



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

SUMMER 2015 NEWSLETTER

The Joy of Taking Refuge

BY DALE BORGLUM

Dale Borglum is the founder and Executive Director of the Living Dying Project, and a pioneer in the conscious dying movement. He has worked directly with thousands of people with life threatening illnesses and their families for over 30 years. In 1981 Dale founded the first residential facility of people who wish to die consciously in the United States, the Dying Center. He lectures extensively on topics such as spiritual support for those with a life threatening illness, care-giving as a spiritual practice, and healing in the face of illness, death, loss, and crisis. Dale has a BS from UC Berkeley and a PhD from Stanford. He is the co-author of *Journey of Awakening: A Mediator's Guidebook*, and has taught meditation for 35 years.

In Buddhism, at the beginning of retreats, and often at the beginning of practice sessions, we do what is called “taking refuge.” We take refuge in three things. We take refuge in the Buddha, we take refuge in the Dharma, and we take refuge in the Sangha. And we say it three times: “I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the Dharma. I take refuge in the Sangha.” And again: “I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the Dharma. I take refuge in the Sangha.” It’s often done rather automatically, without much heart or forethought.

In thinking about what to talk about today, I wanted to find a way to sneak in joy and devotion in this Buddhist establishment we have here. Usually when I talk I don’t make any notes because I just talk out of my heart and off the top of my head, but when I talk to Buddhists I think I have to have notes because I want to talk Buddhist, and it’s really not my first language. Buddhism is my second language.

Most of you probably have a rough idea what Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are, and I’ll mention what they are in an outer sense. But if we really investigate together their deeper meaning, it can lead to a very deep quality of joy, inspiration, and devotion.

Many people have a lot of enthusiasm when they begin to practice meditation. It’s a wonderful thing. They think, “Look at all I’m finding out about myself.” After a few months or a few decades, however, depending on how stubborn you are, one begins to feel a bit stale in one’s practice, and practice begins to be something that you do out of habit, or maybe that you stop doing out of habit. It becomes something done in a way that makes you feel calmer, like you have a slightly more efficient personality structure, and maybe you think you can make a little more money or find a slightly better grade of partner.

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.

There is nothing you can do, no amount of alcohol you can drink, or drugs you can take, or TV you can watch, that will separate you from your identity as pure awareness.

The notion of actually practicing as a way of finding liberation from suffering, or actually touching that place that is our intrinsic freedom, becomes lost, because practice is a long and often difficult process. One of my early teachers, Trungpa Rinpoche, said that until one becomes truly bored with practice, you haven't gotten very far.

What does it mean to take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha? Taking refuge means finding a place where you feel safe, protected, and secure. In old Hawaii, for example, they had refuge temples where if you committed a capital offence, such as letting your shadow fall upon the King, if you could make it to the refuge temple before the soldiers got to you, you would be free. What we're talking about is a place of freedom, a place of safety, which we can find in our practice.

Taking refuge in the Buddha is, in an outer sense, taking refuge in the fact that this fellow Gautama Buddha existed 2,500 years ago, and he became the living embodiment of awareness. What we're really taking refuge in is not this fellow, but in awareness. We're taking refuge in the fact that you and I are intrinsically awake. In fact, all of the spiritual traditions say that enlightenment isn't something that we find or that we create, but is who we are already. We have just forgotten. In this moment, Sunday morning, we are enlightened. We are awake. We may be identified with an ego structure that makes it difficult to experience in a moment-to-moment way, but there is nothing to be found outside. As long as we look outside, we're looking in the wrong direction.

Here are some quotes from a few of my favorite enlightened people. Wei Wu Wei said, "What you are looking for is what is looking." Another teacher, Swami Nityananda said, "Be peaceful, I am everywhere." And my guru Maharaji said, "The best form in which to worship God is every form." What these people are saying is that freedom is here right now, and we can begin to feel awakeness in our body even at the cellular level. Right now I'm talking, you're listening, we're here together, but is there also a sense of inward awakeness that you can feel vibrating in your body?

