

Newsletter
October 2000

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.

Dharma on the Frontline

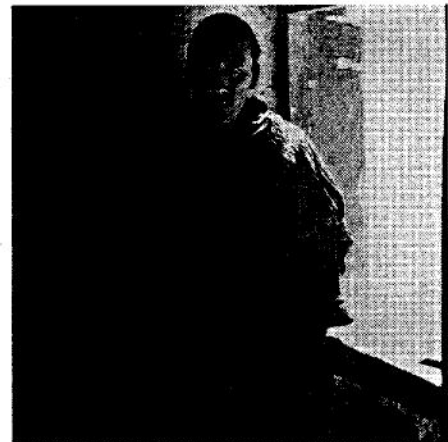
Second of two parts: Excerpts from a talk by Venerable Robina Courtin given to the Gay Buddhist Fellowship on July 30, 2000.

It is the sense of "I" which causes us, propels us, from one life to the next; this is the way they talk about when you die, especially in the Tibetan tradition. There are very detailed descriptions of the death process in Buddhist tantra, and of course there are very esoteric practices, very sophisticated methods of actually harnessing the energy of the subtle physiology of the body and the mind—to literally go through death without losing control, in order to live or choose rebirth. This is how they talk.

What Tibetans say happens, roughly speaking, at the time of death, is the gradual throwing off of this gross sense of "Me," Robina. This gradual throwing off is of the sense of who she is, this Australian female, this, that, all the stuff, all the package that we have and identify with; that is ceasing, ceasing, ceasing. By the time you stop breathing, even by then (which is when you're ready for the body bag in this culture) you're not yet dead according to the Buddhist tradition. You've got two more days before the subtler consciousness is able to leave the body.

But even before then, Tibetans say the karmic imprint that will cause the future life is beginning to ripen, to harness, so there's this powerful grasping energy they say manifests at that time. It's like a huge motor that just propels us into an intermediate set between lives, frantically looking for another "I." This is ego grasping. This is ignorance, this kind of propulsion to continue to get reborn. It's what drives us. And its main energy, because it is separate-cut-off-dualistic, it's nature is to feel lacking; it's main voice is "I want."

This is why attachment is our main delusion. Attachment is the main cause of our suffering. Effectively, in this life, the fundamental cause of suffering is this ignorance, this ego grasping. There's also the "I want," the attachment energy, and again it too is so primordial. It's not a question of "I'm attached



GBF Committees

We always welcome and need interested participants, so please, **JOIN US!** 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 and a wonderful way to serve your Sangha.

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Call 415.974.9878

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If you would like to volunteer, please contact us at 415.974.9878.

to chocolate cake, I'm attached to this or that"—that's a gross level of it. It's something truly that is moving us from second to second. And its voice is dissatisfaction. Its voice is feeling a deep sense of lack, a deep sense of dissatisfaction, a deep sense of something missing, always needing something more. And because it's so crazy and such a liar, it projects onto all the outside objects, absolutely believing that that handsome body and that gorgeous cake and that delicious sound and that whatever looks delicious will give me the happiness that I am craving. So when we shove it in, to any of the five senses, and then wonder why five minutes, five days, five years later we're feeling bereft again. This is the energy of attachment.

So even to begin to lessen this attachment, not to mention the ego grasping, is already sublime. And then what's anger? Well, as one lama said, anger or aversion is the response when attachment is thwarted, when attachment doesn't get what it wants. I mean, look at this world. Just look at this culture, look at this country. The thwarting of needs is quite obvious: the raging, the smashing, the beating, the blaming is unbelievable, and that's anger energy. That's because attachment is thwarted, attachment doesn't get what it wants. Then you can see all the others—jealousy, pride—all these are coming from this attachment, which comes in turn from the positing of this "I". This is samsara, this is suffering.

Maybe we'll have some questions.

GBF: What kind of cooperation do you get from the wardens in the prisons?

RC: In general, they're all fundamentalists, very suspicious. In general—I'm not trying to be critical now—the nature of that type of environment is to not be supportive. It's rare to find support. It's like a jewel when

I find support. "It's the law, you know," as this fundamentalist chaplain says in Kentucky, "to see guys on death row." And he almost said, "I don't want to have you in here." There's a look of horror on his face when we talk about stuff, and he'll stand at the door listening. It truly offends him and I feel sorry for him. But he knows he has to allow it.

Yeah, unless I'm very determined and always polite I can't get any support. I can never be aggressive, but it takes sometimes years to actually get them to set it up. Some are kind, a few are very supportive, but it's rare to find someone who truly doesn't care and is supportive.

GBF: As someone commented, this is the most positive dharma talk I've heard at GBF, you just cut right to the chase; very, very powerful, and I want to thank you. We have a sangha brother who is in prison right now. People do visit him, but it's one of those things where people have to wait about five hours for a half-hour visit. There seems to be an effort to break the prisoner's spirit. I mean, pointless ways to degrade or to humiliate the prisoner take place. Do you send a newsletter out to prisoners?

RC: No, *Mandala* is the magazine of this Tibetan Buddhist group with centers around the world, and on the back of Wisdom Books it say to write to *Mandala* for a free copy; that's how come guys in prison write, and that's how these letters get sent to me. So *Mandala* is just the magazine we put out, but out of this has grown the prison thing.

GBF: What about working with women in prison?

RC: We've only had one letter from one woman, which is kind of curious. I don't know why. I only respond to people who write. And then send books to them, and go visit. What else?

