

What is BFoD? An Annotated Timeline

January 12, 2019

BFoD Planning Group meets to continue mission/vision work. Develops 10 Values to Guide Our Work. Determines that Sangha Forum is needed to elicit sangha feedback to complete mission/vision work.

Shoan Note: We worked so hard and steadily all day to do this critical work of mission and vision, which we considered vital to bringing BFoD out to the sangha at large. The day had good energy, lots of creative juice, but at the end we were only half-way through the mission/vision process. As I was lamenting the fact that we were never going to get to a place where this was ready to bring out, Chikei offers the bold suggestion that we go ahead and bring this to the sangha now. Everyone greets the idea with great enthusiasm and I feel a sense of relief. At last!

Joshin Note: Relief to bring this the work to the sangha, for sure! We had been living with this for what seemed a long time and it was definitely time to get the input of others. Also, a sense of trepidation for me: what would the sangha think of all of this?

January 5, 2019

Valerie Brown and Marisela Gomez offer a PoC-only retreat at ZCNYC called Healing the Wounds of Racism. It's well-attended, bringing in long-time sangha and new people. This program and its success was the result of the newly formed Programming Committee including PoC from BFoD and doing outreach in the larger NYC Buddhist community.

Joshin Note: This was an important retreat for me in more ways than I expected: it began to offer a model for how inclusion and the dharma can support each other.

Daisen Note: When one of the 2 Black female facilitators recounted a police encounter she had with a fearful cop who pulled a gun on her as she singularly walked beside a highway needing help ... I re-experienced some of that brazen raw negative energy that I used to routinely offer any policeman I encountered.

It was anger, broad and deep. It reduced my wit and...I remembered some of my youthful aggression. That woman had been treated just exactly like how cops treat me. It was the same story. She expressed how her controlling wit prevented the fearful cop from shooting an unarmed woman who had car trouble.

That was the first time I experienced a woman telling 'my' cop encounter story.

I did not like her having that experience. I know I am chauvinistic, but I am still routinely amazed by the difference in physical strength that men have over women generally speaking. What exactly are men who point guns at unarmed people afraid of?

Her story and the cop's inexplicable fear felt much worse when she told the story.

Something about that Fire Lotus Diversity Retreat was / is important to me.

December 16, 2018

BFoD Planning Group meets via Zoom to begin mission/vision work.

December 1, 2018

White members of MRO Governing Bodies—Guardian Council, Seniors, Monastics, Board, BFoD Planning—do a day-long training with outside facilitators Eduardo Gonzalez and Maryellen Whittington-Couse called “Power & Difference: A Framework for Change.”

Meiju Note: I think it’s important to note that the wkshp had initially been framed as for all of the above people, though after lots of consideration and communication, the POC members of the BFoD planning group expressed concern that in this context, the proposed agenda was really designed for white members at the beginning stages of anti-racist work and might be harmful/not beneficial for POCs to participate. There was a very involved, thoughtful (and for me, personally—anxiety-provoking) electronic conversation amongst BFoD planning members prior to this wkshop. Zuiko and Jordan were working long and hard with MaryEllen and Eduardo to come up with an agenda prior to the day, and ultimately, (PLEASE, correct me if I got this wrong?!) with the feedback from the POC members of the group, ME and Eduardo agreed that this initial workshop would be for the white members. We did get some survey feedback from participants. Maybe good to include a sentence about the upshot of that? The few I spoke to felt it was a good start and appreciated the non-judgmental/non “holier-than-thou” aspect of the learning experience.

Jinfu Note: After many months (actually years) of questioning my relationship to ZMM, it was at the time of this meeting that I realized that I was neither fully in, as in a river stream, nor fully out, as sitting on its banks—but involved. I opted to not join this meeting, clarifying my deep commitment to the work of BFoD within the role of an “outsider” of sorts.

November 29, 2018

ZMM Residents’ BFoD meeting planned and facilitated by a group of non-monastic residents around examining the Monastery’s Doshinji Code.

