Day of Meditation
Set for September 30

On Saturday, September 30, 1995, GBF will sponsor a silent, one-day sitting at Shambhala Tibetan Center, 1630 Taraval Street (between 26th and 27th Avenues) in San Francisco, from 8:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The schedule will include sitting and walking meditation, and some brief dharma readings. Please bring a meditation cushion or bench, and a bag lunch. Tea will be provided.

To register, please mail a check for $10.00 payable to GBF to: GBF Sitting, 2261 Market Street #422, San Francisco, CA 94114. Include your name, address, and telephone number.

If you have any questions about the Day of Meditation, call Daishin David Sunseri. We hope to see you there.

Gays, Lesbians to Meet
to Discuss Anthology

GBF is initiating a preliminary planning meeting to discuss the possibilities of creating an anthology that gives voice to the experiences of gay and lesbian Buddhists. The meeting is set for Thursday, September 14, at the home of John Krowka.

Women and people of color are encouraged to attend and participate in the creation of this anthology, which it is hoped, will reflect the diversity of the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender Buddhist community.

Next Potluck Sept. 23

The next GBF potluck will take place on Saturday, September 23, at 7:00 p.m. at the home of Brian Shelley, 42 Tioga Street, San Francisco. If you need travel directions, call Brian.

These social gatherings provide an opportunity to meet new friends and to get to know other GBFers better, thereby strengthening the GBF sangha. The atmosphere is relaxed, the food nourishing, and the folks friendly.

We would like to continue to hold GBF potlucks on a monthly basis. However, to do this, we will need new people to host them. If you are interested, please call Clint Seiter.

Sangha works best when people actively contribute. Each person has special talents and skills. We look forward to your participation.

Coming in October...

The October issue of the Gay Buddhist Fellowship Newsletter will carry the full text and question-and-answer session of a Sunday morning talk given by teacher-practitioner Eric Kolvig at GBF on June 11, 1995, titled, "Gay Sexuality and the Dharma."
The Local Dharma
September-October 1995

[Note: Sometimes schedules change, so we recommend you call to confirm events.]

Special Events

7 and 21 Sept. (Thurs.) “Learn to Love Problems.” Ven. Robina Courtin. 7 pm. $10.00. TCL

10 Sept. (Sun.) “Form is Emptiness... The Heart Sutra.” Ven. Geshe Thardo, teaching. 9:30 am-midnight. $15.00 per session or $25.00 for both. TCL

15-17 Sept. (Fri-Sun.) Shambhala Training Level II: “The Art of Being Human.” $125.00. SFSC

16 Sept. (Sat.) Ven. “Introduction to Tibetan Buddhist Meditation.” Carol Corradi. 9am-11am. $10.00. TCL

23 Sept. (Sat.) Day of Mindfulness with Thich Nhat Hanh. 8am-6pm. SR

26 Sept. (Tues.) Thich Nhat Hanh presents a dharma talk, “Be Still and Know.” Berkeley Community Theatre. 7 pm. $18.00. CML

5 and 19 Oct. (Thurs.) “Learn to Love Problems.” Ven. Robina Courtin. 7 pm. $10.00. TCL.

Beyond the Bay


Thich Nhat Hanh Visits Bay Area in September

Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh is featured at two events to take place this September in the Bay Area. On Saturday, September 23, he will be at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre for "A Day of Mindfulness." The event is from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and includes a dharma talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, sitting and walking meditation, a mindful, silent lunch, and deep relaxation.

On Tuesday, September 26, at 7:00 p.m. he will give a dharma talk titled, “Be Still and Know” at the Berkeley Community Theater, located at Allston Way and Martin Luther King, Jr. Way. The evening is an opportunity to practice mindfulness in community, and to hear Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, who will offer fresh insights from his new book, Living Buddha, Living Christ.

Tickets for both events are available by mail from the Community of Mindful Living, P.O. Box 7355, Berkeley, CA 94707. All proceeds will benefit the work of Thich Nhat Hanh, the

(continued on page 3)
The Practice of Money

Recently the steering committee made two financial decisions that relate to the money energy that flows into and out of GBF. The first decision is in regards to the $15 contribution that we ask of people when they initially request to be put on our mailing list to receive the GBF Newsletter.

Many of you have sent that $15 to us, but we have no system in place to remind you in writing when another payment is needed. We feel that a system of notification is too complicated a task for us at this point. Therefore, we have decided to abandon the request for $15, and will place all of our financial emphasis on the fundraising requests that we send out when we run out of money.

The last request was made in November of 1994, and we have just sent out our most recent request for donations. Please consider this request as a way to continue to support the newsletter and GBF-sponsored activities and projects. Be as generous as possible.

