



## Understanding Race and Racism – Essential Information for White Dharma Teachers at IMS

### Overview

*“Welcome” can be problematic language – as if the space is not already shared. We’re already here. The question is not how to get people of color to come here. The question is how to get them to stay. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

Because racism has been woven into the social, political, legal and economic institutions of the US, it is a deeply rooted form of oppression in our society. IMS recognizes this, and also acknowledges our own institutional racism. We have made a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion work, with dismantling racism as our primary focus, and embodying a diverse perspective in every part of our organization as our aspiration.

In 2007, we adopted our first vision of diversity and inclusion to guide our efforts. Today it reads:

*In offering a spiritual refuge for awakening, IMS is committed to cultivating a community that reflects the diversity of our society and our world. We believe that all members benefit from diversity, as a wide range of human experiences and viewpoints broadens and enriches the understanding of all. We seek to promote the inclusion, equity and participation of people of diverse identities, including those of all races, genders, ethnicities, cultures, sexual orientations, gender identities, classes, religions, abilities and ages, that all may feel welcome, safe and respected within this community.*

We know that many who teach at IMS have begun their own engagement with these issues. And we also recognize that when it comes to dismantling racism, we are all at different stages of awareness, understanding, and action.

An important awareness for white people about race/racism is coming to realize how much it is they do not know *because* race is generally not an area for reflection and study throughout our lives the way it is for people of color.

*These conversations seem to keep happening, but how do we know that the work is actually being done by the white teachers? — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

This document was created for white dharma teachers to serve as an introduction and a complement to understanding how race, structural racism and the dynamics of power and oppression might play out at IMS, particularly in relation to identity and inclusion. It is informed by conversations we conducted with teachers (lay and monastic), staff and yogis – both people

of color and white people. It is not a comprehensive analysis of the issues but is offered as a preliminary roadmap for the challenges and possibilities that are often encountered within the retreat environment with regards to race/racism.

*Some white teachers talk about this work because they think it's important for people of color. But it's important for everyone's freedom. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

We believe this work not only benefits the people of color in our community, but also contributes both to one's awareness of oneself as a white teacher as well as to a better understanding of the white students who come to IMS. This document is not telling you what to think or say, but it is offered based on our realization, gained through many years of experience, that most white teachers need support in comprehending and addressing these complex issues.

We begin with limited background information on race/racism, and cover, in an introductory way, topics such as whiteness and dominant culture, internalized racial superiority and oppression, white fragility, microaggressions, cultural appropriation and intersectionality, all interspersed with quotes from the interviews. We end with some suggestions about what to keep in mind as you teach at IMS, as well as links to further resources.

*Some people may be excited about talking about these issues, but it doesn't mean they are ready. As much as I care about this, have thought about it, cried about it... I'm a baby in terms of eradicating it in myself, let alone guiding other people to do the same. I wouldn't talk about it comfortably if I hadn't been working on it myself for many years. As dharma teachers, what we can offer is that maybe we've worked on it a little longer than other people or gone a little more deeply into our hearts. And that's good enough – talking about it from my own experience. — White IMS Teacher*

There was a strong consensus among those interviewed that this work takes time and effort and that nothing can substitute for the personal and collective energy invested in educating oneself through conversations, trainings, readings and other materials – please check out the google drive resources link at the end. We strongly encourage you to engage deeply with this work and to approach it with curiosity, humility, and patience. It is not easy and will most likely not feel comfortable. We are encouraged by our own progress as individuals, as a community, and as an institution. And we have more to understand and to do.

*Our commitment to diversity and inclusivity has to be significantly stronger than our commitment to comfort. — White IMS Staff Member*

*Normalize the conversation about race and diversity. The more normal it is to speak about these issues in your community, the easier it is for people to open to it if they're white, or be more relaxed in the conversation if they're not white. — White IMS Teacher*

Thank you for making time to read this, and for all your service to our yogis, to IMS, and to the Dharma.

**May this be for the benefit of all beings everywhere, without exception.**

## **Race/Racism**

Most of us know that race is a construct. But we may not be aware of how that construct was created and why. Understanding the history of race, how it is intrinsically connected to racism, and that this history has been largely hidden from white people can help one begin to understand why, for white people, it can be so hard to see these issues clearly. Race is an unscientific invention and a social reality; it is both a myth and a powerful force. It is undisputed that there is greater genetic variation within “racial” groups than between them, which means race is a social category, not a scientific one.

