



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

JUNE / JULY 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.

Practicing Alone with Everyone

BY 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*. She spoke to GBF on January 8th.

When I give dharma talks, I talk about my own experience and my own life—not because it's particularly important but because all of us as we practice the dharma are exploring what it means to be born a human being and how to fully express that, and for me, the only human being I know what it's like to be born as is myself, and so I use myself as an example in the hope that what I experience will be something that others share and can connect with.

I want to talk today about the one month solitary retreat that I made this past fall, which was really an extraordinary experience for me, and it was very much dharmic practice. I spent a month completely alone in a cabin in Mendocino County, north of the town of Willits. It's a small hippy-hand-built cabin that I own. It's on a very small piece of land that I own with three families. There are three little rustic cabins there that were already built when we bought the land, and I've been going up there for 25 years or so. But I never have particularly liked going there alone because it's so isolated. It's a great place to be with a friend or lover or family, but a theme in my life has been that I'm afraid of loneliness. It's something I've struggled with a lot, and through my Zen practice I've gradually come to understand that I am not alone, that I'm not separate, and that it's the belief in a separate self that is one of the greatest causes of suffering. That's easy to say, and I thought, "Well, I feel ready to try to face myself and see what it's like to be alone and see who's there when there's nobody there but me." This cabin is two miles up a steep dirt road on a ridge, and there's no electricity, no phone, no cell phone access. There's a neighbor half a mile up the dirt road and another neighbor a mile down the dirt road, both of whom live there but work in the town of Willits every day. So it's very, very isolated. There's no way for me to get in touch with anybody, and that was my intention—to really not speak with anybody or see anybody for a whole month. If you start to think about it, how often do you even go for a day without seeing or speaking to another person? It practically never happens.

So this was a pretty intense ambition, and I set up the experience quite carefully. I arranged with the neighbor up the road to drop off some fresh produce twice during the month, but mostly I ate rice and beans and things like that. I also arranged

with Norman Fisher, my dharma teacher, to have once a week telephone interviews. I would drive to a highway rest stop down on the paved road, about a twenty-minute drive from the cabin, to call Norman, and that was going to be the only time I would leave the cabin. By making these plans, I was getting ready in my mind to go for a long time. Some people in my life couldn't understand why I wanted to do this. My mother said, "What would you want to do that for?" I wasn't going to be calling her up twice a week as I usually do, and she had to allow me to go. One of my sons said, "When you get up there, you should be getting to know the neighbors. Why would you just not want to talk to anybody?" It goes against the grain for people to do this sort of thing.

I began to feel that I was sitting in the lap of Buddha. I began more and more to understand that the universe was taking care of me. That was partly because of being in nature like that. You're really not alone in nature. . . . When the crickets are singing and the trees are whispering, you can start to feel the vibrations of all the life that's passing through you, especially when you've been still for so long. I began to feel that I really was not a separate being.

In Zen practice we don't really have a tradition of solitary retreat—at least not in Japanese Zen practice, the tradition that I'm in. I guess in Tibetan Buddhism there is a tradition of solitary retreat, but this retreat was of my own devising, and Norman was very supportive. He thought it was a good idea too. So I wanted to read you my text for the day, a short quote from Dogen Zenji, a Zen master from the 1200s, whom you may know of. This is much quoted little piece from Genjokoan by Dogen. He says, "To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to become one with myriad things. When you become one with myriad things your body and mind, as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of enlightenment remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly."

So I was hoping maybe I'd forget the self and my body and mind would drop away and so would the body and mind of everyone else. And it sort of happened. So I wanted to tell you a little more specifically what it was really like.

