



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2011 NEWSLETTER

Buddhist Practice and Anxiety

BY TOM MOON

Tom Moon, MFT, is a psychotherapist in San Francisco who works primarily with gay men and specializes in the use of mindfulness as a tool of self-exploration. His column, "The Examined Life," appears bi-weekly in the *San Francisco Bay Times*. His spiritual home is Spirit Rock Meditation Center. He gave the following talk on December 12, 2010.

Last time I was here, I talked about depression and meditative and spiritual practices for responding to depression. This time, I want to talk about another afflictive emotion, namely, anxiety.

Working with anxiety is kind of a growing edge for me. I'm still learning how to do it. My personal and professional experience is that it has been a little easier to work with clients who are depressed and to teach them mindfulness than it is to work with clients who are experiencing anxiety. Anxious clients have trouble meditating. There seem to be a couple of reasons for this. Oh, and by the way, not everyone finds that to be true; this is just my experience. Some people find it harder when they're depressed to meditate. But my experience has been that anxiety is more difficult. And one of the reasons seems to be that anxiety is a highly energizing emotion.

When you're anxious, it's your threat system that's been stimulated. There are two amygdalas in here. The alarm goes off, the heart rate goes up, adrenaline is released, and cortisol, the stress hormone, which makes you feel awful, also gets released. And the whole point of it is to impel you to fight, flight, or freeze. And the freeze part isn't relaxed. And it's a very old system we have in our brains. There have been brains on earth for about 600 million years, and the anxiety system, the threat response and detection system, developed very early on. So, we have this system in our brains back in what's called the lizard brain. You know, we have four brains in us. We have the reptilian, paleo-mammalian, neo-mammalian, and human brains. One of the reasons it's so hard to be human, I think, is that what we have in us is a lizard, a squirrel, a monkey, and just a little human up here. And when we're trying to manage it, it's all tied together, so we're kind of challenged. We know what it feels like to be a lizard in a desert seeing a snake. We know what that feels like. It's a very powerful, intense response system.

To try to sit and meditate through that is, for most people, pretty challenging. That's one reason I think that it's difficult. But it's important to try to respond to anxiety, because it's a huge issue in our culture. It's estimated that about 18% of the population has some form, every year, of diagnosable anxiety disorder. And even the people who don't in our culture are still dealing with it. I mean, we seem to me to be a really stressed out culture and getting worse all the time. We're angry, irritable, scared, exhausted, and I think it's getting worse in this recession.

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.

So it's important to have some way of responding to anxiety. And it *seemed* like a good idea to teach mindfulness. You teach a calm abiding. You know, stop responding to what's happening. But what I've found is that when people are in panic states or anxiety states, forget it. What you need then is some more active response, like aerobic exercise and yoga and a hot bath and reassurance from other people, and some people need medications. When you've done that, then the anxiety level goes down. Then maybe you can

quickly than positive experiences. And there's a simple thought experiment to show why this was absolutely inevitable, why this had to be the case.

Here's two mistakes. Ask yourself which mistake is the most dangerous to make. First mistake: You're outside on the Serengeti Plain, and you think you see a tiger in the bushes. You *think* you see a tiger, and you run away. But you're wrong; there isn't a tiger. Second mistake: You're out on the Serengeti Plain, and you look

It's a very old system we have in our brains. There have been brains on earth for about 600 million years, and the anxiety system, the threat response and detection system, developed very early on. . . . You know, we have four brains in us. We have the reptilian, paleo-mammalian, neo-mammalian, and human brains. One of the reasons it's so hard to be human, I think, is that what we have in us is a lizard, a squirrel, a monkey, and just a little human up here.

begin practicing, and that can help.

But I think another reason that I have had some difficulty with anxiety is that for a lot of people there seems to be a misunderstanding of what mindfulness really is. It comes from the way we use this word "mind" in English, which is the thinking process for most of us. And a lot of people conceive of mindfulness as a kind of dispassionate, even aloof, even cold state, where you simply observe what's happening and you're not affected by pleasure, pain. You're neutral, and you're just sort of watching it all. And when mindfulness is seen as that, it tends to foster a sense of separation between you and your experience. Actually, you can feel kind of isolated inside yourself. I don't know if anyone's ever experienced this. And you can feel a kind of aloneness.

