



# Gay Buddhist Fellowship

APRIL / MAY 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.

## A View on Vows

BY DELBERT RAY COLLETT

**G**reetings to all my friends at GBF. I pray you are well, at peace, and experiencing the happiness, joy, and prosperity that comes from a pure practice. I rejoice in all you do. Although I am without realizations myself and I struggle every day to gain even the slightest control of this mind that insists on hiding its true nature, I sincerely seek a path of knowing that brings peace, love, and wisdom, not just for myself, but for all others who find discontent in this cycle of confusion.

I've been thinking a lot about vows lately. My thoughts have brought me an understanding that has escaped me for lifetimes without number. See, it's easy to live a life where we try to do the right thing, a life where we abstain from harming others. In my deluded way of seeing things, however, I have been the cause of a lot of negative states of mind while believing I was doing the right thing. Let me try to explain the thoughts I've found so comforting lately.

There's an old story about a snake. It seems that the head and the tail of this snake continually argued over who should lead the body. The tail said to the head, "You're always leading the way. It's not fair. Why can't I lead the way sometimes?"

The head replied, "It's our nature that I lead the body. We can't change places or the nature of things will be disrupted."

The tail continued to argue, however, and one day the tail fastened itself to a tree. Tied firmly, the head couldn't continue on its way. Finally, the head got tired trying to break free and gave in to the tail. The tail was so proud of itself as it led the way, over rocks and grass. But not being able to see where it was going, the tail blindly led the snake right into a pit of fire and both head and tail perished.

There is an appropriate order to everything and in physical nature everything has a function to perform. Should the order of things be disrupted, then the whole order and system of things falls to ruin.

We must remember that, as beings, our nature is pure and perfect. We possess Buddha nature because we all have the potential to become Buddhas ourselves. This is possible because our underlying nature is the same as Buddha. We've just forgotten this perfection because we've gotten caught up in our worldly lives of seeking the pleasant and avoiding that which we feel will bring discomfort.

This is a dire situation because this perfection we hold leads us to the goal of ultimate liberation for not just ourselves, but all other living beings. We continue to allow our blind tail to lead us to suffering upon suffering, however, and we call the moments in between happiness. How can we cling to endless sufferings in order to experience tid-bits of happiness? I believe I've found the way to escape this cycle by adhering to a structured way of life outlined two and a half thousand years ago.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

There is nothing that is everlasting. The beauty of our existence is that we can see the impermanence of things and know that through that very impermanence change is possible. Once the causes and conditions are in place, change will occur. We can be anything in life we choose if we create the proper causes under conducive conditions. We all know about making goals. Isn't making a goal a way of taking a vow? We take vows every day. We vow to have dinner with our friends. We vow to call family. We vow to do our laundry. We vow not to make that smart remark when we feel put out or disrespected.

It's not that difficult to live in vows of morality. We just need to recognize that we live a life that's inter-dependent with all other living beings. Even the worm that lives in the soil in Italy is dependent upon you, and vice-versa. The chemicals you release into the air affect the soil where the worm lives and his health is affected. On the other hand, the olive oil used to cook your food is a result of the soil nourished by the worm in Italy, so your health is dependent upon the worm's health. See it? Think it through and you'll come to know with a certainty that you are truly *inter-dependent* with every other living being.

Look also at the environment around you. We are truly dependent upon the earth we live on, just as the earth is dependent upon us to take care of it. Being conscious of all beings, as well as our environment, should bring us to an understanding of what way of life we should vow to live.

Living in vows is also a way for us to examine our own minds and repair the delusions we've cultivated from time without beginning. So before we look at the nature of vows in particular, I feel it's important to look at the states of mind we should eliminate and avoid.

In Buddhism we hear a lot of talk about "ignorance." Our ignorance arises from allowing our deluded state of mind to guide us through this life by seeking what it finds attractive and pushing away that which it finds repulsive. We are allowing the tail to lead the head.

Yes, we are ignorant as to the cause of our state of discomfort and suffering in this cycle of existence. We are ignorant to realizing the

us from attaining an ultimate state of perfection. Afflicted states of mind are renowned for ruining our day. Through their very function they disrupt any peace we find throughout our day; they make us unhappy and disturb those around us.

