



East Bay Meditation Center

# MARCH 2019 NEWSLETTER

---

## In This Issue

- State of the Center Report
- What Is Kōkua?
- People of EBMC: Arisika & Melvin
- Congratulations, Konda Mason!
- EBMC Teacher Dharma Talks online
- Resilience, Refuge & (R)evolution for People of Color



## State of the Center Report

Read all about the latest news from EBMC's board of directors (Leadership Sangha), as well as our fundraising and development news, and our programs and finance news in our March 2019 State of the Center report by clicking [here!](#)

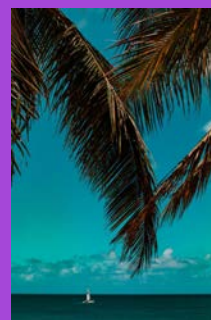


## What Is Kōkua? (And what can it bring to EBMC?)

by Candi Martinez Carthen, EBMC Event Director

Like most languages, the Hawaiian language (‘Ōlelo) is rooted in rich oral traditions, passed down through stories, myths, chants, hula and song before it was ever in written form. The language, consisting of only 12 letters, is incredibly poetic in nature and oftentimes words carry more than one meaning.

At East Bay Meditation Center, we're lovingly incorporating the use and practice of Kōkua, which most commonly translates as "help." The practice of Kōkua is a practice of shared stewardship, collective responsibility and connection. It is a noble practice, one of remembrance that you are part of community and in relationship with nature. Practicing with Kōkua could be as simple as taking small (or large) actions to help care for the spaces in which you practice, work, live, learn, and love.



[Photo: Taryn Kaahanui]

As an islander myself, I connect the practice of Kōkua with both Wise Action and Wise Effort and I bow in gratitude to the tremendous Kōkua that our volunteers, Board members and staff offer every day in the stewarding of our center and its mission.

Mahalo no kāu o Kōkua, East Bay Meditation Center,

Candi

*'Ike aku, 'ike mai, kōkua aku kōkua mai; pela iho la ka nohona 'ohana.*  
"Recognize and be recognized, help and be helped, such is family life."



[RETURN TO TOP](#)



# People of EBMC: Arisika Razak and Melvin Escobar, our newest EBMC core teachers

**EBMC:** Hi Melvin and Arisika, what brought you to EBMC, and could you tell us a little more about yourselves?



**Arisika Razak:** I think I was invited to teach at EBMC after co-teaching with the late Marlene Jones at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. I met Marlene, a fierce advocate for People of Color (POC), at Spirit Rock's first POC retreat. We had a lot in common since we were both African American women who had attempted to bring an understanding of diversity, and intercultural sensitivity to predominantly white institutions. Subsequently, she and I became part of a seven-person woman-of-color sangha that included

Ruth King and Alice Walker. This sangha, which lasted ten years and was led by Jack Kornfield, deepened my commitment to Buddhism. Marlene asked me to co-teach several daylong workshops with her for People of Color at Spirit Rock, and it was after this that I taught my first workshop at EBMC's former location on Broadway in Oakland.

**Melvin Escobar:** It was 2007 and a couple folks through other spiritual communities told me about the People of Color (POC) Sangha at EBMC. I didn't have the chance to go until early 2008 because a dear friend and mentor of mine (and my first Buddhist teacher), Don Marx, was dying and I was his main support – Don made me his power of attorney two weeks before he passed away, and in the two years I knew him, it seemed like he had been preparing me to help him with his transition. In those early months of EBMC, I was stuck in the "bargaining" part of the grief cycle – his death brought up grief from the biggest death I had experienced up to that point, my grandmother's death when I was 12 years old. The POC sangha was a liminal experience. I dedicated my practice to Don—I volunteered in many roles at EBMC, and offered all my monetary dana to honor his memory. The first class series I took was led by Lyn Fine and Chinh Nguyen based on Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*. I connected wholeheartedly with the teachings, the teachers and the others in the class. With Don and my grandmother as spiritual guides, I knew that I had found my main spiritual home.




**EBMC:** What are you passionate about?

**Melvin Escobar:** I love, love, love, music. I have always had a strong inclination toward the piano and play to help me de-stress. I am also passionate about connecting with people. I approach the practice of trying to connect with a wide variety of people as musical improvisation. I jam with both consonance and dissonance: I find it gratifying to listen to what's beyond and between the words. I take in the world primarily via the auditory sense sphere.

**Arisika Razak:** I came to Buddhism after spending many years as a cultural





worker, social justice activist, nurse-midwife and healer. I'm passionate about helping oppressed people find their voices and their power. I've done this in many ways: I worked for twenty years as an inner-city midwife, primarily serving ethnically diverse, low-income, and immigrant women in the hospital and the home. I worked for another twenty years as a college professor, helping my students find relevance and inspiration in the stories of their ancestors, while giving birth to new, empowered versions of themselves. I worked as a movement teacher and workshop leader helping participants to identify and cultivate resilience – and I try to bring all of these skills to my teaching at EBMC.