The trouble is that anxiety is an alone state. When you're really anxious, there's an experience of feeling all alone in a very hostile, threatening universe. That's the subjective feeling of anxiety. So to dispassionately watch that from a distance doesn't help too much. But I think this is a misunderstanding of what mindfulness actually means. You know, in the Pali language, the word for mind and the word for heart are the same word, *chitta*. They didn't separate them. So, in mindfulness, we could also use the term "heartfulness." And I think if we looked at practice as developing a kind of heartfelt response to our experience, then it begins to be able to respond to anxiety.

I want to do a guided meditation here in a couple of minutes. Once I started getting into all this stuff, I found a lot of people were ahead of me, and I found some resources for lowering stress and anxiety that I think are effective, that *lead* to mindfulness, but don't just start with an attempt to do mindfulness.

I want to talk about one of the challenges, though, in dealing with anxiety. Have you read this book, by the way, *Buddha's Brain*? It's really interesting. I strongly recommend it. What I'm saying comes a lot from this book. There's a negativity bias built right into the brain. In other words, the brain tends to favor negative experiences. It gives them more attention. It responds to them more

in the bushes and you think, "No, that's not a tiger. That's just a shadow." But actually it *is* a tiger, and it's about to pounce. So which mistake is the most dangerous? Pretty obvious, right? The second one is the more dangerous mistake to make. If you are threatened by something and it isn't really a threat, then you're just feeling bad, but you're still alive, and you can pass on your genes. If you *underestimate* a threat and it really turns out to be the tiger, then you might get killed and won't pass on your genes.

In a sense, what this says, really, is that evolution doesn't care—well, it doesn't care about anything, but we have to use teleological language to talk about this to save time—it doesn't care about whether you're happy, peaceful and contented or not. It cares that you survive. Survival is what it's about. So we have a bias for paying attention to negative experiences. Positive ones take much longer to even register. It takes five to ten to thirty seconds before we even begin to notice positive experiences. A threat: a split second and the threat system is activated.

So there are some important consequences. Here's a consequence. You go to a party. And everyone at the party is very friendly and fun and likes you. But one person is snide and contemptuous. Who do you go home thinking about? And it isn't just you. It's not that you're crazy. People in therapy tell me this all the time. They tell me, "Why do I do this?" And I'm thinking, "Yeah, I do this too."

It is a very natural response because the brain evolved not to understand reality dispassionately but to focus on problems, threats, and dangers. So problems, threats and dangers are what capture its attention. What's good tends to fall into the background. So we have this bias, and here are some of the consequences. It's easy to acquire a feeling of learned helplessness, which is an important component of depression, from just a few failures. But it's hard to undo these feelings, even with many successes. Research shows that people will do more to avoid a loss than to acquire a comparable gain. Another one: in intimate relationships, it typically takes about five positive

interactions to overcome the effects of a single negative one. That's from John Gottman's *Relationship Guide*.

So there is this negativity bias. It seems to me that an active approach to anxiety would involve inclining the mind away from negativity and activating the parts of the brain that are positive. In addition to the threat system, we have the affiliative system, which is the most lately developed part of the brain. Our brains are big because we have to interact with each other and form communities, and that requires a lot of brain power. And in the affiliative system, there's compassion, empathy, love, connectedness. And these emotions can be very soothing. So when your threat system is activated, if you can incline the mind more toward these positive interactions, then, theoretically, I think you begin to dampen the anxiety response. And then, it becomes possible to feel safe, to relax more, and to become mindful. That's my theory, anyway. That's what I believe I'm seeing with clients.