Race as we know it today was invented in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to categorize different groups of people, in order to justify the slave trade and colonialism.<sup>1</sup> Pseudoscientific research (mostly on skulls and cadavers) and biased classifications were used to label and hierarchize people largely by geography and skin color. “Race” was created in order to rationalize racism; or as Ta-Nehisi Coates says: “Race is the child of racism, not the father.”

*Isn't it great to be wrong?... I like how anti-racism work stretches my mind. It blows my mind. There's movement from delusion to seeing clearly. I find it liberating actually. — White IMS Teacher*

*The more I learn, the more I learn about my biases. — White IMS Teacher*

Although race was especially useful for the slave trade to the Americas (which also benefited and accelerated Europe’s industrial revolution), the story of race has been used to justify the theft of land and resources and the subjugation of people all over the world. Often race/racism is seen as an “American problem” and while the issues have played out here in a unique way that are especially and intimately connected to the enslavement of Africans/African Americans and the genocide of Native Americans, the story of race – which includes the invention of “whiteness” – has been disseminated globally for hundreds of years (and has only grown exponentially in influence with digital media).

*From the [American Anthropological Association’s Statement on Race \(1998\)](#):  
[“Race”] was a mode of classification linked specifically to peoples in the colonial situation. It subsumed a growing ideology of inequality devised to rationalize European attitudes and treatment of the conquered and enslaved peoples. Proponents of slavery in particular during the 19th century used “race” to justify the retention of slavery... [Race] became a strategy for*

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<sup>1</sup> The PBS documentary series, [Race: The Power of an Illusion](#), gives an excellent overview of the invention of race.

*dividing, ranking, and controlling colonized people used by colonial powers everywhere... "Race" thus evolved as a worldview, a body of prejudgments that distorts our ideas about human differences and group behavior. Racial beliefs constitute myths about the diversity in the human species and about the abilities and behavior of people homogenized into "racial" categories. The myths fused behavior and physical features together in the public mind, impeding our comprehension of both biological variations and cultural behavior, implying that both are genetically determined. Racial myths bear no relationship to the reality of human capabilities or behavior. Scientists today find that reliance on such folk beliefs about human differences in research has led to countless errors.*

The errors mentioned above abound to this day as, for example, when scientific research mistakenly categorizes research according to “race” as opposed to cultural or environmental factors. One illustration of this is where medicine or interventions specified for “black” populations can use distorted logic and erroneous methodology, yet most doctors still do not understand the unscientific nature of “racial” categories.

*The Irish never forget their history and the English never remember theirs. — Irish Saying*

*Why do you think you have nothing to learn from a person of color? How do you actually view people of color? What are your actual perceptions and views of black people? Do you even know? — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

*There's a spectrum of openness to feedback with white dharma teachers... There was a talk where a white teacher said something racist. This was a phenomenal talk up to that point... I regretted not saying anything in that moment but it was a teacher I had no relationship with and I could feel a sense of closedness from them... But I also want to recognize that for a person of color the awareness about these kinds of statements is much greater and ends up creating a situation where BIPOC IMS yogis are constantly engaging in unpaid consulting in how to make IMS less racist. — White IMS Staff Member*

Generally, people of color who come on retreat at IMS are much more knowledgeable about the history of race/racism (and the history of colonialism) than their white teachers. This history is incredibly violent and traumatic but, until recently (e.g. the movie *Twelve Years a Slave*), it has gone largely untold in mainstream education and media. In fact, dominant versions present genteel and generous visions of slavery and colonialism that mask both the brutality of the oppressors and the brilliance of the oppressed. Of course, brutality has occurred amongst and between many categories of human beings, but the particular whitewashing – pun intended :-)

– of the brutality of race/racism continues to be systematically distorted, challenged and suppressed.<sup>2</sup>

*I have to be willing to believe people of colors' experience is legitimate. Somebody cuts you off in line and it upsets you – for white people this may not be a big deal, but what I started to understand is that if you're part of a marginalized group, it doesn't mean you're 'too sensitive' but that this is a legitimate experience, even if I as a white person having that experience wouldn't think the same thing. The same experience for different people is a different reality and part of internalized racial superiority is assuming that my reality is the right one. — White IMS Teacher*

