Gay Buddhist Fellowship

This being, that arises. This not being, that does not arise.

Excerpts from GBF's Foundations of Buddhism class on Saturday, May 2, 1998, facilitated by David Sunseri, David Holmes, and Alan Oliver.

Sunseri: Buddhism is not an absolute religion. Buddhism is completely relativistic. Nothing is higher or more profound than anything else. There's no guiding principal. And, there is no Atman, God, etc.

Our biggest problem is that we think we're separate. That's the biggest cause of suffering. Also, Buddhism has minimal rituals. You don't find your way to the teachings through magic. Unlike Hinduism, there is no caste system. You don't have to work your way up in the caste via reincarnations.

Oliver: When the Buddha was asked: “What's your interpretation of the meaning of life?”, the Buddha would say, “I'm not here to talk about that.” When asked what miracles the Buddha could do, he said, “When I'm thirsty I drink, and when I'm hungry I eat.” He presented a simple, grounded message. This was revolutionary. He was a reformer, going against the grain. In that sense, he runs parallel to Jesus. Over time, however, Buddhism picked up the accoutrements that he was fighting against in his life. It became institutionalized. He said, don't make images. It became more elaborate; more ritualized. The important thing, however, is to get back to the person. To directly experience Buddhism for yourself.

Sunseri: The Buddha said that anyone can obtain enlightenment. Buddhism has a particular quality and if you get it, if you intuit it, if you get a feeling for it, and it feels comfortable to you, then it's yours, right? You make it yours. The Buddha doesn't make it yours.

Holmes: The story of the Buddha's life is the story of every person's journey. That you start off as a child and you are in paradise, and protected. You come into a world where you are king. Then, you encounter some limitation on that right away. As you're growing up, you're confronted with these irreducible causes of suffering. And you have to find an answer. And you have to leave home, find an answer, and search it out.

The Buddha is tempted by Mara. At every juncture in your life you are presented with temptation and a possible fall. The fall from this grace that's arising in you. The awakening that's happening has the possibility of falling asleep at every moment. And, Mara keeps presenting more and more of these things and, what do you do? You go back to your practice;
you touch the earth and you say, “I’m here.” ‘The earth bears me witness’ means that I am taking refuge in the whole setup, and not going along with my mind’s fabrications.

Sunseri: The Buddha traveled a lot. That’s all he did most of the time, except during the monsoon season. After he was enlightened, he did most of his teachings (45 years worth) while traveling about.

Holmes: The dharma is rare. It’s saying this is a rare opportunity to see through what normally, in the course of all animal life, plant life, biology on this planet, is just mechanically going through the motions of reincarnation and rebirth, and that this is a moment to make some kind of change. Everything is an opportunity rather than a stumbling block.

Sunseri: If you pay attention to what the Buddha taught in the 45 years, he made up things as he went along. He taught like a doctor. He might deal with somebody very differently from another. For the same problem, he might deal with you differently depending on your background. So, they saved everything that the Buddha ever said. You have probably one of the largest canons going in the world. Everything was written down, and divided up. It ended up being rules; the Triпитaka, for example.

I’m interested in giving people a feel for these teachings, rather than just the ideas which you can read about. The Buddha had the same experiences as the rest of us have. He taught from our experiences. He did not teach from a transcendent philosophy, or transcendent view. When the Buddha sat there under the tree and woke up, everybody said, “What did he wake up to?” He became enlightened, and what does this enlightened state mean? I don’t pretend to know exactly what he experienced. But, the teachers I had were able to make the teachings a part of their lives. By their lives, they showed the teaching. What I think is the most important thing about the Buddha is that he was the Teacher. His life exemplified the teaching. That’s paramount to the information. How we live our lives, how we live out this thing called Dukkha, or how we live out non-duality in our lives, or how the Buddha lived out impermanence.

When he woke up, people said, “What happened to you?” And he said, “I can’t tell you.” He didn’t say anything for a whole week or so. He just sat there. He couldn’t use words to describe this experience. So, he wouldn’t teach in the beginning, because he couldn’t put it into words. Then, he finally relented.

