

“We need many more dharma centers like EBMC to play the much needed role of creating inner psycho-spiritual resilience in these times”:

An interview with Kritee Kanko, climate scientist and Buddhist priest

(If you'd like to join Kritee's new decentralized spiritually-rooted, interfaith and decentralized direct action network that will take strategic actions to stop climate chaos and bring racial healing, read to the end of this interview!)

EBMC: Kritee, what are the top three actions that EBMC Sangha members can do to better understand and address climate change?

Kritee: Ongoing planetary climate disruption is an emergency. And yet, it is the tip of the iceberg of ecological devastation caused by neoliberal capitalism (rooted in colonization and slavery). Our collective way of life is [causing the extinction of tens of thousands of species](#) on which our own survival depends.

While humanity will probably not go extinct from climate disruption, the kind of world we will have in 20-30 years will absolutely depend on what we do in the next few years. I don't let anyone tell me that climate pollution has crossed a tipping point and there is no use in taking any actions. There are many tipping points in the Earth system. While we have crossed one tipping point of snow/ice covered Arctic, there is a lot that can and must be done to protect ice in Greenland and Antarctica as well as carbon-rich forests in Amazon.

Having said that, even in the best-case scenario, we will lose many human and more-than-human lives/ecosystems. So climate grief and anxiety are real: they need to be [faced and transformed while we act creatively](#). We need many more dharma centers like EBMC to play the much needed role of creating inner psycho-spiritual resilience in these times.

Lastly, personal behavioral changes are important but we cannot stop at recycling and must do everything to keep fossil fuels in the ground and [fight the oil and gas industry](#). Oppression systems are connected: We must make connections between [social justice and environmental issues](#) at all times and work on [new abolitionism](#). If nothing else, we must [start talking about climate](#).

EBMC: You're a scientist and a Zen Buddhist priest. How do you understand and deal with climate change through the lens of Zen practice?

Kritee: One shining light that Rinzai Zen tradition offers is the teaching of holding paradoxes (or [koans](#)). I practice expressing grief as well as joy/gratitude. I hold the paradox of accepting things as they are while working to change them. Most crucially, I hold the paradox of standing up for dignity and justice while maintaining love for human “adversaries.”

The most important way for me to feel empowered is to get involved in organizing spiritually-rooted actions myself. I have come to respect that [climate disruption ain't the first existential threat](#), especially for Black, indigenous and other people of color. Building on the work of [Boulder Ecodharma Sangha](#), I have gotten involved with forming a YET-TO-BE-NAMED decentralized spiritually-rooted, interfaith and decentralized direct action network that will take strategic actions to stop climate chaos and bring racial healing. We are currently finalizing the member handbook which will include the values and practical commitments (aka DNA) of this network. For an older and less detailed version of the values of this network, please see [this zine](#). I will be delighted if any of EBMC members could be involved in beta-testing this new network as an Oakland team member in Fall 2019. Anyone who is interested can reach me at kritee@boundlessinmotion.org.



Born in the family of a Gandhian direct action leader, **Kritee (Kanko)** was raised in India by a single mother. She came to the U.S. for her Ph.D. and has done over 20 years of research on health of our soils, waters and atmosphere. She is a Rinzai Zen priest and was authorized to lead Zen retreats independently in 2013. Currently, as a climate scientist, she is studying and promoting climate smart farming methods in Asia among farmers and policymakers. She is a co-founder of [Boundless in Motion](#), [Boulder Ecodharma sangha](#) and [Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center](#).

The Fifth Messenger: Climate Emergency

by René Rivera

One of the stories of awakening that has always resonated for me is the story of the Buddha's encounter with the heavenly messengers. In his escape from the life of luxury and ignorance that his father created for him he encounters four messengers: an old person, a sick person, a dead body, and finally a monk. These "messengers" profoundly change his life and set him on his path to enlightenment by clearing away the ignorance of his protected life.

If the Buddha were to walk the streets today, or encounter our life now, what would he see? Certainly he would see sickness, old age, and death. Maybe he would also see people living outside without the shelter that many of us take for granted. He might also see signs of the way our planet is changing with extreme weather events, fires and more becoming commonplace.

Would these also be messengers to wake up this present day Buddha, or us? How do we respond when we see signs of how global capitalism has failed so many people, plants, animals and ecosystems? Does this wake us up from our ignorance and does it move us to take action?

For myself part of my daily practice is being aware and available to the sometimes painful experience of waking up to what is happening right now to our way of life and to our planet. This may include watching a video on [Deep Adaptation](#), reading Theravada teacher Thanissara's call for us to [Declare Climate Emergency Now](#), and following One Earth Sangha's [Buddhist response to Climate Change](#).

In May 2019 I participated in a day of awakening to climate emergency in honor of the Buddha's birthday or Wesak. Organized by Thanissara and One Earth Sangha and co-sponsored by EBMC, this day of ritual, practice and connecting with community felt so needed. It felt like such a support to see that folks from many sanghas around the country are coming together to develop a Buddhist response to climate crisis.

To continue to build this response together in community, mark your calendars for a week of events in September 2019. The Global Climate Strike on September 20 will just be the beginning of a week of climate actions all over the world. [Sign up here](#) to

get updates about Bay Area actions organized through the Buddhists Declare Climate Emergency Now (DCEN) network.

When the Buddha was confronted with sickness, old age and death, he did not despair or go back into his life of escape from reality. He was energized to go forth, to leave everything he knew behind and to go on a journey of awakening. May this fifth messenger of climate emergency create the fire in all of us for practice, for adaptation, and most of all to take the actions that are still possible to contribute to a world where we can live in harmony with all life.



René Rivera is a leader and bridge-builder, working and learning in all the spaces in-between race, gender, and other perceived binaries, as a queer, mixed-race, trans man. René has been a student of the Dharma since 2004 and has been a part of the East Bay Meditation Center (EBMC) Alphabet Sangha since 2008. He has participated in the Commit to Dharma and Practice in Action programs at EBMC and the Community Dharma Leaders program at Spirit Rock. He currently serves on the EBMC Program Committee and Midday Sangha coordinating committee.