

CAMBRIDGE **ZEN** CENTER

AN AFFILIATE OF THE KWAN UM SCHOOL OF ZEN

THE EASTERN GATE

SJDI EDITION / FALL 2021

HOW TO USE THIS PRACTICE TO HELP OURSELVES AND THE WORLD

by Kwan Haeng Sunim

Cambridge Zen Center has a Social Justice and Diversity Initiative, which consists of a Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) group and an Unpacking Whiteness group. BIPOC people share a particular experience of racial and cultural difference within a predominantly white culture. Part of the question of our Zen practice is: how do we look at that? How do we work with that? How do we carry ourselves? Similarly, our Brothers and Sisters in the Unpacking Whiteness group get together to see how it is that they benefit from privilege and consciously or unconsciously contribute to systemic racism. This is done with a mind of inquiry that asks, "What is this? What am I? How can I help?"

A way to begin to deal with these questions is building a center. In Korean, we say Tan Jien, or energy ground, which is just below the belly button. Through building that center you can have confidence and believe in yourself. One of the techniques we use to strengthen our center is bowing. Bowing is a very physical practice that grounds us. Bowing requires no thinking. You just do it. The physical act of bowing strengthens your center enabling you to attain that you are equal to any other human being on this planet by continuously retuning to "don't know and "before thinking." This "Don't Know Mind," our True Self, I often refer to it as the Spiritual Self. There is a very interesting thing about those of us who are brought up in a culture where we are not considered first class citizens by the people who hold the power: many of us have what has been referred to as "internalized racism"—or as Zen Master Seung Sahn would say, "We don't believe in ourselves."



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The Buddha in his meditation practice over 2,500 years ago attained this point that all human beings are equal. This was his experience. We, too, can have that experience through the use of various meditation practices, which brings us to this "Don't Know." But the three poisons of anger, ignorance, greed are strong. Our culture and society's message is strong, and our mind habit – our karma – are also strong. It is important that we continuously revisit this before-thinking mind where there are no opposites, no male or female, no up or down, and no colors, no black, white, red, yellow. Over and over again, we return to "Don't Know." We return to things as they are, rather than as we think they are, or are conditioned to believe they are.

As we continue in our practice our center becomes stronger, and this "Don't-Know-Mind" changes. It changes to Clear Mind. Clear Mind is truth: sky is blue, grass is green, dog barks, woof, woof. And as Zen Master Seung Sahn would say, "One more step is necessary": how use this Clear Mind? When someone is hungry, give them food. When you are tired, rest. And with this "Clear Mind," as we grapple with social injustice, we ask ourselves "How can I help?"

WHAT AM I?

by Jennifer Magrone

The Social Justice and Diversity Initiative (SJDI) initiative began at the Cambridge Zen Center in 2018, with the two discussion groups of the SJDI first meeting in December 2018. Recognizing that discussions of race often don't happen because people are afraid of being too vulnerable, having their experiences minimized or denied, or causing harm to others through their ignorance or lack of experience, the SJDI provided two safe havens for people to share their experiences. The BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) and Unpacking Whiteness groups allowed for people with similar or shared life experiences to come together and discuss their perspectives and life questions in a space where they did not have to explain, defend, or validate their differences to each other.

When the SJDI groups were meeting in person, everyone came to sitting practice in the dharma room together for thirty minutes, then the BIPOC and Unpacking Whiteness groups each moved to a private space for discussion. The SJDI began meeting virtually in May 2020. Everyone now has the option to join the CZC evening zoom sitting at 7:30. The SJDI meeting begins at 8:15 with five minutes of sitting all together, after which the BIPOC and Unpacking Whiteness groups each move to their own breakout room for discussion. The two groups then rejoin at 9:15 to close by reciting the four great vows together. This format, as it evolved through the move from in-person to virtual meetings, provides both for together action practice in the tradition of the Kwan Um School of Zen, and nurturing space for deeper inquiry into different ways race and racial identity impact the way people work with the question "What am I"?