Understanding this history is important for understanding the power of racism. Just because race as science is a myth, this does not mean that race as a social construct can be ignored. The power of this myth is evident in the economic, material and social inequities that abound around the world between white people and people of color, between colonizer and colonized; these have been woven into values, practices, policies and laws. In the US, there is a stark racial wealth gap where a typical white household has 16 times the wealth of a black one. The racial wealth gap is related primarily to inheritance but also other factors including income, home ownership, access to education, policing/incarceration and the labor market – these factors have been shown historically and currently to be socially, structurally and legally controlled and manipulated to favor white people. A recent [Pew Research Center study](#) found that the gap in average wealth among all blacks compared to all whites has worsened: In 1983, the median net worth of white households was eight times higher than the worth of black households. By 2013, white household net worth was 13 times that of black households. But structural racism is often dismissed and overruled by ideas and myths about self-reliance and equal opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

*Another resource that helped me was [Traces of the Trade](#). The power of that film is it shows this little New England town like we see all around us, and in the past we were always told we were the abolitionists, we were the good guys. But we see how the wealth of the north is based on slavery and the horrors in that little white town that people turned away from and pretend not to see. That was very effective to show that the wealth and privilege that is the foundation of white lives right now is based on that injustice. Wow. That was one of the first places I started to hear about reconciliation work. — White IMS Staff Member*

## **Whiteness and Dominant Culture**

Race is often presented by dominant culture as something that other people – people of color – possess. This allows most white people to ignore the fact that they too are racialized beings. Especially in the US, whiteness has been a manipulated category with ideas about who is white shifting to accommodate various social priorities. Over time, often to control labor or resources,

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<sup>2</sup> An excellent exploration of ongoing distortion and suppression of history is described in [this Radiolab episode](#) which details the British colonial experience with the Mau Mau in Kenya.

<sup>3</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates gives a detailed overview of these “moral debts” in the US. in [The Case for Reparations](#).

different ethnicities and cultural groups in America have been or not been “scientifically” categorized as white (or as multiple inferior and superior white races, such as Anglo Saxons above Celts above Northern Italians above Southern Italians, and so on). Eventually, all Europeans entered into the primarily flat category of “white,” which stands in opposition to the categories of “Black,” “Asian,” “Native American,” and “Latino,” which are to this day promoted by the dominant culture as inferior, through lack of representation and/or negative stereotyping.

*One shift for me was understanding internalized racial superiority... I really started to see that white values are the dominant values of our country; that are twisted and carried to an extreme. —White IMS Teacher*

*All of us tend to universalize our subjectivity. White teachers might speak out of their own experience of the world and not realize that their experience is filtered by their age, gender, race or class, and that it is not a universal perspective of the world, but absolutely filtered through all the different elements of social location... Race or other parts of our social location become part of our perceptual field and color how we view things, things we don't even realize. — BIPOC IMS Teacher*

Entering into whiteness has often meant losing a connection to strong ethnic or cultural identity and practices including language, customs, food, costume, arts and rituals. The dominant culture of whiteness is reflected even in the loss of regional identity; for example, mainstream newscasters have an unidentifiable “American” accent that does not belong to any one region or ethnicity but denotes a class and education hierarchy. Yet when people of color have this accent, they are described as “sounding white.” This accent is the accent of the dominant culture; it is considered to be superior and is rewarded socially and economically. What else connotes dominant culture?

*The culture of IMS, with all that it entails: the silence, no eye contact, the way people speak to each other, the cadence of teachers when they deliver a talk, the way talks are structured (a well-formed argument in a western academic setting), and even the ask around not wearing brightly colored clothing... I wish that teachers were curious about understanding not only cultures other than their own, but I wish they understood their own culture better. I wish they understood whiteness better. Because I think part of the problem is that what makes white people feel at home at IMS is that the culture is very white, not that it's “dharmic.” The question is not how to make people of color feel more at home in the Dharma, it's how do you make the culture at IMS less white. Then people of color would want to practice there. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

As one interviewee pointed out, IMS is already a home to both white people and people of color; but IMS is a dharma home to the former *because* of the environment and a dharma home to the latter *despite* the environment.

