Two Speakers For June -
"The Western Buddhist Order" and "A Report
From The Dalai Lama/ Gays Meeting"

Our speaker on June 8th will be
Paramananda, a teacher in the Western
Buddhist Order who is one of four
teachers at the San Francisco Budhilsh
Center, the host site for our Sunday
Practice Sittings. He will speak on
"The Western Buddhist Order & The
Teachings Of Sangharakshita".
This will be a great opportunity to
learn more about The Friends Of The
Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), one
of the few Western based Buddhist
traditions.

The talk will review the history of
the FWBO, their approach to estab-
lishing Buddhism in the West and the
nature of spiritual friendships.
Paramananda is the current chairman
of the SFBC, has been an ordained
teacher for eleven years and is author
of a book on meditation.

On the 22nd we will have a report
and discussion about the meeting
between the Dalai Lama and a group
of seven gay and lesbian Buddhists.
The issue of gay sexuality and tradi-
tional Tibetan teachings has been
featured in our newsletter, gay
newspapers and in our local papers
over the past five months. The meet-
ing is tentatively scheduled for June
10th and will likely generate more
newspaper coverage. Come and help
us sort it all out on the 22nd. ♦

Allen Ginsberg To Be
Remembered On Gay
Pride Weekend

On Friday, June 27th, GBF invites
you to "drop in" to a house party that
will offer all of us a chance to just
relax and have some fun together
(also part of the dharma). Since this
will be the kickoff of gay pride
weekend we feel it is appropriate to
celebrate the life of one of our great,
gay Buddhists who recently left us
physically, Allen Ginsberg. Some
poetry will surely be read, perhaps a
video tape and a sharing of some
personal encounters with Allen. Call
us with ideas or suggestions for the
evening.

Please bring your own choice of
drink and some light food to share so
that you won't have to drag dishes
with you to wherever else you are
going. It will be held from 7:30 p.m. till
11:00ish at Larry White's digs.

New GBF Brochure;
Audiotapes To Follow

Over the past two years, we have
been trying to describe GBF in a
simple and clear way. This has now
been done and brochures have been
duplicated on great lilac colored
paper. They will be made available at
our Sunday Sittings. If you live
elsewhere and would like some
copies to share with friends, please
contact us. Our thanks go to Bob Hass
for seeing the project through to
collection. Watch for the announce-
ment of audiotapes of GBF Dharma
talks in our next issue. ♦
Editor's Mind
by Alan Oliver

You can consciously choose a theme for an issue or a theme can emerge from separate decisions and chance circumstances.

Thus compassion has appeared among our June decisions. Toby Johnson's article on "The Male Buddha Of Compassion" seemed particularly appropriate for our gay community since compassion is one of the great central points of the Dharma and much in need of being expressed by people who are gay. We live in a type of exile from the dominant culture although that is changing. It still makes it difficult to show compassion sometimes. Also the need for compassion towards ourselves needs to be kept bright and clear in our minds. The article reminds us of the old teachings and myths of Buddhism.

We coaxed an article from Christopher in Hyden, Kentucky because it seemed appropriate in this graduation month. Again the theme of compassion came up in his article as he sought ways to help other students who might be gay, his mother and to others who befriended him. Perhaps from a little distance and safety after graduation there is even a hint that it could be extended to the "Christians" in the school.

Paul in his letter from prison reminds us of the difficulty of living the Dharma in prison and his efforts to share it with others and Daishin David Sunseri suggests in Dharma Gateways that living it is better than talking about it as difficult as that can be.

It's The Early Bird That Gets To Retreat And To Take the 6th

Now that we have got your attention with impossibly confusing mixed phrasing, we want to remind you to reserve time to attend GBF's 6th Annual Retreat at the Vajrapani Institute near Boulder Creek on September 5-7.

The schedule will include traditional practices of silent sitting and walking meditation on both mornings followed by sangha hikes and dharma dialogue in the afternoons. The focus of the dialogue periods this year will be on Buddhist approaches to relationships another step in the exploration of that part of our lives. More silent time is optional for individual needs.

Complete details and a registration form will be included in the July/August newsletter. This is a great opportunity for those members of GBF who live further away and can't make it to our usual programs. Enlightenment (at least a moment or two) guaranteed or your money back. We kid you not or do we?