Now think about virtuous and un-virtuous states of mind. Any unhappy state of mind is a non-virtue and only leads to suffering.

We've all heard of the three most basic mental afflictions. We call them the "three poisons." They are anger or aversion; attachment or craving; and the granddaddy of them all, ignorance. As we consider our states of mind, we can see that at least one of these afflicted states is behind almost everything we think or do. Further dividing these afflictions we find six general divisions:

1. Attachment. We all know what it's like to desire something. We look through magazines and gaze upon all sorts of desirable objects with craving. "If only I had enough money for that new car." We justify each desire by imagining how it may, somehow, make our lives easier or serve some purpose that is indispensable. This is attachment fed by ignorance. We are ignorant as to the true nature of the item or person. We believe it to be somehow self-existent and don't want to be separated from it. In order for attachment to be a mental affliction we have to misunderstand the object; we would perform some non-virtuous act to get or keep the object.

2. Aversion. This occurs when we perceive something through our ignorance as self-existent and everlasting. We are willing to perform some non-virtuous act to avoid it or to get rid of it. When someone yells at us and we yell back out of aversion to the situation, then we have created the cause for only more yelling.

3. Pride. Quite properly, the Tibetan word for pride is *na gyel*, which literally means, "I, the king." This is when we feel like we're a little better than others based upon real or imagined qualities. Feeling self-confidence or uplifted is similar to rejoicing in true goodness. This is good. But pride where we are full of ourselves and act arrogantly, condescendingly, etc., is an affliction. When we experience pride we focus on our own temporary good qualities, like being rich, good-looking, or educated. We feel we have to state our

## There is nothing that is everlasting. The beauty of our existence is that we can see the impermanence of things and know that through that very impermanence change is possible.

ultimate and true nature of reality – that it is empty of any substantial, lasting existence. Ignorance is when we see that a thought or thing is independent, when in reality it is dependent upon many causes and conditions, pieces, parts, and labels. Because of this Dependence, it is not lasting and will perish into something else.

We must recognize that there are obstacles that prevent us from reaching nirvana, or the extinguishing of all suffering. They are *mental affliction obstacles*. Mental afflictions are what feed our deluded state of believing we are independent, lasting and substantial beings. It is only by destroying these afflicted states of mind that we can eliminate our delusions of seeing things as self-existent and believing ourselves to be that island we call a "self."

Any thought that disrupts our peace of mind is a mental affliction. These thoughts hurt us by making us unhappy and preventing

credentials and constantly have to state our good qualities so that others will know them. When we find ourselves doing this, we should look and examine our mind to see whether we really hold those qualities or not. Someone who truly has the credential or good quality will demonstrate it to others through just being themselves; they don't have to state it.

4. Ignorance. As we've already seen, ignorance is the cause of every affliction we can experience. This form of ignorance, however, is a little more. We lack insight into the laws of karma and interdependence. We haven't thought things through to examine their causes and how they are intertwined with other events.

5. Doubt. This is lazy doubt. We don't analyze and evaluate things with our mind. We are lazy to find out or pursue a teaching because it takes effort. We want to know that our sins are just for-

given and we don't have to actually take action. We don't feel like making the effort to clarify things because if we do then we will have to act.

6. Wrong View. There are five primary wrong world views. These are serious afflicted states of mind that cultivate other afflictions:

A. Perishable View. This view focuses upon items that will not last. We place our attention on "me" or "mine." "Me" refers to my

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body, my arms, my face, my legs, etc. "Mine" is focusing upon my clothes, my house, my car, my cell phone, etc. Some will say that this is the view that causes all the afflicted states of mind.

B. Extreme View. This is a subtle one because it creeps up on us. We hold that things exist and are never changing; the sun will always shine; my lawn will always be beautiful, etc. Or we examine the composition of things and determine that things do not exist. We believe that emptiness is somehow nihilistic. On the contrary, things function *because* they are empty of permanence. Change occurs because all things come together and fall apart in a never-ending play of creation and destruction.

C. Wrong Views. This world view occurs when we actively believe that there's no such thing as karma, future lives, interdependence, etc. We possess Wrong Views when we have decided it so, or not so, and firmly hold our conclusion as fact. This world view and the next one are closely related.