To say a little more about being alone, I've had this feeling that I'm very gregarious. I love people, and I love my friends and family and community, but I spend a lot of my life making sure that a lot of people love me all the time—just to make sure I really am there. I just decided, "Enough, already! There's plenty of love; it's okay. Now, what if there isn't anybody there? What if somebody doesn't love you for three seconds? You still have to be okay." So I just really wanted to know that I was all right without anybody else. It's not just being loved that was the problem; it was also the feeling that if there was-

n't another person there reflecting me back to myself, it's harder to know that I actually exist. Some of you might know this kind of existential feeling of lack: how do you really know you're alive and you're a person if you're all alone and there's nobody else there to say, "Yeah, I heard what you said." This was the core question that I had: Is there somebody there? When there's nobody there but me, is there somebody there?

I went up there with one of my sons and a friend of mine who has one of the other cabins. She was there with two of her grandchildren, and my son was up there with me for the weekend. My friend and her grandchildren and my son had dinner together, and then they waved good-bye and drove down the road and left me there. I cried that afternoon when

they drove down the road. I thought, "Waah! I'm here all alone," but I was also really excited and really up for it. I also had with me my sister's dog, whom she had loaned me for the retreat, a really nice dog named Sachmo, who's a big shepherd mutt mix who looks kind of like a deer, and he's a very, very tender sensitive dog who was devoted to me and was really good company. I also wanted him with me because there's been a bear prowling around a lot up there. It had broken into my cabin several times over the last year or so and trashed all the food, and various visitors have encountered this bear going to the outhouse in the middle of the night. I was a little scared of the bear, even though it's not the kind of bear that eats people. I thought Satchmo would make me feel braver, so it was nice to have the dog, and it was nice in ways that I hadn't even anticipated, because I got to know the kind of company that an animal can be and the kind of communication that went on between us was amazing to me. It was constant, and especially since there wasn't anybody else there but the two of us and he pretty much stuck close by me the whole time, I was actually relating to another being just about the whole time. I didn't have him the last week of my retreat. I left for 36 hours to go to a memorial service of somebody very close to me in Chicago. It was like some strange time warp that I'm not even going to get into because basically it's as if it didn't even happen except that I drove to Oakland airport, got on a plane to Chicago, went to the memorial service, came back to Oakland airport, and drove back to the cabin. And I also left the dog with my sister in Berkeley at that time. So I had the experience

of three weeks with the company of the dog and the last week without the dog, and it was hugely different. I hadn't anticipated that, but it was good that I had the dog at the beginning when I was gearing up and getting braver, because I don't think I would have been ready to be there alone without the dog at the beginning, and when I came back from this memorial service, I had a complete collapse the first night. I got back up to the cabin and just completely fell apart with loneliness because I had just been with really close friends and family celebrating the life of this wonderful person who had died, and I had had an intense dose of intimate family love and friendship, and then there I was all of a sudden by myself again, without even the dog, and suddenly I couldn't understand what I was doing there and all the worst tapes about loneliness got charged up again. But they subsided and by the end of that last week I was feeling wonderful.

I want to tell you some more specifics about how my time was there. I didn't take a watch. This was another thing I really wanted to explore because my life ordinarily is ruled so much by schedules and appointments and my calendar: "Am I on time? Am I late?" I have to rush from one thing to the next. I wanted to have the experience of getting up when I woke up, going to bed when I went to bed, eating when I was hungry, not knowing what time it was, not caring what time it was, not saying to myself—one of my main purposes was also to write—"Oh I'll sit here for another 20 minutes and then I'll let myself get up and have a cup of tea." I was trying to be in the present moment as much as possible, and it really helped not to have the watch; it changed my feeling about time. I had a schedule, but my schedule wasn't according to the clock; it was an order of activities that I tended to do in the day. I didn't want to do a heavy duty sesshin, meditating all day long. I wanted to explore who I was and write and have pleasurable experiences—not that meditation isn't pleasurable—but I didn't want to just do that. I would get up, and then the first thing I did was walk the dog, who was ready to go the minute I woke up, and then after we had a really good walk, I'd meditate for a while. I don't know exactly how long I meditated for, but I had some sticks of incense, so I meditated for the length of the stick of incense, and I had a nice little meditation corner I made. Then I had breakfast and I wrote all morning. When it seemed like it was lunch time, I had lunch, and then in the afternoons I did some kind of work project or other. I found myself just completely excited about doing things physically with my body, building bookcases and clearing trails and stacking firewood and sawing boards and fixing benches. I was just amazed; I had a wonderful time doing that, and every afternoon I would do some kind of work project like that, and then I would have some tea in the afternoon, and I would take the dog for another walk, and then I would come back and sit on the porch. The cabin has a really nice porch or deck. It's like the prow of a ship; it looks out over this valley and across to mountains on the other side. So I would sit on the porch in the afternoon, and the weather was just perfect in September. It was warm in the day but not too hot, and it was cool at night but not cold. I would sit on the porch and read until it got too dark to see, and then I would go inside and meditate again. Then I had supper, and after supper I didn't know what to do because sometimes I

