



Newsletter
September 1999

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.



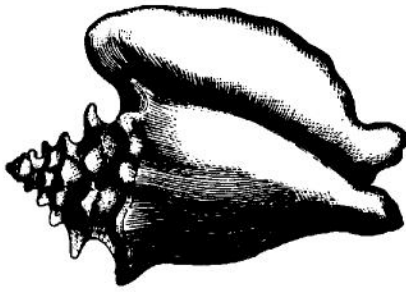
Photo Larry Hermesen

Finding the Muscle

from a lecture by Katherine Thanas

Recently someone asked, "How do you get rid of the pain?" An experienced meditator said, "The pain never goes away." The great secret of Buddhist practice is we learn to open to the pain, the frustration, the suffering that never goes away. We might call this pain the gap between what's happening and what we are willing to accept . . . the gap between the moment that's here and a better moment we might imagine.

That's a different result from what we anticipate when we begin practice. Someone—a long-time sitter—told me recently that he was very disappointed with his practice. He recently "blew" it, got really angry, "lost" it. He was very disappointed in himself.



Possible Change of Sunday Sitting Schedule

In our September discussion periods, members of the Steering Committee will submit a proposal for your consideration, to change our Sunday sitting schedule. The plan is to eliminate the 9:30am sitting, and move the 10:30am sitting to 10am, which would allow time for our speakers to give lengthier presentations. Your opinions, preferences, and feelings about this idea are necessary before any changes could be made. Please come, and let us know what you think.

Submit to GBF

We always invite you to submit your essays, articles, poems, and letters, as well as artwork and photographs, for inclusion in this community newsletter. Our Sangha encompasses many talents and much experience, and we want to share your insights and creative energies. For submission guidelines, see the back page.

We think that when we've been practicing for many years we should have found equanimity, a calm mind, some place safe from the winds of anger, greed, and confusion. We think by now we should have calm sailing, that when we see some heavy-duty thing coming ahead, we should adjust our sails, monitor our breath, our posture, our state of mind, and sail smoothly through it.

What actually happens is that we are constantly falling out of balance and returning to balance again and again, until falling out is one movement with returning to balance. Maybe practice is learning to return to balance, rather than dwelling in balance.

When we practice for many years, we are more willing to know our experience, and to let it pass through us. The longer we sit, the bigger our stomach and heart become, and the softer our muscles and mental formations become.

We may think we should be centered and calm, but if we try to practice equanimity before we have met all the energies of our lives, circumstances that have not yet been resolved, nor completely met, await us. When the circumstances are ripe, frustration, or joy, or anger, rage, longing, whatever, pop up. If we don't let that stuff come up because we have prematurely found a place of ease, we do not see what has to be seen.

Expressing our anger, or our bully nature, or whatever, allows us to see, "Ah. Here's something I actually do. I can be a bully. I can really unload anger, or power-trip someone; I can kick someone around." If we don't ever see ourselves enacting this, we continue to live our lives dualistically, deceiving ourselves. By denying or degrading fields of energy within, we bypass large parts of ourselves, perhaps the juicy creative energy of our lives.

When you have really known your experience, entered it, penetrated it—you don't hang on to it any longer. The secret power of that energy returns into continuous exchange with the universe. It is only when we don't really admit our energy that we are pushed around by its power.

Dogen Zengi says, "The Great Way of the Buddhas is ultimate reality, things as they are." This great way is constantly being transmitted, without interruption. Today we are enjoying these beautiful apple branches, that Jim cut from the tree, but in order for the apple blossoms to grow, last autumn's leaves had to fall. The Great Way of the Buddhas is the actual way your mind is, the way your body is, your thoughts, your feelings, everything that's coming up for you as you sit.

The main precept of our practice-life is that "practice is not separate from enlightenment." Right now is the only moment of our life and in this moment delusion appears, enlightenment arises. Inseparable, arising together. This moment is fully delusion. This moment is fully enlightenment.

