GBF Calendar
Call 415/974-9879 for news about GBF and GBF-sponsored events. To skip the recording and leave a message, press 5.

2 Feb., Sunday Sitting (East Bay), 10:30 am, at the home of Geoff McEnany.

5 Feb., Wednesday, Steering Committee Meeting, 7:15 pm, at the home of Jeff Miller.
All are welcome.

6 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Bill Kirkpatrick.

9 Feb., Sunday Sitting (SF), 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St. Mark Marion, a psychotherapist and GBF member, is our speaker for February and will talk about adapting to loss.

10 Feb., News Deadline for next GBF Newsletter. Send all articles to Jeff Miller, Co-Editor, GBF Newsletter.

13 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 6:30 pm: potluck dinner, 7:45 pm: meditation, at the home of Lee Robbins.

15 Feb., Saturday, GBF's Feed-The-Homeless Project at Hamilton Family Center. To participate, contact Clint Seiter.

16 Feb., Sunday Sitting (East Bay), 10:30 am, see 2/2

(continued on page 3)

New Approach to Grief and Loss is Topic
February 9

Mark Marion, a psychotherapist and GBF member, is our speaker for February. He will discuss loss or life transitions from a Buddhist perspective, as a pathway to renewal and awakening. This will include a new “circular model” of living with loss, which views loss as a normal process of life.

Mark’s approach differs from Kubler-Ross’ more familiar model, which sees loss as occurring in a linear progression, and moving through five stages: denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance.

In Brief
Time Is Running Out!

If you have not yet sent in your subscription fee to the GBF Newsletter, there will be a red insert notifying you that this will be your last issue. If you want to continue receiving this newsletter, please subscribe as soon as possible.

Thanks...

After years as the GBF Newsletter editor, Bob Hass has decided to move on to other projects. GBF would like to warmly thank Bob for the outstanding job he has done. He has set a standard that will be hard to match.

And Welcome!

GBF would like to welcome Alan Oliver and Jeff Miller as the new co-editors of the GBF Newsletter, starting with the March, ’97 issue.

GBF’s Feed-The-Homeless Project Needs Your Help!

On the third Saturday of every month, a band of GBFers gets together and prepares a meal for the Hamilton Family Center, a shelter for homeless families. Typically, we feed about 50 people, half of whom are children. We plan the menus, buy the food, prepare the meals in the shelter kitchen, and serve them to the residents.

Last month, GBFer Richard Saiz’ mother, Esther, headed the detail, selecting a menu that included chicken mole enchiladas, Mexican rice, pinto beans, green salad, and apple-cranberry raisin pie (made from scratch) with vanilla ice-cream.

We have been doing this for almost three years now, and the project has been a tremendous success. However, it is run solely on contributions. A typical meal to feed 50 to 60 people costs $120. GBF donates $50 a month; the balance comes from contributions by individual members.

Most of us are deeply concerned about the rising homelessness we see in this city, but don’t know what we can do to help. This project is one way we can help. There are no overhead costs involved. Every dollar donated goes directly to buying food to feed homeless families. A monthly $10 commitment by 7 contributors would be all that it would take to keep this project alive. One time donations, of course, would also be greatly welcomed. For information on how you can help, please call Clint Seiter.

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Gay Buddhist Fellowship Newsletter
February 1997
Dharma Centers
[Each center offers ongoing programs and activities. If interested, please contact them directly.]

• BSC: Berkeley Shambhala Center; 2288 Fulton Street, Berkeley; 510/841-6475.
• BZC: Berkeley Zen Center; 1933 Russell Street, Berkeley; 510/845-2403.
• CDS: California Diamond Sangha, P.O. Box 2915, Petaluma, CA.
• CMU: Community of Mindful Living, P.O. Box 735, Albany; 510/527-3751.
• DJ: Dudjom International, P.O. Box 40155; Berkeley; 510/849-9928.
• EGZC: Empty Gate Zen Center, 5707 Oak Grove Ave., Oakland; 510/653-5991.
• EHMC: Enlightened Heart Meditation Center; 415/225-0798.
• GGF: Green Gulch Farm; 1601 Shoreline Highway, Suasalito; 415/383-3134.
• HSZC: Hartford Street Zen Center; 57 Hartford St., SF; 415/663-2507.
• LMB: Land of Medicine Buddha; 5800 Prescott Rd., Soquel; 408/622-6383.
• LFMC: Living Peace Meditation Community; 1650 Clay St., SF; 415/284-5023.
• NL: Nyingma Institute; 1815 Highland Place, Berkeley; 510/849-0125.
• ODD: Origen Dorje Den; 410 Townsend #406, SF; 415/826-7161.
• POM: Pema Osel Ling; 2013 Eureka Canyon Road, Corralitos; 408/761-6266.
• RF: Rigpa Fellowship; 316 Bancroft Way, Berkeley; 510/644-1858.
• SBC: Saraha Buddhist Center; 3145 Geary Blvd., #515, SF; 415/731-5973.
• SCZC: Santa Cruz Zen Center, 113 School Street, Santa Cruz; 408/457-0206.
• SFBC: San Francisco Buddhist Center; 37 Bartlett St., SF; 415/282-2018.
• SFSC: Shambhala Center; 1630 Taraval St., SF; 415/773-4426.
• SFZC: San Francisco Zen Center; 300 Page Street, SF; 415/643-3136.
• SMZC: Sonoma Mind Zen Center, 6367 Sonoma Mtn. Rd., Santa Rosa; 707/545-8105.
• SR: Spirit Rock Meditation Center; 5000 Sir Frances Drake Blvd., Woodacre; 415/488-0164.
• TCL: Tse Chen Ling Center; 4 Joost Ave., SF; 415/332-3261.
• VI: Vajrapani Institute, P.O. Box 2130, Boulder Creek; 408/338-6654.

The Local Dharma
February - March 1997

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

Special Events

2, 16 Feb., 2, 16 Mar. (Sun.) Meditation and Mantra. Periods of chanting together will alternate with periods of quiet sitting. Those who wish may do silent mantra accumulations. This type of group mantra practice can be an inspiring method for meditation. Open to students at all levels. 4:5-30 pm. RF

2 Feb.-2 Mar. (Sun.) Sunday Tea Gatherings with Randall Weingarten, Sarah Seiter and Meiya Wender. Having cleaned the tea room and arranged freshly picked local flowers in the tokonoma, the host makes a charcoal fire, boils water and prepares green tea for a small group of guests. Your role as guest is to appreciate this particular time and space and enjoy a Japanese sweet and bowl of green tea, together with the other guests. Open to all—no experience necessary. Please register in advance. Limited to 10 people. $15. GGF

3 Feb.-21 Mar. (Weekdays) San Francisco Zen Center Classes. The following classes are being offered through the SFZC Study Center. Life of the Buddha; The Teachings of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi; Hara Development; The Poetry of Enlightenment; Experiencing Buddhist Psychology; and Tea Ceremony. Call for details and registration SFZC

15 Feb. (Sat.) A Short Daily Yoga Practice to Help You Sit with Shosan Victoria Austin. This workshop is for anyone who wants to cultivate the strength, suppleness and stability that Zazen practice demands. Emphasizing safety and practicality, participants will learn a short yoga practice for posture and back health, hip flexibility and knee health, and relaxation and breath awareness. $30. Call to register. SFZC

16-23 Feb. (Sun.-Sun.) Sesshin Retreat with Jakusho Kwong-roshi. Silent Meditation Intensive for experienced sitters to “still the Mind” in a rigorous schedule which begins at 4:45 am with prostrations, 10 periods of meditation, chanting, mindful work, Dharma talks, and private interviews, ending at 9 pm. Special arrangements can be made for those who cannot come for the entire retreat due to work commitments. $315. SMZC

