



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

DECEMBER 2005 / JANUARY 2006 NEWSLETTER

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

An Empty View on Relationships

BY DELBERT RAY COLLETT

All beings want happiness, and no one desires suffering. Furthermore, all beings wish to be loved. As humans, we feel a certain warmth inside whenever someone gives us a caring expression. We also avoid those with abrasive personalities and impose upon them our perception of ugliness. In this way, we train our minds to avoid everyone with a negative countenance, lest cruel treatment hamper our pursuit of happiness and bestow upon us suffering. Undeniably, we are social beings who crave acceptance, affection, and love.

Through our Buddhist studies, we know that social cravings originate out of confusions. We develop ignorance as to our true nature and hallucinate an independently existing "I." This false view creates dualistic judgments that perceive self and other, subject and object. In order to maintain this dualistic view, we impute differences between that subject and object. Let's look closer at this process.

We are beings of energy, a continuous stream of consciousness existing from beginningless time. This stream of mind is without substance or form and is entirely dependent upon its previous moment of existence. The only way it can perceive phenomena is through prior awareness. Therefore, nothing can exist to this energy/consciousness/mind that has no prior association. Even our present body is the result of previous moments of generosity, virtues, and aspirations that are causes bringing about this human manifestation.

Without a continuous stream of experiences to base perception on, conventional reality would not be possible; our mind would have no reference point. Insight into the continuity of mind can be cultivated through meditation. Contemplate your state of mind now, and then trace the previous moments back as far, and in as much detail, as possible. Could even this very moment occur without a previous moment acting as a base? A previous moment was even required to receive and pick up this page to read, not to mention the previous moments of education required to make sense of these markings.

Once we have strengthened our insight into the continuity of mind, we start

to see all phenomena, including people, as reflections of our own mental state. Check it out: plants, rocks, buildings, sun, moon, family, enemy, friend, lover. Some see phenomena as beautiful, some as ugly. All perception, however, comes from the mind of the perceiver who apprehends dependent phenomena as independently existing from its own side. To recognize all conventional reality as dependent arisings is to see a magnificent display of interwoven events that is total bliss. With this

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awareness, what can we say about our interdependent social state?

How fortunate the person who lives in love. The individual who is cherished and cared for brought this blessing upon himself through previous acts of generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration, and wisdom. To demonstrate the power of these precepts, try living by them even for a short time, and then notice the positive way in which everyone you come in contact with reacts toward you. It's no wonder they're called perfections.

Recognizing the power of our virtuous actions, how can we not view the manifestations of loved ones as blessings, rewards for our familiarities with loving-kindness, now presenting itself as part of our everyday life? An accountant who spends endless hours crunching numbers will start to see everything in terms of cost-analysis. It's the same with loving-kindness.

Imagine that you spent several days baking yourself a special cake. Each ingredient you prepare by hand. You grind the flour and spices. You handpick the chickens that lay the eggs. You milk the cow. Each item receives special care and selection. When you've finished, it would be a victory and you would cherish every bit, mindful of the causes bringing each into existence. It wouldn't even cross your mind to carry it outside and leave it on the patio with indifference, or worse yet, throw it into the

trash. Those might seem like unlikely extremes, yet look at the many fortunate people who have collected the karma to be loved by another and then abuse that blessing through apathy or cruelty. Those people are only assuring themselves future pain and loneliness. How can we not feel compassion for their future pain?

Our equanimity practice shows us that there is no difference between friend, enemy, and stranger. However, being overwhelmed by the Eight Worldly Concerns (gain,

loss, pleasure, pain, praise, blame, fame, dishonor), we sometimes can't see equality when our dualistic view provides us such vivid hallucinations of happiness that we believe them to be real and forever lasting. If only we could just _____. Fill in the blank for yourself because you, like me, are full of plans and goals to bring lasting perfection. Will our temporal plans, however, truly bring us lasting happiness, or are they also causes for future sufferings?

