Gay Buddhist Fellowship
Newsletter

July/August 1996

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

2 July (Tuesday), Steering Committee Meeting, 7:30 pm, at the home of Larry White.

4 July, Thursday Sitting, 8 pm, at the home of Bill Kirkpatrick.

6 July, Saturday Sitting (East Bay), 10 am, at the home of Geoff McEnany.

11 July, Thursday Sitting, potluck at 6:30 pm, sitting at 8 pm, at the home of Lee Robbins.

14 July, Sunday Meeting, 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St., SF. Roger Corless, Professor of Buddhist Studies at Duke University, will give a talk titled, “Dharma Quality Control.”

18 July, Thursday Sitting, 8 pm, at the home of Mark Marion.

20 July, Saturday Sitting (East Bay), 10 am, at the home of Geoff McEnany.

21 July (Sunday), Half-Day Sitting, 8:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m., at Kairos House, 2128 15th St. (near Market), SF. 415/974-9878.

25 July, Thursday Sitting, 8 pm, at the home of Edward Sams.

28 July, Sunday Meeting, 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St., SF. Open discussion.

Program of Sunday Speakers Continues

Speakers for GBF's Sunday meetings have already been scheduled through September, thanks to the efforts of Tom Moon, who has recently taken on this task. GBF will continue to schedule one speaker each month, while reserving the alternate Sunday meetings for discussions.

Roger Corless returns to GBF on July 14, at which time he will give a talk titled, “Dharma Quality Control.” How do we know whether a Buddhist teacher and his or her teaching is authentic? Roger will discuss traditional Buddhist views on lineage and canon, and will suggest how they might be adapted to a pluralistic culture.

(continued on page 3)

Half-Day of Meditation Set for July 21

On Sunday, July 21, 1996, GBF will sponsor a silent morning of meditation practice at Kairos House, 2128 15th Street (near Market) in San Francisco from 8:45 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The moderate schedule will include sitting and walking meditation, and a brief Dharma reading. Be sure to bring your own meditation cushion or bench. Pre-registration is required. To register, please mail a check for $10.00 payable to GBF to: GBF Sitting—7/21/96, 2261 Market Street #422, San Francisco, CA 94114. Include your name and phone number. If you have any questions about the sitting, call the GBF information line at 415/974-9878 and someone will get back to you. We hope to see you there.

Vajrapani Site of GBF’s Fifth Annual Retreat

GBF will sponsor its fifth annual weekend retreat on September 13-15, 1996, at Vajrapani Institute in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

This year’s schedule will include traditional practices of silent sitting and walking meditation in the mornings. In response to the growing number of new GBF practitioners, afternoon activities will consist of a mindfulness hike in the redwoods, Dharma discussion, and free time with silence optional. The retreat is a good opportunity for us to be together in fellowship, to practice together, and to enjoy the quiet beauty of Vajrapani.

Registration fees are on a sliding scale of $90-$120 per person, which includes housing and vegetarian meals. Housing will be in large dormitory cabins and camping areas. A small number of semi-private cabins (two to a room) are also available at additional cost. Some scholarships are available. Registration forms will be mailed out to all members in early August. We hope many GBF practitioners will be able to attend.

Seeking Retreat Attendees for Article

The newsletter editor is seeking one or more Bay Area residents who have participated in Buddhist retreats over the past few years. If you have attended an extended retreat of one month or longer and would be interested in participating in a joint interview with other GBFers, please call Bob Hass.
The Local Dharma
July-August 1996

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

Special Events

5-7 July (Fri.-Sun.) “Practicing Compassion: An Exploratory Forum on Socially Engaged Buddhism.” This is a workshop for Buddhists who are social activists, and for others interested in learning how Buddhist practice can invigorate social action, and how social action can invigorate Buddhist practice. It is being held on the weekend of the birthday of His Holiness The Dalai Lama, who is widely regarded for his life of compassion in action. Speakers to date include: Donald Rothberg, Diana Winston, Daishin David Sunseri, Don Marx, John Landaw, and Charlie Hinton. The day will include panel discussions, small group exercises, and sitting meditation. $75-100 sliding scale. Info: Kat. Savannah, VI.

7-12 July (Sun.-Fri.) “Spirituality for the New Millennium.” This five-day workshop exploring the connections between science, art, and spirituality will be offered by Sophia Center at Holy Names College in Oakland. It will include special presentations by Joanna Macy, Huston Smith, and Luisah Teish, as well as a variety of class options, seminars, conversations, rituals, and celebrations. Tuition: $325. For information, call 510/449-1261.

17 July (Wed.) “Love Relationships and the Spiritual Path” with Lama Tsering Dechen. Lama Tsering Dechen has been newly ordained by Chagdud Tulku. He will be giving a dharma talk at Open Secret Bookstore in San Rafael. Cost: $10. 7 pm. 923 C St., San Rafael. 415/457-4191.

20 July (Sat.) “Awakening the Body” with Bob Britton. This workshop in the Alexander Technique will be especially applicable to practitioners of meditation and awareness. Bob’s 15 years of experience as a Zen practitioner and teacher in the Alexander Technique enables him to help others to awaken to the healing and enlivening capacity of bodily awareness while sitting, standing, or moving. This workshop may be of great benefit to those who have back pain or other postural difficulties. Cost: $30. 1:30-4:30 pm. SFLC

20 July (Sat.) A Daylong Vipassana Retreat with Ajahn Jumnien (Thai forest monk) with translation by Michael Zucher and Jack Koenfeld. Join the Spirit Rock Community on a day of mindfulness meditation, and dharma talks. 9 am to 5 pm. $25-35. SR

20-22 Aug. (Tue.-Thu.) “Breathing Room: A Retreat for School Teachers,” with Abbot Zoketsu Norman Fischer. This retreat is for people who teach school at any level. The retreat will emphasize meditation, Buddhist teaching focusing on qualities of the Bodhisattva path that are especially relevant to teachers (such as patience and energy), and group discussion. GGF

28-29 Sept. (Sat.-Sun.) “Gay and Free” with Arinna Weisman and Eric Kolvig. This weekend of vipassana practice for lesbian women and gay men is being co-led by a longtime friend and member of GBF, Eric Kolvig. Eric has recently moved to Santa Fe to be the teacher of a vipassana community, but will return for this special weekend. Call for further information. SR
Sunday Speakers
(continued from page 1)

Roger’s own qualifications are that he is Professor of Buddhist Studies at Duke University, and he tries to be as honest as possible about what he doesn’t know.

Zen Priest Myo Denis Lahey is scheduled to give a dharma talk on August 11. Myo began practicing in 1969 while still in high school, at which time he joined a sitting group in Los Altos that was led by Suzuki Roshi. In 1989 he served as head monk at Tassajara Zen Center. Currently he serves as treasurer for the Zen Center in San Francisco and resides at the Hartford Street Zen Center.

Howie Cohn will give a talk on September 8 titled, “Freedom: Near or Far?” Howie is a vipassana teacher who has conducted retreats since 1985, and leads ongoing meditation classes in San Francisco and Marin. He has studied with Asian and Western teachers of several traditions, including Theravada, Zen, Tibetan, and Advaita Vedanta. He incorporates a non-dualistic perspective in his teaching. Howie is a Ph.D. candidate in East/West psychology, and has a private practice in counseling.

GBF is always interested in receiving suggestions for future Sunday speakers. If there is someone you wish to recommend, please contact Tom Moon.

Tse Chen Ling Center Offers Healing Meditation Program

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has said, “One of the best healing meditations is that of Medicine Buddha, who is the healing energy of all enlightened beings.” Rinpoche is director of the Tse Chen Ling Center for Tibetan Buddhist Studies in San Francisco. The center is offering an ongoing program on the third Wednesday of every month titled, “Healing Meditation/Medicine Buddha.”

This practice is designed to lessen the suffering of disease through one’s own mind using meditation. It promotes healing, peace, calmness, and tranquility in the heart. A session of Tonglen (giving and taking) meditation is included. Tonglen practice utilizes the breath to cleanse the body of negative energy. At the same time, it builds a reservoir of compassion for all other beings.

For more information on this healing practice, please call Tse Chen Ling Center at 415/333-3261.
India:

Through Four Eyes and One Heart

by Alzak Amlani

This past winter I was graced with almost six weeks of travel throughout India. India has been calling me for years. Towards the end of last fall all signs pointed East, even the dollar sign. I had to go; it was scheduled. Dreams of chaos and death woke me at 4:00 a.m. The familiar wrappings of a well-known Western world were being removed. The severing had begun.

I went to India as an Indian who had never been there to find my roots. I went to India as a mindful “western foreigner.” I also went under the tutelage of a Jungian analyst, Robert Johnson, who has spent the last 17 winters in South India. I went to research cross-cultural human development from a psychoanalytic perspective with my Indian friend, Renuka Sharma, M.D., who is a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley. Thus, it is from these four perspectives or “eyes” that I discovered and am now writing about this ancient and complex culture.

