



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

WINTER 2015 NEWSLETTER

Moments of Awakening

BY TOM MOON

Tom Moon, MFT, is a well-known psychotherapist in San Francisco who works primarily with gay men. He specializes in the use of mindfulness as a tool of self-exploration, combining the insights of Buddhism with contemporary therapeutic practices. His column, "The Examined Life," appears bi-weekly in the San Francisco Bay Times. He was GBF's first speaker coordinator, and his spiritual home is Spirit Rock Meditation Center.

The subject I'm going to talk about today is Moments of Awakening, or as they're often called in the Western world, mystical experiences. It's a subject I love. Literature goes back thousands of years in every one of the spiritual traditions where people have these experiences. Often they're completely unpredictable moments of spiritual awakening that change lives, and reading them can be quite inspiring. I want to share three accounts of my favorites and then talk a bit about what the Buddha said about them; about their strengths and weaknesses, and what the pitfalls are of these kind of experiences.

The first is the Awakening Experience of Arthur Koestler, Hungarian-born writer and author of *Darkness at Noon*. During the Spanish Civil War, he was arrested by the Fascists and thrown into solitary confinement for being a Communist. That was bad news then, because it was a capital offense, so he was in pretty dire straits. In the middle of the night, he would hear other prisoners being dragged out of their cells and shot. There was no way of knowing that wasn't going to happen to him. He had nothing to read, no communication with anybody.

What he did was take a spring out of his mattress and use it to write on the stone wall. He was a smart guy; he studied mathematics. He was trying to remember Euclid's Proof, that prime numbers are infinite. He managed to remember it and worked out the proof, writing on the wall. He was standing there imagining his handiwork, and thinking about how the infinite is something the human mind can't understand, yet can say very definite things about it that aren't vague and mysterious.

As he was pondering, a wave suddenly came over him. He writes this about it: "The wave had originated in an articulate verbal insight; but this evaporated at once, leaving in its wake only a wordless essence, a fragrance of eternity, a quiver of the arrow in the blue. I must have stood there for some minutes, entranced with a wordless awareness that 'this is perfect—perfect'; until I noticed some slight mental discomfort nagging at the back of my mind—some trivial circumstance that marred the

The gay Buddhist fellowship supports Buddhist practice in the gay men's community. It is a forum that brings together the diverse Buddhist traditions to address the spiritual concerns of gay men in the San Francisco Bay Area, the United States, and the world. GBF's mission includes cultivating a social environment that is inclusive and caring.

perfection of the moment. Then I remembered the nature of that irrelevant annoyance: I was, of course, in prison and might be shot. But this was immediately answered by a feeling whose verbal translation would be: ‘So what? Is that all? Have you got nothing more serious to worry about?’—an answer so spontaneous, fresh, and amused, as if the intruding annoyance had been the loss of a collar stud. Then I was floating on my back in a river of peace, under bridges of

to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream. This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. And I suppose my happiness could have taken form in the words: ‘Thank God, thank God that

“I suppose my happiness could have taken form in the words: Thank God, thank God that I am like other men, that I am only a man among others.”

—Thomas Merton

silence. It came from nowhere, and flowed nowhere. There was no river, and no I. The I had ceased to exist.”

He then tries to describe what he was experiencing. He wrote: “Verbal transcriptions that come nearest to it are: the unity and interlocking of everything that exists; an interdependence like that of gravitational fields or communicating vessels. The ‘I’ ceases to exist because it has, via a kind of mental osmosis, established communication with, and been dissolved in, the universal pool. It is the process of dissolution and limitless expansion which is sensed as the oceanic feeling, as the draining of all tension, the absolute catharsis, the peace that passeth all understanding.”

While he was in prison he kept having these experiences, often a couple of times a day, then less frequently later in life. He studied Buddhism in Japan and yoga in India. He never committed to any spiritual tradition or beliefs of any kind, but he said that these experiences became the foundation for a new way of life for him. Before he died, he talked about the oceanic feeling that he experienced as removing his fear of death.