Remember when Helen Hunt challenged Jack Nicholson to pay her a compliment in *As Good as It Gets*? His reply: “. . . you make me want to be a better man.” How romantic. With this statement clearly in mind, think about your motivations for being involved in a relationship. Is it to fill an empty gap in your life? Is it because your partner makes life worth living? Now consider how you describe your partner: my other half, my life partner, my wife, my husband. How many of your motivations and descriptions contain “I” or “me”? Is your involvement in the relationship for the sake of your partner, or is he merely a prop, a tool for you to use in building your own happiness? When you fail to be amused and entertained with his presence, is he to be discarded? You may think this reasoning selfish and cruel, yet there are hundreds of millions of people who view their relationships on variations of this theme. Instead, we should turn the tables, then look.

In the *Anguttara Nikaya*, Shakyamuni Buddha described the qualities of true friendships:

A friend endowed with these three qualities is worth associating with. Which three? He gives what is hard to give, he does what is hard to do, he endures what is hard to endure. (111.133)

Of course, we know that becoming attached to other people and clinging to their companionship is just another cause for cyclic existence. Future pain and suffering always come from dualistic attachments. I'm not saying we should turn our backs on our loved ones—that's not what renunciation means. On the contrary.

Giving our compassion, love, and forgiveness to loved ones and friends does not necessarily mean craving or attachment. We must be cognizant of impermanence while cherishing each moment individually, without clinging to the next. Be mindful of each delicious taste of the cake while knowing it will soon be gone. Smile, enjoy, then let go, allowing each moment to start anew. Allow each to be a complete plot with beginning, middle, and end. Then when impermanence enforces its writ, we are ready: no regrets and no surprises—no glue with which to bind us.

For one seeking liberation, our first concern must be to

tice with our partner, seeking ultimate merging with our partner in a state where there is no duality or separateness, only the single, blissful experience of reality. Since our true nature is in the aspect of clear light, ultimate bonding can be defined as our natural state, free of obscuration: nondualistic, blissful awareness.

We share a karmic bond with our partner that allows us the privilege of developing compassion, equanimity, and bodhichitta with another who has our liberation at heart, a dependent phenomenon arising out of countless causes and conditions of virtue. Because you know your partner better than anyone else, it is most beneficial to both of you to meditate on each other's dependent nature as it relates to your experience. This practice will help you develop insight into your partner's perceptions and into karma as well.

Set aside some time and sit down to meditate. Face your partner. Focus your breath to calm your mind, and then look at your partner. Remember all the special moments you've shared with one another. Without judgments, recall all the smiles and contentments you've shared with one another. Now look at those memories and ask yourself why you remember them as positive. Which of the Eight Worldly Concerns was involved?

Imagine that you spent several days baking yourself a special cake. Each ingredient you prepare by hand. . . . When you've finished, it would be a victory and you would cherish every bit, mindful of the causes bringing each into existence. It wouldn't even cross your mind to carry it outside and leave it on the patio with indifference, or worse yet, throw it into the trash. Those might seem like unlikely extremes, yet look at the many fortunate people who have collected the karma to be loved by another and then abuse that blessing through apathy or cruelty. Those people are only assuring themselves future pain and loneliness. How can we not feel compassion for their future pain?

end our craving for future cyclic moments and all the suffering phenomena contained therein. The impure aggregates are suffering; the pure aggregates are liberation. While attempting to attain purity through dissolution, we must seek non-duality with all beings: friends, enemies, and strangers alike. We can cultivate this through prac-

Imagine, through insight, what your partner felt at those times. What is his analysis now? Think of all the times, through your beginningless lives, when you've been together and shared positive moments such as these. Think of your differing births and how you've been friends, wives, husbands, brothers, sisters, parents, bene-

factors, lovers, etc.