Through the eye of a mindful western foreigner I found India to be a land of paradox, ironies, and extremes. Upon arrival a visitor is immediately assaulted by the chaos of this ancient civilization that is being thrust into the fast modern world. The disarray sends even a practiced traveler into days of shock. One’s logic collapses in the face of such dichotomies. Both worlds co-exist in full vigor:

The bullock cart curls between the diesel trucks. Graceful women in colorful saris balance gravel-filled pots on their heads alongside a Lufthansa jet at Delhi International Airport. Aromatic curry cooks over dried cow patties. Husband and wife will rarely embrace in public, while male friends walk arm-in-arm. A brusque government officer turns into a bodhisattva when he sees someone truly in need.

It appears that nothing functions, yet electricity powers a VCR in the remotest village. A people who hardly erect any psychological boundaries still maintain an exquisitely sensitive, inner private self. Poverty and dysentery remain rampant, yet the children exude joy at every opportunity. These extreme combinations defy familiar, rational modes of thinking and living. My Western trained mind was baffled. I found myself waging an inward battle between my preconceptions, judgments and fears, and my heart which simply wanted to accept, appreciate, and enjoy. The fight waged on for several days. Fortunately, India won and I surrendered. I would tolerate this side of outer India—a small price for the gold she would offer. Her doors opened and I stepped into inner India. I saw things I never saw before. I felt profound feelings at the most unusual moments with the most unexpected people. Beautifully India was revealing her inner treasures. I fell in love.

Through the eye of a Jungian, Robert Johnson, I understood why my love for India lingered and grew. I spent almost two weeks with Robert in Pondicherry, South India. We stayed for two days at a small fishing village where he does his philanthropic work. When I asked him how long this village had been here, he answered without hesitation, “Forever.” It is timeless. Robert is revered as an elder who “comes from America on a large bird that drinks oil.”

Robert has observed that Indians as a collective are Introverted-Intuitive-Feeling types. Imagine a whole country of INFP’s. Nothing works, outwardly that is. Inwardly, one breathes a sigh of relief. Home at last. It is safe here. A quiet and profound relatedness tightly weaves a person into India’s intricate culture. Physically one is quite vulnerable to accidents and illness. Inside, one is constantly held and protected.

Feelings are primary; all else can wait. And all else does wait. The sensate world hangs together
very loosely. In response, Robert insightfully states, "India leaves space for God." And God does come, in the most unexpected places. She is in the humility of the rickshaw man, in the eyes of a street merchant, and, of course, in the joy of the children. Sometimes she is everywhere veiled in the archetypes of the magician and the lover.

**Through the eye of psychoanalysis,** which emphasizes the importance of early human development, I learned why I was so easily absorbed and felt swallowed up by many families in India. My primary guides in this model were Runuka Sharma, an Indian-born psychiatrist practicing in Australia, and the work of Sudhir Kakar and Alan Roland, psychoanalysts studying Asian human development.

Indian parents place an immense emphasis on constantly nurturing and gratifying each child up to the age of four. I noticed infants and toddlers were continually held and assisted by numerous mothering figures. Homes are very small and a child will often sleep with his or her parents until the next child is born. Separation and aloneness are minimized, promoting tight emotional bonding. Consequently, unlike in the West, an Indian person's identity includes his family members.

Most people in India develop and maintain close-knit, interdependent relationships. In the West, separation and self-sufficiency are highly encouraged. In contrast, in India such independence is favored only insofar as it relates and contributes to the family. I witnessed this when I visited a carpet merchant's extended, multigenerational family consisting of 35 members living together in Banaras. Within minutes I became a brother, an uncle, and son.

On a larger scale, this relatedness shows up everywhere in India—from large, extended families living together, to anything from goats, children, rickshaws, and trucks intersecting at one corner. Not only is there very little separation between generations, but also between the hygienic and unhygienic. Everything is merged in the big "Indian muddle." Explanations are often given in story, metaphor, and in relative terms. Answers to questions are indirect, contradictory, and indefinite, accompanied by the common Indian head movements. They're not comfortable saying "no," but since no one can always say "yes," they end up saying both at the same time. I recall a visitor insightfully commenting to me that Indians live by ambivalence.

