



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2010 NEWSLETTER

The Four Noble Truths

BY DAVID LEWIS

David Lewis has been a member of the sangha for three or four years now. He has studied the dharma for thirty-five years, first in the Vajrayana tradition and more recently in the Vipassana-Theravada tradition. He is currently enrolled in the Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Dedicated Practitioner's Program.

I've been thinking about the Four Noble Truths and doing a little bit of reminder kind of research, so it has been my focus for a couple of weeks.

For thirty-five years Buddhism has been my thing, but I really didn't practice very much or very seriously until the last five years or less. And I can tell you it's a whole different ballgame when you start practicing seriously. I used to read Buddhist books and liked Thich Nhat Hanh and would go on a retreat every once in a while, listen to speakers. But the Buddha taught and emphasized that what he was putting forth was a practice, a path. It's something you do; it's not something you wrap your mind around. It's not something you can learn or understand. You don't have to be intelligent to get the Buddha's path and to move very far along. Buddhism is not really a religion. It was kind of made a religion by Western missionaries and explorers in the nineteenth century, who named it Buddhism. Buddhism wasn't called Buddhism before Westerners named it that. If you asked a practitioner in Tibet or Japan or Southeast Asia before the nineteenth century what they did, they'd say they were following the path or following in the steps of the Buddha or doing the practice. And sometimes it was more devotional and sometimes it was more meditative, but it was something you did, not something you studied or understood. So there's a little bit of misunderstanding about that, and a lot of what I want to talk about this morning is some of the misconceptions around the Four Noble Truths and the practice.

The Buddha has sometimes been metaphorically described as a doctor, and that certainly applies to his teachings around the Four Noble Truths. A doctor diagnoses a problem, identifies its cause and prescribes a cure, and the Four Noble Truths do exactly that. The First Noble Truth, *dukkha*, is the identification of the problem. The Second Noble Truth, which is the cause of *dukkha*, is the cause of the problem. And the Third and Fourth Noble Truths about freedom and the cure are the cure of the path. It's something you do. And hopefully it's not something we think about doing at some point in the future. It's something we all just did as we were sitting this morning as we let our minds rest and let our minds relax, watched our thoughts, experienced our thoughts as being temporary things that pass in and out, that teach us impermanence. One of the central teachings of the Buddha is impermanence. That's something we experienced when we sat this morning. So we all practiced, and I'll bet a bunch of people in this room had moments of awakening. You might not have seen it that way, this morning as you were sitting, but the moment of awakening is any time when we let go of clinging to thoughts: anytime we just let them go, let them be—our

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.

thoughts, our feelings, our sensations—and realize them as impermanent mental states that don't really belong to us. They just pass through us. So awakening is available here and now. We get kind of caught up in this idea of nirvana as something far away, but nirvana is simply awakening. And nirvana is a permanent state of that freedom from clinging to thoughts, ideas, desires, but we can experience that state on a temporary level, and it brings real relief and real release in our lives.

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So true happiness, the way Buddha taught it, is not about acquiring anything, and it's not about gaining some esoteric knowledge, and it's not about studying. True happiness is about letting go of our illusions of what we think we want and what we need, and revealing our true nature. In the Mahayana tradition, our true nature is called our Buddha nature, and it's something that we already have. What we're seeking is something that we already have. My favorite depiction of this in the West is *The Wizard of Oz*. It's one of my favorite movies. But it's an incredible *dharma* story. Dorothy falls in the delusion; she gets bopped in the head, but she falls in delusion. She goes to this magical place; she's shown a path to follow to get back to what she wants, to get home. Dorothy wants to go home. She's shown a path, the Yellow Brick Road. And along the way on that path she meets other deluded characters. She meets a Scarecrow who thinks he doesn't have a mind. The Tin Man thinks he doesn't have a heart. The Lion thinks he doesn't have courage. And they all follow this path, this complicated path, with challenges and complications and end up at this place—you remember at the end—where Dorothy realizes she always has been at home. She didn't have to do all of that. Or maybe she had to do that to realize that what she was seeking she already had. She already was home. The Tin Man already had a heart. He had a huge heart. We saw it during the course of the movie. But he was deluded; he didn't think he had one. The lion had courage. They all had what they were seeking. And the whole process of exploration was finding that which they already had.

