† "We are striving for a world where we deal with harm in our communities through healing, love, and kinship.

This means an end to state sponsored violence, including the excessive use of force by law enforcement. We are committed to an America that comes to terms with the trauma of its painful history and finds true reconciliation for it. Mass incarceration and the over criminalization of black and brown people must forever end, leaving in its place a culture that embraces our histories and stories. This means an end to racial bias and white supremacy in all its forms.

Our dreams are directly linked with those resisting militarism, war, and state repression around the world. We will achieve this new beloved community hand in hand, step by step, in global solidarity with all people committed to lasting peace and full justice.”

— Organizers in Ferguson, MO

December 2014
Buddhist Peace Fellowship members have participated in two different kinds of blockades in the past four months in response to the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York. A blockade is one type of “holding action,” Joanna Macy’s term for the kinds of work that must be done to stop harm from happening.

In a blockade, we use our bodies, and sometimes additional props, to interrupt the movement of people or equipment and create a visual statement about the need for change. It’s not the only spiritual activist work that we have to do, but it’s an important part of interrupting business-as-usual when business-as-usual causes harm.

In early September, an interfaith crew sat in meditation for two hours to block the doors to a hotel hosting a weapons expo and police training. [Video and article]

In December, a coalition of Black, Asian, and white people shut down the Oakland Police Department with more confrontational tactics, including locking people to the doors and blocking intersections. In this action, you might not have known that any Buddhists were involved, but if you looked closely you found both of BPF’s Co-Directors, and a number of other BPF members sprinkled in to the action. [Video & highlights]

We offer these two actions next to each other to demonstrate the power of direct action blockades as a holding action that interrupts harm. They are an assertive, even militant, practice of ahimsa, an insistence that harm not be done in our names. We’re curious to explore with other BPFers what the role of blockades and other types of holding actions are in our work, and what it means to participate overtly vs. secretly as Buddhists.

Here, BPF’s Co-Directors Katie Loncke and Dawn Haney offer their reflections on participating in the OPD Shutdown. We invite you to reflect with us about the kinds of action that are needed for racial justice.
Black and Breathing: A Black Buddhist’s Reflections on the OPD Shutdown
by Katie Loncke

As a mixed black Buddhist practitioner, both realms influence the way I experience the muck and marvel of this world. Both realms inspire the militant ahimsa I want to foster, the politicized lovingkindness I adore seeing others advance. Less oppression; more compassion. Less fascism; more freedom.

Dharma is a worldview that helps me navigate reality, and it so happens that reality sometimes involves getting out in the streets to firmly and disruptively assert the beauty of black humanity. In joining a coalition of bold, astute, and creative black leaders (BlackOut Collective, Black Brunch, ONYX, and Black Lives Matter), supported by Asian and white allies, to shut down Oakland Police Headquarters for 4 hours — blocking traffic, occupying doorways, raising a resistance flag to honor black lives stolen by police, security forces, and vigilantes — the swirling, intersecting, Venn-diagramming black and Buddhist viewpoints in my head converged in certain unexpected ways.

One point of overlap: the BLACK and BREATHING banner.

On first spotting the sign during prep for the action, I smiled like I’d just crashed shopping carts at the grocery store with a long-lost high school crush. The love of breath is so real! In my early days exploring anapana meditation, breath became an object of total wonder. I was elated, fascinated, paying attention to this simple but vital, unconscious action: breathing in and out. Today, I think of Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh, who has spent his whole life cultivating present-moment awareness of breath, and who continues to astound doctors.

One who has gradually practiced,
Developed and brought to perfection
Mindfulness of the in-and-out breath
As taught by the Enlightened One,
Illuminates the entire world
Like the moon when freed from clouds.
(Therigatha 548)
with the steadiness of his respiration even amidst his current health difficulties. Some have called him "the best breather in the world." It's a practice for a lifetime, and I know that even after weeks, months, years of meditation, I'm still only beginning to befriend it.

At the moment, though, the whole nation's heightened awareness of breath is arising not from any mindfulness program, but for much grimmer reasons.

Dressed all in black and lined up in our unified formation outside the Oakland Police Department, as my cold-stiffened fingers struggled to keep a grip on the BLACK and BREATHING banner, I marveled at the connection.

Breath: a key object of many dharma forms of meditation.

#ICantBreathe, an outcry against Eric Garner's unpunished murder — like too many other extrajudicial killings of black people by police and their auxiliaries. Every 28 hours. (Imagine ringing a mindfulness bell every 28 hours, to remember this.)

For those more likely to endure anti-black violence in our society, breathing isn't just a conduit for mindfulness. It can also be survival. It can also be resistance. It can also be defiance in the face of a state that has both commodified black life and deemed it worthless.

