UUCSJ White Fragility Video Transcript

Hello friends, my name is Julica, I am a program leader for the UU College of Social Justice, and in this video I’m going to talk a little bit about white fragility. Below this video you will find a PDF link to the article that Dr. Robin DiAngelo wrote that defines white fragility and explains how it occurs in her experience in academic settings. I really recommend this article to you, it is very helpful and it details exactly how this shows up.

For the purposes of this video, I’m going to do a very quick definition, and then I’m going to talk about how it might show up in your immersion journeys and some recommendations about how to engage with it.

Dr. DiAngelo describes this as an emotional response that has fear or anxiety or an overwhelming sense of sadness that white folks might experience when encountering the impact of racism in society, and when struggling to make meaning or make sense of their role in these societal dynamics.

The reason that this happens is because we don’t have enough conversations about race and racism, right? It’s not polite to talk about race and racism, so we don’t do it. And because we don’t do it, we don’t stretch our muscles, we don’t know how to do it when we actually get to it. So one of the things that occurs for white folks is this overwhelming emotional response that Dr. DiAngelo has labeled as white fragility.

So in terms of how this impacts your immersion journey experience: probably the most important thing we can do is have awareness about this, have an understanding that this is going to happen. For those of us who identify as white, I think it’s important for us to prepare: how will I handle it, and what is my plan when it occurs? Rather than say “oh no no, that is not going to happen to me,” -- it might not, but it might. Or, if it doesn’t happen to you, it will happen to a dear colleague of yours. And so how can you support that colleague, or how can you create a situation where you can support yourself?

Because here’s the trick about white fragility: everybody is entitled to their feelings. Everybody is entitled to their own emotional experience. The question is: where and how do we manage that, and who does it impact? So one of the dynamics that occurs sometimes with white fragility is that white folks turned to people of color to look for reassurance, for support, for absolution. For the sense that “I am a good person, and if this person of color agrees with me, or absolves me in some way, then that will make me feel better.” When in fact, sometimes white fragility can be difficult and triggering for folks of color, because they have had to navigate it many times.

So for those of us who identify as people of color, I invite you to consider how will you prepare for when this happens? Again, rather than thinking “oh, this is not going to happen,” let’s plan on it happening and let’s have a plan of action to support ourselves when the dynamic shows up. How can you lovingly set a boundary that helps you take care of yourself? How can you engage this in a way that you recognize when you may have been triggered by someone else’s comment, or their process, or their emotional response? What do you need in this journey as a person of color, especially as mentioned in other sections of this study guide? Because as a person of color you are experiencing not only your fellow travelers’ experiences, but also the host people’s experiences of you, and their internalized racism or whatever it is that they might be bringing to the table. So there’s a lot coming at you from different perspectives; what will you do to support yourself? How can you set up a spiritual practice, a support group at home, a fellow traveler that will hold you and support you?

And of course we are all here to support each other, right? We are all here to do the learning and the teaching, and in the listening and the sharing, and we’re going to take turns. But it’s helpful when we have an awareness that this is the dynamic that we need to address, and when we approach it with judgment-free awareness. It’s not something that is bad, it’s something that we need to handle. It’s something that we need to deal with.

So my hope for you is that this short video has given you some food for thought. There are some reflection questions below as well that will help you do some more of this preparation, and hopefully set you up for success when you are in the thick of it in your immersion journey experience. I am super grateful to you for your commitment to this work, for your desire to find the intersection of social justice and spiritual practice, and to bring a spiritually grounded approach to this work. I wish the very best for you and for your journey. Thank you!