So another way that the Buddha described the path was that it's something you master, it's something you learn. It's like learning how to play an instrument, or learning a sport. The Buddha very often used music because he was musically trained. He was a wealthy guy, a wealthy prince, and he'd been musically trained, so he used that as a metaphor. So it's something you learn, and meditation, which is what we all come here to do in the morning, is only part of the path, but it's the training part of the path. In terms of comparing it with music, meditation is like playing scales. It's something we do to become conversant with the music that we're hoping to practice. But playing scales isn't what music is all about. It's just part of what we do, and I'm going to come back to this a little bit later.

In a way, we could spend the whole year talking about the Four Noble Truths. When I told one of my teachers I was going to be talking about the Four Noble Truths, he just chuckled and said, "There's only one *dharma* talk—it's the Four Noble

Truths." Everything in Buddhism can be contained in the Four Noble Truths; no matter what you talk about, it can somehow be fitted with the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are: First one, *dukkha*. Life is difficult; it's inherently challenging because it requires constant accommodation to changing, often painful conditions. (I'll come back to this again.) The Second Noble Truth: Suffering is the insatiable need to have things other than they are. That's the cause of suffering—the need to

have things other than they are. (I want more of this; I want less of that.) Third Noble Truth: Freedom from suffering is possible because peace and happiness do not depend on what's going on in our lives, but how we respond to it. My favorite expression of this is, "Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional. Suffering is what we add to pain." So suffering isn't something that happens out there, suffering is how we respond to what happens out there. And the Fourth Noble Truth is the doctor's prescription. It's a program of practices to promote freedom and happiness.

Coming back to the First Noble Truth, *dukkha*, I'm trying not to use the word "suffering" too much, and that's the common English translation for *dukkha*, because I think it misleads us, and even if it doesn't mislead us, we tend to be terrified of suffering. Suffering is what we turn away from. That's what we're conditioned to do in our culture. We avoid suffering. Suffering happens; we do something else. We distract ourselves. Let me give you some other words that have been used for *dukkha*. These are all accurate translations in their own way. *Dukkha* can be dissatisfaction, discomfort, stress. I know one of my favorite Buddhist teachers never says suffering; he always says stress. *Dukkha* is stress, anxiety, remorse, instability, disappointment, lack of control. Anyone ever had that in their lives? That's *dukkha*. Anger. Longing. Simply wanting more of this and less of that, wanting things to be different. Again we're conditioned to be resistant and, especially in our culture, we're conditioned to be resistant to suffering and to turn away from it. What the First Noble Truth asks us to do is to just sit with our suffering. Don't turn away from it. Don't fall into it wholeheartedly. Just notice it. Allow it to be—to be with our suffering rather than wanting it to go away.

The Buddha was a pampered prince, and his father was worried because a soothsayer or psychic had said when the Buddha was born that he would either be a great king or a great spiritual leader. And the Buddha's father, being a king, wanted him to be a king, wanted him to stay in the family business. So the way the Buddha's father dealt with this was to distract him: to give him everything he wanted, to give him women, wine, song, dance, sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll. The Buddha had everything he wanted, whenever he wanted it, and he found dissatisfaction in this life. The Buddha had wisdom even in the midst of all that delusion. The Buddha knew that that wasn't quite enough, something was missing in his life. He went out looking for it. The story of the Buddha's early life is why I think that Buddhism is so incredibly appropriate for our age, because I think in modern America we're all princes. We're all really wealthy peo-