Contributors

Thanks to the following people who helped with this GBF Newsletter: Alan Oliver, Chris Alferitz, Jon Weaver, Scott Stalnaker, David Holmes, Mark Marion, Daishen David Sunseri, Tom Moon, Jack Carroll, Paul Veach, Toby Johnson - White Crane Journal and Christopher Osborne.

Letters:
Voices From Indra's Net

Indra's Net was the mythical Net suspended over Indra's palace in which at each intersecting point in the Net was a jewel. The facets of each jewel reflected all the other jewels in the Net. The various facets of GBF opinion are reflected here.

Dear Editor:

I would like to thank you for publishing the article Buddhism, Homosexuality and Renunciation, by Ronald Martinez Lahez in the March 1997 issue. I think it is one of the most thoughtful and level-headed considerations of sexual orientation and sexual conduct that I have read in a Buddhist publication. The fact that it is blessedly free from rant and cant contributes very much to its value.

On page five of the same issue you ask in regard to the "anti-gay letters" to the editor in Tricycle, "How should we respond as gay Buddhists?"

Perhaps we should respond as people who have confidence in the Buddha dhamma and not look to make a special gay Buddhist response. If we are followers of the Buddha's way who are first gay/straight, male/female, European/African/Asian, and all the other "ors" that are rife in this world, then perhaps we have missed the point of Buddhist dhamma entirely. As human beings we all have to respond to situations, but should not we be responding as human beings in the light of Dhamma, rather than seeking a special-label-first response.

The difference between understanding our sexual orientation from within Dhamma, as opposed to considering Dhamma from the point of view of our sexual orientation first, may present many problems to our habitual mode of thinking. However, if we do not (continued on page 3)
Letters
(continued from page 2)

make that effort how have we understood Dhamma in any way that is different from those letter writers?

If our understanding of Dhamma has not been a metanoeic experience, a basic change of insight and an attempt to live by that insight, then we are simply going to engage in the same old “same-old”, whether we are “gay Buddhists” or “anti-gay.” How many carts do we have to put before the horse before we get a clue? A rewarding issue of the newsletter in any case.

Sincerely, Jack Carroll.

Editors Note: Does spirituality develop before sexuality in the cycle of birth-life-death? Are children aware of spirituality before sexuality? These are key issues to reflect over and answer. ♦

dear editor:

As a Theravada Buddhist inmate in a Texas State prison, things have not been easy. However, they could be much worse! On this unit we have had no trouble receiving written study material, as well as tapes from several monasteries and meditation centers. The problem is in getting approval to listen to the tapes as they are in the Christian Chapel tape library. This requires special arrangements which is sometimes hard to get because of the unique problems of prison life.

However, there is a bigger problem. Prison policy requires at least 15 registered Buddhist inmates and an outside free person who has been approved by the prison to come and teach, in order to be listed as an established Sangha on the same level with other religious groups.

So, the Chaplain will not let us put up a one time flyer in order to contact other Buddhists in the

prison. It seems our poster is “recruiting”, while they are just “informing”. They are organized, we are not. We are in a classic “Catch 22” situation. Many Buddhist inmates do not even know there is a dharma and meditation tape library. Although this may change if inmates see the ad for a teacher placed in the GBF Newsletter, Turning Wheel, or read this letter. Also, inmates who are registered Buddhists living in other units might be able to get transferred to this unit when we get a teacher. Religious freedom and all that! This would start the first Texas State prison Sangha.

Most prison inmates are new to Buddhism and do not have the support of outside Sanghas. So, one of the most important support (metta) an outside Sangha could perform is to establish written and verbal contact with Buddhist inmates and prison Chaplains. The central theme of the contact with prison staff should be spirituality reduces crime!

Recently, I was asked how my Buddhist practice has helped me? That was easy to answer! My meditation and study has greatly contributed to my positive mental and physical health. All the Buddhist inmates at this prison would like to thank you for your help.

With metta, Paul Veach. ♦

The Dali Lama Is Coming To Town!

