
Annual Report:

Our Sangha in 2022

Plans for 2023

“The times are urgent; let us slow down. [...] Slowing down is losing our way—not a human capacity or human capability. It is the invitations that are now in the world-at-large, inviting us to listen deeply, to be keen, to be fresh, to be quick with our heels, to follow the sights and sounds and smells of the world.”

—Bayo Akomolafe



open heart project

Dear Sangha



I am so happy to be in a sangha with you. Together, we are building a community of free-thinking spiritual practitioners who want a *genuine* path but are not interested in hierarchical systems, dogma, or cultural appropriation. We sense the difference between spirituality and self-help. We know that meditation is not a “life-hack”. We want real teachers and teachings but don’t want to join another organized religion. We want our whole lives to be our practice.

Our sangha does not provide pre-packaged answers but offers a way to explore these wishes together, as friends. This may sound dramatic, but it is true: we are creating together a new model for spiritual study, practice, and community.

This is not a simple journey. We live in a world of unprecedented access to spiritual teachings, whether from the West or the East, theistic, pantheistic, or non-theistic, familiar to us or completely foreign. At the same time, there is decreasing regard for traditions and organizations. What happens when teachings and the beliefs that gave rise to them go their separate ways?

For example, I grew up Jewish. We did not celebrate Christmas. On December 25, my people went to the movies and ate Chinese food.

My husband grew up Episcopalian and for 25 years I've celebrated Christmas with him. I love having a tree in our apartment. He has boxes of ornaments from his parents: little snowmen, skiers carved from wood, tiny angels. Over the years, we've added to the stockpile: a Christmas Elvis, a Stevie Ray Vaughan ornament (inscribed: "Don't Mess with Texmas"), Day of the Dead skulls, Buddhas. Our tree is a reflection of our lives, but there is no connection (as far as I can tell) to any world beyond our world.

We also light a menorah during Hanukkah to commemorate a miracle (probably in the 2nd century BCE) that allowed eight days of light from a single jar of oil which, absent the miracle, would have lasted for only a single day. This allowed Jews to reclaim their Temple. The miracle of Hanukkah is but one of countless miracles experienced by the Jewish people over the last 5000 years. Still, when I light the menorah and recite the bracha (blessing), I don't think of our treacherous history. I think of my parents. Dreidels. Chocolates.

Added to all this, for the last 30 years, I've been a Buddhist. Where does that fit? Where is the feeling of home and belonging to be found in this mix? Where is the wisdom that can guide me? It doesn't seem appropriate to simply choose what feels "right" to me from Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism because what do I know?

Buddhism is my path, no question. I have never had a moment of doubt on this. However, I will never not be Jewish. (When a DNA test

came back saying I was 100% Ashkenazi Jewish, I couldn't believe it. No one had ever, ever departed from the tribe? Apparently not. I repeated the test with a different service. Same result. Yeah, these genes aren't going anywhere.) Still, on this morning, January 1, 2023, I went to my shrine, lit candles, made a tea offering, and invoked the blessings of Gampopa, Padmasambhava, Buddha, Avolokiteshvara, and Kurukulla. What would my Bubbes and Zaides from Ukraine and Poland have made of this?

In 2016, I visited the Auschwitz concentration camp and saw (and will never unsee) what would have become of them if they had not found a way to escape. I saw rooms filled with the hair of my ancestors. Ash and bone. During the visit, I chanted the Padmasambhava mantra over and over and cried, sobbed, wailed. How can I honor my ancestors? And in the vast brilliance of the Buddhadharma, where is my blood, where are my bones?

What can guide me, you, *us* that includes all of who we are? And is not BS?

Here are two bad choices. The first is to join an organization that discourages independent thinking and then try really, really hard to adhere to whatever the rules are, ascend through various levels, make a relationship with the teacher or teachers, prove that you are loyal, committed, and supportive. Whoever is in charge, you try to do what they say. Okay, not that, please.

Or, upon seeing the horrors (and worse) perpetrated by such organizations we may think, fuck that. No one is going to tell me what to do. Gurus are a scam. The [teacher-student](#) relationship is outmoded, not right for our times. Okay. Although this second option in some ways has more intelligence, I suggest the same as with the first option: Not that. Please.

As far as I can tell, the majority of spiritual organizations end up becoming quite problematic. 99% of people who present themselves as gurus are full of shit. That's the bad news. The good news: there is that 1%. Great teachers are actually out there. They really, really are. There are various ways to meet them. In Vajrayana Buddhism, these ways are called outer, inner, and secret.