When the Unpacking Whiteness group first started meeting, our focus was directed to providing group members with information and resources specific to exploring and understanding white privilege. As a facilitator of the Unpacking Whiteness group, I looked for ways to bring my experience in the realms of diversity train-



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ing and anti-racism/anti-discrimination work to bear on the direction of the SJDI and the Unpacking Whiteness group. When I was joined by co-facilitator Martin Klasek, we worked together with the group to recognize the impact of systemic racism on people of color and looked at how systems of oppression operated. We examined how white people experience unearned privilege and power through racist systems in society. We learned about implicit bias and looked at tools for identifying our unconscious biases so we could digest them and remove their power to blind us to the truth of each moment. These are all important and valid learning processes, and yet somehow this path did not feel completely in line with the direction of our practice.

As the SJDI matured, and as the Unpacking Whiteness group continued to meet regularly, we started to shift our focus to the practice dimension of addressing the question of race and our white identities. As both Martin and I are Senior Dharma Teachers in the KUSZ, we looked for ways to organize the group discussions around the way our individual identities as white people, and our group identity as the "Unpacking Whiteness" group, were kong-ans we could work on together. With guidance and direction from Zen Master Jok-Um, we started using the method of inquiry to guide our group process. We looked at books written by Buddhist practitioners on the topic of race, including "Radical Dharma" by Rev. angel Kyodo williams

NOT KNOWING, BEARING WITNESS, TAKING ACTION

by Bo-Mi Choi

The Zen Peacemaker's tenets - "not knowing, bearing witness, taking action" - are as concise as they are wise. They have been a helpful reminder to me in the slow yet steady work we've been doing with the Social Justice and Diversity Initiative at the Cambridge Zen Center for the past three years. Back in the summer of 2018, a handful of socially engaged residents and sangha members felt an urgency of confronting the reality of racial injustice in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. We also became acutely aware of the lack of diversity within our own practicing community, which sadly reflects the racial make-up of North American Buddhism at large: mostly white with some Asian sprinkles. With the support of the only African American monk in our Zen school, Kwan Haeng Sunim, who had yanked me out of my personal racial slumber during the winter retreat of 2017 when I listened to his dharma talk about his experiences as a Black monk, we started formalizing the initiative by creating two separate groups, BIPOC and Unpacking Whiteness, not with the intention to further divide us but to allow for safe spaces to discuss potentially painful topics.

As a Korean woman who grew up in Germany but has lived in the US for over twenty some years, I am part of the BIPOC group, and regularly attending the bimonthly meetings for the past years has enabled me to start digesting some of my own undigested experiences as a person of color. More importantly, it has given me the chance to listen to other members' racial experiences, to intimately share in their struggles as an African American, Hispanic, South-East Asian or racially mixed person within a world that is organized according to a visible and also subconscious code of racial hierarchy. The concrete practice of listening to experiences that are familiar yet vastly different from mine has been invaluable: not only has it helped me in sharpening my own ability to speak about race but, as a group with diverse backgrounds, we are creatively confronting the challenge of how to look beyond individual epidermal differences and really grasp the systemic nature of racism. The fruitful tensions we keep address-



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ing as a group seems to coalesce around the question of how we can voice and embrace the differences among BIPOC, including social and historical conflicts between racial minorities that are real and undeniable. Yet at the same we also ask ourselves how to best keep our minds and hearts open to the human condition we all share, which, as the Buddha clearly stated, is fundamentally rooted in suffering. This shared suffering is what substantively connects us all, and from a Buddhist perspective, it is a sufficient cause for standing in solidarity with those suffering because of their race, gender or any other perceived difference.

Though as beauteous as this idea of human solidarity might sound, in practice it requires time, energy and a dogged commitment. One must show up for the encounter. Repeatedly. And it helps to keep a mind of "not knowing," which is the very opposite of blissfully ignoring reality and is instead the radical embrace of it. And by showing up, these meetings of mind and heart become the very ground on which the seeds of mutual sympathy and sharing can grow into solidarity. What I've been learning in these regular encounters with my BIPOC compatriots is that the comportment of compassionate "not knowing" regarding our so-called racial identities is not achieved by glossing over differences but by "bearing witness" to each other's experiences with an open heart. Helping each other gently push beyond the usual habits of frantic analysis, harsh criticism or crystalline narratives of right and wrong

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that provide a false sense of certainty, we allow ourselves and others to sink into "not knowing," or as Zen Master Seung Sahn called it, "Don't-Know-Mind." With "Don't-know-Mind," the universe becomes proportionally larger, a little wider, and in the arising spaciousness new beautiful possibilities are allowed to take shape.