*Acknowledging historical and collective pieces is important. Being socially situated as white, my mind has the cultural tendency to seeing things in terms of individual experience rather than the collective. When I'm judging another person around body size, or skin color or accent,...I don't see, "Oh, this is society playing out in my mind." I can keep on saying "judging," but I don't see the bigger societal framework of my judging... We need to normalize that our minds are shaped by society. — White IMS Teacher*

### **Internalized Racial Superiority (and Internalized Oppression)**

*Once people start getting interested in the conversation, they get afraid that they're going to say something wrong, or offend me. I always give the invitation to my colleagues that it's okay to make mistakes with me – that is the place to practice. Better to say something to me than to not say it and be a silent bystander... Try it on and ask for help. — BIPOC IMS Teacher*

*What we can hope is that practitioners, people who know how to investigate their own hearts and minds, get their antennae out for attachment to view along these lines and catch ourselves, even if it's after the fact. Dhamma is beautiful in the beginning, middle and end, even when it's all over. You caught it, you saw it – if you can soak in the feeling of that even for a few moments it starts to shift things over time. — White IMS Teacher*

The power of this myth called race is internal as much as it is external, mental as much as material. And the connection of race/racism to the Dharma can be a powerful tool for self-exploration. There has been profound research in the past decade on "implicit bias" (also called "unconscious bias") that shows people have relatively automatic prejudiced judgments and social behavior about race (as well as gender, sexual orientation, size and other categories) and that white people overwhelmingly perpetuate hierarchies of racial oppression in their unconscious thoughts, speech and actions. Of course, these biases are a reflection of socially constructed hierarchies but the important point (and the interesting one for dharma practitioners) is that they are largely unconscious. Many white people do not want to see this about themselves for fear of being "racist."

*It's tricky because there's such a range of ways of looking at the issue. People can be touchy about it. I know I was at the beginning. You start to feel defensive, not really acknowledging "Actually, I'm a racist" and starting with that as the reality. — White IMS Teacher*

*Be part of a diversity group that is for whites. Before we come to the table to discuss this with people of color, we have a lot of talking we need to do just among white people first. Learn more about white privilege, white supremacy, racism; learn more about what's going on. — White IMS Teacher*

*I don't have any problem applying skillful means to thoughts of self-hatred... When I figured out I could use the same kind of skillful means for racist thoughts, that was enormously helpful. So there's not this terrible heaviness that I'm a terrible human being but that it's conditioning... There are going to be harmful effects of growing up in an almost completely white environment and it shows up in my thoughts and I can make a mental note of "racist thoughts arising." They happen less frequently now, but they still arise. — White IMS Staff Member*

*My reactivity changed as I began to trust my sense of things. Our institutional approach does fall short. I love that we have become more diverse and I'm thankful for the things we have done to get there, but I want to see these institutions take it deeper, to the place where Buddhist practice can take it... I'm wanting to find ways to see the harm more deeply. Panning back more, race and gender relations are ills for society, but to get at that deeper shift we have to turn to the teachings: attachment to views and mental states... If I don't see my views about people, I don't see how my ways of relating to people is being altered by that and that there's attachment and prejudice and bias that arise in my own heart. And also really paying attention when it's done to me [as a woman] and really open my heart to how it feels. Once I know how painful it is to be classified and diminished, I am much less likely to do it to someone else. But let's be honest, this is subtle stuff. It's taken me many years of practice just to begin to open to those feelings in myself because we have sophisticated systems of denying them. — White IMS Teacher*

While the unconscious conditioning of white people towards people of color could be labeled "internalized racial superiority," one way people of color internalize these hierarchies is as "internalized oppression." An example of internalized oppression is "stereotype threat" – the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype. The term was coined by the researchers who showed that black college students performed worse on standardized tests than their white peers when they were reminded, before taking the tests, that their racial group tends to do poorly on such exams. If you are part of marginalized groups, you do not need to be reminded of negative stereotypes... those stereotypes are broadcast by the education system, the media and culture at large so that they are internalized.

