arab guy? Not all Muslims are Arab. And you're assuming she was forced. Some Muslim women make the choice to wear the *hijab* as a part of their religious practice of modesty." ❖

Sheridan Adams is a European American psychotherapist in Berkeley, California, and a co-chair of the Diversity Council at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. For more vignettes, go to www.learningdiversity.com.

Being an Ally as a Path to Awakening

by Diana Lion

I do ally work because I want to wake up in this lifetime. I am an ally because I know from my own life what it's like to need allies. Very simple, but not always easy. For me, ally practice continues to be a leading edge around awakening, and a lens which clarifies how other aspects of my dharma practice are coming.

A little 411 about me: I am the daughter of a Holocaust survivor. I grew up in Montreal when the province was 95 percent Roman Catholic. In those days Catholic schools taught that the Jews killed Jesus, so I had to endure countless taunts, while crossing the schoolyard, that I had killed God. It was mystifying and scary. If even one kid had stood up for me it would have made a huge difference. Perhaps the other kids would have even started thinking a little for themselves instead of accepting without question the dogma they were being taught (which was later rejected formally by papal edict).

Growing up I was told by non-Jewish friends that I didn't "look Jewish," which was considered the highest compliment. Having had nobody stand up for me made it hard for me to know how to stand up for myself when I "passed" as a non-Jew amongst the French Quebecois, especially when they were talking about *maudits Juifs* (dirty Jews) or telling stories about being "Jewed down" in French. I spoke fluent French so nobody even knew I was English-speaking much of the time. And even as a child I was aware that my family in Austria and Poland might have survived if they'd had people stand up for them during World War II.

When I was a child, an interracial couple lived next door. The man was a Japanese Canadian who'd been interned during World War II in Canada. He'd married a white woman who was institutionalized for schizophrenic breaks numerous times. I loved their kids and hung out with them from time to time. The people on our block often heard screaming inside that house, and their very young girls ran into the street unsupervised. Kids were in and out of each other's houses on the block but never that house. Even as a child, I knew the family needed help, though I had no idea why. But nobody on our street, including my family, ever stepped in. We didn't know what to do and we all looked away from the double stigma of racism and mental illness.

Down the block was a police officer who I think was beating his wife. She couldn't get pregnant, so they adopted two little girls. My friend and I babysat for them. But nobody ever talked about the bruises we saw on Mrs. Johnson's face and arms, or the terrified look on her face as she scurried around the yard. This was before we knew the term "domestic violence." I have no idea what I could have done as a child, but I still regret that I didn't do anything effective for them or for the neighbours* next door to me.

In 1976, questions about race and class came up in the Vancouver Women's Health Collective, where I worked. We were already looking at issues of gender and sexual orientation when explosive emotional issues arose between the women of colour and those who were European Canadian, and between those of different class backgrounds. We started talking deeply with each other, although we were often afraid to say how we felt.

I had to endure countless taunts, while crossing the schoolyard, that I had killed God.

Sometimes people on all sides felt crippling shame and guilt. But despite the pain, some good emerged from the truth-telling. We learned about the suffering of racism and classism, and the importance of speaking out.

I remember listening to friends paint poignant pictures about how racism had affected their lives, saying that within our collective we had been focusing only on women's issues until then, but they considered that a white women's luxury. They had the double whammy of never knowing whether something was happening—housing or employment denied, receiving a lower standard of medical care, being disrespected in personal interactions—because of being female or a person of colour. I remember sitting there and allowing the pain to pierce my heart. It was almost unbearable to realize what my beloved friends had to endure daily. However, it was no longer bearable not to. A new sense of commitment was born inside me. As a European Canadian Jewish bisexual mixed-class woman, I had a commitment to stand up to oppression. Now I had a name for that role: being an ally. It was the start of a new practice. I had no idea what a wakeful, arduous, and lifelong practice it would be.

In 1974 I was introduced to the dharma. From the beginning I looked for ways to combine it with my

social justice work, including the practices of dismantling gender, race, and class oppressions. However none were apparent to me at the time. In the early '80s I was fortunate to receive skilful training from Ricky Sherover-Marcuse and others in "unlearning racism." She, Harrison Simms, and Hugh Vasquez created elegant, nonblaming models which explained how racism and other forms of oppression were learned and internalized, and therefore how they could be unlearned. Many other amazing people of colour and people of European ancestry have contributed to this field. However, I knew of none that included explicit dharma practices and principles.

It was not until 2001 when I was in the Community Dharma Leader training program at Spirit Rock Meditation Center that a dozen of us formed a Diversity Committee to unify our vision of dharma and diversity in a large group context. It was a huge experiment. Later feedback told us our program took effective steps in changing many of the 80 participants' perceptions and fluency around dharma and diversity issues.

Many of us feel shame and fear about being "bad white people" when we make mistakes.

Dharmic diversity work assumes that participants are engaged in dharma practices and are therefore familiar with a nondualistic view of the world. I see it as resting on the following assumptions:

- The ground of all beings is Buddhanature.
- Anything that prevents us from seeing each other's inherent goodness is conditioned, and therefore can be unlearned.
- Anything that prevents us from acting with complete wisdom and compassion is conditioned, and therefore can be unlearned.

As with any practice, motivation is the critical starting point. Being an ally in racial diversity work provides a lens for white-skinned people to see where we do not yet have freedom around race issues. For those of us who have done ally work, many of us feel shame and fear about being "bad white people" when we make mistakes. While doing this work, we need to clarify continually our motivation. Do we want to escape the discomfort of being labelled "politically incorrect"? Do we want to free ourselves and all beings? Do we want a fully textured life? Do we want to be seen as "good white folks"? Do we want to recapture a sense of lost innocence? Some combination?

I remember coleading a class for white allies many years ago. Much shame arose among class members when we asked them to talk about times they had held mistaken assumptions about a member of a different racial/ethnic group. Here's one of mine: The first time I met my friend Walter, a very tall African-American man, I assumed he played sports, and said so. I later looked back on that conversation with great embarrassment. I now know that he's had to field that assumption countless times from people as ignorant as I was then. I was unable to see him—his academic brilliance and absolute lack of any sports interest at all! I was not being intentionally cruel; I was trying to connect with him. However, I was not seeing *him*.

Even well-intentioned blunders are exhausting for people of colour. Much racism now is of this stealth variety—much harder to identify. It requires us allies to be very sharp. As we do racial diversity work, we unpack and unlearn our assumptions, and become better able to listen.

I remember walking into a store with my late partner, a dark-skinned Chicano man, to buy bottled water. The clerk made no eye contact with him and mumbled something under his breath that neither of us could hear when Miguel asked him a question. Yet when he talked to me, he looked me straight in the eyes, talked in a regular tone, and addressed me respectfully as "Miss." It was one of a thousand times when people treated Miguel and me differently. It took a visible toll on Miguel, who couldn't tell if the reaction was personal or race-based. That uncertainty about what is behind shabby treatment is very common, and is part of the oppression.

The suffering of people in non–target groups is different from that of the target group. It is critical not to underestimate the suffering we experience in the non–target group: the tremendous separation from others (people of colour) and from ourselves (having to harden ourselves against the devastation of watching other precious beings being treated horribly). It harms *all* of us to watch, participate in, and be complicit in a system that harms *some* of us. I understood this viscerally after witnessing incidents happen to Miguel repeatedly, and it was reinforced when I saw his daughter treated in racist ways. For instance, many times I watched clerks eye her suspiciously in their stores. I noticed that they didn't watch the white girls with the same vigilance. I experienced some of the protective anger parents of colour may sometimes feel. Miguel and I talked daily about skilful ways to raise Martina. I remember when her brilliant older siblings opted for the security of jobs in a pharmacy and grocery store instead of going to college because they felt the system was too stacked against them. The combination of being brown and poor was overwhelming. I listened to and talked with them both as they made their choices. I will never know what it's like to be them. However, I grieved their dropping their dreams. My heart beat quickly a few months back when Martina hesitantly asked me to edit her college scholarship application essay. It was excellent. Her dad, who'd died the previous year, would have been very proud.

