GBF Calendar

GBF's 24-hour hotline: 415/974-9878. Call for info. about GBF and a listing of GBF-sponsored events. To skip the recording, and leave a message, press 5.

5 Dec. (Tue.), Steering Committee Meeting, 7:30 p.m., at the home of John Krowka.

7 Dec., Thursday Sitting, 8 p.m., at the home of Alan Oliver.

9 Dec. (Sat.), Monthly Potluck, 7 p.m., at the home of John Krowka.

10 Dec., Sunday Meeting, 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St., SF. Informal panel, with discussion to follow, on dealing with HIV from the perspective of the Buddhist teachings.

10 Dec. (Sun.), News/Calendar/Classifieds Deadline for GBF Newsletter.

14 Dec. Thursday Sitting, 8 p.m., at the home of Lee Robbins.

21 Dec., Thursday Sitting, 8 p.m., at the home of Mark Marion.

24 Dec., Sunday Meeting, 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St., SF. Open discussion. ♦

28 Dec., Thursday Sitting, call David Holmes for location.

Buddhist Practice and HIV Disease is Topic of Sunday Meeting

At the Sunday morning meeting on December 10, we will have a discussion about dealing with HIV from the perspective of the Buddhist teachings. What did the Buddha say about sickness and death, and how can we cope with this disease in our own lives, and those of our partners, friends, and family?

We hope to have present at the meeting an informal "panel of experts" who will first share their views with us. Then we'll open up the discussion so everyone can participate. Please join us for what promises to be an informative and supportive gathering. ♦

GBF Member
Brian LeFevre Dies

by George Gayuski

(Editor's Note: Brian was on the GBF Steering Committee for a year and a half. He facilitated the Sunday morning meetings, and made a great contribution to our sangha. We are thankful for his practice and the time he shared with us.)

Brian LeFevre passed away at home on October 29, 1995, from cancer. Several friends and his sister were with him. Brian had a wide network of friends who looked after him regularly during his last months. Brian's sister, Kathy, took devoted and wonderful care of Brian and made the last months of his life especially filled with love.

Brian discovered Taoism and Buddhism in his early twenties, and almost immediately moved to San Francisco to begin practice at Zen Center. Shortly thereafter, he found himself at Tassajara for three-and-a-half years of Zen training. After a period of time back in San Francisco, Brian went to live in Barcelona where he taught for many years. It was in Spain that he met Joseph, his life's love.

Although Brian was in some ways a private person, he was also often animated. He would frequently express his perspective in surprisingly bold terms. (He surprised many a Zen student!) Brian was a remarkably intelligent man. He could discuss any number of subjects knowledgeably.

(continued on page 3)

Coming in January...

An article by Alan Oliver on the "Buddha and Boundaries" workshop that was originally scheduled for this issue of the GBF Newsletter will appear in the January issue. We also hope to have a surprise feature article.
The Local Dharma
December 1995-January 1996

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

Special Events


5,12, 19 Dec. (Tues.) “The Basic Meditations” with Tom Dempsey. A practical series of meditation classes based on The Meditation Handbook by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. The subjects of the evenings are as follows: “The Four Great Rivers: Coming to Terms With Our Suffering” (12/5), “The Psychology of Discontent” (12/12), and “The Path to Liberation” (12/19). $10 per class. SBC

4,11 Dec. (Sat.) “Introduction to Meditation” with Tse Chen Ling director, Carol Corradi. The program includes several short meditations and basic instruction on different meditation techniques, and concludes with a brief introduction to basic Tibetan Buddhism. This introduction is offered monthly on the third Saturday of each month. 9 am-11 am. TCL


Beyond the Bay

15 Dec-13 Jan. “Winter Dathun and Weekthuns.” Month and weeklong Buddhist meditation and practice intensive. This program is staffed by senior students and includes lodging, food, and instruction in meditation. To $630. At the Rocky Mountain Shambhala Center in Red Feather Lakes, CO. 970/881-2184 ext. 272.

