



# Gay Buddhist Fellowship

DECEMBER 2006 / JANUARY 2007 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.

## Christmas is for Buddhists Too

BY ROGER CORLESS

How does it happen that Santa is able to do all that he does? Well, according to Dharma Master T'an-Luan, when we attain to the dharma body, we spontaneously begin to manifest transformation of our bodies instantaneously and simultaneously in all worlds where they are needed without departing from the dharma body. This is like the sun which while remaining in the heavens is reflected in 10,000 rivers and lakes. So that's how Santa does it.

As to the substance of the talk, it comes up every year, and it seems to have come up a little more this year than before, whether this is a Christian holiday and whether we should put Christ back into Christmas because it's become secular. I think that the issue now is that the president, or should I call him the occupant of the White House, is officially a born-again Christian, and he has continued the tradition which was apparently only started under Clinton to send out cards saying "Happy Holidays" and not "Merry Christmas," and so the Christians are saying, "It's getting out of hand; we need to put Christ back into Christmas," the assumption being that it's originally a Christian feast. So the first part of the talk will be a quick history of this because I think the history of what the feast is all about is quite fascinating. It is not a Christian feast originally. It is a Northern hemisphere European feast of the winter solstice, which we say today is on December 21st, but it was on the 25th because the calendar's been messed around with a lot, so it's the same thing, really. This winter solstice feast goes back as far as we know to prehistoric times. It makes sense that there should be some kind of feast then because before the solstice the days are getting shorter, the nights are getting longer, the sun is getting weaker, and it appears that maybe it will keep on going and there'll be perpetual night and cold and darkness, and then we find it reverses itself, and that the sun gets stronger again and the days get longer, so this was noted and celebrated and there was some kind of festiveness, as it were, going on, by the lighting of fires to go along the rebirth of the sun. Scholars of religion used to call this "imitative magic" because they said, "Well, of course, those primitives didn't know what was going on, and they felt that if they lit the fire in the physical world it would affect the spiritual world. Isn't that strange they could be so dumb? I mean, those people back there were so dumb it's amazing there's anything that was left, and how could they have survived?" Well, of course, they were not dumb. What was going on, I think, is that they realized the interdependence of the invisible world, what they would call in the Celtic tradition the "other world," and the visible world—the spiritual world and the material world. In Buddhism, we have the experience that the mind and the

body are interdependent. We can't see the mind, although we know the mind is there. If we see smoke, we know that there's fire. We don't see the fire but we know for certain there must be fire if there is smoke. So when we see a being that has a mind, it acts in certain ways, and we know that there is a mind even though we can't see it. We realize that the body and the mind interact and they're interdependent. We can affect the mind by the body and we can affect the body by the mind. So I think that was what was happening.

We have some kind of record of the feast in Northern Europe because although the people didn't write anything down, when the Christians came, they recorded things, and when the Romans came, they recorded things. We're not sure whether they got it right, but at least it sounds reasonable. And the feast was called *Yule*. It's not certain where this word comes from. It might come from the old German word *Jol*, which means the turning of the wheel. So it's the turning of

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the wheel of the earth. I like that explanation better than the other suggestion that comes from the Anglo-Saxon *geol*, which means the feast. “We're having a feast.” “What sort of feast?” “*The feast!*” “Oh, that feast!” “Yes!” It seems to mean that it would be the turning of the wheel, the turning of the earth. And what would happen is that people would go out and find a large log, the yule log, which was to be kept burning for 12 days for the 12 months of the year which were about to come, and then it would be kept burning, and all the sparks and energy from this were intended to assist the energy of the crops and of the cattle as we went into the rest of year. So that's why we have yule logs, and light a fire at Christmas. I was channel surfing last night—I didn't have much to do and I didn't have much energy. There was one channel that was entirely a picture of logs burning and some carols. And it was for the whole night. You come back during the day and there it is again. Well, that's a very ancient tradition, and now you can have the logs burning without the actual trouble of going out and finding a log and burning it yourself. And of course you're familiar with the 12 days of Christmas.