read, sometimes I listened to some music I'd brought on cds, or I crocheted, or I tried to teach myself the ukulele. I had all of these little projects lined up, but actually when you're in a cabin with kerosene lanterns, kerosene lanterns just don't have the oomph to get your energy up to do something very challenging, and I kind of faded a lot in the evenings. Plus it was dark and strange sounds were going on and scratching the roof and so on, so I just tended to go to bed fairly early.

So that was a picture of my day. One of the main things I was doing was taking care of myself. I was feeding myself; I was cutting the firewood to make sure I had a wood fire when it was cold; I had to fix the waterline one time when there was a leak in the waterline, and I was so proud of myself that I figured out how to do it. And I cooked three meals a day for myself, because I was eating the kind of food that you have to prepare. I didn't have quick foods there, so when I would make a delicious potato salad for myself, I figured, "You know, there must be somebody here; otherwise, why would I be making all this potato salad?" It just really convinced me, "Yeah, I'm a person too. I need to be warm; I need to get water." I'm used to doing that for my children or my housemates or other people around me, but to just do it for yourself is a wonderful experience. It's a real privilege to take care of yourself as if you are a worthy person who deserves to be taken care of.

So I wanted to give you three pictures—little snapshots—of different experiences there, and one is of the hardest time. I found that at twilight I got really sad, and this has been true for me ever since I was a small child. There's something about the end of the day, that in-between time when it's not day and it's not night and the day is dying, that just seems so unbearably sad. And up there alone, where it was so beautiful, it just seemed unbearable. I would get so lonely. I had what I would call a twilight sickness that came over me. I just sobbed and sobbed: "Why am I here? What is this?" It was really kind of out of control and strange like a visitation or something. There was always some taste of grief at the end of the day. I want to read to you from a little prose piece I wrote about that:

Last night when the sun set the twilight sickness came. There was no one with me in the sad time between light and dark. The day was on its deathbed. I watched it lie down on the brown hills. The insects sang out, katydids, crickets. "Farewell, day; hello, night." I tried to catch the moment when they started their Klezmer song, but I missed it. I always do. When I first hear them, they're already singing, like the first star, always already shining. I knew it was not to make me sad that the insects sawed at their legs, but so it seemed. I had no one to be at my side at the end of the day, as they say. I could have tried to distract myself from the twilight sickness, could have cranked up my windup radio and listened to KMUD in Garberville, where old hippies are always bashing Bush and so providing a certain amount of company, but the windup radio runs down, and in the sudden wordless pause before I crank it up again, I hear the crickets, and the demon named "all alone" breathed down my neck making the hairs stand up. So I sat down on my round black cushion to face the twilight. I vowed to sit there until it was night. I watched the day give up the ghost. Where the sky met the line of the mountains,

I saw a color with no name between green and pink. I slipped down in the loss of light and my own life seemed to fade with the day. All I loved was gone; all I'd done was wrong. The dark ate the trees leaf by leaf, and still I sat there staring down my mind. After all, I'd come by choice to be alone on the ridge like a monk in a Chinese scroll. "What is it?" I shouted. "What is it?" At last, twilight was gone. I went down the steep stairs and lit the lamps and ate my rice and beans in a time that was called light.