ple in this room, compared with people in third-world countries, in most of the world. Even if we don't think of ourselves as wealthy, if you have a TV, if you have the Internet, if you have a roof over your head, enough to eat, a cell phone, you've got more than an awful lot of people in this world have. You're wealthy—like the Buddha. And like the Buddha you have a phenomenal number of distractions available to you. You can watch TV. If you are in a relationship you don't like, you can change it. Not everybody in that world has that option. If you have a job you don't like, you can change it. If you don't like your house, your apartment, you can move. If you don't like your town, you can move. If you're not satisfied with where you live, you can change. We have this phenomenal range of options. Like the Buddha we have distractions available to us. And those distractions—many of them, not all of them, but many of them—are about turning away from suffering. They give us the opportunity not to be with our suffering. So you might say, "Why not? Why not turn away from our suffering?" Because the Buddha realized—and you and I can realize through practice, try this out for yourself—that when you turn away from your suffering, it merely perpetuates the suffering. If you stuff your grief, the grief's not going to go away. So the First Noble Truth is really about simply being in the moment. Whatever's going on—whether it's pleasant, whether it's painful—just be in the moment. And you'll realize, as we realized this morning when we were meditating, that whatever is going on is temporary. Bad mood, just let it be a bad mood. It will pass. Good mood, unfortunately that's going to pass, too.

So let's move on to the Second Noble Truth. The misconception around the Second Noble Truth is that it's desire. Ask a lot of people what the second noble truth is, what's the cause of suffering, and people say desire. It's not really desire. Well, yes, it

this or less of that, the greater the desire is and, the Buddha would say, the greater the suffering. Clinging to desire is the cause of stress and anxiety. The Buddha said, "He who understands clinging and non-clinging understands all of the dharma." Simple as that.

So I've got a little example. When we think about suffering, a lot of times we think about the big sufferings, and it is kind of scary to think about old age, illness and death. But if you think of *dukkha* simply as dissatisfaction, sometimes on a really subtle level, then you start to understand what the Buddha taught about suffering being an aspect of our lives that's present in every moment of our lives. Dependent origination is a flow chart the Buddha came up with about how suffering happens. So let me try to simplify using a Snickers bar. Dependent origination is the path that leads from your coming into contact with an object—your senses, your eyes, your smell maybe—and what happens and how that leads to suffering. This Snickers bar is simply a thing I'm holding up, and you're seeing it. But your senses, your mind, are going through this whole kind of complicated trail of process around how you react to this. If you like this thing I'm holding up, here's the path, here's the flow, and if you meditate on this, you'll see it in your own experience. The first thing you experience—and you probably didn't notice this—was either a sense of pleasant or unpleasant. "When he held this up I had a pleasant reaction or an unpleasant reaction." What followed on that was, "I like it or I don't like it." So let's say you had a pleasant reaction. I held this up and you went, "Oooh, I like that." Before you even got to the point of liking it, it was pleasant. And before you even got to the point of liking it, you named it. "Oh! that's a Snickers. It's pleasant. I like it." Next step on the chain is, "I want it. I want one of those." Or, "I wish I had that." Next step on the chain is, "I've

So true happiness, the way Buddha taught it, is not about acquiring anything, and it's not about gaining some esoteric knowledge, and it's not about studying. True happiness is about letting go of our illusions of what we think we want and what we need, and revealing our true nature. In the Mahayana tradition, our true nature is called our Buddha nature, and it's something that we already have.

