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Seven Ways to Help End Racism

**Dharma Talk to
White Practitioners**

**Exploring White Awareness
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By John Bell

We are amazing, determined, generous, kind, compassionate human beings who deserve nothing less than complete respect and appreciation for the ways we try to be aware of and counteract racism and diminish our own part in it. Even when we fail to achieve our deepest aspirations, we deserve self-forgiveness. Thorough conditioning has separated us from our sisters and brothers of color. When it is safe enough, most of us can touch our broken-heartedness about this separation.

We are white people but have other identities around gender, sexual identity, class, religious traditions, nationality, political orientation, age, and so on. Each identity comes with its personal and collective suffering, oppression, or privilege. In many ways, we have suffered, been hurt, marginalized, disrespected, or discriminated against. Suffering exists. But, through no fault or merit of our own, our status as white people endows us with advantages and privileges. While we might need to speak about our social oppression or mistreatment, white awareness work focuses primarily on the advantages and impact of white inheritance.

It may help to remember the ultimate and historical dimensions. In the ultimate dimension, each of us is already home, plugged into the Source or Buddha nature; each of us is unharmed, radiant, a source of love, compassion, and wisdom. In the historical dimension, we have been thoroughly conditioned in habits of separation. We have experienced hurt and hurt others. Being white in this lifetime, we may appreciate and be proud of things accomplished by people of European origins. We may acknowledge noble actions and lives devoted to the common well-being. Being white also can be a source of shame, guilt, defensiveness, or ignorance for terrible things done by white people.

Ending racism and the system of white supremacy is good for people who are not white and for white people. All of us have been deeply harmed by centuries of white supremacy culture. Being aware that it has been a catastrophe for whites, too, shifts the work from being just “for them” to being about liberation and real community for all. This is deep work. Remember to pause, breathe, notice what is arising in the heart, mind, and body. Cultivate kindness for yourself and others.

Here are seven ways white people can help end white racism.

1. Cultivate “Right View”

Right View includes observing, studying, and experiencing the four Noble Truths: suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering, and the path to ending suffering. It includes understanding the wholesome and unwholesome seeds we nourish, and the four kinds of nutriments; understanding impermanence and inter-being; knowing how perceptions and mental formations shape our awareness.

In relation to racial inequity and white supremacy, Right View might include:

- Remember our goodness as human beings. Know racism is not inherent or permanent. A teacher of mine said: “Racism is like dog poop on your sneaker. It’s not an inherent part of the sneaker. It’s really hard to scrape off from all those crevices in the sneaker. And everywhere you go, it stinks the place up!” But it’s worth the work to get rid of it as best you can.
- Know that race is not biologically real but a constructed notion used to separate and hurt us. The label “white people” was invented in mid-1600s colonial America to justify a system of exploitation and domination and divide poor whites from poor blacks and indigenous folks.¹
- Remember that in the historical dimension, the realities of the lives of people of color are very different from the lives of white people. We are all one in the ultimate sense, but differences in lived experience need to be heard and understood. We need to educate ourselves, learn history, listen deeply.
- Explore who we are in addition to the “white” identity. Thich Nhat Hanh says, “If you look at me and see only a monk,

look again. If you look at me and see a Vietnamese man, look again. I am more than these appearances.” All identities are imposed by society. They are not the whole person. In the ultimate dimension, we are inseparable, one with everything, an ever-changing flow of energy. Becoming attached to our historical dimension narrows us. One teacher’s approach to identity: “Claim it. Clean it up. Let it go.”

- Remember being close to people of color is our birthright. Separation has been imposed by white racism. Framing this work as key to liberation from the delusion of separateness is Right View. It also frees us for a more fulfilling and joyful life.

2. Heal Our Own Hurts

All people have suffered because of racism, not to the same extent, but racism diminishes all lives. Nothing can substitute for healing our own suffering. Right View helps. It takes courage and diligent practice.

Healing from early hurt helps us recover our natural power, our true nature.

Our fundamental practice is to slow down, stop, and get in touch with the body. Calmness and stability developed through concentration forms the basis for deep looking at racial suffering. Many white people are more familiar with the suffering that racism causes people of color than we are to the suffering racism causes us.

It’s important to listen deeply to people of color. Read, watch videos, listen to the music and theater by and about people of color. Be willing to be uncomfortable. What we take for granted and don’t even notice is toxic for people of color. People targeted by racism and genocide have suffered immeasurable harm. The Fourth Mindfulness Trainings asks us to get close to the suffering of others to deeply understand and be better prepared to help transform suffering.

Just as important, we have our own healing to do. No matter our class or gender, all white people benefit from being white. And inherent goodness and humanity is intact for all white people. Human beings in our natural form are not the problem. The problem is the delusion of separation.

In the historical dimension, white supremacy culture has harmed people and the earth. Whites have been conditioned to feel dominant, superior, and entitled, and conversely feel shame, guilt, and grief. Over years of working with white people on white rac-