That's how it felt sometimes. But there was a way in which I really did stare down the demons. I just kept sitting there, and as I said, "What is it? What is it?" it was nothing, and it was okay. I began to feel that I was sitting in the lap of Buddha. I began more and more to understand that the universe was taking care of me. That was partly because of being in nature like that. You're really not alone in nature in the same way that you are when you get disconnected from natural events, or at least I don't feel that way. When the crickets are singing and the trees are whispering, you can start to feel the vibrations of all the life that's passing through you, especially when you've been still for so long. I began to feel that I really was not a separate being. The day after one of my first bouts, I had one of my phone conversations with Norman, and he was encouraging me that this was a really good thing that I was having this experience, that it's natural, of course, that it's a kind of primitive, basic, human emotion to feel some sadness at the end of the day maybe and to just be in touch with nature that way and to not add on all my own stuff about how my whole life has been a big mistake. So that was also my practice as I was sitting in the twilight asking, "What is it?": to see that it wasn't thinking about the mistakes that I made in my life—that wasn't what it was. I was sitting there in this beautiful place looking at some beautiful light that was fading on some beautiful mountains, and if I wanted to add on "My life has been a big mistake and I blew it in 1972 when I did x, y, z," that was really too bad for me to rob myself of the experience that I was having right then. I really saw quite clearly how much we seduce ourselves away from the lives we're in right now by having these thoughts and running these tapes on ourselves.

I thought I'd read you a poem of Emily Dickinson's that kind of relates to this, and she's also speaking of the spirits or God or the angels who are present all the time with one. She says:

Alone, I cannot be—
For Hosts-do visit me—
Recordless Company—
Who baffle Key—

They have no Robes, nor Names—
No Almanacs—nor Climes—
But general Homes
Like Gnomes—

Their Coming, may be known
By Couriers within—
Their going—is not—
For they've never gone—

So another picture that I want to give you is a completely different sort of vignette. One afternoon after I had been there for a while and I was feeling really good and strong and enjoying myself a lot, I was doing some yoga on the porch, and these planes kept going overhead, and one of the things I loved there was the silence. I was feeling so annoyed. "Why are these planes going by? They're really annoying." And then I looked out and saw huge billows of smoke and realized that there was a forest fire and that they were forestry planes. I couldn't tell where the fire was coming from, but from where I stood, it looked like it could have been coming from the little valley right at the bottom of our dirt road. I got worried and anxious and thought that if the fire's down on the road, it could come tearing up this ridge and I could be done for in a second. So I got the dog and I thought we'd drive down the road and check it out. Satchmo and I got in the car, and I went to start the car, and it had a dead battery. Guess why it had a dead battery? I'd brought my laptop up there, and I'd gotten this special little gizmo that you can use to recharge your laptop by plugging it into the car, and I'd been doing that, and I'd actually been starting up the car every couple of days to make sure that the battery was still good. But I hadn't started up the car in a couple of days; I guess I'd gotten cavalier about the whole thing. So I had a moment of a little bit of fear. I thought, "Hmmm, if this fire is coming up this ridge and I can't get down there very fast . . ." I thought about the Oakland fire, and the people who died in the Oakland hills. My mind got going. I thought, "My family and friends would be so annoyed with me if I burned to death because I had a dead battery." So I got the dog and we walked down the road. I figured I'd get my neighbor to give me a jumpstart. I walked down the road to the neighbor a mile down the road, but he wasn't there. I figured he was at work, and I knew the neighbor above me was at work. So I thought, "I'm the only person—the only living person—on this Ridge." So we walked another mile down to the bottom of the dirt road, and by that time I could see that that fire was not coming up from our valley. It was on the other side of another ridge, so I was relieved about that. Down at the bottom of the dirt road, some neighbors were at home, and they were with the neighbors who hadn't been home one mile down the dirt road. These people are old hippies who live up there and they're very nice. It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and they were sitting around drinking beer—this was on a weekday afternoon. There were two families sitting there. I said, "Oh, what's happening with this fire?" They said, "We went on the Internet; it's over on 101. Don't worry about it. If it were coming up, someone would come and get you. Don't worry." I said, "Well, I have a dead battery," and they said, "Oh, we'll give you a jump start. Sit down and have a glass of water," and I just sat there and we chatted for half an hour, and nobody did anything. I didn't say, "Hurry up and give me a jumpstart." I wasn't in any hurry anyway. But I was very struck by how this would never happen in Berkeley. If you ask some people for a jumpstart, and they said, "Oh, yeah, we'll give you a jumpstart," and then they would just sit down like they hadn't said it and go on drinking beer. It's just a different pace there. So I just wait-