Come back to the moment and again look at your partner. Think about all the times you've quarreled. Think of the times your partner has done something you've disagreed with and vice versa. Without passing judgment, recall how you felt at the time and afterwards. Which of the Eight Worldly Concerns drove your feelings? What was your partner's motivation? Yours? Think of all your previous lives when you've hurt one another. How many times have you been enemies and even killed each other? Imagine every small discomfort you have experienced for eons, due to some cruel pain you inflicted. Think of all possible pains in all worlds and realms and know that you have inflicted them.

Return again to the present and focus upon your partner. This time think of all the things you don't know about one another, the things you've felt unimportant to share. What must it be like to perceive things through his senses? What are the unremembered dreams? In a twenty-four hour day, how many minutes of thoughts and experiences are actually voiced or otherwise shared? How many past lives have gone by when you weren't even faces in a crowd? For that matter, how many of the billions of strangers now living have the same thoughts? What were they like when they were each your lover? Did they each have the same likes and dislikes? How

nizable composition, such as one of the Eight Worldly Concerns. What followed was your conscious development of emotional discernment in which you develop a storyline that gives justification to a newly constructed emotional feeling that substantiates the ego. All this, just to reinforce our dualistic view.

Was the event you analyzed independent, or was it dependent upon causes and conditions? What were they? Individually, how do they relate to your emotional response? Look at the effect your emotional response had on yourself and others. Was your emotional response justified, or was it also a dependent arising? Allow this analysis to sink in and manifest the emptiness of the event/emotion/response. Remain for a while in this state of calm abiding.

Arise into the moment by becoming again aware of your partner. Dedicate your merits that all sentient beings may find release from cyclic existence through understanding their dependent natures and attaining realization of renunciation, bodhichitta, and emptiness. Then openly discuss your experiences with your partner.

It is important to remember our teaching on this perfect human birth and use all the leisures and endowments to assure liberation for ourselves and all sentient beings. You are born into a fortunate time and place where you are able to practice freely with another person every day.

Consider how you describe your partner: my other half, my life partner, my wife, my husband. How many of your motivations and descriptions contain “I” or “me”? Is your involvement in the relationship for the sake of your partner, or is he merely a prop, a tool for you to use in building your own happiness?

many started out as enemies? Did you experience the Eight Worldly Dharmas in the same way with each of them, and they with you? Contemplate the equality of all these countless beings.

Notice what drove your perceptions of each person and situation previously examined. Which is the most common pursuit? Take one situation and evaluate how it arose. First, a physical or mental event occurred. Then you perceived that event through one of your six senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, thought). Next you formed a reflex where you either wished to be rid of the event, became attracted to it, or were indifferent to its presence. You then categorized the event into a recog-

The time you spend with your partner is a great opportunity to work on your discursive emotions, your insight into karmic consequences, equanimity, selflessness, bodhichitta, and emptiness. Virtually all the steps on the path to enlightenment can be further developed through mindfulness in your relationship. To expand the above practice (or for those, like me, with no partner), perform the meditation visualizing a generic stranger, or even an enemy before you.

Look beyond the conventional nature of all manifest phenomena and see their dependence. Be mindful of your every action and ask yourself which Worldly Concern is its home. Which root delusion fed that action?

Was it attachment, anger, pride, ignorance, wrong views, or doubt? Find out about yourself by looking into the mirror of your perceptions, this dream-like illusion created out of your propensity toward delusion. Ask your-

will be thirty seconds after death. I have no family and all my friends are in various prisons around the country. I find my loneliness a great thing. If I had not lost those I used to call friends, I would not have built the desire to

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self how you can react to dualistic occurrences when they are all inward interpretations, built on our previous wrong conceptions.

See, instead, the glory-filled positive potential for love all around you and that is exactly what you'll experience. When a difficult situation arises, remember that it is an empty phenomenon that manifests only because you mistakenly perceive it as independently existing. Take that difficulty and manipulate its aggregate causes and conditions for the benefit of all beings—our endless partners.