is desire, but it's more than desire. Desire can be skillful or unskillful. So for instance, if you have a desire to intensify your spiritual path, or desire to meditate more, or desire for your children to be happy and healthy, those are skillful desires. Nothing wrong with that. What the Second Noble Truth is really all about is attachment to desire, our attachments. Sometimes it's called clinging. So even skillful desires—like a desire to follow the path more intensively—if we cling to them, can become unskillful. But an awful lot of our desires are inherently unskillful. And when we say desire it's not only wanting things. Desire is also about not wanting things. Desire is wanting things to be different than they are. So if you want more of this, that's desire. If you want less of that, that's desire, too. And the more intensively you want change, the more intensively you want more of

got to have that." Next step on the chain is, "This is just kind of taking over my whole thought process. Now I'm really kind of obsessed on this Snickers bar. I'm a person that needs to have a Snickers bar." So this is an oversimplified description, but you can see where I'm going with this. The suffering increases as your wanting, as your clinging increases. At the point where you see this, and you say that's a pleasant thing, you're not suffering. But every stage of the process, as it goes through the stages, you cling a little bit more to the point where "I've got to have that and I'm going to be unhappy if I don't have that." Likewise, if you don't like Snickers, or you're allergic to chocolate, or you're allergic to peanuts, I hold this up, you're going to have an "Oh, that's unpleasant. I don't like that. That's a Snickers bar—keep that away from me. Why is this guy holding this Snickers bar up

in front of me? It's really annoying me. I wish he'd put it away. I don't want to see a Snickers bar; I really hate them." That's how hate comes about. That's where hate comes from. So that's called dependent origination. That's the chain of dependent origination, and it happens to us many times a minute throughout the day. Many times a minute. Many, many, many times an hour. Our senses—eyes, ears, nose, taste—come into contact with objects; they're pleasant or they're unpleasant—sometimes

to, what you like, what you don't like, how you feel about that, and just being with it. Not pushing it away, because that's desire that's clinging. Just allowing it to be and noticing that it's temporary and it's going to pass. We can free ourselves from suffering by changing our response to suffering. Suffering is something we cause in our own lives. So the practice is noticing whether there's clinging in this moment and noticing what happens when we bring our attention to it. Simple as that: noticing whether we're clinging and

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they're neutral—they're pleasant or unpleasant or neutral, and then we go down the chain of dependent origination, where we end up loving or hating, having to have or divorcing. That's *dukkha*. When the Buddha said, "Our lives are *dukkha*," he meant that our lives are many experiences—a minute, an hour—of wanting, of not wanting. So by practicing and meditating, and getting more experienced and learning this path, what we learn to do is notice that process, become more aware of it as our senses come into contact with things—and things include thoughts and emotions. Our senses come in contact with thoughts and emotions. And we learn what our mind does, and we learn what our preferences are, and as we do that we discover that if we're paying attention, if we're mindful of what happens in our heads when this thing appears, we can actually short circuit the process. We can stop at pleasant, or we can stop at "I like." I can say, "I like Snickers bars; that's a pleasant thing. I like Snickers bars, but I don't have to have it," and save ourselves a lot of suffering. Likewise, if you don't like Snickers bar, "That's a Snickers bar; I don't like it. Doesn't matter to me. I don't care if he's holding it up—life goes on." That's how we release from attachment. And it takes some practice, and meditation really helps a lot. The practice of meditation helps us notice how we react to things and be with our experience. So we pass our days jumping from one desire to another, and that in Sanskrit is called *samsara*, the wheel of suffering, this passing our days jumping from one desire to another, grabbing for this and pushing away that.

So the Third Noble Truth is the good news—there's freedom from this, freedom from clinging. And I just described how you do that. You practice noticing how your mind works, what you cling

noticing what happens when we bring our attention to it. You might find it simply dissolves when you notice you're clinging to something. Do you ever notice that when you're just kind of obsessed with something, and you wear yourself out, you know, your mind is spinning, and you just get tired of thinking about it, and you finally just intuitively let go? That's letting go of clinging. So that's suffering and that's freedom from suffering.

