

Strategies for Healing

Elizabeth Nguyen

All of us need healing from the way that racism has impacted our lives. People of color—Asian, black, Latin@, Native American/Indigenous—need practices of healing to restore our spirits after painful experiences and to strengthen our ability to face inequality.

Often when bad things happen in my life because of racism, I don't know what to do. I feel sad. Or angry. Or frustrated. Or powerless. I feel sad that I don't know how to speak Vietnamese because my dad thought it was more important for

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me and my brother to speak good English. I feel angry that the police came to the school where my friend works as a janitor and handcuffed him because they thought that he must be trespassing or stealing since

he's black. I've learned a lot of tools from activists, family, and friends to help my heart face racism.

I try to connect with something bigger than myself. In my house, I have a small altar with candles, incense, quotes, and photos of my ances-

tors. I put things on the altar that inspire me and remind me of everyone else who is struggling for a better world. I also try to connect with my own spirit by making time to sit in silence. Just sitting (even on the train or bus!) for five minutes in silence and breathing makes me feel more calm and less scared. I also love to make *pho* or Vietnamese coffee—things that make me feel connected to my communities.

I try to take action because when I am changing our racist system, I am showing myself that transformation is possible. When I tell my story about a racist experience, interrupt someone who is using racist language, recognize a racist thought in my head, attend a protest, or help to change a law, I am healing through acting for justice.

I try to put myself in the way of beauty since so much of life is hard. I make sure to cuddle the baby that I live with or take a moment to look at the leaves on the trees or listen to a song with a positive message. Some of my favorite songs for struggling against racism are "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free" by Nina Simone, "I am Not My Hair" by Indie.Arie, "I Like the Things About Me" by Mavis Staples, and "Something Inside So Strong" by Labi Siffre.

What helps you heal when you encounter racism?



Religious leaders action at the Department of Justice in St. Louis on the anniversary of Michael Brown's murder by police. Photo by Heather Wilson.

Elizabeth Nguyen is a Unitarian Universalist (UU) minister, and she is the Leadership Development Associate for Youth and Young Adults of Color.

AFTER YOU READ: What are three things Elizabeth does to aid her own healing? Discuss your healing strategies. What's on your healing play list?