In the Roman Empire, the equinox, which was on the 25th of December as the calendar was then, was celebrated in rather a dramatic way as the rebirth of the sun, the day of the rebirth of the invincible sun, and was surrounded with saturnalia, Saturn being the god of plenty. It was very similar to what was happening in Jule when the people would be inside their houses with the winter outside and the demons outside, and you had the bright fire inside, and you ate food and, yes, had a lot of sex because you were trying to help the productivity of the rest of the year. So light and abundance and also

sex, which seems to have dropped out of the favor at least in the public eye, were the main features of this. Certain of the Romans were followers of what we called Mithraism. The Persian god Mithras was associated with the sun and maybe the sun god himself, and he was a culture transformer. By the ritual slaying of the bull in the cave, the cosmic bull in the cosmic cave, he brought about the transformation of the culture from hunting and gathering to agriculture, and the product of this was bread and wine, so in the Mithraism, in the chapel to Mithras, which was made to look like an underground cave even if it wasn't an underground cave, there would be the ritual consumption of bread and wine. The Christian tradition has a similar thing, and of course there was some kind of resonance between these two ideas. It's almost a historical accident, although it's much more complex than that, that in fact it was Christianity rather than Mithraism that took over the Roman Empire. We might all still be celebrating the birthday

of Mithras and saying, “We've got to put Mithras back into the Mithras feast because it's grown too secular!”

Mithraism may not have entirely disappeared. The slaying of the bull by Mithras is depicted as the bull coming down, and Mithras is bending over and slaying the bull from the front to the back, and this is exactly the most revered and honored way to kill the bull of the Festa Brava, in the bullfight. The bullfight, as we call it in English, is of course not really about killing a bull. There are much easier ways to kill a bull than that. Something cosmic is going on, and the chief matador wears a suit of lights, so he's associated with the sun. So there still might be a lot of Mithraism drifting about, but it's not called that anymore.

However, the Christians eventually decided to take this over. Christians did not celebrate the birthday of Christ at the beginning. Easter was the main feast, the resurrection, and actually the earliest traditions of Christianity have no mention of the birth of Christ. The earliest of the gospels as we have them in the New Testament today is the gospel of Mark, and Jesus simply appears on the scene like a Hebrew prophet, and he speaks very much like a Hebrew prophet: he gets angry, he gets petulant, he gets sad, and everything happens immediately. The Greek word *euthus*, which means *immediately*, is constantly coming up in Mark. It's a very craggy kind of gospel, a completely different picture of Jesus than we get in later tradition. And then Matthew and Luke have traditions about the birth of Jesus that are not entirely compatible, though they can be made to be compatible. Interestingly, one of the accounts includes shepherds who come to worship at the birth of Jesus. Shepherds came to worship at the birth of Mithras.

So there's something going on here. It's not too clear what's going on; it's murky still, but scholars are convinced that there is some kind of resonance between these two things.

So it wasn't until at least the year 300 in North Africa that Jesus's birth was celebrated, and then not until 350 was there a definition by the Vatican of the celebration of the birth of Jesus. When the Christian church decided to celebrate it on December 25, they made no pretense that this was the birth date in historical time. They admitted they didn't know. Nobody had made a record of it for some reason. It's possible that it happened in the springtime, because if you're going to have shepherds abiding in the field, they're not going to be in the middle of the snow, are they? It's going to be somewhat warmer than that, but whenever it was, it's quite clear that the Christian Church picked December 25, the rebirth of the sun, to be the birth of the Son, and the birth of Mithras at that time was not so popular, so he was going into the shadows or into the bull ring or something, and the other tradition was coming up. So then saturnalia were kind of reduced, but they still went on, and letting it all hang out around Christmas is still quite a tradition.

When the Christian Church did this, it's worth putting in a footnote as to what was going on here. Some people will think, "They were just kind of opportunistic or something, or Christmas is really a pagan festival." This was the way that the Puritans thought of it, but actually there is a good theological reason for this. If you start from the proposition that Jesus is the incarnation of God, and that the incarnation occurred not by the degradation of divinity or the descent of the divinity into humanity, but by the lifting up of the humanity into the divinity, then you have a theological position in which the whole purpose of the Christian life is the lifting up of the earth and the human and humans living in the earth into the divine. At the end of the service of lessons and carols at Kings College, Cambridge—which is now transmitted live and I always try to listen to it because that's the one thing I miss about England: those wonderful services in the cathedrals and chapels; the Church of England may not be too good on doctrine but it's wonderful on music—so at the end of that, the Dean, who turns out to be a Scots, to my great surprise, talks about people sharing in the divine life. If I were to give an extended talk on Christianity or Buddhism or what Christianity is really about, this is a point I would emphasize, because it is quite foundational to the Christian religion and is missed by so many Christians. I've hardly ever heard about this in the Western Church. In the Eastern Church and Russian Church, there were sermons on this, but not so much in the Western Church. The idea, as St. Athanasius says, is that "God became a human so that humans might become divine." And in the Eastern tradition, the end of the Christian life is called "divinization." In the Western Church, it's called "sanctification," which is supposed to be the same thing but doesn't have the same hit with it. So it is perfectly in line with this that already occurring festivals of the earth, such as Christmas, and Easter—the word Easter, of course, is an ancient Anglo-Saxon word meaning "dawn" or "springtime", "rebirth"—that it would be taken up into the Christian tradition. It is also quite

