



# Gay Buddhist Fellowship

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2010 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.

## *“Our Hearts Open in the Midst of This”: Reflections on Service*

BY BILL WEBER

**Bill Weber is a senior Vipassana practitioner and a graduate from Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leaders program. He teaches beginning meditation classes and daylongs. He has studied for the past ten years with Eugene Cash, among others, and has fifteen years of extensive retreat practice. He is also a documentary filmmaker and video editor.**

**G**reetings, everybody. I'd like to begin with just a little reflection on the sitting practice. We've all been sitting in silence for the last 30 minutes, and it's a bold and brave and very telling thing that we do. I'm sure that we all have different practices: sitting in silence, maybe a mantra, maybe following the breath. No matter what you do, I'm sure there's a fair amount of spacing out, a number of things that go on. No matter what happens, I think there's a certain level of awareness that arises when we sit in silence for a while. It's a fairly unusual thing that's done, especially in our culture. Generally we're very active. But part of the awareness that comes up, no matter what our practice, is awareness of the body. At some point there's an ache, there's a level of tiredness, there's a desire to move. I can almost guarantee that everyone had some awareness of the body in the last thirty minutes. What does the body feel like at this particular moment? And probably also fairly common is an awareness that came up about emotional states. Am I anxious? Am I tired? Am I afraid of something? Am I angry about something that happened? Generally there's some awareness around our emotional state which we don't often sit back and pay attention to in quite this level of silence and quiet.

I've had the opportunity to teach about six or seven beginning meditation classes. One thing that very often comes up for people that are just starting to sit in meditation and silence is the self-judgment that goes on: "I don't know how to sit. I don't know what I'm doing. I wish I could sit better." There's some level of self-awareness that can be very judgmental that often comes as we just sit quietly for a while. I bring this up now because I think these are very useful tools: the ability to pay attention, the ability to see this and let this guide us as to how we function in the world. Which brings me into service.

When I was called a number of months ago and asked if I wanted to speak, it was suggested that I might speak about a group I work with through GBF that does service work, one of the service branches of GBF, of which there are actually quite a few. I work with the meal program at this place run by Larkin Street Youth Services. They have a residence hall for twelve young adults with HIV. And these kids have mainly been homeless or foster kids, or kids that have nowhere to go. A lot of them have full blown AIDS. I go down there, and the kids are coming and going out of the hospital. The residence hall is actually very well run, but it's in a very bad neighborhood.

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They have a cook that comes in during the week. On the weekends nobody comes in to cook, so it's just up to staff and volunteers to cook for them. And here comes Bill, who's actually one of the GBF members that comes to help cook over there. So this whole organization is an offshoot of something that Clint Seiter started at GBF eleven years ago, delivering meals to people in a homeless facility, and then it branched into Larkin Street a few years ago. The first place where GBF started to do this was a residence hall for kids, and it was more of a temporary residence hall for youth. Larkin Street called GBF and said, "We have another place where we would like to do a second program." And Clint called me and said, "Would you mind heading this up?" And I said, "Sure."

They don't have people that really cook for them much on the weekends, so there's that particular need right there. I saw even a greater need, and part of it is that when people go in and cook for these kids, I wanted to make sure that they got meals that had a certain level of nourishment about them and a certain amount of care put into them, and also just to raise the bar as to what kind of food they get. Because this is a place that deals a lot with frozen fish sticks and oven baked French fries and stuff like that. And again, not to demean the work that goes on at Larkin Street, because I think it's really wonderful, but I wanted to go in with a few people and really make lovingly cooked meals with healthy food and some level of sophistication about them.

We've been doing this for a little over a year now. Another need I saw was that those kids are pretty much all gay. I wanted them to have the experience of hanging out with middle aged gay men who come from all different walks of life, and whose only intention of being there is to be kind and to be nourishing to these kids. They have social workers and things like that, but we're not really there to help them solve their problems so much, just to cook them a nice meal. It's a different kind of role modeling I saw, a potential for them in this place that seemed to me to be pretty healthy. So it's this active service that's very generously supported by GBF. I'm

**A number of the disciples, the story goes, went up to the Buddha and said, "Great one, how can we serve you?" And his response was, "If you'd like to serve me, serve the sick."**

given a monthly stipend to go out and buy good food and go over there and cook it and get a wonderful group of people to help me cook it. And it's a bit of a sangha for us too, the volunteers who do this work.

