"Creating Lasting Happiness" – September's Dharma Talk

Our speaker on September 14th will be the Venerable K.T. Shedrup Gyatso, spiritual director of the San Jose Tibetan Temple. Tipton, as he is known by his friends, is a fully ordained, openly gay, celibate, Buddhist monk. He is a disciple of Kama Tharchin and Penor Rimpoche, and a student of both the Nyingma and Kyu School of Tibetan Buddhism. He will be visiting us at the end of a long speaking tour of Canada and the United States. His topic will be 'Creating Lasting Happiness.'

Tipton has a fascinating personal history. Before he became a Buddhist, he was a Christian Pentecostal minister. He also has a long history of queer activism, and was the founder of Queer Nation San Jose. More recently, he was a member of the gay and lesbian delegation which met with the Dalai Lama in June.

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

2 Sept., Steering Committee Meeting at the home of Larry White

4 Sept., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm: meditation, at the home of Bill Kirkpatrick

5-7 Sept., GBF Annual Retreat (Vajrapani Institute)

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

8 Sept., Monday Sitting (Sonoma), 7:30 pm, at the home of Avery

11 Sept., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm: meditation, at the home of Lee Robbins

14 Sept., Sunday Sitting (SF), Dharma Talk, "Creating Lasting Happiness" (See article page 1), 10:30am, SFBC, 37 Bartlett St.

15 Sept, Monday Sitting, 7:30 pm. Call for location, Avery

18 Sept., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm at

GBF—Sonoma Chapter Start-Up

For those of us in San Francisco who can arrive at GBF events after a short ride in the car or a convenient bus ride, there is a little awe associated with gay Buddhist who make it to events from the Peninsula, the East Bay or from the North.

In the past, we welcomed the start of a East Bay sitting group and now we are pleased to announce the beginning of a gay men’s sitting group in Sonoma. Especially for those who would like a weekly evening group to practice with, a more local location is often essential. Of course we hope to still see our Dharma friends from the East Bay and Sonoma at our Sunday sittings and at special events/parties. The group will meet on Mondays starting September 8th at 7:30 p.m.

Poetry Night in Sept.

Poetry can reveal our deepest feelings or express our craziest delusions. Our Ginsberg Night in June was enjoyed by all. GBF invites you to a second relaxed evening of good company, and the opportunity to share your thoughts in verse—sacred or profane, sober or fun, penned by yourself or a favorite poet. Please bring your own choice of drink and light food to share. The "happening" will be on Friday, September 26, from 8:00p.m. till 11:00 p.m. at the home of Michael Collins.
Editor's Mind
by Chris Alferitz

Taking Refuge in the Triple Jewel of Teachers, Teachings, and the Spiritual Assembly has the implication of fleeing from a place we know on some level to be negative, harmful, and even dangerous! The literal translation in Japanese of “I take refuge in the Buddha” means ‘I throw myself through the door of the Buddha’s house.’ The Four Noble Truths, and the Eight Fold Path are guides leading us from suffering to bliss! The nature of this journey is a vital topic!

With the annual GBF Retreat only days away, the GBF Newsletter team once again presents the topic of relationship for reflection by our assembly. There is a balance and synergistic energy between various Buddhist spiritual practices (meditation, chanting, etc.), and the application of these practices. Spiritual theory and practice is only as meaningful as an end, and never an end in itself. The primary goal of all Buddhist activity is an increase in wisdom and loving kindness.

One sign of spiritual maturity should be a positive, healing, and nurturing relationship to ourselves, our community, and the universe. The most intense expression of this maturity is the ability to nurture ourselves and other people at the same time! Spiritual theory and practice is always validated by application in all spheres of life like a never ending cycle. Therefore, the subjects of spiritual theory and practice, and daily application are like an ocean, which can never be emptied or exhausted of treasure.

The gay “assimilationist” agenda has a mixed score card! Most of the gay male community lives on the margins of this society. Even if the “assimilationist” agenda is successful, not all sub-groups in our community will have a “place at the table.” How many gay males pretend to be “normal” in their quest for the Holy Grail of acceptance by the larger society?

Once the closet door to the heart is opened, most gay males experience some type of dysfunctionality. Many of our brothers are victims who endured long and intense suffering because their only “crime” was facing the wrong way”. The impact of “facing the wrong way” is further defined in the article by Tom Moon. Therefore, the daily spiritual expression of a kind, gentle, and open heart is a vital tool for healing and growth in our community.

