Gay Buddhist Fellowship

"To Be or Not To Be?": GBF and the Challenge of Commitment
By Alan Oliver

Engaging The Question
This classic quote from Shakespeare's Hamlet poses the choice of to act or not to act on a life-defining issue: to be passive in the face of events or to be active in pursuing a goal. Our "Hamlet", Prince Siddhartha, must have considered the question often before his decision to leave the passive acceptance of his palace and princely role to seek out the answers to suffering. Life always comes back to what you are committed to and how you go about achieving the goal (The Eightfold Path).

For the past seven years of its existence, GBF has had its own dance with passive and active responses to Buddhism. It has served three interacting functions: as a support group for Gay Buddhists, as a place to practice Buddhism, and as a social group. It has required action to keep the group going, plan events, and sponsor practice opportunities. This action has always been from a passive position regarding the various Asian Buddhist traditions and forms. Passive should not be confused with negative in this sense. We have chosen to operate more as a generic Dharma forum from which participants can refine and develop their awareness of Buddhism. If one wants to go further, we have encouraged him/her to seek out the various traditions which have meaning for him/her and to participate in those forms and practices. GBF has created a "Gateway" for people to enter, to sample, and to experience the Dharma. After that, they are on their own.

Experiments with Dharma (teachings) are going on throughout the country as second- and third-generation Buddhist teachers seek out what is an authentic American Dharma form and practice. This process has happened in every country/culture that Buddhism has entered. This redefinition poses a basic question of commitment for GBF: Do we continue to serve as a gateway to the traditional Asian forms of practice or do we join the growing number of American practitioners in developing our own version of forms and practices? This is very dualistic and the answer is a paradoxical yes to both alternatives.
GBF Committees

We always want and need interested participants, so please, JOIN IN! Call the contact person on the committee, or talk to him (or anyone on that committee) at a GBF sitting or event. This is a great practice opportunity!

Steering Committee
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Clint Seiter. Contact

People will continue to find validity, insight, and support in the traditional Buddhist paths. But, that does not prevent us from developing a "container" which holds one's Gay Buddhist practice (developed from our own experiences) based on the original "Turning of the Wheel" by the Buddha. We don't have to find our way to enlightenment by only going through Asian traditions. The way has always been clear for us to develop our own version of the path the Buddha walked on 2,500 years ago. In fact, he encouraged his followers to do this by saying, "Be lamps unto yourselves".

In light of this, we pose the following question to the GBF Sangha (spiritual community):

"Should GBF sponsor a commitment ceremony, commonly called Taking Refuge in Buddhist circles, for those in GBF or associated with GBF who choose to participate in a commitment service?"

This seemingly simple action raises many questions and is interdependent with many other issues that we face as a Sangha/community.

The Steering Committee has discussed this issue twice, and in July a meeting of the Practice Committee was held. This issue of the newsletter invites you to participate in this process. The question of commitment is a practice question and has great implications for your own life, for GBF, for the gay community, and perhaps for Buddhism in America and Gay Buddhists throughout the world: a question well worth sitting with and pondering.

What is Taking Refuge?

Whether a person engages in a formal commitment service or demonstrates commitment informally by his/her attendance, interest, questions, and engagement with teachers/leaders at Dharma centers, the commitment is noticed by the people around them. In a formal ceremony the
basic words of this commitment are familiar to all Buddhist traditions: "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha." By Taking Refuge within a Buddhist tradition, you acknowledge your commitment to study and practice Buddhism.

You participate with others in a ceremony that is designed to help you strengthen and support this commitment. It is not a commitment which is exclusive or to other commitments. (It would not stop you from Taking Refuge with another group or expressing a commitment to study some other path). It is focused on being supportive of your effort to understand and study Buddhism.

Chogyam Trungpa, in his book Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism, talks about it as "an example of surrendering to the reality around us, acknowledging negativity as part of our makeup, and then seeking refuge in the Buddha. Are you willing to open your eyes to the circumstances of life as they are? It involves sharing your experiences of the whole environment of life with your fellow pilgrims, your fellow searchers. We do not lean on them. We just walk with each other, side by side, shoulder to shoulder, working with each other, going with each other".