natural that someone like Our Lady of Guadalupe, who'd been an Aztec princess, would have been taken up into the Christian tradition. So that was just an extended footnote so that you see it wasn't just an accident that the Church chose this since it didn't know when the time was.

So then what happens in our country, in the USA? Well, Christmas was being celebrated with a reduced form of the saturnalia in England until the Puritans took over. When I did my history in high school in England, I learned that the Puritans were nasty people and the Royalists were nice people. We let off fireworks on the 5th of November to celebrate the defeat of the nasty people, the Puritans. I then came to the US and I realized that over here people are told the Puritans are the nice people and the Royalists are the nasty people and we set off fireworks on the 4th of July to celebrate the defeat of the Royalists. Okay, I can handle it either way. The thing was that when they got rid of the king and the Puritans took over, the Puritans had a theological proposition derived from John Calvin, which was an attempt to purify the Christian church of what it thought were the abuses of previous ages, and it did not find it easy to go along with this principle of divinization. It made a separation between the body and the mind, flesh and spirit, and it emphasized the spirit or soul and tried to put down the flesh as evil. I won't go into remarks about what I think was going on, but it really was the heart of the reformation of the Church in the West in the 16th century. The Eastern Church had never been affected by this because it looks at the Western Church and thinks, "What are you doing? The 16th century was trying to get rid of the images. We went through all that in the 6th century in the East, and we think it helped. We're going to have images, so why are you doing all this stuff?" So the Eastern Christians often think Western Christians are really very strange.

But the heart of the reformation of the Christian Church in the West was the controversy over whether or not the flesh and the earth are still being divinized and taken up into God or whether that only happened once in Jesus. This is a gross oversimplification of the Reformation. I studied it in my undergraduate career for two years, but I think it gets to the point that the extreme Protestants wanted to say that the incarnation happened only once in Jesus, and then the sacramental structure of the church had to go, and anything that smacked of the earth or the flesh or of paganism had to go also. So when the Puritans took over England, they abolished all festivals including Christmas, and the English didn't like this. They said, "We either want the king back or Christmas back or something; this is not working." And the great thing is they got both, and the Puritans were told that if they wanted to leave for the plantations in the New World, they would be welcome to go, and that's where they went. Of course, they weren't the only people to come over here. In Episcopalian and Roman Catholic parts of the country, as settled by the Episcopalians in Williamsburg and then Spanish and Mexicans in other parts, Christmas was celebrated in the old way. But in New England, no Christmas. And if you had the temerity to celebrate, you were subject to fine of five shillings. I don't know how that would work today, but I believe five

shillings back then was a lot, so you didn't want to be fined that. So that was that: Christmas was forbidden.

But people are people everywhere, and even in America they said, "The Puritan thing is okay for a bit, but we want some fun; we just can't go on with this." So the Puritan influence began to wane, and then they said, "Now, if we're Protestant, how are we going to celebrate Christmas?" So

**Now can we stand at the doors of the temple of the dharma, think of the treasure of the dharma, and do we stand in front of it like those people on the TV commercial for Mervyn's? ...They're standing in front of the door saying, "Open, open, open!" And then finally it opens. Do we have that intensity when we want to hear the teaching of the dharma, something new that would really help us, not something that will be nice for a bit, but something that will get to the roots of why we are not entirely happy, not as happy as we should be, something that will cut the root of suffering? Are we at least as urgent as those people who were trampling over other people to get an iPod or saying "Open, open, open," so they can get a new thing from Mervyn's?**