ed. There were all these humming birds; there were about two dozen humming bird feeders that the woman had up, and they were wonderful. I hadn't talked to anybody for about two weeks, so I was in some kind of altered state. It was very odd; I was just sitting there, quite grateful that I was going to get a jumpstart, and not at all anxious anymore because I wasn't going to be burned to death after all, and these people were nice, and everything was fine. But I was also noticing how different this was from my usual state of mind. Finally this guy said, "Okay, let's go. And he got his truck. He drove me up the road and gave me a jumpstart. From then on, every time I charged up my laptop, I kept the engine running the whole time so the battery wouldn't die. But the other problem is that my car's gas gauge is broken, and the only way I know how much gas I have is by using the trip odometer, but if I wasn't going anywhere, I didn't know if I had any gas. So then I had

I realized that even there, alone, on my solitary retreat, I was completely woven into the whole web of human society . . . , and actually my whole retreat was resting on a foundation of human good will and human society in a way that I hadn't recognized.

to make one more trip out to get a can of gas in case I ran out of gas by charging my laptop, so then I felt like I had my technology together.

I had just been feeling so proud of myself for being this pioneer woman out in the woods fixing the waterline and so forth, and annoyed with the airplanes, and suddenly everything flipped, and I realized that even there, alone, on my solitary retreat, I was completely woven into the whole web of human society and that I was grateful that the forestry department had planes to put out forest fires, and I was so grateful that there were nice friendly people at the bottom of the road who were going to give me a jumpstart, and actually my whole retreat was resting on a foundation of human good will and human society in a way that I hadn't recognized, and it was really good to be reminded of that.

My third picture is of one of my happiest moments, which was one morning when I took the dog for a walk, and Satchmo and I were walking back from the cabin. We'd been for a long walk, and it was still fairly early in the morning, and I looked up and there was the gibbous moon, the almost full moon, just floating in this bright blue sky right above some digger pines, and it was just suddenly the most amazing thing I'd ever seen, and I burst into tears of joy at the sight of this white moon giving himself or herself to the world up there. And the way it was kind of nibbled at the edges was particularly, heartbreakingly wonderful. I don't think you can even describe a moment like that really, because I was so overcome with gratitude for my life and for the ability to see and the ability to breathe that air, and I just felt so held in that moment and realized that everything that we experience is such a miracle. I looked down at Satchmo and his tongue was lolling out, and I noticed for the first time that he had these black splotches on this pink tongue; they were part of his tongue. And that seemed

amazing to me too—and I wasn't on any kind of psychedelic drugs. I knew that because of being so quiet for so long and opening myself that I had made it possible. I was available for that kind of experience.

Here's another poem. This is Hafiz:

Only that Illumined One
Who keeps seducing the formless into form
Had the charm to win my heart.

Only a Perfect One
Who is always
Laughing at the word Two
Can make you know of Love

I love that part about laughing at the word "two." For people who are afraid that they're all alone and that there's not a second person there, you're not two, you're just one—and this

perfect one is laughing at the word "two." There's no such thing as two. We're all one.