In a lecture by Ven. Khenpo Kathar Rinpoche, "On Taking Refuge", he says "the enlightenment of the Buddha is a continual potential for humanity as such, even though the Buddha is not physically present, and we may always go for refuge (sheltering/support) in the Buddha. The teaching of the Buddha which of course survives in the world is an object of refuge because it provides us with the spiritual guidance that is required in working towards our own enlightenment, and, as such, that is a fit object of refuge. The Sangha is the third object of refuge because the Sangha is the vehicle through which the teachings of the Buddha are preserved in the world...

"The benefit of going for refuge and difficulty of not going for refuge is summed up in the idea of refuge as spiritual foundation, as a spiritual grounding...That background is provided by refuge because refuge serves to center one’s intention, one’s aspiration in the vision of Buddhahood, and the teachings which proceed from that enlightenment and in the community that follows it; and without that there is no firm foundation for any practice that would go beyond it...Refuge in a Buddhist sense conveys an idea of protection...in the ultimate sense we are powerless in the face of life and so it is the whole mass of suffering of life that is that form which we seek to be protected from when we go for refuge."

In conclusion, ceremonies are basic to human culture. They help us clarify, commit to, and integrate on a deeper level what are lives are about. Taking refuge is a basic ceremony in some Buddhist traditions, and if done authentically by GBF could help us build our community, establish connection on a deeper level, and strengthen our commitments.
A Spirituality of Loving Kindness
By David Richo, Ph.D.

The Dalai Lama says, “All beings are always kind”. This is because they keep affording us every opportunity to practice letting go and to show humble/ego-dismantling love. Bodhisattva literally means enlightened warrior: one who is already enlightened but still dedicated to the enlightenment of others. Metaphorically the Bodhisattva is an inner force in all of us that is stirred by the spectacle of human suffering and meets it with fearless love. In fact, the force is fearless love. The Bodhisattva vow is: “Whatever be the highest perfection of the human mind, may I realize it for the benefit of all the living”. Once there is no separate ego, there is no personal liberation; only a universal one. What gives the Bodhisattva strength? It is his/her capacity to see the true nature of things; to bear with circumstances without fear; and, has the ability to meet all situations with wisdom and compassion. These are not virtues, but simply the outcomes of love. In addition, they are precisely the elements of mindfulness. Is mindfulness then a program for activating the force of fearless love?
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The Whole And The Parts
The question of a new ceremony focusing on commitment/refuge is one part of a whole. That part is related to other visions (see Alternative Visions) and actions. Someone has to lead ceremonies. Does it create more of a need for official teachers? Do we want that? Will it bring us closer or divide us? No action is independent. All is connected and changing. Impermanence will change things as we move along. Actions that emphasize dualism will have to be balanced with non-dualistic actions. Being there with the whole and the parts in an intricate dance is part of the practice.

Understanding The Issues
In the practice committee meeting, a number of issues came up that are worth noting for future clarification and discussion. These discussions will be at the heart of the process as we come to a consensus about a commitment ceremony:

1. How far do we want to go in creating forms of our own?
   How do we ensure they are authentically Buddhist?
2. Will this ceremony split the Sangha into those that have taken refuge with GBF and those who have not? What affect will this have?
3. Will this ceremony lead to other forms, such as a Taking of Precepts ceremonies?
4. Will this get people started on a path we can’t continue in any organized way? Is the path sequential?
5. What are we committing ourselves to: Buddhism, GBF, or both? Can they be separated? What effect does it have on other commitments to spiritual paths?
6. What will the ceremony look like? Will I like it?
7. Should it incorporate traditional elements of all traditions, or should we create our own?
8. What do the other traditions do for this ceremony?
9. How will it effect the inner quality of a person’s practice?

Alternative Visions
What is your vision? What action are you willing to take? How does this commitment relate to your practice?