There are three qualities to the awake mind. The primary channel of Buddhism and psychotherapy, for in-

stance, is the mind channel, and the quality of awakeness is felt as emptiness, of spaciousness; that the mind is as vast as the sky. Weather may fly through the part of sky you're looking at, but it is only the weather, the clouds, and you are the sky. If we come instead through the body channel, awakeness is experienced as a sense of aliveness in the body. Right now there is the vibrating sense of aliveness, and if we begin to tune into that, eventually we can feel it even outside of ourselves. We can feel it in inanimate objects as well as in the people around us. If we come to awakeness through the third channel, the heart or quality of spirit, awakeness is experienced as presence. There is radiant presence in each of us that can be experienced as joy.

There are practices to awaken each of these channels. In Tibetan Buddhism, there is Guru-Yoga, where you imagine a form of the deity that appeals to you, seated in front of you. There is the Buddha, there is Hanuman, there is Christ, there is the Mother, and this being appears to you as radiant golden light. Out of this being, from Her or His heart, comes a ray of golden light that goes into you and purifies you of any remaining obscuration, and you then become a being of exactly the same radiant golden light. Gradually, you then merge with this other Being.

Even though this practice is a visualization, it is also the true nature of things as they are. Right now, you and I and the Buddha are made out of exactly the same substance, the pure awareness of consciousness. There is nothing you can do, no amount of alcohol you can drink, or drugs you can take, or TV you can watch, that will separate you from your identity as pure awareness. We can certainly forget and distract ourselves from this truth. This is what practice is about. It is difficult and frightening to realize that we are awareness, because it means that who we thought we are has to die. If I think I'm separate from you, and I'm told I have a Ph.D. from Stanford, that's who I am in a certain way. But though I have those identities, that is not fundamentally who I am. I take refuge in the Buddha. For the second time, I take refuge in the Buddha. For the third time, I take refuge in the Buddha.

We can remember, and it need not be in an automatic parenting way. The challenge though reminds me of a lovely story. There was a young boy whose mother became pregnant with another child. She was about to go to the hospital when the little boy said, "When you come back, can I be alone with the baby and talk to her?" The mother said, "Okay, you can do that." When she came back from the hospital, the boy was very persistent. "I want to go in and talk to the baby." Finally the parents said, "Okay," but they were a little concerned that maybe he was jealous and would harm the baby, so they left the door open a crack to hear what was going on. The little boy came up very close to the baby, and very quietly said, "I'm beginning to forget God, can you help me remember?" I take refuge in the Buddha.

Moving on to taking refuge in the Dharma, on the outer level the Dharma is the body of the Buddha's teaching, or the Christ's teaching; the true teaching of all religions. Dharma is all the things that we can read about in books: The Four Noble Truths, the facts of karma, and impermanence, and suffering, and more. It's a wonderful thing to take refuge in a path that so many people traveled, and found a great deal of freedom. The Dharma is this body of teaching and truth.

When we take refuge in the Dharma, we're essentially taking refuge in the truth. In fact, all religions start out by saying you can take refuge in the fact that freedom exists. Taking refuge in the Dharma also has the deeper level of taking refuge in the fact that we're living in a lawful universe. Things are unfolding in a way that can be talked about in terms of karma, impermanence, and *dukkha* or suffering. There's even a deeper level of taking refuge in the Dharma. Right now in this moment, the Dharma is unfolding for each one of us. Whatever appears right in your face or in my face is your Dharma in that moment. The only possible event in your life, the perfect event to lead you to the next step on your path to awakening, is exactly what's happening, and so we can begin to let go of the self-improvement project. We can begin to let go of trying to fix things or manipulate things.

The Prajna Paramita Sutra says that the Dharma is neither tainted nor pure. One time my friend Ram Dass was with our teacher Maharaji, and Ram Dass said, "Maharaji, I feel so impure." Maharaji looked up Ram Dass's sleeve and said, "I don't see any impurity, Ram Dass." There is, in fact, no impurity. The Dharma instructs us to trust the perfection of awareness itself; that just being present to this simple moment of being together is absolutely all we need to move toward full awakening.