As white allies we have a double listening role: to listen to ourselves compassionately, so that we can

once again uncover that great tender heart that can be touched by the suffering of others. And to listen compassionately to our friends of colour about their experiences with racism.

Cultivating both these abilities is critical for being a skilful ally. We need to learn to keep our seat while listening to pain and suffering about racism. This practice is done without resorting to problem solving or trying to fix the situation out of one's own sense of discomfort. It is akin to a silent meditation practice of returning to staying present over and over, freshly, each moment.

Listening to Anger and Fear

When people have been systematically oppressed, anger and fear may result. It can be healing to express these feelings and be deeply heard and understood. Obviously this does not take the place of correcting racist structures—this is what legislation and affirmative action seek to do. However, people also need a place to speak their truth (one reason why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was so powerful). Sometimes the anger of a person of colour overlays fear and grief and a strong desire to finally be fully witnessed and heard.

While allies may find it relatively easy to listen to sadness, we may become frightened listening to the anger of a person in a target group. Even if the anger is directed towards someone else, we may fear being the next in line. We may turn toward justifications or explain our innocence, becoming defensive and self-absorbed, rather than able to stay present with what the other person is saying. Listening to strong anger can trigger our own experiences of not being heard, of early abuse, or even of our own anger. Yet being able to listen to someone else's experience and anger about it without taking it personally is a critical piece of being a good ally. This does not mean consenting to being someone's punching bag. However, we may feel like that when race issues get heated, because fears come up of being seen as or called racist.

This work takes courage, honesty, and clarity on everyone's part. We cannot do it alone. We need the third jewel of sangha. Listening to anger is a practice that takes full presence, much support, and a willingness to be messy. Even when we have messed up, which may happen often, we can repair our mistakes and heal our relationships without ever doubting our essential goodness.

Not taking things personally is tricky. It applies even when the issues are personal. When addressing a woman of colour I'd known for many years, I used a nickname without asking her permission first. Sounds innocent enough, right? But she was angry. She pointed out to me that she had not said it was OK, and as a woman of colour she wanted to determine how she was addressed. This right has historically been taken away from people of colour by dominant cultures. At first I felt defensive and thought of my many other friends of colour who *liked* my nicknames for them. It took me some minutes to regain my equanimity. Once I did, I could see my mistake and was grateful for the reminder.

Here are some steps I've found helpful in staying present with anger:

1) I pause. I notice what is happening in my body and mind before speaking. I may need to do some emotional first aid on my own heart/mind before I can be present with the other person. In that case, the wisest course is to say I need a minute (or more).

2) Once genuinely present, I listen deeply. How would it be to experience what that person is experiencing? I may or may not use words.

3) I own my part verbally in what has happened.

4) I check with the other person about our connection before problem solving.

5) I ask what the other person wants from me as an ally. I may offer suggestions.

Please note that these steps may not happen in this order in real life!

However, ally work isn't always hard. Miguel and I talked about race, class, and gender issues daily, so were completely comfortable with each other in those arenas. We sometimes teased each other affectionately, using totally politically incorrect language. We'd both smile, knowing we'd gone through enough together to play with each other's stuff.

When Miguel was dying, his two sisters and brother and I sat by his bedside. Afterwards family gathered to tell stories and reminisce through our tears. His youngest sister turned to me and said, "We've gone through so much together, Dianita. Will you be my *hermana* (sister)?"

Being allies with people brings the whole world closer. May all beings without exception be awake and truly free. ❖

We need to learn to keep our seat while listening to pain and suffering about racism.

*Note from *TW*: We have used Canadian spelling throughout this article because the author is Canadian. Canadians have to adapt to American spelling all the time, and so this one time, for the sake of cultural awareness, we diverge from our style sheet. Pseudonyms have been used throughout by the author.

Diana Lion was the founding director of BPF's Prison Program and the associate director of BPF until serious chronic illness forced her into full-time healing. She is a certified trainer in Nonviolent Communication. *She thanks members of her diverse family, plusMushim Ikeda-Nash, Victor Lewis, Ricki Sherover-Marcuse, Lewis Woods, Larry Yang, the Dharma and Diversity Leadership Council, and her friends inside for their ongoing love and support. She aspires to be an active ally for all beings. This article is dedicated to Antonio Vega y familia with love and gratitude.*

A Safe Space for Everyone

A People of Color and Allies Sangha

by Bonnie Duran and Marcos Martinez

[Compiled from discussions and notes from the People of Color and Allies Sangha of Albuquerque, New Mexico]

> "For many years, I was unable to observe the sangha jewel due to the racism I repeatedly experienced at most sanghas."—Isabella Beaulieu

One of the biggest challenges facing American Buddhism is the lack of diversity in many of our sanghas. As practitioners of the dharma, we need to ask ourselves how we can address the racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and other forms of ignorance that we find ourselves surrounded by, which continue to permeate American culture. More important, how do those of us who are members of marginalized groups carry on our practice in such a toxic environment?

Of the three jewels, the sangha can be a difficult proposition for people of color, who seek a safe place to practice but who find the "mainstream" sanghas (if such a word can be used to describe any Buddhist gathering) too fraught with unintentional expressions of racial prejudice.

In an effort to explore these issues, a group of us people-of-color practitioners in Albuquerque, New Mexico, have formed what we call the People of Color and Allies Sangha. The group came into existence back in 2000, when several people from Albuquerque attended a people-of-color dharma retreat at the Vallecitos Mountain Refuge, a wonderful retreat center deep in the Carson National Forest in New Mexico. After a great retreat experience we wanted to continue our Buddhist practice, but many of us felt uncomfortable attending sanghas in which we might be the only person of color, or one of only a few. Some of us experienced isolation from not being actively welcomed or introduced. So we decided to form a new sangha, one that would speak to our needs as people of color. Put simply, we are providing a safe environment for practice, one in which we can be both protected and challenged, our cultural traditions known and honored.

> "I just hope that the sangha can be a place where this healing from racism can exist side by side with our growth in the practice."—Carlos Flores

From its inception, the sangha received great support and encouragement from vipassana teacher Ralph Steele, who traveled down from Santa Fe regularly to sit with our group and share the dharma. The People of Color and Allies Sangha is a loosely structured community made up of 20 members. We meet once a week at the Wat Buddasothorn. The monks at this Thai temple have graciously allowed us to use their space, where they sometimes join us in chanting.

Our weekly meetings include a sitting period, followed by an informal dharma discussion, and occasional visits from dharma teachers or periodic book study. Recently we undertook a guided study of the Paramitas to increase goodwill and integrate the profound teachings of the dharma. This group has formed deep bonds that support our practice.

> "We have had the expertise in the group to establish the talking circle as another way of having dharma reflections and enrich group cohesion at the same time."—Melinda Garcia

One of the values that people of color share is the importance placed on family, and our sangha has the warm and welcoming feeling of family. Our members have supported each other through personal and family crises and have celebrated countless birthdays and other joyous events. As a group we have gone on retreat together to avoid the discomfort of being the only person of color.

Of course, families don't get along all the time and our group has certainly experienced internal conflict. In the beginning the conflict was about the balance of people of color and allies. We also disagreed on the rules we created for inviting new members. This is a semiclosed sangha, which means that any person of color can participate, but non-people-of-color can attend only if they are invited by a person of color. At the beginning, we were already a mixed group, and some felt that the specialness of the group needed protecting. The discussions we had were difficult and required courage, honesty, and nonattachment to particular points of view. This practice of openly discussing difficult topics like racism in Western Buddhism and the role of white people in our sangha may in itself have made some people too uncomfortable to keep attending. As we continue exploring these issues, we often realize the importance of doing this in a group that includes people of color and whites who understand and support our commitment to practic-

ing the dharma in a space that we as people of color feel safe in.