Zuiko Note: This felt important in that the residents’ meetings have been a process for me of understanding how easy it is to re-create dominating power dynamics within anti-oppression work. We used to not even post an agenda for the residents to know what we were going to do! I keep thinking of it as: the way that we do this work is the work itself (e.g. non-hierarchical, power-sharing, trusting the wisdom of the group)

Shoan Note: This was inspiring to me, and gave me a sense of what else is possible in our sangha and how rich it is to have more people in leadership. The five residents who planned it were so thoughtful and sincere and worked so hard and similar issues around power and hierarchy were very present in the planning and consideration. We have been slow on the follow-up to re-write the Doshinji Code, but it’s going to happen, and that is really from the residents’ grass-roots initiative.

November 2-4, 2018

Hojin Sensei and Gokan attend the PISAB's Undoing Racism workshop in Poughkeepsie, NY.

Hojin Note: The first question they asked in this retreat after forming a big circle of 40 + people was: "say your name, what your work is and why is this work urgent for you". Did fine on the first two questions and then my mind and mouth froze and would not move to the outside as something was defrosting inside with this word URGENT. The urgency seemed to want to seep out of my heart and eyes in buckets of tears. I just held my seat.

All the time being with the people in the BFOD group, all the reading and wanting to get informed, the past work our endangered earth, was vibrating at a high frequency of answering this question of urgency. Gokan was in the car with me and we were so quiet riding home the first day. I stared out the window and still couldn't form a sentence though he was right there with me. A voice began to emerge over those days

October 23-25, 2018

Shoan attends the PISAB's Undoing Racism workshop in Westchester, NY.

Shoan note: The chance to do anti-racist work with people from outside the sangha was so informative and enlivening. I appreciated how universal the themes and tensions are. I also appreciated how much work I had done through our BFOD work compared with the white folks in our group who were stepping into this kind of thing for the first time. And so much of that work had to do with knowing my own racism and owning my own privilege.

September 28-20, 2018

Zuisei Sensei and Zuiko attend the PISAB's Undoing Racism workshop in Kingston, NY.

Meiju Note: I attended as well. A few other sangha members unaffiliated with BFoD also happened to be there. I felt huge relief to have contact with non-sangha in this work. It aired things out, showed me new possibilities, and showed me how the white members of BFoD group could help each other do our own work exploring white ethnic identities as part of anti-racist work, rather than just looking to POCs to teach us about "culture." It somehow brought more kindness (for self and other) into the work for me.

September 23, 2018

With the dissolving of the ZMM BFoD Planning group into the larger BFoD Planning group, the white members of BFoD begin meeting as a White Affinity Group at the Monastery. Through working within BFoD, it became clear that white people had their own work to do together to unpack whiteness and white racial identity, and to process feelings associated with doing this work.

Zuisei Note: I believe this is when we failed to address Gikon and thank him for his work with the ZMM BFoD group, just as we failed to welcome him properly when he joined. It was so clear that we were once again repeating the very same familiar yet exclusionary power dynamics that we are working to change.

September 1, 2018

ZMM BFoD and ZCNYC PoC meet for a full day at the Monastery and vote to merge into one group: the BFoD Planning Group. That day, the group forms the Youth Education, Programming and Communications Committees. This is the first time the idea of a Sangha Forum is offered as a way to bring our work out to the community, but we feel we are not yet ready.

Zuisei Note: Throughout there have been the questions of commitment and division of labor within the group. They came up before, during, and after this meeting, though we didn't address them directly.

Jordan Note: Everything from September 2018 to now feels way too clean. Those months felt like some of the most difficult times we've had together particularly as a large group and I'm not getting the feeling of that history here. It feels very much like the really poor telling of "the birth of this country" that I got in school. That feels like a harsh statement but I say it that way to highlight that these months got us here and they were not easy or simple to say the least.

Zuiko Note: Jordan and I took on facilitating this day-long meeting. We spent 12+ hours planning the agenda and logistics. After the July meeting, a lot felt on the line. I remember the hours we spent, discussing how to make the *form* of the meeting the work itself, even how we planned the meeting, e.g. showing the agenda to the group ahead of time to get feedback and make adjustments (the affinity work happened b/c of someone's suggestions). We had a call with Shugen about how we wanted to do this—how to let non-monastics take the lead on creating liturgy for the meeting. It was an incredibly rich and joyful process and taught me so much about the value of transparency, collaboration, group process, cross-racial leading, power-sharing vs. my usual let's do it the most efficient and best way (i.e. *my way*). One of many examples of my starting to see what seems like "my personality" (perfectionist, my way's best, dominating, efficient) as my white supremacist conditioning, and seeing the lack of trust and imagination in that.

