Gay Buddhist Fellowship

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship supports Buddhist practice in the gay men's community. It is a forum that brings together the diverse Buddhist traditions to address the spiritual concerns of gay men in the Bay Area, the United States, and the world. GBF's mission includes cultivating a social environment that is inclusive and caring.

Lineages of Buddhism
by Jim Wilson

Transcribed from a Dharma talk given at the August 9, 1998, GBF sitting.

What I would like to do today is give an overview of different schools, and how they perceive the Dharma, and how they interpret the Buddhist traditions. Obviously, I can't do a thorough scholastic analysis in a short time. But, I would like to touch on the various traditions as a way of beginning a dialogue, or cross-talk, about the different traditions, especially as they relate to the Four Noble Truths.

To refresh everyone's memory, the First Noble Truth is the truth of suffering, the Second Noble Truth is that there is a cause to suffering, the Third Noble Truth is that it is possible to bring an end to suffering—the cessation of suffering, and the Fourth Noble Truth is the path to the end of suffering. So one way of understanding different Buddhist schools is that all different Buddhist schools are a response to these Four Noble Truths.
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!

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For example, given the fact that everyone is suffering, how do you interpret that? Different schools will interpret the meaning of suffering in different ways. Or given the Third Noble Truth, the truth of cessation, how exactly do you bring that about? What are the means whereby you bring about the end of sorrow? So once again, different schools will interpret the Third Noble Truth in different ways, and that will have implications for the practice of a particular tradition.

One of the ways that different traditions interpret is that they look at the Four Noble Truths and they perceive some of the Noble Truths as what they call “absolute truths” and the other Truths are “relative truths” or “circumstantial truths.” This gets a little abstract, and I won’t dwell on it very long, but if you do some reading in Buddhism you will come across this kind of analysis. So the Second Noble Truth, that there is a cause to suffering, is often interpreted in traditions as an absolute truth, because everything is derived from causes and conditions. There is nothing in existence which exists independently or separately. That’s the meaning of the Second Noble Truth. But the First Noble Truth, that people are suffering, is not an absolute truth; it is a contingent truth. An absolute truth means that the truth is never changing; it’s always present. A contingent truth means that it is circumstantial, due to conditions, and dependent upon conditions. But the Third Noble Truth says that one can bring about an end to suffering, which makes the First Noble Truth a relative truth, a circumstantial truth. So how do you interpret that? How do you deal with these kinds of categories?

There is a model which is very prevalent which I’d like to briefly discuss, which categorizes the Buddhist schools into what are called Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. It’s kind of a three-tiered model, and the interpretation usually given is that Theravada Buddhism is the original, pure Buddhism. If you’re not a Theravada Buddhist, then it is a truncated form of the complete Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism, the great vehicle, is an expanded reaching-out of the Buddhist Dharma. And Vajrayana Buddhism, is the pinnacle of the Buddha’s teaching.

The problem with this model, other than the fact that it is inherently critical of the teachings that are beneath the “top” one, is that it doesn’t apply very well to specific Buddhist schools. For example, in Japan and China there is a school of Buddhism called Tendai which hasn’t yet reached the West very strongly, but is a very important school of Buddhism in China and Japan. Tendai incorporates into its teaching certain Vajrayana practices: mandalas, rituals, and esotericism, but they don’t consider these practices to be the ultimate teachings. They consider the ultimate teaching to be the Lotus Sutra, which is not an esoteric teaching, like some of the Vajrayana teachings.

Another example would be Pure Land Buddhism. There are schools of Pure Land Buddhism which have highly elaborate visualization practices which are very strongly reminiscent of Vajrayana practices. So where
would Pure Land Buddhism, which is a devotional form of Buddhism, fit into this scheme when it uses these kinds of Vajrayana practices?

So what I'm suggesting is that it doesn't work. I remember my teacher, Soen Sa Nim, would once a year have a teaching retreat for his students who had become teachers, and he would say: "There is Hinayana Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and then Zen." So, that was his three-tiered scheme. What I discovered is that any Mahayana Buddhist who is deeply committed to their school presents their teaching in that three-tiered scheme. In Nichiren Buddhism, for example, there's Hinayana Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and then Nichiren's interpretation of the Lotus Sutra which is the supreme teaching of the Buddha. So obviously they can't all be right. It kind of fits the thinking that "my school is the best."