So, I want to try this out a little bit. I want to do a little guided meditation. I don't know how long this will take, maybe about five or ten minutes. No tigers! This is a meditation which comes from the Tibetan tradition. It's really a kind of Tibetan form of loving-kindness or compassion meditation. And in order to do this, first of all, you need to come up with a few people who, to use the Tibetan term, are your benefactors. A benefactor is anyone who you feel has love and compassion toward you. So that can include spiritual beings, the Buddha, Rama Krishna, your teachers. But it also includes friends and family members. It may be people you haven't had perfect relationships with, but who you have felt, at least at some point in their life or your life, that they felt a kind of unconditional compassion and love toward you. It can also include pets. When I do this meditation, I think of Samantha, who's my friend's dog. Every time I saw her, she'd have a seizure! Even if she saw me two hours ago, she'd be so happy. And I always put her in my meditation.

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So, come up with a few (one is enough) benefactors that you can recall, and we'll do the meditation. You can do this with your eyes closed, or with your eyes open. If your eyes are open, gaze at a forty-five-degree angle, just in front of you. Keep the focus broad.

So, begin by just taking a few very deep breaths.

And take a long exhalation. Inhalation tends to be energizing. A long exhalation seems to be relaxing. And as you exhale, relax into the body and into the present moment.

And sitting in a relaxed way, recall your benefactors. And imagine that they're behind you and slightly above your head, arrayed behind you. And they're sending you love in the form of compassion. It's a kind of healing radiance that they're sending into you. It's like a soft rainfall. Receive this loving compassion into any

physical pain you might have. And any surface tension. Let it penetrate like a warm sunlight, relaxing you, soothing any pain you may have.

Now, bring to mind some of the worries and anxieties about your daily life that you may have. You might start by thinking of worries over finances, security, or meeting some personal obligations. And just really recall what those anxieties feel like. Let yourself really know and feel what that is in your body. And your benefactors are sending loving-kindness, compassion right into the heart of those anxieties, so that you're aware of it, but you're feeling this soft, radiant energy of love.

Run right into it.

Be receptive, like a puppy lying on a rug in the sunlight.

As you breathe in, breathe in that compassion, right into the center of this pain.

Now bring to mind any anxieties you may have about how others perceive or judge you. Making it real, really recalling how you actually experience these things.

Once again, you're not alone with this. It is being seen and witnessed and loved by your benefactors, who are sending radiant, loving energy into your anxieties.

Bring to mind fears of severe illness, injury, or your fear of dying. Let this be felt and known. And let it be loved, just as it is, by your benefactors.

Bring up any fears you have for loved ones or pets, in their vulnerability and mortality. And the anxieties you feel there. And then feel the soft, warm light of compassion coming from your benefactors, falling right into the center of those anxieties.

So receive compassion into your deepest patterns of clinging to yourself. And completely surrender to compassion by letting go of the visualization and merging with the energy of compassion itself. Merge with that luminous wholeness beyond separation between self and others, deeply letting be.

Notice any grasping in the body. Let it go. Surrender to the natural power of the body to embody you. Let the breath come into its natural power, breathing all the way in and all the way out, bathing your body in the natural compassion. And let the mind unfurl and fall completely open. Free. All-pervasive. Sense the boundless openness of awareness, without boundaries. Infinite openness and translucence, pervasive, open like the sky. And let that meditate you.

When you know the suffering in yourself, you can sense it in others. And when you know the place of freedom in yourself, you can uphold that in others.

So if your eyes are closed, in a moment I'm going to ask you to open them. But see if you can form the intention to rest in that

open, spacious awareness, with open eyes, so that all your attention doesn't just flow into the room. See if you can have 60% percent of yourself just in that awareness and then the rest of you in the room.

And then, when you're ready, you can open your eyes and come back into the room.

I would be interested—very interested, actually—in what that was like for people: positive, negative?

RESPONSE: For me, having benefactors, especially those who have known me for awhile, helps take me out of the moment of particular, specific fear, and maybe a sense of limitation, to having people who have seen me as beyond that person that's scared of this particular situation. It's like you're the one who's lived through it all. They've seen me grow. They've seen me happy and celebrate, and it sort of reminds me who the rest of me is.

Yes, that's really good. I think one of the things with anxiety, especially when it becomes chronic, is that it is very easy to start to see yourself as weak and damaged, essentially. And another one of the benefits of something like this is that it begins to incline you toward remembering your strengths, remember the things in you that are loved.