> "My experience of the world seems to approach completeness only when it is informed by the perspectives of individuals whose backgrounds differ markedly from my own. In the context of the sangha, the shared stories and practices of the diverse members support the experience of no-self."
>
> —John Trotter

Recently, we had a conflict about the best way to explore sensitive issues. A well-known group of Buddhist race and diversity trainers was visiting New Mexico, and our group discussed bringing in this team to help us explore these issues through a dharma lens. Some group members felt that our sangha had the expertise internally and should not give up our voices or power to outside facilitators. The outcome of that conflict was that the group, in consensus, decided to forgo the outside-expert facilitation in favor of honoring a group member's strong feeling that we not do it. To many of us, it was an exercise in renunciation and putting the needs of others before our own.

Regardless of the conflicts, we do our best to maintain the goodwill that allows us to continue to meet and go forward. Although we don't have many senior dharma students, most members of the group have a lot of experience in ethnic and class-related conflict resolution, and we draw on those skills. One of our members is in the Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leader (CDL) training program. She brings awareness of the resources of the larger Western Buddhist institutions to our group, and is working with other people of color and allies in the CDL to increase diversity. Our group is aligned with a larger movement to improve the cultural competence of western Buddhist institutions, so that they resonate authentically with communities of color in the U.S.

> "Once we attempt to define and categorize ourselves, we seem to get into struggles over what the sangha should be, instead of letting it simply be what it is."
> —Eileen Gauna

True to the impermanent nature of reality, our sangha is always changing. Over time, people come and go. The members vary in their reasons for participating and in their roles. For some people-of-color members, this is a safe place to investigate issues of race and maltreatment; for others, it's a safe place to go deeper with the dharma.

Our sangha reflects the ethnic and racial diversity of our community. Among other attributes of our group, almost all the members have advanced college degrees, are financially secure, and are over the age of 45. There is good representation of the LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) community.

Members of the sangha with monks from the Wat Buddasothorn temple, where we sit

As our individual practices mature, so too will our sangha. We look forward to the time when the dharma will more fully inform our relationships inside and outside the meditation hall. Our sangha is part of a larger movement to promote greater recognition and understanding of communities of color and other marginalized groups, and of the importance of creating a safe space and dharma home for everyone. We hope our efforts will contribute to happiness, enlightenment and equality for all beings. ❖

Bonnie Duran has been involved with Buddhist practice since 1982. She has taken teachings from many Western, as well as Tibetan, teachers. Bonnie is engaged in the Community Dharma Leader training at Spirit Rock Meditation Center.

Marcos Martinez has practiced Vipassana meditation since about 2002. A member of the People of Color and Allies Sangha, he lives in Albuquerque.

When It Gets Dark, You're Out of There

Reflections of a White Social Worker

by Meg Yardley

Over the last several years, I've spent a lot of time reflecting on what it means to be a middle-class white social worker serving communities made up primarily of low-income African American or Latino residents. Acutely uncomfortable with the feeling of being an intruder and aware of the long history of middle-class social workers entering poor communities to dispense charity, I often find myself asking, "Who invited me here? Who wants me here?"

In many ways, my white skin is a disadvantage, representing a barrier between me and the youth I work with.

These questions have been particularly salient for me when working in school settings in low-income urban areas. In many ways, of course, my white skin is a disadvantage, representing a barrier between me and the youth I work with (and sometimes other staff members). I continue to be struck by the way students and staff recognize me immediately, on sight, as a staff person—usually assumed to be a teacher. In fact, an elementary school student once asked me if I was the new principal! This contrasts sharply with my experience when going into primarily white schools, where I am often assumed to be a student, since I look young. In this way, even in a situation where I am a numerical minority and might be seen as being in a "one-down" position, my white skin is still a form of privilege, a marker of power and authority.

To many staff and parents, I represent the intervention of an outside agency that probably doesn't hold the same values and cultural norms of the community it serves. On a more personal level, I am aware of the privilege I embody, through both my fair skin and blond hair, which grant me an advantaged status in our society, and also through my middle-class background, my experience of having grown up in a safe neighborhood, and my degrees from prestigious liberal arts schools. Not all white people benefit equally from these types of class privilege, but as a group we benefit disproportionately; and so my whiteness is connected to my class privilege, both in the reality of my life and in the minds of my clients.

Although I am committed to fighting racism in myself, other people, and institutions, I am still trying to figure out how to be an ally for social change while representing white power and authority. This tension leads me to ask: What does it mean to me to be a white person working with low-income kids of color?

I can only answer this question for myself, but I hope my thoughts will prompt some new questions and encourage others to reflect upon their own experiences. It means I need to struggle with my own biased assumptions about kids and families. In fact, I struggle to even be aware that I have such assumptions. If I find myself making excuses for a white mother who misses several appointments in a row, explaining to myself that she works full time and is attending school, I have to ask: Do I make the same assumptions about an African American mother who also misses appointments? Or do I tell myself disapprovingly that this mother doesn't really value counseling for her son? It means that other white people often make biased assumptions about "those kids" or "those families" I work with. I search for ways to educate both them and myself.

It means that I am at risk of playing a "missionary," of seeing myself as the savior of those who are "less fortunate." The assumptions underlying this role are patronizing and disempowering to my clients. I have to keep watch for the emergence of this attitude in myself, and for any behaviors that might suggest this attitude to others. Other white people often describe me this way, (making comments such as "Your work is so noble") which could easily reinforce my own "inner missionary" tendencies.

It means that I constantly ask myself how I perceive the community where I work, and how that compares to the perceptions of the youth I work with. When I see a group of young Black men playing basketball in the neighborhood where I work, do I become sad, seeing the dirty asphalt, the scraggly weeds, the broken hoop? Or do I become joyful and inspired, seeing the powerful muscles of the players, the sheer joy of playing, the well-planned strategies of the game? Are these my only two options, or am I also capable of seeing this picture as it is seen by the youth I work with? The answers to these questions might be nothing more than an interesting personal reflection, if my perception of my clients and their communities did not carry so much weight, both with authorities who may influence my clients' lives, and with the larger society.

It means that I work hard to be mindful of the words I use in describing my clients to themselves and to others. Someone recently asked me if many of my clients come from "broken homes." I was completely taken aback, not having heard this term in some time, and it must have showed on my face, as the person quickly corrected herself: "I mean—single-parent

homes." This incident reminded me of how language affects perception. Describing a client's home as "broken" definitely engenders the picture of a hopeless, damaged family.

In addition, the clinical language I am required to use in my assessments and progress notes encourages me to describe people as individuals with individual problems, not as community members affected by social and economic structures. For example, I might find myself writing a treatment goal like "Client will decrease aggressive behavior toward peers," even though I am fully aware that the boy lives in a neighborhood where gunshots are heard daily. Thus I find myself framing the problem as the child's aggression (an individual problem), rather than the community violence that gives him something to be angry about (a societal problem).

This kind of language also tends to be distancing, putting the social worker or therapist in the role of powerful expert and often leaving out clients' voices. I find this disempowerment to be problematic in general, but its implications are even stronger for low-income families of color, whose lives are more subject to control by outside agencies (e.g., child welfare or criminal justice). Therefore, I am continually working to learn more ways to include families' voices and empower them within the process of therapy, as well as to validate the social and economic resources and constraints that affect their lives.

