GBF Calendar

Call 415/974-9878 for news about GBF and GBF-sponsored events. To skip the recording and leave a message, press 5.

1 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 8 pm, at the home of Alan Oliver;

6 Feb. (Tue.), Steering Committee Meeting at the home of Clint Seiter;

8 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 8 pm, at the home of Lee Robbins;

10 Feb. (Sat.), GBF Newsletter deadline for calendar, news, and classifieds.

11 Feb., Sunday Meeting, 10:30 a.m. Open Discussion. This meeting will not be held at 273 Page Street. Call the GBF information line for location.

15 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 8 pm, at the home of Mark Marlon;

22 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 8 pm, at the home of Edward Sans;

25 Feb., Sunday Meeting, 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St., SF. Speaker: Petra McWilliams, co-director of The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition.

10 March, Sunday Meeting, 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St., SF. Speaker: GBF member Samuel Schindler will speak about the Enneagram, a system of sacred psychology based on nine personality types.

Sunday Speaker Feb. 25 is Petra McWilliams

GBF welcomes Petra McWilliams as our guest speaker at the February 25, 1996, Sunday morning meeting. Petra is a student of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and co-director of The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), an international organization of over 70 retreat centers, monasteries, and teaching centers around the world in the Tibetan tradition of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

Vipassana G/L Retreat Set for April 3-7

Due to the wonderful turnout at Spirit Rock’s recent “Gay and Free” weekends and the considerable interest expressed by participants for a longer retreat together, a group of gay and lesbian vipassana students have organized a five-day retreat this spring. It will be held the week of April 3-7 at the Angela Center in Santa Rosa, and will be led by Eric Kolvig and Arinna Weisman.

There will be silent sitting, walking, and eating meditation; group discussions; and interviews. The cost ($225) does not include payment to the teachers. Some scholarships are available. An effort will be made to accommodate persons with life-threatening illness. Angela Center is wheelchair accessible.

Illustrator Sought for Newsletter

The GBF Newsletter is actively seeking someone to join our journalistic “team” as staff illustrator. Our vision is to find someone who would enjoy creating a few simple illustrations to accompany specific articles for each issue of the newsletter. Currently, we must rely exclusively on images that we can find from other sources. If interested, this individual could also work with the editor to shape the overall design of the newsletter.

Here is a creative practice opportunity for a member of our sangha who is artistically inclined. For more information, please contact Bob Hass.

Coming up...

Last month, members of the GBF steering committee and a couple of other GBFers participated in a two-day retreat at Sea Ranch, California, to plan for the future of our sangha. The March 1996 issue of the GBF Newsletter will highlight the deliberations, decisions, and tenor of the retreat.
Dharma Centers
(Each center offers ongoing programs and activities. If interested, please call them directly.)
- BPF: Buddhist Peace Fellowship. Box 4650; Berkeley 94704. 510/525-8596.
- BSC: Berkeley Shambhala Center. 2288 Fulton St., Berkeley. 510/841-6475 or
  510/549-1481.
- CMI: Community of Mindful Living. P.O. Box 7355, Albany 94707. 510/527-3751.
- D/L: Dzogchen International. P.O. Box 22318, Berkeley 94704. 510/849-9228.
- EGCZ: Empty Gate Zen Center, 5707 Oak Grove Ave., Oakland 94618. 510/653-5991.
- LMB: Land of Medicine Buddha. 5800 Presidio Road, Sequoia. 415/662-8383.
- ODD: Ogyen Dorje Den/Bay Area Yeshe Nyinpo. 410 Townsend #406, SF. 415/826-7181.
- POL: POL, Pema Osel Ling. 2013 Eureka Canyon Road, Corralitos. 408/761-6266.
- SBCC: Saraha Buddhist Center. 3145 Geary Blvd., #515, SF. 415/731-5978.
- SCZC: Santa Cruz Zen Center. 167 School Street, Santa Cruz. 408/457-0206.
- SFSC: San Francisco Shambhala Center. 1630 Taraval St., SF. 415/731-4426.
- SFZC: San Francisco Zen Center. 300 Page Street, SF. 415/863-3136.
- SMZC: Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. 6367 Sonoma Mountain Road, Santa Rosa. 707/545-8105.
- TCL: Tse Chen Ling. 4 Joost Ave. SF. 415/641-0671.
- VI: Vejjanipan Institute. P.O. Box 2130, Boulder Creek 95066. 408/228-6654.