Last year I hit a pretty dark period in my practice. I mean a period of my practice which was a dark period in my life, and I was just overwhelmed by the world, and I think I also hit a point in my own personal practice where—and I'm told this is somewhat common—after 15 years of a fairly serious Buddha connection, it didn't resonate with me in quite the same way. I didn't want to hear dharma talks, and I didn't particularly want to sit. I'd read dharma books and they'd seem sort of useless and silly to me. The one thing that resonated with me in a very deep way was the desire to go out and be of service to others, to be of use. That was the one part of my practice that stayed, and it stayed in a fairly substantial way. I now don't mind hearing dharma talks again, and I now like reading the dharma again. That's all passed, and the service is still there too.

A story is told about the time of Buddha. As you can imagine, the Buddha had many devoted followers. You're hanging out with the Buddha, and you would want to hang out with him, I would think, and to serve him. A number of the disciples, the story goes, went up to the Buddha and said, "Great one, how can we serve you?" And his response was, "If you'd like to serve me, serve the sick." Simple enough. Very direct, very humble. But as with almost all the teaching that I've read about the dharma there are many layers, and on the surface it does sound humble. It also sounds like, "There's suffering in the world, so go out and deal with it and help alleviate some of it."

So there's a very practical and direct sort of way we can look at that. But in serving the sick and serving those in need, I think there are always other levels that can lead to our own sense of happiness, contentment, enlightenment, freedom, understanding, wisdom compassion—all of this is contained in this act of serving people in need. It's a very leveled, layered response to how we can serve the Buddha: to serve the sick.

So I ask everybody in the room now to take a moment and just reflect about when it is that you feel most contented. When do you feel like life is good, that you're "on," that there's a certain level of happiness that you have? When is it really rich for you?

This is where the whole practice that we do in silence, of paying attention, can really come into play and help out. Because usually when we are deeply contented or happy there's a certain feeling in the body. There's a certain thing that we notice, a certain way we feel physically. It can be warmth; it can be expanded, like a vibration, a tingle, an energy, a vitality. It's very physical, and it can be felt. Our body tells us when we're really connected and when it is that we really feel most happy and alive. I think it's often when there is a connection with something outside of ourselves. For a lot of us it can be when we're in communication with a friend or a family member or a loved one. It can be when we're walking in nature and we feel like this is part of us, these trees, this creek, this grass. It's not

just so much this small separate sense of self, but this connection with something much bigger.

So what do we do to connect with that? What do we do to foster our own happiness, our own contentment? When we look at it and when we feel it in a physical sense, we realize there's some sense of connection. How do we connect? What do we do to go out there to connect and foster this?

My partner and I live on a block in a wonderful neighborhood in the Castro, and there's an older gay couple that live on the corner who have been there since the late 60s. And these are really wonderful gay men. One of them went into a pretty big health decline last year. He used to garden a lot, and he has a couple of trees out on the street. And all the tree boxes are always filled with flowers every year. I've been in the neighborhood for twenty years, and it's always been there for twenty years. But now he's in such bad health that he doesn't come outside much, so he hadn't been planting flower boxes. And then one day I noticed that there were flowers out there. Unbe-

knownst to me at the time, my boyfriend had gone to the store and bought some flowers and planted his flower boxes. It was just a wonderful way of serving this wonderful man who lives on this corner.

And, again, even in telling this story, I realize my own physical sense of connection, of warmth, of whatever, just really increases, and maybe even for you in here, hearing it, just this act of serving, what it can do for us physically. What a wonderful thing to do, to make this guy on the corner feel better, and to make the block look better, and to continue this tradition. All of this from this act of very simple service.

Part of the power of this act of service is to step out of what I'd like to call our personal dramas. And that's another reason why I was talking in the beginning about what happens when we sit here in silence. We realize our personal dramas can go on and on in our heads sometimes, whatever our dramas may happen to be at the time: I'm having a terrible time at work; I'm having a terrible time with my partner; I'm having a terrible time with my family; I'm not getting enough respect. Our personal dramas just go on and on and on, and I don't mean to belittle them because in many ways, a lot of us are dealing with some pretty heavy stuff. Maybe all of us are dealing with very challenging stuff from time to time. But if we just wallow in that all the time it gets to be overwhelming and not particularly helpful. I see service as almost an antidote to help get us out of our dramas that just go on in our head all the time.

