Dalai Lama Meets With Lesbian And Gay Leaders
Endorses Full Human Rights And Suggests Process For Dogma Review

Press release - June 11, 1997

In a historic meeting in San Francisco on June 11, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, for the first time ever, discussed issues of homosexuality, human rights and Buddhism with a small group of gay and lesbian leaders. His Holiness expressed his strong opposition to discrimination and violence against gay and lesbian people. He voiced his support for full human rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation. The Dalai Lama was moved by personal stories of loss and discrimination related by the participants, and urged respect, tolerance and compassion for all. He made it clear that gay and lesbian activists could rely on general Buddhist principles as a foundation for their struggle for full equality.

"His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s support for our rights is very significant," said Tinku Ali Ishtiaq, co-chair of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. "The Nobel Laureate commands tremendous respect among people of the world and is highly respected for his words of wisdom. I hope that his message of non-discrimination and respect for our rights will have considerable impact on non-Buddhist religious traditions as well."

(continued on page 3)

Tony and Roger Speakers For July; Dharma Discussions For August

On July 13th our speaker will be Tony Richardson whose topic will be "Somatic Techniques For Enhancing Buddhist Practices". Tony is an Australian psychiatrist, who is a somaticist (the physical body) oriented psychotherapist and teacher. He is a student of Venerable Gyalsay Rinpoche. With colleagues, he has been working to translate Tibetan yoga into practices and exercises that support wellbeing and meditative practice.

Roger Corless, our favorite gay Buddhist professor from Duke University, is with us again for July. On July 27th, he will speak on "The Positive Value of the Negative Precepts." We also look forward to hearing his reflections on Gay Buddhism and his research on GBF.

Both sittings in August will be focused on Dharma discussions. On August 10th, Alan Oliver will lead a discussion on "Ads And Cruising From A Buddhist Perspective". August 24th TBA. Do you have a topic you would like to discuss. Please phone us.

Tundra Wind will lead GBF's Fall Retreat - See article and registration information on pages 5 & 6.
Editor's Mind
by Alan Oliver

"Present At The Creation" is the name of a book by Secretary of State
Dean Acheson about his part in the post World War II, Cold War world.
I always thought it was a powerful
title. So when Chris and I came
across the "Gay Way Of Buddhism"
article it reminded us that love and
relationships (not just sexual)
between people of the same sex was
there at the creation of Buddhism.
The delightful "like two deer"
reference to Buddha and Ananda in
the article is an early reminder of
our presence there and the need to
awaken the Asian traditions to their
culturally based homophobia.

Adding an overview article (not a
definitive history) about GBF roots
seemed a natural complement. In
using the "gay lens" to understand
Buddhist principles we also get
some permission to be a bit irrever-
ent. Within lighter comments, even
offensive comments (who is being
offended—can an awakened person
be offended?) can lie gateways to
greater understanding. It is in that
context (T-shirt slogans?) that the
following irreverencies heard at
GBF meetings and elsewhere are
offered:

"So many sentient beings—so
little time"

"Samsara sucks, and so do
we."

"I'm a follower of Trungpa
Rinpoche— I drink the same
mixed drinks he drank."

Any others? Comments?

Letters: Voices From
Indra's Net

Indra's Net was the
mythological 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.

To the Editor:

I just received my GBF Newsletter
and I wanted to thank Christopher Osborne for his article. I was
deeply touched by what he wrote.
He certainly has learned a lot early
on in his life about compassion,
attachment, and non-judgment. It's
wonderful he was willing to take
the time to share his experiences
with us at what is likely a very busy
time for him right before graduation
from high school. Christopher,
thanks very much and may you
remain steadfast to your spiritual
journey.

Bob Hass

(Editor's Note: I received similar
reactions from many other people.
Perhaps our reactions come partly
from the appreciation of what a
great gift it is to learn about the
Dharma early in life. Most of us
have come to this path in our 30's,
40's or later and after much suffer-
ing without benefit of a Buddhist
perspective to help us.)

Contributors

Thanks to the following people
who helped with this GBF Newslet-
ter: Alan Oliver, Chris Alferitz, Jon
Weaver, Scott Stalnaker, David
Holmes, Larry White, Daishen
David Sunseri, Tom Moon, Bob
Hass, Randolph Conner, David
Sparks, Maryia Sparks, and Lao
Tzu.

