The Positive Value
Of the Negative Precepts

By Roger Corless
Transcribed from a Dharma talk given at the July 12, 1998 GBF sitting.

The Precepts I want to talk about are the five so-called grave Precepts. They are expressed in the negative, yet Thich Nhat Hanh calls them the Five Wonderful Precepts. In my experience of GBF over the years, there has been sort of a dancing around these Precepts. Maybe partly because this is San Francisco, where nobody can tell anyone anything. “I’ve got to do it my way, thank you” we say. If anybody tells us not to do something, that’s exactly what we are going to do. Also, many of us come out of abusive religious or family situations as children. So when we come up against the basic Precepts of the Buddhist tradition and find that they are expressed in the negative, we think “Well, that’s the end of that”. We’re going to do something else, and look for some other way to practice the Buddhist tradition.

I would like to reframe the Precepts so that we can see something worthwhile about them, even as, or just because, they are expressed in the negative. I don’t wish to rewrite them in the positive. This is not as easy at it sounds. I’ve asked my students at Duke to discuss the positive value of the negative Precepts, and practically no one has got it. They were disappointed in the grade when they got their papers back, because most of them had merely rewritten the Precepts in the positive. They had difficulty seeing that there is a positive value in saying “No”.

Since some of you may not be too familiar with the Precepts, I will go through them briefly. I will first chant them, but, not in English. I’m sure, as I tell my students at Duke, that the Buddha would have spoken English if he could have, but he couldn’t, it hadn’t been invented yet. So, we have to study them in Pali and then make an attempt to translate them into English. The Precepts are commonly recited at the beginning of traditional Buddhist services, just after reciting the Triple Refuge—something else we haven’t had the tradition of doing at GBF.
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They go like this:
Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.
Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.
Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.
Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.
Surametiya-majjamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.

That’s in the Pali tradition, as used in Theravada Buddhism (the form of Buddhism dominant in Southeast Asia). The Sanskrit form is not used because there is no continuing tradition in Sanskrit, but Tibetan and Chinese translations are used. The heart of them is the repeated phrase about “undertaking the rule of training”, that is, the sikkha (shiksha in Sanskrit), a word we often translate into English as practice. Shiksha means learning how to do something, like learning how to drive a car, or learning how to live. It’s not just learning information. So, in the Precepts we say that we undertake the rule of training, or rule of practice, to refrain from (this is where the negative comes in)—and then we have the list of five. In English, then, they go something like this:

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from harming living beings.
I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking that which is not offered (i.e., stealing).
I undertake the rule of training to abstain from sexual misconduct.
I undertake the rule of training to abstain from false speech (especially, but not only, lying).
I undertake the rule of training to abstain from alcohol.

Each of these has extensive commentaries, and I think the commentaries by Thich Nhat Hanh, entitled For a Future to be Possible (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993) in which, as I have said, he calls them the Five Wonderful Precepts, would be a good place to do further reading. (Professors are only as good as their bibliography, you know, so I have to give you further reading.) And then also, there is a book called The Mind of Clover (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), which is largely a discussion of the Precepts, written by Bob Aitken, the Roshi who until recently was in charge of the Diamond Sangha in Honolulu, and one of the best known teachers of Zen Buddhism in the West.

The foundation of them all is the first one which is the precept not to harm living beings. Now we should realize at once this is impossible, that as long as we’re living in samsara (cyclic existence), we are going to harm living beings. Somehow it seems that if Caucasians become Buddhists in the West, they have to become vegetarian. They have to take their shoes off, be vegetarian, and sit on a cushion. That must be Buddhist, they think. Of course, it’s incidental. And actually, only the Chinese Buddhists are traditionally vegetarian. Other kinds of Buddhist are sometimes
vegetarian, and sometimes they are not. The Tibetans are meat-eaters, and that’s just the end of it. I mean, they just eat meat. When they say, “I’ll have vegetables,” they mean vegetables with the meat, they don’t mean just vegetables. The idea is that they, as Buddhists, don’t actually do the killing, they have someone else do it, like a Muslim. The point of all this is that none of the precepts are necessarily couched in such a way that they are all or nothing—that you either do them perfectly, or it’s hopeless. They are not absolute commands, “Thou shalt not do so and so” and if not, thou shall definitely go to Hell, or at the very least, be a naughty boy and have to go stand in the corner.