D. Superior Views. Once we hold a wrong world view, we decide that it is the best view. What we are doing is rejoicing in our own ignorance. We need to learn not to close our minds to other people's views. When we hear a philosophy, we should open our mind and listen to it. We then should test it against logic and proofs. For instance, someone may hold that reincarnation is not proven, yet they may believe that one can go to heaven after this life. This is a more specific view of future lives than we Buddhists adhere to. See, we believe that there is an energy, or subtle essence, that will animate another body that will most certainly not be who that person was in the previous life. Rather, the new being is the result of actions created for several lifetimes. No part of this new person is the same as the past being. This is the general idea and further discussion is best saved for future discussions.

E. Extreme Practices. When people believe that spiritual practices like starving oneself, causing oneself pain, beating oneself, are the way to salvation, they experience this wrong world view. It's of no spiritual help to intentionally hurt oneself or to damage one's body or mind. Buddha himself tried different ascetic practices and rejected them for a middle way of firm dedication and healthful living.

These afflicted states of mind are our mortal enemy and cause us suffering upon suffering. They have ruined our lives and we must make war on them. In Buddhist philosophy we hear a lot of talk about warriors and victors. These are beings who have defeated

the real enemy—their mental afflictions. This is the greatest battle one can ever fight. Stress, bad habits, and every nasty thing in our lives have come out of these afflicted states of mind. We can't stop until we have eliminated them from our mental continuum forever. One of the best ways to do this is to take vows of morality and certain ways of living. Training our mind in this is a powerful antidote to being taken astray by any afflicted states of mind.

We've outlined the top six mental afflictions. As you've heard

before, Buddhism has a lot of lists. This is to make the 84,000 teachings that Buddha gave easier to remember. You can receive a teaching and relate it to a simple list. That way we contemplate the list and meditate on how the teaching relates to each one of us. Everyone will relate to a certain teaching in a different way, depending upon their life experiences and their particular way of relating to those experiences. The Dalai Lama states that there are over six billion people in the world, so there should also be over six billion religions. This is because everyone's mind is deluded in its own individual combination of afflictions, so everyone has a different way of change.

We also can't ignore the twenty secondary mental afflictions. These are Anger, Insincerity, Stinginess, Forgetfulness, Retained Anger, Pretense, Conceit, Lost Mindfulness, Irritation, Shamelessness, No Faith, Dull Mind, Malice, Inconsideration, Laziness, Distraction, Jealousy, Hiding Faults, Carelessness, Scattering

We should always check our mind to see if one of these afflicted states is dominating our state of mind. It is possible to totally destroy the mental afflictions. They all come from the ignorance that sees things as self-existent. Living in vows of morality is an excellent way to train in eliminating them. However, we must remember that it's part of a package deal. We must listen to the teachings, contemplate them by turning them over in our mind and testing them. Then we must meditate on them to assure that they become part of our mental continuum. We must practice morality and wisdom together. This is what we refer to when we speak of *method* and *wisdom*. Method is training in morality and wisdom is our insight into the true nature of things. They are like the two wings of a bird; there's no way the bird can fly without both of them. Likewise, there is no way we can totally eliminate the mental afflictions and attain an extinguishing of our discomforts and sufferings if we don't apply these two wings.

There was once a wealthy but foolish man. He saw one of his neighbors build a beautiful three-story house. He saw the glorious patios and gardens on the third story and decided that he had to have one just like it. He called a carpenter and asked if he could build it. The carpenter agreed and started construction on the foundation, raised the frame for the first and second floor and began work on putting it all together. The wealthy man came to inspect the construction and inquired why the carpenter wasn't just

finishing the third story. He firmly stated that he didn't want a foundation, first, or second floor. What he wanted was the beautiful third floor and he wanted it now!

A foolish man always thinks of the results and is impatient with the process. He doesn't want to put forth the effort necessary to get good results. We can't receive good results without putting forth the effort, just as there can't be a third story without a foundation, first and second story. Taking vows of morality, then living in them, will assure our foundation is firm and will support us as we fill our house with virtue.