I'd like to offer an alternative model; I call it "the Lotus of Buddhism," where I interpret all the different schools of Buddhism as petals on a flower. In this way they're not arranged hierarchically. If you consider the center of the flower as the Four Noble Truths, then the petals of the flower are a response to the suffering of the world.

In this conception of Buddhism there is no need to place one school of Buddhism over the other. They are all interpretations of the core insights of the Buddha.

So what are some of these responses that different schools make to the Four Noble Truths? There are various models which predominate in different schools, particularly if you focus on the Third Noble Truth. The Third Noble Truth is that it is possible to bring an end to suffering, the truth of cessation. This is what made Buddhism so tremendously appealing. It's very attractive. If the Buddha had stopped with the First Noble Truth, it's like "Thanks a lot, there's a lot of suffering." And, if he had stopped with the Second Noble Truth that there is a cause to suffering, that might be interesting in an academic sort of way, but beyond that it wouldn't have sparked this powerful vision of existence which swept across Asia. So it was the Third Noble Truth that said it is possible to bring an end to sorrow.

It's very interesting because the Buddha himself focused on this in the Sutras. He was often asked to respond to cosmological or metaphysical questions which were relevant in his day, or, phrased in terms that were relevant to his culture: "Is the universe eternal?" "Is the universe finite both in time and in space?" for example. The Buddha would refuse to answer these questions. Finally, one of his disciples pushed him on this issue: "You are the fully Awakened One, the Buddha, and when I ask you this question you won't answer. Surely you have an opinion on these subjects?" The Buddha's response to this is very interesting. He said that those kinds of questions resemble someone being shot by a poisoned arrow, who, when a doctor comes along and says, "I have an antidote to the poison," argues with the doctor: "I want to know who shot the arrow so that I can take revenge on him. I want to know what kind of wood

Fundraising Needs—Everyone's Business

Twice a year we send you very low-key fundraising requests. In a separate mailing, you have received our second request for this year. Please consider this request as an opportunity to strengthen your own practice as well as helping GBF to assist and interact with Gay Buddhists throughout the world.

To be aware of a single shortcoming within oneself is more useful than to be aware of a thousand in somebody else.

—His Holiness The Dalai Lama
the shaft was made from and what kind of feathers are on its end..."
And the doctor says, "By the time you figure out all these answers, you
will be dead."

These kinds of questions do not bring about an end to suffering. Time
is precious and one should not waste time trying to answer questions
that, when answered, won't end suffering. The Buddha did have an
opinion, but that opinion would not bring an end to sorrow, and that
is why he would not respond to those questions.

There's an interesting result from this. Buddhism was able to cross cul-
tural barriers—for example, the movement from India to China. India
and China are very different cultures and one of the reasons Buddhism
was able to do this was that it doesn't have a strong cosmological com-
mitment. So when it moves from one culture to another, the cosmology
of different cultures does not cause a friction with Buddhism, because
its central focus is to bring about the cessation of suffering. That is in
contrast to Western religious traditions, which tend to have a very strong
cosmological commitment, which historically has caused a great deal of
friction when those cosmologies change.

The Purification Model

What are some of the responses that different Buddhist traditions have
made to the Third Noble Truth, the truth that it is possible to bring
about a cessation? One of the predominant models of Buddhism is
Purification. The way you bring about the cessation of suffering is to
purify your mind, purify your body, purify your speech, purify your
conduct, and purify your heart. When all that purification is accom-
plished you will be enlightened. So we're talking about a long time here.
Usually it's written as eons of time. We're not talking about five years of
graduate school. We're talking about life after life after life of purifica-
tion. So, inherent in this model is the idea that cessation means to put
out (extinguish).

The Second Noble Truth is that there is a cause to suffering: craving
(desire) and clinging (attachment). The Purification model focuses on
craving. "I will put an end to craving by bringing about purification of
my psycho-physical organism." This model also tends to be very monas-
tically oriented. In order to really carry out this program, you have to
leave home and enter a monastic community. It is the predominant
model in Theravada Buddhism, but it is also a very strong model in
Mahayana Buddhism. In Mahayana Buddhism, the purification will be
integrated into the image of the Bodhisattva, but basically the program
is the same. Interestingly enough, this has resulted in the earliest forms of
aversion therapy I know of. For example, if craving for food arises in the
mind, here's an antidote for craving food: you are to envision vomit, so
then that will repel your desire for food. No doubt. If craving for sex
arises in the mind, then you visualize the object of your desire full of
shit and pus and various disgusting bodily fluids, and that would be an
antidote for your craving for sexual desire. Pretty cool, huh? So you can see how this works, and why monks are so cranky.