The Local Dharma
February-March 1996

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

Special Events

3 Feb. (Sat.) “Who Dies?” with Stephen Levine. The workshop will explore the levels of healing that are possible through living and dying with awareness. There will be guided meditations, lectures, and question-and-answer periods. The workshop will take place at the Scottish Rite Center, 1547 Lakeside Drive, Oakland. For additional information, call 415/753-5755 or fax 415/753-5700. 10 am-5 pm.

Steven Levine is a teacher of Vipassana meditation and the author of several bestselling books. A colleague of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, Levine has served people in the processes of healing and dying for over 25 years.


26 Feb. (Mon.) “Death and Dying” with Lama Tharchin Rinpoche. Open Secret Bookstore, 923 C Street, San Rafael. $15. 7 pm.

10 Mar. (Sun.) “Snow on the Mountain top: a Day of Mindfulness Focused on Our Aging Process and Caregiving For Older Parents” facilitated by Tova Green and Paul Takayanagi with a Dharma talk by teacher Maylie Scott. This all day event will feature meditation periods, guided meditations, and small and large group discussions. $15 donation. 8:45 am-4 pm. Call 510/649-2566 to register or for more information. BZC

Beyond the Bay

3-4 Feb. (Sat.-Sun.) “Tasting the Great Bliss: Introduction to Tantric Practice” with Tubten Pende. Have you ever experienced problems with self-esteem or wallowed in worthlessness? These problems arise solely through our clinging to mistaken perceptions of ourselves and our reality. This uplifting program will help shatter these false and destructive notions we so often carry around. Sessions involve explanation about the connection between tantric practice and Buddhism, as well as guided meditations. 10 am (2/3)-4 pm (2/4)

Contributors

Thanks to the following people who helped with this issue of the GFB Newsletter: Alan Oliver, Bob Hass, Chris Webster, Daoshin David Sunseri, David Holmes, Greg Eichler, Harv Whitten, Jerry Gagnon, Joel Michael, John Krowka, Mark Marion, Rob Del Ré, Robin Levitt, Ron Ginsberg, and Trebor Onas.
**SF Mindfulness Community**
Now Meeting in Castro

The San Francisco Mindfulness Community invites all interested persons to sit with them every Monday evening from 7:30 to 9:00 at the Hartford Street Zen Center, 57 Hartford Street (near Castro & 18th Streets). After a 40-minute period of sitting and walking meditation, the group listens to a taped talk by its teacher, Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, the founder of the Order of Interbeing. The talks, which center on how to apply mindfulness practice to everyday life, are followed by dharma discussions.

Once a month, members of the community recite together the Five Wonderful Precepts. They also regularly join other Bay Area mindfulness communities on weekend retreats.

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**“The Sower”**

Adapted by Rob Del Ré

(The following dharma tale comes from a book titled *The Gospel of Buddha* by Paul Carus (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1917). It has been shortened and paraphrased for publication here.)

The saying, "You reap what you sow," reminds me of the story of the Brahman farmer and the Buddha.

There once was a wealthy farmer named Bharadvaja, who was busily celebrating his abundant harvest in the central marketplace. Suddenly Buddha appeared with his usual begging bowl.

Some in the crowd gave to him happily, but Bharadvaja the Farmer held back, finally saying angrily, "Sir, it would seem more proper to do some honest day's work, than to beg for one's subsistence. Do as I must do by working the field, first by plowing, then by sowing, and finally by harvesting. Then do I gain the fruit of my labor."

The Buddha, having listened patiently to the man, responded, "I, too, am a 'Farmer of the Soil' for I plough and sow, and having done that, I am able to reap the 'fruit of my planting' as well."

Bharadvaja, after hearing this, was taken aback, and rejoined, "Honorable Sir (looking around), then where are thy bullocks, the seeds for planting, and the plough for working the soil?"

Buddha smiled, saying, "Truly I am here to show you and thereby librate. Listen. 'Faith is the seed that I sow, and Good Works are the water that fertilizes it, while Wisdom and Modesty are the plough, and my Mind guides the rein. And Earnestness and Exertion are the willpower and drive of my oxen. Further, the ploughing that I do is to destroy the weeds of Illusion or Maya. And the harvest it all bears is the immortal fruit of Enlightenment or Nirvana.'

Upon hearing all this, Bharadvaja bowed down, offering Buddha a golden bowl in place of his wooden begging bowl. Filling it up with sweet rice milk, he said, "Let the Enlightened One partake of this 'offering' for you. Verily, plough that which bears truly 'the fruit of immortality.'"

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Rob Del Ré is a GBF member who is very interested in carrying his practice mindfully into his everyday life.