We tend to live our lives seeking what we feel will bring us happi-

ness. When we take a vow, it's a lot more than just making a decision to do, or not do, something. We take a vow consciously in front of an admired teacher who is either present or visualized. By doing this we are strengthening the impact of the vows because there is a mental and verbal intention not to disappoint the vow giver by living up to his expectation and scrutiny. We don't want him to catch us breaking the vow because we don't want him to feel disappointed and we don't want to experience the resulting shame. We are making a powerful affirmation when we go before someone and request to take a vow.

By taking vows of morality, we are working to eliminate the af-

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ness and performing all sorts of deeds along the way to attain that happiness. We forget that it is all transitory and that nothing but peace of mind can ever bring lasting pleasure.

In Buddhist philosophy, when we speak of morality, we're really talking about the two divisions of restraint and collecting virtue. Restraint is when we catch ourselves and refrain from performing non-virtues. Collecting virtue is the performance of actions that help us become enlightened beings. As long as we are keeping our vows of morality and thereby abstaining from negative acts, we are practicing restraint. When we take that one step further and practice our restraint in conjunction with performing positive deeds of generosity and joyfully helping others, we are collecting virtue. When we add to this our practice of concentration, tolerance of others who are guided by their confusions, we are on our way to directly perceiving *interdependence* and realizing the empty nature of all perceived phenomena. This is how we practice the perfections of a Bodhisattva.

Sure, it's good to just live in morality without taking vows, but through actually taking vows we are multiplying their power because we have taken conscious effort and a decision to perform certain deeds or to live a certain way. The seeds planted in our mindstream are more powerful when we take this additional effort. On the other hand, when we break a vow, it is much more damaging than if we never took the vow in the first place. So it's important never to take a vow that you can't keep. If there's one of the vows of a particular category that you can't keep, then don't take it. Or better yet, take the vow for the next hour, day, week, month, whatever period of time you can keep it. Gradually increase the period of time until you are comfortable with living in the vow over the long term.

One of Buddha's teachings says that our virtue is more extensive if we have taken vows than if we haven't. Some people might say that it's easier not to take vows because if they are broken it is so serious. This is a fallacy. See, the virtues you gain from living in your vows are enormous. Even while you're asleep you are gaining the merit and benefits from living in these vows. There isn't a greater cause for high rebirth as a human or a pleasure being than living in vows of morality.

flicted states of mind that cause us to perform negative acts. If we eliminate the actions altogether, then their afflicted cause will consciously manifest and we can apply the appropriate antidote. Afflictions are wiped out of our continuum because the sensual effect the affliction seeks is no longer there. It is a powerful start for those of us who are beginners on the path.

If we take a vow, we'll continuously receive virtue, and if we take a non-virtuous vow we'll continuously receive non-virtue. A career criminal, such as I've been called, takes a non-virtuous vow, as does anyone who chooses a livelihood that causes harm upon any other being. These non-virtuous vow takers will experience their misdeeds continually increasing, even while they are sleeping or relaxing.

In a sutra delivered to his monks, the Buddha said:

For some, ethics mean happiness;

For some, ethics mean suffering.

Those who keep their vows will be happy.

Those who do not will suffer.

In our age, if we disobey a law sometimes we'll be punished severely, and sometimes we'll slip through the cracks. But if we break a vow, we'll undergo punishment in this life, in death, and in future lives to come.

Even though we may not have received a lot of profound dharma teachings, if we properly keep the vows we take and hold in our mindstream we will reap benefits beyond measure in both this life and future lives to come.

We want others to believe we are good people and are doing the right things. So why do we leave the meditation group and engage in talk of a non-virtuous nature? We hold opinions on everything, yet all we seem to be able to do is complain and slander others. We can't make a difference like that. We have to live as an example of what we believe in so that others will want the same pleasant effects we are experiencing. We must consciously take vows and put forth the effort necessary to assure we keep them.

Should we slip and violate a vow, we must apply the Four Opponent Powers of Regret, Refuge, Remedy, and Resolve immediately. A teaspoon of salt placed in a thimble of water is bitter to drink. But take that same teaspoon of salt and place it in a barrel of water,

and it won't even be noticed. We must make our misdeeds like the teaspoon of salt and our virtuous deeds like the barrel of water.