The second decision of the steering committee was prompted by several people who told us they would contribute more money to GBF if we had tax exempt status. The committee has voted, in principle, to seek tax exempt status this fall. We invite you to send us your comments in writing about this decision, or contact our voice mail line, or talk with members of the steering committee. A final decision on this issue will be made at the October steering committee meeting.

The question of how much money we need to operate has been an ongoing issue before the GBF steering committees over the past several years. Some members feel we should confine ourselves to seeking just enough funds to support the newsletter and very basic operating expenses. Others feel we could do more for the gay Buddhist community, both in the Bay Area and elsewhere, if we had more funds for workshops, conferences, development of materials, and for rental of our own space that we could use every week.

We are open to hearing from you about these issues, and encourage you to do so. Your commitment is important to gay Buddhism, and it affects the support we can offer to your practice.
On Meeting a Spiritual Friend

by the Venerable Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

(Editor’s Note: There has been considerable interest within CB7 as to the importance of working with a spiritual teacher. This article discusses the spiritual support and guidance that is available when one finds such a person. It also suggests that each of us may already have someone in our life—perhaps a close friend, partner, or family member—who may be a teacher for us as well.

The following article represents the full text of a talk given at the Albany (NY) Karma Thegsum Choling (KTC) on November 9, 1987, by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, director of the KTC, and abbot at Karma Triyama Dharmachakra. It has been reprinted here with permission from the Albany KTC. The subheadings have been added.)

Rinpoche would like to extend warm greetings to everyone. In talking about meeting with a spiritual friend, we might begin by asking, what is a spiritual friend? What does it mean to meet a spiritual friend, and having met a spiritual friend, what should one’s approach be to the relationship? What should be the outcome of having met a spiritual friend? Around these points Rinpoche would like to share his thoughts with you.

The Meaning of “Spiritual Friend”

To explain what is meant by “spiritual friend,” in Sanskrit the word is Kalyanamitra, and in Tibetan gewa chenjen. Gewa literally means “of virtue” or “of goodness,” something that is wholesome. And so the word we are using here, “spiritual,” may not exactly express it.

And so Kalyanamitra has to do with wholesomeness, something that is in the correct direction, and the second word, “che nyen,” is generally referred to as friend, but really means more than a friend. Of the two syllables, “che” has the meaning of friendship, and “nyen” means kinship, which is a family or blood relationship.

Whatever proper understanding, whatever wholesome knowledge and experience, someone who extends the generosity of such knowledge is expressing friendship. And what knowledge and insight the one who extends them has, could become your knowledge and your realization.

Through the sharing of the knowledge and the realization, you develop a more precious and special relationship, like a kinship. Through the bloodline in the case of a family, we are related to each other, and through the means of the teachings, through the possibility of common understanding, an intimate relationship takes place.

A spiritual friend is also able to extend one’s understanding as to what is unwholesome and destructive in one’s life, that one should be aware of and avoid getting caught up in.

Meeting a Spiritual Friend

How does one meet such a person? This can happen in two ways. One is a ripening of previous good connections, a previous history of having worked and studied with the help of such a spiritual friend. In this case, because of continuous ripening of wholesome karma, a good relationship that one has started in the past, in some former lifetime, for example, is able to continue, and so it is a matter of making a reconnection.

This is actually the best way, and the experience is also very special, in that, when you meet such a spiritual friend there is a sense of coming home. It is like a good friend whom one has not seen for a long time. When you see that friend again, there is a sort of mutual recognition, a good, relaxed feeling free of uncertainty or hesitation. As for the guidance of such a spiritual friend, and the inspiration that one can receive from such a spiritual friend, one does not have any question. There is a genuine, effortless confidence.

But such a meeting is rare, because one who meets a spiritual friend in this way must be very fortunate, and have a good history of connection, a good history of cultivation of what is wholesome and virtuous, as far as mental development is concerned.

The other way one meets a spiritual friend is because of auspicious coincidence, because certain circumstances brought one to the situation. Auspicious coincidence, Rinpoche says, does not mean simply by chance, not coincidence in that sense. While the meeting with a particular spiritual friend is not because of previous connections, and it is not the same spiritual friend who you have worked with, the fact that one can have this experience at all is because of some degree of previous connection with wholesome dharmic activities. When you come into contact with something that is good, especially towards the experience of awakening of one’s mind, the ripening of these experiences happens mainly because of two things.

First, one has some history of conducting one’s life or lives in wholesome or virtuous ways, coupled with an aspiration that in all future times until complete awakened mind is experienced, may one be always
able to continue to cultivate such qualities of mind, and may one find the necessary conditions to do so. That is the reason on the part of the student.