The Precepts are recommendations, the sort of recommendations that we might get from a physician who would say “Because of your physical or psychological condition, I recommend that you don’t do this, and you do do that.” If you have a heart condition, a physician might recommend that you cut down on salt. You don’t have to cut down on salt, but according to the physician’s investigation of your condition, if you don’t cut down on salt, you might get ill. So, it’s a good idea to cut down on salt, or even have no salt at all. The idea is to look at your salt consumption, to watch it. So, the recommendations are that if we follow the Precepts we will reduce the suffering that we bring to ourselves and to others. And, we follow the Precepts to the extent that we wish, and to the extent that we feel capable. There is no absolute way of doing this.

For example, we could become vegetarian because we don’t want to kill living beings, but then we have to do something in order to grow crops. We can’t let all the insects eat everything up. And, as a matter of fact, if we did nothing at all, the bacteria would take over the world and we would be a mile high in bacteria in a couple of months. So, just allowing all life to flourish as it wishes will never work, because everything is eating something. (The point, of course, is not to be eaten too soon.)

So actually, the point of the Precept is not really about what’s happening to the being that’s going to be hurt or not hurt, killed or not killed. The focus of the Precept is on my attitude. One way of killing insects like flies, mosquitoes, or cockroaches, is to go after them with lust and hate. But, if you kill them only as needed, or perhaps allow them to live if they’re not doing any particular harm, that is a very different motivation. The point is that if we observe the Precept, as soon as we go to kill it, the Precept comes up: “I’ve undertaken the Precept not to harm living beings.” So, then we think about it. We stop and we think about it…is it necessary? What’s my motivation in doing this? Am I practicing hate in trying to kill this being? Or, can I practice acceptance and compassion? Would it be appropriate to kill it or not? It might be appropriate to kill. But, what if I kill it with delight? I could think to myself “I love to catch cockroaches and rip them apart!” On the other hand, I might kill the insect with regret, saying to myself “Unfortunately, there’s not room for both of us in Dodge City, and I’m afraid that I happen to have a rebirth which makes me more powerful now, and you’re going to have to go, there’s nothing else I can do.” (continued on next page)
Dear Brothers,
At this particular time there are those in the GBF Sangha who want to create and take part in a commitment or Refuge ceremony. This impetus comes from the strong and sincere intention of members who have practiced together for many years. Some people are concerned about how we should do such a ceremony, whether or not it is authentic, what it may mean, if it will create separation, and so on. These questions are in the realm of duality. We should not be concerned about them.

It is most important that we acknowledge the truth of where we are at this particular moment in time. Any ceremony should reflect the actual practice of this sangha in 1998-1999. This ceremony should support practice in GBF, should manifest our unique Dharmic expression as gay men, and mirror the wise and compassionate nature of our lives together.

(continued on next page)

So, what do we say when we’re eating meat? It may be that we need to eat meat occasionally for health reasons. The Dalai Lama apparently tried to go vegetarian and it didn’t work, and his physician said that he needed to go back to eating meat. I don’t know the details of all that, but he did try it. Some of us have particular health problems and it would be dangerous, perhaps, to be vegetarian, and the only real option is to eat meat. In either case, when we remember the Precept, it puts up a wall and says, now, why are you doing this? We don’t just eat meat in a thoughtless way. It’s a way of making us more mindful. In the revised edition (1998) of For a Future to be Possible Thich Nhat Hanh calls the Precepts the Five Mindfulness Trainings—another very insightful way of seeing the negative language as positive.

I, myself, eat meat, although not on a regular basis. But, I’m always aware that I’m not just eating meat because I’m American, by golly. (And, yes, I am an American actually, even though I have an English accent. I became an American by naturalization.) So it stops the habitual action, and it makes us think about that.

The next Precept is not to take what is not offered. Of course in essence this means not to steal. But, it’s put more subtly than this because in certain cultures there is the tradition that if a guest admires something it is understood that the host or hostess would say, “Oh, wouldn’t you like to have it?”, even if they can’t afford to let you have it. Coaxing them into offering it to you, then, is actually stealing it, because it hasn’t actually been offered. The Precept reminds us not to be too pushy. It is not simply about not actually stealing, which I imagine for most of us would be fairly unusual. The Precept prods us to figure out what would be sufficient for me, what can I do without. If I am a guest and really need to have something for health reasons, then, certainly, I can ask for it.

And now for the Precept you’ve all been waiting for: to abstain from sexual misconduct. The Pali form of the Precept says kamesu, using the locative case of the word kama. (Note that this is not at all the same as the word kama, though English speakers often pronounce them the same way. There’s a slightly trilled “r” in the word karma.) Kama refers to sensuality, and especially to sex, the most sensual experience that we, as humans, can have. The Precept says to refrain from micchacara, that is, from false or deceitful action, and then says kamesu, in regard to sensuality.

Now, as gay men, sometimes this is the most difficult Precept to take any notice of because we feel that for so many years, or for centuries, we have been oppressed and told not to have any sex at all. And so now, we’re liberated, especially in San Francisco, so we’re going to have all the sex that we can, even if it’s going to injure our health. Otherwise, we may think, we’re not really being authentic. Once again, the Precept tells us to think about this. Don’t just simply have a reaction—think about it. What am I actually looking for, and what effect is it going to have on me, on the people around me, and the other person, the sexual partner? In the
traditional Buddhist texts, there’s a fair amount of discussion on the
details of what kind of sex to have, how, with whom or with what, and
so forth, such as: not to have sex during daylight, or in the open air, or
in the presence of one’s lama, or in the presence of a picture of one’s
lama, or more than six times in one night with the same person (yes, the
rule is written just like that!). I remember receiving a teaching on this,
and one of my fellow students, who was straight, said, “Oh, dear! Having
sex with my girlfriend in the woods in the daytime is the one thing I
really like, and now the Rinpoche says we can’t do that!”

Hidden amongst these rather curious rules are the one or two which seem
to relate to gay sex. They say that one shouldn’t have sex with another
man, or use the anus, mouth, or hand to reach orgasm. (Note that these
rules all assume a male as the person initiating sex. There is very little
about women and sex.) The Dalai Lama, as you all know, has quoted
some of these rules, and now he’s being asked what he means by it. I don’t
want to enter into any great discussion about that now, but I do want to
say that His Holiness is apparently referring to one of the detailed
comentarios on the general Precepts. It is the kind of thing that could be
debated at length amongst different teachers, even in the Tibetan tradition,
and certainly in other Buddhist traditions which might not accept the
authority of the text that the Dalai Lama was using. Apparently he was
referring to a passage from Asvaghosha which is embedded in the Lam
rim Chen mo (The Great Treatise on the Graded Path), a textbook
written by Jé Tsongkhapa, who is the founder of the lineage of which the
Dalai Lama is the principal teacher. We don’t know whether Tsongkhapa
quoted Asvaghosha correctly, and, even if he did, we don’t know what
authority Asvaghosha was using when he wrote his text.

It’s really an academic issue which has kind of hit the media. I would
hope that we would want to cool it a bit and say that the main point of
the Precept is authenticity in sexual encounters. Note that it says miccha,
which literally means false, a lie, a deception. So, the Precept recommends
that we inspect our conduct in regard to sex, as to whether it is authentically
on the side of intimacy or not. Or, maybe we just want to have fun
and recreation. If we are doing that, is the other person up for that also,
or, do they want something more than we’re prepared to give? The
Precept makes us mindful of all that, it asks us to see that we’re not
actually harming others, and to inspect whether or not we are being
forced into this by some kind of addiction.

The energy of sex is, obviously, very strong and it can often confuse and
could our minds so that we think something is going on that isn’t, or so
that we go out and do strange things that we normally wouldn’t do,
maybe even harming others under the influence of sexual passion. When
we find ourselves thinking “I’ve got to get laid this evening. It’s Saturday
night, and it’s after midnight; what am I going to do?” If that’s the
situation you find yourself in, isn’t it something you need to look at, to
see what is authentic about that? (continued on next page)

By actually noticing what makes this Sangha what it is,
we learn a great deal about any
ceremonial expression of our
intimate connections.
The exact form of the
ceremony is not important.
What is important and
essential is the intention,
mindfulness and open-
heartedness we bring to any
discussion and decision about it.
When we act from our true
Buddha nature, only Buddha
nature is present. Trusting in
our true nature is also trusting
in one another, that we act in a
way that supports each other.
We have nothing to fear. We
can trust one another and
create a sacred space that
contains all we need. We are
very fortunate to be able to
take a new step on the path
together.

Love in the Dharma,
Daishin David Sunseri

Daishin David Sunseri will be
leading a half-day meditation
and Dharma talk on Saturday,
November 7, from 8:45 am to
12:30 pm, at the home of
Clarence Wong.
This mini-retreat will consist of
sitting and walking meditations,
as well as Dharma instruction.
Space is limited, so please
RSVP to Clarence Wong.
Suggested donation is $10-$20,
with checks made out to GFB.

David is also available for
individual practice discussion.
Please feel free to contact him
at Dharma Family
415.267.3939.
GBF Homeless Project
Needs Volunteers

The Hamilton Family Center is a shelter for homeless families, with children comprising half of its 70-plus residents. For the past four years GBF has been preparing dinners for the shelter residents every third Saturday of the month. This involves planning a menu, purchasing the ingredients, preparing the meal in the Hamilton kitchen, and serving the residents.

In order for GBF to continue to provide this service, we need additional volunteers. This is a wonderful opportunity to practice "Engaged Buddhism", and it's also great fun. For minimum effort, you get the chance to make a much appreciated, heartfelt contribution to people in need. The cost of this event is funded entirely by GBF out of our Sangha's generous donations.

If interested, please call Clint Seiter.

The fourth Precept concerns musavada, which means false speech. It's not the same kind of falsity as miccha, inauthentic. The English equivalent is more like devious or harmful. In general, it means not to lie. But it also means not to speak in a harmful way, not to back-bite, so that it really means not to harm our words, and is related to the first Precept. As soon as we feel the urge to say something like, "Hey, d'you know what so and so did...", this Precept asks us to wait a bit, and then we might think that maybe it would be more helpful to everybody if we didn't say that. We can ask ourselves, "Supposing I didn't say that, would it make any difference now, or, say, in six incarnations from now?" We need to put it in perspective.

The last of the five Precepts has a long Pali compound: suramāryavamajjapamadatthana. Literally, this means "fermented liquor which leads to confusion or instability of mind". That's sort of a long way of saying alcohol. Even a small drink of alcohol gives us a buzz so that we are not as 'here' as we were—and that's the reason, of course, that we have it, that's the reason why alcohol is so popular—it's a way of relaxing, of zoning out.

It's probably easier to become addicted to alcohol than to sex, if we have whatever it is in our metabolism that does that. It appears to be practically certain now, from the medical evidence, that certain people have a genetic predisposition to metabolizing alcohol in a different kind of way from others. The more alcohol such people have, the more hooked on it they get. The addictive process starts because their particular metabolism is different. Such a person, once addicted, needs help to stop drinking. But even if we are not the sort of person who is naturally going to be addicted, if we are the kind of person who can have a drink or two and say "Well, that's enough", we can still think "Why do I need to do this if I am trying to practice the Buddhist tradition, to waken up?" The word Buddha means 'woken up'.

Alcohol is a depressant, and it's going to make me a little more dull. "Am I not sufficiently dull? Don't I want to wake up a little more? Why would I want to go more asleep than I am?" So, once again the negative Precept prods us, reminds us, makes us think about before taking a drink of alcohol. "Would it be appropriate? Do I want to do this? Am I having a problem with this? What is the best way to handle this?" Once again, not just to react.

The Precept is often used today, in America, to refer to other kinds of mood-altering drugs. It does not, of course, refer to any kind of medication which you get on prescription from a qualified physician. It's referring to recreational drugs. These things were not known at the time of the Buddha. The only thing that would have been known, perhaps, was hemp, or bhang, as it's called in Hindi. Today, in India, the attitude to drugs and alcohol is kind of upside down from the attitude in the U.S.
In the U.S. we think alcohol is okay. Sure, people get drunk and fall down and that’s not too good, but, we say, it’s only alcohol. But as for drugs: don’t you ever smoke a joint! (Or at least, don’t inhale!)

In India, it’s the other way around. Bhang is tolerated, although not exactly approved, while alcohol is called apeya, “non-drink.” Alcohol, then, is the primary focus of the Precepts, and drugs are not. But, once again, it’s something we can use as a way of inspecting what is going on with us. When offered a joint (or something stronger) we can ask ourselves “What do I get out of this, and does it really help me to be more compassionate, or more clear, does it help or hinder my practice?”

A book of essays by the Dalai Lama is called Kindness, Clarity, and Insight (Ithaca NY: Snow Lion, 1984). I believe that the three words in the title give us a simple test to see how we’re doing. Are we progressing along the path of greater kindness, greater clarity, and greater insight? Are we practicing in such a way that would help that? Or, are we practicing in a way that would stop that, or set us back?

Some years ago I met Ajahn Sumedho, the Abbatt of Amaravati Buddhist Center in England. He’s an American bhikkhu (monk) of the Thai tradition of Theravada Buddhism. He was talking about the specific way that the Precepts are enlarged, or expanded, for the bhikkhu. There are 227 Precepts for the fully ordained monk of the Theravada tradition. One of them is not to eat after noon. If you are a bhikkhu, you have a pretty good meal sometime before noon (you’re not going to starve to death), but you are not supposed to eat anything for the rest of the day. If, then, in the middle of the afternoon he wants to eat something, he remembers the Precept and becomes aware of his desire to eat. The Precept makes him more mindful, and tells him how much, or little, work he has to do on himself.

So, in summary, I suggest that the five Precepts are specifically written in the negative because we come to the Buddhist tradition having practiced unskillful actions. The first thing to do is to say “No” to samsara, and stop what we’re doing. The Precepts are tools which can make us become mindful of what we are doing. Having stopped, or at least greatly reduced, our thoughtless, unskillful actions, we can graduate to the positive aspects of the Precepts and, for example, rewrite the “non-harming” Precept as “being compassionate.” That leads us into a discussion of the paramitas (Perfections), rules of conduct which are written in positive language. More on them in another talk, perhaps.

Roger Corless is Professor of Buddhist Studies at Duke University. He is a frequent visitor to the Bay area and plans to retire here in 2000.

**Thrift Store Donations**

Thrift Store Donations benefit GBF and our Community: bring your extra clothing and other items to Community Thrift Store at 623 Valencia St between 10am and 5pm any day of the week. The donation door is around the corner on Sycamore Alley (parallel to and between 17th and 18th) between Valencia and Mission. Please inform the staff you are donating on behalf of GBF. Our ID number is 40.
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Berkeley Shambhala Center
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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

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5000 Sir Francis Drake Blvd, Woodacre 415.488.0164

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4 Joost Ave, SF 415.333.3261

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P.O. Box 2130, Boulder Creek 408.338.6654

Zen Hospice Project
415.863.2910

Local Dharma
Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, 10:30am: HIV Sitting Group.
Hartford Street Zen Center.
Information 415.863.2507.

Thursdays, 12:30–1:30pm:
Mindfulness Meditation for people living with chronic or life-threatening illness.
Instruction, practice, talk; led by Eugene Cash & Frank Ostaseski.
Zen Hospice Project.
Information 415.285.7502.

Thursdays, 7:30pm–9pm:
Unity & Diversity—a study of the Zen/chan classic Sandokai
(Merging of Difference and Unity).
San Francisco Zen Center.
Information 415.863.3133.

Tuesdays, 7pm–9pm: Lam rim monastic Study Course taught by Ngawang Chotok. 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.

Thursday, October 1, 7:30–9pm:
Study and Meditation Group for Professional Caregivers.
Rigpa Study and Practice Center.
Information 415.392.2065.

Saturday, October 3, 9am–5pm
Monastic Daylong Retreat, led by Ajahn Amaro. Spirit Rock.
Information 707.485.1630.

Mondays (first & third),
October 5 & 19, 7:30pm–9pm:
Mindfulness Community—students of Thich Nhat Hanh.
Meditation and discussion.
Hartford Street Zen Center.
Information 415.863.2507.

Friday, October 9, 7:30–9pm:
Recognizing Our Kinship with Others: talk by Pema Chödrön.
San Francisco Zen Center.
Information 415.863.3133.

Saturday, October 10, 2–5pm,
Sunday, October 11, 9:30–12pm:
Practical Advice on Spiritual Training: Readings from the Buddhist Canon, with Dr. Robert Bushnell. San Francisco Zen Center.
Information 415.863.3133.

Mondays (second & fourth),
October 12 & 26, 7:15pm–9pm:
New Recovery Meditation and Discussion Group.
Hartford Street Zen Center.
Information 415.863.2507.

Thursdays, October 16 & 23,
7pm–9pm: Heart Sutra taught by Ngawang Chotok. Tse Chen Ling.
Information 415.339.8002.