Anxiety tends to both lead to and come from self-denigration. When you're feeling stressed, it's very easy to activate the inner critic, and it starts denigrating you, telling you that you're wrong, especially since people try to deal with anxiety typically through self-control. They try to make it go by using the front brain to turn off the threat system. But you can't do it. So you get flooded with anxiety and you start saying, "There's nothing to be scared of. Stop it." Or something like that. If you say that to yourself, what happens? The anxiety goes up because you have joined the enemy. You know what I mean: you're experiencing the world as hostile. You get hostile toward yourself. So you're not even safe in your own skin. Right?

But this is a typical response: to get angry and frustrated with ourselves because we're suffering. So that's another thing that this helps to do. You can do a practice like this momentarily during the day when you're stressed. Take a deep breath and just remember somebody who loves you. Imagine they're seeing your state right now. And the idea is not that you try to get away from the anxiety. That's where the mindfulness comes in here, because you are paying attention to it and sending love into it. So you're not trying to push it away. You're actually responding openly to it. So it's both a form of mindfulness and compassion meditation at the same time. At least, that's the idea.

RESPONSE: I just want to piggyback on that last comment. As you were leading the meditation, I was picturing my benefactors,

There's a negativity bias built right into the brain. In other words, the brain tends to favor negative experiences. It gives them more attention. It responds to them more quickly than positive experiences.

the people in my life who always talked me through times of stress and anxiety. And I came to realize they're always right. So I'd get through something, and lo and behold, they were right. I didn't need to be that stressed out. You know, they were there. And it helped me quickly move from a present anxiety state to a future state where it's finished and gone, and they're right again.

Very good. So you can accept the reassurance when you remember it coming from other people. It makes it stronger. I find this true. That sometimes when I try to reassure myself, it's not such a potent effect, you know. How do I know I'm right? But this person that I respect says that I don't need to be afraid, so letting that in makes it stronger. Is that the basic idea?

RESPONSE: Just based on past experience, I've always gotten through everything, gotten to the age I am, and I'm still here. And it just kind of put it all in perspective.

Yes. Very good. Thank you.

RESPONSE: So, to follow up, you were talking about the example of the tiger. What it reminded me of—you may be familiar with this—is Type I and Type II errors in statistics. And the problem is that if you reduce one error, it tends to increase the other, to change the boundary. That is, you become more alert and anxious, for example. So it's helpful for avoiding tigers, but it's bad for feeling threatened. The other approach is to have a better way of distinguishing, getting a pair of binoculars, to take your example. And so what Tom was talking about, I think, was one way to do that, which was to have respected people that can check it out. And the other thing that struck me, which tied in with your earlier discussion about mindfulness, is that if I can become more mindful, not in a general, more global sense, but of just being aware of what's around, I can probably do a better job of distinguishing which are the bushes with the tigers and which are the ones without.

Yeah. Sure. I think that that is true. I think it becomes easier to become mindful, too, if there's a base-line of a sense of safety. When you're on alert, it's very difficult to go into some kind of calm abiding, where you see the whole picture. The focus tends to be on the danger that you're facing. Vision becomes very narrow. Thinking becomes very preoccupied, and it goes around in circles. We start to obsess. And the fear response is mediated by the amygdala. There are two of them back in there. It's the alarm system. And once it turns on, it's hard to turn it off. The more it turns on, the more it tends to turn on. They actually get physically bigger. So, there's a tendency for anxiety to build on itself. And that has to do with what's called "neuroplasticity," that the way that you use the brain alters its structure. Everything you do slightly alters the structure of your brain, so that if we practice anxiety, we become more anxious, and our trigger for anxiety gets lower and lower so that just anything will set it off. If you spend some time practicing inclining your mind

in the other direction with practices like these, theoretically, you start to develop other areas of the brain. That's the brain physiology for this.

