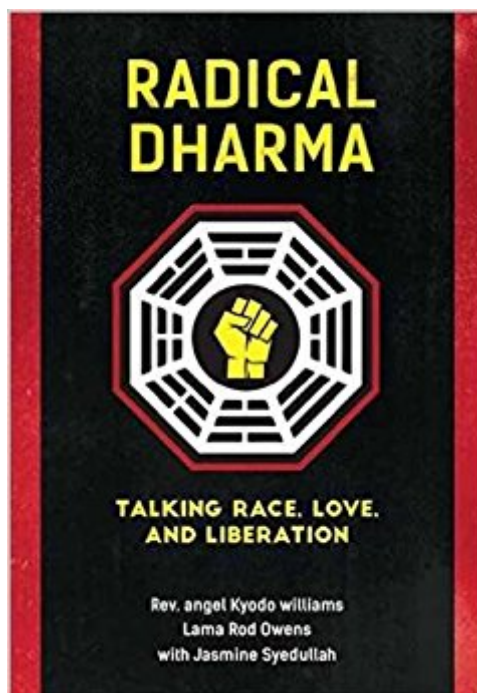


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Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, And Liberation



Synopsis

Igniting a long-overdue dialogue about how the legacy of racial injustice and white supremacy plays out in society at large and Buddhist communities in particular, this urgent call to action outlines a new dharma that takes into account the ways that racism and privilege prevent our collective awakening. The authors traveled around the country to spark an open conversation that brings together the Black prophetic tradition and the wisdom of the Dharma. Bridging the world of spirit and activism, they urge a compassionate response to the systemic, state-sanctioned violence and oppression that has persisted against black people since the slave era. With national attention focused on the recent killings of unarmed black citizens and the response of the Black-centered liberation groups such as Black Lives Matter, *Radical Dharma* demonstrates how social transformation and personal, spiritual liberation must be articulated and inextricably linked. Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Lama Rod Owens, and Jasmine Syedullah represent a new voice in American Buddhism. Offering their own histories and experiences as illustrations of the types of challenges facing dharma practitioners and teachers who are different from those of the past five decades, they ask how teachings that transcend color, class, and caste are hindered by discrimination and the dynamics of power, shame, and ignorance. Their illuminating argument goes beyond a demand for the equality and inclusion of diverse populations to advancing a new dharma that deconstructs rather than amplifies systems of suffering and prepares us to weigh the shortcomings not only of our own minds but also of our communities. They forge a path toward reconciliation and self-liberation that rests on radical honesty, a common ground where we can drop our need for perfection and propriety and speak as souls. In a society where profit rules, people's value is determined by the color of their skin, and many voices—including queer voices—are silenced, *Radical Dharma* recasts the concepts of engaged spirituality, social transformation, inclusiveness, and healing.

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Customer Reviews

It is rather astonishing that the Black tradition of continuous and endless enlightenment in this country produces its prophets as if bad laws, discrimination, horrors of financial inequality and so on, do not exist to blight the way. No wonder one often imagines the ancestors laughing. This is a book to grow on, to deepen over, to partner with. We are on a magnificent journey of liberation, every moment we are alive in this odd place that has yet to awaken to itself. And we are always, generation to generation, ready to travel. How cool is this?

• Alice Walker, American novelist and poet

Radical Dharma is a clear, honest testimony of the heart from three provocative leaders of our time. You may not always see things just as they do (I didn't) or even feel like you fully understand it all (again, I didn't) but that makes it even more important to read.

• Sharon Salzberg, author of *Lovingkindness* and *Real Happiness*

Radical Dharma is both radical and courageous. The authors build upon the growing understanding of the connection between personal and societal liberation. Radical Dharma unflinchingly turns this lens to this most challenging and critical nexus of racism and white supremacy. We whites on a spiritual path are lovingly challenged to get our butts off the mat, understanding that our personal liberation is impossible while we unconsciously enjoy the privileges of our skin color. Those in pain and enraged from the brutalities of oppression are lovingly challenged to get that we will never create a liberated society without attending to our own liberation. This is not an "easy" book. Just like a Zen koan, Radical Dharma asks provocative questions rather than prescriptive answers, questions that unsettle, questions that challenge some of our most precious assumptions. Through personal stories and dialogue, we are invited on a powerful journey of spiritual and political awakening. Take the invitation!

• Robert Gass, EdD, cofounder, Rockwood Leadership Institute and Social Transformation Project

This is a moving and crucial book for anyone interested in the flourishing of the dharma in the West. Read it, sit with it and then get off the cushion and do something radical to make a difference.

• Cheryl A. Giles, Francis Greenwood Peabody Senior Lecturer on Pastoral Care and Counseling at Harvard Divinity School, coeditor of *The Arts of Contemplative Care: Pioneering Voices in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Pastoral Work*, and Tibetan Buddhist practitioner

Radical Dharma is a powerful and vulnerable circle held by three

Dharma practitioners who are people of color. It is a beautiful and rare invitation to listen to how each transformed their pain. Some of this is familiar: no one sees me because of my weight. And some of this, for white people, will be new: What does it look like to truly sit with the pain caused by racism in your body? Radical Dharma demands that we step into the circle and ask: How do we restore our humanity? How do we transform ourselves and the world? In this book, Rev. angel Kyodo williams has created a powerful circle of truth around race and reconciliation. Sit, participate, and be broken open and transformed. Understand how the system of racism has traumatized all of us and how we need to heal individually and collectively. • • "Marianne Manilov, cofounder, Engage Network

Rev. angel Kyodo williams is an author, activist, master trainer, and founder of the Center for Transformative Change. Her critically acclaimed first book, *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace*, was hailed as "an act of love" by Pulitzer Prize winner Alice Walker and "a classic" by Buddhist pioneer Jack Kornfield. Ordained as a Zen priest, she is one of the only two black women Zen "Senseis" or teachers. Her work has been widely covered, including in *The New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Ms.*, and *Essence*. Lama Rod Owens is a graduate of Berry College, where he majored in English and speech communication. It was there that he began his work as a student activist and organizer. In 2011, he was authorized as a lama in the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism. He then moved to DC and ran his own center for over two years. Later, he returned to Boston to begin his divinity degree in Buddhist studies at Harvard Divinity School. Jasmine Syedullah holds a PhD in politics with a designated emphasis in feminist studies and history of consciousness from University of California, Santa Cruz, and a BA from Brown University in religious studies with a focus in Buddhist philosophy. Syedullah is currently a University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellow and lectures on her work at colleges and universities throughout the country.

Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation • This is a book of how three people used meditation and practice to transform themselves in the face of America's race illness and how they are now working on liberating others and the world. I got to live and breathe and cry through the pain they faced and then to listen as they brought their learnings into dialogs around the country on race, love, and liberation. There were moments I put the book down and just said "Damn." So much truth here. A must read.

Radical dharma explores the intersections of race, racism, gender identity, and sexual preference in the US as those terms relate to Buddhism. There are both articles and moderated discussion groups with the three authors, all of whom are black, gay, bi or transgender intellectuals. One of the most interesting discussions involves race and the sangha, as Buddhism not based in East Asian communities is overwhelmingly populated by white middle to upper middle class educated members. I think that Rev. angel Kyodo Williams sensei both nails the problem on the head and highlights the conflicting viewpoints that run throughout the book when she states: "Race is the ultimate delusion in that it both does and does not exist in reality." With respect to sanghas the conversants note that problems arise when the sangha is not willing to turn into itself and explore what it means to be in a racialized society. Another one of the author's, Lama Rod, describes radical Dharma, within this context as having the bravery to have dharma talks and meditation practices that will focus on topics that make participants feel uncomfortable and learn how to deal with their suffering. One of the criticisms of Lama Rod's, with which I agree, is that many sangha's have become severely compromised by capitalism and need to provide a consumer oriented Buddhism. The result is too heavy a focus on selling classes and not offending sangha members which dilutes the authenticity of Buddhist practice. On the other hand, you need money to run a sangha, so where is the balance? My criticism of the viewpoints and discussions is that it is at times it is devalued by the overuse of racial and sexual labels. An example is the comment: "for white folks, though the coexistence of being historically lauded as the creators of what is right, making mistakes must be hard." I wanted to ask which "white folks?" There are immigrant white folks and holocaust survivor white folks and down and out white folks, should they be lumped into the white folks of the quote above and does the author seriously think that all white folks see themselves and their relation to race in the same way? The authors turn to greater complexity at times when they talk about racism and economics as co-repressive self-feeding factors. However, the essays and discussions veer between the "race as monolith" and "race as factorial" viewpoints. Overall, this book is of great value both in understanding applied Buddhism and the need to openly discuss racial issues within the sangha. I highly recommend this book.

I am moved to write my very first review for this book. This book is both overdue and exactly on time. We need this, in the dharma community, in the white dharma community (the "we" I can speak for). As a queer white buddhist woman, I can both connect to big parts of this book and also know so much of it will never be my experience. And it is that intersection of what is needed to know, what is known, what is universal and specific, that is needed to help the over-whitening of dharma in

north america to crack open.

Finished Radical Dharma yesterday. Powerful, powerful work. The format made it feel like I was right there with you all engaging in these courageous conversations. Gave me a lot to investigate, to sit with...how I honor and dishonor my own experience, how I relate to my own suffering, what role can I play in alleviating the suffering of others, etc. This type of discourse feels like the antidote to spiritual bypassing and the path to true liberation. Deep bow, much gratitude. I recommend this book HIGHLY.

If you have practiced Buddhism for some time, hearing only the standard dharma talks about the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, sitting in meditation, cultivating ethics, and chanting -- all with no connection to who you are as a person of African descent living in a racially brutalizing culture, this book is for you. If you are a White person automatically privileged through racism and wonder if Buddhism can help transform a privileged mind, this book is for you. If you are a person who is not Black and is not White, and wondering what Buddhism can say to you in your ethnicity, you too can be enlivened by "Radical Dharma." "Radical Dharma" is, in part, a provocative and dynamic argument for predominantly White Buddhist communities in the U.S. to examine their attachments to the comfort of meditative transcendence while simultaneously "transcending" the suffering of African-descended people in the sangha and the country. Perhaps if and when Williams, Owens, and Syedullah write together again, there will be additional emphasis placed on the importance of their queerness, the influence of Black Christianity, and the hint of Islamic influences on the shaping of their prophetic voices. Read this book with your guards down so you can get up off the cushion with open heartedness.

An excellent book for anyone looking for guidance on how to live a fuller more satisfying life. The narrative is not shortsighted Radical Dharma shows you how you can find your voice in all the chatter and honor the place in you that seeks to make the world a better place. As a person of color, I found the book easy to grasp and well worth the read. It is especially helpful now since recent events have me bombarded with so much to ponder on race and how I navigate my world safely and constructively .

Brilliant book from one of the top dharma teachers in the country. I can only hope her truly intersectional lens serves to wake up the hundreds of thousands of people who practice in

meditation and yoga studios and centers all over the US in particular.

A brilliant, refreshing read that is long overdue! A must read for all who are interested in walking the path of wisdom and compassion. These conversations are necessary for us to hear and to be engaged in, if we truly wish to fully examine our individual and collective actions in the world, and whole heartedly step forward to be in service for each other.

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