*I think, I mean, that we have very gravely underestimated the damage that apartheid inflicted on all of us. You know, the damage to our psyches, the damage that has made – I mean, it shocked me. I went to Nigeria when I was working for the World Council of Churches, and I was due to fly to Jos. And so I go to Lagos airport and I get onto the plane and the two pilots in the cockpit are both black. And whee, I just grew inches. You know, it was fantastic because we had been told that blacks can't do this. And we have a smooth takeoff and then we hit the mother and father of turbulence. I mean, it was quite awful, scary. Do you know, I can't believe it but the first thought that came to my mind was, "Hey, there's no white men in that cockpit. Are those blacks going to be able to make it?" And of course, they obviously made it – here I am. But the thing is, I had not known that I was damaged to the*



*extent of thinking that somehow actually what those white people who had kept drumming into us in South Africa about our being inferior, about our being incapable, it had lodged somewhere in me. — Archbishop Desmond Tutu*

*It's ridiculous to think race/racism is outside the realm of the Dharma. We have to start using the frameworks of the Dharma to understand these issues. What do we think wrong view is? I am still uncovering and trying to bring awareness to my own internalized racism and sexism... People may not be understanding their social location as white people, but I am not finished with my work either. — BIPOC IMS Teacher*

*In the moment, working with students the most that I can do is help people pick up the pieces and process, working with someone from an oppressed culture... In the end, we have to say, this is the dukkha of this time that we've born into. Knowing this, we can work with it in the moment. — White IMS Teacher*

### **Microaggressions, Cultural Appropriation and Intersectionality**

Below are three related topics that are closely tied to this work. Of course, they are not the only ones, and we cannot do them full justice here. However, there are many resources available to help you understand them better, and we hope they, along with everything written here, continue to inspire you into your own explorations.

*Sometimes when something racist happens in the space, I will stop tracking with that critical lens. It starts feeling like I can't deal with this right now and then that thing doesn't get interrogated. It's only with other practitioners or teachers of color that this gets worked through but that also just reopens wounds over and over again. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

*There has to be an understanding of the impact of my whiteness, regardless of what my intentions might be. — White IMS Staff Member*

Microaggressions are subtle, usually unintentional, comments or actions directed at people from marginalized groups. The term was coined by psychiatrist and Harvard University professor Chester M. Pierce in 1970 to describe insults and dismissals he regularly witnessed non-black Americans inflict on African Americans. The term has grown to encompass the experiences of other marginalized groups but is most often associated with racialized interactions.

There can be a tendency by white people to label the identification of microaggressions as people of color being “too sensitive,” rather than a consideration that the microaggression is based on ignorance, internalized superiority and implicit bias of which the white person is not even aware. Not being able to tell people of color apart, assumptions about a person of color's retreat or study experience, casual comments about their appearance, and many other interactions can all manifest as microaggressions, especially if there is a lack of awareness. The

most important thing to consider is the reaction or response you give when feedback is offered about these slights.<sup>4</sup>

*These recommendations need to be understood within a greater paradigm and context which requires a much more thorough education or training – without that, they can just translate as behavioral modification types of practices for the teachers. If they don't understand why it's so deep, it can land as just trying to be sensitive to what's touchy for people. I want to know there's understanding, I don't just want the behavior. And I don't think the behavior will be very successful anyways if there's not the understanding. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

*People have a tough time with narratives where they're not the hero... To do this work there has to be a renunciation of that narrative. — White IMS Staff Member*

*An essential part of teaching is highlighting that the yogi's safety is paramount, otherwise there is no going forward. Teachers need to demonstrate a willingness to adapt to yogis' needs, help them be comfortable. — White IMS Teacher*

Cultural Appropriation is a very complex issue that is especially impactful to Asian and Asian American yogis at IMS. We all know that the Buddhadharmas has been dynamic from the start and has involved an intermingling of various cultures over centuries. However, in its modern form, the selective presentation that privileges the rational or “scientific” aspects of the teachings by white teachers, yet dismissing certain teachings, rituals and forms as “cultural baggage,” is often experienced as demeaning and painful.

*A Modern is someone who believes that others believe. — Bruno Latour*

*One thing that's been disturbing is using people of color or BIPOC culture as a background or prop – for example, using Asian accents, or not citing the specific cultures but saying things like “a Native American” story. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

*If you're going to talk about another culture, imagine a majority of the audience is of that culture. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

We cannot explore the nuances of cultural appropriation here, as this is a living conversation and impacted deeply by each teacher's relationship to the teachings, but again, we encourage you to explore the issue and recommend beginning with this powerful article by Funie Hsu, [We've Been Here All Along](#).