RESPONSE: Thank you. This is really wonderful. I have a long prayer list, but I never think of people who are praying for me. So this approach is wonderful. I had a friend in journalism school who

was being taught a theory about the reason why, in a room full of people you want to talk to, if there's TV on, you cannot keep from checking out that television. The theory was that, when you're a cave man, if you could see the glint of the fire in the tiger's eye in the dark, that supported your survival, and that our current tech-

RESPONSE: It's like one is forward looking and one backward looking, or anticipatory versus regretful.

Well, that's good. People who are depressed are often focusing on their sins, their character deficiencies, the things they've done wrong, the ways they've failed. Anxiety tends to be focusing on

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nology, in fact, throws our minds into higher vigilance all the time. It's always changing our thoughts. And people who are on computers late at night have such a hard time sleeping. I just wonder if you think that the way we live our lives technologically is increasing the sense of anxiety we have.

Well, thank you for that. That's really an interesting input. It would explain the Midnight Sun. Going into the Midnight Sun to meet people, and you're watching videos instead.

RESPONSE: You know, keeping track of small, changing light dots is a survival process.

Yes. Yes. The brain gets captured and inundated by all this stuff. Television is supposed to be a soothing and relaxing medium, but it actually isn't. The brain goes toward what's problematic or what might be problematic. So you go toward what's moving. Yeah, that makes sense.

RESPONSE: Thanks for a great talk. I'm glad you mentioned pets because that's one experience of unconditional love that I've received. In particular, one of my dogs gets so hyper; she's so happy to see me. No matter what kind of a day I've had, it just happens to occur, this great reassurance. I have not been as conscious of the connection between that and the lowering of the anxiety. I do it kind of on automatic, but I do look forward to her, to interaction with her, on a regular basis.

Well, I think one of the reasons we love dogs and cats so much is that they help us incline the mind toward the affiliative systems. They awaken compassion. They awaken the sense of being loved and loving. And those are all very soothing emotions. It makes a lot of sense.

RESPONSE: Can you help us distinguish between anxiety and depression? I'm not sure I always understand this.

Let's see. Well, the problem is that most depressed people have some anxiety and most anxious people have some depression. If you have a diagnosis of one or the other, it's because you're kind of "majoring" in one, but the other one is in the background. Experimentally, I experience depression as a kind of lowering of energy, as a kind of immobilization, a down feeling. Anxiety is jumpy. You're impelled to act, to do something. With depression, you're not impelled to act. Maybe other people can define it better.

the next awful thing that's going to happen. So I think that probably is true: depression looks more backward. I know what they *feel* like from my own experience, but I haven't really thought of defining them. Does that help at all?

RESPONSE: Yeah. Thank you.

RESPONSE: I wanted to ask you if you will talk a little bit about what's been found to be effective about combining exercise with meditation, seeing that they both help.

Well, they're both important. One of the most important things for both anxiety and depression is aerobic exercise. I personally find that if I'm really anxious, the order of things that works best for me is some aerobic exercise—work up a sweat—some yoga postures to stretch, a hot bath, and then I meditate. The trouble is that self-care takes so much time, and most of us are working so hard that we don't have time for all this. But that's what my ideal is. The thing is that what happens when you get anxious is you're flooded with stress hormones and adrenaline. And the flood waters have to recede. And you have to have patience and compassion for that process of letting things recede. We tend so often to forget that we're embodied beings, that these are brains in action here. People get mad and think, "Stop it!" Or they go to a short cut, like having a drink or drugs or something, instead of working with the anxiety to calm down. I think aerobic exercise is really important for all the stress we have.

I just want to say a couple of things. In terms of resources, this book is really good, *Buddha's Brain*. He has a lot of meditative exercises for actively changing mental states. And he shows they're grounded in the physiology of the brain. It's by Rick Hanson, and he has also come out with CDs. How about this one: *Stress-proof Your Brain*? Actually, I've been giving it to people and it works. There are a number of meditations on this cd that are about activating feelings. Strong, activating feelings. Connected. Feeling compassionate. Taking in the good. Practices for inclining the mind away from stress and anxiety.