It seemed to me that one of the main effects of this retreat—to connect it a little bit with coming back into the world—was that I became a person less in need of reassurance, just more available. I definitely feel that it was transformative for me, and I actually believe that I'm okay at some level that I didn't quite know before. So I don't need to be asking other people to tell me I'm okay in the same way that I used to. I did it in a way that was fairly gracious so that people didn't feel that they were always having to pat me on the head, but still I knew that I needed that, and it distracted me, and it distracted me from being able to become my full self and from having that kind of confidence that one is being held by the universe. And that gratitude for the miracle of human birth is something that we can find our way to in different ways. It's not everyone who can go on a one-month solitary retreat, obviously, but for all of us, if we can find our way to that kind of confidence that we're worthy and we're sitting in the lap of Buddha, then we're already at that point to just step up to the plate and listen to whatever somebody has to say, be available to work for peace in the world, do all the work and all the jobs that need to be done, and make all the connections that need to be made, and offer ourselves so that our own happiness really is a gift to others. You know yourselves that when you are with somebody who's happy that that's a gift to you. So that, I think, was the main lesson for me. I want to end with one more short poem. This is a poem from a book of enlightenment poems by women translated by Jane Hirschfield. This is by Izumi Shikibu, a Japanese poet who lived in the early 11th Century.

Watching the moon at midnight, solitary, mid-sky,
I knew myself completely, no part left out. ■

GBF

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July 22nd

Mount Tamalpais Steep Ravine Hike

Come join GBF this July 22 (Saturday) on a cool summer hike under the shade of the redwoods and by a series of cascades down Steep Ravine trail on Mt. Tam. This is an easy 3-4 mile hike, all downhill, that ends in the town of Stinson Beach. We'll hang out in Stinson Beach, have lunch in one of the cafes, and then take a bus back up to the parking lot. Nature and the comforts of civilization, all in one day. Who could ask for more?

Hikers will meet in front of 37 Bartlett St. at 9:30 (yes, I know that's early, but the parking lot at the trailhead gets full quickly, and we have to be there early). Bring sun screen, sturdy shoes and water. Rain cancels.

For further information, call Clint at (415) 386-3088.

The Fall Retreat Dates Set

GBF will have its annual fall retreat during the weekend of October 13-15. We will return to the beautiful Vajrapani Institute in Boulder Creek, California. The retreat will start Friday evening and will conclude after lunch on Sunday. Watch out for registration information in a future issue of the newsletter.

How to Reach Us

World Wide Web Site

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:

www.gaybuddhist.org/programs

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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

Calendar

Sunday Sitzings

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.

Sunday Speakers

June 4 Tim Wickens

Tim Wickens began practice in the Theravada tradition in 1991 and has attended many Vipassana retreats, including several three-month retreats in Massachusetts. A Bay Area native and a carpenter by trade, he lived and worked for two years at Spirit Rock and has participated in GBF, off and on, since 1993. In 2001 he spent a period of retreat as a monk in Burma and has recently returned from a month's stay at Chithurst Buddhist Monastery in England. Tim will describe his experience at Chithurst and how Ajahn Sumedho, senior monk at the monastery, helped him with his long-time struggle with self-doubt.

June 11 Lama Palden Drolma

Lama Palden Drolma is the Resident Lama of Sukhasiddhi Foundation in San Rafael. She completed the traditional Tibetan Buddhist three-year retreat under Kalu Rinpoche's guidance in 1985. In 1986 she became one of the first Western women to be authorized as a lama in the Vajrayana tradition. In addition to Kalu Rinpoche, she has studied with many of the great Tibetan masters from all lineages.