*The more diverse the community is, the more differences there are in interpretation and perspectives that teachers have never had questioned before... Their own relationship to Dharma is going to be challenged in the presence of different groups of people. We are all coming from a conditioned lens. What you think is objectivity*

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<sup>4</sup> [This Atlantic Monthly article](#) explores the impact microraggressions can have in an educational setting.

*has only looked like objectivity because you've been surrounded by people so similar to you. The more you are surrounded by other people, the more you see what you thought was objectivity is actually interpretation through a particular lens. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

*Your intentions don't excuse you. You have to keep looking at the impact of what you do, irrespective of what your intentions are. — White IMS Staff Member*

Intersectionality is the concept that someone can experience many forms of oppression and also experience both privilege and oppression simultaneously. Oppressive systems (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. The term was coined by American civil rights advocate Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw to name overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination or discrimination.

*There's an assumption that a person in the audience has never had to kill or steal. There's an assumption of who's in the room. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

There is an almost unbearable complexity to understanding the many experiences of oppression (and trauma) that people bring into the retreat container. Intersectionality is another complex and powerful issue that we hope will be of interest for you to explore. [This article](#) on the intersection of anti-Semitism and white privilege is one place to start.

*I think teachers need to be trauma informed and well trained in trauma to work with communities of color. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

### **Things to Keep in Mind and Heart While at IMS**

Below are some additional areas for consideration.

*There's care needed for each person getting it and feeling inspired and empowered to move forward... Some people will need to get shocked into their understanding and others will grow in their awareness over time. Each person is going to learn differently. — BIPOC IMS Teacher*

Engaging in a Personal Process: As we have been emphasizing, this work takes time. There is a certain amount of theoretical and historical information to be understood alongside a personal and internal process. We encourage you to connect with other white people either in your community or virtually. Take care in burdening people of color with the need to educate you, especially if you do not have an established relationship of trust. A good place to start is at [White Awake](#), which offers a range of resources and a curriculum model for exploring this with others.

*There has to be much more space for listening and sharing. This work here is in service of the institution and people of color become the unpaid consultants for*

*waking up white folks. But I still appreciate having this conversation because we need more. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

*I feel like there's a way in which, through the teaching role, there's a holding at arm's distance the internal work that can be done. There's a sense that I'm going to engage in this work because it's going to help this suffering class of people – not because it's what I owe to myself in my own awakening, or to my community of white folks to aid in their liberation as well. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

*How willing are you actually to do this? This is where you get to show us. And some people might say, "I'm not. I'm not interested." And if someone is not willing, maybe it's not a good fit, IMS. — BIPOC IMS Teacher*

*The most transformation that I've witnessed is when white folks do this work together on their own. How can we get white allies to do this work and why are white teachers not tapping the expertise that's happening in the community? The hierarchy of teaching limits this work. It takes humility of teachers placing themselves squarely in the middle of the sangha. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

Building Diverse Teaching Teams: Diversity at the front of the hall is key for this work, for a range of experiences and voices to contribute to our understanding of the Dharma as well as for a sense of safety and empowerment for the yogis. Yet we suggest you first establish a relationship with people of color who you would like to include on teaching teams.

*The tokenizing of teachers of color is becoming more of a problem. Please don't invite me onto your teaching team just because I'm brown. — BIPOC IMS Teacher*

Taking Care When Responding to Concerns of People of Color: When people of color share their experiences around race, or offer feedback to white teachers about issues around diversity, we encourage you consider that there may be aspects of the situation of which you are not aware. Offering only dharmic interpretations is usually not helpful. Listening deeply is the best response.

Sometimes, being confronted around race produces what is termed White Fragility – you may want to explore [Robin DiAngelo's research paper](#) on this dynamic.

*There's a deep invalidation in calling all of this suffering "just yogi mind." — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

*Can you, when getting feedback from a person of color, can you just listen and not try and recontextualize their feedback from your deep dharma wisdom? And, to go farther, can you reflect back to that individual that you are interested and working on what was shared, and maybe even ask for forgiveness if you feel it's appropriate? — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

*There's such a strong attention to not disturbing the practice, there's a deep love for that capacity (like the staff keeping their eyes down). But there's a way in which a reverence for trying to make a container invisible then undermines a legitimate critical lens towards the container itself. Instead of, "go back to your own noting practice" it's a recognition that sometimes it's "hey, you're identifying something important here." The more people of color you have, the more you'll see that your container needs to be looked at critically. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

Taking Care... But Not Shying Away from the Issues: Each of us must develop our own relationship with and understanding of these issues, and an awareness of our capacities and limitations. We encourage you to begin addressing race/racism in your own teaching.