The second mystical experience is that of Thomas Merton, whom many of you know. He was a Trappist monk, who wrote a lot on mysticism. He was one of the first Catholics to study and practice Zen Buddhism. He became a good friend of D. T. Suzuki, and thought there was a fruitful exchange to be had between Catholicism and Buddhism. Before that, though, he was a regular monk living in Kentucky. He was smug, by his own admission, and thought he was living some kind of special, holy existence, and that he was better than lay people. Then, he had an experience. There’s now a plaque in the shopping center in Louisville where it happened. There really is. His quote is on the plaque: “In Louisville, at the corner of 4th and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien

I am like other men, that I am only a man among others.’ It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes. A member of the human race! To think that such a commonplace realization should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstakes. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun. They are not ‘they’ but my own self. There are no strangers! Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach—the core of their reality. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed... I suppose the big problem would be that we would all fall down and worship each other.” I love that. That was a good day for him.

The third is Byron Katie’s awakening experience. She’s a homegrown, world-renowned spiritual teacher from Barstow, California. Before this moment, she was, by her own description, a total mess. She was an alcoholic. She was so depressed she couldn’t get out of bed. She was over-weight. She wound up in a halfway house in Bakersfield, California, for women with eating disorders. She was sleeping on the floor, and she woke up in the morning and there was a cockroach climbing over her leg. That was her moment of awakening.

“In that instant, all my rage, all the thoughts that had been troubling me, my whole world was gone. The only thing that existed was awareness. I was seeing without concepts, without thoughts or a story. There was no me. The foot and the cockroach weren’t outside me. There was no outside or inside.” In another context she said: “... in that moment, it’s like IT opened its eyes and it looked

and it had never been born before; it was awake and it saw everything. It had no name, no recognition, no identification for it or what it saw—there was nothing. And then I noticed the mind just bombarded, and in that moment laughter was born, it just rolled out, because it recognized that none of the thoughts were true. It was wisdom that could see past everything. So actually, I inquired within that moment—before the thought, no problem—and then the thought comes and we believe it, that’s where the whole world is created. Thought brought imaginary form with it, and a whole world, basically.” Then, she sums up what this experience taught her: “I discovered that, basically *when I believe my thoughts, I suffer; when I don’t believe my thoughts, I don’t suffer.* I’ve come to see that this is true for every human being.”

She went through this very sudden transformation, and she now teaches a really interesting form of self-inquiry that came out of this experience, where she asks four questions. I use it sometimes in my work. It’s a great form of cognitive therapy, if nothing else. It’s a way of using the mind to get beyond the mind.

Those are my three favorite mystical experiences. The thing they show me, and that people who study these experiences say, is that there’s a family resemblance among them. They arise in all cultures, and seem to be a kind of human experience. It’s very sudden, there’s no preparation. It’s one of immense freedom, expansiveness, and joy. It isn’t just a Julie Andrews moment. A mystical experience always presents itself as a kind of personal revelation into something that hadn’t been seen before; some truth about the nature of things that was hidden before. There’s a sense of being more alive, of more understanding than before.

Usually, when people have this experience, it’s so self-evident that they can’t doubt it. They can doubt it later, but in the moment it’s obvious they’ve seen something true. But

den spiritual being, whose still voice of wisdom you have only rarely heard or attended to.”

How people interpret these experiences varies, but there’s usually a sense that, “I am not who I thought I was,” and a kind of unity these experiences point toward. Not surprisingly, everybody tends to interpret them within their own spiritual tradition, and most people who have these experiences see them as religious. So Christians—or anyone in the theistic religions—would probably see these experiences as Grace, or as union with God. In Buddhism, perhaps they would view it as seeing beyond the ego. They would use terms like the Deathless, the Unborn, or Buddha Nature, or no words at all. By contrast, Arthur Koestler had no spiritual tradition and remained a life-long agnostic/atheist. He did not come to any theories about it; you don’t have to. Byron Katie, who says, “I have no beliefs,” says that direct contact is something that you can’t put into words, and leaves it at that.

My spiritual life started with one of these experiences, which explains my personal interest. In the ‘60s, they weren’t well understood. I remember that in college, people would advertise meditation groups and yoga classes and the like. They were still kind of exotic in the West. They would say, “These are ways of getting high without drugs.” Getting high, of course, was very important. It was the end and purpose of spiritual life. In fact, an enlightened being was described as a person who gets high but doesn’t come down—to be permanently high.