But seriously, the Purification model is a very strong model in Buddhism, and once again, the interpretation of cessation means to put out, or extinguish. This interpretation of the Four Noble Truths extends even to Nirvana itself, where this interpretation of the Buddha’s teachings understands Nirvana as “to extinguish.” When you finally reach the ultimate goal of the Purification model, Nirvana, you are extinguished, you exist no more.

The Awakening Model

Another model that is very important in Buddhism is what I call the Awakening model. The Buddha means “The Awakened One.” This interprets cessation as waking up. Schools in which this model predominate are Zen, some readings in Tendai, and Dzogchen in the Tibetan tradition. Here the idea is that what causes suffering is clinging (attachment). In the Second Noble Truth the truth of causation is craving and clinging. This model tends to focus on clinging as opposed to craving. Craving is not seen as the primary problem in this analysis because as craving appears, if you release it, let go of it, cease to cling to it, then it is not a problem. The Purification model sees the mere appearance of craving as a problem and therefore requiring an antidote, but if you shift your focus from craving to clinging, then certain consequences follow. If anger appears in the mind, you simply release that anger. That letting go is a cessation of suffering. That’s how these traditions interpret cessation. You release whatever appears and then suffering ceases. So, non-grasping, non-clinging, is the practice and the goal, and enlightenment itself. In this interpretation, cessation is not understood as putting out or extinguishing; it is interpreted as letting go. Nirvana is interpreted as being present in the world without clinging to the world. So once again, the two traditions distinguish between what is the ultimate in that kind of interpretation.

The Transformation Model

Another model is what I call the Transformation model. The Transformation model is strongly operative in Vajrayana Buddhism, including Japanese Shingon. It is also seen in most of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism and some of the branches of Tendai as well. The Transformation model indicates that it is possible to use whatever energy appears and transform it into compassion. The operative ideal, then, is to be a Bodhisattva. This is very tricky, though, so let’s go back to anger. In the Purification model, anger appears and you apply an antidote to it. An antidote to the arising of anger would be to cultivate universal love for all beings. In the Awakening model, when anger appears let it go through you. Watch whatever arises next and do not cling to it. In the Transformation model, if anger appears, you ask yourself how can you use the energy of anger for the benefit of other beings?

Here are some examples from your own life which might clarify this. If you are a parent, and in your kitchen is a drawer full of knives which

GBF's New Website <www.gaybuddhist.org>

The GBF website contains information for newcomers to GBF (mission statement, history of GBF, etc.) as well as information for GBF members (sittings, social events, newsletter articles, etc.).

A feature of the new website is the GBF E-Mail Sangha. Using Internet e-mail listserv technology, GBF members as well as other Gay Buddhist practitioners can have an on-going group dialog via e-mail on topics of interest to Gay Buddhist practitioners.

Visit our freshly launched website and join the new GBF E-Mail Sangha by sending an e-mail message to <gbfmain-subscribe@egroups.com> or go to the list’s home page at <http://www.egroups.com/list/gbfmain>.

The GBF E-Mail Sangha is an electronic forum for the exchange of ideas and views among Gay Buddhist practitioners. The purpose of the forum is to facilitate open discussion on Buddhist teachings and practice, particularly as it relates to the lives of gay men. The goal is to enrich and render more meaningful the Buddhist practice of list members through an open and honest e-mail dialog. Subscribers will also receive via e-mail a monthly calendar of GBF and other Bay Area Dharma events as well as notices and reminders of GBF sittings, meetings and events. We hope you will find participation in the GBF E-Mail Sangha to be a rewarding spiritual experience.
Help for Newcomers
And Members

Periodically, GBF has offered a Foundations of Buddhism workshop. This has proved to be an inadequate response to our many new members who would like some guidance as they explore Buddhism and how it can be applied to their lives. We can now offer a twice-a-month opportunity to ask questions about meditation, Buddhist principles and GBF. Although prompted by the needs of new members, it is also for anyone who has questions they want to explore. We will do our best to share what we know and direct the questioner to other sources.