Outer You may actually meet a true teacher in person. That would be great. They do exist, no doubt. I've had the extraordinary good fortune to meet some, primarily [Tulku Thondup Rinpoche](#) and my own brilliant meditation teacher, Sam. I've received teachings from Kyabgon Traleg Rinpoche. Khandro Rinpoche. Mingyur Rinpoche. Khenpo Tsutrim Gyamtso. Pema Chodron. These are serious individuals who have each transmitted something beyond words to me and many others. The main thing they have in common is they are not trying to bullshit you into believing...anything. Rather, they emanate love that is both sweet and merciless. They make a huge impression and then disappear. Any attempt to hang on to them fails. But at least you could have a conversation with them.

Inner. Through these teachers, you encounter their teachers.

Though I never met Dodrupchen Rinpoche (well, actually, I did, but only for a moment), Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, or Thinley Norbu Rinpoche, I meet them quite distinctly in their written works, as well as in the hearts and minds of my own teachers. When you and I practice together, you meet my teachers and they become part of your wisdom stream. It all happens on the inside.

You know the inner teacher extremely well. When you meditate, you let attention rest on the breath...until you start thinking about lunch, dying, what you're going to wear tomorrow, an email you need to answer, whatever. Then, at some point, you become aware that you're not meditating, you're thinking. Something cuts through this discursiveness and you check yourself.

Wherever that "something" comes from is, perhaps, the domain of the inner teacher.

Secret. ...which means something like "reality." The truth is hidden in plain sight and all phenomena are trying to teach it to you: duality is an illusion. Everything is your teacher. I really don't know what more to say about this teacher because I don't understand it myself.

The great Khandro Rinpoche once said that the job of the outer teacher is to introduce you to the inner teacher. The job of the inner teacher is to introduce you to the secret teacher. If the hand-offs are not made, something has gone wrong. In other words, at first, you hear your teachers speak in their own voices. Then you hear their voices in your own mind. Then your voices became indistinguishable. I know this is happening for you; I see it.

Now you know why I always say *don't take my word for anything*. I really, really mean it. I'm not trying to be humble. I'm suggesting you protect your own mind and its innate wisdom from me, from others, even from yourself.

Okay, that was a long-winded way of reminding us what we are doing here in the Open Heart Project sangha. We are deeply rooted in lineage and also going our own way. We are working to meet all three teachers.



About 2022



Each time I write one of these end-of-year letters, I am amazed at what we have accomplished together and extremely proud to be in a community with you. THANK YOU.

This year, we found more and deeper ways to practice together, support each other through loss, change, breakups, even war. We have also celebrated true love, recovery from illness, new babies, creative projects completed...and pets, pets, pets. (Y'all are some cat and dog lovers and it is endlessly wonderful when they sit with you in our Zoom sessions.) Most important, we've deepened our understanding of wisdom, compassion, and bravery.

Here is a recap of what we did together in 2022. An overview of what is planned for 2023 follows.

- *The Path*: 12 in-depth newsletters (explore a different theme related to spiritual practice)
- 53 Friday sangha gatherings (with me)
- 12 Creative Rave retreat days on the 3rd Saturday of each month (a ½ day retreat to support creative pursuits)

- 12 Meditation Immersions w Maho Kawachi (two-hour sits to offer the experience of a longer practice) on 2nd Sunday of each month
- 260 Daily Live meditation practice sessions, M-F at 9a ET with a variety of wonderful teachers
- 365 Daily Audio Meditations (delivered via email)
- 12 Circle Groups: Weekly Peer-led Gatherings (that meet each week to practice and discuss the journey together]

Special Programs, Webinars, and Workshops

- 21 Day Meditation Challenge
- Five Buddha Families webinars with Kevin Townley
- Two “Introduction to the Enneagram” webinars
- Refuge Vow Ceremony (for those who want to make a formal commitment to the Buddhist Path)
- Transcendent Wisdom: A webinar about the Heart Sutra
- Build a Mindful New Year: 6 Days, 6 Teachings, 6 Paramitas

In-Person Meditation Retreats

In 2021, I began to teach small (limited to 12 participants) 4-day retreats out of our home in Austin, TX. Covid put the kibosh on some but in 2022, we managed to pull a few off:

March 23-27 *Heart Sutra Retreat* A chance for deep practice and study of this central text, the Prajnaparamita Sutra

August 10-14 *Fearless Creativity: A Writing and Meditation Retreat* Creative work in a practice environment

Nov 2-6 *Heart Sutra Retreat* Another chance for deep practice and study of this central text, the Prajnaparamita Sutra