Luckily, we know better. We are Black and Breathing, we are organizing, we are loving ourselves and one another. Even samsara has its limits. Anti-blackness is on notice.

I sat in the cold rain chained together with other white protestors, our linked bodies blocking the intersection directly in front of the Oakland Police Department. We were putting our bodies on the line in an act of civil disobedience to create space for Black protestors to demand an end to racist policing.

The chants echoed back and forth, Black folks asking, "Show us what solidarity looks like!" while Asian and white allies responding, "This is what solidarity looks like!"

Solidarity means responding to the suffering of others with the material support they've requested. Solidarity means supporting the liberation of others, knowing without a doubt that none of us can be free until all of us are free.

The Buddha might have called solidarity the right action that flows from compassion. When we feel the quivering of our hearts in response to suffering, our wisest self asks, "How can I help? What do you need?" Solidarity listens to real needs, and stretches into uncomfortable places to meet them. It wasn't particularly pleasant to be sitting in the rain with tired shoulders, risking arrest on an early Monday morning. But in solidarity, I was willing to experience temporary discomfort for the sake of greater freedom and justice for Black people who face the unrelenting discomfort of racist policing.
Reflections on the Urban Shield and Oakland Police Department Blockade Actions

- Based on these images and descriptions, do you see these actions as peaceful? Why or why not?

- On a scale of 1 to 10, from least violent to most violent, where would you rate this action? Why?

- What seem to be the aims of the action? On a scale of 1 to 10, from least effective to most effectiveness where would you rate this action? Why?

- Can you see yourself participating in an action like this? Why or why not?

- When is it strategic to participate in actions as Buddhists? When is it strategic to be an undercover Buddhist?

Buddhists Blockade Hotel to Protest Police-Military Training

Buddhist Peace Fellowship and allies decided to stage a group meditation blockading the doors of a Marriott Hotel in Oakland, California. The reason? Police violence and institutionalized hatred. Read more & video.

Oakland Police Department Shutdown

On Monday, Dec 15th 2014, members of newly organized all-Black groups, including The Blackout Collective, #BlackBrunch and #BlackLivesMatter, joined with Asian allies in #Asians4BlackLives group and white allies in the Bay Area Solidarity Action Team to lead an occupation of the Oakland Police Department and demand an end to the war on Black people in Oakland and everywhere. Video & highlights
Take Action: From the streets to our sanghas

Now is the time! You can be part of this mass movement for racial justice.

Three ways to participate:

1. **Donate to the Ferguson Legal Fund** to support people arrested in the uprisings about Mike Brown or Black-led racial justice organizing in your community.

   Goal: Show solidarity with Ferguson and move resources to Black-led work. Consider a stretch toward being a monthly sustainer of the work.

2. **Think of 3 people in your life you want to talk with about anti-Black racism; write their names down and pledge to have that conversation by the end of this month.**

   Goal: Protests bring attention to the issue, but hearts and minds are changed by conversations with our family, co-workers, friends, and neighbors. Your commitment to talk about this Ferguson moment is a critical component.

3. **Foster conversation in your sangha or spiritual community about racial justice.**

**SOLIDARITY SANGHA ACTION**

The vision: We need Buddhists in the streets, but we also need racial justice in our spiritual communities. Bring the conversation about racial justice to your sanghas with racial justice Solidarity Sangha Signs.

Goals:

a. Build community with sangha allies who are committed to racial justice
b. Open and deepen conversations with sangha members who are "in motion" - curious, open, and ready to talk about racial justice
   c. Share media and stories about the action to encourage other BPFers across the country to bring this action to their sanghas

To participate: Show up and participate in sangha as you normally would. The only difference: Bring a Solidarity Sign.

Black Lives Matter
I Can't Breathe *
White Silence = Violence
One of your own devising (even better if you've been out in the streets with it!)

*noting that we discourage folks who don't experience racist policing from using this slogan

Wear one of the solidarity signs and participate in the practice offered. If you want to give the teacher a heads up about your intent, you can - this is not designed to be an interruption of the sangha beyond the introduction of signs that might spark otherwise latent interest and conversation.

Consider taking pictures of your group or writing a reflection on what it was like to participate in this action for Turning Wheel Media.

To organize: Use this action to build community with others in your sangha who care about racial justice.

Make an announcement

Sample language: You might have noticed that I (a few of us) are wearing signs that Black Lives Matter. Tonight, we practice not turning away from the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and so many other Black people at the hands of police. This is the time for us all to stand up for racial justice - if you are interested in learning more, please talk to me (us) after.

Invite interested people to a longer conversation about racial justice:

Pick a date, time, and location to host a 1-2 hour conversation about racial justice among interested sangha members. Considerations: How can you center voices of Black sangha members or Black activists in your community or region? How can you turn the conversation toward action?
BLACK LIVES MATTER

WHITE SILENCE = VIOLENCE

I CAN’T BREATHE
The following resource list might seem like a lot, but take heart! No books, just articles. For those who learn best via words on a page or screen.

