



One Earth Sangha

# Session Seven: Core Offering

Transcript of EcoSattva Training 2023-24 Video

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## Session Profile

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Session Seven: Expressing Our Awakening Agency

[Session Resources](#)

## Speakers in this video

- Kritee Kanko

## Transcript

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### Holding One Another in the Polycrisis

#### **Kritee Kanko:**

Greetings, everyone. My name is Kritee Kanko, and I am a climate scientist, and a Buddhist teacher and priest, and a grief ritual leader. It's such an honor to talk to you for your seventh session, which is about expressing our awakening agencies. I'm aware of the journey you all have been on so far. Dipping deep into your commitments as small groups if you have one. Going deep into the grief of these times and discussing different possibilities. And now you are about to almost finish the journey. Congratulations for coming that far. I'm going to share some thoughts based on my own experience and I hope they'll resonate with you.



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Before I go deeper, I want to acknowledge this tender space that I myself am in these days. The word that I increasingly use to describe the times we are in is called "polycrisis." I no longer use the word "climate crisis" because in how many ways the causes of climate crisis are deeply entangled, intertwined, interdependent with so many other crises that we are facing: the racial injustices, our colonization of lands, our stealing of languages from indigenous people, our theft of money, increasing inequalities, fascism, and just such extreme nauseating violence. So you put all of this together with lingering impacts of the pandemic and the health crisis, especially the mental health crisis. The word that can capture all of this for me is polycrisis. It's not just one thing, but these interdependent, evolving set of crises. So that's where I will start.

What I wanted to say about polycrisis is that as each new wave of conflict, local, global, crisis comes up, we are going to all feel new waves of grief, shame, helplessness. And each of us feeling those things in our own bodies and hearts and minds will inevitably lead to tensions in our relationships, even in our small groups where people tend to agree with us on several issues. A lot of beautiful, amazing, even Buddhist friends of mine are not on the same page when it comes to this intense raging conflict in the Middle East right now, in 2023.

And what is needed in all of this: just intense mindfulness, compassion, and patience. That has to be the bedrock, right? The bedrock of how we move in this world. In this world where things are falling apart. We have to weave a web of belonging instead of this culture of separation, in this culture of competition, and competition even of who is more right. We have to just lovingly keep coming back to, "How do I be in relationship within my small group, in my community, in my family?" There is just no substitute for that work, no matter how much intelligent frameworks for action and reclaiming our agencies we have; all of that intellectual work aside. We just have to learn to hold each other like this mother is holding a baby in a ravaged landscape.

I do not know the name of this artist who created this image. This is definitely an AI image. I tried my best to find it, but I couldn't. So I'll just say AI created this image.

So, we have acknowledged polycrisis. Now, the second thing I want to say is before we talk about expressing our agencies, we have to awaken to and keep in mind some of these planetary boundaries.



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### Respecting Planetary Boundaries

The first boundary that I want to talk about is around climate pollution. I can give you an hour-long lecture on this, but I'm going to do the most important message here. You can pause the video if you need to, but I'm going to ask you a question. The question is: What is the average footprint of an American living in the US? Doesn't have to be a citizen of the US, of Turtle Island, but anyone, any background living in the US: How much carbon dioxide equivalence do you and I individually produce in a year? Okay, right now. And then the second part of the question is: What does this footprint, individual footprint, need to be for us to have some kind of climate sanity where the whole planet doesn't get ravaged by a very high sea level rise and just extreme level of not just chaos but collapse. Where are we now and where do we need to be? And I invite you to pause your video now before you hear the answer from me.

Okay. So, the answer is that an average American, the individual footprint needs to go from 50,000 pounds per year to about 5,000 pounds per year before 2030. What I have done here, this footprint includes your food footprint, your transport footprint, the heat in your house, if any, whatever energy you might be consuming at work, whatever industrial products that might be coming to your home. It includes all aspects of our lives. Right now, each of us is responsible for about 50,000 pounds of carbon dioxide every year.