Rumi says, "Don't turn away. Keep your gaze on the banded place. That's where the light enters you." Pema Chodron says, "Lean into your suffering." That is the secret to practice. When difficulties arise on our path, we have two choices. We can harden into aversion, or we can open our hearts even more. Opening turns difficulty into the gift it truly is, because it shows us where we are making life difficult.

Cancer does not cause suffering. One of my dearest and oldest students called two days ago, and told me that she has just been diagnosed with cancer in her spine and liver. It's a very difficult diagnosis. Can she work with that in a way that it opens her heart, even though fear will arise? Cancer does not cause suffering. Resistance to cancer causes suffering, and if she can work with that resistance, she can open her heart to the extent that it gives her immune system and her body the greatest chance to heal.

When we cut our finger, we trust it will heal. We trust that eventually the skin will grow back, the scab will fall off, and we'll be healed. Can we also trust the intrinsic movement toward healing in our heart and mind? We talk about it as the heart but in Chinese there's only a single word for heart and mind, *hsin*. Heart is the depth of the mind; the mind is the surface of the heart. Can we trust that our heart will heal? Can we trust that our mind will heal if we take refuge in the Dharma, if we keep moving toward being with what is in front of us, moment to moment? Can you actually begin to have a love affair with the Dharma? It's easy to have a love affair with a person, with God, with music, with beauty, with art, but can we love the truth of the moment? Can we really begin to say, "Dharma, I love you"? Can we meet the way things are

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unfolding in life with openness rather than resistance, and to feel that in our hearts?

Finally, there's taking refuge in the Sangha. The Sangha could be also called "connectedness," or love. If we think about that along with awareness and truth, rather than the old Pali words of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, then we're taking refuge in awareness, we're taking refuge in truth, and now we're taking refuge in connectedness.

The Sangha in the outer sense is the people in this room. We sat together and we're practicing together. The Dharma path is very difficult to do on your own, almost impossible. People on the path together are being in a Sangha. You go to a 12-step meeting. You come to a Sunday morning meditation. Not only is the Sangha the people in this room, but at this moment countless people are practicing all over the world. If you have a smartphone there's an app called Insight Timer, where you can see little dots of light where people are meditating all around the world. There's this whole Sangha of people all over the planet, and in a very real sense, their practice is supporting your practice. You are not practicing alone.

We take refuge in the way we are connected. When my friend called and told me she was diagnosed with cancer, then in a very natural way love and compassion arises in my heart and goes out toward her. We're loving each other, and that connectedness in love supports our practice.

Buddha said, "Don't believe what I'm telling you. Investigate it yourself." But even though he's saying don't believe, he is not saying don't keep your heart open. We can have faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. We can have faith in refuge as an inner experience. Trungpa was asked, "What is it that we're really taking refuge in?" He answered, "Well from yourself, of course..."

So it's not faith in something outside of our self, it's really faith in this quality of the awareness, the truth and love that we each have. When we begin to deepen this faith, then out of that comes a certain joy in practice, so that we're not practicing just because we're suf-

fering, and we're trying to make suffering go away. There's a certain joyfulness. There's a joyfulness in being quiet, a joyfulness in movement, and a joyfulness in being with other people on the path.

In Buddhism, there are levels of devotion, and levels of joy, if you will. There are what are called the three turnings of the wheel: *Hinayana*, *Mahayana*, and *Vajrayana* Buddhism. *Hinayana* is essentially *Vipassana* practice, *Mahayana* is Zen practice, and *Vajrayana* is Tibetan Buddhist practice. Beyond those three turnings is the non-practice of non-duality of Dzogchen, or *Mahamudra*, or *Maha Ati*. But if we're talking about this joy of practice, this sense of devotion to the triple gem, then it goes through stages of development.

For the first stage, beginning to take refuge, the invocation is in asking for a relationship. I take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma, in the Sangha. I don't completely feel it right now, but I have faith that it exists out there. Maybe I felt it in the past. So that I'm taking refuge, hoping I'll begin to feel that relationship. That is *Hinayana*, or Theravada practice.