For me, the BIPOC meditation group has been a great source of comfort and support during these turbulent times of racial reckoning, especially this past year of global awakening in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder. As we prime ourselves for taking "bigger" action on the political fronts, by communing twice a month we are "taking action," albeit in small yet meaningful ways right here and now. I think these small actions are crucial in counter-balancing the sense of isolation and helplessness when confronted with painful incidents of racially motivated violence. By literally coming together, we remind ourselves that we are in this together. And it is proverbially the first step we can take in a long and difficult yet necessary journey ahead of us, a journey we must embark on with each other if it is to take us towards racial healing.

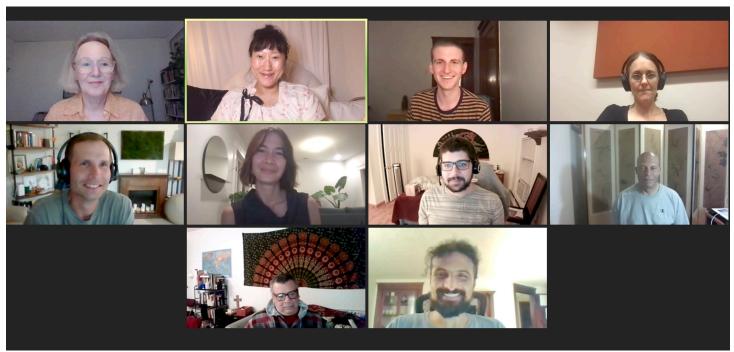
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and Lama Rod Owens, "Awakening Together" by Larry Yang, "America's Racial Karma" by Larry Ward, and "Mindful of Race" by Ruth King. Through the simple process of reviewing passages on the topic of practice and race and reflecting together on questions about how race impacts our life experience and the way we interact with others, we walk the path of waking up to truth of living in a racialized society, moment by moment. Using this process, we can start to understand and digest how systemic oppression serves to sepa-

rate and damage people of all races, in different ways, including us as white people.

The Unpacking Whiteness group exists as a kong-an – what does it mean to Unpack our Whiteness? This is another way of asking "what am I", another way of practicing our bodhisattva vow of trying for 10,000 non-stop to save all beings from suffering. Please join us. (You can subscribe to our email list by sending a message to unpacking-whiteness-cambridge-zencenter@googlegroups.com)



SJDI on Zoom

THE DAYS OF A MIGRANT SOUL

by Allen Perez-Somarriba

I come from a land that is a narrow strip, jungle, volcanoes and earthquakes. Its ground moves frequently, and tremors are an everyday occurrence. Central America is an unstable territory that reminds us of the geological fate of the planet, and even our historical destiny; always changing, moving according to the whims of fire. As if that weren't enough, the oceans and winds of the Caribbean remind us of the insecurity produced by the seas with their storms and hurricanes. In one phrase: permanent change and ever-present uncertainty. Landless rural families and urban families with informal jobs know best when they are lucky.

This is also a region ravaged by internal armed conflict, as well as foreign and white military intervention by the US. I will recount just two examples. In 1856 a "luxury" mercenary, William Walker, who was himself a lawyer, doctor and journalist, a distinguished racist belonging to the aristocratic society of Tennessee, invaded these lands. Walker even declared himself president of Nicaragua with the purpose of creating new Southern slave states for the U.S. From 1912 to 1933 the white elite of the United States government decided to occupy Nicaragua militarily. In the end, the Marines were expelled by the rebel leader Augusto César Sandino. The instability of these lands is not only geological.

What does the Dharma mean to this Central American who lives in the United States as one of its citizens? What does it mean to live with the awareness that nothing is permanent - neither mind nor matter - that life often appears chaotic, uncertain, and in many ways unpredictable? That everything boils, that everything changes, that nothing remains the same, be it in space or in time? What moral and ethical impact does all this have on human history? For each generation and for each individual the above questions will mean something very particular.

For me, these questions and their responses will be multiple and indefinite in time as well as in space. I face questions that I cannot answer with absolute certainty.



Allen Perez is a native Costa Rican born human rights advocate and a member of the BIPOC group.

Many times I will say, "I don't know." They are uncertainties that knock on the doors of eternity but they are not eternity; I only intuit that everything will cease to "be" when the silence is total. Of course, now, we have the responsibility of living well in what we call "human history." I write these lines as one who is perishable, created from the mud of mother earth and her migrations, with the sounds of more than one alphabet. But I am here, in this present moment, which is already an historical fact.