For example, is GBF:
- a support group for gay Buddhists?
- a social group for Gay Buddhists and friends?
- a place to get introduced to Buddhism?
- an organization that does outreach to the gay community?
- a practice place for sharing the dharma?
- a resource base from which to explore other traditions/centers?
- a place for practice with its own forms, ceremonies and structures?
- a base for a new American Buddhist tradition with its own teachers, transmission, and authentic American voice?
- one part of a global network of gay Buddhist individuals, groups, and centers?
"To Be Or Not To Be?":
You are cordially invited to the next meeting of the Practice Committee on Sunday, August 8, at 2pm, at Bill Kirkpatrick’s house, 37 Frederick St, near Buena Vista Park. Many of the issues listed here will be discussed and debated. We welcome your participation. This topic may also be discussed at our open Sunday sittings, Thursday sittings, and with the Steering Committee. Please think about it and give us your opinions. We especially urge you to write a response and send it to the newsletter. We would like a future issue to be focused on this discussion and what it will mean for you and for GBF. The more thoughtful your response, the better the final result. Think about it. Make a commitment. ▼

Dharma Quote

Whatever wholesome deeds, Such as venerating the Buddhas and practicing generosity, That have been amassed over a thousand eons, Will all be destroyed in one moment of anger. There is no evil like hatred, And no fortitude like patience. Thus I should strive in various ways To meditate on patience.

All the mistakes that are And all the various kinds of evil Arise through the force of conditions: They do not govern themselves.

Just as desirable objects would give my mind no pleasure If my body were ablaze with fire, Likewise, when living creatures are in pain, There is no way for the Compassionate Ones to be pleased.

—from Shantideva’s Chapter Six, “Patience”, from A Guide to a Bodhisattva’s Way of Life, translated by Stephen Batchelor

"If the elephant of my mind is firmly bound By the rope of mindfulness All fears will cease and virtues will become easy... I am ever dwelling in the presence Of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas Who are always sharing Their unobstructed vision.”
—Shantideva, Entering the Bodhisattva’s Path

Follow the path to the Three Excellences of the Bodhisatta:

1) Prior to an activity: form an altruistic intention to bring enlightenment to others.

2) During the activity: realize that you, your action, and your goal are ultimately empty of inherent existence. The ego and all its neuroses are ways we have of entertaining, inflating, or scaring ourselves. Fear and craving, the sports of the ego, are meant to fill a space that seems like a void. Actually, deep down, we are pure spaciousness that is an eternal Self. This is another sense in which we are synchronous.

3) Upon completion of the activity: dedicate its merit to the welfare of people and nature, and to the increase of love in the world. We establish a compassionate program when we apply the above three practices to our work.

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Anger and Abuse

By David Richo, PhD

Buddhist practice does not include violence. Anger is sometimes confused with violence or aggression. Anger is appropriate if it can be expressed in a compassionate way. It is a natural human feeling that everyone experiences often and that needs to be expressed to maintain psychological health. Anger is the feeling that says “No” to opposition, injury, or injustice. It is a signal that something we value is in jeopardy.

Anger is inevitable in any relationship in which people are free, and in which they allow each other to get close. “To let ourselves be touched also involves letting ourselves be scraped,” writes John Welwood. Love without the safety to allow anger is not love, but fear. When adults love they reveal their own anger and welcome it from others.

Anger may seem dangerous because in early life it was never shown openly, or if it was, it led to physical or emotional violence. However, this was not real anger, but only a dramatic misrepresentation of it. Anger does not lead to danger, distance, or violence; drama does. In this context, drama means ego-centered, manipulative theatrics with an explanatory story line attached. Many of us have never seen real anger, but only drama. Another word for drama is abuse.

True Anger:

**Authentic self-expression**

- Meant to express a feeling
- Arises from displeasure at an injustice
- Informs the listener and creates rapt attention
- Meant to communicate
- Desires a response from the other, but does not require one
- Takes responsibility for this feeling as one’s own
- Asks for change, but allows the other to change or not
- Contains sadness or fear, and acknowledges these
- Is non-violent, in control, and always remains within safe limits
- Coexists with other feelings
- Asks for amends or lets it go

Abuse:

**Theatrical display**

- Meant to manipulate
- Arises from an affront to ego
- Scares the listener and drives him/her away
- Meant to silence, intimidate, or insult the other
- Insists the other acknowledge how right or justified he/she is
- Blames the other for what he/she feels
- Masks a demand that the other change
- Hides a dashed expectation, disappointment, or loss of control
- Is violent, aggressive, out of control, derisive, punitive, and hostile
- Occludes other feelings
- Seeks to retaliate

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Releases the aliveness in one's true self and leads to repose
Is brief and then lets go with a sense of closure
Coexists with, and empowers love
Derails lively energy and creates continuing stress
Is held onto and endures as lingering resentment or a grudge
Cancels love and trust in favor of fear

True anger cannot be held onto. Once it is expressed fully, relief and letting-go follow automatically. What is held onto is not anger, but resentment which is stoked by a set of story lines that keeps the drama ignited. Entitlement, expectation, and insult are neurotic ego strategies. People who are building more functional ego-responses let go of entitlement by asking for what they want while acknowledging that sometimes people come through, and sometimes they do not. They drop expectations (one-sided) and ask for agreements (two-sided). They ask for amends when they are insulted and shun those who consistently refuse to treat them respectfully.

Affirmation of Anger
I accept anger as healthy. I examine the belief behind it and the personal history it evokes in me. I take responsibility for this feeling as totally mine.

I express my anger, but I choose not to act out aggressively by retaliation, vindictiveness, or malice.

I embrace more adult beliefs about myself and the world so that my anger now arises from a sense of justice, without the insulted, arrogant, ego dimensions.

Practice this love not from a neurotic need to care-take (a compulsion), but from a serene and sane enthusiasm for fellow humans. It works best with specific individuals, not people in general. Extend love especially to people with whom you have a karmic connection, since they are the ones most helped by your love. “I cannot do this!” can be re-framed as: “Now I know how to do this and I am acting as if I were already fully enlightened”.

Remember to include all of nature in your love, showing what St. Bonaventure calls: “a courtesy toward things.”

Love is the best antidote to fear. The more love you have and show, the less fearful you are. Paradoxically, you increase your love within, when you aim it outward. Also, your altruistic cherishing of others brings you to enlightenment faster than any method you may find. As you see yourself acting with more love and compassion, you think more highly of yourself, and your self-esteem grows exponentially. This is an example of how spiritual works produce psychological benefits. Paradox: you cherish others more than yourself and thereby cherish yourself more.

This article is from Dave's latest book, Unexpected Miracles: The Gift of Synchronicity and How to Open It. Crossroad, 1998.
GBF Annual Picnic

GBF will host its annual potluck picnic Sunday, August 23, starting at 11:30am. The picnic will be at the Lake View picnic site in Tilden Park (the same site as two years ago). We'll share in the food we bring, socialize, wind down, and relax. Afterward, for those interested, there will be a hike led down the appropriately-named Inspiration Trail (great views of the Oakland Hills). Carpooling is encouraged. Anyone needing a ride can carpool with drivers meeting at 37 Bartlett St at 11am.

Directions: If coming from San Francisco, Berkeley or Oakland, take Highway 24 East. Get off at the Fish Ranch Road exit, immediately after the Caldecott Tunnel, and turn left down Fish Ranch Road until you get to Grizzly Peak Road. Turn right on Grizzly Peak Road, and stay on it until you reach South Park Drive. Turn right on South Park Drive and stay on it until it ends at Wildcat Canyon Road. Bear right on Wildcat Canyon Road. The Lake View picnic site is about a quarter of a mile down the road, on your left. If you reach Inspiration Point, you’ve gone too far.

Local Dharma


Thursdays, 7:30pm-9pm: Sitting & Discussion Group, taught by Dharma Teacher Reb Anderson. San Francisco Zen Center. Information (415) 863-3136.

Tuesdays, beginning August 4, 7pm: Lam rim Study Course for 8 weekly meetings taught by Ngawang Chotak. Tse Chen Ling. Information (415) 339-8002.


Saturday, August 1, 10am-5pm: Relationships and the Spiritual Path. Public talk by Lama Tsering Everest. Rigpa Center. Information (415) 392-2065.

Thursday, August 6, 7pm: Attitude Adjustment. Talk by Venerable Robina Courtin. Tse Chen Ling. Information (415) 339-8002.

Friday, August 7, 7:30pm-9pm: Revealing the Naturally Radiant Heart. Talk by Sharon Salzberg. San Francisco Zen Center. Information (415) 863-3136.