Future issues of the GBF Newsletter will present various tools used to interpret the classical Buddhist scriptures. The formal name of this field of study is called Hermeneutics. The recent dispute in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition points to the importance of hermeneutical exegesis (explanation of the language and thought of a literary work) and the written works of that time. How we relate to the traditional Buddhist scriptures is critical in telling our stories. The GBF Newsletter team shall borrow from the Jewish-Christian-Islamic hermeneutical experience in reviewing this topic because their tools are more developed in relation to American culture. As always, we welcome and appreciate any comments on the topics presented in any issue of this publication.

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.

Letters: Voices From Indra’s Net

The following letter did not arrive in time to make our July/August issue of the newsletter. However, it expresses so well the rational for attending such retreats at Buddhist Monasteries or Centers that it is worth sharing. It also keeps us up to date with Eric Kolvig’s activities and reminds us that we need to ask him to put us on his schedule the next time he visits the Bay Area. Eric is a member of GBF and a valued Buddhist teacher who recently moved with his lover to Santa Fe, NM.

Dear Friend,

For several years Arinna Weisman and Eric Kolvig have together led many Buddhist meditation retreats for gays and lesbians. This year we are fortunate to have them join us at Zen Mountain Monastery to lead a weekend retreat, August 14-17, titled "Gay & Lesbian Spirituality, A Retreat for Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexuals and their Friends."

Celebrating the gifts of gay and lesbian spirituality in the safety of retreats such as this creates a particular kind of joy for many participants, and brings a new dimension to taking refuge in the sangha (the community of practitioners).

Within the unique environment of Zen Mountain Monastery, and the daily monastic training schedule of zazen (formal seated meditation), liturgy, community work, and other forms of practice, we will explore
the spiritual tools of mindfulness and acceptance to work with our negative patterns that can impede our happiness. To merge our lives with spiritual practice is to forge freedom in the crucible of discrimination, AIDS, cancer and institutions that often condemn us for who we are. This retreat is about wisdom and compassion, how to cultivate a clearer mind and a more open heart, and how to live more empowered lives.

Sincerely yours,
Jody Hojin Kimmel,
Zen Mountain Monastery

We want to thank Zen Mountain Monastery for continuing to play a leading role in providing Buddhist services to gays and lesbians in the New York City Area and the Northeast.
Obstacles To Intimacy In Gay Male Relationships

Tom Moon

Note: This article is adapted from a talk on relationships presented at a GBF workshop last November. The style of this article reflects its verbal origins which allow for more meanderings and informality. We are pleased to present it to a larger audience and a different version of it will be part of a Gay Buddhist Anthology to be published in the Fall. More on that effort will be in a future issue.

Homosexuality is a very deep hunger on all levels, animal-physical-emotional-spiritual, for a closeness with other men. It is an ancient hunger. It seems to speak through us. It is older than we are by eons. It is a force to be reckoned with, a force of nature. That is a better way of looking at it than "sexual orientation" or those other tepid phrases we use to describe this "thing" we come into life to deal with. We become aware of it, I think, very early. Let me tell you a story from my own life about how early and how powerful this all is, which will give me a lead in to the first obstacle to intimacy I want to talk about.

I am four years old and I am sitting on the landing of my apartment in San Francisco's Mission District, when Sal the Fireman, who lives next door, comes home from his shift. Bounding up the stairs is this gigantic, sweaty Italian "God", and I look at him. I am four years old, and it is this "oh! oh! oh!, yeah!" kind of feeling. Next to me is sitting Davy, his three year old son, who is waiting for his daddy to come home from work, a daily ritual. Sal runs up the stairs, picks Davy up, throws him in the air, and then hugs him. The kid is squealing with delight. Then Sal puts Davy down, and turns to me. Now I think it is my turn. Sal looks at me, our eyes make contact, and he pulls back. If Sal was ever asked, he certainly could not say why he pulled back. Rather his response is unconscious and instantaneous. Sal pats me on my head, says "Hello, Tom." My immediate reaction, probably not even conscious is, "What is wrong with me?"