As many members of the GBF may already know, H. H. the Dalai Lama will be in San Francisco in June for a conference on violence. While in our city, he will also meet with a committee to explore the relationship between Buddhist spirituality and Gay sexuality. These are issues very close to the heart of the GBF! There has been discussion in the Buddhist, Gay, and Gay-Buddhist communities about these topics. The GBF reflects many Buddhist traditions, and supports our brothers in the various Tibetan lineages in exercising patience, compassion, and metta as they search for insight, wisdom and knowledge related to these complex subjects. The GBF encourages and actively supports continued dialogue and research in all Buddhist traditions on the positive, vital link between Gay sexuality and Buddhist spirituality. ♦

GBF Mission Statement

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)

21 June (Saturday), GBF’s Feed-The-Homeless Project at Hamilton Family Center. To participate, contact Clint Seiter,

22 June, Sunday Sitting (SP), 10:30 am. NEW LOCATION: SFBC, 37 Bartlett St. Report on the meeting with the Dalai Lama and discussion.

26 June Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Larry White,

(Note: this is a permanent change in location for the 4th Thursday Sitting.)

27 June, Friday Party, 7:30 pm at the
Avalokiteshvara
The Male Buddha of Compassion

by Toby Johnson

Editor's Note: This article is reprinted in part from the Autumn 1996, issue of the White Crane Journal, with the kind permission of Toby Johnson. For those persons interested in learning more about the Male Reflection of the Buddha of Compassion, contact the Buddhist Church in America (BCA). The BCA is part of the Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land) tradition of Japanese Buddhism.

The name Avalokiteshvara means “The Lord Looking Down In Pity”, and “The Lord Who Is Seen Within”. We are all reflexes of the image of the Bodhisattva. The sufferer within us is that divine being. We and that protecting father are one. This is the redeeming insight. That protecting father is every man we meet. So it must be known that, though this ignorant, limited, self-defending, suffering body may regard itself as threatened by some other - the enemy - that one too is God... New life, new birth, new knowledge of existence (so that we live not in this physiques only, but in all bodies, all physiques of the world, as the Bodhisattva) was given us. This is the meaning of the image of the bisexual god. (Joseph Campbell, The Hero With A Thousand Faces, pps. 160-161.)

An ancient Mahayana Buddhist myth tells of a fellow who had worked his way through countless incarnations to become a bodhisattva, a stage of development just before becoming a buddha. In what promised to be his final incarnation, he was a young, beautiful, kind, gentle, and androgynous being called Avalokiteshvara, whose name means “The Lord Looking Down In Pity.” As he was entering his final meditation, about to achieve his goal of lifetimes beyond number, he heard a groan go up from all around him. He came out of his meditation and asked, “What is this about? I was about to achieve Nirvana. Why the groan?”

All of nature answered in a single voice, “O Avalokiteshvara, we are happy for you that you are about to enter Nirvana, but we are sad for ourselves. Life is hard and full of suffering. What has kept us going was the thought of you. You are so kind and lovely. You have been a source of strength and inspiration for us. Now you are about to leave us, and so we groan.”

Rapt with compassion, the young saint responded,

“Well, then I will not leave you, but shall renounce my own Nirvana until all sentient beings are likewise enlightened.” Indeed, he went on to say, “It would be better for one to suffer than for all. Therefore, I vow to take upon myself all the karma and all the suffering of all sentient beings. I shall remain in the cycles of reincarnation until the end of time bestowing grace and mercy for the good of all.”

According to one interpretation of the myth, when Avalokiteshvara made his great vow, all other sentient beings were at that moment ushered into Nirvana, leaving Avalokiteshvara alone behind to live out all their karma for them. This androgynous being then is the only being who is incarnating.

Though we all think ourselves to be different, separate individuals - all fighting, struggling, conquering, or succumbing to the exigencies of our unique karmas - indeed, we are each and all really manifestations of that one being, Avalokiteshvara, living out the vow and discovering that this is what Nirvana really is. Not the renunciation of the world, but the loving, compassionate embrace of all possible human experience. Thus the name Avalokiteshvara can also be interpreted “The Lord Who Is Seen Within.”

Of course, this Buddhist myth from the first or second century of the Common Era is not about homosexuality and gay identity as we know them in the twentieth century (though one has to wonder if homosexually-oriented Buddhist monks down all the corridors of time (continued on page 6)
The Spirit of Compassion Arises

Surviving High School
A Gay Buddhist Graduates In The Heartland

By Christopher Osborne-Kentucky

I can hardly believe I’m finally graduating. As I think back over the past four years, I can vividly remember my experiences of being a young gay Buddhist in a homophobic Christian community. There is wisdom one can gain through being a practicing gay Buddhist in a closed Christian community.