Shoan Note: I think we were all nervous about this next meeting. How would it go? Would the group repair and move on? Would people throw in the towel and bail? The meeting was powerful. I give a lot of credit to Zuiko and Jordan, who worked extremely hard as co-facilitators and planned a very effective agenda that took care of the group in such a skillful way.

Joshin Note: This was the first time that we were meeting face-to-face after the July meeting and the many calls, texts and BaseCamp work that we had after that meeting. I was nervous, but kind of determined not to let my fears get in the way of being really present and ready to be supportive of others...or accept support from others. It felt very important to have the opportunity

for PoC to meet separately from the white members at times and the realization of that need really came from the last meeting.

July 8, 2018

ZMM BFoD and ZCNYC PoC meet for the third time, at the Monastery, this time without outside facilitators. The meeting is difficult and charged, as are the electronic discussions that follow. At the urging of sangha member Tanya Bonner, the group schedules a day-long meeting during the Ango Opening Peaceful Dwelling retreat.

Zuiko Note: This meeting was emotionally intense. I can't remember being in a situation with sangha where things felt so charged. I was afraid after this meeting that things were going to fall apart with BFoD. The electronic threads that followed this meeting were also charged. I and other white people fell into so many predictable patterns—white solidarity, white centering. As painful as it was for me to stumble and see how I hurt others, I learned so much from this meeting and the electronic message thread. (It's also painful to see how I've made some of these same mistakes again.) It was hard learning, but I also felt a stronger commitment in myself and some other white members of ZMM BFoD in the aftermath.

Shugen Note: I felt that this meeting was one of the more important moments in all of the work we had done up to this point. During the meeting, I felt I was watching the real possibility that it would all come apart due to the lack of deeper, more honest commitment and participation from the white members including myself. To me the experience, and its aftermath, exposed the distance that systemic racism creates between White and PoC, but also helped us begin to create a stronger bond and trust.

Shoan Note: Yes. Intense and charged. And uncomfortable. There are a few exchanges from that meeting that are emblazoned in my mind. There was fire in the room. I felt called out for my own complacency and that all the monks were called out as being the power-holders at the Monastery and yet unable/unwilling to make real change happen. I felt a genuine resolve to change, and also like I see something very clearly, like I finally "get it." But then a few days later in our Basecamp thread I displayed the same kind of complacency and blindness and had to be called out once again. This was extremely uncomfortable. I felt nauseous almost the whole of the next week.

Joshin Note: I just ended up having to leave the room and cry for a while. I don't think I can say more, still.

Meiju Note: I remember feeling scared beforehand about not having outside facilitators for this meeting and being met with the clear message, esp from POC members of the group that things needed to be able to get messy and that we needed learn to do this work without outside facilitation. This meeting and the ensuing electronic conversation helped me encounter and learn a lot more about my own tendency towards "white silence" and my capacity/default setting to freeze in the face of conflict and the work of undoing racism. I was physically sick for days

after the meeting. I obsessively thought about the meeting, my role in it, and tried to choose the “right” words to post electronically. Among other things, the whole experience showed me very specific areas I needed to work on within myself and in company of other white people in order to decrease harm to POCS. These included: white shame, silence, centering, and how to be supportive to other white people in this work without centering ourselves and being white supremacist. It also made me look at subtle and overt ways I’ve been conditioned to lack empathy for POCs and strengthened my determination to change all of this.

Jinfu Note: Daisen named it that day—the gulf between the PoCs who were responding with urgency and clarity to an ongoing danger and the white people who were ASLEEP. I lit the match with a racist comment and caused harm (I think our group was already primed and combustible). The feedback I received from the PoC members was very direct and varied. Most of the white people were conspicuously silent, still safely on the sidelines, as if afraid to get caught up in it. I felt like I couldn’t quite think clearly for a week or so, as I tried to incorporate what I thought I was saying and the destructive impact my words had made. It’s a painfully peculiar gap between intention and impact. Like diving into clear blue waters but then hitting the rocks—there’s really no point in focusing on what I thought I was saying, given the severity of how it landed. No real need for defensiveness either, since I never felt harmed or attacked personally by this direct confrontation. Through the fog of it, I could see there was truth in it—something I wanted. Over the course of the deeply charged BaseCamp thread, I was sure most people, especially Tanya, had had it with me! Not so. Amidst the turmoil, I felt met with openness and a willingness to press on. That’s still amazing to me.