Ram Dass—I love Ram Dass—is a deeply spiritual man. He went and had a great experience with his guru, Neem Karoli Baba, and came back to America and did a tour all around the country describing what he learned. He was a beginner in those days. I remember hearing one of his talks, where he tried to explain the great, exalted state he believed this guru lived in. He said, “Neem Karoli Baba is having an orgasm from every pore of his body 24/7.” To me, in my 20s that sounded really hot. I thought, “They have that? Damn, I got

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—Byron Katie

there’s a difference between your ordinary waking life and this kind of experience. People begin to see themselves almost like they’re two separate beings. Aldous Huxley used to say that, “Human beings are amphibians. We live in the spiritual world and the material world simultaneously.” Sogyal Rinpoche, in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, says, “Two people have been living in you all your life. One is the ego—garrulous, demanding, hysterical, calculating. The other is the hid-

den spiritual being, whose still voice of wisdom you have only rarely heard or attended to.” It’s amazing when I think back on how much—as yoga and Buddhism and Hindu practices have come into the West—we’ve matured since those days. Even *Be Here Now*, a classic book, is a little... I used to read it on acid, and then it really made a lot of sense.

The Buddha had a lot of these experiences too. Early in his spiritual quest, he started studying forms of meditation. He was able to achieve deep, one-pointed concentration, and

would have experiences of infinite consciousness and profound insight. He called them “raptures.” To me, they sound like mystical experience. He thought, “Wow, this is the greatest of all worldly pleasures, to have this.” For a while he thought, “This is it.” He’d be deep in one of his experiences, and then he’d have to get up and go to the bathroom. The experience would fade, as they all do. What he discovered was, “Damn. These experiences have the same limitations as all other experiences. Namely, they arise, stay for a while, and pass away. They can’t be clung to. They’re not a secure refuge.”

The Buddha had two opinions of these experiences. On the one hand, he called them “The Gateway to Nirvana,” because he did see them as important openings into the nature of reality. He didn’t just dismiss them. He also called them “The Corruption of Insight”—when you cling to them, grasp onto them, or try to do things to induce them, as if they were the whole purpose of spiritual life. You can induce them by taking drugs, such as acid and psilocybin mushrooms. Again, in the ‘60s, that’s what a lot of us were doing. The point is that, what these experiences show us is a possibility. They show us, “Wow, life can be a lot different than I thought. My ordinary, dull-witted, day-to-day perception of reality is not the whole story. There’s more to what we can experience.”

Once you have an experience like this—the way I’ve experienced it—it sets the compass of your heart. You know something you didn’t know. You know a possibility. You have a direction you want to go, even if you don’t know how to get there. We didn’t know what to do with these experiences in the ‘60s, because our spiritual traditions were pretty—I would

experience, he was seen levitating in front of a crucifix. That’s the kind of thing I was taught, and it’s like, “Eh, probably not.” I had skepticism about it, because it was all wrapped up in the miraculous.

In the Eastern traditions like Buddhism and Hinduism, these experiences are more central. Buddhism begins with the Awakening of the Buddha himself, which I think was a mystical experience—the *maha* mystical experience, you could say—the most influential one of all time. The Eastern traditions have developed ways for understanding, nurturing, and learning from these experiences, without getting lost. What these traditions say is that once you’ve had the experience and seen the possibility, the next fundamental step on the path is that you have to begin living an ethical life. This was not happy news in the ‘60s—cleaning up your act. For instance, Byron Katie was alcoholic when she had her awakening. Of course, she had to stop drinking and get her life straight. Not because drinking is bad, but because having that experience taught her that her mind, her awareness, is meant for a higher purpose. You have to clear away whatever obstacles get in the way. Mystical experiences teach you a goal; ethics get you there.

Mystical experiences typically show us that the individual self is not what it appears to be, or it’s illusory, one of the central beliefs in Buddhism. If the individual self is a kind of prison, the ethical life is about opening to others. It’s about opening to service, opening to compassion, opening to love. One of the principles I love in Buddhism that really inspires me is, “Give no one cause to fear you.” That’s how we should live: “Give no one cause to fear you.” Growing up, I thought that was really naïve. Boys

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—Aldous Huxley

say—*decadent* in this culture. We didn’t know what to do.