19-23 Feb. (Wed.-Sun.) Meditation Movement. Men’s Work: a unique retreat using meditative awareness to explore the hearts of men with Jack Kornfield and Robert Hall. This retreat combines traditional vipassana practice with an exploration of the spirit of our lives as men. Discussion groups and meditations will focus on men’s issues and men’s inner work, enhancing the experience with movement, sounding, and sharing from the heart. $300 includes room and board. To register send $100 deposit payable to ‘SRMC’ to: Richard Ditzler, 5200 Gates Road, Santa Rosa CA 95404, or phone 415-488-0164 ext. 376. SR

1 Mar. (Sat.) Bodhisattva Archetypes with Taigen Dan Leighton. This workshop will be an introduction to Mahayana Buddhist psychology as seen through the major bodhisattva figures. Participants will examine the iconography, mythology, practice strategies, and associated teachings of these major archetypal bodhisattvas: Manjushri, Samantabhadra, Avalokiteshvara, Kshitigarbha and Maitreya. $45. Call to register. SFZC
Notes From The January Steering Committee Meeting

- Alan Oliver and Jeff Miller will be co-editors of the newsletter starting in March; Clint Seiter will edit the February newsletter. Volunteers are being sought to volunteer to help on one newsletter a year.

- GBF will increase its support of the Hamilton Family Center Project from $25 to $50 a month. This project requires the support of all of us. Please see the related notice elsewhere in this newsletter.

- GBF's 1996 financial statement was presented by Ding-Hao Ma. Our biggest expense involves printing and sending out the newsletter. If you've received a "red sheet" insert you are about to be removed from the mailing list unless we hear from you.

- Edward Sams will now take responsibility for answering and dealing with the GBF phone messages as well as the mail sent to the GBF mailbox.

breathe

Contributors

Thanks to the following people who helped with this issue of the GBF Newsletter: Bob Hass, Brian Shelley, Clint Seiter, Roger Corless, David Holmes, David Sunseri, Edward Sams, Jeff Miller, Jon Weaver, Ken Harper, Mark Marion, Robin Levitt, Steve Peskind, and Tom Moon.

Engaged Buddhist Projects

(This is only a partial listing of Bay Area projects. For details about individual projects, please contact the organization directly.)

- BAP: Buddhist AIDS Project, 555 John Muir Drive, #803, SF 94112. 415/522-7473.
- BPF: Buddhist Peace Fellowship, P.O. Box 4650, Berkeley 94704. 510/525-8596.
- HFCP: Hamilton Family Center Project, c/o GBF, 2261 Market Street, #422, SF 94114. Clint Seiter, 415/386-3088.
- MH: Maitri Hospice, 61 Hartford Street, SF 94114. 415/863-8508.

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship supports Buddhist practice in the gay men's community. It is a forum that brings together the diverse Buddhist traditions to address the spiritual concerns of gay men in the Bay Area, the United States, and around the world. GBF's mission includes cultivating a social environment that is inclusive and caring.

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship Newsletter is published monthly by the Gay Buddhist Fellowship. All signed articles express the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the GBF. © 1997 Gay Buddhist Fellowship. All rights reserved.

GBF Calendar (continued from page 1)

20 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Mark Marion,

22 Feb., Saturday, Dharma Dinner Party, 7 pm at the home of Jeff Miller,

23 Feb., Sunday Sitting (SF), 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St., S.F. Open discussion.

27 Feb., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Edward Sams.
Dharma Quality Control

by Roger Corless

How do we know if the Dharma that we are hearing or reading about is authentic or not? The question comes down to a notion of lineage, and there's a lot of rhetoric about that and a lot of confusion. The first thing to notice is the authenticity of the teacher and the true lineage of the teacher is always stressed and considered very important, but the second thing to notice is that when you try to get precision on the issue you tend to find that the trail goes cold. People in the Zen and Tibetan traditions claim an authentic lineage, but those are really late developments and in some ways not typical of the Buddhist tradition in general. So, I will begin at the start of the Buddhist tradition and then give some idea to the differences as they developed.