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**Classifieds Corner**

**HOUSING SEARCH**
Seeking shared living arrangement in northern part of SF beginning 4/1/96. 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.

**NEW CAREER NETWORKING**
Beginning new career in ecology/environmental field. Would like to meet others working in this area to share my vision, explore the possibilities, and network. If this is you, or if you know someone I should talk with, please call Bob Hass.

**PENPAL**
Gay Buddhist majoring in writing seeks another writer to exchange work and correspondence. Am also classical piano player, Tai-Chi enthusiast, total vegetarian. Sun Ying.
Letters

No-Boundary Buddhism

Alan Oliver’s “No-Boundary Buddhism” makes some good points, but it may also be valuable to acknowledge how important boundaries can be in maintaining psychological/spiritual health.

Although we may experience a “universal energy field” on a day-to-day basis, it’s still important to say “no,” and to protect ourselves from aggressively crazy behavior, knowing where our boundaries end and others’ boundaries begin.

I don’t see this as apart from something that may be called enlightenment, but rather, a function of it. Setting boundaries may be a foundation for “skillful means.” Certainly safe sex is an example of setting healthy boundaries for our survival. Any Buddhist psychologists who would be interested in addressing this subject?

Jerry Gagnon
San Francisco

Australian Gay Sangha

We are a very small group of gay Buddhists who meet monthly in a Quaker hall behind the Anglican cathedral in North Adelaide, Australia. There are always at least 6 of us, and sometimes as many as 12. We are a slightly mixed group. I am a follower of Soto Zen, there are two Shin Buddhists (one of them a recently ordained priest whom we invite to talk to us), and several others of no fixed order who find inspiration in the teaching of the Buddha.

We have just had our “Picnic in the Park” where the gay community of Adelaide gets together for a very frolicsome appearance. Our group of gay Buddhists attend and sit under a rainbow canopy of silk. Also attending are other gay religious groups, including our own high-profile Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, who always come over to see us and give us their special blessing.

But apart from that, we are a very quiet group of people. Adelaide is a bit like that, too—a small, fairly civilized city of less than one million people. Next February to March is our twice-a-year Festival, so that means an overdose of culture. How nice.

My best wishes and greetings to all at GBF.

Chris Webster
Adelaide, Australia

In Appreciation of GBF

GBF receives a small, but steady flow of notes and letters expressing gratitude for this sangha. Included here are excerpts from a number of these. Writers’ names have been omitted, since logically it was not possible to contact each person for permission to include their name.

“...It’s a very good thing that a group like this exists to go over the silence that sometimes hurts so much.” —Canada

“Wishing that you will have continuous energy overflow to study, practice and share the Buddha’s teachings with everyone so that each one of us discovers happiness and joy.” —Singapore

“I truly enjoy receiving the GBF Newsletter. October’s issue was wonderful. Thank you for your work in the Dharma.” —New York

“Thank you for sending me your newsletter. Since I live in Chicago, I obviously am not interested in the newsletter as a calendar of events/sittings. But it is important to me to receive a gay Buddhist newsletter, any gay Buddhist newsletter. I enjoy the features, and I enjoy the tangible link between my spiritual practice and my “tribe” (as Paul Monette would say). Perhaps next year I will begin to look into forming the Chicago Gay Buddhist Fellowship. Thank you.” —Chicago

“Congratulations on your fine-looking newsletter with useful information and Dharma talk.” —Santa Cruz Zen Center

“I really appreciate and enjoy your newsletter. I’m somewhat shy and not a group-oriented person, but it’s great to know what you guys are up to. I find your newsletter informative and uplifting, and look forward to every issue.” —Berkeley

“I really value the Gay Buddhist Fellowship Newsletter. It’s funny what a little piece of paper arriving in the mail once a month can do. Thank you for the effort involved in publishing the newsletter, because it is always uplifting to learn about the ideas that are being discussed.” —From the rest of the gay world, San Francisco is like ‘the homeland,’ the Holy City, and it gives me a feeling of solidarity to have a community of like-minded Buddhists in SF...

“Four of us are experimenting with the idea of forming a gay Buddhist commune-collective-sangha...Our understanding of Buddhism gravitates toward social engagement. I will keep you posted as our experiment in gay sangha unfolds.” —Seattle
Gayness in the Life of the Buddha

Remarks on Ashvaghosha's Buddhacharita

by Saddho Joel Michael

It is not that I despise the objects of sense, and I know that the world is devoted to them; but my mind does not delight in them, because I hold them to be transitory.