Contributors

Thanks to the following people who helped with this issue of the GFF Newsletter: Al Chase, Rob Del Rey, George Gayuski, Ron Ginsberg, Bob Hass, David Holmes, John Krowka, Alan Oliver, Stephan Pardi, Clint Seiter, Brian Shelley, and Daishin David Sunseri.
How to Remain Mindful in the Workplace

by Rob Del Ré

A number of years ago, I made a conscious choice to simplify my life, and working in the mailroom at the University of California has made it possible for me to do that. To paraphrase a saying, one must strive for simplicity and repetition in order to produce a spiritual awareness. Hakuin, an eighteenth century Rinzai Zen master, has written, “Concentration in the midst of activity excels concentration in stillness by a hundred, a thousand, or even a hundred million times.”

Working in the mailroom is not without its periods of stressful activities and shifting priorities. As a result, I have had to devise “techniques” to keep myself balanced and grounded. I’d like to share some of these with you.

The same techniques that work while sitting in practice also work while standing or walking. Sometimes we forget that our practice is more than just sitting alone in a quiet room; it is wherever we may be. The aim is to be as totally mindful (focused and alert) as possible to the situation at hand. For one thing, I strive to remain conscious of my physical boundaries in the workplace. Also, I try to remain flexible to the schedule at hand, and take “one thing at a time,” whatever the multiplicity of tasks I must accomplish. This also requires that I pace myself.

To remain focused, it is skillful to set one’s priorities with clear beginnings and endings. I’ve found it helpful to remind myself frequently that everything is temporal and transitory, nothing lasting beyond the given moment. So whatever stress you may be feeling will pass. Relax and breathe. Remain loose and not uptight, remembering to consciously breathe out the tension and breathe in the renewal energy.

Another important technique is to be “good to yourself.” Remember to take short breaks from your work such as a walk outside, or stretching tired muscles. While doing this, always remain mindful of your breathing and thereby your state of mind. This is a good way of avoiding a scattered, fragmented self. Depending on the nature of one’s work, this can be done every 20 minutes to every couple of hours.

Another good technique I’ve found is detaching consciously from the stressful situation, and returning only when you are more focused and fully alert. Just pulling yourself away for a few deep breaths, and then returning, can work wonders. It is the process, and not the end result, that truly matters in the larger scheme of things.

Being mindful at the workplace also requires taking a balanced approach to the job. If your work is primarily of a physical nature, like mine, it is helpful to use your breaks and lunchtime to stimulate your mind by reading, doing crossword puzzles, sitting quietly, or just being a silent observer of life all around you. After all, on the other hand, your job requires mental activity, go out for a brisk walk, jog, or engage in any other athletic activity. The important thing is to be consciously present in whatever you may be doing as a balance to your work activity.

Paying attention to your physical work environment is another key to maintaining a mindful demeanor on the job. For example, you may want to adjust the lights or air flow (opening windows or turning on fans), and play classical music to create a more peaceful work environment. The ability to detach yourself from chaotic situations will help you avoid feeling fragmented and scattered. Only by remaining aware of these processes from moment to moment can you maintain your boundaries and be effective in furthering your practice in the workplace.

For me, the hardest thing about working in the mailroom is the sudden need to shift priorities or to “change gears.” When that happens, I simply try to remind myself to pull back, detach myself mentally for a few moments from the task at hand, and then deal with the new task.

When I am not mindful, I notice my body feels the stress. For me, the usual symptoms are hunched shoulders, and a tightness in my jaw and stomach. This results from my pulling in and holding my breath. These are clues that are telling me to relax and let go of whatever is bothering me. Once I become aware of any physical symptoms, I know to drop my shoulders, loosen my jaw, or soften my belly.

In the end, it is up to you to become aware of and responsive to your states of mind and body, and then act accordingly. We spend a major portion of our lives working. Therefore, becoming increasingly skillful in responding to work situations in a more mindful way will only increase your practice in the most meaningful and beneficial way.

Brian LeFevre
(from page 1)

Always the romantic, he definitely took a wistful and wholesome delight in the passions of life.

Last August we spent a wonderful week together at Tassajara. There, he told me that as a Zen student he used to check out tall stacks of books from the library so that during study hall, he had someplace to rest his head to sleep. It was great to see him at Tassajara. Even with the physical pain he was in at the time, he was happy to be there enjoying a bath, a nap, the sangha, and the sunshine and stars.

