The Four Immeasurable Minds

By Thich Nhat Hanh

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During the lifetime of the Buddha, those of the Brahmanic faith prayed that after death they would go to Heaven to dwell eternally with Brahma, the universal God. One day a Brahmin man asked the Buddha, “What can I do to be sure that I will be with Brahma after I die?” and the Buddha replied, “As Brahma is the source of Love, to dwell with him you must practice the Brahmaviharas—love, compassion, joy, and equanimity.” A vihara is an abode or a dwelling place. Love in Sanskrit is maitri; in Pali it is metta. Compassion is karuna in both languages. Joy is mudita. Equanimity is upeksha in Sanskrit and upekka in Pali. The Brahmaviharas are four elements of true love. They are called Immeasurable, because if you practice them, they will grow every day until they embrace the whole world. You will become happier, and those around you will become happier, also.

The Buddha respected people’s desire to practice their own faith, so he answered the Brahmin’s question in a way that encouraged him to do so. If you enjoy sitting meditation, practice sitting meditation. If you enjoy walking meditation, practice walking meditation. But preserve your Jewish, Christian, or Muslim roots. That is the way to continue the Buddha’s spirit. If you are cut off from your roots, you cannot be happy.

According to Nagarjuna, the second-century Buddhist philosopher, practicing the Immeasurable Mind of Love extinguishes anger in the hearts of living beings. Practicing the Immeasurable Mind of Compassion extinguishes all sorrows and anxieties in the hearts of living beings. Practicing the Immeasurable Mind of Joy extinguishes sadness and joylessness in the hearts of living beings. Practicing the Immeasurable Mind of Equanimity extinguishes hatred, aversion, and attachment in the hearts of living beings.
If we learn ways to practice love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, we will know how to heal the illnesses of anger, sorrow, insecurity, sadness, hatred, loneliness, and unhealthy attachments. In the Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha teaches, “If a mind of anger arises, the bhikkhu (monk) can practice the meditation on love, compassion, or equanimity for the person who has brought about the feeling of anger.”

Some sutra commentators have said that the Brahmaviharas are not the highest teaching of the Buddha, that they cannot put an end to suffering and afflictions. This is not correct. One time the Buddha said to his beloved attendant Ananda, “Teach these Four Immeasurable Minds to the young monks, and they will feel secure, strong, and joyful, without afflictions of body or mind. For the whole of their lives, they will be well equipped to practice the pure way of a monk.” On another occasion, a group of the Buddha’s disciples visited the monastery of a nearby sect, and the monks there asked, “We have heard that your teacher Guatama teaches the Four Immeasurable Minds of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Our master teaches this also. What is the difference?” The Buddha’s disciples did not know how to respond. When they returned to their monastery, the Buddha told them, “Whoever practices the Four Immeasurable Minds together with the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eightfold Path will arrive deeply at enlightenment.” Love, compassion, joy, and equanimity are the very nature of an enlightened person. They are the four aspects of true love within ourselves and within everyone and everything.

(continued on the next page)
The first aspect of true love is maitri, the intention and capacity to offer joy and happiness. To develop that capacity, we have to practice looking and listening deeply so that we know what to do and what not to do to make others happy. If you offer your beloved something she does not need, that is not maitri. You have to see her real situation or what you offer might bring her unhappiness.

In Southeast Asia, many people are extremely fond of a large, thorny fruit called durian. You could even say they are addicted to it. Its smell is extremely strong, and when some people finish eating the fruit, they put the skin under their bed so they can continue to smell it. To me, the smell of durian is horrible. One day when I was practicing chanting alone in my temple in Vietnam, there was a durian on the altar that had been offered to the Buddha. I was trying to recite The Lotus Sutra, using a wooden drum and a large bowl-shaped bell for accompaniment, but I could not concentrate at all. I finally carried the bell to the altar and turned it upside down to imprison the durian, so I could chant the sutra. After I finished, I bowed to the Buddha and liberated the durian. If you were to say to me, “Thay, I love you so much I would like you to eat some of this durian,” I would suffer. You love me, you want me to be happy, but you force me to eat durian. That is an example of love without understanding. Your intention is good, but you don’t have the correct understanding.

Without understanding, your love is not true love. You must look deeply in order to see and understand the needs, aspirations, and suffering of the one you love. We all need love. Love brings us joy and well-being. It is as natural as the air, the trees, and our beloved.

Maitri can be translated as “love” or “loving kindness.” Some Buddhist teachers prefer “loving kindness,” as they find the word “love” too dangerous. But I prefer the word love. Words sometimes get sick and we have to heal them. We have been using the word “love” to mean appetite or desire, as in “I love hamburgers.” We have to use language more carefully. We have to restore the meaning of the word love. “Love” is a beautiful word. We have to restore its meaning. The word maitri has roots in the word mitra, which means friend. In Buddhism, the primary meaning of love is friendship. (continued on the next page)
One compassionate word, action, or thought can reduce another person’s suffering and bring him joy. One word can give comfort and confidence, destroy doubt, help someone avoid a mistake, reconcile a conflict, or open the door to liberation. One action can save a person’s life or help him take advantage of a rare opportunity. One thought can do the same, because thoughts always lead to words and actions. With compassion in our heart, every thought, word, and deed can bring about a miracle.

We all have the seeds of love in us. We can develop this wonderful source of energy, nurturing the unconditional love that does not expect anything in return. When we understand someone deeply, even someone who has done us harm, we cannot resist loving him or her. Shakyamuni Buddha declared that the Buddha of the next eon will be named Maitreya, the Buddha of Love.

The second aspect of true love is karuna, the intention and capacity to relieve and transform suffering and lighten sorrows. Karuna is usually translated as “compassion,” but that is not exactly correct. “Compassion” is composed of com (“together with”) and passion (“to suffer”). But we do not need to suffer to remove suffering from another person. Doctors, for instance, can relieve their patients’ suffering without experiencing the same disease in themselves. If we suffer too much, we may be crushed and unable to help. Still, until we find a better word, let us use “compassion” to translate karuna.

To develop compassion in ourselves, we need to practice mindful breathing, deep listening, and deep looking. The Lotus Sutra describes Avalokiteshvara as the bodhisatva who practices “looking with the eyes of compassion and listening deeply to the cries of the world.” Compassion contains deep concern. You know the other person is suffering, so you sit close to her. You look and listen deeply to her to be able to touch her pain. You are in deep communication, deep communion with her, and that alone brings some relief.

When I was a novice, I could not understand why, if the world is filled with suffering, the Buddha has such a beautiful smile. Why isn’t he disturbed by all the suffering? Later I discovered that the Buddha had enough understanding, calmness, and strength. That is why the suffering does not overwhelm him. He is able to smile to suffering because he knows how to take care of it and to help transform it. We need to be aware of the suffering, but retain our clarity, calmness, and strength so we can help transform the situation. The ocean of tears cannot drown us if karuna is there. That is why the Buddha’s smile is possible.

The third element of true love is muddita, joy. True love always brings joy to ourselves and to the one we love. If our love does not bring joy to both of us, it is not true love. (continued on the next page)
Commentators explain that happiness relates to both body and mind, whereas joy relates primarily to mind. This example is often given: Someone traveling in the desert sees a stream of cool water and experiences joy. On drinking the water, he experiences happiness. Ditthadhamma sukhavihari means “dwelling happily in the present moment.” We don’t rush to the future; we know that everything is here in the present moment. Many small things can bring us tremendous joy, such as the awareness that we have eyes in good condition. We just have to open our eyes and we can see the blue sky, the violet flowers, the children, the trees, and so many other kinds of forms and colors. Dwelling in mindfulness, we can touch these wondrous and refreshing things, and our mind of joy arises naturally. Joy contains happiness and happiness contains joy.

Some commentators have said that mudita means “sympathetic joy” or “altruistic joy,” the happiness we feel when others are happy. But that is too limited. It discriminates between self and others. A deeper definition of mudita is a joy that is filled with peace and contentment. We rejoice when we see others happy, but we rejoice in our own well-being as well. How can we feel joy for another person when we do not feel joy for ourselves? Joy is for everyone. (continued on the next page)

**MBA’s and Financial Types**

In order to continue to grow what appears to be emerging as a New GBF, we would like to solicit help from our vastly talented Sangha: for anyone with an MBA in Finance, or with financial management experience, and/or fundraising skills, we need you!

In particular, we would like a committee of such individuals to be formed to assist the Steering Committee to fund raise, create budget projections, and forecast cashflows needed for the next quarter, year, and out. This committee will augment the exceptional bookkeeping and tax work preparation being performed by our Treasurer, Ding Hao Ma.

Your efforts will facilitate grant proposals and the funding of our brand new Gay Buddhist website (still in progress); newcomers-to-GBF literature packages; the creation of an electronic archive of all GBF guest speaker’s teachings; potential Gay Pride Parade entries and a booth; future commitment-to-Buddhism ceremonies (Taking Refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha); and, the continued support of the Hamilton House monthly dinner, GBF Sunday Sittings, and the Newsletter.

Please contact Alan Oliver or Nick Kolivas to volunteer.▼
Sexuality and Spirituality
by Paul Shepard

I am aware that gay liberation promulgated a sort of sexual anarchy within parts of the Gay Community: sex any time, any place, with any number of partners, was our right, as long as we did not hurt anyone. The AIDS epidemic brought traumas into the Gay Community and many people had to radically change their sexual behaviors in order to reduce the spread of AIDS. However, AIDS also brought our community together, spiritually, in terms of dealing with physical and emotional suffering. Today, unsafe sex is on the rise, as is the use of recreational drugs.

I realize that I have been spiritually challenged, and, at times, confused by all of the above, and in the process caused suffering for myself and others. My sexuality is important, but so is my struggle to bring mindfulness to my sexuality; a relatively new venture for me.

For almost a year, I have been in a group called the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement, or BASE, a program of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. Our purpose in that group is primarily to bring our practice into our work. Similarly, I would like to form a group that focuses on bringing our practice into sexuality.

The fourth element of true love is upaksha, which means equanimity, nonattachment, nondiscrimination, even-mindedness, or letting go. Upe means “over,” and ksh means “to look.” You climb the mountain to be able to look over the whole situation, not bound by one side or the other. If your love has attachment, discrimination, prejudice, or clinging in it, it is not true love. People who do not understand Buddhism sometimes think upaksha means indifference, but true equanimity is neither cold nor indifferent. If you have more than one child, they are all your children. Upaksha does not mean that you don’t love. You love in a way that all your children receive your love, without discrimination.

Upaksha has the mark called samatajñana, “the wisdom of equality,” the ability to see everyone as equal, not discriminating between ourselves and others. In a conflict, even though we are deeply concerned, we remain impartial, able to love and to understand both sides. We shed all discrimination and prejudice, and remove all boundaries between ourselves and others. As long as we see ourselves as the one who loves and the other as the one who is loved, as long as we value ourselves more than others or see others as different from us, we do not have the true equanimity. We have to put ourselves “into the other person’s skin” and become one with him if we want to understand and truly love him.

When that happens, there is no “self” and no “other.”

Without upaksha, your love may become possessive. A summer breeze can be very refreshing; but if we try to put it in a tin can so we can have it entirely for ourselves, the breeze will die. Our beloved is the same. He is like a cloud, a breeze, a flower. If you imprison him in a tin can, he will die. Yet many people do just that. They rob their loved one of his liberty, until he can no longer be himself. They live to satisfy themselves and use their loved one to help them fulfill that. That is not loving; it is destroying. You say you love him, but if you do not understand his aspirations, his needs, his difficulties, he is in a prison called love. True love allows you to preserve your freedom and the freedom of your beloved. That is upaksha.

For love to be true love, it must contain compassion, joy, and equanimity in it. For compassion to be true compassion, it has to have love, joy, and equanimity in it. True joy has to contain love, compassion, and equanimity. And true equanimity has to have love, compassion, and joy in it. This is the interbeing nature of the Four Immeasurable Minds. When the Buddha told the Brahmin man to practice the Four Immeasurable Minds, he was offering all of us a very important teaching. But we must look deeply and practice them for ourselves to bring these four aspects of love into our own lives and into the lives we love.
The Six Conords of the Sangha
by Thich Nhat Hanh

1. Sharing space.
2. Sharing the essentials of daily life.
3. Observing the same precepts.
4. Speaking harmoniously.
5. Sharing insights and understanding.
6. Respecting one another’s viewpoints.

Note from Alan Oliver: Many of us live separate lives but often long for a greater closeness and sharing. We dance between the I and the WE. Once in a while it is helpful to be reminded of the essential elements of Sangha; the sense of breathing together, and walking down similar spiritual paths.

GBF “Taking Refuge” Ceremony is ON!

Thanks to the “enthusiastic perseverance” of Alan Oliver, a consensus of the Practice Committee was reached to offer a “Taking Refuge” ceremony within GBF. For anyone who wishes to more formally engage themselves with the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, within a Gay Buddhist context, this ceremony will be available for you. Participation is absolutely voluntary and in no way connotes exclusivity or separateness. The actual format, design, context, and timing of the ceremony still needs to be developed, and your participation in this process is requested. A meeting in the second half of September will be called to form a subcommittee which will work on creating the actual ceremony. The date, time, and place will be announced at future Sunday Sittings. You may also phone Alan Oliver for more information.

The Practice Committee, facilitated by Alan Oliver, with guidance from Daishin David Sunseri, met at the lovely home of Bill Kirkpatrick, on Sunday, August 2nd, for its second, high level discussion of this process. Other practice committee members, and GBF participants who attended included: David Holmes, Doug Hall, Nick Kolivas, Bill Kirkpatrick, David Richo, Don Wiepert, Andrew Okumoto, Joachim Pose, Clear Englebert, and Kim Hollingshead.

We have a great challenge before us: to consider this issue as it relates to Buddhist practice. The exact form of the group still needs to be determined, and this will be done at the first meeting of its members. I personally prefer that the meetings be weekly or biweekly, and that a core number of members commit for three months. This group may continue longer if the participant’s wish.

I propose that the first meeting be on Sunday, September 20, just after the GBF sitting, at a location to be announced. The agenda of that meeting would include introductions, and a discussion of the times/place(s) to meet, and the frequency.

For anyone interested in engaging this group, please call Paul Shepard

Photo credits:
Page 2: Monks begging, Thailand.
Keith Mundy.

Page 3: Buddhist temple, Burma.
Ellis Klarenbeek.

Page 5: Detail of a contemporary statue of Buddha, height 30 feet, Tikse Monastery, Ladakh*. Larry Hermesen.

Larry Hermesen.

Back Cover: Himalayas, Kashmir, India.
Jerry Hoy.

*Ladakh is a small region of northwest India, in the Himalayas on the Tibetan border. Ladakhis are culturally Tibetan and Buddhist.
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 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 415.383.2134
Hartford St. Zen Center
57 Hartford St, SF 415.863.2507
Kamtsang Chöling 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
Medicine Buddha Healing Center
6809 Chiala Lane, San Jose
Nichiren Buddhist Temple
3570 Mona Way, San Jose 408.246.0111
Nyingma Institute
1815 Highland Place, Berkeley 510.843.6812
Ogyen 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 510.649.1858
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, SF 415.731.4426
Sonoma Mtn 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

Local Dharma


Tuesdays, 7pm-9pm: Lam rim monastic Study Course taught by Ngawang Chotak. Tse Chen Ling. Information 415.339.8002.

Thursdays, 7:30pm-9pm: Sitting & Discussion Group, taught by Dharma Teacher Reb Anderson. San Francisco Zen Center. Information 415.863.3136.

Friday-Monday, September 4-7, 7:30pm: "Daring Compassion" Weekend Program. The Bodhisattva path: making friends with ourselves and with others, led by Pema Chödrön. Shambhala Center. Information 530.756.4343.


Mondays (first & third), September 7 & 21, 7:30pm-9pm: Mindfulness Community—students of Thich Nhat Hanh. Meditation and discussion. Hartford Street Zen Center. Information 415.546.6566.

Tuesdays, beginning September 8: Study of the fifth century Chinese poem called "Faith In Mind" (sometimes translated as "On Trusting the Heart"). Pre-registration requested via email <hszc@aol.com> or US mail to: Kokai Roberts, 300 Page St, SF 94102. Information 415.546.6566.

If you would like to recommend a Dharma event for this column, please send the information to the attention of Greg Eichler, via e-mail to:
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.

September 6  Guest speaker
                Jim Wilson
September 13  Discussion
September 20  Guest speaker
                Carol Newhouse*
September 27  Discussion

*Carol Newhouse is from the
Theravada tradition of Buddhism
and specializes in the Abhidamma
(the Buddhist study of Consciousness). She is the guiding teacher
of the Lesbian Buddhist Sangha.

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.

September 3  Bill Kirkpatrick
September 10 Lee Robbins
September 17 Mark Marion
September 24 Larry White

Tuesday, September 1, 7:30pm: Steering Committee Meeting
(open to all GBF participants),
at the home of Alan Oliver

Friday, September 11: GBF "Second Friday of the Month"
Movie Night—“The Avengers,”
playing at the Metro, on Union at Webster. Unfortunately at press
time, the exact show times of the
movie are not listed. We will see
the movie closest to the 7:30-8pm
range, so check the papers and
Car poolers: meet at 37 Bartlett St
at 6pm. Please leave a message for
Clarence Wong if you plan to car pool

Seventh Annual
GBF Retreat,
September 11-13, 1998

This is just a reminder that plans
for the Seventh Annual GBF
Retreat are entering their final
stages. However, you can still sign
up! Cost, on a sliding scale
between $100 and $140, includes
room, board, and an offering to
the facilitators. Please call Bill
Kirkpatrick for sign-
up and payment information, or
David Holmes for
program information, or any other
questions you may have.

Halloween Potluck

The October 1998 Potluck will be
held Halloween Night, Saturday,
October 31, at the home of Nick
Kolivas in the Castro. (Public trans-
portation is highly recommended).
The fun starts at 6:30pm. Further
information to follow (in the
October Newsletter).

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.

Daishin David Sunseri is
available for individual practice
discussion. Please feel free to
contact him at Dharma Family
415.267.3939.
A person who doesn't know, but knows that he doesn't know, is a student; teach him. A person who knows, but who doesn't know that he knows, is asleep; awaken him. But a person who knows that he knows is wise; follow him.

Old Asian Proverb

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, #422, San Francisco, CA 94114. If possible, include a DOS or Windows disk in Word or as a text file, along with your hardcopy. You may also send your submissions via e-mail with your documents attached to:
<nicholas.kolivas@schwab.com>