Obviously I will not answer all the questions posed here. Not because I do not want to but because I cannot. I do not possess the powerful wisdom that comes from silence. I may be able to whisper a few notes, play a string or two but no more than that. Yet, I want to think that these questions are presented as guides, as labels placed on a map, destined to point to some truth that contributes to our liberation from suffering.

In my personal life, I now feel that my job is to process the meaning of so much change and instability in my roles as a left-wing political activist, as a Christian leader, and as a member of a small and very human family. What marked my childhood, youth and the rest of my life was turmoil and the chaos that the Central American revolution produced in the lives of millions of people. This is a story for another time. But it is worth noting that now these experiences intrigues me as a matter of the mind, more specifically, the silence of the mind and the practice of Dharma.

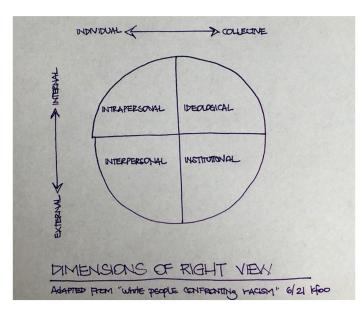
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DIMENSIONS OF RIGHT VIEW

by Katherine Foo

Recently I've started noticing myself speaking from a white voice. On two occasions, I have observed that feelings of racial exclusion vanish from my verbal account of a situation. Having grown up in a white majority town, attending white majority schools, and working in white majority institutions, I've been very connected to my white perspective and my white voice. Although I valued my Cantonese heritage, was close to my family, and had many Asian and non-white friends, I didn't fundamentally identify as different or "other." There was, of course, a distinct class privilege to this perspective. I did not anticipate that 2021 would usher in a new type of self-consciousness rising from Anti-Asian hate.

Right View is usually thought of as the first step on the Noble Eightfold Path because seeing correctly enables people to speak, act, and conduct themselves in an upright manner. Historically, teachings about Right View have tended to be formulated in singular and situational terms. In broader society, we have been waking up to deeply rooted biases—some gross, others subtle in the ways that we view others and ourselves. In our tradition, we are taught to approach each moment with a spirit of inquiry. How may we as a sangha meet the current moment with an attuned social inquiry?





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This summer I have been exploring my practice and social inquiry through the lens of my anti-racism trainings and advocacy. I adapted "Four Dimensions of Right View" (Figure 1) from the instructional materials of a "White People Confronting Racism" course I just completed at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education. I believe that a practice dimension of that work is to expand the spheres of our awareness by considering multiple dimensions to Right View. This figure identifies four different quadrants of right view - intrapersonal, interpersonal, ideological and institutional. They are along two axes - individual vs collective, and internal vs external.

Intrapersonal refers to an internal and individual dimension, focusing on our inner relationships with ourselves, our ability to reset, and be upright in a moment, to act from our center. Interpersonal deals with an external and collective dimension, pertaining to our understanding of others and our relationship to them. For example, in May I camped at a state park in Montauk, NY. Early the morning after my (white) friend departed the campgrounds, my neighbor unfurled a gigantic flag, which he displayed on the canopy in front of his tent. I started to assemble my makeshift kitchen, boiling a pot of water for breakfast ramen. As I handled the soup's ingredients with my chopsticks, his whole family watched me carefully. Under the glare of the white family's gaze, this situation raised the question of

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intrapersonal right view—what is my relationship with myself in this situation—and interpersonal right view—how am I upright in my dealings with others? How may I see them clearly?

A third dimension of right view—an ideological dimension—often interferes with this. I have been feeling this more acutely in recent months. Certainly, anti-Asian sentiment has shaped the settling of the country. Chinese were brought to the United States to work on the railroad in the 1800s, but Chinese immigration was limited to single men to try to prevent them (us) from staying here. The white business elite pitted early Asian immigrants against whites for jobs, and the ensuing rise in anti-Asian discrimination led to the Chinese Exclusion act in 1882. Chinese exclusion was generalized to other Asian groups around the turn of the century, and not lifted until 1965, when Asians with specific advanced degrees were allowed to enter. After that the restrictions eased up a lot, but fifty years is our recent memory.