Dear Friends:

Please help a good cause:
Houghton-Mifflin publishing
company is giving books to
children's hospitals; how many
books they give depends on how
many e-mails they receive from
people around the world. For every

(continued on page 3)
Letters (continued from page 2)

25 e-mails they receive, they will give (1) book. All you have to do is e-mail: share@hmco.com and type a message saying “children’s hospitals book drive program”. Hope you can spare a few seconds and let your friends know. So far they have only received 3,400 messages; last year they got 23,000. It would be great if we could kick it up to 30,000. Please forward this message to ANYONE you know. Thanks for your help,

John Krowka ♦

Dalai Lama (continued from page 1)

In a warm, relaxed meeting, the Dalai Lama sought to clarify his understanding of traditional Buddhist texts concerning sexuality and empathized with participants' concerns and frustrations about the unfairness of the prohibitions for gays and lesbians. Traditional Buddhist teaching prohibits certain sexual activities for practicing Buddhists, including homosexual acts for men (and by implication, he said, for women). He expressed his willingness to consider the possibility that some of these teachings may be specific to a particular cultural and historical context.

He stressed that he does not have the authority to unilaterally reinterpret Buddhist scriptures, but urged those present to build a consensus among other Buddhist traditions and communities to collectively change the understanding of the text for contemporary society. His Holiness expressed interest in the insights of modern scientific research and its value in developing new understandings of these texts (that could be brought to upcoming conferences and meetings).

Lourdes Arguello, a professor of education at the Claremont Graduate School and a board member of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship summed up her observations as follows: “It is always amazing to see how His Holiness rises beyond the culturally bound context of his own tradition and grapples with seemingly absurd proscriptions to focus on the complex needs and desires of human beings in the here and now. I left the meeting with both the understanding and the feeling that this is a first stage in an exiting and provocative dialogue between His Holiness and other Buddhist teachers on the one hand and gay and lesbian Buddhists and human rights activists on the other”.

“This open, honest discussion of Buddhist traditional doctrine, with the participation of one of its outstanding teachers, is 20th Century Buddhism at its best,” said Steve Peskind of the Buddhist AIDS Project. ♦

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)

20 July/17 Aug, Sunday Sitting (East Bay), 10:30 am, at the home of Geoff McEnery,

24 July/28 Aug, Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Larry White,

27 July/24 Aug, Sunday Sitting (SF), 10:30 am. SFBC, 37 Bartlett St. Roger Corless will speak on the Negative Precepts. ♦
Exploring Our Roots: We Were There At

The Gay Way of Buddhism

Randolph Conner, David Sparks, and Mariya Sparks

The following article is adapted from the forthcoming Encyclopaedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit, Cassell, spring 1997. This article first appeared in The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review, Fall 1996. Special thanks to Randy Conner for his kind permission to re-print sections from this article. Additional sections of this article concerning the Japanese Gay Buddhist experience will be published in a future issue of the GBF Newsletter.

Buddhism may be defined as the spiritual tradition associated with Shakyamuni, the Buddha, the Enlightened One, who lived in India in the sixth/fifth century BCE, and who is also referred to as Gautama or Siddhartha. Central to Buddhism is the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths: that life is full of suffering, that suffering is caused by desire; that in order to eliminate suffering, one must eliminate desire; and that one may eliminate desire by following the Middle Way. (This does not, incidentally, mean eliminating erotic and other desires, but rather the craving for, or addiction to, them.) This way, called the Noble Eightfold Path, focuses on Buddhist ethics and meditation. Buddhism, while emphasizing correct ethical behavior, also imparts the notion that one must develop her/his own way of perceiving and experiencing the sacredness of life. Some Buddhist sects, like Zen, emphasize philosophy, while others emphasize spiritual devotion, at times even magic.