It seems impossible to empty an ocean with a small ladle, but the determination to do it, even if it takes many lives to do, is the mind with which we must protect our vows. This is how we'll create a pure land of peace, a refuge for those who suffer and who are in sorrow and agony, a place of rest for those who are tired and a place where we spread the ideal of peace, happiness, and well being. Those who reach this haven will never return to a world of delusion fed by the afflictions.

As the light of a small candle will spread from one to another in succession, so the light of morality and compassion will pass on from one mind to another—endlessly. Bodhisattvas, as well as aspiring Bodhisattvas, realize the spirit of compassion and morality. They adopt the task of purification and develop enlightenment, passing it on from one generation to another in order to make a pure land that is glorified eternally and forever.

A man was once boiling honey. His friend came by and the man wanted to offer him some of the honey. It was too hot, so without removing the pot from the fire, he fanned it to make it cool. Like this, it's impossible to get the honey of cool wisdom without first removing it from the fire of worldly concerns. We remove the fire of the worldly concerns through living in vows.

So why have I all of a sudden had such a preoccupation with vows? Well, it all boils down to the fact that I don't want to suffer anymore. I am tired of all the struggles and confused, afflicted states of mind that have led me to perform deeds that have only brought pain for those around me, as well as myself. Money, drugs, sex, violence, deceit, and manipulations—this is how I lived my life until meeting the dharma. I've been incarcerated for ten years and my life has been severely restricted, but enough is enough! I don't need this life anymore, but I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Why wouldn't I trade it? Well, I have met the dharma, I have

greatest accomplishment, however, was developing a dharma group here. I was so surprised when I got here to find that there was no dharma group. Several years of administrative hassle finally resulted in permission to organize a Buddhist group. Now we have three kind and compassionate volunteers and we engage in several day-long retreats during the year. What a blessing to rejoice in!

I will be released from prison on March 29, 2010. After spending so long behind walls and fences, I am a little uncertain as to what life will bring. If only I were omniscient and could know the karma of past lives that will ripen in the upcoming portion of my life. Only an enlightened being could know. I do know that it is going to be very difficult. I have no family. I have no friends (other than my dharma family, like you). Life will be more than rough. The economy is shot out and I wonder why someone would hire a multiple-time convicted parolee over a family man who has mouths to feed. People are losing their homes and jobs and my past is one that has every appearance of a cancer that eats society. Hmmm, maybe that's why I battled cancer during my incarceration.

I have died since I've been behind these fences. I have completed chemotherapy, and the old Del has ceased to exist. I think differently and react to situations differently. That is a demonstration of the miracle of impermanence—we have the capability to change. I will have only the two-hundred dollars they give me upon my release, minus a train ticket to Ventura or Los Angeles. I will leave with some dharma books and a state-provided jumpsuit as my sole possessions. It will be the most challenging time of my life as I will be in unfamiliar surroundings with nothing except a new found wisdom.

I write these words on vows because I wish to take a vow. Please allow me to make this vow with each of you as my preceptor:

I vow to live my life after release as an example of virtue. I vow to not seek any of the ten non-virtues as a shortcut to happiness. I vow to be compassionate to all beings I encounter. I vow to be honest with all I interact with. I vow to live as a Bodhisattva, not focusing

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grown, and I have become something I never knew I could be. I help people every day. At the prison, I am employed as Men's Advisory Council Chairman. That makes me a kind of union representative for inmates. I argue matters that concern their welfare. It's all part of a system of balances and checks. I meet with the administration regularly and represent the inmate population on various matters. Through this I am able to help others find temporal happiness. I like to think that it is because of the example I set that the yard where I am housed has the fewest incidents of violence of any yard in the department—and that's statewide! I have also served as president of VietNow—VIP, our veterans' group. During my tenure, I promoted service and development of community involvement. I also arranged for counseling and a writing group where veterans put their life stories on paper as a tool toward healing. The

on my own difficulties but only concerning myself with helping others. I vow to perform every action as an example of how to live a virtuous life. I vow to share with sincere seekers the path I've found so comforting. I vow to experience every hardship I endure on behalf of all those beings who likewise suffer. I vow to be a doctor and medicine to those who are afflicted. I vow to be food and drink to those who lack such. I vow to be clothing to those who have none. I vow to be a companion to those who are lonely. I vow to lead each and every being to a pure land of comfort through helping them subdue their minds.

