



Shogaku Zen Institute
shogakuzen.org

**Buddhist History, Philosophy, and Racism:
Zen Perspectives and Beyond**

**A nine-week online course taught by
Rev. Eric Daishin McCabe and Rev. Steve Kanji Ruhl**

**Wednesday evenings, 9:00-10:30 pm EST
Starting January 27 and ending March 24**

How can we approach the vexing conundrums of race as a *genjokoan* -- a koan of our daily lives, as Dogen Zenji (1200-1253) defined it: “To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self”? How can we examine the self and forget the self in a free spirit of Zen inquiry, of not-knowing, independent of either conservative or progressive orthodoxies? How can we hold both a view from the Absolute, which sees race as an illusory construct and emphasizes our Oneness and interconnectedness, and a view from the Relative, which sees race as an actual, undeniable part of the world of individuated differentiation and dualities that we navigate every day -- with historical legacies of pain and suffering but also opportunities for celebration of differences, and of liberation? How can we experience simultaneously the Buddhist reality of no-self and the reality of a racially constructed self? How can we acknowledge racial otherness without attaching to a harmful separation of self and other?

For American Buddhists these are timely questions. The Black Lives Matter movement and the protests following deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others, highlight vividly the necessity for Buddhists to join our fellow American spiritual practitioners in our own examining of the long-standing, damaging issues of race and our own complicated relationship to them.

The facilitators of this forum, Daishin and Kanji (both white) recognize our responsibility as white people to explore our own enactment of racist beliefs that inform and shape our community. This is an aspect of studying the self -- and in doing this study, people of color are not obligated to teach white people about racial issues. Most of our current Shogaku students are people who identify as white, and so we are offering to facilitate an open examination of Buddhism and race, a discussion to which, of course, everyone is invited. Our inquiry will focus on topics addressing white and Black racial issues, but also Asian-American, Latinx, and Native American issues, seen through the primary lens of Zen practice.

This nine-week course will feature a variety of books, blogs, and videos (and possibly a guest teacher or two) as reference sources, and it will be conducted as a forum for honest dialogue and reflection. It will afford a chance to share our personal experiences of race, our insights, our shames and fears, our complicity, our concerns, our hopes; a chance to challenge our assumptions, listen attentively, go deep, and examine racial issues (such as ways we may unconsciously dismiss people of color and consider ourselves superior) in a uniquely Buddhist framework, as well as to critique Buddhist history and philosophy itself in a racial context.