To participate in this 45-minute session, show up at 9:30am on the first or third Sunday sitting and take a seat near the altar in the front room. A senior member of GBF will be there to lead the session. If this format works, we will expand it to all four Sundays in the next several months.

Your child keeps trying to get into, and you say, "Stop that! Don't reach into that drawer or you might get cut" (as you smack your child's hand). Here you have used anger to warn your child of this danger. That is an expression of anger, but from the point of view of the Transformation traditions it is an expression of compassion and caring for others. How anger is expressed, however, is important. Is it for the benefit of others? Or is it self-centered, for your own benefit? This is not always easy to answer, and of course in many instances it might be mixed. So in these Transformation traditions, the training and the program is to transform these energies (the energy of lust, the energy of greed, the energy of anger), into an altruistic motivation, to benefit others. This is different from the Purification tradition, which states that these energies are bad, and require purification.

It's a very fine line, and it's easy to fool oneself. "I'm being angry for the benefit of all other beings." Yeah, right. That's the great difficulty with this. How do you verify this? How do you examine your mind and make an objective assessment of the situation? But it is a response to the Four Noble Truths: how do you bring about a cessation of suffering? The cessation of suffering is to use energy for the benefit of others by overcoming one's self-cherishing mind, because suffering in this tradition is seen as being egocentric. Anger arises because I didn't get what I wanted, so I'm pissed. The parent who is angry at her child for reaching into a drawer full of knives is not angry because she didn't get what she wanted. She's angry because the child is in danger and won't listen to her. This is an expression of compassion for her child.

A good contrast between the Awakening model and the Transformation model is in the use of the intellect. In the Awakening model, like in the Zen tradition, my teacher was never tired of saying, "Cut off all thinking!" I'd go in to my teacher for a koan interview, and I'd sit there and start thinking, "He might take out a stick and hit me." "Cut off all thinking!" Thinking will not help. Why? Because when you are thinking you're clinging. Thinking and clinging are kind of equated in this tradition.

In the Transformation tradition, the idea is: how can we use the energy of thinking to benefit others? Discriminative consciousness is normally seen as the primary means by which human beings separate themselves from each other, and separate themselves from the rest of existence. But in this tradition, the idea is that thinking itself can be a means for transforming our relationship to existence.

The Gratitude Model

The last model that I will be talking about today is what I call the Gratitude model. This is operative predominantly in the Pure Land tradition of Buddhism. Pure Land is the dominant school of Buddhism in many Asian countries: China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and Taiwan. Numerically, it is by far the largest, and interestingly enough, is also the first Buddhist tradition to come to the United States. To give an example
of how this was done, there is in certain Pure Land schools a training methodology called Naikan, in which you systematically focus on everything which has been given to you throughout your life, beginning with your birth. Gratitude for your parents arises. Then speech was given to you, so you feel gratitude for those who gave you speech. Gratitude for all the meals that have been given to you and so on. The antidote to suffering in this model is brought about through the cultivation of gratitude. This is the least monastically oriented of the models, which is one of the reasons for its widespread appeal: this kind of cultivation of gratitude does not particularly depend upon a monastic context. You do not have to leave the world to become aware of all that has been given to you.

The purpose of this kind of training is to make it conscious, so if you undergo Naikan training, and you say something like, “I am very grateful to my parents,” they’ll ask you specifically what did your parents do that you are grateful for. They don’t like to leave it general. Very specifically, what did your second-grade teacher teach you that was so important in your life today. So it’s pretty thorough.

What happens here is one’s sense of self-importance falls away, because one begins to realize that one’s current life is a gift from others. Gratitude then spontaneously appears.

Epilogue

So these are just four models of, I am sure, many. The model of Purification, the model of Awakening, the model of Transformation, and the model of Gratitude. Which do you like?

My purpose in presenting these models is not to say that one is better than the other, or even that one is more efficacious than the other, but to show that Buddhism has these certain interpretations, and that in this room there are people who would be more inclined to one over another. But all of them are rooted in the insight of the Buddha as expressed in the Four Noble Truths. Then you have these various ways of elucidating these insights.