Since 1986, Lama Palden's teachings have translated Vajrayana Buddhist principles and practices in ways that make them accessible to Westerners. She has a deep interest in fostering psycho-spiritual awareness within daily life. At the Sukhasiddhi Center, she offers Buddhist practice in a non-authoritarian environment, which includes cultivating awareness of the feminine in Buddhism. She is the mother of two children.

For more information about Lama Palden and the Sukhasiddhi Foundation, see www.sukhasiddhi.org.

June 18 Cass Brayton and Peter Camarda

Two sangha members, Cass Brayton and Peter Camarda, will speak in the latest of our hit Dharma Duos series

The spiritual path of Cass Brayton (aka Sister Mary Media, SPI), while taking assorted twists and turns upon the way, has consistently followed along the banks of the River Sangha. The Buddha proclaimed one cannot achieve enlightenment without community, and why would you want to? The search for connection has led Cass from sissified faerie circles, through convents cloistered and not, on retreats into meditation halls, and now primarily onto the stage, that sacred place where theatre brings people together in the ancient tradition of religious festivals. How are we connected to each other and to the divine (as if there were a difference!)? How can we articulate the parts of ourselves we recognize in each other and honor the ways we are connected more than the differences that separate us? And just how DOES mascara fit into all of this? Not to mention old and nasty habits.

Peter Camarda has been sitting with GBF since its earliest days in the old Page Street location. He first learned to meditate at San Francisco Zen Center in 1985. However, he has been much too irregular and inconsistent about practice to consider himself an official member of any Buddhist school. Impermanence has been a major part of his life: originally trained as a lawyer, he has since been a word processor, a fundraiser, an editor, a computer operations assistant, and is currently looking for a new work incarnation. He will talk about how Buddhism has helped him move through a life of considerable change and many unexpected developments.

June 25 Gay Day Discussion

July 2 Jim Wilson

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

July 9 Carol Newhouse

Carol Osmer Newhouse has studied Insight Meditation for more than twenty years and has been teaching for ten. Her root teacher is Ruth Denison, who was empowered by the great meditation master U Ba Khin of Burma. She has also studied with Dr. Rina Sircar at CIIS and Dr. Thynn Thynn in Daily Life Practice. She is the founding teacher of the Lesbian Buddhist Sangha in Berkeley.

July 16 Emilio Gonzalez

Emilio has been practicing Qigong and Tai Chi Chuan since 1973. A senior student of Grand Master Kai Ying Tung, he taught Tai Chi at 50 Oak Street in San Francisco for over twenty years. In the 1990s he established a special Qigong for Health class for people with HIV and other chronic illness. He also taught at San Francisco State University, Mills College, and at various national conferences on Traditional Chinese Medicine. In 1996 he produced a best-selling Qigong video that was broadcast nationwide on PBS.

Emilio has been meditating daily since 1970. Most recently, he has studied in the Vipassana tradition with Eric Kolvic and Arina Weisman at Spirit Rock and Cloud Mountain retreat centers. For the past twelve years he has attended silent meditation retreats offered by the Gay Men's Meditation Retreats. Today, Emilio is retired and lives in Occidental where he has been teaching a twice-weekly Qigong class for seven years. He will lead us in a experiential session exploring the impact of Qigong and the Seven Healing Sounds on meditation and community.

July 23 Discussion

Topic: Intimacy in the Sangha

July 30 Lee Robbins and Peter Washburn

Lee Robbins and Peter Washburn will speak in our ongoing investigation into attachment/addiction/recovery.

Lee will describe the process of his experience of emerging as a Buddhist and how it affected his professional as well as his personal life. He will also speak about his experience with the NON-substance related 12 Step Fellowships (AI-Anon, ACOA, SLAA, CODA) and his perspective on how some aspects of our experiences as gay people and in the gay sub-culture relate to issues of codependence and CODA.

Peter has been a member of GBF for nearly ten years. His talk will focus on the inter-twining of his professional life as a physician specializing in addiction medicine and his personal life, and how a spiritual path grew out of that interrelationship.