We already miss his humor, generosity, warmth, intellect, and character. We wish him an auspicious transition filled with the blessings and guidance of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.
Prayer, Karma, and Practice
A Nichiren Buddhist Perspective on Our Lives
by Greg Martin

[This is the second part of a lecture given recently in Seattle by Greg Martin, one of the seniors in the U.S. organization of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a lay organization of Nichiren Buddhism. It presents a helpful introduction to some of the fundamentals of Nichiren Buddhist teachings.]

PART TWO

Looking Honestly at Ourselves Nurtures Our Spiritual Growth

Belief is not something apart from life. Nor is it confined to a select group of people. The important thing is the extent to which one is aware of what he believes in. Most people never even question if the substance of their belief is absolutely correct. Right or wrong, just or evil, they ignore it and go merrily on their way. Here, right here, is the root of unhappiness.

How many times have we asked ourselves if our fundamental beliefs are correct? Many, many times I have seen people with 15 or 20 years of practice who are stuck, unable to make advancement. Their practice has become a difficulty. When we examine the root cause we find that in their head, they know all the right Buddhist things, but in their heart, they remain non-Buddhist, thinking, for example, it’s someone else’s responsibility. They are in Dotai Ishin, or “one in body, many in mind.”

The Rissho Ankoku Ron Thesis on Establishing Peace in the Land Through the Propagation of Buddhism, one of the 10 major writings of Nichiren, states, “Therefore you must quickly reform the tenets that you hold in your heart and embrace the one true vehicle, the single good doctrine of the Lotus Sutra.”

In other words, we chant daimoku in front of the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon is the true object of worship for observing the truth about your own life. When you chant daimoku seeking the truth, you will become aware of yourself, which takes courage, and you will also be able to discover that you have the Buddha nature.

Unless you have the courage to look at the true nature of your life, you cannot find the Buddha nature. You have to have the courage to look.

SGI Vice President Tsuji once said, “We should chant daimoku with the attitude that through our prayers to the Gohonzon, whether it be for a new home, our business, or our health, we will be able to contribute to world peace and the happiness of others (kosen-rufu). Ask the Gohonzon, ‘For kosen-rufu, please let me overcome these difficulties.’”

Without thinking about the happiness of others, and simply chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, we will find little benefit. Benefit derived from our prayers based on kosen-rufu is as dynamic as flying in an airplane, while chanting just for our own sake is as slow as walking in terms of gaining benefit.

Do Not Look Outside For Answers; They Are Within

It is important not to look outside yourself. Seek the solution to the problem within yourself. You are the problem. You are also the solution.

Chant daimoku in front of the Gohonzon with the prayer: “Give me the wisdom to know what I need to do. Give me the wisdom to know what action I need to take.” You will be amazed at the progress you make. Outwardly-directed prayers will not help you in the least, even if you do it for the rest of your life.

The point here is that if you are going to chant daimoku, don’t spend your time trying to fix things outside of yourself. The Gohonzon has a universe of unlimited power to change you and reform your inner life. Open your life and see your true nature. Deal with your true nature.

The quality of our prayer is just as important as the quantity. The ideal thing is to chant quality, quantity daimoku. However, the quality of our prayer is extremely important.

The Three Aspects of Practice

When we look at our life and our Buddhist practice, we only see it from our own perspective, and generally it looks right to us. Most of the time, we think we’re just fine. But someone else can clearly see if we are off track. This is especially true when you have an experienced senior. This is why we receive spiritual guidance.

The reason is because the daimoku you’re currently chant-
ing is not reaching the Gohonzon. Something’s gone amiss
and you’re frustrated. You need someone to point this out to
you, showing you that your view has become non-Buddhist,
or that you’ve lost the correct spirit and you’re chanting for
the wrong reason. The power of spiritual guidance from a seer
is to redirect our prayer to the Gohonzon so we can get the
benefit to start flowing again.