they looked to the Catholics, and the Protestants and they took over some things from them, and then they had services which were somewhat like they were having, and then some of the everyday stuff was brought back too, with the eating and the feasting and so forth. But by this time, things had become a bit Victorian, and they were a bit nervous about actually enjoying themselves, but then they thought, "Maybe it's okay for the children." So Christmas became a children's feast, and you could give gifts to children, and you could look after them, and so forth, and there was a time where children were idealized: children were innocent, and they came from God, and they were quite different from ordinary people. Then I think it was actually Macy's that decided that, "People are giving gifts to each other. Supposing we get them to buy stuff, wouldn't that be good?" I keep forgetting who said, "The business of America is business." Anyway, whoever said it was extremely insightful because it is. It's one way we're distinguished from other cultures, I think. And so Christmas became a time of buying things, and St. Nicholas and St. Klaas were adapted and became Santa Claus. And then it became a festival of abundance for everybody. But it still had a Christian kind of feeling. So then the Jews thought, "Let's see, the Christians are having so much fun. Do we have anything?" So some of the Jews went looking around in the attic where they had these things left over from Auntie Sadie and Uncle Moshe, and they said, "Oh, look, here's Hanukah! This is about the continuing of life in the middle of winter. This will be great." It wasn't that Hanukah hadn't been celebrated, but it wasn't very important. It was brought into importance, and made a part of this. So then we became embarrassed about saying Christmas because there was Hanukah, so we said, "Happy Holidays." That's how we got where we are, that we say "Happy Holidays." And then the idea that you put Christ back into Christmas because that is the real meaning of it—I don't think the people who are saying that are doing their history too well.

Having seen that, then I think we can say that the feast is

really a feast of the winter solstice, which we can even feel in San Francisco, where the weather never really gets to be bad. I mean, people complain here when it's 45 degrees and raining. When I lived in Wisconsin, if it was above zero, you rejoiced. "Oh wow, it's above zero! Let's take all our clothes off, it's so warm!" But we can still feel that. So I suggest that the real meaning of Christmas is this winter solstice, and I'd

say it has three elements—that of light, and of abundance and of wake-up of the beginning of the year. I say "light, abundance and wake up," because that spells LAW, so you can take it away with you so you can remember what I was talking about. The light we see in the Christmas lights and the yule log and all that kind of thing—I'm putting out these things as ways to help us to be mindful of the teaching of Buddha. So light is quite important in Buddhist tradition; it's spoken of all the time in all the traditions. There's one passage in the Pali sutras where all the deities are hanging around having a picnic or something, and they see this light coming on the horizon, and it's an immense light, and they said, "Who is this deity? It seems like it's maybe more powerful than we are. Who is this? We've never seen so much light." And of course it's the Buddha, and he comes to teach them the dharma. And the Buddha is frequently pictured as having a halo or an aureole, which I interpret as being a way of representing the shining mind, the pure mind of the Buddha. In the Pali tradition, it's called Shining Mind; then it's found in the Dzochon tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, where it's called the Mind of Clear Light, and then in the Yogachara tradition of Mahayana, it's called the Wisdom of the Great Mirror, which simply reflects the way things are rather than distorting by projecting something onto reality which isn't actually there. And when a person has attained or has even begun to attain to the knowledge that they have the light of the Buddha within them, it begins to shine out—not physically, but you can tell the difference if you see someone like the Dali Lama. He appears to shine, not so much on the TV, but you must see it in person, I think. You can feel that there is a light. This is in other traditions too—the feeling that a person of some spiritual attainment appears to shed light, which is not a physical light but is painted as that. When Moses came down, his face was so shining that he had to cover it over and so forth. So we can look into ourselves and find the source of that. So when we see the Christmas lights, we can say, "That reminds me of the light of my own Buddha mind."

Then for abundance and the giving of gifts and so forth, we see shopping, and we see shopping getting into a frenzy and people giving gifts to everybody, and then they're very upset if they haven't given the gifts to the people that they should have given, and then the people who get the gifts are upset because it wasn't the gift they wanted, and they have to go the next day to exchange it at the store and so forth, and it's supposed to be really, really good. I suppose you saw the clip on the news of people storming the doors of Wal-Mart, rushing in and trampling over people. Some woman lost her wig. I think it was a woman; if it had been a drag queen, there would have been something to pay for losing the wig. And they're rushing in to get this physical thing, and we're so stuck on physical things now. We think physical things can give us happiness. And the trick is, they can. If I buy a new car or a new iPod or a new something or another, it will give me wonderful happiness, for a time, and after a short or longer time, it's "Oh, no, it's gone." Now can we stand at the doors of the temple of the dharma, think of the treasure of the dharma, and do we stand in front of it like those people on the TV commercial for Mervyn's? I love TV commercials; I hate TV, but I love the commercials because they say so much about our true values. They're standing in front of the door saying, "Open, open, open!" And then finally it opens. Do we have that intensity when we want to hear the teaching of the dhar-