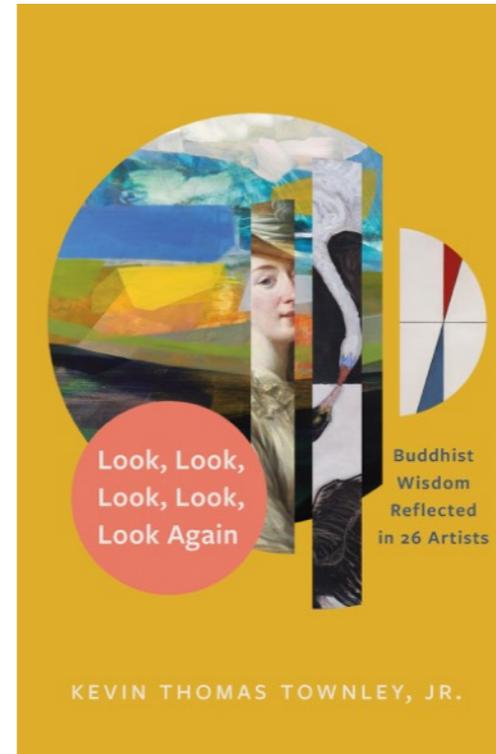
These retreats are a chance to actually be together in human form, to withdraw from the demands of everyday life and spend time on what may otherwise go neglected: attention to our inner world, remembering our true priorities, and commitment to the spiritual journey. Not to mention laughter, sangha-friends, and putting away our to-do lists. And swimming. And tacos. And Austin.

We Published Books



Under the guidance of Crystal Gandrud, the Open Heart Project began publishing books in 2018. While there are lots and lots of books out there about meditation, spirituality, and Buddhism, we want to offer you books that are personal, pragmatic, gentle, demanding, and REAL. After all, our practice is about meeting our lives as they are, in the moment, and exploring relationships, parenting, creativity, and health as part of the practice. Lionheart publishes works that are exceptionally deep (if I do say so myself) yet fully relevant to everyday life.

We published two books in 2022.

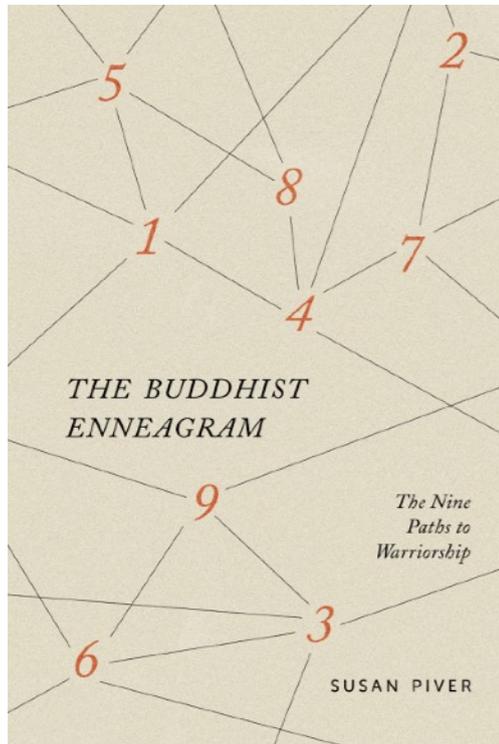


[Look, Look, Look, Look, Look Again](#)

by Kevin Townley

“Beautifully written and hilariously disarming, Look, Look, Look, Look, Look Again vibrates with lucid insight into society, history, and establishment, while teaching you a lot about meditation and Buddhism along the way. In exploring the practice, life, and work of these 26 artists (all of whom are women) through the lens of the five wisdom energies, you come away with a deeper understanding of yourself, the world, and the true dharma that transcends culture and religion—and a profound gratitude for anyone really willing to look.”

Omg, y’all. If we never publish another book, we will have completed our mission of bringing Buddhist wisdom to light in a fresh context.



The Buddhist Enneagram

By Me

As far as I know, this is the first book ever written that views the enneagram through the lens of Buddhist teachings. It was the most difficult thing I've ever written. I'm so happy it's done...so happy it's living its life...so happy with the way it's being received...so happy I don't have to write it again!

"With wisdom, creativity, and artistry, Susan Piver brings a Buddhist lens to the spiritual map of the enneagram. The results are vibrant and nourishing; a banquet of insights that help

us transmute our difficult emotions into pure expressions of our basic goodness." Tara Brach, Best-Selling Author Of *Radical Acceptance And Trusting The Gold*

Thanks, Tara!

Coming up in February 2023

An audio-only revised and updated version of **The Wisdom of a Broken Heart**. I have owned the rights to the audiobook for many years but wanted to update the manuscript with the things I've learned since it was published in 2010. I've completed the recording. The accompanying PDF is being edited. In it are newer writings on the topic and transcripts of talks and interviews about heartbreak. Stay tuned for all the details.