Mahayana practice brings in the quality of compassion. *Mahayana* means "great vehicle," a vehicle big enough not just to get you or me across the ocean of suffering, but all beings. We're practicing for all beings. It brings in the quality of heart, the heart of compassion. In this level of taking refuge, of practice, we're beginning to feel a heartfelt relationship between us and the Buddha and the Dharma and the Sangha, and the Mother, and the Christ.

In *Vajrayana* practice, we begin to find out that our relationship is not to something outside. I am the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. It is not separate at all.

Finally, in non-dual, non-practice, with the teachings of Ramana Maharshi, Eckhart Tolle, Adyashanti, and many other wonderful teachers, we're taking refuge in the nature of everything. It's all of one taste: cancer and non-cancer; living and dying; happiness and sadness. There is a joy that goes beyond happiness and sadness. One can be sad, and that can be part of your path of Dharma. There's a difference between being sad

“Until one becomes truly bored with practice, you haven't gotten very far.”

—Trungpa Rinpoche

“What you are looking for is what is looking.”

—Wei Wu Wei

and being lost in sadness. There's a difference between having cancer and being lost in having cancer. There is joy inherent in every moment when we have faith in being fully present.

So right now there is this joy. There were a lot of ideas that maybe you agree with or don't agree with or are trying to remember, but beyond all that mental activity, is there a joy? Is there a joy in this moment? Is there that God the little boy was trying to remember, and talk to his baby sibling about?

To the extent we can practice with faith and with confidence in the triple gem, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, then this joy will begin to arise. And one can make a practice out of that. In this moment, can you be 75% with the quiet joy that is intrinsically part of each moment? Then 25% of you is out here with a whole bunch of people in the room, listening, talking, understanding... But most of our being is focused on that joy, and we're connected in that joy. In fact, we're one in that sense of joy. Ramana Maharshi said, “Devotion is nothing more than knowing oneself.” Sogyal Rinpoche said, “Devotion is unbroken receptivity to the truth.”

Modern neuroscience has found that over the centuries our brains have been programmed to be like Teflon to positive experience, and Velcro to negative experience. A long time ago, if you're out on the plain being chased by a tiger, that one bad experience could ruin your day. So if now you go on vacation and have 900 wonderful experiences but lose your wallet, what you're going to remember is that one bad experience.

We tend to grab on to and identify with that one negative experience. But neuroscience is finding that if you take a positive experience, amplify it, and be with it for only 20 seconds, it will stay with you. It goes into the part of the brain that retains things, whereas the positive things usually just go sliding through. So when you feel a moment of joy, can you be with it? Can you amplify it? Can you just hold onto it? Not “hold” in a squeezing way, but rest with it? Embrace it for 20 seconds?

Many of us focus on solving problems rather than on joy. Many of us have a career that is focused on solving problems. We get paid for solving problems, and so the mind gets in a rut that whatever appears is a problem to be solved, rather than resting in the joy that is possible in each moment.

The Sioux Indian have a saying, “Sometimes I go about pitying myself, while all the time I am being carried by great winds across the sky.” We are carried by those great winds, those winds of joy, those winds of the inner Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, of awareness, truth, and connectedness.

Finally, I'd like to read a lovely poem by one of my favorite poets, Mary Oliver, titled *Mindful*.

Everyday
I see or hear
something
that more or less

kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle

in the haystack
of light.
It was what I was born for—
to look, to listen,

to lose myself
inside this soft world -
to instruct myself
over and over

in joy,
and acclamation.
Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,

the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant —
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab,

the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help

but grow wise
with such teachings
as these—
the untrimmable light

of the world,
the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the Dharma. I take refuge in the Sangha. And in the joy that this taking refuge cultivates in each one of us. ■

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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.

Your Thrift Store Donations Earn Money for GBF

GBF members can donate their quality cast-offs to the Community Thrift Store (CTS) and GBF will receive a quarterly check based on the volume of items sold. This is a great way to support our Sangha, and the community. So far this year we have received over \$800 through members' generosity. Bring your extra clothing and other items to CTS at 623 Valencia St between 10am and 5pm, any day of the week. The donation door is around the corner on Sycamore Alley (parallel to and between 17th and 18th) between Valencia and Mission. Tell the worker you are donating to GBF.

