GBF Calendar

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

San Francisco Events

4 Nov., Steering Committee Meeting 7:15 pm, at the home of Larry White.

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

9 Nov., Sunday Sitting 9:30/10:30 am SFBC, 37 Bartlett St. Speaker: Dasih David Sunseri. see article on page 1.

13 Nov., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm: meditation, at the home of Lee Robbins.

15 Nov., GBF's Feed-The-Homeless Project at the Hamilton Family center. To participate, contact Clint Seiter.

16 Nov., Sunday Sitting, 9:30/10:30 am SFBC, 37 Bartlett St., see article page 1.

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

23 & 30 Nov. Sunday Sitting, 9:30/10:30 am SFBC 37 Bartlett St., see article page 1

27 Nov. Thanksgiving, see announcement, page 2

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GBF: 4 Sunday Sittings Starting in November

The health and well-being of the GBF Sangha depends upon a number of interrelated factors: the strength and diversity of our individual traditions and practices, the friendships we have developed with each other over the years, and perhaps most importantly the time we spend together in the deep silence of meditation or quietly sharing the Dharma of our daily lives.

For the months of November and December, GBF is trying out an expanded and extended Sunday program—expanded in the sense that we will be meeting every Sunday (beginning Nov. 9) and extended in that we will have an optional early half hour period of sitting meditation and a short (fifteen minute) walking meditation beginning at 9:30 a.m. before our usual 10:30 a.m. starting time.

Our hope is that by going to a weekly Sunday format and an extended meditation schedule we will add an element of consistancy to our Sangha's practice. If it seems to be catching on, we will continue this schedule into the new year.

The meeting dates for November and December are as follows:

November 9, 16, 23, and 30
December 7, 14, 21, and 28

The Sunday morning schedule for these dates:

09:15—09:25 Arrive to help set up
09:30—10:00 Sitting meditation
10:00—10:15 Walking meditation
10:30—11:00 Sitting meditation
11:00—11:10 Break
11:10—12:00 Dharma Talk /Discussion
12:00—12:45 Tea

"Teachers, Our Spiritual Friends" November Talk

At the November 9th Sunday Sitting, we welcome back Daishin David Sunseri as our speaker. Daishin is a Zen monk in the Soto tradition of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, and is a disciple of Issan Dorsey Roshi. He has practiced in the gay Buddhist community for the past 13 years, has done hospice care for 20 years, and is currently working with Buddhist practitioners who have been sexually abused as children.

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American Academy of Religion Meets in San Francisco in November

Roger Corless informs us that the AAR, the largest professional society of academics in Religious Studies, will be meeting at the Hilton Hotel from November 22-25. The Gay Men's Issues in Religion Group is sponsoring two sessions, one of them on Buddhism and Homosexuality (Session A170) on Monday the 24th 9:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m. Parc Fifty-five, Parc Ballroom I. A person with imagination could probably get in to hear the session. Roger will be on the panel.
Meditation Class At Harvey Milk Institute

A four week meditation class will be offered by the Harvey Milk Institute starting November 15. The class, which will cater to beginners as well as seasoned practitioners, will be held at the SF Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett @ 21st Street. The two hour class will meet on consecutive Saturday mornings (except 11/29) from 10:00 a.m. to Noon.

In addition to ample time on the cushion, there will be a variety of topics covered including: beginning instruction, styles of meditation, resistance to meditation, working with distractions, the deeper purpose of meditation, overcoming obstacles to practice, inspiration, commitment to yourself, discipline, meditation as a means to ending suffering, and liberation.

The instructor, Jon Bernier, is a GBF member and has had a wide range of training and practice in meditation. Jon started practicing meditation 28 years ago at the age of 16. His background includes three years of yogic meditation practice, eleven years of Zen Buddhist practice, seven years of Vipassana practice, and seven years of practice in the Advaita Vedanta tradition.

For more information or to sign up for the class, please contact the Harvey Milk Institute at 552-7200. There is a fee for the course.

Advertisements and Announcements

Returning from Maui to San Francisco on or around December 1st. Looking for a one bedroom/studio apartment. Would consider a roommate, short term rental, sublet and/or house/pet sitting. References.

Thanksgiving Celebration: Once again Thanksgiving is here, an opportunity to particularly appreciate and celebrate the Sangha we have in our lives. Traditionally GBF hosts a potluck feast for those members (and friends) who wish to spend this holiday together. If you want to join other GBFers for this holiday call Clint Seiter so that dishes can be coordinated.

"Teachers, Our Spiritual Friends"

He is a long time member of GBF. His topic, "Teachers, our spiritual friends" is one that we revisit periodically and is one of the basic questions we have all asked at one time or another. Should I look for a teacher and how should I relate to a teacher?