Thomas Merton felt that Christianity in the West had become decadent because it was all talk. It was all ideas. In theology, you had to believe improbable things: that’s religion. Any kind of direct experience or openness was not really pursued or talked about. We had no language to talk about the experience of spiritual life. I was raised in the Catholic tradition and there was some talk about such experiences—the beatific vision—but it was something that usually happened after you died, or to saints, often accompanied by levitation.

Thomas Aquinas was a great Catholic theologian who wrote an encyclopedia of theology. Toward the end of his life, he had a mystical experience and said, “Everything I wrote is straw compared to this.” It is said that during the

had to look tough and armored, like “don’t fuck with me.” Otherwise, you’d get beat up on the way home from school.

Then, in academic and professional life, you had to learn more sophisticated ways of armoring and defending yourself against other people. Just for fun, I made a list of the techniques I learned: self-righteousness, irritation, edginess, and impatience; caustic, sarcastic, and withering tones; condescension, ridicule, humiliation, argumentativeness; sighs and eye-rolls; prosecutorial questions; high-handedness and put-downs. What a way to live! We’ve all done this. When you’ve had an awakening, what you begin to see is that this is living in a prison. The more we open ourselves, the more our suffering begins to end. That’s how mystical experiences teach us and inform us.

Ethics in most people's minds, if it's not spiritually grounded, is about being nice. It's about being good and the ideal of unselfish love. Once you've had a mystical experience, then the ideal becomes more like getting your ego out of the way so that you can be a conduit in which that spiritual energy flows into the

said that, "You cannot turn toward God unless you turn away from the self." In other words, if you want to open to the spiritual life, you have to stop focusing so much on your own individual concerns. One way is through meditation. Sogyal Rinpoche describes it this way:

“These experiences have the same limitations as all other experiences. Namely, they arise, stay for a while, and pass away. They can't be clung to. They're not a secure refuge.”

world. It's a much more inspiring kind of ideal, and a much more exacting one. Compassion just doesn't mean being nice to people and smiling at strangers on the street. It really means working at the kind of openness that people don't typically do. There's a poem by Hafiz that I love, which expresses this ideal perfectly:

Admit something:

Everyone you see, you say to them, "Love me."

Of course you do not do this out loud, otherwise someone would call the cops.

Why not become the one who lives with a full moon in each eye that is always saying,

With that sweet moon language,

What every other eye in this world is dying to hear?

What a beautiful ideal. Most of the time we think of compassion and love—love especially--as being on the receptive end. There's a lot of unselfish love in this world. Just look at what parents do with their kids; the sacrifices they make every day. The other day I was watching this guy throw a ball for his dog. The dog is thinking, "This is the most wonderful thing. The ball is in the air." Animals, dogs, are so easily pleased. The guy is bored to tears, but he's throwing the ball because he loves his dog. Simple little things like that. There is a lot of unselfish love in the world, but so much of the time we think of love in terms of receiving it.

I think a predominant religion in America is romantic love. It's based on the idea of, "There's my soul-mate out there; the one person who was specially created to meet all my needs. We will have great sex, of course, and we'll always know love. He'll anticipate all my desires, without my ever having to say anything. He'll heal all my childhood wounds," and so on. There's a faith in this culture in romantic love that is religious, if you ask me.

The other idea all the traditions talk about is the need to train the mind. Buddhism, I believe, emphasizes this the most. The idea is that the spiritual voice in us, except when it's shouting in these mystical experiences, is a very quiet, soft voice, easily drowned out by the noise of the world and our own inner turmoil and desires. In order to hear, we have to make the mind quiet and receptive, to listen. In theistic traditions, in Christianity, it's often

Above all, be at ease, be as natural and spacious as possible. Slip quietly out of the noose of your habitual anxious self, release all grasping and relax into your true nature. Think of your ordinary, emotional, thought-ridden self as a block of ice or a slab of butter left out in the sun. If you are feeling hard and cold, let this aggression melt away in the sunlight of your meditation. Let peace work on you and enable you to gather your scattered mind into the mindfulness of Calm Abiding, and awaken in you the awareness and insight of Clear Seeing. And you will find all your negativity disarmed, your aggression dissolved, and your confusion evaporating slowly like mist into the vast and stainless sky of your absolute nature.