Then on the part of the spiritual friend, the fact that particular teachers of the dharma are able to effect benefit in the lives others, is not only because they have cultivated some realization and accumulated some knowledge, but also because of the strength of their aspiration. That is, whatever knowledge and insight and realization they have, may they be able to continually extend them towards the benefit of others. Because of these two situations meeting together, the auspicious circumstance arises.

Recognizing a Spiritual Friend

With regard to meeting a spiritual friend, how does one know that one has met the proper spiritual friend, not just in name or appearance, but in reality? That is not impossible, but it is not very easy to know, because whether someone you have met is a true spiritual friend or not is not immediately apparent from looking at the outward appearance of the person. The depth of knowledge and realization, the level of commitment to helping others that a spiritual friend has, are qualities of the mind and are hidden from being immediately visible.

Nevertheless, it is not impossible to know whether one has met with a proper spiritual friend, if one has some degree of intelligence and common sense, based on what this person, known as a spiritual friend, is saying. Are the words and the knowledge that are being shared intelligible and reasonable, are they sane and beneficial? Then, more importantly, does his or her action go along with what he or she says? What is said may be very sensible, intelligent, and beneficial, but are the actions reasonable and wholesome?

And so, if not immediately, at least given time one would have the ability to know. With regard to this, Shakyamuni Buddha said that is difficult for ordinary people to have insight into other people’s minds. Nevertheless it is not impossible to know about them without having exact knowledge of their minds. Where you see smoke, you see the possibility of fire. Where you see swans, you see the possibility of water. Where you see the actions that are like the actions of a Bodhisattva, there is the possibility of the Bodhisattva mind. Where there is sane action, there is the possibility of sane mind.

With regard to what should be some of the characteristics or marks of a true spiritual friend, there are a few which Rinpoche would like to share with you. One is in regard to helping and guiding others. From the side of the spiritual friend, there is no discrimination between old and young, weak and strong, poor and rich, man and woman. He or she is simply and purely concerned with benefiting whoever needs help, whoever could be reached by what he or she can do.

Another is being able to maintain these qualities month after month, year after year. Anyone can be impressive once or twice, without any discrimination or favoritism—that should not be difficult. But being able to remain the same way, having an even mind all of the time, is not so easy.

Another mark of a true spiritual friend is that he or she is consistently responsible for a relationship that has been made. It is not a case of immediate excitement and concern, and then later, withdrawing when whatever personal interest involved is no longer being fulfilled. But if a spiritual friend is interested in the well being of others, the experience of awakened mind of others, he should remain interested until the others have experienced the awakened state of mind.

A spiritual friend is able to extend one’s understanding as to what is unwholesome and destructive in one’s life.

And then again, when sharing knowledge and understanding, the true spiritual friend does so with the intention to help others, not with arrogance or pride or a superior attitude, and not bullying others’ ignorance, but rather being patient with others’ ignorance and being sensitive to others not knowing.

One might have started that way, too, and the understanding and realization one has received, one did not begin with, and obviously any spiritual friend might know the same.

And another virtue is not becoming inflated by praises and compliments, not becoming deflated and shrinking because of criticisms. So these are some of the characteristics of one who might be regarded as a proper or true spiritual friend.

So in this way you can actually examine and recognize a proper spiritual friend, even though you do not have insight into the mind of the person. A simple example is that if an object with a terrible odor is wrapped in silk or brocade, it is immediately very impressive. But slowly the odor comes through and it smells more and more, and so you have an idea of what is inside the package.

On the other hand, if an object which is full of fragrance and freshness is wrapped in rags or any simple piece of cloth, at immediate glance it may not seem even worth keeping. However, the longer you are around such an object, the more the fragrance comes through, and the more you value it. So, based on common sense and a discerning mind, it is not difficult to have a sense of whether someone is a proper spiritual friend or not.
Nurturing the Relationship

Meeting a proper spiritual friend, someone having the marks and qualities Rinpoché talked about, in our time is absolutely rare. Given that reality, if one has met such a true spiritual friend, then it is extremely important that one makes the connection and maintains that connection. Because first of all, such a true spiritual friend is very rare to find, and second of all, being able to come across with another is almost impossible.

There is a Tibetan saying that finding a true spiritual friend is like seeing stars in the daytime, or seeing flowers in the winter. In the cold and rugged climate of Tibet, it is almost impossible to see flowers in the winter. If it ever happens, it must be something special and auspicious. It is known that once in awhile it happens, at the passing or at the rebirth of some great teacher, one finds a flower growing in the snow or in some rugged place. So it is not impossible, but it is certainly rare.

Then, when you have come into contact with a true spiritual friend and you recognize that, then there is a good possibility that you will be able to appreciate and recognize the wisdom, the insight that flows from such a relationship, through such a person. And so, now, you are making a true relationship, and when you begin to receive such knowledge, there is a friendship and a kinship happening.

