



# Gay Guru

Men and the art of satsung in the Castro

March 1, 1999 By Paul Festa

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It was 1970, and Adrian Brooks was lying naked on a sofa in a New York art gallery. Not passed out or posing, either -- he was portraying a corpse in Andy Warhol's *The Adventures of Brigid Polk*. Yet the young actor was disobeying Warhol's orders. "I didn't want to be a dead body, so I started moving," Brooks recalls. "Not really moving -- just *sloooooowly* slipping off the couch. It was more interesting than doing nothing."

Flash forward 29 years, and guess what? Brooks is still refusing to play dead. HIV positive he reckons for some 20 years, the 51-year-old attacks his newest role with all the enthusiasm of an ingenue: Brooks is a guru.

Born into Philadelphia high society, he long ago bucked his family's expectations by embarking on a career in the arts and activism. Now, taking a page from the great Hindu texts, Brooks instructs his San Francisco disciples in the painstaking practice of detachment from the body.

On this rainy Sunday afternoon in the Castro, Brooks is teaching half a dozen students who sit cross-legged in a circle in his living room *satsung*, Sanskrit for "being with truth." The hour is equal parts meditation, philosophy and group therapy. "It's wonderful to have *satsung* here," he tells us. "Not just in this house, but in this neighborhood -- the heart of the gay capital of the world."

But the gay guru goes on to voice mixed feelings about his ghetto. "Gay men are seriously off track with this crazy cult of the body," he says. "It's a no-win situation. How can you possibly age, come to awareness or greet death if you're supposed to devote your days to looking like a 23-year-old with washboard abs?" Brooks smiles. We all smile back, secretly sucking in our stomachs.

So does enlightenment equal life? "I don't know how my virus responds to my mentality, but I'm still here," a post-*satsung* Brooks tells me. "And whether my life goes on for another two weeks or 35 years, I'm fulfilled. The opportunity to recognize the truth and share it with people -- that's what I wanted in this life."