It can be quite serious. A few months ago, I rented this documentary on Allen Ginsberg. At the end of it, there was a DVD interview with Patti Smith. Most of you know who Patti Smith is, sort of a punk goddess from the 70s. She became a grand poetess. She's just a wonderful poet, performer, person, musician. She left at the height of her career and moved to Detroit, and in one month her husband died and her brother died, the two people she was closest to, and she said she went into a funk that was really deep and really severe. And she gets a phone call from Allen Ginsberg, and Ginsberg says, "I'm really sorry to hear what you're going through. I really feel for you. But I think one of the best things that you could do right now is go out and be of service. I'm doing a benefit concert. Why don't you come and perform with me?" And Patti, who hadn't performed in years, said okay and went out and did this benefit concert with Allen Ginsberg.

What I find fascinating is that this was Allen Ginsberg's medicine or suggestion or offer of help to Patti: "You're really dealing with some serious stuff. Get out and serve." I like that. Service can also help us keep things in perspective, which can also help us with our personal dramas and maybe help us restore some sense of balance sometimes.

Before I started editing longer films and documentaries, I spent years editing TV commercials, and it's a high stress environment. People take this stuff very seriously. Stupid things like the copyright, the titling, the product placement, or the color—it goes on and on. It's total neurosis around this process of making a TV commercial. And I took it seriously. I was way deep into it too. In 1993, when I was pretty much beginning my connection with the dharma, I signed up with this Zen hospice project over at the Zen Center, which is still going on. And that was back when they had a facility where GBF actually used to meet over on Page Street, at this house where they housed four people with AIDS. They had a volunteer program, and one Thursday a month for three years, I'd go over there to cook, clean, change diapers, hold hands; occasionally, you'd

wash bodies. And at the time I was always amazed at how that balanced me. I'd come from work, doing these TV commercials, being totally frazzled, and then go deal with some explosive diarrhea and leave feeling like, "I'm in balance; I have things in better perspective now. The lower third on that commercial was not such a fucking big deal." And I also had a real sense of all these different things—happiness that I was alive, happiness that I was of use. There's a high that comes out of it. You know, I used to say that if people were really selfish they'd be involved in service because there's a really nice return from it.

I know my teacher, Eugene Cash, has been here a couple of times, and one of the things he likes to talk about a lot is appropriate response. Eugene goes back to Dōgen, a thirteenth century Zen teacher, who asked, "What's the purpose of a life of practice?" And it was really to develop a practice of an appropriate response. How do we respond to the situations we encounter, that arise for us? How do we respond appropriately? It's a beautiful thing to look at and to consider. I was cleaning the garage with my partner yesterday morning, and we got into an argument. I even knew at the time that I wasn't responding appropriately. I was responding out of anger. Right in the middle of this, I thought, "Well, this isn't right," and then I pulled away for a while, and I just sat back and thought, "How do I respond appropriately to this now?" There's tension in my body, and there's anger in the room. What's the appropriate response? It's a great place to sit with our practice and allow some awareness to be there.

To me service is like a perfect appropriate response to so many things. I mentioned that last year I got into a pretty dark place, and with the world the way it is, it just seems to me that you almost have to be blind not to let it affect you. Without going into a litany, I think there are a lot of things that are very scary—between the climate and the population and the genocide and the starvation and the human rights. I mean it goes on and on. How do we respond appropriately to that? Ram Das was really keen on—and probably still is, I'm sure—service work. It's been a passion of his, and a real point of practice. He wrote a book called *Compassion in Action* in which compassion in action really equates to service, because that is compassion in action for Ram Das: "When we look at the vast sadness and suffering in the world we often experience intense pain in our hearts. The suffering so often seems cruel, unnecessary and unjustified, reflecting a heartless universe. The human greed and fear that are causing much of the suffering seems out of control. But when our hearts open in the midst of this we want to help. This is the experience of compassion."