In a relationship between parents and children, there is the passing down of genes or inheritance which is very special, and which we should honor and respect and acknowledge by all means. But nothing is more special than to be able to inherit the knowledge and wisdom of someone else, to have that become integrated in one’s life.

So when you have a proper relationship, there is all the possibility of benefit happening because the conditions for things to happen in a wholesome and proper way are there. If, let us say, there is a piece of scented wood that has fragrance, and if another piece of wood with no scent at all is put with the scented wood, given time, that second piece of wood becomes as fragrant as the first. When good things meet, good things happen.

Once again, such a meeting with the proper spiritual friend is rare. But once such a relationship takes place, that could be the most beneficial thing and the most important occurrence in one’s life. Because whether we know it or not, the reality is that from beginningless time, for aeons and aeons, one has experienced birth in cyclic existence. One’s mind—the complete involuntary way of one’s mind—has been in accordance with the dictates of confused conditioning.

When one’s mind is experiencing confusion, that causes suffering and pain, and pain and suffering causes more confusion, and this has gone on choicelessly from birth to death, again and again. And also the present experience of our lives is quite temporary. We should know that our life is very fragile: we will not have it all the time. While we do have it, when we have the opportunity to make the best use of it, it should be obvious that we must take advantage of that.

Taking Responsibility When Working With a Teacher

Also, there is a very serious ignorance that people like to hold on to, a very strong wishful thinking, and that is the idea of natural evolution. From lifetime to lifetime naturally you become more and more refined, better and better, and then at some point you reach some culmination and you are there.

If that is true, should it not have happened a long time ago? This idea denies the truth of cause and effect, which is not an individual opinion or a possibility, but from a material point of view, the truth of cause and effect is obvious. We know that when we do certain things we experience certain results. If our actions have been wholesome, we experience some happiness, even if it is temporary. And if our actions have been unwholesome and very destructive, we experience the result as pain and suffering. That is the truth of cause and effect.

But on the other hand, somewhere else we would like to have a natural evolution taking place, which is not our doing. But if there is such a thing as natural evolution, there is no point in telling anyone to do wholesome and beneficial things. You could be doing the most heinous of crimes, but natural evolution will take care of you. You could be doing the most incredible, unwholesome things, but it does not matter because you are subject to natural evolution. So the notion that things are going to work out by themselves and obviously for the better is an illusion and wishful thinking.

We are responsible for our actions and we are responsible for our thoughts. We are responsible for the influence that we have on others. We have the ability to have a wholesome influence, and we have the ability to have a very unwholesome influence. We are responsible for the harm that
Renewal Form for GBF Newsletter

Yes, please keep me on your mailing list. I want to continue to receive the Gay Buddhist Fellowship Newsletter.

Name: __________________________

Below, I have indicated any changes in my address or phone number(s):

Address: __________________________________________________________

Home Phone: ___________________________ Work Phone: __________________

Return this form to: GBF, 2261 Market Street #422, San Francisco, CA 94114.

we do to ourselves, and we are responsible for the harm that we do to others.

And so, in this way, it is more realistic to take care of one's own work, whatever one has to do. Given that understanding, when there is an opportunity of having a relationship with a true and proper spiritual friend and fostering that relationship, one cannot afford to miss it.

As for experience of the ultimate and absolute happiness of one's mind—the experience of freedom from sufferings and confusions—absolutely nothing else that you do is going to bring that about, other than working with one's mind through the help of the instructions and the guidance of the spiritual friend who has the knowledge.

When there is an opportunity of having a relationship with a true and proper spiritual friend, one cannot afford to miss it.

We have the potential to become free of suffering, to become as totally enlightened as anyone else who has experienced the awakened state of mind and has become endowed with absolute wisdom. We have incredible potentials; we are profoundly resourceful. But if we imprison ourselves and let our potentials remain completely obscured, our potentials by themselves are not going to evolve without our facilitating the unfolding of them by receiving guidance and then integrating it.

We are doing so many things in our lives. We will try to move any obstacles, do anything, to be able to experience some degree of stability of mind, some freedom from dissatisfaction. But if our actions are limited to things that are not directly related with the problems and potentials of our mind, they are all wasted efforts.

And finally, fully awakened Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, endowed with true wisdom and free from confusion and suffering, how did they reach that state? It is having made a connection with the proper spiritual friend, recognizing the importance of that relationship, developing the knowledge and the wisdom needed to unravel the defilements and obscurations of one's mind, and unfolding the potentials of one's mind. That is what led to the experience of awakened mind. Our situation and potentials and journey are the same. 🕉️