In Tibetan Buddhism, they speak of "the vast and stainless sky of your absolute nature." What happens, I think, is that if we can quiet the mind, awakening experiences are more likely to arise. The more quiet we become, the more this kind of guidance, or whatever it is, is likely to occur, although there's no way to make it happen. Grasping for it is just another form of clinging, which creates suffering.

We can live a life in alignment with the highest in us. We can be inspired by our highest moments, because so many of our moments are dull in meaning in this world. We can keep what we've experienced as an ideal. Then, we begin to see the real nature of existence. As Kalu Rinpoche says--and this is a good example of a mystical utterance in Buddhism—"We live in the illusion and appearance of things. There is a reality. You are that reality. When you understand this, you see that you are nothing, and being nothing, you are everything. That is all."

The first time I heard this, I thought, "What the hell does that mean? You're nothing, you're everything." The thing is, almost all mystical statements are paradoxical like this. Their purpose is to remind us that the nature of life, and the nature of who we really are, is beyond what the mind can comprehend. The heart can know of it intimately, because the heart in us is that reality. The more we come to know this, the more we discover a deep peace and joy inside ourselves that this world, for all its horrors, can never touch. ■

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Sunday Sittings

10:30 am to 12 noon

Every Sunday at 10:30am we meditate together for 30 minutes, followed by a talk or discussion till 12pm. Everyone is then welcome to stay and socialize over refreshments till approximately 12:30pm, after which those who are interested usually go somewhere local for lunch. Our sittings are held at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett Street (Look for the red door near 21st St between Mission and Valencia Streets)

MUNI: 14 Mission or 49 Van Ness-Mission, alight at 21st St, walk 1/2 block

BART: 24th and Mission, walk 3 1/2 blocks

PARKING: on street (meters free on Sundays) or in adjacent New Mission Bartlett Garage. The Center is handicapped accessible.

Your Thrift Store Donations Earn Money for GBF

GBF members can donate their quality cast-offs to the Community Thrift Store (CTS) and GBF will receive a quarterly check based on the volume of items sold. This is a great way to support our Sangha, and the community. So far this year we have received over \$800 through members' generosity. Bring your extra clothing and other items to CTS at 623 Valencia St between 10am and 5pm, any day of the week. The donation door is around the corner on Sycamore Alley (parallel to and between 17th and 18th) between Valencia and Mission. Tell the worker you are donating to GBF.

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There is now a GBF discussion group for the general membership (and others) on Yahoo. Join the discussion at:

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/gaybuddhistfellowship

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Calendar

Sunday Speakers

December 6 David Lewis

David Lewis has been following the dharma path for over 40 years and has a degree in comparative religious studies. He started out in the Tibetan Shambhala tradition and has been practicing vipassana meditation since moving to San Francisco over 25 years ago. For the past 7 years he has been practicing intensively. David is a member of the Mission Dharma sangha, where he teaches an introduction to insight meditation class. He is a long time member of the Gay Buddhist Fellowship and also leads a weekly sitting group for seniors every Friday morning. David is a graduate of Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Dedicated Practitioners Program and has been on the teaching team for Spirit Rock retreats.

December 13 Kevin Griffin

Kevin Griffin is the author of *One Breath at a Time: Buddhism and the Twelve Steps* (Rodale Press 2004) and *A Burning Desire: Dharma God and the Path of Recovery*. A longtime Buddhist practitioner and 12 Step participant, he is a leader in the mindful recovery movement and one of the founders of the Buddhist Recovery Network.

December 20 Kirk Phillips

John Kirk Phillips has been sitting zazen for about 30 years. His first exposure to Buddhism was through Alan Watts in 1968. In 1986 he had the good fortune to meet Issan Dorsey who inspired him to practice zazen, and was also influenced and guided by the work of Ram Dass. His focus was applying Buddhist practice to death and dying. He has been working as a Nurse practitioner at Kaiser since 1998. He studied for 11 years with Darlene Cohen, and was ordained as a Zen Buddhist priest in 2009. He is currently a priest with Great Spirit Sangha in San Francisco led by Cynthia Kear.