To be a gay male means we are men who have an intense longing for intimacy with other men. What we begin to find, before we ever have words to describe being gay, is the very intensity of this longing is the thing that drives the object of our longing away from us. That is the fundamental contradiction of being gay for so many of us. The intensity of our wanting makes other men anxious, fearful, threatened, disgusted, and angry. At times this even causes other men to assault us. There is a very interesting book by Richard Isay titled, Being Homosexual, which describes the relationship between gay men and their fathers, and how this whole dynamic plays out unconsciously when we are growing up. Here is a key quote from this book:

"Very crucial for homosexual children is the fact that fathers often become detached or hostile during the child's early years as a result of the child's homosexuality. Fathers usually perceive such a child as being different from other boys in the family, or from their son's peers. These boys may be more sensitive, have more aesthetic interests, may not be involved in competitive activities, and may be more exclusive than heterosexually inclined boys. This may lead both to the fathers' withdrawal and to his favoring an older or younger male sibling, who appears to be more sociable, conventional, and masculine. Some of the fathers of homosexual boys either consciously or unconsciously recognize their sons have a special need for closeness and an erotic attachment to them. These fathers may withdraw because of an anxiety occasioned by their own homoerotic desires, which are usually unknown to them.

I think who we are as gay males shows up very early in life. Right away this begins to get us in trouble with the people we want to love us the most. Most of this is unconscious; we do not even know it is going on. This becomes conscious in adolescence when conflicts with other guys become more obvious. We easily remember being teased in locker rooms, called a sissy, hiding out in right field and hoping they will not hit a fly ball to us, and even being beaten up. Most of us have been in some ways oppressed by other men. It is very difficult for gay men not to come into adult life with this longing for love from men, only to experience fear, wariness, mistrust, anger, bitterness and withdrawal from men. This is the difficulty so many gay males experience in their relationships. I have never met a gay man who did not have some element of this in his history. Some gay males have more experience of this than others. I think most gay males have experienced this to some degree.

The second major obstacle to intimacy is as a result of what I have just described. We are different! From an early age we see ourselves as an outsider. In a basic sense all minorities are different, but gay males are the one minority who usually do not come from their own kind. If I were Jewish, and beginning as a child to
discover what being Jewish means, I would go to my parents and ask what does it mean to be Jewish? There is a whole tradition behind this search for meaning.

I discovered I was gay when I was 14 years old. I did not go to my parents and ask what do these feelings mean? Instead, I sneaked to the local library and looked myself up in the card catalogue under "Homosexuality: see also perversion, psychopathic deviance." That was 1962, and bad news to discover. (Editors note: The Latin root word of perversity is perversus, which means to face the wrong way.)

Don Clark in his book Loving Someone Gay, describes some of these difficulties, and has several psychodynamic generalizations. These are:
1. Gay males have learned to feel different. In a society which values conformity, the person who is different feels devalued or worthless, even though he may be outwardly successful.
2. Gay males have learned to distrust their emotions. We begin to withdraw from our emotional life as a protective device.
3. Gay males have decreased awareness of their feelings. We may feel alone, and become victims of depression, which includes some degree of immobility.

Therefore, gay males are tempted to dull the pain of isolation, and depression by misuse of drugs, alcohol, or even to get rid of the pain altogether through suicide.

None of the things I am describing are in themselves obstacles to intimacy. They are just experiences, painful though they may be. But the way they become obstacles is our hearts close up in response to these kinds of traumas. We become less aware of our own feelings; we become wary and defensive towards other people. That is how these things become obstacles. It is inevitable this happens. The experiences themselves are not really important. What is truly important is how we learn to deal with them. How we deal (or do not deal) with these experiences either causes more suffering, or gives us some hope we can repair the damage.

Gay males come into adulthood with many of these wounds. Then we flock to places like San Francisco and other urban centers to try to be a community for each other. San Francisco's gay community is a community of social refuge. In a sense we are a community of outsiders, a community of people who do not belong. We come to San Francisco to experience this type of community and this is a challenge! It is important to remember this idea of a gay male community is only about 30 years old. I recall a time in my life when gay communities would have been illegal. There were private, underground gay male circles, but not a community of men who loved and supported each other. We bring our hunger, longing and great expectations, but also fear and mistrust. Is it any wonder we often let each other down.

Two years ago I did a lot of thinking about all of this, and then had a negative experience. I went to a national summit on HIV prevention in Dallas. This conference soon became a free-for-all. We were at each other's throats for three days! The problem was that young/old, male/female, east/west coast, black/white were invisible to each other. Where was the "in group" I wanted to be a part of in this mess?

To feel outside and invisible is a very common experience. It is very natural to project this feeling. We see the effect of trying to be "in" every day on Castro Street in San Francisco. We notice how gay males put on the armor of gym toned bodies strutting up and down the street giving each other "attitude". This recreates the very traumatic conditions from which we fled in the first place! The sad irony of this! How we do to each other what has been done to all of us. This process is unconscious and inevitable. Yet there is much love, affection, and support in our community. We are a community in ferment, trying to create something which has never existed before.

America is an extroverted society which believes the solutions to all problems are "out there". I think the majority religion in this country is romantic love and not Christianity. I know I created "Mr. Right" out of loneliness and rejection. "Mr. Right" was the man who would save me from this pain. Of course, "Mr. Right" is an Adonis, who is great in bed. Emotionally "Mr. Right" will always understand me because he was specially created by God just to meet my needs. "Mr. Right" is "the lover", whose only job is to love me. "Mr. Right" will always understand and forgive. He will know what I want and need without me ever saying a word. "Mr. Right" is a mother with a big dick!

We place such incredibly unrealistic expectations on people. I do not intend to demean romantic love. This is one of the great joys of life. I have been in love several times and hope to do it again. Romantic love is not the problem. Obstacles to intimacy exist because our hearts are closed. How do we open (and keep open) a heart that is closed? Psychology and spirituality provide tools to repair this emotional damage, and to help us open our hearts.

When the heart is open, the quality of life dramatically changes. Loneliness and separation are the results of a closed heart. Intimacy is the atmosphere of an open

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Obstacles to Intimacy
(continued from page 5)

heart. To such a heart the question of how to find a lover is not particularly urgent. When intimacy is the air we breathe, we are free of the obsession with finding one person whose job is to love only us. As long as love is “out there” and someone else possesses it, then we live in anxiety because others can give it, or take it away from us. But, when we understand the “problem” of love has to do with the state of our hearts, we naturally turn within to find the solution of our loneliness and separation. As a result, we are less dependent on other people.

All forms of psychology seek to open the heart by encouraging us to tell our stories. When we share what we have suffered, and when other pilgrims can witness with sympathetic understanding, then our emotional wounds begin to heal. As a result, we are less defensive, less trapped by the past, and more able to live life in the present. Psychotherapy is only one of many tools where this story telling can take place. One of the functions of the gay community is to provide a safe place where we can come together as gay males. Our community can help each other heal the wounds we have suffered in the larger community. This community based healing is essential if we want to develop and keep an open heart. This cannot happen in isolation.

Spiritual practices like meditation are other tools to develop and keep an open heart. Western psychology is just beginning to learn how powerful spiritual tools are in the inner healing process. When we cultivate present awareness through daily meditation, our entire personality is gradually transformed. We can love only by living in the present moment. If our minds are trapped with past resentments and regrets, or if our minds are focused on future hope and anticipation, then the opportunity for love in the present is lost.

Spiritual practice makes us deeply intimate with ourselves, and this is a precondition for intimacy with other people. When we practice meditation with an open and accepting mind, we gradually achieve many of the goals of psychology. Our defenses against experiencing the full range of emotions gradually melts away. The “unconscious” is now conscious! We are more honest with ourselves! I am always amazed how easy it is to feel deeply connected with other people after a five or ten day meditation retreat. When I am fully attending to the present moment, then the sense of being a person completely separated from other persons dissolves. Even speaking with a check-out clerk in the grocery store is an intimate experience!

So, the way to overcome obstacles to intimacy is inside us, not finding a man to love us. The most important question is not “How do I find a lover”, but “How do I open my heart”. When that question is asked and answered, then there are endless possibilities for positive relationships. People with open hearts are more likely to attract partners than people with closed hearts. Therefore, open hearted people have a better possibility of finding the partner they desire. But, open hearted people do not experience single life as being only half alive. Open hearted people are fully alive all the time!*