And the Fourth Noble Truth is the path that the Buddha set out. The path is simply a blueprint. It's a list of eight things, eight practices, that we do, in no particular order. You can focus on one or another. You can focus on all of them at once. You can do them as a cycle. It's a blueprint for how we go about freeing ourselves from suffering. Once again, I could spend a whole hour, a whole dharma talk on each one of the factors of the path. A lot can be said about them, so let me summarize. In the first place, there's this list of eight things. You kind of divide them up into three categories, three general broad categories. The Pali word for one of them is *sila*, which is ethics, and that includes speech, action and livelihood. What we do, how we behave, what we speak about in the world. Our outward behavior and appearance has a lot to do with our happiness. Now, the Buddha tended to stress the Golden Rule, as Jesus did—"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." But the Buddha talked about *sila* not so much in terms of doing good things for other people because that's the right thing to do. The Buddha said, "Do it for yourself." One of the primary reasons that we practice *sila*, that we practice ethics, is because that short circuits remorse in our lives, and remorse causes a great deal of suffering. So by practicing Right Behavior, Right Speech, Right

Livelihood, and being bright and true with the world, kind and compassionate with other people, you have nothing to be remorseful about, and that's happiness. Happiness simply arises. That's a cause of happiness.

The second group of teachings in the Eightfold Path is called *samadhi*, which is often defined as concentration, but it's meditation and mindfulness. A better way of putting it is a calm harmonious mind. The Buddha said in order to work along this path, in addition to ethics, it's important to meditate. And the meditation is the tool that we use to gain calm harmonious mind. There might be other ways of doing it, but that's what worked best for him, and most people in the last 3,500 years that have practiced the path have found that it works for them. So meditation practice is important. It's not everything, but it is important. And the goal of meditation is a calm harmonious mind, which leads to insight.

The Pali word for the third group on the Eightfold Path is *prana*, and that's wisdom. It's not so much the wisdom you gain by reading books or listening to dharma talks or studying. The wisdom is a discernment that you gain from meditating and from insight. The practice of insight, the practice of meditation, leads to wisdom.

So what are the actual Eightfold Path points? The first is Wise View, and Wise View can be as simply defined as understanding and accepting the Four Noble Truths. If you buy the Four Noble Truths, you have Wise View. Wise Intention is the next point, and we could talk about that for hours, but intention is all important in Buddhism. Intention is actually more important than action. You can do the right thing for the wrong reason, and the Buddha taught that all of our action, all of our speech, comes from intention. Wise Speech is the next point, and it's a really hard thing to practice. Wise Speech is a big part of my practice. I'm still working on it. But if you're thinking about what to say, a simplified formula is: Is it true? Is it useful? Is it timely? Sometimes if you have something to say to somebody, it might be true, but it might not be useful, or it might not be timely. It

attention so that you do not get caught up in various mind states. Getting caught up in various mind states is clinging. We talked about clinging. Seeing that Snickers bar and your mind goes off in all your associations with a Snickers bar. That's clinging. Wise Effort is saying, "It's just a Snickers bar. Let's move on." Wise Mindfulness is paying attention. It's something that we do in meditation; it's something we practice in meditation. And it's something that very easily spills over into everyday life; the more we meditate, the more we practice, the more natural it becomes in our daily life—at work, in our relationships, in our walking around town. It includes investigation of experience, not only paying attention to what's going on, but what's the truth of this, what's it really all about. And it includes compassion. It's really important when we're sitting in meditation and we have monkey mind, and stuff's going on, and we have thoughts of remorse or grief or we're worrying about something that's happening later. It's really important to have compassion around that because we can't find peace by judging ourselves or by criticizing our experience either in meditation or everyday life. It doesn't produce skillful effects. So if we apply compassion to our practice, no matter what comes up, even if it's something we're not comfortable with or we don't like about ourselves, we can be compassionate about it. And finally Wise Concentration is simply the ability to collect and unify the mind. I can't stress more the value of Wise Concentration to my daily life and how my practice has supported me in this, and I was noticing it this morning while we were sitting, or after we were sitting. I really had kind of a lovely sitting this morning. I don't know about you, but my mind was calm and relaxed and I wasn't thinking about this talk. So I don't know about you, but I used to get a lot more nervous about sitting up in front of a group and talking. The first few *dharma* talks that I ever gave, I was a wreck. I didn't sleep well the night before, and if there was a sitting before the talk, I'd sit there going over my talk in the sitting. Well, I didn't do that today. I just kind of meditated. Let my mind find a calm relaxed place. I didn't think about

