



Newsletter
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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: Sozan Peter Schellin

Sex and Spirituality: A Gay Buddhist Reflects on a New Phase in Gay Liberation

by Paul Shepard

In the May GBF Newsletter, Larry Hermsen wrote about his experience in a group called Sexuality and Spirituality (S&S). Formed out of GBF, S&S held weekly meetings from October 1998 through May 1999 that focused on sexuality in the light of the Dharma. I would like to offer thoughts about my own sexual history as it unfolded in the group. I invite others to contact me about forming a second group.

My sexual issues have dealt with sexual compulsivity. I came out during the seventies in the Land of Oz, when boogey nights created the bogus daze that he who has the best sex wins. I have been in a Twelve Step Fellowship (SLAA) which focuses on sex and love issues. That program is still an important Sangha for me. I had also become involved in the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE), a program of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. Although BASE was set up to focus on work as practice, I was struck by how much work on personal relationships we had done. Most of the time I had thought of my sexual behavior as separate from my spiritual practice, but now I was conscious of wanting to change that. Sexuality as practice emerged as a concept worth exploring.



On Our Longing For Love

by David Richo

We may feel our life is meaningless if we are not in love with someone or not in an intimate relationship. We discredit ourselves, and miss out on the rest of what our life is about. When it seems it is absolutely necessary that we have a one-to-one love relationship in order to be happy, we are encountering a strong need for personal (not yet interpersonal) work on ourselves. Our longing for that special someone as the be-all and end-all of our lives is also a distraction from our spiritual practice of compassion, the broader love that is our real focus and destiny as enlightened beings.

It is not that erotic and intimate love are not worthy pursuits—only that they seem to work better in a context of consciousness. We relate to our desire for love mindfully by feeling the longing fully, witnessing how it changes and where it leads us, and accepting that it may or may not be fulfilled for the time being. The painful alternative is to be possessed by our longings, unconscious of how they work or how they can serve us. We may be obsessed with them, so lost in them that perspective deserts us. We lose
(continued on page 7)

Page 2

How much I wanted to change became clear to me one day when I listened intently to the Dedication of Merit, usually given at the end of weekly GBF meetings. The prayer refers to Buddhist practice in general; what I ideally wanted was to be able to dedicate not just the concept of my sexuality but the practice of my sexual activity. I wanted to be able to frame having sex in terms of the Dedication of Merit, adding the italicized words in the opening phrase:

By the power and truth of this practice *of my sexual activity*,

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness,

May all be free from sorrow and the causes of sorrow,

May all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is without sorrow,

And may all live in equanimity without too much attachment or too much aversion,

And live believing in the equality of all that live.

I knew that the revised dedication would be quite a challenge to incorporate into my daily life. Would others be willing to join in the challenge, and ask for support? The BASE group had worked for me. The possibilities of a sexuality practice group excited me.

Since there is virtually no traditional Dharma on being Gay, I prepared a handout for the first meeting of S&S. It included a list of basic Buddhist principles: the Three Refuges, the Four Noble Truths, the Five Hindrances, the Eightfold Path, and last, but hardly least, the ten major prohibitory precepts (the number varies with different sources), which include the prohibition against sexual misconduct. I also suggested the format of the BASE meetings: a half hour of sitting, a brief reading, check-ins, a talk on Dharma, or a subject pertinent to the group interest.

We closed membership in the group at five. As the weeks progressed, the small number allowed for greater depth in our work. In fact, it seemed that ninety minutes was never long enough, given the energy that would arise at each meeting. By constantly referring to our Buddhist practice, we kept the group from just being a rap or quasi-therapeutic session. Due primarily to the synchronicity of finding kindred spirits, and because we had time to witness each other's histories in depth, our rare level of intimacy was exhilarating.

Core Work in the Group

We quickly got into the nitty gritty of why we were in the group. We were seeking more equanimity in our sex lives. It became clear that the more we disclosed, the more insight we gained, and the less suffering our sexuality caused.

At first I was fearful, as I had been in the BASE group, that the others' response to MY problems would make me feel ashamed. Our weekly topics, however, clarified my sexual issues. I came to frame my problem with sexual compulsivity as one of attachment to sex as a pleasure without which I could not be happy. For example, I would often go cruising out of sheer habit. Practicing mindfulness while in the S&S group has helped me with that. A day after the group began, for example, I was driving south in Berkeley headed for Oakland. I unconsciously turned west to go to a cruisy park, caught myself, steered south, inadvertently turned west again, before repeated mindfulness brought me back to Oakland.

