



Newsletter September 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.**

## **The Four Immeasurable Minds**

*By Thich Nhat Hanh*

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During the lifetime of the Buddha, those of the Brahmanic faith prayed that after death they would go to Heaven to dwell eternally with Brahma, the universal God. One day a Brahmin man asked the Buddha, "What can I do to be sure that I will be with Brahma after I die?" and the Buddha replied, "As Brahma is the source of Love, to dwell with him you must practice the *Brahmaviharas*—love, compassion, joy, and equanimity." A *vihara* is an abode or a dwelling place. Love in Sanskrit is *maitri*; in Pali it is *metta*. Compassion is *karuna* in both languages. Joy is *mudita*. Equanimity is *upeksha* in Sanskrit and *upekkha* in Pali. The *Brahmaviharas* are four elements of true love. They are called Immeasurable, because if you practice them, they will grow every day until they embrace the whole world. You will become happier, and those around you will become happier, also.

The Buddha respected people's desire to practice their own faith, so he answered the Brahmin's question in a way that encouraged him to do so. If you enjoy sitting meditation, practice sitting meditation. If you enjoy walking meditation, practice walking meditation. But preserve your Jewish, Christian, or Muslim roots. That is the way to continue the Buddha's spirit. If you are cut off from your roots, you cannot be happy.

According to Nagarjuna, the second-century Buddhist philosopher, practicing the Immeasurable Mind of Love extinguishes anger in the hearts of living beings. Practicing the Immeasurable Mind of Compassion extinguishes all sorrows and anxieties in the hearts of living beings. Practicing the Immeasurable Mind of Joy extinguishes sadness and joylessness in the hearts of living beings. Practicing the Immeasurable Mind of Equanimity extinguishes hatred, aversion, and attachment in the hearts of living beings.

## GBF Committees

We always want and need interested participants, so please, JOIN IN! Call the contact person on the committee, or talk to him (or anyone on that committee) at a GBF sitting or event. This is a great practice opportunity!

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If we learn ways to practice love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, we will know how to heal the illnesses of anger, sorrow, insecurity, sadness, hatred, loneliness, and unhealthy attachments. In the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the Buddha teaches, "If a mind of anger arises, the *bhikkhu* (monk) can practice the meditation on love, compassion, or equanimity for the person who has brought about the feeling of anger."



Some sutra commentators have said that the Brahmaviharas are not the highest teaching of the Buddha, that they cannot put an end to suffering and afflictions. This is not correct. One time the Buddha said to his beloved attendant Ananda, "Teach these Four Immeasurable Minds to the young monks, and they will feel secure, strong, and joyful, without afflictions of body or mind. For the whole of their lives, they will be well equipped to practice the pure way of a monk." On another occasion, a group of the Buddha's disciples visited the monastery of a nearby sect, and the monks there asked, "We have heard that your teacher Guatama teaches the Four Immeasurable Minds of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Our master teaches this also. What is the difference?" The Buddha's disciples did not know how to respond. When they returned to their monastery, the Buddha told them, "Whoever practices the Four Immeasurable Minds together with the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eightfold Path will arrive deeply at enlightenment." Love, compassion, joy, and equanimity are the very nature of an enlightened person. They are the four aspects of true love within ourselves and within everyone and everything.

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