2023



As in previous years, each month we will explore a new theme. (You can find all the 2022 themes, essays, and Guru Guides [here](#).) In 2023, we will focus on female teachers. There will also be webinars, programs, and retreats offered throughout the year. We will continue to offer two-hour meditation immersions with Maho Kawachi on the second Sunday of each month and Creative Congregation gatherings (to do creative work alone, together) on the third Saturday of each month.

Here are the details (though some may be subject to change).

January

Creating a Sacred Environment

Guru: White Tara

January 8 Meditation Immersion with Maho January 8

January 24 Webinar: The Four Dharmas of Gampopa

January 21 Creative Congregation

February

Creating a Sacred Practice

Guru: Yeshe Tsogyal

February 12 Meditation Immersion with Maho

February 18 Creative Congregation

March

Creating a Sacred Life: Generosity

Guru: Prajnaparamita

March 12 Meditation Immersion with Maho

March 14 Webinar: The Heart Sutra: Emptiness

March 18 Creative Congregation

March 21 Meditation Instructor Training Program begins

April

Creating a Sacred Life: Discipline

Guru: Green Tara

April 9 Meditation Immersion with Maho

April 15 Creative Congregation

April 18 Webinar: The Heart Sutra: Luminosity

May

Creating a Sacred Life: Patience

Guru: Khandro Rinpoche

May 2 Webinar: About the Refuge Vow

May 14 Meditation Immersion with Maho

May 20 Creative Congregation

May 24-28 Meditation and Writing retreat, Austin

June

Creating a Sacred Life: Exertion

Guru: Vajratopa

June 11 Meditation Immersion with Maho

June 18 Refuge Vow and online weekend retreat

June 24 Creative Congregation

July

Creating a Sacred Life: Samadhi

Guru: Vajrayogini

July 9 Meditation Immersion with Maho

June 15 Creative Congregation

August

Creating a Sacred Life: Prajna

Guru: Saraswati

Aug 13 Meditation Immersion with Maho

Aug 19 Creative Congregation

September

Creating Sanity: Pacify

Guru: Machig Labdron

Sep 10 Meditation Immersion with Maho

Sep 16 Creative Congregation

October

Creating Sanity: Enrich

Guru Guide: TBD

Oct 8 Meditation Immersion with Maho

Oct 14 Creative Congregation

November

Creating Sanity: Magnetize

Guru: Kurukulla

Nov 12 Meditation Immersion with Maho

Nov 18 Creative Congregation

December

Creating Sanity: Destroy

Guru: Ekajati

Dec 10 Meditation Immersion with Maho

Dec 16 Creative Congregation

Email notices will go out about each gathering so don't worry about remembering it all.

In-Person Retreats

I'm delighted continue to offer small, in-person gatherings at my home in Austin, TX. Here are the retreats planned for 2023:

February 22-26

Open Heart Project Meditation Retreat

A straight-up meditation retreat to sit together for extended periods, study some chants, discuss the journey, and deepen our practice.

May 24-28

Fearless Creativity: A Meditation and Writing Retreat

Alternating periods of meditation and time to do creative work.

September

Dates and theme TBD

Teachers, Heroes, Friends

As you know, I'm not the only teacher around these parts. We are lucky to be able to learn from the following practitioners.



Crystal Gandrud

Crystal co-creates the OHP curriculum with me and oversees Lionheart Press. She writes monthly essays for The Path. She teaches various workshops. She is my editor. But that doesn't quite cover how much her influence matters here in the OHP. Whether you know it or not, her presence and wisdom are found at every turn.



Kevin Townley

KEVIN! We love Kevin! He is a teacher of astonishing depth, insight, and humor. Also: **READ HIS BOOK**. He teaches most weeks during our Monday-Friday live meditations. Kevin is a writer/performer, and has been studying Buddhism since 2010. He currently practices with the Sokuko-Ji Zen community under the guidance of Kyoun Sokuzan. Kevin completed the Interdependence Project's teacher training program in 2012. He is passionate about exploring the interplay of meditation and art-making while encouraging others to bring their own innate humor and insight to their meditation practice.



Bridget Bailey

Bridget’s training is rooted in 15-years of Buddhist meditation practice and study. Integral to her work is her years studying and practicing in the lineage of Machig Labdrön (Chöd, Prajnaparamita), working with the dakini mandala and the five buddha families, practicing somatic healing modalities, and more...all of which she deepened in a recent one-year solitary meditation retreat in the mountains of Colorado.