**Through the eye of an Indian** who was born in Uganda, East Africa, and moved to North America at the age of nine, I had the opportu-

nity to find my Indian roots in Gujarat, Northwestern India. I met a relative—an Amlani—in a small town called Wankia, whose great grandfather was a brother to my great, great grandfather. As we stood in my great grandparents' original house, he told me many ancestral stories in Gujarati—a language similar to Hindi and Urdu. Other elders who knew of him appeared to contribute missing pieces. I understood the diaspora that led my grandparents to move to Kenya and Uganda. I visited Botad Boarding School where my father was schooled after his mother died. I had the opportunity to stay with the same family with whom my father spent his summer vacations. The father of this family decided to bring my favorite fruit to the airport while I waited for my flight to Delhi. He cut open two fresh, green coconuts and poured their milk into a glass for me. He watched in delight and satisfaction as I drank it.

It is difficult to convey the depth of feeling displayed by such Indians. They are not just performing an act. They serve you and take care of you with their hearts. They feel your need, and will offer what little they may have to fulfill it. It was always more than I expected.

When I thanked Mr. Tejani in Rajcot for his thoughtfulness, he clasped my hand with both of his and told me, "You are a guest in my country; it is my duty to serve you." I did not know how to respond. He read my eyes and with a quiet understanding uttered in Gujarati, "Such thoughts are not for words." I knew then what they meant when they said, "In our country, guest is God."

I feel I have reclaimed my heritage in ways and levels for which I have no words or concepts. I return with a deep sense of belonging, restoration, and pride. I have roots. My ancestors and their legacy live on. I am a Gujarati.♡

**Alzak Amlani, Ph.D., is a transpersonal psychotherapist in Palo Alto. He is also currently researching the role that culture plays in people's psychological and spiritual development.**
Clouds and Water Revisited

by Daishin David Sunseri

In the June 1996 GBF Newsletter, John Daido Loori’s article about monastic practice versus lay practice seems to de-emphasize the lives of real practitioners and real monks.

I agree with him that it is very important to preserve the traditional monastic model, that is, the formal training of monks and teachers in monasteries. It is equally important, however, that we recognize and acknowledge the responsibility of Mahayana priests and monks to be of service to the communities where they live. In Japan, the vast majority of monks in my Soto Zen tradition do not live in monasteries. After their formal training, they return to their home temples to serve their communities. Many become high school or college instructors.

My last teacher, Issan Dorsey-roshi, was a great example of a monk who spent a good part of his life in service to others. His life was a true expression of Buddhist practice. While working and practicing in the gay community, he supported people with HIV, did hospice care, tried to help drug addicts, and always treated each person he met with compassion and acceptance. I was influenced by his commitment to the Bodhisattva path, and have tried to live my life as a monk in a similar way.

So for some monastics, there is this real challenge of presenting and actualizing the Dharma in the context of everyday life. I have been looking at this issue, and would like to share some thoughts about it with the GBF sangha.

In my tradition, commitment to the Bodhisattva path means to express the truth of the Buddha’s teachings in word and action. It also means to do sitting meditation on a regular basis as the great gateway to wisdom and compassion. In addition, it means to practice mindfulness, which itself encompasses a number of practices. I must take care of what is in front of me completely. I must be fully present. I must function in an integrated way so I am not separated from each activity or moment, but experience interconnectedness. These practices allow compassion to arise.

In my case, taking care of what’s in front of me means supporting the practice of the people in GBF and in the gay community, working with everyday problems, and learning from others. Part of that includes supporting those who are sick and dying of HIV disease. Why? Because for those of us living in the San Francisco area, that is a real part of our lives.

We face many other social ills as well. There is the suffering of homeless people. There is the pain of those who have been sexually abused or harmed in some way. There are many people in prison who need our support and caring.

I cannot do everything, but I’ve found that if I take each situation as it arises, I can practice with it in a way that manifests the Dharma, and creates an atmosphere of caring and non-duality with no attachment to outcome. Another way of looking at this is for me to act in a way that is faithful to my community. I attempt to stay with the situation, to work with others in the sangha. I do this even though at times it is difficult and confusing.

Staying committed to this particular group of people means that I recognize it is no accident we are here. We are all practicing and working together because we are intimately connected to one another. In sangha we have the great opportunity to realize the truth of these words through our interactions with each other. And that truth is the stuff of liberation.

When my teacher Issan-roshi was dying, he made several requests of me. As a part of my practice, he asked me to work in the gay community. I had done that for a time already, and continue it now. At this point, I am very fortunate that GBF exists as a strong and vital sangha. This gives me the wonderful opportunity to practice with gay people. This is the real work for all of us, whether we are monks or not.
Article Writers & Article Finders Make-Better-Meditators Sought

We are always looking for people to contribute articles to the GBF Newsletter. These can be news items, letters and responses to articles for the new “Forum” section, or major features. We also welcome receiving copies of articles or excerpts from other newsletters, magazines, and books that you have found particularly inspiring or helpful to your practice. Just remember to include the name of the publication, issue and number or copyright date, author, and publisher. Please send all submissions to Bob Hass.