April 29, 2018

LGBTQ+ Affinity group begins meeting at the Monastery. They meet monthly on the Sundays that conclude sesshin.

March 22, 2018

ZMM BFoD Planning Group presents a shift to open up the ZMM Residents’ BFoD meetings to the larger sangha. ZMM residents say they’re not ready.

Shoan note: This is another example about how the traditional MRO model of top-down power was upended in the BFOD work. The planning group came to the residents saying, “This is what we want to do,” and the residents were really clear in expressing their objections. So we had to let go of that agenda.

Tanya Note: I didn’t even know this had happened. Did we discuss this?

January 21, 2018

ZMM BFoD and ZCNYC PoC meet for a second time, at the Temple, with the guidance of Eduardo Gonzalez as facilitator. The group works together to create a list of action items based on the Stop, Start, Continue exercise. Many of these action items can also be found in Tanya’s July 2017 proposal to MRO teachers and board members.

Shoan Note: On *January 28, 2018 & February 25, 2018* ZMM and ZCNYC each held sangha meetings on social action, which is the beginning of the Dharma Action initiative. Participants identify structural racism and white supremacy as issues we want to address, and agree that this falls under BFOD rather than a new action group. In accord with the BFOD planning group's wishes, BFOD will continue to be a closed group that will open up to the sangha in the future. Dharma Action participants expressed their interest in joining this work soon--and over the next year, I hear increasing frustration from Dharma Action participants over the fact that BFOD is still a closed group.

Meiju Note: The ZMM BFoD planning group came up with an idea to try to give people a taste of the kind of issues and conversations happening within the ZMM BFoD planning group at the time. Gikon and I did a two-person "fishbowl" as part of ZMM Dharma Action. We screened a bit of an interview with T. Coates as a jumping off point. The two of us then had a live, unrehearsed conversation btwn us with small groups of interested sangha members rotating through to listen and then have a brief Q&A. I felt "exposed" though appreciative to be able to do this with Gikon.

October 1, 2017

ZMM BFoD and ZCNYC PoC meet together for the first time at the Monastery with facilitators Maryellen Whittington-Couse and Eduardo Gonzalez. The groups spend three hours telling personal stories about their experiences around social identities, difference, learning and social justice.

Shoan note: This was a profound and for me, life affirming meeting. So many of the personal experiences people shared made deep impressions on me. I felt so grateful to everyone for sharing so generously and authentically. It was also one of the only times in my life I've heard POC speak about being taught by their families that white people were evil and not to be trusted. I felt stupid that I never really thought about that before. It was also a day where I saw that having an efficient agenda and wanting to "get things done" was not the true work at hand. We had so many things on our agenda that day, and we spent the whole meeting just on the first item. I thought it would take 20 minutes and it took 3 hours. At one point I realized that the facilitators must have thought this was crucial work or they would have contained it. In the days and months that followed, I understood more and more just how crucial that personal sharing was.

Jinfu Note: This feels like the beginning of our work, because we were *meeting*, face to face.

July 28, 2017

Sangha member Tanya Bonner submits MRO Diversity Proposal to MRO leadership, including teachers and the ZMM Board.

Tanya comment: Again, the reason why I did that was left out - which lacks authenticity and honesty that is needed in the telling of history. I had become fed up after a decade of seeing no progress on diversity. Other POCs were fed up too - some of whom had been members of the Sangha for much longer and seeing stagnant progress. Myself and another Sangha member of color met privately with other POCs to discuss the issue at Fire Lotus. Myself and another woman of color initially worked on the proposal. But I solely (for various reasons) ultimately ended up sending a final version of the proposal out to MRO leadership. This proposal reflected decades of frustration, pain, and even anger at decades of neglect in the area of diversity within MRO. I was done. I was tired of waiting. I was tired of the fear some POCs had expressed of negative repercussions from addressing the issue head-on and demanding change. I knew that there will never be a right time for justice, change, and tackling white supremacy in the Sangha for those who fear change. So that time was now. Again, I need to think of how to write this up to include within this chronological period.