Let us assume (ignoring some scholarly claims to the contrary) that the texts in the Pali tradition preserved by Theravada, the Southeast Asian Buddhists, give us the earliest accounts we have of the life of the Buddha. The Buddhist tradition is fairly unified in thinking that when he was alive the Buddha would accept a person into the Bhikkhu Sangha (the monastic community) simply by invitation. He would say "Ehi, bhikkhu" which means "Come, you are now a bhikkhu (monk), I'll accept you as this." There was apparently no further ceremony. The presumption is that he knew that a person was ready to become a bhikkhu. After the Buddha passed on, the question the Sangha faced was "He's gone, now what do we do?" There's a fairly unified tradition that he says "After I am gone you are to take the Dharma and yourselves as your refuge and your light."

I think it's important to note that in the phrase translated from the Pali account "yourselves" is in the plural, not the singular. It's not, "You're on your own now". It's that those who are left, the followers of the Buddha, the whole community, is the refuge. Because while the Buddha himself is no longer around, the Sangha, the community, is still there. The Sangha and the Dharma (the teaching) will be the continuing refuge. When the Dharma is proclaimed rightly, it is in fact the same as contacting the Buddha, and when you contact the Sangha or the community and they are practicing the way that they should, it is the same as contacting the Buddha and the Dharma.

This appears to relate to a saying of the Buddha in the Pali texts: "One who sees me, sees the Dhamma." By watching the Buddha, even by watching the way he eats, you will get the teaching. Some people have remarked on this today, they say "When I was host to this particular Rinpoche I could feel the enlightenment just by the fact that I was preparing the food and feeding him." There was something about the Rinpoche himself, that was somehow the Dharma.

I don't know of any Buddhist tradition where there isn't the custom to start all the services and meetings with the taking of refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. I think that it is worth bearing in mind that we're all taking refuge in something, that we all want to go somewhere where we'll feel safe, happy, and healed. The Buddhist teaching is that unless we go to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, then the refuge we go to will ultimately fail; at most, it may cure the symptoms, but not the disease.

This tradition of taking refuge, which is all over the Buddhist world, is concentrated slightly more in the monastic tradition where a person becomes a monk through a formal service. As mentioned earlier, apparently the Buddha himself just said "You've got it, you've got the potential, so I will admit you." After that, it became the custom to have a testing period and examinations, and the two levels of what we call in English the novice and the full monk. Only after all of this testing and preparation was a person accepted to be a monk, and the actual ceremony had to be performed according to a precise ritual, with the proper number of elder monks in attendance, and at an authorized location. Unless that happened, the ordination was not said to be valid, one was not said to be in the true lineage. This is the situation for most of the traditions today.

When you meet a teacher of the Thai or another Theravada tradition, you can expect that the person has a formal ordination that in theory goes back to the Buddha, but they do not usually talk in terms of being in a lineage of teachers. After a Theravada teacher dies, there is no lineage that is passed on. In Chinese Buddhism, it is passed on as if it were from father to son (although it isn't actually father to son because the monks are celibate). This appears to be an adaptation to Confucianism, the idea that you have a document you can produce that says that you are of a particular family and come from a particular place. The tradition is that the abbot of the monastery has a certificate to say that he was ordained by such a person, and that his lineage can be traced all the way back to the Buddha.