**EBMC:** What's something about you that you're willing to share, that most folks at EBMC might not know about you?

**Arisika Razak:** I have had a thirty-plus year career as a spiritual dancer, creating work that celebrates healing, empowerment, transformation and liberation especially for members of marginalized communities. I've performed overseas in Korea, Canada, and Switzerland – and danced at memorials for the dead at Charlotte Maxwell Clinic, a local venue providing alternative therapies for low-income women living with cancer. I had the privilege of dancing to honor the life and work of Yuri Kochiyama at her West Coast memorial, and I was interviewed in the first film on female genital cutting to be produced by an African woman. In that film, *Fire Eyes*, I'm also shown dancing for an audience of Somali women living with this painful legacy. Dance is important to me, for it can directly reach the heart – it's one of my deepest and most transformative endeavors.

**Melvin Escobar:** Related to music, I constantly have songs playing in my head. Any word or phrase I hear can trigger a song to play in my mind. In the earlier days of my practice, I thought I needed to get rid of my "mental jukebox," but then came to realize that bringing kind awareness to these "sensations of the mind" was the wiser action to take. One other thing related to music: I love singer-songwriter-goddess Tori Amos. I have seen her over twenty times in concert!

**EBMC:** Is there anything else you'd like the EBMC Sangha to know?

**Melvin Escobar:** I am so humbled by the EBMC sangha. The ways that we come together as community and create a space of radical welcoming – it's incredible to me, a model for what's possible and desperately needed in the world. The EBMC Sangha provides so many with the nourishing soil for deep healing and the cultivation of spiritual maturity. It continues to be a wellspring of inspiration for me to continue my service work.

**Arisika Razak:** As a seventy-year-old cisgender woman, I have lived through and participated in many of the struggles for civil rights and social justice that occurred in the aftermath of the 1960s. I grew up in Harlem listening to Malcolm X speak, and I participated in struggles to integrate establishments in the North as well as in the South. I was part of the Black cultural renaissance of the late '60s, and the anti-war and feminist movements of the '70s. I was targeted by homophobia in the '80s, and performed at the first Oakland Pride celebration at Lake Merritt. I consider myself a cultural worker, spiritual teacher, and healer – who is still learning, growing and contributing to the community.



[RETURN TO TOP](#)

## Congratulations, Konda Mason! You're Changing the World!



Congratulations to EBMC teacher and former board member, Konda Mason! Konda has been named by [Conscious Company Media](#) as one of thirty-five world-changing women in conscious business in 2019! The online article, published in December 2018, says Konda is part of a group of women who are "creators and makers, movers and shakers who are transforming business -- and the planet -- for the better."

To read more about Konda's amazing achievements, current projects, and words of motivating wisdom for all of us, click [here](#)!

 [Become a Friend of EBMC >](#)

## Listen to Recorded Dharma Talks by EBMC Teachers

Did you know that for the last year and a half, we have recorded many wise and wonderful Dharma talks by EBMC teachers? We have been able to edit a handful of them, and they are now available on our website?

[Click here to access them.](#)



With thanks to EBMC Event Director, Candi Martinez Carthen and Event Manager, Shah



Hussein, EBMC was able to manifest a longtime dream of making EBMC Dharma Talks available online.

Check out the link for insightful talks on Tender Self Care in the Midst of Pain, Compassionate Dharma and Letting Go of Addictions, Posttraumatic Growth for People of Color and more!

We look forward to sharing more Dharma Talks with our Sangha near and far in the coming days.



Teachers for EBMC's first ever six-month Radical Buddhist leadership training for People of Color, **Resilience, Refuge & (R)evolution**, which began in January 2019, gathered over delicious food, for a planning session on December 15, 2018.

(Standing l to r: cohesion coordinator Sarwang Parikh, Arisika Razak, Kimi Mojica, Kazu Haga. Seated l to r: Mushim Ikeda, Katie Loncke, Melvin Escobar, and Patrick Brown. Not pictured: Lisa Moore)

Upgrade your monthly giving > 



EBMC's Mission Statement

Founded to provide a welcoming environment for people of color, members of the LGBTQI community, people with

disabilities, and other underrepresented communities, the East Bay Meditation Center welcomes everyone seeking to end suffering and cultivate happiness. Our mission is to foster liberation, personal and interpersonal healing, social action, and inclusive community building. We offer mindfulness practices and teachings on wisdom and compassion from Buddhist and other spiritual traditions. Rooted in our commitment to diversity, we operate with transparent democratic governance, generosity-based economics, and environmental sustainability.

---

newsletter editor: Mushim      newsletter designer: Grace Gilliam  
East Bay Meditation Center | 285 17th Street | Oakland, CA 94612

---

See what's happening on our social sites:

