GBF Calendar

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

5 Mar., Steering Committee Meeting, 7:30 p.m. at the home of Alan Oliver.

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

10 Mar., Sunday Meeting, 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St., SF. Speaker: Samuel Schindler will present an introduction to the Enneagram, a system of personality types that can be a powerful tool for understanding oneself and others.

10 Mar., News/Calendar/Classifieds Deadline for GBF Newsletter.

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

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

24 Mar., Sunday Meeting, 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St., SF. Discussion on new GBF vision.

24 Mar., Newsletter Mailing Party, 4-6 p.m., at the home of Mark Marion.

28 Mar., Thursday Sitting, 8 p.m., at the home of Edward Sans.

Special Issue:
A New Vision for GBF

This issue of the GBF Newsletter is dedicated to creating a new vision for our sangha, one that focuses on creating a practice space for GBF. This vision grew out of ongoing discussion and debate in the steering committee and in the larger GBF community over the last year. It became more concrete at a recent weekend retreat. As we share this vision, we also invite your participation in making it a reality. This is a tremendous practice opportunity for all of us. We need and welcome the ideas, energy, and support of all members of our sangha. —The GBF Steering Committee

Refuges
I take refuge in the Buddha.
I take refuge in the Dharma.
I take refuge in the Sangha.
I take refuge in the Buddha as the perfect teacher.
I take refuge in the Dharma as the perfect teaching.
I take refuge in the Sangha as the perfect way of life.

Gay Buddhist Fellowship Mission Statement

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship exists to support Buddhist practice in the gay community. Our understanding of practice includes, but is not limited to, traditional Buddhist practices such as meditation and mindfulness, individual forms of practice, compassionate service in the community, and relationships with teachers and spiritual friends. The GBF is a forum in which all of the distinct Buddhist traditions can be brought together to address the spiritual concerns of gay men.

At GBF we support each other’s individual practices, whatever they may be. We create an open and unique atmosphere for gay men to share their experiences about the truth and relevance of Buddhist teaching in their own lives. We respect and care for each other in a compassionate way as an expression of the full realization of the teaching. In doing this, we recognize that every aspect of our lives is practice. This means

(continued on page 3)
The Local Dharma
March-April 1996

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

Special Events

8-10 Mar. (Fri.-Sun.) “Remembering Shunryu Suzuki Roshi” with Senior Dharma Teacher Tenshin Reb Anderson. In gratitude for the life and teaching of Suzuki Roshi, this workshop is offered as an opportunity to join Reb Anderson as he reminisces about his time with Suzuki Roshi and recollects his life and practice. Through talks, discussion, and periods of zazen, it is hoped that Suzuki Roshi’s mind, heart, and practice will be invoked and evoked. Cost $150-$250. 6 pm (Fri.)-5 pm (Sun.) GGF

12 Mar. (Tue.) “Healing the Body and Mind Through Being Present” with Eddy Buchanan. This is an introductory class. Free/donation. Reserve a space by calling National Foundation of Oriental & Traditional Medicine (6333 Telegraph Ave.) at 510/596-8755.

6-21 Apr. (Sat.-Sun.) Satsang with Gangaji. This is a rare chance to experience the pure teaching of non-duality. This series of afternoon darshans includes a meditation, talk by Gangaji, and an opportunity to engage her in direct questioning. There is no charge for these events, which take place on the campus of Dominican College in San Rafael. For more detailed schedule information, call 414/721-9555.

Gangaji is a realized teacher in the lineage of Ramana Maharshi. As a Westerner, her struggle for liberation has led her along paths familiar to most of us. Before finding her guru, Sri Poonjaji, in India, she had studied psychology and practiced Zen meditation.

10, 17, 24 Apr. and 1 May (Wed.) “Death” led by Guy Micco, MD and Alan Sennaue. One of a series of classes offered by the Berkeley Zen Center. 7:30 pm. BZC

26-28 Apr. (Fri.-Sun.) “Poetry of Enlightenment” with Abbot Zoketsu Norman Fischer. The Zen ancestors in China and Japan have from the beginning found poetry the essential medium for the expression of their insights on the Path. In the West too, poetry has shone a clear light into our darkest, most inaccessible spiritual corners. Through meditation and discussion of poems by such writers as Wallace Stevens, Rainer Rilke, Ryokan, Issa, Saigyo, Mary Oliver, and others, the weekend will help focus participants on their own experiences of the way. Cost $150-$250. 6 pm (Fri.)-5 pm (Sun.) GGF

Beyond the Bay

3 Mar. (Sun.) “Day of Miracles (Cho Nga Chopa).” In order to strengthen the devotion of future disciples, Buddha displayed a different miracle each day during the first 15 days of the year. Join the Vajrapani community on one of the Great Festival Days of the Tibetan calendar when great practice is stressed. The day includes taking the eight Mahayana Precepts, meditations, prostrations, mandala practice, circumambulation of the stupa, and mantra meditation. 6 am-6 pm VI

22-24 Mar. (Fri.-Sun.) “Exploring the Shadow for Men” Your shadow, the thoughts, energies, memories, and

Contributors

Thanks to the following people who helped with this issue of the GBF Newsletter: Alan Oliver, Bob Hass, Daishin David Sunseri, David Holmes, John Krowka, Joe Kukuulka, Mark Marion, Ron Ginsberg, Sam Schindler, and Stephan Pardi.
Mission Statement
(continued from page 1)
that whatever is happening moment
to moment is an opportunity to wake
up to the truth of our Buddha nature
in our daily lives.
As an expression of our practice, it
is our intention to create a spiritual
home for our community, an environ-
ment in which to practice together,
both in the city and in a rural setting.
Also, we intend to offer a meditation
schedule, retreats, classes, study
groups, and workshops to our commu-
nity on a regular basis. We want to
cultivate a social environment that is
accepting, open, inclusive, and caring.
In addition, we want to acknowledge
and support the growing network of
gay practitioners in the United States
and around the world. As engaged
Buddhists, we intend to create pro-
grams that contribute to the well-being
of the larger community.
This mission statement is a written
expression of our GFB community
practice, and as such reflects our
openness to the truths of change
and impermanence. We welcome
the opportunity to explore and present
Buddhist practice for our community
in an organic and dynamic way, and
to share that with others.

A Workshop for
Engaged Buddhists

The image of a community activist
often conjures up a picture of someone
who is aggressive, outspoken,
confrontative, and dogmatic. Because
the world of activism is often perceived
as a "rough-and-tumble" place, many
persons who are on a spiritual path,
including Buddhists, may question
such involvement. Conversely, those
who are engaged Buddhists may feel
the need to challenge people who
advocate ideas or actions perceived
to be harmful or not skillful.
Part of following the bodhisattva
ideal is that we participate as directly
in the outside world as we do in our
own internal spiritual development,
making no distinction between these
two parts of the whole. GFB is plan-
ning a workshop for anyone inter-
ested in working on issues of social
justice and who wants to explore how
to integrate Buddhist teachings into
their activism. How can one work
skillfully with others who may not
always share one's commitment to
such Buddhist principles as right
speech, nonattachment from views,
and compassion?
If this topic interests you, your help
is needed to shape the content and
form of the workshop. Also, if you
know of Buddhist practitioners who
align themselves with the "activist"
label, please let us know. A meeting
to plan the workshop will be held
sometime in March. To help in the
planning or to suggest speakers,
contact Stephan Pardi
(days after 10 a.m., or evenings).

Local Dharma
(continued from page 2)
emotions that you have repressed and
judged as somehow not all right,
appropriate, or allowable, if left
unexamined, will undermine and eat at
you. When explored and directed, its
forces can become your ally for wis-
dom, well-being, empowerment,
creativity, and personal authenticity.
Workshop location: Harbin Hot
Springs, Middletown, CA. Call Jim
Schuenemann
21-23 Apr. (Sun.-Tue.) “Being
Bodhisattvas” with Joanna Macy,
Ph.D. Through meditation and inter-
active exercises, talks, and personal
sharing, participants will explore the
great resources the Dharma can pro-
vide to cope with our world full of
conflict and suffering, learning ways
to transform fear and despair into joy-
ous solidarity with all beings.
Taking Counsel on GBF’s Future

by the GBF Steering Committee

In early January 1996, the GBF steering committee, along with two other GBF members, met at Sea Ranch, California, for a weekend to plan the future course for our sangha. David Holmes arranged for us to stay at a guest house owned by his relatives to help defray expenses. Only $100 from GBF funds was used for this retreat; the participants paid for the remainder of the expenses themselves. It was a tranquil setting, and only a short walk to the coastline where windblown cypresses overlooked dramatic rock outcroppings along the shore.

Alan Oliver began the retreat Saturday morning by presenting a problem-solving model that he had been using with other groups. The model draws on Buddhist teachings and emphasizes the interconnectedness of all parts of a situation to each other and to its whole. Alan explained how using the model makes it easier for people to remain mindful of these dynamics and also helps them understand how these processes relate to the group’s progress as it moves toward decision making.

The group discussed GBF’s five-year history or “story” so, as one member put it, “we can understand where we’ve been before deciding where we want to go.” Next, the group decided to create a vision for GBF, in the form of a mission statement.

The discussion about GBF’s mission was lengthy and involved. Three key points seemed to emerge: 1) GBF provides its members an opportunity to practice together as sangha; 2) GBF provides emotional and social support for gay Buddhist practitioners; and 3) GBF engages in outreach to the gay community, both locally and elsewhere. The steering committee considers this mission statement as open to change. (The full text appears on pages one and three of this newsletter.)

Briefly, we then discussed our application for nonprofit, tax-exempt status. We estimate GBF will receive both state and federal nonprofit status during 1996 so that all donations this year will be covered by it.

Perhaps the most significant decision made at the retreat was to pursue finding our own practice space. The unanimous decision to do this was arrived at only after the group had deliberated for some time. Members felt that having a space available to us would be beneficial in a number of ways. First, it would make possible a regular meditation schedule and would give our community greater opportunities to practice. Second, it would ease overcrowding at Sunday morning and Thursday evening sittings, and at classes and workshops. Third, it would make possible a number of other activities. (See the article, “A GBF Center,” on page five.)

The steering committee remained mindful of the fact that having our own practice space would require that GBF substantially increase its revenues—which are now at approximately $10,000 per year—as well as increase the level of volunteer support. There ensued a preliminary discussion of various ways to generate income, and it was agreed that we would need to create a development committee to begin planning a fundraising strategy for the development of a center.

Another unanimous decision was to create an ongoing advisory group to GBF, comprised of friends of our sangha. (The article, “Spiritual Advisory Group Forming” on page six describes this new group.)

The retreat was a demonstration of sangha. We meditated together, prepared meals together, ate together, mindfully washed dishes together, and took a number of walks to the ocean.

Throughout the weekend we experienced a spirit of cooperation, caring, and playfulness. The good energy from that weekend remains with us, and we are sharing it now with all GBF members through this issue of the GBF Newsletter.

We invite your participation in this new chapter for our gay sangha. Each of you plays an important role in its creation. ☺
Our Space Shapes Our Practice; We Shape Our Space

by Alan Oliver

We may or may not choose the spaces in which we live, work, and play, and we may or may not find them uplifting. But whatever the space, it plays an active role in influencing who we are, how we act, and how we develop.

A space should be taken seriously. It can play the role of "teacher" if we know how to listen to it and observe its effects. Even our dreams are experienced within the context of a space.

Recall how differently you feel, for example, when you walk into a corporate office, a redwood grove, a cathedral, a simple Friends meeting house, a multiplex cinema (followed quickly by the transition to a darkened theater), or a littered public playground in the midst of a city. Each of these spaces creates a powerful energy field that influences and shapes our immediate feelings of fear, joy, expansion, withdrawal, or peacefulness.

I recall a house in Taos, New Mexico, that was designed and constructed by a local Pueblo Indian builder back in the 1920s. All the internal doorways were lower than normal, so you had to bend as you went from room to room. The house was intentionally designed to encourage a spirit of humility. We can't help but be influenced by our environment.

Spaces can seem sacred to us due to natural elements that create an uplifting feeling, or as a result of the human energy that has been invested in them. I've actually visited a forest monastery in northeast Thailand where a simple, gray cave in which the head monk lived was the center of that spiritual place. An example closer to home might be the very basic wooden structure that typifies many Southern Baptist churches in the U.S. The outside appearance does not fully convey the fervent, devotional mood of the spirit generated within.

GBF has been lucky in its choice of spaces. Our Sunday meetings have been held in a beautifully decorated Buddhist space at the Zen Hospice on Page Street. Its size and availability, however, has limited its growth as a "teacher" space, and there is a growing sense that we have outgrown it. We continue to meet for meditation and potlucks in a variety of members' apartments and houses. We appreciate the hospitality of the hosts, yet we also realize this use of space in some ways fragments our shared experience as a sangha. Our daylong and summer retreats have been held at Buddhist practice centers, which have been very supportive of us. In those spaces, however, we remain welcome visitors.

As we envision a space of our own—a place where we can create a distinctive atmosphere, a space that will be a "teacher" in its own right—we need to continually reflect on this concept of space and human interaction. We can learn more about ourselves by remaining aware of how we are influenced by the spaces we inhabit, work in, play in, and where we spend our moment-to-moment mindfulness.

A GBF Center

As you have read in our mission statement—which is a vision for GBF's current and future development—the steering committee has put forth the concept of establishing a space of our own. How this will happen has not yet been defined, but the vision comes first. We now ask that you begin visualizing this center along with us. Our collective energy will help move us towards realizing this goal.

We believe that having a space we can use all of the time will help our sangha support the practice of individual GBF members in a way that has not been possible before. We envision a center where we can hold not only our two Sunday sittings (and perhaps more of them), but also meditations on a more regular schedule, potlucks, and all-day sittings. At times we may still schedule events in other Buddhist practice spaces where we have always felt welcomed and supported.

This center will provide opportunities to assemble a lending library of books, articles, audiotapes, and videotapes; and a place for drop-in activities and socializing. There would be space for the GBF Newsletter and for our general communications work with our expanding sangha. People who are new to Buddhism could drop in for casual conversation or meet there for discussions, and a center could become the focal point for engaged Buddhist activities. The center can be a beautiful and supportive space, and a place to practice in many different ways.

How do we make this vision a reality? First and foremost, we must view everything we do in regards to the center as a part of our Buddhist practice. This will involve efforts to secure tax-exempt status. It will require proposal and grant writing, and advice from those of you who know about possible sources of support. It will also require increased financial support and additional GBF members. Some people will have to look for an appropriate space in San Francisco for the center. We will have to determine whether to rent a space, or whether we can find someone who could donate a space to us. There will also be a need to begin administrative planning for the center. We will need to form a development committee to work on the critical parts of creating a GBF space.

The participation of everyone is needed, a participation that grows out of our spiritual practice. If we approach this vision with mindfulness, it will happen and all will benefit.
The Benefits of Non-Profit Status for GBF

After many months of discussion and input from the sangha, the steering committee has decided to seek non-profit status for GBF. By taking this step, GBF will be able to fulfill its mission more effectively, which is to encourage and support Buddhist practice in the gay community.

The advantages to becoming a non-profit organization are many. First, we would not be required to pay state or federal income tax. All donations and grants to GBF could therefore be used to expand our present programs, and to initiate new ones. A second advantage is that all donations to our sangha would be tax deductible. Several GBF members have indicated that they would support the group more if they could deduct contributions from their income taxes.

Another advantage is that individual steering committee members, as well as general members, would not be personally liable for the debts of the organization. In addition, non-profit corporation status gives our organization a more stable, secure future.

And lastly, the steering committee realizes that to carry out our mission of supporting Buddhist practice in the gay community, it is necessary for us to create a more substantial development program by applying for grants and seeking a higher level of giving. Non-profit status will make it easier to accomplish this.

It is our strong intention that GBF continue to respond to the needs of our members, that it retain a warm, open spirit, and that the good energy of our sangha continue and be sustained. The steering committee feels that by creating more organizational stability, our spiritual practice together will become more committed, and this will benefit members both now and in the future.

Spiritual Advisory Group Forming

The GBF steering committee recognizes the importance of the changes now occurring in our sangha. These include a deepening sense of practice, more interest from newcomers to Buddhism, a greater variety of practice opportunities, and increased discussion about spiritual issues. Because of these new opportunities and challenges, we believe it is equally important that we ask our friends in the wider Buddhist community to help us with the present transition, as well as with future policy matters. We feel it is important to have input from respected Buddhist leaders and friends, as we can learn much from their experiences.

We intend to keep them informed about new developments such as our recent mission statement and ask them to give us the benefit of their thinking. Our intention is to keep communication with them current by mail, telephone, and e-mail. In addition, we hope to host a once-a-year weekend retreat for advisory group members who are available to meet with the steering committee.

Therefore we are forming a GBF spiritual advisory group. The purpose of the group will be to bring as much experience and help to GBF as possible. It will be comprised of individuals who have been long-time friends of GBF, and will include people who are practice leaders in various traditions and at Buddhist centers across the country. These will be people who have expressed support and interest in what we are doing, and who want to make a contribution to our sangha.

The steering committee has begun compiling a list of names of practice leaders, teachers, and other friends. We welcome suggestions from GBF members of persons for the advisory group who you believe may be valuable contributors to our efforts.

It is our hope that by seeking the advice of long-time practitioners and teachers, GBF will more effectively respond to the needs of our members, and will develop a strong base of support for practice in the gay community and in the wider Buddhist community.
GFB Mailing Parties: A Fun Way to Contribute

Come socialize with your gay brothers while helping to prepare the GFB Newsletter for mailing. It’s a nice and easy way to be able to contribute to the sangha. To volunteer for the next party on Sunday, March 24, from 4 to 6 p.m., call Mark Marion.

Zen Center Staff Positions Available

Sonoma Mountain Zen Center needs full-time help from serious Zen students who wish to deepen their understanding of Zen. The center has several positions available that include carpentry, gardening, and maintenance.

Staff benefits include health insurance, an expense allowance, room and board, and the invaluable opportunity to practice Zen in the daily life of the SMZC community, under the guidance of Jaksho Kwong-roshi.

SMZC is growing and these positions are available immediately. The center’s staff prefer people with experience in Zen practice, but they will consider anyone with a sincere interest in living the Zen Buddhist way. If you are interested in making a commitment to the daily practice of Zen at SMZC, please call 707/545-8105 between 9:00 a.m. to noon and ask for Sylvia.

Classifieds Corner

SUMMER HOUSING
Professor seeks accommodations while teaching in San Francisco, early July through mid-August. Will share rent (moderate smoker, non-drinker preferred) or consider short-term sublet. Easy access to California Institute of Integral Studies (in its new location near St. Mary’s Cathedral) a plus. Roger Corless.

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.

PEN PAL
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.

Dedication of Merit

By the power and the truth of this practice
May all beings have happiness
and the causes of happiness,
May all be free from sorrow
and the causes of sorrow,
May all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is without sorrow,
And may all live in equanimity,
without too much attachment
or too much aversion,
And live believing in the equality of all that lives.

Your Input is Needed!

The steering committee asks all GFB members to join us as part of our sangha by giving input to the vision presented in this newsletter. We are simply acting as catalysts for growth at the moment. Please know we want and need your help in further shaping these plans and in implementing them in the months to come. —The GFB Steering Committee.