For me, being a white person who works with kids of color means that I must be especially attentive when kids talk (or hint) about racism and racial issues, because my own cultural conditioning teaches me to ignore racism, which may make it hard for me to notice their "hints." When I asked a Haitian American young woman how she felt about her high school, she commented, "Not all kids get treated the same." When I asked further questions about this, she continued to give somewhat vague answers until I directly asked her whether she was referring to racial discrimination, which she was. Like this Haitian American girl, youth and families may not feel comfortable bringing these issues up with me directly; their past experiences of speaking about these issues with white people are likely to have been negative. On many different occasions when I have heard students bring up the issue of race, white teachers have responded with comments like, "Don't use racial words" or "That's racist."

Talking about race and racism usually will not be comfortable for me either. My task is to recognize and sit with that discomfort, while also attending to the youth in front of me. I may even need to be willing to communicate with the person about my own discomfort. And I remind myself often that I may not be seen as an ally, no matter what I think my political views or liberal upbringing ought to imply.

It means I struggle also with kids' perceptions of white people in general, and white women in particular. I have worked with many teenagers who have absorbed images of white women as rich, naive, privileged, and sexually available. In the face of those perceptions, I may feel observed, scrutinized, judged. I may also feel angry, hurt, violated. I may find it more comfortable to focus on the gendered aspects of these stereotypes, becoming angry at the sexism and misogyny they bear. And like many white people, my first impulse is often to become defensive and use terms like "reverse racism" to describe this phenomenon; however, I strive to remember that my white privilege is what has allowed me to spend much of my life without being judged in this way—solely as a member of a group.

When I hear gunshots while sitting in my office, I too am frightened and angry.

It means that sometimes I feel that my whiteness "marks" me—as a threat, as an authority, as a target. I work to be watchful about not allowing these assumptions to shape how I see myself. I also try to learn from this feeling of being "marked." This feeling has something to teach me about the experience of people of color, about racism, and about the power of perception.

It means that sometimes I want to forget my privilege. After all, when I leave the school to get lunch and my only choice is Burger King, I too am affected by the lack of healthy food options in the neighborhood where I work. When I hear gunshots while sitting in my office, I too am frightened and angry. Yet, while acknowledging this reality, I also recognize that there is a crucial difference: I go home at the end of the day. As my boss said, showing me around the

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The Invisible Wounds of War

by Joseph Bobrow

The Coming Home Project for Vets is an innovative series of free group-support workshops and retreats, sponsored by Deep Streams Zen Institute, that address the mental, emotional, and spiritual issues facing of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families. It invites vets and families to share experiences and stories, struggles and breakthroughs, in an atmosphere of mutual support, safety, and trust; to find understanding and acceptance; to learn new skills, like mindfulness, for reducing stress and anxiety and enhancing well-being; to improve communication and relationships; to express what cannot be spoken, through means such as writing and drawing; and to tend to the wounds of war in heart, mind, identity, spirit, and relationships.

When they met for the first time at our workshop, they were like long-lost brothers: touching each other's wounds and comparing scars and experiences.

The program is open to all Iraq-era veterans and families. No particular political, ideological, or religious affiliation is required. Everyone is welcome just as they are, and all will be treated with respect. The intention of Coming Home is to serve veterans and families, not to convert anyone to a particular point of view. The program is not psychotherapy, but its effects are intended to be therapeutic.

Our workshops and retreats are facilitated by veterans, psychotherapists, and interfaith leaders who are experienced with trauma and the challenges faced by returning veterans and their families. We are also creating a cohort of psychotherapists and chaplains to provide services to family members of men and women currently serving in the military.

As a kickoff for the cohort, the Coming Home Project offered a training for psychotherapists and chaplains on developing skills for working with veterans and their families. Among the presenters at the December 3 event were Tonia Sargent, the wife of Kenneth Sargent, who received a bullet wound to the head and sustained traumatic brain injury (TBI); Steve Robinson, a former Army Ranger and Ranger trainer, now an advocate for veterans' rights with Veterans for America, a group that investigates the causes, conduct, and consequences of war; Robert Grant, a psychologist and trauma specialist experienced in working with military officers in combat and disaster zones worldwide; and Keith Armstrong, head of the family therapy clinic at the San Francisco Veterans' Administration (VA) and author of *Courage After Fire*. Seventy people attended the training and 30 volunteered to provide pro bono counseling to family members of veterans not covered by the VA.

Our second event took place on a Friday evening, January 19, when we held a community meeting for veterans and the general public at the First Congregational Church of Berkeley (FCCB), followed the next day by a daylong workshop for Iraq and Afghanistan vets and their families. The purpose of the weekend was to bring veterans and the community together, to raise awareness of the struggles of vets and their families, and to explore ways in which the community can support them.

One hundred fifty people came out for the evening meeting,themed "Understanding the Realities of War." Speakers included Sharon Salzberg, renowned meditation teacher and author; Joanna Macy, whose groundbreaking work helps transform despair and apathy into collaborative action; Marine Colonel Darcy Kauer, founder of the Warriors' Transition Program at Camp Pendleton; and former Army Captain Stefanie Pelkey, mother of three-year-old Ben, and widow of Michael Pelky, also an army captain, who took his own life after returning from serving in Iraq. We showed clips from *After the Fog*, a moving film that contains interviews with veterans from World War II through Vietnam to Iraq.

The presentations, the exchanges with the audience, and the tone of collective concern were compelling. Media coverage included print, radio, and television. The Hallmark Channel produced a segment focusing on several participating families that will appear soon on its national morning show. Veterans, veteran service organizations including the VA and vet centers, the psychological and interfaith communities, and the general public were all gathered. The vets and their families felt recognized and supported by the public. They went into the Saturday workshop with this wind at their back.

The following day, we had 38 people for our daylong workshop: 31 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and family members, with three members of our older-vet cohort: two former marines, Darcy Kauer and Colin Gipson (now a Zen priest), and Ted Sexauer, poet and former Vietnam combat medic. There were three facilitators—Sharon Salzberg, Robert Grant, and myself—and one volunteer, a former nurse, who provided childcare. Linda Pauwels, a former pilot who teaches yoga and wellness classes for marines at Camp Pendleton, led movement exercises.

It was an amazing day of sharing stories and experiences, meditation, writing and drawing, and building

safety and community. A few vignettes stand out. Kenny Sargent and Rory Dunn are both Iraq combat vets who sustained traumatic brain injur (TBI). One was shot in the head, one hit by an IED (improvised explosive device), and both suffer from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). When they met for the first time at our workshop, they were like long-lost brothers: touching each other's wounds, comparing scars and experiences, making a deep emotional connection. And Stefanie Pelkey, who feels isolated in Houston, where she lives with the legacy of her husband Michael's death, was taken in like a family member within minutes of meeting the other vets' families.

During our opening moment of silence, as we were remembering those unable to be with us, Ben, Stefanie and Michael's three-year-old son, and another three-old boy Isaiah, played around the edges of our circle. Amidst the reverent quiet, we heard Ben say to Isaiah, "My daddy died."

As we were saying our good-byes, Rory and I hugged. I noticed a scrap of paper on the floor beside his seat and asked if it was his (we had done a writing exercise). He said, "Yeah, it's nothing." I picked it up and saw three short family trees and some writing: "girlfriend, baby, church members, mother, father, sister." I asked him about it. "It's all the people blown away by my buddies," he explained. In spite of his TBI and PTSD, he can think, feel, and communicate quite clearly indeed. I asked him if I could hold onto the piece of paper and he said sure.

The web of support continues. Three full-time caregivers—Stefanie, Tonia, and Cynthia (the mother of another veteran with TBI and PTSD)—will be gathering to be with one another in Seattle for renewal.

Our next community meeting is March 23, also at FCCB, followed by a second daylong March 24. We plan a third workshop in July and a four-day residential retreat during the Veterans' Day weekend in November. We are also creating a private forum on our website where workshop participants can stay in touch, and share information, resources, practices, and responses to the weekend. Everyone who attended the community meeting and the daylong workshop felt that this was the beginning of a regional culture of service to vets and families—a safe, welcoming community. Many said that the gathering was what they were waiting for but had not been able to find in the military, in the VA, online, anywhere. It was gratifying to learn that we had met a real need. This was one of our aspirations.