I love that: "Our hearts open in the midst of this." And we all know this to be true. That's why it's so painful because our hearts open in the midst of it. But the heart opening is a beautiful thing and something we can act on and use as a call to action, this opening of our heart, and that is the experience of compassion. The appropriate response in this is acts of compassion to this world that we live in.

Where do we wallow? It's sort of like that old commercial with Madge and Palmolive liquid, "What are you soaking in now?" Are we soaking in our own personal dramas and our own suffering, or in the scariness of the world, or are we going to shift that around a bit in our own acts of kindness and selflessness?

A few months ago I saw this article in *The New York Times*. I love reading *The Times*, but in many ways it confirms all my darkest atti-

tudes about the planet—like here is proof, every day, more genocide, more lies. But every so often you come across an article that opens your heart and often times makes me cry and connect in a different way. And this was an article about the killing of all the students at Virginia Tech a little over a year ago.

The title of the article was “At Virginia Tech a Daughter’s Memory Spurs Call to Serve”:

After their daughter, Austin, was killed in the Virginia Tech shootings last year, Bryan Cloyd and his wife, Renée, asked that donations in her honor be sent to a program that repairs dilapidated houses in the poorest parts of Appalachia. To the Cloyds’ surprise, the program received nearly \$70,000 in gifts almost immediately.

“We realized there was no better therapy than doing more of that,” said Cloyd, an accounting professor at Virginia Tech, who began organizing trips for students to work in the hollows of Virginia.

But for the Cloyds, the trips were not just an attempt to heal. They were also a chance to redefine the memory of their daughter, a process that set an example for a university still struggling to move forward as the first anniversary of the worst campus massacre in American history approached on Wednesday.

“For us, this has become a way to remember these students, many of whom were very involved in activism and service,” Cloyd said. “They should be known for how they lived rather than how they died.” This year, the Cloyds have ushered about 150 Virginia Tech students and faculty members on five weekend house-repair trips, and they plan to continue running regular trips from now on.

In the classroom, Professor Cloyd, 47, has shifted beyond his typical focus on taxes and begun offering an honors class titled “Inventing the Future Through Our ‘Ut Prosim’ Tradition,” a reference to the university’s motto, “that I may serve.” Students in the class spend one weekend working with the house-repair project and the rest of the semester developing proposals for other types of service.

“What they have gone through, and now they have started all this,” she said, wiping her eyes. “It just makes me strong.”

For the Cloyds, repairing the homes of others was a way to restore their sense of humanity, they said.

I love that story. And I love the whole concept of restoring our sense of humanity, and I love the fact that this woman, whose house was repaired, who’s gone through so much herself, had also this great compassion for what the Cloyds went through. And part of what we see when we do service work is that we connect with the suffering that we all go through; we get outside of our own pain and see that we’re all in this together.

I’m working on two different documentaries. They both deal a lot with service work in different ways. One of them is on the effort to eliminate polio, which has been going on for twenty years. And there are some amazing statistics about this. Polio has been close to being eradicated, but it’s not. It’s still out there. And twenty million people have been working on this effort for the last twenty years, and most of them are volunteers. So that means fifteen million, eighteen million people out there trying to eradicate a disease so that kids don’t become crippled adults. This is a huge volunteer effort. The film was actually the brainchild of Larry Brilliant, this old hippie who was a friend of Ram Das and took Ram Das to India. Larry Brilliant and Ram Das started this organization called Seva, in 1978, I think. And since Seva was started they’ve raised sixteen million dollars that’s helped two million blind people in India see again. These two middle-aged hippies, sitting around saying, “You know, we can do something.” And they started an organization and now two million people that were blind are no longer blind.

The other film is on caregivers for people with Alzheimer’s. It’s really fascinating. I don’t get to go out and meet the people. I get footage that’s brought into me, and I get to sit around my office and look at these people whose lives are pretty much devoted to caring for people with Alzheimer’s. How do we care for the sick and the old in this country? It’s amazing how many people are out there with Alzheimer’s. Some of these caregivers we’re following in these films go to these facilities, and they say, “Oh, it’s so nice for you to come visit

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In Jonesville, the Cloyds’ efforts brought 69-year-old Louella Moore to tears.

“Honestly, I don’t know how to thank these people,” she said, shaking her head as she peered shyly through her window, watching Cloyd and his students dig holes for corner posts that would soon support her new front porch.