Saturday, August 8, 10:30am-4pm: On the Path Practice Day. Venerable Robina Courtin. Tse Chen Ling. Information (415) 339-8002.


Saturday, August 22, 9am-4:30pm: Day Retreat with sitting, chanting, bowing, and private Dharma interviews. Empty Gate Zen Center. Information (510) 845-8565.

Saturday, August 22, 10am-4pm: Spiritual Care Day for caregivers and those suffering a loss or terminal illness. Rigpa Center. Information (415) 392-2065.

Sunday, August 23, 10am, and Monday, August 24, 7pm: Manjushri by Demo Locho Rinpoche. Tse Chen Ling. Information (415) 339-8002.


Monday, August 24, 9:30am-5pm: Workshop on being open and protecting ourselves, led by Christopher Titmuss. Spirit Rock. Information (415) 488-0164.

Friday, August 28, 7:30pm: Meditation on Emptiness: Mahamudra. Venerable Geshe Michael Roach. Unitarian Center, 1187 Franklin St, San Francisco. Information: Land of Medicine Buddha (408) 462-8383.

Daishin David Sunseri is available for individual practice discussion. Please feel free to contact him at Dharma Family (415) 267-3939.
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 and 10:30am respectively.

August 2 Guest speaker
Jim Wilson

August 9 Guest Speaker
David Richo,
“Synchronicity”

August 16 Guest speaker
Petra McWilliams*

August 23 Discussion
August 30 Discussion

*In 1991, Petra McWilliams quit a high-paying, career-track job and bought a one-way ticket to India, in search of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. There she became a student of Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. In late 1991, she was asked by Lama Zopa Rinpoche to become the director of the Vajrapani Institute. In 1995, Lama Zopa asked her to become co-director of the FPMT International Office, which she performed until earlier this year.

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.

August 6 Bill Kirkpatrick

August 13 Lee Robbins

August 20 Mark Marion

August 27 Larry White

Tuesday, August 4, 7:30pm:
Steering Committee Meeting
(open to all GBF participants), at the home of Larry White

Friday, August 14: GBF “Second Friday of the Month” Movie Night
August movie will be “There’s Something About Mary”, showing at the new AMC 1000 Theatre, Van Ness and O’Farrell at 8:05pm. 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

Sunday, August 16, 2:30pm:
Mailing Party, Snake’s home,

Saturday, August 29, 7pm: GBF Pot Luck Dinner at the home of Andrew Okumoto,

GBF Newsletter
Needs You
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 2015, Petaluma
Community of Mindful Living
P.O. Box 7355, Albany (510) 524-3751
Dudjom International P.O. Box 40155, Berkeley (510) 849-9928
Empty Gate Zen Center
2200 Parker St, Berkeley (510) 845-8565
Enlightened Heart Meditation Center
(415) 255-0798
Green Gulch Farm 1601 Shoreline Highway, Sausalito (415) 383-3134
Hartford St. Zen Center
57 Hartford St, SF (415) 863-2507
Kamtsang Choling USA
110 Merced Avenue, SF (415) 661-6477
Land of Medicine Buddha 5800 Prescott Rd. Soquel (408)-462-8383
Living Peace Meditation Community
1650 Clay St, #2, SF (415) 346-3923
Medicine Buddha Healing Center
6809 Chalwa Lane, San Jose
Nichiren Buddhist Temple 3570 Mona Way, San Jose (408) 246-0111
Nyingma Institute 1815 Highland Place, Berkeley (510) 843-5812
Ogyen Dorje Dden 410 Townsend, #406, SF (415) 826-7181
Pema Osel Ling 2013 Eureka Canyon Rd, Corte Madera (415) 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 Mtn Zen Center 6367 Sonoma Mtn Rd, Santa Rosa (707) 545-8105
Spirit Rock Meditation Center
5000 Sir Frances 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
To very sweetly scented bathing chambers
With brilliantly sparkling crystal floors
And exquisite pillars ablaze with gems
Having canopies above aglow with pearls,
I beseech the Tathagatas and their Sons
To come and bathe their bodies
From many jewelled vessels filled with waters scented
and enticing,
To the accompaniment of music and song.

—From Shantideva’s
A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life, Chapter 2