We would be grateful for your contributions. We bring entire families to the Bay Area from around the country. Some need to be lodged in hotels, while others find hospitality with local families. The Coming Home Project for Vets is currently funded by one small grant from the Shinnyo-en Foundation and runs entirely on volunteer help. We are beginning to fund-raise in earnest; your contributions of time, energy, expertise, or money would be greatly appreciated. E-mail us at <admin@deepstreams.org> or call 415/387-0800.

The other major challenge we face is getting information about our programs out to vets and families. If you know an Iraq or Afghanistan vet or family member, please let them know about our programs and invite them to contact us or visit our website at *www.deepstreams.org/cominghome.*

Joseph Bobrow is a Zen master and dharma successor of Robert Aitken Roshi. A psychologist and father, he is the founder of Deep Streams Zen Institute in San Francisco (www.deepstreams.org), *where he teaches Zen, leads workshops on Buddhism and Western psychology, and coordinates the Coming Home Project for Vets.*

White Social Worker, continued

school, "When it gets dark, you're out of there." Although the neighborhood where I live is not especially affluent or safe, it is significantly safer than the neighborhood where I work.

It means that even if I am a "minority" in my work setting and among my clients, I am still part of a majority in the mental health field. My supervisors have all been white; most of my co-workers are usually white; and when I go to job interviews, trainings, or conferences, I am almost always part of a racial majority.

It means—and this may be the hardest part—that I need to ask myself why, as a white person, I choose to work with programs that serve mainly low-income kids of color. Is it so I can be seen as a good liberal? Is it because I want to feel like a good person? Or is it because that's where the need for mental health services is, where the social work jobs are? Is some part of me a white "missionary" who wants to rescue people of color?

If I have any answers to these questions, they are clouded by my cultural conditioning, which discounts the structural issues inherent in my position by telling me that racism is solely an issue of individual prejudice. My answers are also probably obscured by my wish to be a good person and to be seen as a good person by others.

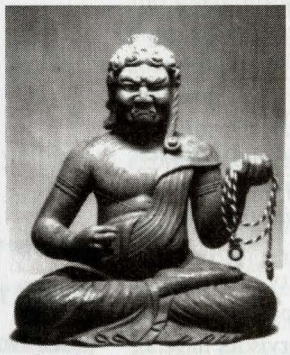
What does it mean to me to be a white person working with children of color? I challenge myself constantly to understand the fear and defensiveness I feel when asking myself this question. And I challenge myself to keep asking. I believe that, ultimately, trying to answer this question will help me to become more whole—to be a more authentic person, to be a more effective agent of social change, and to be a better social worker. ❖

Meg Yardley lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area. She was inspired to engage in these reflections by her daily work and by her participation in the UNtraining, a workshop in which white people investigate their cultural conditioning.

Resources

for Understanding Racism and White Privilege

The following list is in no way comprehensive, does not claim to be objective, and is only partially annotated. However, we encourage you to follow your nose on a treasure hunt among these resources. One thing leads to another. And remember, as you journey, Fudo, the guardian, is your ally. He's got your back.



Books

- Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*
- Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*
- Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity*
- Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*
- Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*
- Robert Jensen, *The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege*
- Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in 20th Century America*
- Michael Kimmel, Abby Ferber, editors, *Privilege: A Reader*
- Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*
- Jane Lazarre, *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness: Memoir of a White Mother of Black Sons*
- Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,* an excellent, accessible, clear examination of white privilege in everyday life. See *http://seamonkey.ed.asu.edu/~mcisaac/emc598ge/Unpacking.html*
- David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the America Working Class*
- Mab Segrest, *Memoir of a Race Traitor,* collection of autobiographical essays exploring the history of "white" consciousness in the United States, the Civil Rights Movement, Southern culture, neo-Nazis and the Klan, and lesbian-feminism
- Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror*
- Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?,* a good resource for allies and would-be allies—teachers, parents, therapists
- Thandeka, *Learning to be White: Money, Race, and God in America,* excellent for understanding white conditioning
- Becky Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism* , an account of the past half-century based on the life histories of 39 people who have placed antiracist activism at the center of their lives, linking individual experiences with social and political history
- Tim Wise, *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son,* a highly personal examination of the ways in which racial privilege shapes the lives of most white Americans. See also *www.timwise.org* for more books, essays, blog, etc.

Training Programs, Websites, and Workshops

◗ **Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence :** Progressive Resources for Schools on Race Relations, an excellent site for lists of resources for teachers, *http://crede.berkeley.edu*

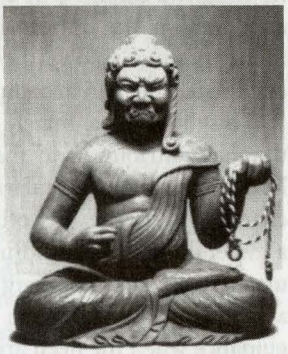
◗ **Learning Racial Diversity:** Online Vignette Exercises for Racial Diversity Training (see page 35), useful for both individuals and group, *www.learning-diversity.com*

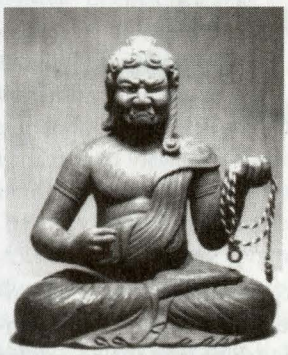
◗ **The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond** (PISAB), based in New Orleans, an international collective of anti-racist, multicultural community organizers and educators dedicated to building an effective movement for social transformation, runs Undoing Racism™ and Community Organizing Workshops all over the U.S., *www.pisab.org*

◗ **Anti-Racist Alliance**, connected with PISAB and based in New York City, holds anti-racism workshops and discussion groups and has a web-based curriculum on whiteness: *www.antiracistalliance.com*

◗ **Theatre of the Oppressed**, interactive theatre of, by, and for people engaged in the struggle for liberation, and grounded in the work of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire, based in New York City, tel: 212/674-9145, *www.spunk.org/texts/art/sp000338.html*

◗ **Unlearning Racism and Building Alliances**, a website containing excellent resources and writing from the work of Ricky Sherover Marcuse, a pioneer in developing diversity workshops, *www.unlearn-ingracism.org*





◗ **The UNtraining**, with Rita Shimmin and Robert Horton, a forum for exploring what it means to be white in order to create change in ourselves and our communities and to become strong allies to everyone working to raise awareness about racism, *http://untraining.org/default.htm*

◗ **Visions, Inc:** Training to Live to our Fullest Potential in a Multicultural World, a nonprofit training and consulting enterprise with the aim of creating environments where differences are recognized, understood, and appreciated so that all members of a group can perform to their full potential, *www.visions-inc.org*

◗ **Whiteness Studies: Deconstructing (the) Race**, a fascinating website that asks, "Who invented white people?" Site includes imaginative and extensive lists of resources on deconstructing whiteness, including fiction and film, put together by an unnamed author. *www.uwm.edu/%7Egjay/Whiteness*

◗ **www.whiteprivilege.com**, an interesting online magazine and resource for anti-racism education and activism, with an editorial focus on analyzing racialized social privilege.

Film

◗ ***The Color of Fear,*** directed by Lee Mun Wah (1995), powerful, revealing dialogue among white men and men of color about the color lines that divide them. ❖

Compiled by Susan Moon, with thanks to Shosan Victoria Austin, Jim Brown, Mushim Ikeda-Nash, Swan Keyes, Diana Lion, and Kenji Liu for their contributions.

The Engaged Spiritual Life
A Buddhist Approach to Transforming Ourselves and the World

by Donald Rothberg

Beacon Press, 2006, $16.00

Reviewed by Ken Jones

This important book is a comprehensive and systematic manual to enable readers to transform themselves, their various relationships, and their work for social justice and service.

