

Ending Racism - A Buddhist View

Preface - Notes on race

The scope of the subject of race is so vast that the most a person can do when writing or speaking about it is to offer one perspective on a part of the subject. Anyone who tries to do more than this is likely to miss some of what others point to as far as how people's views on race have shaped our world, and how they continue to effect lives now, in 2017. Perhaps all together though, we can make progress towards greater inclusiveness, and social justice, and it's in that spirit that I offer these words.

To begin from a different point

In what I've been reading, it's usually only after the details and effects of racism have been extensively laid out do they say where we should go from here. I'd like to do something different, and begin with where we should ultimately be aiming to go.

Toward the ends of her book, *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander lists her recommendations for what needs to change, if we are to end the injustices of mass incarceration:

"Mandatory drug sentencing laws must be rescinded;

drug treatment on demand must be provided for all Americans; and,

barriers to re-entry, specifically the myriad laws that operate to discriminate against drug offenders for the rest of their lives in every aspect of their social, economic, and political life must be eliminated."

She says, "All of these needed reforms have less to do with failed policies than *a deeply flawed public consensus*, one that is indifferent, at best, to the experience of poor people of color." (italics added)

She concludes that *for there to be social justice, and respect for human rights going forward, the public consensus must change*. In other language we can say, we need a spiritual revolution, or *a revolution in values*. Dr. King came to this same conclusion fifty years ago.

If the challenges we face, and their redress have a common root in the consciousness of people, then why not start *there*? Anything less, and there will be no end to the work.

Why is it that we've not been able to hold onto the progress in that has been made in Civil Rights over the last 50 years? - We have not done enough to emphasize the values of compassion and equality that bring lasting social change. We need to work to see that these values have much stronger roots in our national consciousness. That should have been the aim all along.

Obviously the effect of this would go much further than seeking to change one policy, or remedy one form of injustice. When we frame it this way, our aims are the same, but the emphasis is different. The key questions then become how do we articulate the vision we need, and encourage this kind of spiritual revolution? What methods can we use? and how can we maintain this kind of motivation and action, past the initial inspiration? How do you change people's hearts?

Against despair - the full bloom of compassion - vision always leads

It seems that some scholars and human rights advocates (Hedges, Pilger, Coates, Chomsky) dare not imagine a world without injustice - fearing it would betray their hope. They focus on the details of the tragic, until the problems seem intractable. For them, to hope would go against all appearances, against history, and move the subject away what is happening now, and what may happen to our children, and their children. Such pessimism presents itself as realism, but to me it is a contracted view that

suppresses the imagination. I get depressed too when I read them, and I'm sure there are others who feel this way as well, unfortunately.

We should allow the full measure of our compassionate vision to be spoken, no matter how the world appears to us. Then we can set to work. Anyone can be optimistic on a good day. The challenge is to access the light of our wisdom and commitment when things are at their most broken and disorganized.

A progressive is someone who moves the conversation *forward*. When we say that someone, such as Dr. King, was ahead of his time, it means we have to catch up to them, in their thinking and world view, but we shouldn't stop there.

I would like to pick up where they leave off.

Today, in 2017, video games, consumerism, and materialism more than ever stunt our growth as human beings, intellectually, morally and spiritually. Just one example, I heard today that Mariah Carey spends \$30,000 dollars a month on hair and makeup, and this has become *normalized*. Almost no one speaks of it.

Reality tv, vast numbers of people dependent on drugs and alcohol, people giving far too much attention to sports and acquiring more things- all these things keep us down.

We should be asking, What is at the center of our lives? Do our stated values line up with how we live our lives? What are our ministers, roshis, rabbis, and lamas teaching, as far as our responsibility to each other, and the way to become more aware and capable human beings? Are they teaching this vision? and are their methods effective? *It is up to us whether the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice*. Just how important is social transformation to us, and what are we doing about it?

The inner work, and caring for our world

The classic text the Tao Te Ching told us long ago that you can't legislate morality.

*When people lost sight of the way to live
then came codes of love and honesty...*

If affirmative action and other Great Society programs had been explicitly presented as a part of the greater, inner work, of transforming injustice from its root cause in our collective consciousness, then it would have made more sense, and had more weight for us as a people. Instead, as mere policies coming from the left, they have been resisted, resented, rebelled against, and in some cases settled for in lieu of the far greater and necessary achievement of changing people's hearts.

The scope of our work in us and the world should be spoken of as fully and as clearly as possible. Going forward then, let those who would work for justice and human rights everywhere be fully empowered.

A Buddhist take on ending racism - the need for this exposition

*O that I had a mouth large enough
to speak the whole of this truth,
to say all that is needed, and not a measure less,
and one day guide this ship,
and all my family safely home!*

The need for this exposition

If I were to predict that next week, another unarmed black man will be killed by the police, that it will be filmed, provoke protests, and that there will be no indictment of the officer, no one would be surprised. If I said that this would happen the following week as well, and the one after that, most people would be saddened, and angry, but no one would say I was prescient. Witnessing these executions has tragically become the norm, and they will continue until the causes are brought to light and changed.

In our grief and outrage, deeper questions about the causes of racism and police violence are seldom brought up, or talked about for long or in any substantial way before we are caught up again in another televised execution of an unarmed African American man. If rage and grief were enough to end this violence, it would have been over long ago, but it's clear that we need to go deeper to end this scourge.

I would start here: police violence against African Americans is but one expression of racism. They cannot be separated. For these words to have any meaning however, racism in general needs to be understood, and it's particular expressions in the 21st century have to be recognized.

Sociologists and activists have their language and methods of looking at racism, and they have their place. What I'd like to contribute here is a description of the problem of racism from a Buddhist point of view.

Buddhism and other contemplative traditions have a different understanding of the causes of individual and collective suffering. They have a different vision of human nature. They also offer us methods to achieve our compassionate aims.

One need not be a Buddhist, or member of any particular tradition to make use of these ideas. They are universal, and should be applicable in a range of situations. Most of all they are propositions, to be looked into and either disproven or verified and passed along.

Were the need not so great, I wouldn't be attempting to write this. But the unending tragedies call for nothing less than our best efforts to understand and to respond.