Shoan note: I remember seeing Tanya's proposal and being kind of rocked by it. I saw how there were elements in the proposal that ran counter to so many of my assumptions about training and how the MRO does things. And I also saw how she had a perspective that really offered a different view, free of the assumptions I carried, and raised provocative questions about how we do things.

Hojin note: I read Tanya's proposal over and over to feel where she was coming from. I was maybe "startled" is a good word, how much she was looking in and was in too, I experienced it as caring and a carefully written piece, in a very fierce uncompromising way and putting herself out there. I was actually proud of this woman's strength and voice. Much of it I remember feeling stung and lost within it, as it was so clear and strong. What was this view? What hurts? I had to ask myself seriously whatever that meant. She got into my thick inattention.

Meiju Note; When I read Tanya's proposal I was struck by the *hutzpah* at putting herself out there like that and the thoughtful, detailed content of her suggestions. I felt some trepidation imagining the mostly white (and unprepared, in my estimation,) Board members meeting with the author of this document. It was a wake up to me that white sangha members in positions of power w/i the MRO, myself included, hadn't been thinking and talking enough about the problems and issues which Tanya so clearly named and made concrete suggestions about.

July 23, 2017

What is Whiteness? Group holds first public meeting at the Temple.

Meiju Note: This part highlights for me the fact that Donna and Busan have not, thus far, been part of the larger BFoD planning meetings and so we lack their comments and voices here. Would be nice to have their perspective, too. I understand and appreciate there have been various considerations for their not being invited earlier, incl one possible meeting where their participation would have made it so the number of white people in the group was greater than

number of POCs. Speaks to the process and ongoing discussions about who joins BFoD planning, when, and how.

February 9, 2017

Members of the ZMM BFoD Group hold the first residents' BFoD meeting after meeting with and hearing about the experiences of women of color in residency at the Monastery. Residents meetings begin happening monthly or every-other-month.

Gikon note: Again, would be good to mention that ZMM BFOD morphed into essentially a WIW group after the sole POC departed, and resumed as a mixed race group when a sole POC joined.

Jordan Note: Following what Gikon said, I'm wondering how we can capture the history of Gikon and I having been the only person of color represented in the group at different points in time. I'm thinking about the narrative I wrote which now feels like ages ago and wondering where or how that fits into this history and the trajectory of BFOD.

Shoan Note: Just want to follow up on Jordan's comment about her narrative, which was so significant for me. After she completed her year of residency, Jordan wrote a substantial piece about her experience and shared it with the BFOD group. She shared things about her experience as a POC in a white sangha that really disrupted my views: I had lived alongside this person for a year, cared about her so much, and yet there was so much about her experience as a black woman in our sangha that was completely unknown to me. I remember feeling so disturbed and discouraged, like, "We have so much work to do. This is impossible." I also how genuine Jordan's call to the dharma must be that she would choose to stay connected and train here despite the challenges. That was inspiring to me because I really relate to it. So I felt both things: the gulf that divides Jordan's experience of ZMM from mine and the love of the dharma and this place that unites us.

Gokan Note: A lot happened in these meetings. I think they were a big deal for the residents. There was a lot of resistance and upset and we - the planning group - spent a lot of time talking about how to respond to the resistance and upset, how to make these meetings helpful and real and safe enough. How do we do difficult emotional work with people we live with? Some meetings were profound. Some ended feeling like maybe they had made things worse. There were a lot of conversations that happened outside these meetings.

I also want to acknowledge Jordan's narrative, as well as feedback we heard from other POC residents about their experience at ZMM. I remember not understanding what they were saying in some places, and needing to let this sink in. They were having a different experience (!) These helped me to see in a different way. And so uncomfortable to hear that POC were not comfortable - or even sometimes not comfortable - at the Monastery.

Meiju Note: Jordan's narrative changed my life. It was so vulnerable and clear and deeply personal. I felt implicated in ways that she was hurt, even when I wasn't directly involved in a scenario. It raised the stakes for me, realizing that every person who sits in the zendo has their own narrative, and I often won't know exactly what that is (...and even less so for those who belong to marginalized groups of which I am not a member). Now I am more curious about even the silent narratives. And about my own narrative within my social identities.

