Gay Buddhist Fellowship
Newsletter

FEBURARY 1998

GBF Calendar

Call 415/974-9878 for news about GBF events. To skip the recording and leave a message, press 5.

San Francisco Events

2 Feb., Steering Committee Meeting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Larry White,

5 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Bill Kirkpatrick,

8 Feb., Sunday Sitting, 9:30/10:30 am, SFBC, 37 Bartlett St.

12 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Lee Robbins,

21 Feb., GBF's Feed The Homeless Project at the Hamilton Family Center. To participate, contact Clint Seiter,

22 Feb., Sunday Sitting, 9:30/10:30 am, SFBC, 37 Bartlett St.

27 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Mark Marion,

1 Mar., Sunday Sitting, 9:30/10:30 am, SFBC, 37 Bartlett St.

East Bay Events

Sunday Sitting (East Bay), 1st & 3rd Sundays 10:30 am, at the home of Geoff McEnany,

Sonoma Events

Monday Sittings (Sonoma) 7:30 pm, contact Avery for location,

MT. TAM HIKE

CELEBRATE ST. VALENTINE'S DAY with a hike on Mt. Tam; enjoy spectacular views of the Pacific, and walk through redwood groves. The hike will be about 6 miles with modest changes in elevation. Meet in front of 37 Bartlett St. at 9:00 AM Sat. Feb. 14 for car-pooling. Bring a lunch, water, sun block, sturdy shoes. Rain cancels.

Director of Hamilton House

Our speaker for Feb. 15 will be Elba Montez, the Director of Hamilton House. GBF makes dinner for the residents of Hamilton House every third Saturday under the stewardship of Clint Seiter. More volunteers are always welcome and this is an especially good opportunity to practice service. ♦

Support for Ram Dass

Although Ram Dass is recovering from his stroke, he still nees support for medical expenses. Please send donations to: The Hanuman Foundation c/o Jai Lakshman, P.O. Box 478, Santa Fe, NM 87504 ♦

Book Review

Who We Are

by Larry White

"Gay Buddhists are caught, in a way, between the loving kindness of a religion that rejects divisiveness, and a vilified sexuality that calls for response and resistance," writes Michael Hyman in his essay "Practicing Together as a Gay Couple", one of the many treasures found in a new anthology, QUEER DHARMA, Voices of Gay Buddhists (Gay Sunshine Press, San Francisco, 416pp.) There is no neat solution to this dilemma, but

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GBF Mission Statement

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 Bay Area, the United States, and around the world. GBF's mission includes cultivating a social environment that is inclusive and caring.

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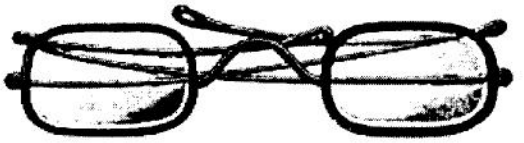

Who We Are

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Hyman shows how the subtle and profound wisdom of Buddhist psychology can be brought into the context of gay relationships. The result is a uniquely helpful essay.

QUEER DHARMA is a truly gay book—our favorite themes of sex and love are at center stage. And it's also a truly Buddhist book, suffering and the release from suffering are recurrent themes. And it's got some wonderful writing. San Francisco poet and short story writer Trebor contributed a story entitled "A Window in the Wall", the account of a short relationship between two damaged young men. Trebor writes, "When I was horny I felt like a blank sheet of paper in need of a story. I felt that way now and his black eyes were dark and deep as ink wells , and his body, pregnant with motion and muscle, had all the potential of a calligraphy brush. I wanted him all over, deep in my fibers that were blasted clean with light; with mania minus lithium my psychiatrist would have said; sick with transcendence."

There are many essays by Gay Buddhist Fellowship members. San Francisco therapist and writer Tom Moon contributed a moving account of the break up of a fantasy relationship, as well as his essay entitled "Obstacles to Intimacy in Gay Male Relationships: A Buddhist Perspective",and there are two wonderful essays by Mark Marion, both of which are sure to help gay men suffering from the loss of loved ones. Lee Robbins' journey to Buddhism makes fascinating reading.

It's not surprising, really, that gay men are more and more being drawn to Buddhism. Much of our experience as gay men requires us to try to understand "who we are". Buddhism can help us–not by giving a definition, but by teaching us a new way of being aware of ourselves and the world.

"Coming Out into Dharma Bliss", by Maitreybandhu, an English member of the Western Buddhist Order explains how the coming out process itself opened him to Buddhism. When he recognized that he was gay, he realized that he could not conform to the accepted social order. He concluded, "Coming out is a special feat of self–awareness and as such can be the beginning of a truly spiritual life..."

Since gay men face rejection from some forms of Christianity and from orthodox Judaism, it's not surprising that many of us anticipate rejection from Buddhism as well. Coming out to a Buddhist teacher can be a little nerve wracking and the result mind–blowing—in a Buddhist way.

Zen practitioner James Soshin Thornton, whose teacher was Taizan Maezumi Roshi, the Zen master who ran the Los Angeles Zen Center, writes that in coming out, he was testing the teacher, "I would tell Maezumi I was gay. If he was compassionate, I would become his student. If not, I would spit in his face and walk away..."

Maezumi's first reaction to Thornton's revelation was a warning to be very careful about AIDS. As Thornton pondered about whether the master was being compassionate or homophobic, Maezumi continued, "Why don't you go back to L.A. and check out our city center? There is a man there that I think might enjoy meeting you very much. He is about your own age. May I ask how old you are?" Thornton laughed and rejoiced and concluded "Compassion had been demonstrated unfailingly. And in the only way that I could then perceive it."

Thornton was either lucky or had chosen very wisely. Buddhism, like all religions, reflects the social values of the societies in which it flourishes, and homophobia is not absent from mainstream Buddhism. John Giorno, long time practioner of a Tibetan variety of Buddhism, states flatly in an interview, "Buddhism is homophobic, as all religions are homophobic." But he then goes on in some detail talking about very frequent and tolerated sexual relations between men in Buddhist monasteries.

QUEER DHARMA includes an account of the meeting between the Dalai Lama and some representatives of the San Francisco gay community. The Dalai Lama had made some contradictory statements, appearing at one time to say that homosexual acts are "sexual misconduct", a violation of Buddhist precepts, and at another time saying that they are "ok." Bitter words were written and said by gay folks who reacted as if the Dalai Lama were a Buddhist pope who had consigned homosexuals to a kind of Buddhist hell. The notes from the meeting with the Dalai Lama show a religious leader who feels obligated to follow obscure teachings peculiar to his sect, but who is clearly open–hearted and non–judgmental.

QUEER DHARMA covers a lot of territory. There are essays, short stories, and poems about the abundance of choice and suffering and joy of being gay and about the beauty and usefulness of the Dharma. The book is a rich resource for gay men who are searching for ways to integrate their spiritual and emotional/sexual lives.

"Queer Dharma" is available at the discounted price of $17.00 plus 8.5% sales tax for CA residents from:

Gay Sunshine Press
Box 410690
San Francisco, CA 94141 ♦