



Newsletter July 1998

Gay Buddhist Fellowship

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

This being, that arises. This not being, that does not arise.

Excerpts from GBF's Foundations of Buddhism class on Saturday, May 2, 1998, facilitated by David Sunseri, David Holmes, and Alan Oliver.

Sunseri: Buddhism is not an absolute religion. Buddhism is completely relativistic. Nothing is higher or more profound than anything else. There's no guiding principal. And, there is no Atman, God, etc.

Our biggest problem is that we think we're separate. That's the biggest cause of suffering. Also, Buddhism has minimal rituals. You don't find your way to the teachings through magic. Unlike Hinduism, there is no caste system. You don't have to work your way up in the caste via reincarnations.

Oliver: When the Buddha was asked: "What's your interpretation of the meaning of life?", the Buddha would say, "I'm not here to talk about that." When asked what miracles the Buddha could do, he said, "When I'm thirsty I drink, and when I'm hungry I eat." He presented a simple, grounded message. This was revolutionary. He was a reformer, going against the grain. In that sense, he runs parallel to Jesus. Over time, however, Buddhism picked up the accoutrements that he was fighting against in his life. It became institutionalized. He said, don't make images. It became more elaborate; more ritualized. The important thing, however, is to get back to the person. To directly experience Buddhism for yourself.

Sunseri: The Buddha said that anyone can obtain enlightenment. Buddhism has a particular quality and if you get it, if you intuit it, if you get a feeling for it, and it feels comfortable to you, then it's yours, right? You make it yours. The Buddha doesn't make it yours.

Holmes: The story of the Buddha's life is the story of every person's journey. That you start off as a child and you are in paradise, and protected. You come into a world where you are king. Then, you encounter some limitation on that right away. As you're growing up, you're confronted with these irreducible causes of suffering. And you have to find an answer. And you have to leave home, find an answer, and search it out.

The Buddha is tempted by Mara. At every juncture in your life you are presented with temptation and a possible fall. The fall from this grace that's arising in you. The awakening that's happening has the possibility of falling asleep at every moment. And, Mara keeps presenting more and more of these things and, what do you do? You go back to your practice;

Practice

By Rob DelRe

Ruminating on a Sogyal Rinpoche retreat in San Francisco.

The message today is that I am very glad that it is all over. It was kind of like a spiritual bootcamp, especially for my ego. Boy, did 'it' ever get so bruised and nicked. You would think that there would be less 'ego involvement' by everyone. But, no! Ego is even more determined to hold its sway even in these so called spiritual gatherings.

I had first-hand knowledge, and was so overwhelmed by this onslaught (I don't function well in crowds). And this whole business of the 'squeeze and wait' cycle for Rinpoche to finally show up. (Talk about a samsaric situation!) At times, I really wanted to just sneak away and slither home, but I stayed for all the major teachings, and have to say that it was well done!!!

When he finally did show up it was always well worth it! For his delivery was always different, and his understanding of the Dharma so original and profound that I couldn't leave. And there were times when he led everyone into meditation practice (a taste of it, anyway).

you touch the earth and you say, "I'm here." 'The earth bears me witness' means that I am taking refuge in the whole setup, and not going along with my mind's fabrications.

Sunseri: The Buddha traveled a lot. That's all he did most of the time, except during the monsoon season. After he was enlightened, he did most of his teachings (45 years worth) while traveling about.

Holmes: The dharma is rare. It's saying this is a rare opportunity to see through what normally, in the course of all animal life, plant life, biology on this planet, is just mechanically going through the motions of reincarnation and rebirth, and that this is a moment to make some kind of change. Everything is an opportunity rather than a stumbling block.

Sunseri: If you pay attention to what the Buddha taught in the 45 years, he made up things as he went along. He taught like a doctor. He might deal with somebody very differently from another. For the same problem, he might deal with you differently depending on your background. So, they saved everything that the Buddha ever said. You have probably one of the largest canons going in the world. Everything was written down, and divided up. It ended up being rules; the Tripitika, for example.

I'm interested in giving people a feel for these teachings, rather than just the ideas which you can read about. The Buddha had the same experiences as the rest of us have. He taught from our experiences. He did not teach from a transcendent philosophy, or transcendent view. When the Buddha sat there under the tree and woke up, everybody said, "What did he wake up to?" He became enlightened, and what does this enlightened state mean? I don't pretend to know exactly what he experienced. But, the teachers I had were able to make the teachings a part of their lives. By their lives, they showed the teaching. What I think is the most important thing about the Buddha is that he was the Teacher. His life exemplified the teaching. That's paramount to the information. How we live our lives, how we live out this thing called Dukkha, or how we live out non-duality in our lives, or how the Buddha lived out impermanence.

When he woke up, people said, "What happened to you?" And he said, "I can't tell you." He didn't say anything for a whole week or so. He just sat there. He couldn't use words to describe this experience. So, he wouldn't teach in the beginning, because he couldn't put it into words. Then, he finally relented.

The first thing that he discovered (the first of the Four Noble Truths), is Dukkha. It means things are kind of off; they don't quite feel okay. Life doesn't feel quite satisfactory. You need something else. Dukkha means out of balance or, off center. A quote from the Buddha is: "Whatever is impermanent is Dukkha." Anything that is impermanent is not going to make us very happy. The other translation is sour. Things are sour.

