***Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love and Liberation* by Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams, Lama Rod Owens, with Jasmine Syedullah, PhD**

**Thesis: The authors of the book**Radical Dharma**state that a new Buddhism called American Buddhism is needed for America and this dharma of American Buddhism is radical Dharma. This radical Dharma will establish a collective awakening. They go on to say that there will be no true liberation for anyone until there is true equality and equity for the Black community. The authors use the language of Buddhism to articulate that the Buddha Dharma is no longer needed. They say that society needs some new or radical Dharma to become the foundation and basis for transformation.**

Angel Kyodo Williams stated in the preface of the book, *Radical Dharma*, “Radical Dharma is insurgence rooted in love, and all that love of self and others implies. It takes self-liberation to its necessary end by moving beyond personal transformation to transcend dominant social norms and deliver us into collective freedom.” (Williams, Owens, and Syedullah, p. xi). The title of the Preface sets the tone of the book from the beginning—A Lineage of Insurgency.

The authors introduce themselves and their early lives. They portray their early roots in the Black church and culture, and exposed their tendency to seek and search for something different while beginning to identify who they are. The rest of the book established the authors’ identity as Black queers and the trials that they have encountered. The authors describe their affinity and pull towards Buddhism, and their testimonies and actions demonstrated their kinship with the Buddha and what he teaches. Each author has found within Buddha Dharma the truths that have brought them toward wholeness. Each author found a different way or means to communicate and articulate that wholeness and self-acceptance. They deserve respect and recognition as teachers and practitioners, but appreciation does not imply following their message and teachings without a close examination. Buddhist practitioners may agree or disagree or agree with parts of what they say. In the last section of the book, the authors explain the necessity for a new Dharma and why it is necessary for everyone’s liberation.

The book Radical Dharma suggests that American Buddhists need to seek and follow a new and different Dharma. But is there a need for a “new” Dharma? Buddha Dharma is profound and deep-rooted. The Buddha instructed his followers to take Refuge in the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels suggests one has decided to walk a path that recognizes that all things are interconnected, impermanent, and have buddha-nature. It is up to every Buddhist follower to follow the way of holding up ourselves and others along the Buddhist path by studying and actualizing the teachings.

*Radical Dharma* is an idea that teaches the concept of “collective awakening.” Does someone’s race, gender, or sexual orientation prohibit one’s ability to know who they are? What is it within each of us individually, as a person, or collectively, as a local or historical sangha that brings us to the Three Doors of Liberation? Buddhism teaches that one is already free—that it is one’s responsibility to find that freedom and what it means and implies. We are all instructed to learn what it means to realize liberation, but the book seems to be saying that liberation is centered on race.

*Radical Dharma* states that there is a need for something new. That people cannot wake up until everyone of all races wakes up together. The authors repeatedly say that interconnectedness establishes the truth that there cannot be liberation until there is Black liberation. Yes, white supremacy, white power, white privilege, and police brutality should be addressed and eradicated, but racism is not limited to a single race or group of people. It is people that are racist. It is the hearts and minds of people that need to change—not Buddhist teaching.

The truth of Buddha Dharma is that all things and people are connected and already liberated. That is why Buddha Dharma includes the study, belief, and faith in the Four Noble truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Three Higher Learnings of precepts, meditation, and wisdom. Without the commitment to truly walk on the path, people will not recognize the poisons of greed, hate, and delusion.

The book Radical Dharma is not just speaking up against the political-economic agenda. The authors are challenging the foundational teaching of Buddhism by redefining Buddhism itself. This new radical Dharma uses the vocabulary of Buddha Dharma to talk about a need for change. These subtle adaptations are laced throughout the book and tied to a political agenda, which may not a Buddhist one. This agenda is expressed throughout the book and explained using Buddhist vocabulary and terminology. *Radical Dharma’s* message must be understood in context of the political-economic conversation to be seen and be heard.