The first thing that he discovered (the first of the Four Noble Truths), is Dukkha. It means things are kind of off; they don’t quite feel okay. Life doesn’t feel quite satisfactory. You need something else. Dukkha means out of balance or, off center. A quote from the Buddha is: “Whatever is impermanent is Dukkha.” Anything that is impermanent is not going to make us very happy. The other translation is sour. Things are sour.
The cause of Dukkha, or why things are off, is because of desire, or thirst, or craving, or want, or fixation, or attachment. And those words can be to anything or anyone, or any idea...including the teachings. Desire's not bad. It just creates suffering. Inordinate desire creates pain for us.

The Third Noble Truth is that it is possible to stop this; to see through desire. And, that is Nirvana. Nirvana is the cessation of dukkha, or desire. Letting go of attachment and distinguishing from greed, hate, and delusion. And, letting go of the idea of self.

So, when the Buddha woke up, he woke up to everything at the same time. And what he realized was that everything is relative, conditioned, interdependent, impermanent, and changing.

The Fourth noble truth is that the way out of Dukkha is the Eightfold Path. It isn't necessarily a formula. It's kind of the way people behave when they wake up. The language that's used in the Eightfold Path is right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Right really means 'whole'. Correct, or truthful. Not the opposite of 'wrong'.

Three divisions of the Eightfold Path are: Ethical Conduct: Right speech, right action, and right livelihood. Mental Discipline: Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Wisdom: Right understanding, and right thought. When people wake up, they 'act' a particular way. Taking right livelihood, for example, the Buddha said it's not so cool to be an arms dealer. Why? Because it creates suffering, and pain. It's related to our interconnections. The Buddha says that the way to protect yourself ultimately is to give up of yourself. Just like the idea that you have that you are an independent, separate being. The fact that you think you are an independent, separate being creates our greatest suffering. That we're alone. That we have to work out our salvation alone; independently from others. We can't. I'm related to everything around me. I am related to this floor, related to this chair, related to the people in this room, related to the people in my family, related to my friends...and, I can't live my life independently. So when I act in a way that is not connected, it creates suffering for me and for everyone else around me.

The Buddha emphasized meditation as a primary practice. Watching that which arises in the mind and body.

Holmes: Because everything is interconnected means there could be cause. That things pull on each other and push on each other; move through this vast space. Suffering has cause. Since there's cause, if we can get rid of the cause, we can deal with the suffering. Thus, the quote: "This being, that arises. This not being, that does not arise." A very scientific, modern view. Nothing can be outside of that. ∨
So it went from high to low, and sometimes to 'nowhere', but it was always fresh and alive with the fragrance of the Dharma in the air! And again, there were times that I was bored out of my skull, and wanting (yes, desiring...ha!) to just split and go home. Only, Rinpoche was trying to show me that my home was not outside, but inside the 'nature of mind'. For he is a Vajramaster; a knower of the spiritual journey from this life to the next, and of the ultimate reality it will bring.

As exhausting and tiring as it was, I am glad that I went and made the 'grand effort'! However, I would have to be a fool to do anything like that again soon! I feel very saturated in a good way. The next time, however, I may need only a weekend, or even less, for every year or so he visits.

I have a lot of his tapes (which I listen to every day), and of course I have GBF, which I consider to be my actual sangha. And, GBFers are my dharma brothers, more so than the practitioners at Rippa.

Such is life. I have been finding in the last few days that my flesh is a lot weaker than my spirit. But, the lessons and the opportunities for personal self-growth are there for all who dare to trek the path.

May the Dharma spread in us all, and like a ripple to all others in the universe! And including all beings in the universal quest for enlightenment...which is just another word for home.▼

Compassion as a Practice
By David Richo, PhD

The Dalai Lamas are believed to be incarnations of Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of compassion. He is depicted with many heads to see the suffering humanity from every direction. He has a thousand arms to reach out everywhere and an eye in the palm of each hand, since compassion is not blind. This is a metaphor of the spontaneous urge toward compassion flowing from the wisdom in our letting go of dualism. Once we are all one and not separate, we are all responsible for one another.

Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, presents the doctrine of non-duality and of the emptiness of ego in the Heart Sutra. The wisdom of the compassion of the awakened heart motivates the enlightened person to give up liberation for himself alone in favor of the liberation of others. Tara, the mother of all Buddhas and the female aspect of compassion, was formed from a teardrop of Avalokitesvara. She vowed to help him free all of us from the fetters of fear and grasping. The Blissful Goddess is at work now as you read this with the wish to let it happen! Buddha himself is said to be born from compassion. He also lives to show compassion and to show it reliably and universally. This is why the prayer says: “I take refuge in the Buddha.”

Compassion is a state of mind flowing from the realization of emptiness (no inherent, self-sustaining existence in any thing or person). We are all interdependent both between ourselves and between us and all of nature. Awareness of this profound, primal, and indestructible unity leads us to mutual reverence and caring love. This is one way the wisdom of non-duality connects us to compassion.

Compassion also flows from egolessness: “I am not in this world just for myself, but just in time for others too.” This is because they, and we, need assisting forces. No one person can do it, or be it, all by herself or himself. I can afford to give this way because I have the rich gift of knowing that service is my true path. Without egolessness, I might try to proselytize or force others to follow my way. In the tonglen meditation practice of Mahayana Buddhism, one sends peace to others in exchange for their distress. This practice consists of sitting in meditation for a half hour with the realization of ego emptiness and egoless compassion. Then for ten minutes, one breathes in the dark cloud of the suffering of others and breathes forth healing opalescent light from one's own heart. The dark cloud diffuses into nothing as it enters the no-thing of one's egoless state. It has no hook to attach itself to! One does this with the image of those one loves and then of those one does not love, and finally of those one hates.

Compassion begins with equanimity in the face of all that humans do. Once we perceive the ultimate oneness of all beings, a solidarity results between us and them. This is our capacity to love without fear. This is the fearlessness that recognizes every event and encounter in life as
happening at just the right time and in just the right way for us to learn what it takes to live out our destiny. In such a synchronous world, nothing can go wrong, at least not for long. In such a spiritual world, we keep finding the discarded pieces of ourselves that clamor for reattachment to our psyche. This is how synchronous meetings and experiences impel us to wholeness.

A great deal of work on ourselves is accomplished by compassion toward others. “An enlightened person does not have to know much. He has the whole teaching in the palm of his hand when he has learned compassion,” says the Sutra of Avalokitesvara. Intuition is the something in us that knows the whole teaching. Lively energy is the something in us that handles things. Compassion is the something in us that gives willingly and sanely.

Compassion is empathetic love for those who still fear what we have learned to trust. This is expressed beautifully in the Tibetan Buddhist affirmation: “I live through the sunset of fear and desire and greet the dawn of sane love and of exuberant compassion. I will always remain loyal to those who are lost in the ever-setting sun of fear and desire.” This is being true to life. The Buddha’s message is about the utterly disappointing emptiness of the ego, vis-a-vis the utterly hopeful compassion for those who have not yet found that out.

Wisdom is not a body of truth. It is a state of being in which truth becomes accessible within us and active through us. The big mind beyond ego looks more and more like light. Our body and all things are composed of condensed light, continually moving, beating rhythmically, always united by undying, unborn, or reborn love. “Things are losing their hardness. Even my body now lets the light through,” remarked Virginia Woolf.

This article is from Dave’s latest book Unexpected Miracles: The Gift of Synchronicity and How to Open It, Crossroad, 1998.▼
Letters to the Editor

Special thanks to Larry Hermes for his monumental efforts on reformatting (and building a new template for) the June newsletter, in spite of moving residences at the same time. Also, thanks to all the newsletter well-wishers including, but not limited to: Clarence Wong, Robin Levitt, Don Crisostomo, Snake, Bill Kirkpatrick, and David Richo.
—Nick Kolivas

I just wanted to tell you what a terrific job you’ve done on the May 1998 GFB Newsletter. This issue will undoubtedly prove helpful to all practitioners. Although I have been practicing Buddhism now for several years, I found it very useful to have this kind of easy-to-read, succinct overview of basic Buddhist concepts. We all need reminders and reinforcement, no matter how long we’ve been practicing!