2017

Shugen Roshi attends the PISAB's Undoing Racism workshop in New York City.

Jordan Note: Again why is this important? And why would Shugen do this again. He's already done it. He must have it all down. I know the answers to these questions but I think we should put it out there more explicitly.

Shugen Note: This was the first time I did this workshop with PISAB. It was important to me to have a more formal training experience and to do this in a group where I was unknown and had no position other than as a participant.

December 4, 2016

What is Whiteness? Group begins meeting informally at the Temple. WIW formed after the 2016 Presidential election as an opportunity for those who identify as white to come together to take responsibility for racism. The group formed with awareness of the work BFoD had done at ZCNYC and the expression by People of Color during that process that white people had work to do.

Gikon Note: More specifically, the WIW group came about when a white sangha member reached out to me and asked how they and other white sangha could be helpful to POCs in the aftermath of the election; I said that before offering themselves to POCs, they should engage in their own work to examine their own biases.

Jordan Note: It feels like important history to know that you told this white sangha member that it would be better to examine her own biases with other white people before doing anything for POC. I had no idea that's how it happened and I greatly appreciate you for stepping in that way, Gikon.

Shoan Note: I remember feeling skeptical that the city sangha was going to start a peer-led group to study whiteness. I thought they should have some kind of expert guiding them, but of course this was kind of a throw-back to a model in which we look to others with more power to lead things rather than taking them up ourselves and muddling through even if it's imperfect. I really see that differently now and am glad other people had the faith and confidence to take this on. Good for Donna and Busan for diving in there and not waiting around to become "experts." And of course, from another perspective, as white people, we have all the experience we need to learn what whiteness is--but we need to shift into a critical and investigative mind about it.

November 3-5, 2016

Hogen Sensei attends the PISAB's Undoing Racism workshop in New York City.

Jordan Note: And? I'm wondering why this is significant. I know it is significant but just saying it without more feels empty.

July 31, 2016

The ZMM BFoD Planning Group continues meeting at the Monastery. In order to learn how to navigate the power dynamics around decision-making and other group processes, the group and Shugen Roshi mutually agree that it would be helpful for Shugen to step out of the group for awhile.

Jordan Note: This part about the group and Shugen "mutually agreeing that it would be helpful for Shugen to step out" feels way too nice and clean. I don't remember it being that way. I remember it being an incredibly difficult decision that arose from Shugen asserting his power in ways that were in direct conflict with what the group was trying to do. Maybe it was eventually mutual but it was not as pretty and clean cut as this description makes it seem.

Zuiko Note: I remember bringing up the difficulty for me of doing this work with people who were were not only in positions of power (e.g. my boss at work, my seniors in the zendo; I was a novice monastic at the time), but who I also lived with every day. I remember there being resistance among some of the more senior people in ZMM BFoD to even looking at or talking about this.

Zuisei Note: If I remember correctly, I was one of the people offering resistance. I was afraid of upending the power dynamic. "Is this all going to fall apart?" I wondered. It was painful later to see both my fear and resistance, which at the time I didn't even recognize as such.

Shoan Note: I remember this feeling like a very loaded decision, loaded with significance because it was really without precedent and addressing a power dynamic by upending it. We were basically dis-inviting the abbot from something he started. I remember the conversations around this were layered and touched so many things, because the teacher plays such a particular role in our community and hierarchy and power have historically been so integral to how we train. The whole thing--considering this, talking about it with the group, taking the matter back to Shugen--made me uncomfortable because it was challenging a paradigm I was comfortable in.

Gokan Note: This whole conversation was uncomfortable for me as well. I was resistant and protective and scared about shaking things up. I also feel like I - and I think we as a group - learned a lot in a year or two of working together. We had a lot of difficult conversations. Hurt each others feelings. Challenged each other. Spoke honestly. It was sometimes really uncomfortable. We spent a lot of time working on what the group was - mission, vision - were

we meeting to do our own work together, or to develop a program to bring to the residents or the wider sangha? It took a while to see that struggling through all of this **was** the work. I really appreciated doing this work together. I felt things in myself shifting and opening. I feel like this is where I saw the power of and need for working on bias.