By practicing Right Behavior, Right Speech, Right Livelihood, and being bright and true with the world, kind and compassionate with other people, you have nothing to be remorseful about, and that's happiness.

might not be the right time to say it. So if speech doesn't meet these three criteria—true, useful and timely—the Buddha said just don't do it. Don't say it. Wise Action is the next point. Wise Action is *karma*. The actual translation of the word *karma* is action. *Karma* is what you do. So Wise Action arises from Wise Intention. If you have the right intention, you're going to do the right action. One place to start, if you're thinking about practicing Wise Action more intentionally, is the Five Precepts. Avoiding killing, avoiding stealing, avoiding lying, avoiding sexual misconduct, and avoiding the use of intoxicants that can cloud your mindfulness, cloud your judgment. Wise Livelihood is the next point, and that basically teaches us that what you do with your life, how you work, your profession perhaps or just your preoccupations, has a lot to do with your role on the path. The path practicing *dharma* isn't just meditating. It isn't just showing up at GBF on Sunday mornings, but what you do with every day of your week, every hour of your day. Wise Effort—we're getting into the concentration and meditation parts, which are precepts on the path, first being Wise Effort. Wise Effort is directing your

the talk. That's a result of my practice. I can only do that because I've practiced as much as I have. So think about the value of knowing you're going to be sitting in front of a group of people giving a talk and not having to worry about it. That for me today is the benefit of my practice, and I'm so grateful for it.

The Buddha taught for forty years, thirty-five or forty years, and we have great volumes full of *suttas*, full of his talks. But everything he talked about somehow fits within the Four Noble Truths. There are stories of strangers coming up to the Buddha and saying, "What do you teach?" One of his most common responses was, "I teach suffering and the end of suffering." That's all. He didn't like big metaphysical concepts. If people asked him about the existence of God or life after death or this metaphysical stuff, he just didn't answer. If it didn't refer to suffering or the release from suffering, he didn't think it was relevant to his teaching. So everything fits into the Four Noble Truths, and it's a lot simpler than you might have thought it was. ■

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GBF Thanksgiving

Come celebrate Thanksgiving Day with the Gay Buddhist Fellowship. This will be a time for GBF members and friends to come together and celebrate sangha over an abundant meal. Kei Matsuda and his partner Chuck have once again graciously offered up their home for the festivities. The gathering will start on Thanksgiving Day at 4:00 p.m.

GBF members planning to attend should call Kei and Chuck in advance to help coordinate dishes. Their telephone number is (510) 237-5091 and their address is 7341 Pebble Beach Drive, El Cerrito, California.

GBF Film Festival!

Our own Bill Weber is graciously presenting his latest documentary that he edited and co-directed with producer/director David Weissman, *We Were Here*, as a special GBF event.

A recent hit with a sneak preview at the 2010 Frameline Festival, their film recounts the stories of men and women who lived through the years of the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco. Our own George Hubbard, who works for Meyer Sound Laboratories, has arranged the screening at the state-of-the-art theatre at the Meyer Sound Berkeley location for this event. There will be 40 free seats available for GBF members, on a first-come-first-served basis. Roy King is kindly acting as registrar for this event. Email him at bakerboy61@yahoo.com to reserve one of the seats.

Many thanks to Bill, David and George for making this happen! They see this as an opportunity to build community around the shared experience of having lived through that period of time.

Bill Weber & David Weissman's *We Were Here*

October 17, 2010 7 p.m.