It was also useful to see the connections you made in a very open, forthright manner (much appreciated) from Buddhist concepts to your own life. I’m sure the meditation guidelines will be helpful to many beginning meditators as well.
—Bob Hass

"Just as elephants don’t travel on rabbit paths, great enlightenment isn’t a matter of details" Jung-chia.

Kind of nice. It’s revealing in a touching/mystic way, in that we love and need to know the details before we are convinced of the path towards our self-liberation.

The Four Metaphors (from Dharma teachings):
1) We consider that we are ill
2) That the Dharma is a remedy
3) That our master is a skillful doctor
4) And that regular practice will heal us.
—Rob DelRe

Local Dharma

Sundays, 1pm–5pm: Drop-in Life Drawing and Painting classes. SF Buddhist Center.
Information (415) 282-2018

Saturday, July 4, 10am: Talk by Zenshin Philip Whalen, resident teacher Hartford St Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-2507

Friday, July 10, 7:30pm: Insight and Activity: The Everyday Life — talk by Joseph Goldstein. SF Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-3136.

Saturday, July 11, 10am: Talk by Michael Wenger, SF Zen Center dean of Buddhist Studies. Hartford St Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-2507

Saturday, July 11, 9:30am–6pm: Insight and Activity: The Zen of Everyday Living—talk by Tenzin Reh Anderson. SF Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-3136.

Sunday, July 12, 11am–3pm: Green Tara Retreat. Explanations on the Green Tara practice, guided by Gosia Pellarin. Karmtsang Chöling USA.
Information (415) 661-6467

Tuesday, July 14, 7:30pm: Turning Inward Series. Part 1—Mores, Culture Shifts, Sexuality, and Practice. SF Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-3136.

Wednesday, July 15, 8pm: Diamond Way Buddhism: The Way and the Goal—talk by Jesper Jorgensen. Karmtsang Chöling USA.
Information (415) 661-6467

Saturday, July 18, 10am: Talk by Shunsen Barbara Kohn, SF Zen Center president. Hartford St Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-2507

Sunday, July 19, 10am–4pm: Gestalt Awareness. Meditators can find in Gestalt therapy a powerful complement to their mindfulness practice. SF Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-3136.

Monday, July 20, 8pm: The Four Dharmas of Gampopa—talk by Pir Weigelt, visiting teacher from Germany. Kamtsang Chöling USA.
Information (415) 661-6467

Tuesday, July 21, 7:30pm: Turning Inward Series. Part 2—Mores, Culture Shifts, Sexuality, and Practice. SF Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-3136.

Saturday, July 25, 1:30pm–5pm: Simple & Easy Vegetarian Cooking. Cook several delicious dishes that require a minimum of preparation. SF Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-3136.

Saturday, July 25, 10am: Talk by Lou Hartman, Zen priest. Hartford St Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-2507

Sunday, July 26, 10am–4pm: Exploring Two Traditions. Rabbi Helen Cohn and Blanche Hartman offer a one-day workshop on Jewish and Buddhist meditation. SF Zen Center.
Information (415) 863-3136.

Sunday, July 26, 11am–12:30pm: The Theory of Perception. Introductory talk by Simone Kirschner. Kamtsang Chöling USA.
Information (415) 661-6467

For anyone interested in starting a Buddhist discussion group on sexuality and spirituality, please contact Paul Shepard

Paul is a member of the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement.
GBF Calendar
San Francisco Events

Sunday Morning Sittings:
SF Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett St, between 21st & 22nd, one block west of Mission St, beginning at 9:30am & 10:30am respectively.

July 5 Guest speaker: Jim Wilson
July 12 Guest speaker: Roger Corless*
July 19 Guest speaker: Don Wiegert
July 26 Discussion

*Roger is a professor of Buddhist Studies at Duke University, and will speak about ‘The Positive Value of the Negative Precepts’.

Please also note that we will be having the GBF Newsletter Mailing Party on the third Sunday of every month, at 2:30pm, at Snake’s house.