Donald Rothberg is an outstanding teacher and writer on socially engaged Buddhism in the United States. He is a vipassana meditation teacher on the Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Teachers' Council, and the Theravadin tradition distinctively colors this book. With Diana Winston, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship's former associate director and now a fellow Spirit Rock teacher, he has developed and mentored the Buddhist Peace Fellowship's Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE) program, linking individual Buddhist practice with social activism and service. In the course of six-month training periods, small mentored groups, whose members work in various fields, develop guidelines for their inner work. BASE has evidently been an invaluable laboratory (or pressure cooker) out of which this ambitious and down-to-earth book has evolved.

The 10 chapters cover "10 core spiritual principles that frame the journey...an integrated path that we walk in our lives." The chapters cover ethical practice; mindfulness in action; clarifying and setting intentions; opening to suffering and compassion; taking care of oneself and hence taking care of the world; not knowing but keeping going; interdependence; transforming anger; acting with equanimity; and committing to action without attachment to outcome.

There are specific practices, which can be done on a daily basis, for learning and embodying these core principles. In each chapter the guidelines and practices are applied across three broad domains: (1) the individual; (2) the relational (from couples, friendships, and families to groups, organizations, and communities); and (3) the collective—namely, social, cultural, political, and ecological systems.

In Chapter Three, "Clarifying and Setting Intentions" (a particularly interesting and helpful chapter), the reader is offered four guidelines to be applied to each of the three domains. The chapter concludes with the "challenges and perils" of that particular practice. There is also an exercise—"Setting Intentions for an Activity"—one of 28 such exercises in the book. Rothberg explains:

> The main aim of mindfulness practice...is to disclose the myriad patterns of our experience. As we begin to see our conditioned, habitual reactions and tendencies we gradually start to discern the intention(s) that fuel each pattern. With awareness of intentions, we are in a position to choose wisely which intentions to follow and which intentions to restrain or abandon. This is it! This is the heart of our practice.

So far, so good—but some readers might well find themselves overawed and even a little intimidated by the sheer weight of tightly structured text and closely written guidance, and by the prospect of having to assimilate so much, let alone personally embody it. The tight structuring is the more challenging in that these are, of course, no more than formal subdivisions imposed on a complex and seamless body of experience. There is inevitably an undergrowth of cross classification, overlap, and intricacy.

Notwithstanding a sufficiency of anecdote and quotation, I found in the text a certain dryness and stiffness; a little paradox, playfulness, and humor would have helped to leaven the lump. I also would have welcomed a deeper exploration of the ambiguities and seeming "mysteries" encountered in socially engaged spirituality. I would have liked more about the situational challenge to the absolute interpretation of the precepts, whereby the underlying compassionate spirit of a precept may be violated through attachment to it as an absolute and universal injunction. I have the impression that, when faced with many personal and public situations, most Western Buddhists are indeed situationists, and certainly many prominent teachers are. They take wholeheartedly Thich Nhat Hanh's injunction (quoted by Rothberg) not to be "idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory or ideology, even Buddhist ones." In my experience, however, this is a subject that some Buddhist editors find too hot to touch.

Breaking deeper through the crust of rationality are the root paradoxes which can be so creatively disconcerting to the spiritually informed activist. In his valuable chapter, "Not Knowing but Keeping Going," Rothberg does indeed take us to the edge of the (apparent) abyss, wherein the fear of losing our deepest attachments threatens our identity itself—or, at the least, our self-assurance. To assist the student, here are ancient koans like "Nothing matters, everything matters" (the subject of our 2007 conference of the UK Network of Engaged Buddhists), or Julian of Norwich's famous assertion that everything is basically ok—even if, in the Buddha's words, our world is burning—or Hisamatsu Shin'ichi on the wreckage and despair of postwar Japan: "If nothing you can do is of any avail, what do you do?" Here, as it were, is the bottom line for the spiritually engaged. Students must resolve these root ambiguities themselves, but the teacher can accompany them the extra mile.

This book is a hugely important achievement and a unique contribution to the growing literature of engaged Buddhism, and particularly to the inner work of social change and service. Too often this appears as no more than a rather ill-defined "mindfulness" added on to seductive secular movements. Rothberg has provided us with a readily accessible compendium in which it is easy to find specific guidance when the need arises. For example, the chapter on

anger and how to transform it is the most comprehensive and nuanced treatment I have ever encountered.

For me and many others, the book will prove a valuable long-term companion and reference. For affinity groups like those the author has mentored, it can provide detailed guidance of a kind not hitherto available. It can be equally helpful to newcomers from either one side or the other of the "split between the spiritual and the social." And although it has avowedly been written expressly as "a guide for young people who may not have yet felt the pressure to choose between spiritual and social vocations," the book can also serve as a helpful refresher for old hands. ❖

Ken Jones is a founder of the UK Network of Engaged Buddhists and a member of the International Advisory Committee of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

Angry Black White Boy Or, The Miscegenation of Macon Detornay

by Adam Mansbach

Three Rivers Press, 2005, $12.95

Reviewed by Ari Messer

In one of his recent films, Woody Allen remarks that if more people had a sense of humor, the world would be a much better place. "I'm serious," he says, too easily penetrating the screen with deadpan eyes.

The compassion we strive for in our meditation practice is a very deep sort of laughter, full-hearted and open. In other words, it's serious. But when it comes to issues of race, it is far too easy to use humor as a way of avoidance. Luckily, East Bay–based writer Adam Mansbach has a sense of humor that is urgent and intelligently confrontational. His latest novel, *Angry Black White Boy or, The Miscegenation of Macon Detornay*, is an insanely funny and compassionate exploration of racial identity in the U.S.

The story revolves around Macon Detornay, a white kid from Boston who has adopted the ways of black hip-hop culture to ridiculous extremes—he has the date of the Rodney King verdict tattooed on his arm, speaks and dresses like a "gangsta," and spits out some really bad rhymes at the Nuyorican Poets' Café in New York, where he has just moved to start school at Columbia when the novel opens: "boom shocka lock / hip hop is not plymouth rock / any more than america's the great melting pot."

He works as a cab driver and starts robbing white people, all of whom report that he's a Black man because of their projected fears and his racial slurs against whites. When he finally turns himself in, he becomes a national spokesperson on racial issues practically overnight.

At a makeshift "press conference," Macon, with support from his newfound, bewildered college friends, uses freestyle poetics to speak of "the white skin privilege / of waking up" to racial privilege. He wows the crowds, and the Race Traitor Project is born. Ostensibly a forum for public discussion of race in the U.S., this "organization" has a tremendous effect, in part because Macon uses it to speak his scattered views, his trademark "chilled blend of amusement and scorn," and to start a public discussion of race. The story retains potency because Macon is always as much an adolescent craving coherence as he is an inside observer of racial divides. It's his inability to speak clearly that catches people's attention. Mansbach seems to suggest that since nobody knows how best to talk about race, a jumbled start is more honest—and tons more compelling—than a filtered, clean one. At one point Macon reminisces about burning a cop car into an "arcane sculpture," after which he "didn't so much feel better as less alone."

Macon, his understandably wary black roommate at Columbia, André, and André's witty old friend from L.A., Nique, organize a Day of Apology in New York where white people are meant to apologize to African Americans for hundreds of years of oppression. As the resulting riots and sparks fly throughout New York, Macon is worse than alone, he's destitute. He declares on the big screen in Times Square: "Forget apologizing. It'll only make things worse. Power doesn't have the power to change, only to self-destruct. If you want to make a difference, kill yourself."

The once "invisible" music culture has become a highly visible farce here. Race has become yet another commodity in the music business, and the characters in the book seem highly aware of this; it charges their friendships with motivating energy. They want, above all else, to know the other person as simply another person, to share their sense of humor—but it is difficult.