Note: these readings aren’t necessarily best suited for the conversation on *whether* structural anti-Black racism exists in the U.S., or deserves Buddhist attention.

To go into that would require a whole other history course on slavery, anti-black terror, sharecropping, lynchings, Jim Crow, redlining, housing, poverty, medical abuse, Civil Rights, Black Power, COINTELPRO, the crack epidemic and War on Drugs, the prison boom a.k.a. The New Jim Crow, affirmative action and neoliberal diversity, black feminism, black cultures and their commodification, police violence, and all kinds of other elements, issues, and nuances.

For now we’ll just take as our premise the belief that #BlackLivesMatter, and the importance of movements for racial justice.

Palms together,

Dawn and Katie
BPF Co-Directors
Great Buddhist Writing

Racialized Terror and the Liberation of the Black Mind / Heart
by Rev. Zenju Earthlyn Manuel
"A liberated black life, as in every life, is a life inherited from those who have lived before. It is an inheritance we are meant to use in walking the streets in our own skin without having to be subjected to fear, investigation, and annihilation. Racialized terror cannot be met only with theory, religion, biology, or even history. It is to be met boldly with the force of our lives."

Do Bodhisattvas Get Angry? A Response to the Killing of Eric Garner
by Rev. M. Jamil Scott
"His Holiness the Dalai Lama explains that anger in response to injustice doesn’t go away so easily. He says that ‘anger toward social injustice will remain until the goal is achieved. It has to remain.’"

Why We Can’t Breathe
by Jan Willis
http://www.lionsroar.com/cant-breathe/
"In Buddhist meditation, our breathing is essential. ...We are interdependent. We are connected with one another. ...If one of us cannot breathe, none of us can breathe fully and deeply and we no longer experience our connection with one another. If Eric Garner cannot breathe, then we cannot breathe. If Michael Brown no longer breathes, we cannot breathe. If Tamir Rice does not breathe, we cannot breathe."

Brooklyn Zen Center's "Thanksgiving and Ferguson" Letter
"While you are with family or friends or alone enjoying a meal or maybe a football game, please consider with the deepest gratitude all the daily blessings given to us just for being alive. It is not to be overlooked. Then take a moment to reflect on our own and other’s suffering, both historic and current. This country was founded on the genocidal removal of indigenous people, and our economy on the backs of African descendants enslaved as chattel, not to mention the brutal exploitation of countless others. We today are dealing with the consequences of those tragedies, of ‘othering’ and harming so many with impunity."

Which Side Are You On?
by Maia Duerr of the Jizo Chronicles
http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org/which-side-are-you-on-maia-duerr/
"I realize the title of this article will irritate dharma practitioners who have studied and practiced the way of non-duality. I am one of you (a longtime dharma practitioner), and I get that. I get your concern. And – this is an invitation to realize that non-duality includes points at which we need to take a stand on the side of love."
Great Racial Justice Writing

On Ferguson Protests, the Destruction of Things, and What Violence Really Is (And Isn’t)
Mia McKenzie, one of the 2014 BPF Gathering speakers and creator of world-renowned media platform Black Girl Dangerous, breaks down the difference between violence and property destruction.

News Media Ignores Black Protests
When mainstream media chases the most sensational stories, they miss the power of more unconventional actions. Spotlighting black-led actions provides a more nuanced perspective than violent-vs-nonviolent debates.

On Black Vision and Turning Points
via Allied Media Projects, a roundup of amazing articles by visionary black writers, including Alexis Pauline Gumbs, adrienne maree brown, Alicia Garza (telling a Herstory of the origins of the #BlackLivesMatter project), and more.

National Demands for Racial Justice
https://mxgm.org/national-demands-for-racial-justice/
Given the failure of justice for Eric Garner despite video of his death, suggestions of implementing police body cameras aren't inspiring much confidence. So what are we to do? Here are concrete, actionable suggestions on decreasing police brutality, from the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement.

#Asians4BlackLives
https://storify.com/smartmeme/asians-for-black-lives
Asians For Black Lives documents Asian solidarity in nonviolently shutting down Oakland Police Headquarters, on December 15th, 2014. Their solidarity statement also lives at the bottom of their Tumblr:
http://asians4blacklives.tumblr.com/

Showing Up for Racial Justice (Resources for White Allies)
http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/
Showing Up for Racial Justice offers toolkits for direct actions and accountability in this comprehensive web site geared toward white allies.

Why Ferguson Matters to Asian Americans
Korean-American writer Soya Jung beautifully explodes model minority myths, using historical context to frame her choices of resistance and solidarity with today’s black freedom struggles.