---Hoo Koji
Special Events

6, 13, 20 Sept. (Sat. 9 am—1 pm) Half-day Community Practice at Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. This half-day schedule will give you a taste of Zen life in silence, stillness and activity. You may also join us for part of the schedule if you wish. If you are familiar with Zen practice, you may begin as early as 5:15 am for the first meditation session. There is a Dharma talk at 11 am and a buffet lunch follows. $5. (The Saturday community practice is ongoing year round, but call ahead to confirm other dates; the center is often closed for retreats.) SMZC

7 & 21 Sept. (Sun. 9:30 am—noon) Sunday Open House Series: Questions of Intimacy and Fear: Our Perfect Companions on the Path of Meditation. 9/7 How does indulgence/avoidance empower our fear, anger and depression? 9/21 How can we paralyze, clarify, and digest our fears? SFSC

14—19 Sept. (Sun. 4 pm—Fri. noon) Green Gulch Elderhostel Retreat. This five-day retreat will provide an opportunity for people age 55 and older to join the Green Gulch community in the study and practice of Zen, through daily meditation, introductory classes on Buddhism, discussion with senior residents, and work in the kitchen, garden and fields. GGF

19—21 Sept. (Fri. 6:30 pm—Sun. 5 pm) Sesshin at Santa Cruz Zen Center with Katherine Thanas. Join the Santa Cruz Zen community for this sesshin. Out-of-town participants are invited to stay overnight with Santa Cruz residents. $35 per day (Oryoki sets may be purchased for $35 or rented for $10) SCZC

26 Sept. (Fri. 7:30 pm) The Love That Cannot Die: Teachings on the Immeasurable Qualities of Love, Compassion, Joy and Equanimity with Bhikshuni Pema Chödrön. The Buddha taught that in all beings, without exception, there are seeds of awakening. The four immeasurable great catalysts of love, compassion, joy and equanimity provide the causes and conditions for these seeds to grow and flourish in ordinary people like ourselves. During this weekend of meditation and teaching, Pema Chödrön will give instruction on how to activate these Four Limitless Qualities—with the aspiration that we can all experience our true nature and be of benefit to others. First Congregational Church, San Francisco $15. SFSC.

Starting Soon—Mindful Body-centered Therapy Group: New group for gay/bi men, combining psychotherapy, mindfulness, somatic and touch to creatively and deeply explore inter-personal issues. Info: Scott Eaton, MFCC.

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.
- CDS: California Diamond Sangha, P.O. Box 2915, Petaluma, CA.
- CML: Community of Mindful Living, P.O. Box 7335, Albany, 510/527-3751.
- DI: Dzogchen International, P.O. Box 40155, Berkeley, 510/849-9928.
- EGZC: Empty Gate Zen Center, 5707 Oakgrove Ave., Oakland, 510/653-5991.
- EMHC: Enlighthened Heart Meditation Center, 415/255-0798.
- HSZC: Hartford Zen Center: 57 Hartford St., 415/863-2507.
- LPMC: Living Peace Meditation Community, 1650 Clay St., #2, 415/346-3923.
- POL: Pema Osel Ling: 2013 Eureka Canyon Road, Corralitos, 408/761-6266.
- SBC: Saraha Buddhist Center: 3145 Geary Blvd. #515, 415/771-3973.
- SCZC: Santa Cruz Zen Center, 113 School Street, Santa Cruz: 408/457-0206.
- SFSC: SF Shambhala Center: 1630 Taraval St., 415/731-4426.
- SEFZC: San Francisco Zen Center: 300 Page Street, 415/863-3136.
- TCL: Tse Chen Ling Center: 4 Joost Ave, SF, 415/333-3261.
- VI: Vajrapani Institute, P.O. Box 2130, Boulder Creek. 408/338-6654.

GAY BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 1997

White Crane
a quarterly journal of gay men's spirituality edited by Toby Johnson

Subscriptions are $14 for 1 yr (US/Canada)
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Gay Buddhist Fellowship Newsletter September 1997
Dharma Gateways

A powerful "Gateway" to Buddhism are the four traditional vows. These are powerful statements of belief and commitment. The following revised set of the same four vows has come to our attention and it is perhaps worthwhile to compare the two sets and use that to deeper the understanding of the path.

I vow to celebrate for all sentient beings.

I vow to enjoy my delusions in vivid and wonderful ways without being attached.

I vow to dance through the Dharma Gates I am presented with and fully experience them.

I vow to appreciate the fullness and emptiness of all my senses and be with them without attachment as Buddha taught.  

Anonymous

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.