Thank you for considering these words. I felt compelled to write them because I needed to instill them in my own mind-stream. This monkey mind has created many causes of suffering for both myself and those I care for. Understanding the laws of karma, I understand that my current situation is the result of actions performed mainly in past lives; the actions of this life have created the conditions whereby those past karmas could ripen. Confusion has generally ruled my current life. I always craved; I just never knew for what. The past four years of my life have been somewhat fulfilling, for even though my environment is somewhat lacking from the worldly point of view, I have found dharma.

I often wonder how much suffering I would now be experiencing if it weren't for this dharma practice that I cherish so much. I have looked into the depths of this mind and found who I am not. I am not any of the people I previously thought I was. I am empty of inherent existence and drive by delusion. I am just as alone as I

practice dharma. Renunciation would still not be in my vocabulary.

As it is, I have looked deep into the sufferings of my life and torn them apart, piece by piece. I have seen their cause in my unrealistic view of an independent self. The end of those sufferings is attainable through understanding, and I work each day at living the path to bring about liberation not just for myself, but also for those who will come into my life. How wonderful that we can bring about full and complete Buddhahood for all sentient beings.

I am a humble practitioner who is without realization and working hard to overcome Mara's forces so that I may tame a mind neglected for eons. Should you have any words of encouragement that may help, please share them.

With all love for my countless mothers, I am Thubten Gyeltsen (Delbert Collett). ■

Delbert Ray Collett is a Buddhist prisoner in Boise, Idaho, where every week he leads an hour-long Buddhist study class. You may write him at the following address:

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Christmas Day Potluck

The next GBF Potluck will be on Sunday, December 25, from 2:00-7:00 p.m., at the home of Bob Seidle-Khan, 352 Waller Street, between Fillmore and Webster Streets, in San Francisco.

Sign up for the GBF Directory

We are in the process of collating data for a hard copy GBF directory. If you attend a Sunday meeting on Bartlett Street in the next few months, you can check a printout of info we have on you in our database and make any additions or deletions. If you are self-employed and wish to publish what service you offer, along with a brief descriptive phrase, you may, e.g., "massage therapist, shiatsu," "attorney, personal injury." Alternately, you can send information to gbfmailinglist@sbcglobal.net. You may include your name, land address, e-mail address, and phone number. The directory will be published in late spring of 2006 and will be available at the Sunday meetings at cost, probably a couple of dollars. Thanks to Todd Pope who is collating the data.

How to Plan an Activity or Event with GBF

At the March All Sangha Meeting, members made a number of excellent suggestions for a variety of activities, including book discussion groups, mid-week sitting groups and social activities. The Steering Committee enthusiastically endorses these kinds of activities. There are four ways you can promote an event:

1. Create your flyer with the pertinent information to be made available at our Sunday meetings;
2. Put out the word on the Internet with our yahoo group;
3. Announce the event on Sundays;
4. Ask that the event be publicized on our bi-monthly newsletter.

If you need assistance organizing an event, consider asking someone in the sangha to help. The Steering Committee is seeking volunteers for an Activities Committee that would coordinate and publicize these monthly events. Service on this committee should not involve a huge time commitment, since publicizing an event involves little more than facilitating with the publicity steps listed above. If you're interested in volunteering for the Activities Committee, please contact a member of the Steering Committee.

Your Thrift Store Donations Earn Money for GBF

GBF members can donate their quality cast-offs to the Community Thrift Store (CTS) and GBF will receive a quarterly check based on the volume of items sold. This is a great way to support our Sangha, and the community. So far this year we have received over \$800 through members' generosity. Bring your extra clothing and other items to CTS at 623 Valencia St between 10am and 5pm, any day of the week. The donation door is around the corner on Sycamore Alley (parallel to and between 17th and 18th) between Valencia and Mission. Tell the worker you are donating to GBF. Our ID number is 40. Information: (415) 861-4910.

Calendar

Sunday Speakers

December 4 **Howard King**

Howard King has been studying on various spiritual paths for over 40 years. For the past 20 years, he has been studying the healing ways that come from shamanic cultures. His present study is within the Tibetan Buddhist traditions.