Although many attempts at moving toward justice end in chaos or misunderstanding, there seem, in this novel, to be as many ways to start bridging racial divides as there are people caught on either side. ❖

Ari Messer is a writer and musician based in San Francisco. He also works at Stone Bridge Press in Berkeley, California.

In Good Conscience

Supporting the Japanese Americans During the Internment

by Shizue Seigel

AACP Inc., 2006, $26.95

Reviewed by Annette Herskovits

Eleven weeks after Japan destroyed the U.S. Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt signed an order to incarcerate all persons of Japanese ancestry living in the West Coast states and western Arizona: citizens and noncitizens, men and women, children and the elderly. They were taken to remote locations and put in camps surrounded by barbed wire and armed soldiers.

No such order struck persons of German and Italian ancestry when those countries declared war on the U.S. shortly after Pearl Harbor. And in the end, not one accusation of espionage or sabotage by a Japanese American was ever substantiated.

Not only war hysteria, but racism, ignorance, and greed allowed this violation of human rights. The California Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association declared: "We've been charged with wanting to get rid of the Japs for selfish reasons. We might as well be honest. We do. It's a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the brown man."

Some white Americans did stand up for the Japanese Americans. *In Good Conscience* focuses on their untold story. Using interviews and documents, author Shizue Seigel draws 20 in-depth portraits of these admirable people.

For example, Helen Ely left her post in a southern California high school to teach in Manzanar, a camp in barren eastern California: "The superintendent of schools absolutely couldn't understand.... It was still the Depression. You couldn't get jobs. And here I was throwing [a tenured position] over to go teach 'those Japs.'" She arrived in Manzanar in August 1942, to find bare, freezing rooms where students sat on newspapers on the floor. She built a vibrant high school program, coaxing outsiders to donate material and using the camp community itself as textbook.

Walt Woodward, publisher of the *Bainbridge* (WA) *Review*, called the mass removal an outrage in editorial after editorial, at a time when the *Los Angeles Times* urged mass incarceration of the American-born "Nisei" (second generation) with language like: "A viper is nonetheless a viper wherever the egg is hatched."

Supporters included white converts to Buddhism, such as Julius Goldwater, cousin of future presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, abbot of a Los Angeles Buddhist temple. After the FBI arrested the entire temple board, Goldwater maintained the building at his own expense, guarded the internees' property and visited parishioners in the camps. He was called a "Jap lover," his house was defaced, and his relatives called him a traitor.

In conclusion, Seigel asks: who were these helpers willing to brave widespread condemnation? Some were religious; others had been close to Japanese Americans as friends, teachers, neighbors; many had strong democratic and humanitarian convictions and a family history of activism; and some had themselves suffered exclusion as members of a minority.

Yet, the mystery remains. Only a few individuals had the clarity of mind to see beyond received ideas to the truth of people seemingly different from themselves, the generous instinct to help when they perceived need, and the courage to act. Political scientist Kristen Monroe calls such individuals "John Donne's people," alluding to Donne's words: "No man is an island, entire of itself...any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind." They see themselves first as part of a common humanity; affective bonds of family, religion, national, or ethnic group come second. As Zen teacher Robert Aitken writes, "Self and other are one mind."

The book's research is scrupulous and extensive. An excellent chapter explains why Japanese Americans in Hawaii—37 percent of the population—were spared incarceration, while the minuscule community on the West Coast was brutally displaced. A chapter on the history of the Japanese American community from its beginnings would have been useful.

Since 9/11, there has been renewed interest in the history of the Japanese internment, as Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. are being victimized by discriminatory laws. In her 2004 book, *In Defense of Internment: The Case for "Racial Profiling" in World War II and the War on Terror*, conservative columnist Michelle Malkin argues that the Japanese internment was justified, and so is internment for Muslims and Arabs today. Despite its being dismissed by serious scholars, the book provides support for those who want to deny due process to suspected "terrorists."

Meanwhile, Japanese Americans show they understand history's lessons well. A Muslim speaker recently thanked the Japanese American Citizens League for responding immediately when Muslims confronting discrimination or hostility called for support.

The book is overall a superb document about the possibilities of solidarity between members of majority groups and oppressed minorities. ❖

Annette Herskovits writes about politics and human rights for Turning Wheel.

If you're in a coalition and you're comfortable, you know it's not a broad enough coalition.

—*Bernice Johnson Reagon*

It's the Little Things

Everyday Interactions That Anger, Annoy, and Divide the Races

by Lena Williams

Harvest Books, 2002, $13

Reviewed by Jim Brown

At first glance, the title of Lena Williams's book, *It's the Little Things: Everyday Interactions That Anger, Annoy, and Divide the Races,* seems to trivialize the topic of racism in America. Could there possibly be anything "little" about racism, except perhaps the mind that perpetuates it?

Yet by focusing on the little things—the everyday experience of racism, and not its bigger, deeper causes—Williams' book offers up a neat lesson in the mechanics of karma, the way that small individual choices and actions reflect and sustain our society's painful racial divisions. As the Buddha taught, when it comes to finding an end to suffering, it's the little things that often matter most.

Inspired in part by a white colleague who expressed the wish for a kind of visitor's guide to Black American culture, Williams, who is Black herself, convened focus groups of Black and white Americans around the country and invited them to talk about their experience of the racial divide. The result is a compendium of all-too-common suffering: the way Black shoppers are ignored or followed in high-end stores; the angry response that greeted Black high school students who tried to organize their own senior prom (one where white classmates didn't pick all the music); the group of white college students who declined to talk to Williams about race for fear of saying anything that might get them branded as racist; the many prosperous, even noteworthy Black Americans who are routinely ignored by cab drivers; and the repeated times that white people reacted with split-second incredulity when Williams introduced herself as a *New York Times* writer.

Williams doesn't prescribe specific solutions to any of these situations, but maybe that's not necessary. She seems to understand that naming them and bringing them into the light has the power to transform them for the better.

Williams's book reads like a lengthy magazine feature animated by the authoritative voices of experts and leaders and the personal voices of ordinary people. Williams speaks in her own voice as well, and doesn't hesitate to speculate, generalize, and judge. I didn't always agree with her, but I couldn't deny the power of her perspective. *It's the Little Things* rings with the truth of someone who knows firsthand that the effects of racism are anything but little. ❖

Jim Brown is a Sacramento-based writer-editor and book review editor for Turning Wheel.

Eyes So Soft

Bo Lozoff and Friends Live in Concert

CD, 14 tracks, Humankindness Foundation, 2006, $15

www.humankindness.org

Reviewed by Diana Lion

Bo Lozoff is best known as the granddaddy of prison dharma in the United States. He and his wife, Sita, have been running the Prison Ashram Project since 1973. He was one of the earliest mentors of BPF's Prison Program, and has also given his time and energy to prison projects all across the U.S. and the world. Far less known is Lozoff's talent as a musician and songwriter. Five years ago he emerged from a year in silence with renewed passion to write and play music. His first CD, *Whatever It Takes,* came out in 2004, and his latest collection of folk, rock, and blues numbers has just been released. Lozoff wrote all the songs and performs them with other musicians, such as Armand Lenchek and Ben Palmer, with whom he's played for the last few decades.

Lozoff has an amazing ability to spin the personal details in life into songs with universal reach. He sings about love, compassion, and staying connected with deep values (what he talks about with prisoners and other faith communities around the country). He paints rather than writes his songs; making each one like a vivid collage. Listening to *Eyes So Soft* allows you to visit Pelican Bay State Prison:

There's pebbles on the seashore in Pelican Bay
Prettier than a diamond ring,
A little freshwater river runs down to the sea
Like a queen beside her king,
And a prison not more than a mile away
Where a man can't see the sky,
Where beauty's against the rules, you see,
Where you're locked away to die.

