

Summary of Clouds in Water Anti-Racist Workshop with Okogyeamon of ASDIC Metamorphosis

Why do some people get squeamish when conversations turn to race, racism or white privilege? Why are some white people unwilling or unable to understand or acknowledge the effects of racism and white supremacy on Indigenous People and People of Color? Why are some Indigenous People and People of Color reluctant to open up to white folks on those effects on them? How can we have personal yet respectful conversations on white supremacy and racism as one tactic in a strategy of dismantling these systems of oppression causing suffering not only to the Indigenous and People of Color but white people as well?

These were just some of the myriad questions and concepts explored at a two-day anti-racism workshop entitled “Truth-Hearing in a Culture of Mystification: Receiving New Truth – Contexts, Ideas, and Practices.” Held on February 8th and 9th at Clouds in Water, the event was facilitated by Okogyeamon (Herbert Perkins), Executive Director of Anti-Racism Study Dialogue Circles (ASDIC) Metamorphosis, an organization that focuses on bringing communities together and equipping them to address racism.

About two dozen multi-racial members of the People of Color and Indigenous Sitting and the Dismantling Whiteness groups at Clouds in Water attended the workshop. The event served as another effort in Clouds’ continuing mandate of challenging racism and white supremacy in general and in the sangha in particular, a mandate that grew out of the Zen priest Rev. angel Kyodo Williams’ visits to Clouds in Water in October 2017 and July 2018.

While some of the answers were uncomfortable for some attendees, all them seemed to agree that having such conversations about racism and white supremacy and being uncomfortable in them is a prerequisite in order for white folk to begin to scratch the surface of deconstructing whiteness and its many privileges.

Silence by good white people in the face of racism and white supremacy may keep them secure in those privileges and comfortable with their family and friends but it also perpetuates systems of oppression that rob Indigenous People and People of Color of their dignity, self-worth and sometimes their lives. Such silence can also rob white people of their conscience. One way to help break down these systems is for white people to remember that, to paraphrase the ubiquitous anti-terrorist slogan, “if you see or hear something racist, say or do something anti-racist.”

Okogyeamon received his graduate degrees from UCLA (MATESL), UC Santa Cruz (Ph.D), and United Seminary Twin Cities (M.Div) and studied at the Institute of Asian Studies, San Francisco (Indian Philosophy).

Guiding Teacher Sosan Flynn would like to express her deep gratitude to Gentle Dragon for all the work she did in helping to get this workshop with Okogyeamon set up.

For more information on ASDIC Metamorphosis or to participate in ongoing Anti-Racism Study Dialogues, go to www.asdicircle.org or call Okogyeamon or Jenna Thorsett, Administrative Assistant, at 612-558-0452 or info@asdicircle.org.