Also central to Buddhism is the idea that numerous Bodhisattvas -typically, human beings who have become enlightened and who have thereby been delivered from the cycle of reincarnation-have declined, rather than accepted, immortality, choosing to return to earth to aid in the healing of the planet and the enlightenment of all sentient beings. Bodhisattvas that are associated with gender and/or same-sex desire include Avalokiteshvara, Kannan, Kuan Yin, and Tara. Kannan, for example, manifests in female, male, and transgendered forms. In a 14th century tale of same-sex love, a Japanese Buddhist monk who is a passionate worshiper of Kannan is rewarded for his faith by the bodhisatta with a young male lover who is himself a manifestation of Kannan. This tale exemplifies the Buddhist notion of hoven, or expedient means. Hoven, allows a bodhisatta to manifest as any form, including that of a homoerotic lover, which will nurture enlightenment.

Buddhism was brought from India to China before or during the first century CE. By the fifth century, it had become the major religion of China. It was introduced to the Japanese around 550 CE.

Indian Buddhism: The Jataka tales of early Indian Buddhism convey a rather positive attitude toward same-sex intimacy in their celebration of the Buddha’s loving relationship with his disciple Ananda. Jose Ignacio Cabezon, in “Homosexuality and Buddhism” (1993), relates that in one of these tales, “the Buddha and Ananda are depicted as two deer who ‘always went about together...ruminating and cuddling together, very happy, head to head, nozzle to nozzle, horn to horn.’ In another, they are two handsome young sons of Brahmin parents who refuse to marry so that they may remain with each other.”

In the practice of the faith, however, writings by Buddhaghosa (ca. 430 CE) and other Buddhist scholars of the third through fifth centuries indicate that both same-sex intimacy and transgenderism were condemned in Indian Buddhism, with the greatest hostility being directed toward gender-variant, third gender, or transgendered, homoerotically-inclined males, called pandakas. These persons were typically forbidden to become monks. If discovered already living in a monastery, they were expelled. Non-transgendered, homoerotically inclined monks, if and when they were discovered, also tended to be expelled, although punishment was usually less harsh.

Chinese Buddhism: As Cabezon observes, “very little work has been done on Chinese Buddhist attitudes toward homosexuality or on its existence in monastic settings.

Tibetan Buddhism. Certain praise-hymns of Tibetan Buddhism, especially when uttered by a male devotee, assume a male-loving aspect. Exemplary of this is “The Ocean of Clouds of Praises of the Guru Manjughosha,” composed by Je Tsong Khapa near 1394 CE, which reads in part: “The complexion of your skin is pure and clear / like dust of gold, fine, smooth and soft. /...Your organs are retracted like a superb horse,/...May the beautiful body of Manjughosha never leave my sight!”

It is most probably in its adoption of the Vinaya rules of monastic discipline, inherited from Indian and Sri-Lankan, specifically Theravada, Buddhism, that the Gelug, or Yellow Hat, tradition of Tibetan Buddhism became linked to homoeroticism; ironically, in India, this was the same set of rules that forbade same-sex intimacy. According to the Vinaya rules, “no woman can stay overnight within the walls of the monastery.” Indeed, the “sexual act between men and women was to be absolutely rejected.” This rule against heterosexual relations appears to have encouraged same-sex relations.

*BCE = Before Christian Era, CE = Christian Era.

(continued on page 8)
GBF Roots: Glimpses, Speculations and Reflections

by Alan Oliver

It was inevitable, after the outburst of gay consciousness in the 1970s and the luxuriant flowering of it here in San Francisco, that Buddhists in the Bay Area who happened to be gay would find each other and begin to compare notes. There were teachers who had not thought too much about gay perspectives and some who were negative. Temples, retreat centers and sangha’s of all sizes were either indifferent or not welcoming. It was probably the absence of consciousness rather than any overt negative behavior that prompted some gay Buddhists to gather together for evening meetings to compare their experiences, talk the Dharma and reflect on how their practice centers could be made more welcoming. No newsletter was produced so we don’t have a “paper trail” for those early meetings.