So you see it needs to come down 10 times. Now, I never, ever say this to make any of us feel guilty or ashamed. It is a responsibility, but it's a responsibility that doesn't get met unless we have systematic ways to take care of 130 trillion pounds of global carbon dioxide emissions, right? We cannot become monks and nuns — or even monks and nuns don't have the footprint where we need to go — but it is important to work at systems level, which I will get to. We cannot use, I believe, all of our agency to just decrease our personal, individual, or family footprint. Some of us can focus there in the short term, but that is not where all of our energy can go.

The other point is which group of people do you think in this world currently have the footprint of 5,000 pounds a year? I'll give you the answer. The people who currently have the footprint Americans need to have to just use their fair share of air pollution, climate pollution, is indigenous people around the world, people living in India, or people living in other parts of Africa or Asia. Yes, each of these countries has their own hyper-rich class,



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billionaires and millionaires. I'm not talking about their footprint, I'm talking about average footprint.

### A Life in Balance

So here is a very important point now. We need to learn from people of color — especially indigenous people who are still living in their native lands because that's where their reciprocity is expressed most powerfully — how to live a balanced life.

You see, I'm going to point out a few more planetary boundaries and I'm going to use elements to give my examples. If you look at water, there is a region in Himalayas, Ladakh, where the native tribes that live there, they use about 20 liters of water a day. But when those areas start getting opening up to tourists from within India, from within Indian subcontinent, tourists use at least 75 liters of water a day. And do you know what amount of water an average American uses? That's like 300, 350, even 400 liters a day. Okay?

So once again, a Ladakhi tribal community member, an indigenous individual, only uses 20 liters of water a day. They know how to live in that landscape, honoring the water as if water was alive, sentient, intelligent, and water could be honored. And we human beings, me included, we need much more hundreds of liters of water. If we start putting tourists from within Indian subcontinent or outside in the fragile belt of Ladakh, you damage the ecosystems, you harm the fragile mountain ecosystems and all the species that live there. You steal water from them.

I come to the green color here, the earth element. I give you an example of another tribe in India, Bhil tribe, one of the oldest tribes in India; probably the tribe that came from Africa to Indian subcontinent. A few subclans of the Bhil tribe live in Northwestern India and the state of Rajasthan and Gujarat. And they have a reciprocal relationship with a tree called mahua. And they might know like 50, 60 "uses" of that mahua tree. They make medicines from it. They might weave things out of the leaves and stems. They brew alcoholic drinks out of it. They just have very intimate knowledge of that beautiful tree. Sacred tree. Whereas for someone who's trying to encroach from outside looks at a piece of land, mahua tree is just a tree in the way of commercialization of that land.

Mahua tree might also be fixing a lot of carbon in that forest where it is. In fact indigenous people are only 5% of the global population, but because of their intimate



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knowledge of the forests, their way of being, their way of life, their culture, their economy, is so beautifully woven around the ecosystem, that they are caretakers of 80% of the world's biodiversity. Five percent of the human population is the guardian of 80% of the world's biodiversity and up to a third of forest carbon, right? You can have all the scientists with all the degrees, my wonderful colleagues working on trying to protect forest carbons, but all of us combined cannot meet the deep understanding of indigenous populations.

I'll give you the last example about fires. Fires need to be managed. We all know the frequency and intensity of fires is increasing all over the world. And what we need, once again, the knowledge lies with a lot of indigenous tribes. You need cultural burns. You need cultural burns done in a way that they preserve water that is needed by different species in an ecosystem. I am not sure if I'm going to pronounce the name right, but there is an amazing human being, an indigenous elder called Ron Goode in California who just describes beautifully how cultural burns take care of not just human needs, but needs of multiple plant and animal species in an ecosystem when they are correctly and wisely guided by indigenous wisdom.

So what am I saying here? What am I saying? What I am saying here is that climate crisis doesn't exist in isolation. There is polycrisis. As we awaken our agency, we have to create our power through a culture of belonging in a way that doesn't cause destruction or harm to other movements that are operating. At the same time, climate movement is operating — at the very least. In any group, in any small group that you might already have, there might be differences of gender, of sexuality, of income, of racial background, and we have to hold these things with sensitivity.