Our ID number is 40. Information: (415) 861-4910.

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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

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship is a charitable organization pursuant to Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3) and California Revenue and Taxation Code #23701d.

Calendar

Sunday Speakers

June 7 David Lewis

David Lewis has been following the dharma path for over 40 years and has a degree in comparative religious studies. He started out in the Tibetan Shambhala tradition and has been practicing vipassana meditation since moving to San Francisco over 25 years ago. For the past 7 years he has been practicing intensively. David is a member of the Mission Dharma sangha, where he teaches an introduction to insight meditation class. He is a long time member of the Gay Buddhist Fellowship and also leads a weekly sitting group for seniors every Friday morning. David is a graduate of Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Dedicated Practitioners Program and has been on the teaching team for Spirit Rock retreats.

June 14 Open Discussion

June 21 Dharma Duo: Jeff Lindemood and Michael Murphy

June 28 Eugene Cash

Eugene Cash is the founding teacher of the San Francisco Insight Meditation Community of San Francisco. He teaches at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and leads intensive meditation retreats internationally. His teaching is influenced by both Burmese and Thai streams of the Theravada tradition as well as Zen and Tibetan Buddhist practice. He is also a teacher of the Diamond Approach, a school of spiritual investigation and self-realization developed by A. H. Almaas.

July 5 Open Discussion

July 12 Emilio Gonzalez

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

July 19 Tom Moon

Tom Moon has been a practitioner of Vipassana meditation for fifteen years, and his spiritual home is Spirit Rock Meditation Center. He is a psychologist in San Francisco, working primarily with gay men. His chief commitment is in exploring the interface between Buddhist practice and psychotherapy.

July 26 Jon Bernie

Jon Bernie is a contemporary spiritual teacher focused on the unfolding of natural wakefulness—the already enlightened basic state that lies at the core of human experience. He has four decades of practice and study in the contemplative traditions of Soto Zen, Theravada Insight Meditation & Advaita Vedanta. In addition to his work as a spiritual teacher, Jon is also an experienced healer and teacher of somatic embodiment via his extensive training in the Alexander Technique, the Qigong system of Dr. Yu Penxi and the Zero Balancing system of Dr. Fritz Smith. He has been in private practice since 1981. Jon leads classes, intensives and retreats in the San Francisco Bay Area and nationally.

August 2 Open Discussion

August 9 Sandy Boucher

Sandy Boucher, MA, is a Buddhist author, editor, and teacher who has been active for 35 years in the San Francisco Bay Area and Pacific Northwest. She is author of *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism*, a groundbreaking exploration of women's participation in Buddhist practice, as well as *She Appears: Encounters with Kwan Yin, Goddess of Compassion*.

August 16 Joe Rodriguez

Joe Rodriguez is a Soto Zen student from the Shunryu Suzuki lineage, studying under Fuyu Nancy Schroeder (Abiding Abness, Green Gulch Farm Zen Center) and serving as a board member of the San Francisco Zen Center. As a business executive and a long-time LGBT activist, his practice is to bring awareness, compassion, and forgiveness to daily life. His topic will be Forgiveness.

August 23 Benjamin Young

Benjamin began meditation as part of his spiritual practice when he was in his early twenties. Over the last forty-four years, he has studied many spiritual paths, pursued a number of meditation practices, led spiritual retreats and given spiritual talks. Benjamin traveled to India for two months in 2001 where he and a close friend took monk's vows. He has been practicing a Buddhist form of meditation called *Anapanasati* (Mindfulness of the In and Out Breath) for the past 20 years and assisting others in developing their spiritual practices.

August 30 Baruch Golden

Baruch Golden, a longtime GBF Member who has been practicing Vipassana meditation since 1998. He completed Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leaders program in 2012 and the Buddhist Chaplaincy Training Program with the Sati Center in Redwood City in 2013. He teaches dharma to many sitting groups in the Bay Area. Baruch is a registered nurse and has been doing hospice work for the past 14 years.

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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, believing in the equality of all that lives.

—GBF Dedication of Merit