**A beginner's mind is *Sho Shin*. *Shin* is translated as mind, but it's really the heart and the mind, ... and *sho* is the word "to begin." It literally means the first cutting of some cloth. You have some cloth, and you want to make something out of it, and before you make anything out of it you have this infinite potential. And then as soon as you cut, you've made an incision and the options are restricted. The event horizon has collapsed. But just before you cut, you have this infinite potential. So that's the mind-and-heart in the moment of infinite potential. What will happen next could be almost anything, and that brightness, that liveliness of the mind-and-heart, is what is being talked about in the beginner's mind, *Sho Shin*.**

ma, something new that would really help us, not something that will be nice for a bit, but something that will get to the roots of why we are not entirely happy, not as happy as we should be, something that will cut the root of suffering? Are we at least as urgent as those people who were trampling over other people to get an iPod or saying "Open, open, open," so they can get a new thing from Mervyn's?

And then finally, wake up. I put it as "Wake up," because this was actually something that was said by Dogen Zenji. It relates to Christmas as the time of the new year because the winter solstice was, and in some cultures I think still is, the time of the new year. It makes sense to say that the new year begins when the sun becomes stronger again. It's the newness of the new year. It's also a part of the Christian tradition that I think anybody can relate to whether they're Christian or not, the birth of a new baby. We always say "new baby," don't we, as if there were old babies. There actually was. According to the Chinese tradition, Lao-tze was in his mother's womb for

seventy years before he was born, and was an old baby. That was a long-suffering mother. That's why he was called Lao-tze, or old boy. Anyhow, a new baby we can all relate to the freshness—as long as it's a healthy baby, of course—the freshness and the amazement that this baby has. "What's all this stuff? Where am I? What's going on? What's happening?" We can see that here's the new beginning, the potential, and it should remind us of the beginner's mind. Suzuki Roshi, who founded the Zen Center in San Francisco, only wrote one book, and it was a small book, but it was a wonderful book. It's all he needed to write, and he called it *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. A beginner's mind is *Sho Shin*. *Shin* is translated as mind, but it's really the heart and the mind, and it's suggested that we should always translate that as "mind and heart" or "heart and mind" because the character *shin* in Chinese and Japanese means both the thinking and the feeling. We tend to separate head from heart. East Asian cultures have a problem with that. They don't quite understand what that really means. So the mind and heart, the whole of our thinking/feeling, and *sho* is the word "to begin." It literally means the first cutting of some cloth. That means here you have some cloth, and you want to make something out of it, and before you make anything out of it you have this infinite potential. And then as soon as you cut, you've made an incision and the options are restricted. The event horizon has collapsed. But

just before you cut, you have this infinite potential. So that's the mind-and-heart in the moment of infinite potential. What will happen next could be almost anything, and that brightness, that liveliness of the mind and heart, is what is being talked about in the beginner's mind, *Sho Shin*.

And what are we waking up to but to the Buddha nature in all of us. As Chi Sing never tired of reminding us over the Fall Retreat, we are all Buddhas. When we see it this way, we connect to the sangha. So what I've tried to do is connect light as a way of reminding us of the Buddha, the abundance as a way of reminding us of the dharma, and the wake-up, as Dogen would say, as a way of reminding us of the sangha. Just one more thing on the wake-up thing, Zen Master Dogen would disturb the sepulchral silence of the zendo occasionally with the shout, "Wake up!" And in fact, that is the whole of the Buddhist tradition. I have a coffee mug with "Wake Up!" on the side, which reminds me every time I have coffee of what the dharma's all about. ■

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## **Goodbye Hamilton Center, Hello to Larkin Street Youth Center**

In what signifies the end of an era, GBF has ceased its volunteer effort with the Hamilton Family Center, a shelter for homeless families. Every second Saturday of the month for the past ten years, a team of GBF volunteers would plan the menus, buy the food, prepare the meals in the shelter kitchen and serve them to the residents. In spite of all the various culinary mishaps and kitchen crises, we have always managed to pull everything together in the last moments and come up with great, "comfort food" meals. It's been wonderful fun and a truly rewarding experience for all of us, and over the years we've formed warm and friendly relationships with the staff and residents there. We were all saddened when we learned that the shelter was shutting down and our ties with the Hamilton Family Center would have to end.