The other thing that comes out of what I shared previously is that one way in which we can design solutions is to say that we in America have access to a hundred gallons, let's say 350 liters of water a day. And freedom and justice should mean that everyone on the planet gets a hundred gallons of water a day. A hundred gallons is same as 350 some liters. Or if I get to emit 50,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions every year, then everyone around the world should get those emissions. They should get our level of comfort, heat, cooling, hot showers, big houses. That is impossible because that kind of human freedom or justice for human beings will mean acute injustice for other forms of life. For Gaia.



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So whatever we do, one, we have to acknowledge polycrisis. We have to acknowledge difference. I'll say more about that. And number three, we have to operate within planetary boundaries. Is the solution: You are putting your energy into scaling up in a way that ensures justice for all or not? I believe that is a very crucial question to ask. All of us don't have to become Gandhian civil disobedience leaders. I have great respect for people who do that. I have taught courses about Gandhian civil disobedience or Kingian civil disobedience. But all of us don't have to do it. But I do feel we have to operate within the boundaries that our precious ecosystem has, planetary ecosystem has. If you are working on creating a system where you are just working on, let's say, converting everyone going from gas-based personal vehicles to electric- or solar-charged, battery-operated, cars, I'm inviting you to pause and consider: Can that solution be available for everyone? And can that solution be scaled up in a way that ensures wellbeing of not just human species, but our non-human relatives as well?

### Decolonizing Activism

The other thing I want to say is that when we use more than our fair share of these elements — fire, earth, water — we are stealing from humans and more than human relatives, right? That's stealing. The more complicated names for that are colonization and racism. When that is already in our history and it continues to happen every day around the world, within our neighborhoods and across the world, we all develop burdens.

I want to direct your attention to work of Ian Henny Lopez, a Berkeley professor, has some amazing videos on YouTube, but the main argument he presents is: "The most important thing you can do to strengthen climate movement is to fight racism against black and brown people." And then in other parts of the video, he says, you have to look for racism within and outside of yourself.

I know this point has been made in previous sessions, but I cannot underscore that when we are expanding our agency, wanting to express our agency as a small group or as an individual, we want to operate within some boundaries. And then one of these boundaries, one of these guiding principles is undoing the burden created by stealing that happened in the past, in our lineages. If we are from Caucasian backgrounds, European backgrounds, it's a burden on our psyche; at least people who have done the inner work, they can see that it's a burden on their soul, psyche, inner being. And giving land, power, and money back to indigenous folks — especially indigenous folks, but to black and other



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people of color as well — that is very important for our own collective liberation as well as survival.

If we don't give power back to indigenous folks who know how to adapt, how to mitigate, how to store carbon, how to respect forest spirits, we are all doomed to a much larger degree than we could be otherwise. So, I'm coming back to what I started with: That we have to keep working with our own grief, our spectrum of guilt versus shame. First in groups of people that are like us, and then go beyond our affinity groups. So if you have folks who are all black women, you would have shared stories. You would need your own kind of grief work around how you have related to everything in this course and how you relate to polycrisis, how you relate to different strands of it, how you relate to relationship with the natural world, how you relate to Asians, to white folks, to Chicana, Chicanx.

And if you are white, if you are a heterosexual man, you might need to do this processing with others who are like you, while being accountable to maybe people of color or women as you do this work. That sometimes is the hardest work. So hard.

## Movement Ecosystems

The last thing I want to talk about is what work we will take up. What work will we devote ourselves to has to depend on our understanding of all of these factors that I have talked about. And then where does our unique self want to flow in the whole movement ecology?

So you might have heard of "Block Build Be." That's a framework that the Buddhist Peace Fellowship talks about. That framework probably comes from the work of Joanna Macy who has talked about three aspects of the Great Turning. And then the two diagrams, schematics, you are seeing on the screen right now are also related to that. Maybe they came up independently, but it seems like there are always these three common elements.

The one on your left is talking about a book called *Gandhian Iceberg*, which is based on how Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi — one of the people who was my role model as I was growing up as a kid in India — he said, nonviolent direct action of the kind that Tim is talking about is tip of the iceberg. The most important part of this movement ecology is actually self-transformation, and it is under the water. This self-transformation includes the kind of things we were talking about; where we work on our guilt and shame and grief and anger. We build our community, we build a culture of belonging. And then a



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smaller but visible part, they call it "community uplift" or Gandhi in his writing called "constructive program." What are you saying yes to? What kind of community, alternative structures, schooling structures, community resilience structure, community policing structures, are you building? And then out of those two big things arises direct action, where you are saying, "No." What Joanna Macy calls the "blocking actions."