If the triad of old age, disease, and death did not exist, I too should take my pleasure in the ravishing objects of sense.


It’s no surprise that gay people get a bad press in the earliest Buddhist scriptures, commentaries, and other extra-canonical writings. In early Buddhism geared to professional practitioners, sex of any stripe is condemned as illusive pleasure in what has been called the Buddha’s “systematic and organized hostility to life and earthly existence.”

For instance, a couple of monks were booted out of the sangha for having anal intercourse with each other, and Gautama Buddha himself cautioned another monk who was obsessively infatuated with him to back off. Though it remains unclear how the practice of homosexuality might have been recognized in ancient India, persons who were “sexually-identifying” were considered heirs of unworthy karma and thus “moral outcasts past redemption” for sainthood (except gankas or wealthy courtesans who as converts to Buddhism might materially support the sangha).

But most curious of all regarding gayness and relatively early Buddhism is the poet Ashvaghosha’s Buddhacharita (Life of the Buddha) wherein it would seem that gay men are enlisted to seduce Gautama. A long heroic poem written in classical Sanskrit some 600 years after the Buddha’s death, the Buddhacharita isn’t historically accurate, but the poet’s apparent gay temptation of the Buddha-to-be is a fascinating sidelight which probably reveals more about Ashvaghosha’s times than Gautama’s libido.

Still, the fact that the poet places gay temptation before the bodhisattva was likely to raise an eyebrow here or there by even hinting that the Buddha-to-be could be interested.

Lest there be any doubt, Gautama was not interested in the slightest, according to the poet, who says that the bodhisattva “paid no heed” and “did not falter in his firmness.” But the story of the attempted seduction, brief as it is in 17 verses, can be a curiosity to gay Buddhists who can read there that the founder of their religion “by his steadfastness and tranquillity” overcomes any possible craving for gay passion.

The episode is this. The Bodhisattva Gautama is meditating beneath what will come to be the Bodhi Tree. While sitting, he is attacked by Mara, the god who is the personification of worldly temptation, the Buddhist equivalent of Kamadeva, the Hindu god of love (Eros). Mara enlists the aid of his three enchanting daughters to try to entice the bodhisattva from his resolve for enlightenment.

But less well known, Ashvaghosha also adds Mara’s three sons to the bevy of temptresses. The sons’ names—Vibhrama, Harsha and Darpa—explain why they are accompanying their father. Their names translate, respectively, as “Impulsiveness,” “Gayness,” and “Promiscuousness.”

Given the aristocratic circumstances in which Ashvaghosha wrote his epics for the court of Emperor Kanishka, the sons’ names seem to suggest a stereotyped

(continued on next page)
impression of homosexual behavior in northern India in the early Second Century C.E. The trio may have been written to exemplify what was understood as tritiya prakriti, literally "the third nature," an intermediate gender which, for males, meant the unwillingness or lack of desire to procreate.

The etymologies of the names bring the brief portraits into sharper focus. Vibhrama literally means "without seriousness" or one given to capricious acts, impulsive. The derivation of Harsha suggests gaiety so ardent that it makes hair stand on end. And Darpa means wantonness, loose morals, horniness.

In its Buddhist context (the poet Ashvaghosha was Buddhist, as was Emperor Kanishka), one should expect no less than that the hero of the poem should successfully resist every kind of temptation. Yet it seems clear that Mara’s assault on the Buddha-to-be isn’t meant literally, that rather it represents symbolically the psychological torment and conflict that the bodhisattva experienced as he tried to attain nirvana.

Certainly some straight men—especially fops, dandies, and sycophants (nagarakas) that hung around the imperial court where Ashvaghosha Saketaka was poet-in-residence—were Impulsive, Superfluous, and Promiscuous as Ashvaghosha named Mara’s sons. But considering that Mara’s daughters—named "Delight," "Impatience" and "Craving"—were arrayed on one side of him as seductresses (succubi), it’s reasonable to infer that the sons waited on the other side as seducers (incubi).

As the seven of them stood before Gautama, Mara aimed a flower-tipped arrow (Cupid’s love dart) and shot it straight at the meditating figure. The mere touch of this same arrow, says the poet, causes "excitation for the application of sexual delight." Having formerly pierced the hearts of others, it caused them to fall into frenzies, lose self-control and become uninhibited, or "agitated with love." Had the arrow in Gautama had its usual aphrodisiac effect, Mara was prepared with bait for the hook—passionate women or lascivious men; the Buddha-to-be could choose.