How we pray in Buddhism makes all the difference in the
world. The practitioner of the Lotus Sutra practices three
things strongly. You can only have your prayers answered if
you are 1) studying Buddhism, 2) if you are chanting daimoku
to the Gohonzon, and 3) if you are fulfilling the bodhisattva’s
pledge to teach others.

Do your best in those three areas. If your practice has lost
its power to produce benefit, I would immediately look at
those three legs of your practice and ask yourself, “Am I
exerting myself to the best of my ability in study, practice for
myself, and practice for others?” The prayers of those who
carry out these three practices strongly are answered. A
practitioner of the Lotus Sutra is not seeking personal
benefit, but rather is seeking the enlightenment and wisdom
to become a Buddha. Of course, when you become a Buddha,
you get benefit as a natural consequence.

Praying With Determination Brings Results

Another aspect of karma which is often misunderstood is
this: we often think our karma is something outside of us.
However, someone else’s behavior is not your karma. Your
karma is that you don’t know how to deal with their behavior.
You can’t handle their behavior. You respond in the wrong
way to their behavior. That’s your problem. Your behavior is
your karma and your responsibility. Their behavior is their
responsibility.

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda states, “Daily life and life
itself are battles. Do you win or lose? The outcome is not
always determined by how much experience or ability you
have. What’s most important is your decision to win. Then
pray with all your might, bringing forth great wisdom while
making every effort to accomplish your goal.

“Start with a determination. For example, ‘I will overcome
my suffering. I will do it.’ You may have no idea how, so you
pray for the needed wisdom and strength. That kind of self-
empowering prayer produces results.”

Mr. Ikeda continues, “Prayer in Nichiren Daishonin’s
Buddhism means to chant daimoku based on a pledge or vow.
At its very core, this vow is to attain kosen-rufu. It means
chanting resolutely with the determination: ‘I will realize
kosen-rufu. Therefore, I will show magnificent actual proof
in my work. Please enable me to somehow bring forth my
greatest potential.’ This is what our prayers should be like.

‘It is also important that we establish clear and concrete
goals for what we hope to achieve each day, and then pray
and challenge ourselves to achieve each one. This earnest
determination will give rise to wisdom and resourcefulness,
thereby leading to success. In short, to win in life we need
determination and prayer, effort and ingenuity. It is mis-
guided to dream of getting rich quick, expecting to encounter
a rare stroke of luck or some shrewd money-making scheme.

This is not faith. It is mere fantasy” (World Tribune, 6/6/94).

Prayer in Buddhism absolutely works, but it has to be
correct prayer. How we pray makes all the difference in
the world. What we are doing and thinking while we are
chanting daimoku in front of the Gohonzon makes the
difference between a trickle of benefit and a river of
absolutely incredible benefit.

Please reflect on whether you have the Buddhist
atitude or are you simply trying to get someone else to
help you. What is your attitude in front of the Gohonzon?
Are you playing the victim or are you filled with the
determination that you will overcome your suffering?

“I need wisdom and strength from my prayer, but I am
going to do it!” With that kind of prayer, I believe there is
nothing that you cannot achieve.

For further information on Nichiren Buddhism and the Soka
Gakkai International, please contact SGI-USA, 2450 17th Street,
San Francisco, CA 94110; 415/255-6007.

Not to be Missed:
Monthly Potluck Sat., Dec. 9

If you haven’t been yet, you oughta go. To what? GBF’s
monthly potluck, that’s what. It’s where it’s happening!
This month we return to the home of steering committee
member John Krowka, at 26 Naylor Street in San
Francisco. The festivities usually start promptly at 7pm.
For directions, call John.

A word to the wise: be punctual. Should you arrive on
“gay time,” you may find that the delectable potluck dishes
your talented sangha brothers have prepared just for you
have miraculously disappeared.

And yes, please let us know when YOU are able to host
a future potluck. To volunteer your home and your
hospitality, please call Clint Seiter, potluck coordinator,

Classifieds Corner

HOUSING SEARCH
Seeking shared living arrangement in northern part
of SF beginning 1/96. Interested in creating greater
sense of gay Buddhist community, mutual support,
spiritual growth. If you know of a situation that fits
this vision, call Alan Oliver.