'GREATNESS EXISTS IN THE INCONSPICUOUS AND OVER LOOKED DETAILS.'

Leonard Koren
I was talking to a friend the other day about "connection" and the odds gay men in San Francisco face to make this happen. We live in a country whose culture prides itself on individuality. We belong to the gender that favors "agency" over "communion". Urban living demands erecting invisible barriers to keep the people around us at a safe distance. Most of us are transplanted from other parts of the country, and with our biological families left behind. We are members of a minority which is marginalized at best, and despised at worse. When we include the ways the gay community often incorporates homophobia within itself, and manifests this in all sorts of colorfully dysfunctional ways, it is a miracle gay men have any sense of community at all.

Recently, I raised the problem of community/ connection at one of the GBF Thursday night sittings, since there is a discussion period after the meditation. I was feeling isolated, depressed, and deeply in need of a nurturing community. The issue was raised about what role (if any) GBF could play in dealing with the problem I was experiencing. This dialogue was frank, thought provoking, and sometimes very personal. One participant said when his mother died a few months ago, he went through a period of feeling isolated, and would have welcomed the emotional support of the GBF community. Another person talked about the disappointment he felt when the pre-meditation pot-luck dinners he hosted were so sparsely attended. However, another member felt GBF’s primary function was limited to only providing a place for meditation.

The operative word seems to be "Sangha", and how this term is defined. As one of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) this concept occupies a primary position in Buddhist teachings along with the Four Noble Truths, and the Eight Fold Noble Path. [Editor’s Note: The Three Jewels are commonly defined as Teachers, Teachings, and Community.] The post-meditation discussion at the Thursday evening sitting barely touched upon the concept of Sangha, and nothing conclusive was agreed upon. I would like to offer one possible vision of Sangha. Buddhism plays a central role in my life, but I feel the image of a silent hall filled with people meditating to be cold and impersonal. I would like to balance this with another image of people sharing a meal, laughing, talking, and eating around a common table. I would like to see the austerity of the Dharma balanced by the warmth and love of the Sangha, both coming together in the Buddha. I am deeply moved by this vision of balance between Dharma and Sangha, and over the years my involvement in GBF has tried to realize this vision through various projects.

Yet, this vision is not unique to me. A common theme I hear in conversations with other gay men, either privately or in groups, is the isolation and alienation we often feel, and the frustration we encounter trying to solve this problem. When these feelings are explored further, it does not take long before the core issues surface. These primary questions include: “How do we connect with one another?” “How do we bring meaning into our lives?” “How do we transcend our sense of isolation into a bigger picture of inter-relatedness?” “How do we live lives of value, compassion and centeredness?” “How do we attain a happiness which is not solely dependent on external circumstances?” “How do we meet suffering with openness and love?”

It is difficult to find questions more primary and important than these. But, how often do we have a chance to explore these essentially spiritual issues with other gay men? Despite the many gay organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, these topics are best addressed by groups like the GBF who have primarily a spiritual mission. Indeed, these groups would be negligent of their primary duty if they did not address these problems.

GBF is an extraordinary and brave experiment in combining Buddhist spirituality and gay culture. This synthesis offers the gay community an alternative spiritual path which is compassionate, non-judgmental and rational. This mixture also offers the larger Buddhist community a uniquely gay male view of the Dharma. GBF is a wonderful resource for exploring gay life and culture in relation to the Buddhist Dharma. But, I feel this resource is barely tapped.

The forces which isolate gay men as individuals and the gay community as a group are always at work. We are continually confronted with elements of this society who are hostile to us and even question our right to exist. Examples of this are seen in newspapers reporting the latest “Family Values” campaign against “Militant Homosexuals”, and according to the U. S. Department of Justice gay bashing is on the rise. If this was not bad enough, one third of gay men in San Francisco struggle with alcoholism, and almost one-half are HIV+. Many gay men have some type of sexually transmitted disease (STD). One third of teenagers who commit suicide are gay or lesbian. The struggle for gay men to survive, much less live sane, safe, meaningful lives, filled with rich and satisfying connections is often a difficult challenge.

Another vision of GBF I carry is of a flame burning in a storm. The survival of GBF rests on having a vision, and implementing this vision in an effective and timely manner. If GBF does not have a vision, or the vision becomes unclear, or if the vision is not implemented, then GBF will cease to exist as an effective spiritual group. I hope this article will spark dialogue on the current GBF vision, implementation of this vision, and how GBF can become a better resource for solving the problems facing our community.
Dharma Gateways

“That which man acquires by contemplation he should spend in love.”

*Sermons, Meister Eckhart*

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**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: 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.