By the mid-80s, Hartford Street Zen Center, a primarily gay practice space created on purpose with the Castro location in mind, had been organized as a live-in space for a few gay Zen practitioners and as a sitting space for other gay men who preferred to sit in a gay space. It was an offspring of the San Francisco Zen Center and has retained that close association. Issan Dorsey, our first officially “out” gay Buddhist monk and teacher, played an important role there in the later 80s, living at Hartford Street for four years until his death from AIDS in 1990. The HIV/AIDS rapidly growing epidemic through the 1980s overtook Hartford Street as well as Issan’s life. The Maitri Hospice effort started by Issan and the gay sangha there, overwhelmed the regular practice functions as they continued. Many straight people volunteered there with the Hospice and general gay Buddhist concerns were dwarfed in relationship to the needs of gay men who were dying as best they could with help from volunteers both gay and straight.

By the early 90s, gay Buddhist concerns once more stimulated a return to evening meetings twice a month by both Tibetan and Zen practitioners. This support group, which began meeting in the Fall of 1991, made several crucial decisions that expanded the dynamic of the group. They chose to give the group a name and started a newsletter which announced up-coming events. Besides adopting a formal image as a group, The Gay Buddhist Fraternity as it was called up to 1994, engaged in a discussion that continues to this day.

Is the purpose of the group to support individual gay Buddhists in developing their spiritual path or does it also have a role in engagement with the gay community and communities of our city, state, country and world? A major turning point for the latter concept was stimulated by the Gay & Lesbian March On Washington in April 1993. GBF became part of a loose network which wanted to arrange a meeting in Washington of gay Buddhist march participants. At the end of the cover letter to Buddhist Centers around the country it said, “We ask that you post this letter and the enclosed flyer for your Sangha members to see. Many of us will be meeting in Washington as a group on that weekend, and it will be an excellent opportunity for all of us to link up with the emerging national Sangha of gay, lesbian and bisexual Buddhists. Your members can also link up with this effort by contacting us directly by mail.”

This important decision to inform other gay Buddhists around the country of our existence was emphasized in the March 1993 newsletter before the march, “Though only a handful of local GBF members are currently planning on actually attending the events in Washington, it is thought that such a project would constitute a significant service to queer practitioners everywhere, and could perhaps be the first conscious effort to connect the invisible gay Sangha on a national scale.”

So here we are four years later after several “generations” of steering committee turnovers, on the verge of tax exempt status and with ads in Turning Wheel and Tricycle that bring us subscriptions from Gay Buddhists throughout the United States and the world. We still debate the inner practice vs. outer engagement issues and continue to try to strike a balance between them. Probably inner practice often wins the debate.

Why are we here? Because there is a natural tendency to share with our brothers our concerns and experiences that are important to us. In addition to using traditional Buddhist sources and teachers for insight into our lives, there is a growing effort to seek understandings and applications to our own lives as gay men. We are only slowly realizing what new insights we will experience as we look at our lives through both a Buddhist lens and a gay lens. The persistence of this search over the past seventeen years is a tribute to its need and validity.

We need to practice together! We need to support and share with each other! We need to explore the traditional paths together and we need to share with Buddhists everywhere our insights and moments of enlightenment about the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. We also need to have fun together and form relationships of all types.

Where are we going? We are going inward! We are going along the path together! We are engaging with the gay community! We are sharing with other Buddhists! We are adding our unique view to the universal interpretation of the Buddhist cannon and perhaps helping to awaken the world in the process.

(continued on page 8)
The Gay Way (continued from page 4)

Numerous scholars have reported that same-sex relationships were once very common in Gelug monasteries: “the monasteries in Tibet...have] a very strong reputation for male homosexuality...[especially] master-novice relations.” Same-sex relationships appear to have also been particularly prevalent among the so-called “warrior” priests, the dpal ba, who were skilled athletes and fighters and who protected and served the “scholar” priests. Kawaguchi relates that the warrior priests were often also ritual musicians who played “flutes, lyres, harps, flageloets...[and] drums” as well as preparers of “offering for the deities.” Same-sex relationships appear to have been especially prevalent at the Gelug monastery at Sera. These relationships were celebrated during the “festival of Lights” held in wintertime.

American Buddhism: The impact of Buddhism upon American culture may be traced to the later half of the 19th century, when writers like Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman—both lovers of men and perhaps also of women—began to explore in their writings and lives an integration of Eastern and Euro-Western spiritualities.