Thursday Evening Sittings,
7:45pm: Sittings are held at participants’ homes and are open to all GBF participants. Please speak to hosts for directions to their homes.

July 2 Bill Kirkpatrick
July 9 Lee Robbins
July 16 Mark Marion
July 23 Larry White
July 30 Larry White

Tuesday, July 7, 7:30pm: Steering Committee Meeting (open to all GBF participants), at the home of Nick Kolivas

Friday, July 10: GBF "Second Friday of the Month" Movie Night. Our July movie will be "The Truman Show", showing at the Regency 1 Theatre, Van Ness and Sutter at 8pm. We’ll gather at 7pm at Tommy’s Joynt on Van Ness at Geary, and head for the theatre at 7:30pm. Call Clint Seiter for more information.

Saturday, July 25, 7pm: GBF Pot Luck Dinner at the home of Bill Kirkpatrick, 37 Frederick St, San Francisco,

GBF Annual Picnic: Summer is coming up, and along with it the annual GBF potluck picnic. This year we are returning to our old site at Tilden Park on August 23, so mark your calendars. Details will be in next month’s newsletter.

Special Request
Please send in your newsletter comments, questions, articles, letters to the editor, Dharma lessons, and poems by the 10th of the prior month,

via snail mail, to:
Editor, GBF Newsletter,
2261 Market Street, #422,
San Francisco, CA 94114.
We do reserve the right to edit for clarity or brevity.

Local Dharma Centers
Berkeley Shambhala Center 2288 Fulton St, Berkeley (510) 841-6475
Berkeley Zen Center 1933 Russell St, Berkeley (510) 845-2403
Buddhist Church of San Francisco 1881 Pine St, SF (415) 776-3158
California Diamond Sangha P.O. Box 2915, Petaluma Community of Mindful Living P.O. Box 7345, Albany (510) 524-3751 Dudjom International P.O. Box 40155, Berkeley (510) 849-9928 Empty Gate Zen Center 2202 Parker St, Berkeley (510) 845-8565 Enlightened Heart Meditation Center (415) 255-0798 Green Gulch Farm 1601 Shoreline Highway, Sausalito (415) 383-3134 Hartfield St. Zen Center 57 Hartfield St, SF (415) 863-2507 Kamatsang Chaoling USA 110 Merced Avenue, SF (415) 661-6467 Land of Medicine Buddha 5800 Prescott Rd, Soquel (408) 462-8383 Living Peace Meditation Community 1650 Clay St, #2, SF (415) 346-3923 Nyingma Institute 1815 Highland Place, Berkeley (510) 843-6812 Orgyen Dorje Den 410 Townsend, #406, SF (415) 826-7181 Pema Osel Ling 2013 Eureka Canyon Rd, Corralitos (408) 761-6266 Rigpa Fellowship 816 Bancroft Way, Berkeley (510) 644-1858 San Jose Tibetan Temple 300 South Tenth St, San Jose (408) 280-6827 SF Buddhist Center (Friends of the Western Buddhist Order) 37 Bartlett St, SF (415) 282-2018 San Francisco Zen Center 300 Page St, SF (415) 863-3136 Santa Cruz Zen Center 113 School St, Santa Cruz (408) 457-0206 Saraha Buddhist Center 3145 Geary Blvd, #515, SF (415) 731-5973 Shambhala Center 1630 Taraval St, SF (415) 731-4426 Sonoma Mun Zen Center 6367 Sonoma Mtn Rd, Santa Rosa (707) 545-8105 Spirit Rock Meditation Center 5000 Sir Francis Drake Blvd, Woodacre (415) 488-0164 Tse Chen Ling Center 4 Joost Ave, SF (415) 333-3261 Vajrapani Institute P.O. Box 2130, Boulder Creek (408) 338-6654 Zen Hospice Project (415) 863-2910
Though you lack what you need and are constantly disparaged,
Afflicted by dangerous sickness and spirits,
Without discouragement take on the misdeeds
And the pain of all living beings—
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

18th Bodhisattva Practice, by Gyelsay Togmay Sangpo, 14th Century