Meyer Sound Laboratories

2832 San Pablo Avenue Berkeley, CA 9470

To read more about the film, go to:

<http://www.frameline.org/festival/film/detail.aspx?id=2050&fid=47>

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GBF Yahoo Discussion Group

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

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/gaybuddhistfellowship

Calendar

Sunday 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

October 3rd 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.

October 10th Shahara Godfrey

Shahara Godfrey has trained in the Theravada Buddhist tradition for over 20 years. Other influences have been spiritual teachers from various cultures and traditions as well as the creative arts. She is a graduate of Community Dharma Leaders and Path of Engagement programs from Spirit Rock. She is a community teacher at the East Bay Meditation Center. Shahara has a Ph.D. and currently works as an educator.

October 17th Larry Peiperl

Dr. Peiperl is an Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine at UCSF and has been practicing internal medicine at safety-net clinics in San Francisco and New York City for 15 years. He has worked on clinical trials in HIV prevention and treatment. He serves as an editor for the open access journal *PLoS Medicine* and as medical consultant at Glide Health Services in the Tenderloin. He received the bodhisattva precepts in 2005.

October 24th Rebecca Dixon

Rebecca Dixon has been a member of the Lesbian Buddhist Sangha for over 10 years. Her main teacher is Gil Fronsdal at IMC in Redwood City, where she teaches with their web courses and serves on the Chaplaincy Council. Rebecca lives in Oakland, has spent five years putting the East Bay Meditation Center together (vision statement, events to promote the idea, etc), and has taught a day-long there with Larry Yang. She went through Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leader program and has taught in jails and the Drug Court treatment program. Rebecca has volunteered a day a week with the Zen Hospice Project for over 3 years. For five years she has led a sitting group in Oakland that meets on Monday evenings, and she was the teacher for the Alameda Sangha in 2009.

October 31st Eugene Cash

Eugene Cash is a Spirit Rock teacher and the founding teacher (since 1993) of San Francisco Insight. Eugene is also the co-founder and co-teacher of the Dedicated Practitioners' Program for senior students at Spirit Rock. In addition, Eugene teaches the Diamond Approach® in San Francisco and Holland. He is passionate about teaching mindfulness, inquiry and waking up in daily life.

November 7th Trip Neil

Trip Weil has been practicing Buddhist meditation since 2004. He is a participant in the Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leader Program and a past participant in the Dedicated Practitioners Program. Formerly an attorney, Trip is a psychotherapist in private practice in San Francisco. In his life and work, he's very interested in exploring healing at the intersection of therapy and spiritual practice.

November 14th Donald Rothberg

Donald Rothberg, a member of the Spirit Rock Teachers Council and the Executive Faculty at Saybrook Graduate School in San Francisco, writes and teaches classes, groups, and retreats on meditation, daily life practice, and socially engaged Buddhism. He has also been a board member of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship over many years. His experience uniquely combines a long record of activism and organizing, extensive teaching, and leadership roles in pioneering programs that weave together social action with spirituality. He has guided several training programs—both interfaith and Buddhist-based—in engaged spirituality for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Saybrook, and Spirit Rock. At Spirit Rock, he directs a two-year program called "The Path of Engagement," bringing together spiritual practice, service, and social action. He is the author of *The Engaged Spiritual Life: A Buddhist Approach to Transforming Ourselves and the World*.

November 21st Paul Winternitz

Paul Winternitz is a fine art photographer whose work has been exhibited and published internationally. Though his images have always dealt with a spiritual theme, it was in 2004 that he started a dedicated approach to the spiritual path. He was raised an atheist and has kept an open approach while his intuition has led him to many spiritual traditions. He has focused on the commonalities of the great traditions, learning from all of them. At his core he feels most attached to the Christian mystical experience, yet has been profoundly influenced by the presence of the Hindu teacher Amma. From Buddhism he has learned the invaluable skills of Vipassana meditation. He has also been influenced by the very pragmatic approach of both the Tibetan Bon and indigenous Toltec teachings.

November 28th Open Discussion

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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