Saturday, October 31,
10am–1pm: Letting Go—session deals with “unfinished business” and times of personal change and challenge.
Rigpa Study and Practice Center.
Information 415.392.2065.

If you would like to recommend a Dharma event for this column, please send the information via e-mail, to the attention of Greg Eicher:
<anatman@sirius.com>.

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 e-mail: <nicholas.kolivas@schwab.com> or 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.
GBF Calendar
San Francisco/Bay Area 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.

October 4 Guest speaker
Jim Wilson
October 11 Discussion
October 18 Strybing Arboretum*
October 25 Guest Speaker
David Sunseri**

*SF Buddhist Center will be closed to us that day, so there will be a single 10:30am sitting only, in Strybing Arboretum, Golden Gate Park. Walk through the entrance and onto the large lawn area; bring your own zafu, mat, etc.

**Daishin David Sunseri is a Soto Zen monk in the tradition of Dissen Dorsey Roshi, and a long-time member of GBF. He will speak about loving-kindness practice.

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.

October 1 Bill Kirkpatrick
October 8 Lee Robbins
October 15 Mark Marion
October 22 Larry White
October 29 Larry White

Tuesday, October 6, 7:30pm:
Steering Committee Meeting
(open to all GBF participants), at the home of Doug Hall

Sunday, October 18, 2:30pm:
Mailing Party, Snake’s home, 415.552.6378.

Saturday, October 24, 12:30pm:
Sonoma Day Trip and Potluck, home of Bob Hass,

Maps available at Sunday sittings.

Directions: Driving time is 50 minutes from Golden Gate Bridge.
- Rt 101 North. Pass San Rafael. Pass the following exits: Hamilton Field/Nave Dr; Ignacio Blvd/ Bel Marin Keys Blvd.
- Exit onto Rt 37 (Napa/Vallejo exit) and proceed east toward Vallejo for 7.5 mi (Speed limit 65).
- Look for sign: “Rt 121, Napa/ Sonoma.” Get into left lane. At light, turn left onto Rt 121 North. (Sears Pt Raceway will be on your left), go 6.5 mi. (Don’t speed—cops abound. Speed limit varies from 45 to 55.)
- Look for sign: “Junction 116 & 121.” Do not bear right. (Rt 121 goes to right.) Continue forward. As you approach, there’s a BP gas station on the left, then a blinking red light at a 3-way stop. Go forward. You are now on Rt 116 West.
- Look for sign: “Arnold Dr-Glen Ellen/116 West-Petaluma.” Do not bear left. (Rt 116 bears left.) Continue forward. At blinking yellow light continue straight ahead—you will be on Arnold Dr. Turn left at next light onto Verano Ave (you’ll see the tall spire of a white church on left).

Important: When going home, take Arnold Dr south the way you came. The only difference is that you must remain on Arnold (i.e. continue straight ahead) until you deadend into Rt 116. Then turn left onto 116, and follow the rest of the directions.

Car poolers: meet at 37 Bartlett St at 11am. Please leave a message for Clarence Wong if you plan to car pool.

Halloween Costume Potluck Party
Come dressed as a character from your favorite book, movie...or whatever! Saturday, October 31 6:30pm at the home of Nick Koliwras, (between Castro & Market), San Francisco (public transport highly recommended). RSVP Nick Koliwras

GBF Holiday Events
Celebrate the holidays with your GBF Sangha! In November, the monthly potluck dinner will be held on THANKSGIVING DAY (November 26). In December, the monthly potluck dinner will be held on NEW YEAR’S EVE (December 31). Please mark your calendars! Look out for more details in forthcoming issues of the newsletter and on the web site.

If you are interested in helping to organize an activity for GBF members on Christmas Day, please contact Clarence Wong

Volunteer training begins October 21 for the Zen Hospice Project. If you have the time, we encourage the cultivation of wisdom and compassion through service. For information call 415.863.2910.
"Even Buddha died. His death was a teaching, to shock the naive, the indolent, and the complacent, to wake us up to the truth that everything is impermanent and death an inescapable fact of life. As he was approaching death, Buddha said:

'Of all footprints
That of the elephant is supreme.
Of all mindfulness meditation
That on death is supreme.'"

Quote from Sogyal Rinpoche’s *Glimpse After Glimpse*