American interest in Buddhism flowered in the period spanning the 1950’s to the 80’s, commencing with the Beat Movement and culminating with the Hippie and New Age movements. Other than those reared in Buddhism (primarily Asian-Americans), the two branches of Buddhism to which Americans appear to be most drawn are Zen and Tibetan Buddhism. The work of poet Allen Ginsberg is exemplary in revealing both of these influences, as is the writing of poet John Giorno, author of Balling Buddha (1980), also allied with the Beats. In early 1970’s, Giorno’s teacher was Dudjom Rinpoche of Darjeeling, India. At this time, Giorno also met and was profoundly affected by the Dalai Lama. When Winston Leyland asked him in a 1974 Gay Sunshine interview how his participation in Buddhism had affected his sexuality, if indeed it had, Giorno replied, “I’ve become like a rose...it has to do with openness, surrendering to the space around you...making love is meditation. It’s surrendering. It seems to me gayness is just two people who are Buddhists.”

In more recent years, Robert Aitken, a renowned Zen master and author based in Hawaii, has been particularly outspoken in his acceptance of queer-identified persons in Buddhist practice. For Aitken, “Buddha-nature is neither homosexual nor heterosexual, it is both.”

Also in more recent years, Buddhist gay-centered groups have been founded in northern California and elsewhere, one of the most well-known being the Hartford Street Zen Center in San Francisco. One of whose abbots was the drag queen-become-monk Issan Dorsey. Another is the Gay Buddhist Fellowship of San Francisco, which hosts meditational “sittings” and publishes a monthly newsletter.

In Gavin Harrison’s book, In The Lap of the Buddha (1994),

the author, a teacher of Insight Meditation, employs scenes from the life of the Buddha as well as his gay identity and his HIV-positive status to illuminate his discussion of Buddhist principles. In the Buddha’s first sermon, suffering, the second Noble Truth, lies in the inability to accept life as it presents itself. Here, Harrison explores his difficulty in accepting, and coming to terms with, his place in the universe as a gay man suffering oppression and as a person living with HIV/AIDS. Elsewhere in the book, he describes his acceptance of his own approaching death, depicting the experience of “letting go” not as a loss but rather as a gaining of potent spiritual force, invoking Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche’s metaphor of the “wind horse” as a “strong self-existing energy that is available to [one] after letting go...one can ride this hidden store of energy...like a horse.”

Attitudes of Buddhists toward same-sex eroticism and transgenderism, or gender variance, have varied according to culture and historical epoch. In recent decades, numerous American gay, and other queer-identified and queer-accepting Buddhists have explored these interrelationships in their lives and works. In general, it would seem that traditions hostile toward same-sex intimacy and transgenderism, as well as traditions in which same-sex-inclined and transgendered individuals played roles in Buddhism, have given way to a general acceptance of gendered and sexual variance accompanied by the loss of particularized behaviors or roles.

GBF Roots (continued from page 6)

How do we get there? Everyone who believes this is true or even believes part of it is true needs to look at their responsibility to add their efforts to make it possible. First, we have to practice and apply the Dharma to our own lives. Support GBF with your presence and financial ability. Join the steering and other committees and help share the decision making. Engage with each other and with the world based on Buddhist principles. Perhaps we need to recontact the many gay men who had once been part of the Sangha and have since moved on. We need their insights into this process of the past seventeen years. They might have the most valuable insights of all. Reflections on leaving a group are can be profound in their collectivity. In this summer of 1997, we search the roots of our existence to discover the persistent force that is greater than any one of us and that provides us with the energy to keep moving down the path of spiritual growth.
The Local Dharma
July/August 1997

The Local Dharma seems to have taken its own path this month, perhaps to “postal Nirvana.” It never arrived in the mail. So we invite you to enjoy this poem from Wordsworth, and make your own Local Dharma with friends and family. Perhaps a walk in the woods or a drive in the countryside will fill the bill.

And I have felt...a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
Adn the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

---Wordsworth

May everyone have an enjoyable and enlightened summer.
Dharma Gateways

There is no need to run outside for better seeing,
Nor to peer from a window.
Rather abide at the center of your being;
For the more you leave it, the less you learn.
Search your heart and see
If he is wise who takes each turn:
The way to do is to be.

--Lao Tzu, The Way of Life

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 Win-
dows disk in Word or as a text file,
along with your hardcopy. ♦