The ideological dimension is an internal orientation, but it is collectively determined. This refers to inherited ways of seeing that we are likely unaware of, but it strongly interferes with our ability to see clearly. These vague, yet entrenched, ideas have a long historical memory. The prevalence of single Chinese men without families gave rise to an emasculated image of them. And the few Chinese women in the states on the frontier were disproportionately sex workers. Jump forward 150 years and many of us possess a vague notion that Asian men are not as masculine as white men, and Asian women are more sexualized than white women. One man in Atlanta can publicly blame the Asian women he killed for his sex addiction, and the Director of Communications in the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office will respond by saying that he had a bad day.

The fourth dimension of right view, I think, is an institutional dimension, which is external to an individual and collectively determined. Institutions are powerful in determining what is seen and unseen. They determine what does and does not count as the dharma – through their programming, through their affiliations, through their sanctioning of inappropriate

behavior, through the welcome signs they post at their visitor rooms. On May 4, there was a National Buddhist Memorial Ceremony, a 49-day vigil for those murdered in the Atlanta shootings. Many sanghas signed up as supporters of the event, including the New Haven Zen Center and the Cambridge Zen Center. These were institutional actions that made explicit the values held by the institution in a time of social upheaval. Value statements clarify the way that the community sees the world, both for the community and for outsiders.

We know that we are not the authors of our own thoughts. Many Buddhist teachings revolve around this very point. Ideologies cloud and distort our vision. This is not a matter of getting more non-white people to come to our Zen centers. It's about excavating the dusty corners of our own consciousness. Ideologies have really run interference with our ability to see clearly.

Our liberation is bound up with each other's. CZC has a social justice and diversity initiative (SJDI), which is developing practices to broaden the realms of our awareness in order to see our situations more clearly. Our communication guidelines for the group include a dozen different principles on the SJDI tab of the CZC website. These communication guidelines help to do the work of sharpening our right view. For example, one first principle is "both/and." It encourages us as participants to move from a reality which is defined by "either/or," in which the introduction of one reality displaces another reality, to recognize multiple realities and lived truths. When relating to a comment that another person makes, notice the conjunction that we use to link our statement with theirs. Another principle is "Accept non-closure." Can we open into the notknowing of an unresolved topic? Practicing "Accept non-closure" in our views of other people can bolster our self-inquiry, and deepen our ability to ask, "What is this?" for ourselves.

Let us not stick our head in the sand out of fear of being bad or attachment to our position. Instead, let us infuse the spirit of intrapersonal inquiry into the interpersonal, ideological, and institutional realms to deepen that very same inquiry.

SITTING ZEN AND UNPACKING WHITENESS

by Mike Bruffee

Sitting Zen and unpacking whiteness:
Discuss racial bias, see true nature.
How did all this pain get here?
400 years of cleaning an oil spill with a toothbrush;
Just keep scrubbing for ten thousand more.

White supremacy is such a complicated, insidious, and destructive phenomenon; it's hard to know where to begin with it. But then again, so are ignorance, anger and greed, and all the complicated permutations of each. And yet each has a direct relationship with my life.

In the Unpacking Whiteness (UW) group, we bear witness to our experience of race from the perspective of whiteness. There is the teaching from Dae Soen Sa Nim: "When mind looks at mind, mind disappears." I would say the goal of the UW group is to begin the process of making whiteness look at whiteness, and thus little by little chip away at the impossibly huge mountain of insidious karma that is white supremacy.

But the process is rather simple. Every other week, we come together and we begin each session by sitting together as one big, integrated group. Then those who identify as BIPOC head off to one breakout room, and those who identify as white head off to another breakout room, and we do the hard work of investigating how our spiritual selves relate to whiteness and racism. And each time, we come back together at the end of our sessions and close by reciting together the four great vows, for the benefit of all beings.

It actually reminds me of being in 12-step recovery rooms. Similar to the process of recovery, in SJDI there are two tracks: one for the sick, and one for those who love the sick (i.e., in recovery from alcoholism, there is AA for the alcoholics; and Al-Anon for friends and family). The BIPOC group allows a space away from white gaze; the UW group allows those "recovering from whiteness," if you will, to work the program free from judgment. The separation allows for safety — and for those in recovery to recognize, and take steps to heal



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from their problematic behaviors at their own pace. If the addicts and those who loved them tried working the steps together, in the same room, all hell would break loose; they love each other very much, but there is also so much pain that turns quickly into judgment and misplaced anger if not unpacked separately. So in SJDI we similarly practice together-action, but apart – and we all understand that this is an act of love.