However, the volunteer effort lives on in another form: GBF is now involved in a similar project with the Larkin Street Youth Center. For many years the Larkin Street Center has offered a safe environment for homeless and runaway youth, providing them with living quarters, meals, health care, counseling and a secure and loving haven from life on the streets. When GBF contacted the center and offered to continue our monthly dinners with the residents there, the staff embraced the project enthusiastically. Now, every third Saturday of the month, GBFers gather and prepare meals for the young men and women living at the center. We have every reason to believe that this will be as rewarding an experience for us as our times were with the Hamilton Family Center.

For further information regarding this effort, you can contact Clint Seiter at (415) 386-3088.

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## **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.

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## **Prisoners Urgently Need Buddhist Books**

The most frequent request from gay Buddhist prisoners, other than for pen pals, is for books. In many prisons, they are circulated among small sitting groups and are used in daily and group practice. All books are welcome, particularly those suitable for beginners. If you have any available, please call Don Weipert at (510) 540-0307, or email him at GDWiep@aol.com. Don will arrange to collect them and get them to prisoners.

# Calendar

## 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.

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**December 3 Bill Weber**

Bill Weber is a senior Vipassana practitioner and a graduate from Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leader program. He teaches beginning meditation classes and daylongs. He has studied for the past ten years with Gil Fronsdal and Eugene Cash, among others, and has extensive retreat practice. He is also a documentary filmmaker and video editor whose recent work includes co-directing and editing *The Cockettes* and editing the recent History Channel documentary *Into the Fire*.

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**December 10 Donald Rothberg**

Donald Rothberg has practiced Insight Meditation since 1976 and has written and taught widely on socially engaged Buddhism and transpersonal studies. He is on the faculty of the Saybrook Graduate School, where he has developed a program in Socially Engaged Spirituality. He has been an organizer, educator, and board member for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF), particularly working as a mentor for its Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE), since its inception in 1995. He is also a meditation teacher, working with two small groups in the East Bay, and is helping to develop a new dharma center in the East Bay.

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**December 17 Diana Elrod**

Diana Elrod, an active member of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), is a PhD candidate in Buddhist Studies at the California College of Integral Studies. She will speak about the Nichiren tradition.

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**December 24 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 the widely praised *Vision of Buddhism: The Space Under the Tree*.

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**December 31 Open Discussion**

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**January 7 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, and the author of *The Life and Letters of Tofu Roshi*, and editor/author of *Not Turning Away, The Practice of Engaged Buddhism*.

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**January 14 Teng How Bae and Steve Carson**

Teng How Bae was born under Buddhism. He was born in China but grew up in Thailand, so he has been influenced by Chinese and Thai traditions of practice, as Buddhism is a part of Chinese and Thai culture. Buddhism is a philosophy of life.

After his first quarter century in the great midwest of upstate New York, Steve Carson's life is the Tale of Three Cities. At 25, he packed up and moved to New York to study at Union Theological Seminary. After that, he served for five years as pastor of MCC Boston. In 1990, he moved to San Francisco, where he currently works as a sixth grade teacher. As post-New Yorker, post-Christian, post-pastor, post-50, he is a great believer in "seasons of life."

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**January 21 Larry Yang**

Larry Yang is a Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leader and leads meditation retreats tailored for men, people of color, the LGBTQ communities, and people in recovery from addiction. He co-leads a meditation group for the LGBTQ community in San Francisco and is a psychotherapist and a consultant in cultural competency.

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**January 28 Harv Whitten, Don Wiepert and others in a panel discussing the experience of aging.**

At 5, Harv Whitten had a sandbox satori but quickly learned to shut up and role play. The U.S. Army took him to Buddhism in Japan and Korea as a medic. Then he was a Ram Dass groupie, etc., from the early 60's. Tears, fun, fear, anger, laughter, pain, etc. Nothing happened. Grace! Harv found GBF 12 years ago. Grace!

Don Wiepert is well aware of illness and death and particularly of old age, as he is in near sight of 80. Old age for him is a series of little insults. He is a Dharma student of Victoria Austin and is the retiring (but not shy) coordinator of GBF's prisoner outreach program.

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## How to Reach Us

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For general questions about GBF write 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:  
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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