A year ago, Moore said, her house seemed to be caving in around her. The water heater broke, then part of the roof and the foundation started to collapse. Moore said she had little money to do anything about it. Her life, too, seemed to be closing in, she said, as a daughter died of a heart attack, a brother-in-law died of a brain tumor, and her husband died of unknown causes, all in about three years.

But Moore stopped crying when asked about the Cloyds.

your loved ones because most people here don’t have any visitors.”

The humanity that comes out—reclaiming our own humanity. There’s one man, probably in his early 70s, who has the sweetest face. He had a wife who had Alzheimer’s for eleven years. And he saw his wife go from being a very vital person into being this very overweight vegetable that had no response to much of anything after a while. He spent eleven years caring for her, and then when she died, he now goes and volunteers at this Alzheimer’s facility. And you can see the vitality and joy that comes up within him from doing this. I’m sort of amazed. It’s like, “My God, after you’ve gone through this for so long, why would you want to continue?” And again I come back to the paying attention that we do. The paying attention just happens at some point. What really makes us feel good? What really makes us feel connected? What really makes us have a sense of vitality and connection?

We all do service work, and we all do a lot of service work that I don't even think we consider service work. I know a lot of you in this room, and I know the level of friendship that a lot of you are able to offer your friends. That's a huge service: the ability to be there for somebody, the ability to care, the ability to be an ear, to be a witness, to help somebody through health issues. This is all service work that we all do. The reason that I'm bringing this up now is that I think it's really important that we take some comfort and some joy in our good work. It comes back to, "What are we soaking in now?" We all do really good stuff. If we soak in that for a while, it's very healthy and healing. We're good friends. I think a lot of us are really good family members. We take part in our communities. We practice acts of kindness, maybe occasionally. This is a type of service. Sitting here in silence and paying attention to ourselves, with maybe a bit of a desire to become more peaceful, more loving, more compassionate people. That's an act of service, that's a huge act of service

Jack Kornfeld tells a story about practicing in Cambodia in the middle of the 70s, in the middle of the war. At times he wondered, "Is what we're doing really of service?" And the feedback they got from the Cambodians and the Vietnamese and even the American soldiers that were around was twofold. The people that actually came there said, "Oh my God, we're finally in a place of some sanity in the midst of all this insanity." It's a huge act of service. And even the others said, "Even just knowing that you're there practicing in the middle of all this brings us some sanity in the midst of all this." So sitting is an act of service on some level. We all are generous sometimes. GBF is generous to support this program that we do for the Larkin Street Youth kids. Generosity is an act of service. And another one of my favorite teachers, Gil Fronsdal, down in Red-

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wood City, told me a long time ago, "You know, if you're going to practice anything, practice generosity, and you can get full enlightenment. You can go the full way. Generosity. That's it." And that's an act of service.

A couple of years ago I spoke at the Urban Dharma group, and I talked about service. I don't know if you're familiar with the Urban Dharma group, but it's a Dharma Punx group that meets over by the park Friday nights. I have my own preconceptions about people that are heavily tattooed and pierced. I sort of associate them with the Johnny Rottens of my younger years. I mean, a "fuck you" to everything. And that's just not true. When I was talking to them about service, I asked, "What kind of service do some you do?" And this one heavily tattooed and pierced woman said, "Once a month I go and I do hair at a homeless woman's shelter. I go and I do hairdos." And that's beautiful. Another woman did free tattoos on people's bodies that had suffered a great loss. She would put the tattoo of the loss on their body as an act of service. And I bring that up again to say, "Not only should we take delight in the service that we do, but I think that it would be really useful to say, 'What else can we do?'"

There's a lot of need; there's plenty to be done. So I add the suggestion that maybe all of us can consider maybe volunteering more.

There are hundreds of organizations, hundreds of places to give. Or you could even do what Ram Das and Larry Brilliant did, start your own. The one thing to be careful of around this is not to layer self-judgment, "I'm not doing enough. I should be doing more." Again, take delight in what you do, and then maybe look for something else. But don't let this be another way to beat yourself up. You've got plenty of that already.