Meiju Note: This was a messy, loaded group formation. Some of us would sometimes leave the meetings feeling physically ill. As I remember and experienced it, we spent a lot of time working and playing out power dynamics within the group (ie: lay vs. monastic; male vs. female; POC vs. white)... trying to see the patterns and often being blind to ourselves. There was also conflict and group factions that seemed to break down along these lines: “we’re not moving fast enough” vs “let’s be thoughtful and take the time we need so as not to do harm.” Group members would call each other out on not being “urgent” enough. We were learning about “calling out” vs. “calling in” and how to do this within our own relationships. We had breaches and repairs.

Jinfu Note: I felt that the decision to ask Shugen to leave for a time was deeply problematic for the monastics, but not so sensitive an issue for the lay members, driving home how insidious power dynamics can be. Without a leader, we were bound to move slowly, each of us stepping independently and eventually more in unison. We often talked about how if it’s this difficult within our group after all these meetings, how are we going to be able to contain what comes up within the larger sangha! It was daunting!

Early 2016

Shugen Roshi invites a group of sangha members to form a ZMM Beyond Fear of Differences planning group to bring anti-oppression work to the larger sangha.

Jordan Note: Following what was said below I think it is incredibly important to bring up the fact that the Early 2016 integration of BFoD was also lacking “diversity” in a meaningful way considering RaShaun and I were both year long residents at the time who explicitly expressed our desire (to Shugen) to be a part of what would soon be BFoD and were left out. Also thinking about Zuiko’s fight to be a part of BFOD as she had spent a great deal of time doing similar work in college.

Tanya Note: This invitation was not inclusive - and especially left out a diversity of minority voices that would have helped make this effort more effective. The initial incarnation of BFOD had many problems. This entry is deceptive in that it leaves out this tension and the problems. It is my understanding that this incarnation was problematic (I remember speaking to people who expressed this at this time), and that the group decided that white Sangha members needed to do more work separately. I need to think of how to write this as part of this history period. Suggestions also welcomed.

Shugen Note: The beginnings of our BFoD work did indeed have many inadequacies which were essentially of my own doing. My basic mistake was to enter into this work acting on my own rather than, from the beginning, inviting in a more diverse group of sangha members. Now I see this as a result of my lack of understanding and maturity surrounding the very issues I was intending to address. There was so much I did not understand about Whiteness, Patriarchy and Power, as well as issues of bias and oppression.

Gikon Note: Shugen, maybe you can add a bit about how you came to choose those initial BFOD invitees? What criteria did you use? That would help add some context and might offer some insight into how your position as a white man informed, complicated, and limited the initial ZMM BFOD formation.

Shugen Note: I invited students that I believed were interested in doing this work, and could be instrumental in helping to develop it within our upstate sangha. I also was thinking of people that lived within the area local to ZMM so we could meet together on a regular basis. At that time there were no PoC sangha members living locally and I didn't have the vision to consider using internet meeting platforms. The yet unseen - and still being discovered - forces of patriarchy and white supremacy within myself prevented me from fully understanding the inherent problems with an all-white group which it was in its beginning. Looking back I deeply regret not having, from the outset, invited Jordan and RaShaun to the group. I was struggling within myself in both wanting to engage in anti-oppression work within the Sangha, but being afraid of the challenges to power - as a white person, a man, teacher, Abbot - that were being brought out and to me directly.

Gikon note: As I understand, one of the most problematic features of ZMM BFOD since inception has been the skewed ratio of POCs to Whites. In order to give folks an inkling of this, I suggest that we include that ratio (ex., the group consisted of ___ white and ___ POC). This is important because otherwise the risks of the POCs in this group will be overlooked.

Zuiko Note: At the time that I was invited into BFoD, there were 9 white people and 2 PoC. One PoC left shortly thereafter. After Jordan's departure from residency and the group in late 2016, ZMM BFoD was 9 white people and 0 PoC, until Gikon joined the group in early 2018.

Meiju Note: I remember having a couple of early conversations with Jordan (which were painful and uncomfortable for me) about the formation of this group, and the fact that she wished to be part of it and hadn't been invited. I felt hurt/gross that I was included and she was not. I had a sense that by virtue of my position in the sangha (I did not have clear words for it then, but a feeling it had to do with my whiteness and/or my place in the MRO hierarchy) that I had a kind of unfair access to Shugen, which she did not. With Jordan's permission, I approached Shugen and raised the issue of her participation in the group, understanding from her that she had already done this herself. It felt weird and awkward to be in this position. The whole thing was full of power dynamics I could not name... I now see what played out as a micro example of white privilege within a patriarchal hierarchy.