On the right is a framework that developed before I had heard of Joanna Macy and before I had heard of Block Build Be. It's called Three Pillars of EcoDharma and has similar elements, but instead of kind of like an iceberg that shows directionality towards direct action, it's like circular, overlapping things that need to keep happening all the time. And it includes trauma resilience on the top. On the left is communal village life: What are we saying yes to? What kind of communities we are building? And the one on the right says resistance, collective resistance: What are we saying strategic no to? It is completely okay to say, "I am not the person who's going to block the construction of pipelines or shut down a coal power plant or shut down a polluting industry or resist in front of a politician's office so they sign on to ask for ceasefire in the Middle East. I am not that kind of person." That is completely okay. But have you found collaborations, other groups of people who are doing that and you support them through your skill to cook, through your skill to knit, through your skill of being able to write poetry or songs, to create music. Whatever you are doing, are you building institutions, platforms that can lead to that resistance? How, if your skill is as someone who can bring compassionate, loving presence into a room, can you go to meetings of climate organizations just with the sole purpose of bringing some love there? It takes time to create space in any organization, but could your role be to keep the vibe of that place patient, loving, even amidst conflict that is bound to arise because we are all fucking traumatized?

So the question I want to leave you with is: What is your movement ecosystem? And is your movement ecosystem really paying attention to polycrisis? Is it paying attention to planetary boundaries? How is the solution going to scale up to meet the level of scale of challenges that we have? So I hope that this share makes some sense.

The invitation is: There are many ways in which we can all contribute towards justice and peace. Yes, yes. Things are really dire. In fact, I believe as a climate scientist that we're gonna have a lot of chaos. It's already here. We're gonna keep deepening this crisis. We still have to act so chaos doesn't become planetary level collapse. And our job is to create these islands of belonging, of resilience in a sea of climate crisis. In this raging storms of polycrisis, we have to create these islands of belonging and sanity. And we have to start



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with inner work, but not stop there. We can say we specialize in this aspect of the movement ecosystem. Fine, go do it. But are we then living our lives in a way that honors planetary boundaries, that honors the truth of racial and class difference? Are we working on reparations as a part of our work within the climate movement? If we consider yourself part of the climate movement. For some people their primary affiliation is part of the gender justice movement or I am part of the racial justice movement. That is fine. I'll ask the racial justice advocates the same question: Is your movement working for racial justice in a way that will also ensure climate justice for other humans in the global south or for a more-than-human world everywhere? Planetary boundaries are just crucial because I do not think we get to advocate for a lifestyle that has ravaged the whole planet for poor people in the world.

They could say that — in fact, it is one of the arguments India and other developing countries use all the time — that people in the West have so many privileges. They get to use so much electricity and water and energy. And so people in the Global South should also get to have a higher footprint. And that will lead to planetary collapse. So the question is: How are we gonna go to lifestyles that keep us in the sacred web of life as responsible human beings who are like keystone species taking care of all species around us and not just a few people in our family or in our neighborhood or in our community? And I think that wisdom lies clearly with indigenous communities where they still have their power, still have their languages, still have their access to the native lands. And in my mind, working on strengthening indigeneity, supporting indigenous people where they still are active, and reindigenizing ourselves so we can live more simply individually and as communities is so, so important. That is not the only answer, but whatever answer we do choose I'm saying this one more time: It has to honor the overall planetary boundaries. We don't get to generate endless amounts of water or soil or even energy — even though folks are working on nuclear fusion power. The planetary boundaries need to be honored.

So, that is all I have for this session. Thank you so much. Thank you for your attention. Many blessings. Thank you for your care. I want to be in this world because you are here caring for our collective survival and wellbeing of all human and more-than-human beings. Please be well.



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## Dana

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We hope you have found this transcript helpful. We invite you to help offset the cost to produce this transcript and the rest of the training by [making a donation to One Earth Sangha](#). Whatever you offer will be used wisely and is deeply appreciated.