December 11 **Open Discussion**

December 18 **Donald Rothberg**

Donald Rothberg, a member of the Spirit Rock Teachers Council, writes and teaches classes, groups, and retreats on meditation and socially engaged Buddhism in the San Francisco Bay Area and nationally, and directs a two-year interfaith program in "Socially Engaged Spirituality" for Saybrook Graduate School. He has been an organizer, teacher, and board member for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, particularly working as a mentor for its Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE) Program. His book, *The Engaged Spiritual Life: A Buddhist Approach to Transforming Ourselves and the World*, will appear in 2006 with Beacon Press.

December 25 **Roger Corless**

Roger Corless is Professor of Religion, Emeritus, at Duke University. Having retired to the Bay area, he contributes to the GBF Newsletter under the nom de plume Dharma Daddy. He is the author of several books, including *Vision of Buddhism: The Space Under the Tree*.

January 1 **Jim Wilson**

Jim Wilson, the former abbot of the Chogy Zen Center in New York, has studied in the Chogy, Fuke, and Soto traditions of Zen. He leads a weekly sutra salon in Sebastopol.

January 8 **Susan Moon**

Susan Moon has been a Zen student since 1976, practicing with Mel Weitsman at the Berkeley Zen Center. She now practices primarily with the Everyday Zen Sangha, and in August of 2005 she received lay entrustment from Zoketsu Norman Fischer. She is the editor of *Turning Wheel*, the quarterly magazine of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, the author of *The Life and Letters of Tofu Roshi*, and editor/author of *Not Turning Away, The Practice of Engaged Buddhism*. To find out about her writing workshops and her photography, see: www.susanmoon.org.

January 15 **Marlene Jones**

Marlene Jones, Ed.D. is a woman of African ancestry who holds professorial appointments in the Social and Cultural Studies Department at Dominican University. Her doctorate is in International Multicultural Education. A social and community activist, she has worked in multicultural education and cultural competency training since 1990. She leads People of Color day-longs and retreats at Spirit Rock and gives Dharma talks throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and parts of Northern California. She is a co-founder of the Spirit Rock Diversity Council and is currently the co-chair of the Council. Marlene was introduced to meditation in 1970.

January 22 **Open Discussion**

January 29 **Diana Elrod**

Diana Elrod is a PhD candidate in Philosophy and Religion (Asian and Comparative Studies) at the California Institute of Integral Studies. A practitioner of Nichiren Buddhism since 1994, Diana is a Research Assistant in the Asian and Comparative Studies program at CIIS, where she is developing the first PhD level and MA level departmental bibliography of Hinduism, Chinese Philosophy and Buddhism. She also has spearheaded GLBT Buddhist groups within Soka Gakkai International (SGI), the largest Nichiren association in the US and the world, and was instrumental in starting the first national GLBT Buddhist conference in the SGI-USA, held annually. She holds a Master of Science in Urban Planning from Columbia University (1986) and a Bachelor of Arts from Oberlin College (1983).

Sunday Sittings

10:30 am to 12 noon

Every Sunday followed by a talk or discussion, at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett Street (near 21st St between Mission and Valencia).

MUNI: 14 Mission or 49 Van Ness-Mission, alight at 21st St, walk 1/2 block.

BART: 24th and Mission, walk 3 1/2 blocks.

PARKING: on street (meters free on Sundays) or in adjacent New Mission Bartlett Garage. The Center is handicapped accessible.

Miss a Dharma Talk?

You can listen to it on the Internet.

Audio files of Dharma talks are available on the GBF website.

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www.gaybuddhist.org

For general questions about GBF write to:

inquiry@gaybuddhist.org

To reach our Program Committee with suggestions for speakers and comments, go to:

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Send submissions to:

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GBF Yahoo Discussion Group

There is now a GBF discussion group for the general membership (and others) on Yahoo.

Join the discussion at:

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/gaybuddhistfellowship

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By the power and truth of this practice, 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 lives.

—GBF dedication of merit