The meditation we did today is based on a Tibetan practice. You can get a CD called *Awakening through Love* by John Makransky, who does smaller versions of this meditation, which I have found the most effective with my anxious patients. ■

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GBF Thanksgiving

Come celebrate Thanksgiving Day with the Gay Buddhist Fellowship. This will be a time for GBF members and friends to come together and celebrate sangha over an abundant meal. Kei Matsuda and his partner, Chuck, have once again offered up their home for the festivities. The gathering will start on Thanksgiving Day at 4:00 p.m. GBF members planning to attend should call Kei and Chuck in advance to help coordinate dishes. Their telephone number is [\(510\) 237-5091](tel:5102375091), and their address is 7341 Pebble Beach Drive, El Cerrito, California.

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. Our ID number is 40. Information: (415) 861-4910.

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GBF Yahoo Discussion Group

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

Calendar

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 12 noon. Everyone is then welcome to stay and socialize over refreshments till approximately 12:30, 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.

Sunday Speakers

October 2 Alistair Shanks

Alistair Shanks has studied Tai Chi, Qigong, Taoist meditation, Taoist breathing and Ba Gua with his teacher Lineage Master Bruce Frantzis since 1994. He currently teaches Tai Chi at the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine on Potrero Hill and teaches classes, workshops, and private lessons around the Bay Area. He has been a volunteer with Zen Hospice Project (ZHP) since 2004, and for the last 4 years has assisted in training new volunteers as a facilitator. He also is an adjunct faculty member of the ZHP Education Center, conducting trainings and presentations on the Zen Hospice approach to end of life care. In 2007 he completed a year-long Buddhist chaplaincy training at the Sati Center in Redwood City with Gil Fronsdal and Paul Haller and did his training at San Francisco General Hospital, where he also completed a four month training with Sojourn Chaplaincy. He has been practicing Vipassana meditation since 2003 and has sat long retreats at Spirit Rock, Insight Meditation Society and the Forest Refuge.

October 9 Open Discussion

October 16 Dave Richo

Dave Richo, Ph.D, M.F.T., is a psychotherapist, 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 his website at davericho.com.

October 23 Pam Weiss

Pamela Weiss has practiced Buddhism for 20 years, including several years of Zen monastic training. She is a meditation teacher, professional coach, and leader of coach training programs. She is currently in teacher training with Jack Kornfield at Spirit Rock.

October 30 Dharma Duo: Tage Lilja and Jay Davidson

November 6 Daigan Gaither

Daigan Gaither began Buddhist practice in 1995 as an Vipassana practitioner and began to study Zen in 2003 with Paul Haller. He received Lay Ordination in 2006 and became a resident of San Francisco Zen Center in 2008, where he currently lives and is in training to be a Priest. His work and practice include many hours devoted to community service as one of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (since 1995) and a volunteer caregiver with Zen Hospice Project (since 2003). Daigan is a full-time student working towards a graduate degree in Buddhist Studies to become board certified as a chaplain. He is also the co-facilitator of San Francisco Zen Center's Queer Dharma, which meets once a month on Saturday afternoons.

November 13 John Mifsud

John Mifsud has studied insight meditation for over nine years and recently completed the East Bay Meditation Center's Commit to Dharma Program led by Larry Yang. He is currently in the Community Dharma Leaders Training Program at Spirit Rock. He is a lead facilitator of the EBMC Deep Refuge Affinity Group for Men of Color and their Euro-descent allies. He also studied with Rodney Smith at Seattle Insight Meditation for eight years. John was also the coordinator of the Seattle Multicultural Sangha and spent ten years on the leadership team of Seattle Dharma Buddies, a meditation group for GBT men.

November 20 Tovah Green

Tova Green began sitting at The San Francisco Zen Center in 1990 after many years of Vipassana practice. She became a San Francisco Zen Center resident in 1999 and was ordained as a priest in 2003. She currently serves as volunteer coordinator at the SFZC's Zen Hospice Project in San Francisco.

November 27 Open Discussion

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By the power and truth of this practice, may all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness, may all be free from sorrow and the causes of sorrow, may all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is without sorrow, and may all live in equanimity, without too much attachment or too much aversion, and live believing in the equality of all that lives.

—GBF dedication of merit