In closing, I'd like to mention that I think there's a particular relevance to this act of service for us as gay people. As gay people we don't historically and traditionally become part of a family unit in the sense that we don't generally raise kids. That's changing some, thankfully. But I think that's one way people greatly give service, by raising kids. You really step outside yourself; you step outside of your personal dramas to some degree. The culture that we live in can be really "me" oriented and image oriented. As gay men we can certainly fall prey to that sometimes, I know that I sure do. So the act of serving, the act of giving outside of ourselves, with a larger family, can all be really beneficial for us. I also think that we have something unique to offer: a creativity, a sensitivity that is maybe a little bit more peculiar to gay and lesbian people, that can really be beautiful to offer other communities.

I've taken part in a number of the AIDS life cycle events. It's amazing to be in. One of my favorite things about it, and why I think it's such a powerful event, is that the whole thing is basically run on service. There are 600 people who volunteer a week of their time just to serve the riders: bike techs, cooks, people carrying your gear, doctors, nurses, massage therapists. All they do is serve you all week. To me as a rider, all I do is I get up in the morning, and there's someone serving me breakfast, there's someone fixing my bike, there's someone serving me a snack. It's just

service. And to experience a world like that is pretty incredible.

One more reflection on service: I think about everyone here is old enough to remember what San Francisco was like in the 80s or 90s when hell was upon us. And how did we respond? How did we respond appropriately when people were dying right and left? And what happened out of that was probably the greatest sense of community that I've experienced, certainly as a gay man. All these organizations arose, and many of them are still around, to offer care, to offer financial support. I mean, they even had organizations to take care of your pets. It was really incredible, this huge outpouring of service in direct response to what we all were facing.

In closing, I'd like to quote again from Ram Das: "Compassion in action is paradoxical and mysterious. It accepts that everything is happening exactly as it should, and it works with a full-hearted commitment to change. It sets goals, but knows that the process is all there is. It is joyful in the midst of suffering, and hopeful in the face of overwhelming odds. It is simple in a world of complexity and confusion. It is done for others, but it nurtures the self. It shields in order to be strong. It intends to eliminate suffering, knowing that suffering is limitless." ■

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## Introducing Dharma Companions

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship no longer has a prison project. In its place, the volunteers who ran the BPF Prison Correspondence Committee have formed a group called the Dharma Companions.

Dharma Companions offers free Buddhist materials to all inmates, prison study groups, and prison libraries: Buddhist books, pamphlets, used magazines, including old issues of *Turning Wheel*, and some tapes. Our all volunteer staff will be happy to answer questions inmates might have about Buddhism or their personal practice. As so many inmates are practicing Buddhism without a teacher, we offer help in whatever way we can provide. We will try to answer your questions about Buddhism, and we can look up information that you need on Buddhist practices on the Internet. Please note that this is not a pen pal program; this is a Buddhist information service. Our volunteers are all lay Buddhists, not ordained priests, so we will be sharing what we know with you, not teaching you.

Please contact us at:

Dharma Companions

P.O. Box 762

Cotati, CA 94931-0762

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TW Inside Subscriptions

Buddhist Peace Fellowship

P.O. Box 3470

Berkeley, CA 94703

Please note that this address is for subscriptions only.

We ask your help in two ways. One: please write your name, address, and ID number clearly on the envelope or in your letter. We often get packages returned because we misread your name or address. Two: please help us spread the word in whatever way possible about our change of name and address. Many resource lists continue to have our name listed as "The Buddhist Peace Fellowship Prison Project." We would appreciate your help in getting the new information out as widely as possible.

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## Second Annual GBF Daylong Retreat

Save Saturday, March 20, 2010, from 10 am to 4:30 pm, for the Second Annual GBF Daylong Urban Meditation Retreat, at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett, San Francisco. Last year was our first outing with this event, and it was broadly appreciated, so we're going to offer it again. We will have multiple silent sittings, a walking meditation, a dharma talk, chi kung, a small group discussion, a large group closing, and a delicious vegetarian pot luck lunch organized by Richard Azzolini. The fee will be minimal.

Details to follow! This will be a chance to deepen practice and sangha friendships. If you have ideas for this event or would like to pitch in organizing it, there will be a planning meeting after sangha on Sunday, February 7.

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## Note to Readers

Send us poetry you have written that is related to or inspired by your Buddhist practice. We will include some of these poems in future issues of the Gay Buddhist Fellowship Newsletter. If we receive enough poems we may devote an entire Newsletter to poetry.