*In a group meeting, a black yogi shared their fear of walking in the woods, but the group was not picking up on the racial dynamic. The white teacher said, "Yes, for you, this is an issue; for me as a white person, it's not." And just through that simple acknowledgement, [it] created a whole other layer of safety and connection in the room. — BIPOC IMS Yogi*

*One white teacher was questioning whether we should use the phrase "white privilege" on retreat because it might be triggering for people. But what is the karma of not using it?... There are karmic implications for the ways we do harm. If we don't take this up, there will be karmic implications for that. We will be irrelevant organizations in 20 years. — BIPOC IMS Teacher*

*How do we teach about attachment to view? It's too deep. I don't expect centuries of oppression to turn around in my lifetime. But I can and do let people know when it hurts on a one-to-one basis [around gender]. I hope I can bring more and more into dharma talks, talk about attachment to view and bring examples around race and gender into it. — White IMS Teacher*

*I feel like we can be too gentle. I'm not interested in being gentle anymore. Because it's not gentle for us. I don't want to be unkind, but the babying has become unappealing to me... I only want to be authentic moving forward. I'm tired of hiding, I'm tired of being quiet. If you're willing to go on this ride, you're welcome. And if not, that's okay, but we can't work together. — BIPOC IMS Teacher*

*As a teacher, what I'm curious about is beginning to imagine what it's like being someone else coming into a retreat. I have all these assumptions about what it's like, and I can be so wrong about someone else's experience is... The only way I can find that out is by speak to people's experiences.... On the 3-month retreat, I shared a poem by May Sarton and I gave her background, that she was a lesbian and a yogi said later, "I've been coming to IMS for 20 years and that's first time I've heard the word 'lesbian' in the hall and that one small thing made a huge difference." I'm straight, I have to step out of my own shoes to try and understand what's going to be impactful in a positive way. — White IMS Teacher*

Deepening Connections and Easing Suffering: Our individual and collective work in dismantling racism directly helps to decrease the suffering in the world brought about by injustice, and also helps to reconfigure societal and institutional equity.

While not easy work, our efforts often lead to bridging divides, deepening connections and a much stronger sense of sangha.

*I'd like to acknowledge the progress IMS has made in working with ignorance and delusion around race and structural racism. There have been a lot of struggles to get to this place. At the same time, there is a feeling of a deepening connection among many of us in this dharma community. This feeling gives me a sense of hope, as well as a real optimism that we can truly fulfill our beautiful intentions together. — BIPOC IMS Teacher*

*What has made the work sing for me is the personal contact with people of different cultural backgrounds that brings in feelings of learning and growing and, yes, metta and love, that make it inspiring and delightful. — White IMS Teacher*

*Anti-racism and diversity work has been both mind-opening and deeply heartwarming. Sure, at times it's also embarrassing and uncomfortable. And that seems like a small price to pay to heal the wounds of racism in our dharma family. — White IMS Teacher*

AND, When Things Go Wrong...: You will make mistakes. We all do. If a person of color on your retreat is upset or concerned by an interaction around race/racism, please let the retreat manager or Executive Director know as soon as possible, so that we can all better respond to the yogi.

For example, you might inadvertently say something racist, or may fail to acknowledge the reality of racism for a BIPOC yogi. Without realizing it, you may express the dharma in a way that is particularly triggering for our BIPOC retreatants.

If you want to discuss this work at any time, we encourage you to reach out to other IMS teachers, to our Guiding Teachers, and/or to the Executive Director. In this way, we keep our own work vibrant and ongoing.

*Coming to IMS, there is such power in being in an environment where this conversation happens and where it's valued, where you get to focus out loud on this stuff and where we are regularly talking about it, regularly sharing materials. The emails that go out sharing videos we found and articles we found – it keeps the conversation very alive and ongoing... It's really important. — White IMS Staff Member*

## **Additional Resources**

To supplement the articles and other resources mentioned throughout this document, we offer this google drive: [IMS Understanding Race-Racism Resources](#).

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