Buddhist Gay Anthology Seeks Submissions

In late 1997 San Francisco’s Gay Sunshine Press/Leyland Publications will be publishing a Buddhist gay anthology edited by Winston Leyland. The editor is now soliciting articles, essays, interviews, poems, and stories. All material should be connected to the general theme of the anthology: gay male sexuality and the Dharma. You need not be a professional writer to submit material. Please write, with an outline of proposed material, to Winston Leyland, P.O. Box 410690, San Francisco, CA 94141.

Classifieds Corner

HOUSING IN MARIN COUNTY/SF BAY
Professional learning holistic medicine, seeking housing in Marin County. Will also consider East Bay or other warm location in SF Bay Area. Ideally looking for one-bedroom apartment; alternately, renting two rooms in a shared household OK. Need to move between June and September 1996.

HOUSING FOR LONDON TRAVELER
Zen Buddhist practitioner in his fifties who lives outside London seeks (paid) accommodations while in SF, preferably with a member of GBF. Expects to visit U.S. later in 1996. Also willing to reciprocate the hospitality to GBFers traveling to London.

The Discovery Community

Since 1987, the Discovery Community has been holding retreats for gay and bisexual men who are interested in expanding their self-awareness—emotionally, spiritually, and communally. Four retreats are offered annually, facilitated by members. They are held on the weekends of Presidents’ Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving. Each has a unique theme, such as community, life goals, body image, and spirituality. These are complemented with small support groups and workshops.

Who attends the retreats? Generally it is people who are seeking more community in their lives, more self-understanding, and more contact at the level of the heart. Participants range in age from 20 to 75, and come from every kind of background. Most are single, but there are many couples too, some of whom met at a Discovery retreat.

The Discovery Community is a community. Bonds among members are close, and members support each other in many aspects of their lives.

“Buddhism is like spiritual tofu. It takes on the flavors of whatever culture it encounters.”

—By group of GBFers during an enlightened moment while lunching together following a Sunday meeting

Contributors

Thanks to the following people who helped with this issue of the GBF Newsletter: Alan Oliver, Alzak Amlani, Bob Hass, Brian Shelley, Daishin David Sunseri, David Holmes, Jon Weaver, Ken Harper, Mark Marion, Russell Van Tassel, Tom Moon, and all the wonderful mailing volunteers!
Back By Popular Demand

Foundations of Buddhism Workshop
Saturday Mornings - May 2nd and 9th

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship generally operates on the guiding principle that each person is responsible for their own spiritual development and finding an appropriate path. We encourage anyone interested in Buddhism to read books and articles, talk with others who also relate to Buddhism, seek out teachers and practice centers and of course to practice meditation. We also encourage people to attend GBF practice sessions/events and serve on committees that maintain the GBF structure.

This decentralized approach, although traditional in many ways, does not help the newcomer to Buddhism easily achieve a general understanding of the nature of this spiritual practice. Periodically there comes a time in GBF when enough people have asked for some guidance in understanding Buddhism that we offer a structured workshop that reviews the basics. This workshop "Foundations of Buddhism" has been offered twice in the past four years and we are pleased to offer it again in May.

The last Foundations course was held on two full Saturdays and was somewhat of a forced march through the material. It was successful, but exhausting for both leaders and participants. This workshop is scheduled as two half day sessions covering the same topics. Perhaps we can be more succinct in the presentations. There will be less time for discussion, but this will still be a good opportunity to review the basics for both new and more experienced practitioners.

The workshop will cover Buddhist history, concepts and forms of Buddhist practice. It will acquaint you with language and structure that can aid in understanding readings, dharma talks, discussions and your own internal thoughts. The first session will focus on the Buddha, Buddhist History, The Four Noble Truths, The Precepts and key concepts. The second session will focus on the major Buddhist traditions and key practice questions examined from a gay perspective.

The two half day sessions will be on Saturday, May 2nd and 9th, from 8:30 to 12:00 noon. They will be held at the MCC Church at 150 Eureka Street in The Castro, 2nd floor. There will be a charge of $10.00 per session for a total of $20 for both workshop sessions. This pays for rental of the facility, copying of handouts, light refreshments etc. Handouts will be given to you before the first session. If you are interested in attending send a check for $20 to GBF along with your name, address and phone number. Bring a pillow to sit on. Chairs will be available if you choose. Please respond as soon as possible.