A practitioner of Dharma and meditation as a spiritual path since 2002, Lilyán is a certified instructor by Dr. Alan Wallace of the Cultivating Emotional Balance program, endorsed by the Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies, and has completed the Open Heart Project Meditation Instructor Training Program.



Lilyán de la Vega



Maho Kawachi

Born and raised in Tokyo, Japan, Maho Kawachi never had an experience of meditation. When she came to NYC in the early 90s, she finally realized she needed something to remind her to be sane, and after some trial and error, she encountered her first official meditation class in 2000. She now teaches meditation at the Open Heart Project, Rikers Island Correction Facility, and other places.

Kristy has been practicing meditation and studying Tibetan Buddhism since 2011. In 2017, she completed Shambhala Teacher Training and David Nichtern’s 100 Hour Mindfulness Meditation Teacher Training, a program for which she now serves as an Assistant Director. Kristy’s background is in art and design and she currently works with architects and designers to create custom, hand-knotted rugs.



Kristy Krivitsky



Marisa Viola

Marisa has been studying Buddhism since 2008, and teaching since 2013. She has taken refuge and Bodhisattva vows with Venerable Robina Courtin, and studied with Ven. Thich Nhat Hahn and other great teachers from various lineages. She teaches regularly at the Open Heart Project, MNDFL, Shantigar Foundation, and in the MNDFL Teacher Training Program, where she also mentors aspiring teachers. She has taught inmates at Rikers Island, in hospitals, and in countless business settings ranging from corporations to universities to non-profits.

It would be 110% impossible for one person to run the OHP. Here are the wonderful human beings who make it work for all

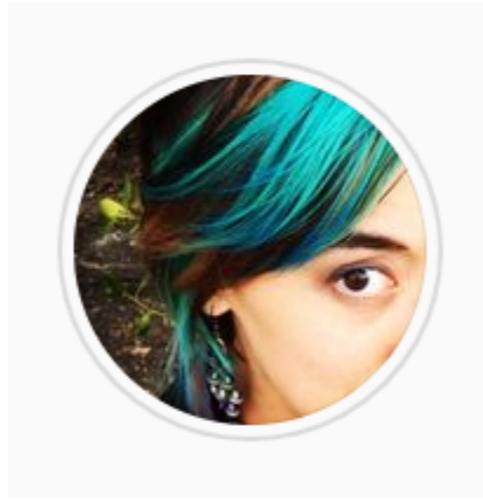


Leanna Kristine

Leanna works super closely with me to help me stay on track with all our projects. She also handles every aspect of support for members of the OHP. If you have trouble with your membership, want to know where to find something, or just need an extremely kind, wise, and caring person to talk to, she will help.

The Open Heart Project keeps expanding, as do all the responsibilities involved in making it work. Each of you is extremely important to us and, with Leanna's help, we want to make sure your sangha experience is a happy one.

Geneviève Okuma joined us recently as Communications Coordinator. She sets up all our programs, cues up the emails, posts everything to instagram, and makes sure our monthly newsletter, *The Path*, is created and posted accurately. There are a million moving pieces for each of these communications and I'm so grateful she's here to oversee it all. Every link, landing page, payment channel, and website plug-in has to work for you. Geneviève helps make sure they do.



Geneviève Okuma



Carra Simpson

You may not know Carra Simpson, but she is fully instrumental in bringing our publishing projects to life. She creates timelines (and gracefully holds us to them), makes sure that our books have ISBN codes and are designed and uploaded correctly, that all the formats are available on publication date, and so much more. She oversees the countless details of publishing a book. We could not do this without her.



In closing

Written by Shantideva, from Bodhicaryavatara,
The Way of the Bodhisattva

May all beings everywhere
Plagued by sufferings of body and mind
Obtain an ocean of happiness and joy
By virtue of my merits

May no living creatures suffer,
Commit evil or ever fall ill
May no one be afraid or belittled
With a mind weighed down by depression

May the blind see forms
And the deaf hear sounds
May those whose bodies are worn with toil
Be restored in finding repose

May the naked find clothing
The hungry find food
May the thirsty find water
And delicious drinks

May the poor find wealth
Those weak with sorrow find joy
May the forlorn find hope
Constant happiness and prosperity

May there be timely rains
And bountiful harvests
May all medicines be effective
And wholesome prayers bear fruit

May all who are sick or ill
Quickly be freed from their ailments
Whatever diseases there are in the world
May they never occur again

May the frightened cease to be afraid
And those bound be freed
May the powerless find power
And may people think of benefitting each other.

For as long as space remains,
For as long as sentient beings remain,
Until then may I too remain