The most memorable aspect of my life was the loneliness. The only contact I had with other Buddhists was through the mail, and the only contact I had with other homosexuals was slim also. I knew one “open” homosexual whom I dated for awhile, however, since being gay is strictly prohibited here, he felt forced to stay in the closet. I came out as a Buddhist before I came out as gay. A few of my close friends told me a major advantage of me being Buddhist was that I was totally trustworthy.

So before I was criticized for being gay, I was constantly criticized for being Buddhist. I was often attacked verbally and once physically. On one occasion, as I sat in class, someone asked who I prayed to; but before I could respond the teacher jumped in and said, “Those Buddhists worship wooden statues! We Americans should go overseas where they come from and teach them who the real GOD is!” Suddenly the whole class burst out in laughter and were yelling, “You’re going to Hell, stupid! If you don’t believe in God you’re crazy! You had better never come around me, or I’ll knock your teeth down your neck! You Buddha boy!!!”

As the teacher sat back and watched what was I to do or say to defend myself against the ignorance of 20-30 students and a teacher? As time passed, I found myself in more and more situations like that so with all that pressure I sure wasn’t going to come out about being gay which I finally did in my junior year. During one of these situations, I couldn’t say anything so I got up and walked out. I went to talk to the principal who said, “Son, this country was founded by Christians, for Christians and it will always be run by Christians. So all I can say is live with the ridicule.” Then I decided to purpose a multi-cultural class to inform students of the different religions they will encounter throughout life, and his response was, “The parents just wouldn’t allow it. We just couldn’t teach about anything other than Christianity. This is a Christian town and it’s gonna stay that way!”

My first year of high school was also my first year of practice as a Buddhist, and I quickly learned it wasn’t going to be easy to practice. I found myself being attacked by people constantly asking questions like, “Do you believe in God? Do you stick pins in dolls to put spells on people?” Here in my town people know so little about Buddhism that my fellow classmates and family thought I practiced “Voodoo”. Why else would I light so many candles and incense and meditate? When I would try to explain, my classmates, teachers and often family would twist my words to make it sound as though I was some type of psycho. You see here it is a deadly sin to be gay or Buddhist, and I was made aware of that daily by different people who would protest, “It just ain’t right fer ye ta be a voodooist!”

Somewhere in this process of practicing in high school I realized that Buddha’s dharma of impermanence which is usually thought of as pain causing actually worked both ways. Not only did all comfortable states soon pass away, but so did all the uncomfortable ones. Armed with this inexhaustible truth, I found a certain peace in all my future experiences.

It was not until my junior year that I decided to come out to the small group of friends that I had gained in hope that if one of them were gay knowing that they were not alone would comfort them. To my amazement, this seemingly anti-gay group of friends took it really well. However, soon the word got out and more and more people found out that I was gay. Now I was faced with a new criticism and I was teased with fag jokes which for some reason didn’t bother me as much as Buddha jokes.

Soon a few people came to me and let me know that they were gay and that it helped to know that they weren’t alone. I soon discovered that homosexuality was so forbidden in Christianity that these people were afraid to even think about being gay and would out to other gays for two main reasons. First, their parents would kick them out of the house if they ever found out. The actual quote often heard is, “If I ever found out that ye was a gay, I would kick ye as out of da house and disown ye as my child.”

Secondly, they would definitely go to Hell if they even thought about this ‘deadly sin’. Nevertheless, knowing that I had brought some comfort to these friends brought a change to my painful state of existence and brought me happiness. As I have read more, I realize that we see our experiences “locally” and feel the ridicule of all homosexuals as our own. However, if we imagine that we were on the moon and could see everything on the Earth all at once we would be able to see all experiences of everyone not just ours alone.

Understanding this need for universal compassion also (continued on page 6)
Avalokiteshvara

have not found it, at least in the depths of their
time, remnants of the feelings in their
lives.) But the character in the myth reminds us today
of what are thought of as gay traits. Avalokiteshvara's
sensitivity and generosity, his loveableness and sweet-
ness, his attractiveness and youthful vitality and
pluckiness reflect characteristics that certainly are not
limited to gay men - and are not even necessarily
honored in popular gay culture or portrayed in the gay
erotic media. Nonetheless, these qualities shine forth
from so many gay men in the acquaintance of us all. It
is, indeed, the appearance of such traits that justifies our
speaking about "gay men's spirituality."