But you can never get it all the way back. They try to, but the trail goes cold. In any case it's an institutional thing that fits with the Confucian understanding of how things should be done. This means that often it's very political. In theory the person who is given the transmission is worthy
because of their realization. In practice it is often that they are just sufficiently senior, they've been around long enough, they come from a good family, and this would be the "proper" thing to do. It's not always clear why a person has a certificate to be a Shih-fu (Abbot) or a Roshi. This is particularly confusing when we get into the reform of the Zen movement which happened in the beginning of the Meiji Era in Japan. Some Japanese felt that the monks had become lazy and corrupt and were simply in it for the money. It's an easy job, once you have your certificate; you get a temple and you conduct services for the dead, and that's about all you have to do. You get married, buy a BMW, and everything is fine.

So some people in Japan said, "We have to correct this, we can't let it go on like this," and they tried to purify the lineage transmission so that it was given to someone worthy. The person who was the successor in the lineage was to be someone with the proper realization. They extracted from the tradition the notion of kensho, seeing into one's nature, and they tried to find a way that they could authenticate kensho without using the corrupt method of "You've been here a long time, you're very senior, and you know all the texts, so your answer is the right one now, even though when you gave the same answer as a novice it was the wrong answer." This often isn't known in the West, because often the only kind of Zen that people contact in the West is this reformed Zen. They are not aware of the reason for trying to reform it, all the laziness and corruption in the ordinary way that Buddhism was conducted in Japan.

The Tibetan tradition, found in Tibet, Mongolia, and surrounding cultures, developed something else. It put more emphasis on the teacher, specifically a lama (Tibetan for "guru"). In the Tibetan Tradition, before you take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha you take refuge in your particular lama. It's not however that you add a fourth refuge, but that the lama is the incarnation or embodiment of the Triple Refuge for you. By watching the lamas, by being in their presence, you can see what the Dharma is just by the way they do things. Then you accept what they tell you unquestioningly.

But, you don't do that the first time you meet them, that would be very dangerous. The recommendation is that if you are looking for a teacher in the Tibetan tradition you go shopping and test them. Only when you feel safe, after you've tested the teacher enough and have seen them in all kinds of different situations, can you conclude that this is the one for you. The Tibetan teachers will quite often show a lineage that goes back to a non-human source, not to Buddha Shakyamuni, but to Vajrasattva or Vairocana or some such so-called "cosmic Buddha". Then you might say "How do we deal with that?"

What is happening here is that there is a tension between whether anything is being passed from teacher to disciple, or whether the disciple's own enlightened mind is being enabled or somehow allowed to free itself. This is something that the Buddhist world has not really resolved. It seems to be in some kind of tension between the two, and it seems that that is a particular problem for something like GBF, because we're not really a lineage. We have a gong and we have zafus: they aren't particularly Buddhist, but they look Buddhist if you're not used to them. They are just things, you could just as well be sitting on a chair or whatever. So, what is Buddhist about this? Do you need to have a teacher in an authentic lineage, and, if so, is it going to be on the East Asian model, the Tibetan model, or the Theravadin? Or do you need to say simply that we allow our own enlightened mind to manifest, and that is sufficient to be Buddhist? In any case, I think that the final test of whether the teaching is authentic or not is if it is actually performing its job of being liberating.

The Buddhist tradition is enormously complicated; it takes a long time to get a fair handle on the tradition. There are thousands of texts, in Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, and other languages. No person has read all of them. So it seems on the surface impossible to read all about Buddhism and find the heart of it, yet on the other hand, the Buddha is supposed to have said, "Although my teaching is as deep and broad as the cosmic ocean, yet, just as the ocean has only one taste, which is the taste of salt, so my teaching has only one taste, which is the taste of liberation." So, if you feel that the teaching is liberating you from your neuroses, your fears, or your passions that are enslaving you, you have a pretty good idea that it is working. However, there is still the problem of whether or not you feel that you individually or GBF collectively should get authenticated in some kind of traditional lineage. What is your answer?

Roger Corless is a Professor of Religion at Duke University, a member of GBF, and a frequent visitor to the Bay area. This article is an edited transcript of a talk he gave to GBF on Sunday, 14 July, 1996.