Thank you all for allowing me this opportunity. I love each and every one of you and I have kept you all in my prayers for years as a reflection of all I aspire to become.

May all be auspicious. ■

# GBF

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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.

## 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. 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.

## 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:

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

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[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)

# 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

### April 4 Jeffrey Schneider

Jeffrey Schneider is a Zen priest and has practiced at the San Francisco Zen Center since 1978. He started the Meditation and Recovery Group at the Zen Center and leads meditation retreats at many different centers.

### April 11 Bernd Bender

Bernd Bender has been a student of Soto Zen since 1984. After moving to San Francisco from Germany, he began his studies at the San Francisco Zen Center, receiving lay ordination from Tenshin Reb Anderson in 1996. He has lived at all three practice centers and has translated several Buddhist texts from English to German. Bernd was Shuso (head student) during the City Center Spring Practice Period in 2009. He is inspired by how the simplicity of practice meets the infinite complexity of life.

### April 18 Pamela Weiss

Pamela Weiss has practiced Buddhism for 20 years, including several years of Zen monastic training. She is a meditation teacher, professional coach, and leader of coach training programs. She is currently in teacher training with Jack Kornfield at Spirit Rock.

### April 25 Heather Sundberg

Heather Sundberg began teaching meditation in 1999, primarily to youth and families. A graduate of the Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leaders program, she is currently in teacher training under the guidance of Jack Kornfield. Beginning her own meditation practice in her late teens, Heather has studied with senior teachers in the Vipassana and Tibetan traditions for over fifteen years and has sat 1-3 months of retreat a year for over a decade. She has been the Family Program Teacher and Manager since 2001 and is a teacher for the weekly Women's Class. She brings to her teaching a passion for the depth of retreat practice, combined with a playful creativity for integrating the teachings into daily life.

### May 2 Sean Feit

Sean has practiced meditation in the Rinzai Zen and Theravada Buddhist traditions since 1993 and yoga since 1995. He studies meditation and mindfulness with Jack Kornfield, Sylvia Boorstein, and Eugene Cash, yoga with David Moreno and Alice Joanou, and piano with Myra Melford. He was a monk in Burma in 2002 and maintains a regular intensive retreat practice. His yoga teaching emphasizes breath and concentration in asana, focusing on alignment and devotion. Sean is a member of the Performance company Circo Zero and teaches piano to adults.

### May 9 Open Discussion

### May 16 Heather Sundberg See April 25.

### May 23 Tim Wickens

Tim Wickens began practice in the Theravada tradition in 1991. He has studied with many Western lay teachers (primarily Michele McDonald and Eric Kolvig) and with senior monks and nuns in the Burmese and Thai traditions. He lived and worked for two years at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and has attended retreats around the U.S. and in Canada, England, and Burma, where he spent a retreat as an ordained monk. Tim and his partner, Robert, live in Santa Rosa, where he works as a carpenter and co-facilitates an LGBTQ sitting group.

### May 30 William Schindler

William Schindler, a.k.a. Brother William, earned a B.A. in Sanskrit from UC Berkeley (1975) and a Master's degree in clinical psychology from Antioch University (1986). He also holds a California single-subject teaching credential in English. He has been studying and practicing traditional Hindu Tantra since 1969, and he lived in India for two-and-a-half years between the years 1972-1977 first as a pilgrim, then as a student at Banaras Hindu University (Hindi, Sanskrit), and finally as a pre-probationary monk of the Ramakrishna Order. He left the Order in 1977 and rejoined in 1980 at the Vedanta Society of Southern California. He left the Order again in 1982 to teach meditation and Sanskrit and to explore his gay being in relation to spirituality. He trained and worked as a psychotherapist both in a public clinic and in private practice, and he founded and coordinated a student counseling program at the public high school where he also taught English for ten years. He retired in 1994 when AIDS complications impelled him to focus exclusively on the needs of his physical body, and he experienced an astonishing recovery starting in May, 1996. This physical change reflected an equally dramatic mental and spiritual change, and he was inspired in 1997 to found Ashram West, which offers meditation instruction, spiritual coaching, and counseling free to all sincere seekers. He lives as a gay Tantric monk, the first in a new Order he founded as part of the work of Ashram West.

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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