This isn’t the place to go into the bad press that the Buddha and Buddhism also get. One sometimes comes across a statement like "Buddha quite seriously wanted to rub laughter off the face of the world," or one hears that "Buddhism is based on Negation, is Negation itself." These sorts of fractious misstatements and misunderstandings add negativity, intolerance, and "organized hostility" to the gay issue, too.

But at least in this episode of the Buddharcharita, gay men—stereotypically scandalous though they be—have a role to play, and one that is alleged to have played itself out in Gautama’s mind as he strove to overcome his mental predispositions (samskara), specifically sajvakata, defined as "anxious longing, a desire that torments."

Naturally he rejected gay blandishment of samsara for the bliss of nirvana, but at least in Ashvaghosha’s dramatic telling of that turmoil, Siddhartha Gautama comes across as human and heir to all the driving passions of the heart.

References


Saddho Joel Michael is a 30-year student of Buddhadhamma, primarily the Theravada, and a member of GFG. Joel lives in Pennsylvania with his spouse and four dogs.

"Message"

by Thich Nhat Hahn

Life has left her footprints on my forehead.
But I have become a child again this morning.
The smile, seen through leaves and flowers,
is back to smooth away the wrinkles,
as the rains wipe away footprints on the beach.
Again a cycle of birth and death begins.

I walk on thorns, but firmly, as among flowers.
I keep my head high.
Rhymes bloom among the sounds of bombs and mortars.
The tears I shed yesterday have become rain.
I feel calm hearing its sound on the thatched roof.
Childhood, my birthland, is calling me,
and the rains melt my despair.

I am still here alive, able to smile quietly.
O sweet fruit brought forth by the tree of suffering!
Carrying the dead body of my brother,
I go across the rice field in the darkness.
Earth will keep you tight within her arms, my dear,
so that tomorrow you will be reborn as flowers,
those flowers smiling quietly in the morning field.

This moment you weep no more, my dear.
We have gone through too deep a night.

This morning,
I knead down on the grass,
when I notice your presence.

Flowers that carry the marvelous smile of ineffability
speak to me in silence.

The message,
the message of love
and understanding,
has indeed come to us.

[Editor’s Note: This poem exemplifies the spirit and practice of The Order of Interbeing. Reprinted from Call Me By My True Names: the Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hahn (1993) with permission from Parallax Press, Berkeley, California.]
GBF Member Survey

Added Incentive: Return Your Survey, Win a Book!

Normally the percentage of people who answer surveys is very low. Because GBF really, really needs your participation, however, we have devised an incentive for those of you tottering on the edge of indecision. Therefore, this spring we will hold a drawing from among the returned surveys, and will award one Buddhist book for every 25 surveys we receive. If you'd like to be in the drawing, please include your name and address on the lines provided at the bottom of this page. Surveys must be postmarked no later than March 15, 1996.

Please answer each item as completely as possible. If you need more room, feel free to attach an extra sheet to this page. We value your feedback.

1. Do you like the fact that the GBF Newsletter runs articles both about Buddhist practice and spiritual topics not confined to Buddhism? Please explain. Also, list topics/themes you would like to see covered in future issues.

2. Is there anything about the newsletter on which you would like to comment? (e.g. timing of mailings, length of articles, sections you think are important, something that's missing, layout and design, etc.)

3. As you may have noticed, we have chosen not to use only traditional Buddhist images in the newsletter. What types of images would you prefer to see used?

4. We are considering changing our logo (a Tibetan dharma wheel superimposed on a "pink" triangle). Given that GBF is gay and American, what sort of images come to mind if you were designing a logo for us?

5. If GBF offered reprints of the most significant articles from the GBF Newsletter over the past five years, and tapes of important talks at GBF meetings and workshops, do you think you would use this service? The process would include the use of an order sheet, and the cost would be reasonable.

6. We are considering printing GBF t-shirts with a new logo. Do you think this is a good idea, and would you order one?

7. For non-Bay Area GBF members, would you be interested in hosting a GBF speaker in your area to: 1) hear about our five-year experience as a gay Buddhist sangha; 2) discuss gay Buddhism; and 3) discuss ways of forming a GBF sangha in your own area?

8. I am interested in helping GBF in the following areas:
   _writing/editing     _designing a new GBF logo     _long-range planning
   _layout/design/desktop publishing     _illustrationfinding artwork     _proofreading
   _typing articles into computer     _preparing GBF newsletter calendar     _mailing parties
   _other:_

NAME: ________________________________________ PHONE: __________________________
ADDRESS: ___________________________________