It is said there are Three Wonders of the Bodhisattva
to meditate upon. The first is that the Bodhisattva is
simultaneously male and female, transcending the
polarities, like the Two-Spirit persons of Native-Ameri-
can (and pop gay) lore. Sometimes Avalokiteshvara is
portrayed iconographically as male on the right side of
the body and female on the left.

The second wonder is that from the Bodhisattva's
perspective there is no distinction between life and
release-from-life, between samsara and Nirvana, no
ascertainable difference: time and eternity are one. In
the jargon of the New Age: "This is IT," no difference
between now and life-after-death, no distinction be-
tween the longing for God and the experience of living
life, no goal to achieve.

The third wonder is that the first two are the same.
Transcending the polarities of male and female is a
necessary step in achieving enlightenment and a
contribution to the evolution of consciousness.

The goal of religion and spiritual-seeking, after all, is
not to get to heaven after practicing unspeakable
mortifications and penances in this life, but to discover,
honor, relish and enjoy one's place, beyond the limits of
individuality and the accidents of personality, as
embodied in the divine process here and now. This is
Heaven. ♣
Special Events

7 June (Sat. 10 am-5 pm) The Art of Meditation with Anna Douglas and Robert Hall. A day of meditation exploring the relationship between silent sitting and walking and the creativity which can emerge from silence. $30 includes lunch. SR

13-15 June (Fri. 6 pm-Sun. 3 pm) Koan of the Present Moment: A Study-Practice Weekend with Abbot Zoketsu Norman Fischer. A relaxed weekend of Dharma study and practice focusing on Dogen’s basic text Genjokoan “The Koan of the present moment.” While the text will be covered from the traditional point of view, the emphasis will be on the application of its teachings to our actual meditation and daily life practice. $150-250. GGF

15 June-27 July Integrating Practice into Daily Life: Summer Dharma Intensive. During this very special six weeks, we’ll explore the ways in which our Buddhist practice helps us bring compassion, wisdom and clarity to our everyday activities. The program includes daily meditation instruction and practice, Buddhist philosophy, weekend programs with instructors, work practice on outdoor projects, Tibetan language classes. $600 includes meals and dormitory or camping. Call Kate Savannah at 408-338-6654. VI

21 June (Sat. 3 pm-sundown) 20-Year Anniversary Summer Solstice Celebration at Vajrapani Institute. Come celebrate with music, dinner (please bring salad, non-alcoholic drinks, or dessert), inspirational talk by Geshe Wangdu, oral history by some of the founders, poetry readings, candlelight offering at sundown. R.S.V.P. No charge. VI

21 June (Sat. 9:30 am-5 pm) Meditation and Inquiry with Howard Cohn. Basic meditation instruction, sitting, walking, and dharma inquiry. special emphasis on how we look away from ourselves to find happiness, thereby missing the essential peace that is available here and now. $30 includes lunch. SR

22 June (Sun. 10 am-5 pm) Transformations of Narcissism in Self-Realization with A.H. Almaas (Hameed Ali). What it means to be in touch with our True Nature and how a disconnection from it leads to narcissistic manifestations of ego. A day with the creator of Diamond Heart Training and spiritual director of the Ridhwan School. $75 ($85 after 5/22) SR

11-13 July (Fri. 6:30 pm-Sun. 5 pm) July Sesshin. A weekend sesshin will be held at the Santa Cruz Zen Center. Call to reserve a spot. SCZC ♦

I am so small I can barely be seen. How can this great love be inside me?
- Rumi, via Coleman Barks
Dharma Gateways

When you meet someone who speaks the Dharma well, you are inspired and gratified. You feel wonderful and happy and uplifted. This is a great gift.

But when you meet someone who is awake, who is wise and compassionate, who personifies the teaching, your life is changed completely. There is a radical difference between the two. One is a source of edification, the other is liberation itself.

Meeting a Buddhist or meeting a Buddha.

-- Daishin David Sunseri

How to Reach Us:

**GBF Sangha:** Send correspondence and address changes to GBF, 2261 Market Street #422, San Francisco, CA 94114. For 24-hour information on GBF activities or to leave a message, call 415/974-9878.

**GBF Newsletter:** Send submissions to: Alan Oliver, Editor, GBF Newsletter, 2261 Market Street #438, San Francisco, CA 94114. If possible, include a DOS or Windows disk in Word or as a text file, along with your hardcopy.