This collection allows you to hear about a cop and an outlaw saving each other's lives, meet a woman with one arm and one leg finding true love, and listen in on family scenarios about aging, regrets, and advice. Lozoff's powerfully resonant voice carries the lyrics with a trademark ring of honesty. Harmonies are well-placed, the music stunningly mixed, clear, melodic, sometimes dramatic, in fine counterpoint to the words.

Eyes So Soft is a jewel—exquisite, deeply moving, and reflective, without ever overstepping. It combines beauty with a fully engaged life. ❖

See page 9 for more about Diana Lion.

New Year's Teen Retreat

Thirty-seven teenagers from seven states gathered in the redwoods near Santa Cruz, California, in late December for the largest meditation retreat held to date by BPF's Young Adult Program. The five-day retreat at the Land of Medicine Buddha retreat center was the ninth in an ongoing series of Northern California teen meditation retreats sponsored by BPF and modeled after teen retreats offered at the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts.

Joined by 15 adult staff and teachers, including Young Adult (YA) Program Director Tempel Smith, the teen sangha spent five days together meditating, hanging out, enjoying old and new friendships, speaking truths, bearing witness, laughing, hiking, eating, cooking, making music, and celebrating a joyous, safe, and sober transition into the new year. One highlight was a special afternoon workshop on nonviolent action led by BPF's Alan Senauke that prompted the sangha to brainstorm ways to use nonviolent methods to give teens a greater voice in school policymaking, and help them protect the environment and create a more diverse and inclusive teen sangha.

The retreat welcomed back two alumni who served in supporting roles: Amy Celis of Lemoore, California, as a work retreatant in the kitchen, and Alexa Watkins of Santa Cruz as the retreat's official photographer. And for the first time in the past three winters the skies stayed blue at the Land of Medicine Buddha—there were none of the weather-related power outages or road closures that have made past teen retreats so memorable.

Meanwhile, the teachers and staff continue to plan for BPF's first weekend teen retreat in April in Los Altos (a collaboration with the Insight Meditation Center of Redwood City) and a weeklong teen retreat this summer near Roanoke, Virginia, the first BPF teen retreat outside California. There are also plans to hold a college-age retreat based on the teen retreat model at the Padmasambhava Peace Institute near Cazadero, California, where BPF will hold the June 2007 teen retreat a week later.

For more information about the BPF Young Adult Program and upcoming teen retreats, visit the BPF website at *www.bpf.org* and choose "Current Programs." ❖

—Jim Brown, Young Adult Program staff member

New BASE Coordinator

I'd like to introduce myself as the new coordinator of the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE) program for BPF.

Since 1994, I have practiced in the Theravadan Thai Forest tradition of Ven. Ajahn Chah and the Tibetan Buddhist traditions of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and the Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche. My journey has taken me from corporate America, to international humanitarian and human rights work with Oxfam, to studying for a Ph.D. in sociology, social psychology, and organizational behavior at Harvard. As a founder and alumnus of BASE in Boston, I experienced firsthand the transformative power of BPF's programs.

As part of my Ph.D. program, I am working on a project proposed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama called "Cultivating Emotional Balance," based at the University of California, San Francisco. We are creating a training program that integrates Western scientific knowledge with secularized Buddhist meditation practices, with the aim of helping people reduce their destructive emotions and cultivate positive emotions.

Prior to taking this position, I served on the board of BPF for several years as well as the boards of the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies and Stone Circles, an organization encouraging activists to integrate the contemplative practices of multiple faith traditions into their social justice organizing work.

I look forward to overseeing the growth and development of the BASE program. Please feel free to contact me with questions, comments, and feedback at <base@bpf.org>. ❖

—Diane Biray Gregorio

Young Adult Retreat at the Land of Medicine Buddha, December 2006

Letter From the Executive Director

A question that comes up a lot in Zen Buddhism, the tradition in which I practice, is "What is the appropriate response?" I use that question frequently to guide my choices—personally, professionally, and as an activist. The answer often isn't what I think it will be. Staying open to new possibilities and adapting to changing conditions with a clear mind and a soft heart is, to me, the essence of dharma practice.

When the board of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship invited me to become BPF's executive director in April 2004, it was a true joy for me to accept the position. I loved the organization and its mission, and I felt the skills that I had to offer matched what was needed at the time.

Now, nearly three years later, I find a different answer feels true. My own reflections, and the changing conditions around me, have led me to conclude that the appropriate response now is to step down as executive director by the summer of 2007. Let me reassure you that everything is good at BPF. Really. More than good. Please keep reading. I hope you'll be pleasantly surprised.

I have let the BPF board know of my decision to step down and also of my desire to stay on at BPF and transition into another staff role—the newly created position of Communications and Outreach Director.

When I was invited to become ED in 2004, BPF was greatly in need of a stabilizing presence and structure. It's now a fairly standard practice in both businesses and nonprofits to hire an interim executive director to serve as a buffer during such transitions, and I have secretly always thought of myself that way in this position. With my previous experience at BPF as a member of both and board, it made sense to bring my insider perspective to the role. I've felt that my job was to right the ship, to institute some standard practices related to finances and management in the office, and to get BPF ready for the next stage of leadership.

Along the way, we have accomplished a great deal, thanks to all of you and a very dedicated staff and board of directors. During three years, these are just some of the things we've done together:

◆ Offered leadership in catalyzing Buddhist communities to work for peace in Iraq and globally; organized two Buddhist Peace Delegations to Washington, DC, in 2005 and 2007; and published numerous articles and essays on peace and justice issues in *Turning Wheel* and on our website.

◆ Convened two membership gatherings: a BPF New England Regional Conference in 2004 in Massachusetts with 130 people attending, and BPF's first open membership retreat/gathering in more than a decade in June 2005 in New York.

◆ Concluded a yearlong planning process, resulting in a strategic plan for 2006–2009, the first such plan BPF has had in more than six years.

◆ Initiated the Chapter Council, comprised of regional representatives who have volunteered to serve as hubs within their own regions and who have helped to greatly improve the relationship and communications between chapters and the BPF office.

◆ Stabilized BPF's finances and established a three-month emergency reserve account.

◆ Set up training and support for board, staff, and chapters to become more empowered to raise funds based on dharmic values.

◆ Received funding support from Hidden Leaf Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, LEF Foundation, and several other family foundations.

In the next phase of our existence and especially with a new strategic plan in place, I believe that BPF could benefit from someone in the leadership role with a different set of skills. And I feel that I will benefit from moving into a new role at BPF that is more suited to my professional skills and more sustainable for me personally. I am, at heart, a writer and someone who loves to help people make connections. I especially look forward to continuing to work in some capacity with our chapters.

Part of my story overlaps with that of Susan Moon, our beloved *Turning Wheel* editor. Sue has been at the helm of *Turning Wheel* since 1990. She has announced her retirement from this position effective June 2007. Upon her retirement, this position will evolve into that of the Communications and Outreach Director, and will include developing a number of creative ways to stay in touch with BPF members and the general public, as well as editing *Turning Wheel.*

I believe we have an opportunity to create an innovative leadership model where we can experiment with sharing leadership. One of our dharma friends (and BPF International Advisory Council member), Mushim Ikeda-Nash, has a "Vow to Not Burn Out," and this new leadership vision is inspired by that kind of vow. I remember how invaluable Alan Senauke's mentorship and friendship was to me during my first months in my new role, and I will be offering my full support to the new executive director.

Thank you for all your support during this time. I look forward to continuing our relationship together, and to working for peace, justice, and the liberation of all beings. ❖

In the dharma,
Maia Duerr

BPF Chapters and Affiliates

This directory lists BPF chapters that are currently active. For an up-to-date and longer listing that includes "BPF Friends" (formerly called "Contacts"), please visit *www.bpf.org*.

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