Jinfu Note: I was very naive to what we were trying to do and actively wondered what kind of group this was. It became clear early on that it was not what I was used to—as when openly sharing my thoughts and feelings, as among close friends. There’s a place for that, but it became clear that that kind of expressiveness can be an expression of white centering, and that this work was about learning how to confront very harmful conditioning. As much as this threw me early on, I see that I’ve been learning how to see, speak to, and experience things directly—whether the confrontation comes from within or from others.

Late 2015

LGBTQ+ Affinity group begins meeting at Fire Lotus Temple to be visible in the community, to offer mutual support to LGBTQ+ sangha members because of the bias they experience and the karma that creates. How do we practice that karma?

Zuisei Note: This group is still very much touch and go, and some of it is because of me and my wavering commitment to it.

February 9, 2014

PoC Tea Group begins to meet at Fire Lotus Temple for those who identify as a person of color, in order to strengthen diversity at the Temple and to support each other’s practice by offering a space for dialog, questions and connection.

Tanya Comment: this group is not in operation at the moment - and hasn’t been for years. There was a lot of internal conflict among those who attended meetings. There was a lot of pain - pain that people felt internally due to white supremacy and oppression and pain that they inflicted on each other. To me, it seemed that even POCs struggled with how to create an authentic and healing space for each other that didn’t perpetuate the mores of white supremacy. I can speak to this because I went to the meetings. I’m not sure exactly when the group was put on “hiatus,” but I remember inquiring about the group not meeting for a long while and was told via email that it was put on hiatus, and I remember expressing irritation that this decision was made without really discussing with others on the mailing list, or calling a meeting. This is also why I was confused when the current incarnation of BFOD included BFOD/POC Tea Group because there was no Tea Group - and there hadn’t officially been one for a long time. The dissolution of the Tea Group was ugly and horrible. And that needs to be mentioned. Not having this group left a huge void for me personally, and POCs not being able to have a group (at that time) that wasn’t harmful was also painful.

2013

The Temple Sangha is invited to apply to a 9-month course that meets monthly. A group of 30 sangha members participate in this first “BFoD course.”

Shoan Note: This “course,” although it had its flaws, was so helpful and instructive and eye-opening for me. I remember during one meeting a POC participant was expressing her view

on America as a land of “white supremacy” and I had never heard that phrase used that way before. I keep thinking “Hmmm, isn’t that a bit extreme?” I wondered why Shugen or others weren’t asking her to tone down the rhetoric. But no one did. Instead, other people used it, too. I felt confused and disoriented--like something in my view was being challenged and shaken lose. I really identify that moment as one where I began to see just how limited my view as a white person is and how much I have to learn..

Gokan Note: My clearest memory of this group was of a POC member exploding at a white member over something she had said to him. I heard the authenticity of his anger - what’s happening here? And we didn’t know as a group how to hold and process this incident. Left me wondering if this whole course had been helpful and healing or not. But for me, it was a start.

Note: I remember this group and was excited and apprehensive at what the end result would be. The work with this group, however flawed was much needed. What struck me most over the nine months was that we tackled our “**Fear of Differences.**” Nothing was off the table; racism, gender bias, inequality, ageism, sexual orientation, etc.....and from there on, the (inclusion) work began as we had a retreat with a PoC teacher, Sensei Boyd.

2011

A group of longtime students begins meeting monthly to continue these conversations and develop a curriculum to bring this work to the larger sangha in a more structured way.

Shugen Note: I believe there were about 10-12 of us in this group and that roughly ¼ were PoC members of the Sangha. I invited people that I thought were interested in examining racism and sexism or already had experience with this work. Through trial and error, we explored how to work with our own prejudices and how to work with each other. We had a couple of sessions with a professional facilitator who helped us develop our first discussion guidelines.

2009

Shugen Roshi initiates a series of evening discussions around issues of race and gender in the context of the Dharma. This continues for a couple of years.

Shugen Note: These were open discussions, loosely organized and usually based on a short video clip or article. We often had 30-40 people in attendance.