I've had conversations with some who are skeptical of this process; they see it as segregation. Why can't we just talk with each other? We do, I say. We talk to each other in an integrated space at all other times but there's a lot of hidden shame to go around, and we need a place to explore it safely. As racism has morphed and lurched from different forms, we need new tools to investigate our relationship to it. And shame is how racism feeds. In Al-Anon, I heard the phrase, "Shame and secrets thrive together." As soon as we voice the problem and bring it to light, it's no longer a secret, and shame disappears.

To the point of "just" talking with each other, two things come to mind. One is, without Unpacking Whiteness affinity groups, many white people who become aware of racial issues just go to their BIPOC friends in order to process their feelings about racism. I've heard it said often from the BIPOC community that people are "tired" of doing the emotional labor of assuaging the anxiety of their white friends and acquaintances,

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reassuring them that they're not "bad people." So there must be a place where white people becoming aware of their whiteness - and all the feelings of anxiety and shame that come with it - can come together to investigate their racial identity in a sincere way, with sympathetic peers. And furthermore, since whiteness is a "compounded phenomenon," as the Buddha might say, in that it is a socially constructed collective delusion, it is a completely legitimate object of study. In unpacking this construct in this way, we relieve the undue emotional burden of forcing the people that White people hurt in the first place to be the ones that help us heal. (This, by the way, is again the same idea behind 12-step meetings.)

The second thing is, the hidden trauma of not unpacking racial identity and harm is just that: hidden. According to Resmaa Menakan, a Black licensed clinical social worker and author of My Grandmother's Hands, we carry this trauma in our nervous system everywhere we go. We are wired, no matter whether White, Black, or Brown, to be concerned for our survival. And we are concerned for our survival, still not having dealt with the vast traumatic karma of our collective past, which in the U.S. includes all the horrors of slavery, genocide and internment camps. And then we casually say, "Let's just talk with each other." Well, we are pushing ourselves into a situation in which we are unwittingly hurting each other with our very presence, and we don't realize it. So we need some practical frameworks and exercises that cut deeply and recalibrate our spiritual selves; and we need to intentionally and mindfully carve out separate spaces for white and BIPOC sangha members to begin to heal from the wounds of white supremacy.

So in SJDI, we have created this experiment in radical together-action. We practice disentangling ourselves from the insidious tendrils of racism and white supremacy - and we recognize that this process looks different for white and BIPOC sangha members. And just as the 12-step recovery process passes "from warm hand to warm hand," with a community of peers acting as the supportive medium of healing from the pain of addiction, so too does the process of deconstructing the pain of racial trauma. In the end, as an eminent teacher once said, the most precious jewel is sangha.

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Politics, religion, and even morality are highly controversial, high-voltage topics, often expressed with an excess of passion that bitterly divides nations and even families. The Christian gospels as well as the Dharma warn about the care that must be taken with our tongues. We must actively and sincerely refrain from offending or causing harm. I take refuge in the morals and ethics of Jesus and Sakyamuni to guide my life, to rectify it. I take refuge in the contemplative silence of both traditions to quiet my mind, to dispel the fog of my judgments, to be loving and compassionate towards others. We must be a beacon that does not offend, a guiding torch.

When I evoke the deep green of the Central American geography and its jungles clothed with the ocean mists, its tragic stars, and the exile of humanity, and when I notice that this landscape is reflected in my soul, I offer this stardust to the Gospels and to the Dharma, here and now. I offer it to my neighbor as Jesus commands; I offer it for the benefit of all sentient beings as the Buddha said.

WHAT WE ALL OWN

By Zen Master Jok Um (Ken Kessel)

This is a Thick mess Like glass Shards in honey

Who knows
How to
Find and use
The fine cloth
And warm water?

Many suffer Cry and Bleed waiting

For now
Where is
The refuge
With no roof?



Zen Master Jok Um (Ken Kessel) teaches at the Chogye International Zen Center of New York. Ken is a clinical social worker and psychotherapist who works with children and families in foster care. Ken is a member of the SJDI steering committee.





BLM Protest in Boston on May 31, 2020



Protesters marching in Downtown Boston.



Our first SJDI in-person outing in over 18 months, September 2021

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AND THE

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Facilitated by Zen Master Jok Um (Ken Kessel) and Members of SJDI

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22 January 2022
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