# Calendar

## Sunday Sittings

### 10:30 am to 12 noon

Every Sunday at 10:30am we meditate together for 30 minutes, followed by a talk or discussion till 12 noon. Everyone is then welcome to stay and socialize over refreshments till approximately 12:30, after which those who are interested usually go somewhere local for lunch. Our sittings are held at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett Street. (Look for the red door near 21st St between Mission and Valencia Streets). **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

### February 7 Open Discussion

#### February 14 Dave Richo

Dave Richo, Ph.D, M.F.T., is a psychotherapist, teacher, and writer in Santa Barbara and San Francisco who emphasizes Jungian, transpersonal, and spiritual perspectives in his work. He is the author of *How To Be An Adult in Relationships* (available at Books, Inc. or Different Light). For more information, visit davidricho.com.

#### February 21 Doug Von Koss

Doug is the Artistic Director of THE NOAH PROJECT, a men's ritual performance group in the San Francisco Bay Area. Through a magical blend of chant, movement, poetry and ritual, Doug weaves a spell that encompasses the ecstatic, the sacred and the wise fool. He draws from many of the world's religious traditions—Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Zoroastrian, Christian, Jewish and Sufi—to create a glorious mosaic that is, above all else, a celebration of the human spirit.

#### February 28 Jennifer Berazon

Jennifer Berazon is a singer/songwriter, teacher and activist. She has made eight albums. Beginning in 1995 she started her journey into meditative trance music and wordless chanting and singing, which she will share with us. In her musical career she has explored music as a spiritual practice from cross-cultural, traditional, Buddhist and contemporary perspectives. She teaches at the California Institute of Integral Studies, in the department of Philosophy and Religion. She has been involved in Buddhist practice for many years. For more information, see edgeofwonder.com

#### March 7 Tova Green

Tova Green began sitting at The San Francisco Zen Center in 1990 after many years of Vipassana practice. She became a San Francisco Zen Center resident in 1999 and was ordained as a priest in 2003. She currently serves as volunteer coordinator at the SFZC's Zen Hospice Project in San Francisco.

#### March 14 Suvanna Cullen

Ordained in 2001 into the Western Buddhist Order, Suvanna-prabha (or Suvanna for short) is Director of the San Francisco Buddhist Center and a writer. She teaches classes and retreats at the SFBC, workplace wellness and mindfulness based stress reduction at local businesses, and occasional meditation classes at the San Francisco county jail. Her humorous advice column, "Ask Auntie Suvanna", was featured in *Dharma Life*, a British Buddhist magazine. Other writings have appeared in *What Book?! Buddha Poems from Beat to Hip-hop* (1998) and *Challenging Times: Stories of Buddhist Practice When Things Get Tough* (2007). She is currently working on a book about meditation. The topic of her talk: Introduction to the Heart Sutra.

#### March 21 Joan Amaral

Joan Amaral was ordained as a Zen priest in the Suzuki-roshi lineage by Darlene Cohen in 2004. She lived and practiced at Tassajara Zen Mountain Monastery for several years, and currently is in residence at San Francisco Zen Center, where she was head student during the fall practice period.

#### March 28 Open Discussion

## How to Reach Us

[www.gaybuddhist.org](http://www.gaybuddhist.org)

For general questions about GBF write to:  
[inquiry@gaybuddhist.org](mailto:inquiry@gaybuddhist.org)

To contact Program Committee with suggestions for speakers and comments:  
[www.gaybuddhist.org/programs](http://www.gaybuddhist.org/programs)

Mail correspondence:

**GBF**  
**PMB 456**  
**2215-R MARKET STREET**  
**SAN FRANCISCO CA 94114**

Address changes or to subscribe or unsubscribe to the newsletter:  
[mailinglist@gaybuddhist.org](mailto:mailinglist@gaybuddhist.org)

GBF Newsletter. Send submissions to:  
[editor@gaybuddhist.org](mailto:editor@gaybuddhist.org)

#### 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](http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/gaybuddhistfellowship)

**GBF NEWSLETTER**  
**PMB 456**  
**2215-R MARKET STREET**  
**SAN FRANCISCO CA 94114**  
**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

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