December 27 Open Discussion (Holiday)

January 3 Dale Borglum

Dale Borglum is the founder and Executive Director of The Living/Dying Project. He is a pioneer in the conscious dying movement and has worked directly with thousands of people with life-threatening illness and their families for over 30 years. In 1981, Dale founded the first residential facility for people who wished to die consciously in the United States, The Dying Center. He has taught and lectured extensively on the topics of spiritual support for those with life-threatening illness, caregiving as a spiritual practice, and healing at the edge of illness, of death, of loss, of crisis. Dale has a BS from UC Berkeley and a PhD from Stanford University. He is the co-author of *Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook* and has taught meditation for the past 35 years.

January 10 Dhammachari Danadasa

Dhammachari Danadasa has been practicing with the San Francisco Buddhist Center (SFBC) community since 1993 and was ordained in 2011. What brought him to Buddhism was a deep sense of isolation and dissatisfaction with my life. What brought him to ordination was a deep knowing that Buddhist practice is of utmost value and a burning desire to align his actions with the teachings of the Buddha. About 3 years ago, he became fascinated with the secular mindfulness movement. What is the mindfulness movement doing well, and what is it leaving unsaid? What is the difference between relaxation techniques and mindfulness training? He has been teaching a mindfulness class at the SFBC for two years.

January 17 Carol Newhouse

Carol Osmer Newhouse has studied Insight Meditation for more than 30 years and has been teaching for 20. She was given Dharma transmission by The Venerable Ruth Denison, student of the great meditation master U Ba Khin of Burma. She has studied with Dr. Rina Sircar of CIIS and Dr Thynn Thynn in Daily Life Practice. She is the founding teacher of the Lesbian Buddhist Sangha in Berkeley, and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

January 24 Benjamin Young

Benjamin Young began meditation as part of his spiritual practice when he was in his early twenties. Over the last forty-four years, he has studied many spiritual paths, pursued a number of meditation practices, led spiritual retreats and given spiritual talks. Benjamin traveled to India for two months in 2001 where he and a close friend took monk's vows. He has been practicing a Buddhist form of meditation called Anapanasati (Mindfulness of the In and Out Breath) for the past 20 years and assisting others in developing their spiritual practices.

January 31 Dave Richo

Dave Richo, Ph.D, MFT, is a psychologist, teacher, and writer in Santa Barbara and San Francisco who emphasizes Jungian, transpersonal, and spiritual perspectives in his work. He is the author of *How to Be an Adult in Relationships*. For more information, visit www.davericho.com.

February 7 Bill Weber

Bill Weber is a senior Vipassana practitioner and a graduate from Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leaders program. He has twenty years of extensive retreat practice and currently practices at home with his husband or sits with a small group of gay men. He is also a documentary filmmaker and video editor, whose latest projects are *The Galapagos Affair* and *To Be Takei*.

February 14 Open Discussion

February 21 Emilio Gonzalez

Emilio Gonzalez has been practicing Qig Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan since 1973. A senior student of Grand Master Kai Ying Tung, he taught Tai Chi at 50 Oak Street in San Francisco for over twenty years. In the 1990s, he established a special Qig Qigong for Health class for people with HIV and other chronic illnesses. He also taught at San Francisco State University, at Mills College, and at various national conferences on Traditional Chinese Medicine. In 1996, he produced a best-selling Qig Qigong video that was broadcast nationwide on PBS.

February 28 Gary Ost

Gary Ost is a retired Episcopal priest living in San Francisco. He began his study of the dharma in 2008, starting with the Shambhala school of Tibetan Buddhism. Since then he has practiced daily shamatha-vipashana meditation. He recently Decembered his aspiration to help Christians understand Buddhism better and Buddhists to understand Christianity better. Gary has taken informal bodhisattva vows, and is studying the Lojong teachings of the 11th Century Tibetan monk Atisha. Out of those teachings he is currently exploring the transformative psychological effect of Tonglen, a personalized mantra practice accompanied by taking in and sending out the breath.