The interpretations are not mutually exclusive. It tends to be the case that a particular Buddhist tradition will emphasize a particular model, and it also tends to be the case that those schools who have adopted a particular model will denigrate the others. But I would like to suggest that they are neither logically nor experientially mutually exclusive.

GBF is a cross-current of many traditions taking place simultaneously. I don’t know if GBF will have an opportunity to specifically bring this up: the idea that different traditions can speak to each other and to enrich and inform each other. This opportunity certainly exists here. In the Orient, there is not much of an opportunity for that. The schools in the Orient tend to stay pretty separate from each other. One of the wonderful things that is happening in the West now, particularly in groups like this, is the merging of these traditions. I think something really creative and very fruitful can blossom from that.▼
Happy New Year!

Local Dharma

Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays,
10:30am: HIV Sitting Group.
Hartford Street Zen Center,
57 Hartford Street, San Francisco.
Information 415.861.6160.

Thursdays, 12:30-1:30pm:
Mindfulness Meditation for People
living with chronic or life-threat-
ening illness. Instruction, practice,
talk. Led by Eugene Cash & Frank
Ostaseski. Zen Hospice Project.,
Information 415.285.7502.

Mondays, December 7 & 21,
January 4 & 18, 7pm-9pm:
San Francisco Mindfulness
Community—followers of
Thich Nhat Hanh meet.
Hartford Street Zen Center.
Information 415.252.8476.

Wednesdays, December 2 and
January 6: Meditation and
Dhamma talk led by Ajahn Amaro
of Abhayagiri Monastery.
746 46th Avenue, SE
Information 707.485.1630.

Sundays, December 6 and
December 20, January 3 and
January 17, 10:30am-12pm:
East Bay Sitting Group for Gay
and Lesbian People.
4120 Oakmore Road, Oakland.
Information 510.482.2860.

Sunday, December 6, 5pm-7pm:
Death, Change and Illusion.
Nyingma Institute, 1815 Highland
Place, Berkeley.
Information 510.843.6812.

Saturday, December 19, 9am-
5pm: Monastic Daylong Retreat
led by Ajahn Amaro.
Spirit Rock, 5000 Sir Francis
Drake Boulevard, Woodacre.
Information 707.485.1630.

Local Dharma Centers

A list of local Dharma centers is
available on our website and will
be available as a handout at our
Sunday sittings. We encourage our
members to explore what these
other Dharma centers can offer to
their practice.

GBF Newsletter

Needs You

Please send in your Newsletter
comments, questions, articles,
Dharma lessons, and poems by the
10th of the prior month,

via

surface mail, to:
Editor, GBF Newsletter
2261 Market Street, #422
San Francisco, CA 94114

We do reserve the right to edit
for clarity or brevity.

Photos:
Front Page  Lamayuru monastery,
Ladakh, India. Larry Hermson.
Page 4  Buddha in meditation, Lopburi
style, Thailand. Photographer unknown.
Page 6  Novice monks, Chang Saen,
Thailand. Larry Hermson.
Page 8  Buddha, Sukhodaya style,
15th Century, Thailand. Photographer
unknown.
GBF Calendar
San Francisco/Bay Area Events

Sunday Morning Sittings,
9:30am and 10:30am:
San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett Street, between 21st and 22nd, one block west of Mission Street. Beginning meditators' instruction is available at 9:30am on the first and third Sundays.

December 6    Jim Wilson
Guest speaker

December 13   Presentation—
Healing Racism in Our Sanghas

December 20   BASE
Guest speakers*

December 27   Discussion

January 3     Jim Wilson
Guest speaker

January 10    Discussion

January 17    Tony Richardson
Guest Speaker

January 24    Discussion

January 31    Discussion

*Tova Green, Terry Stein, and Paul Shepard will be speaking about the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement.

Thursday Evening Sittings,
7:45pm: Open to all GBF participants. Please speak to hosts for directions to their homes.

1st Thursday  Bill Kirkpatrick

2nd Thursday  Lee Robbins

3rd Thursday  December: Martin Kung
January: Clint Seiter

No sittings December 24 & 31.
4th and 5th    Larry White
Thursdays

Tuesday, December 1, 7:30pm:
Steering Committee Meeting
(open to all GBF participants),
at the home of Nick Kolivas,

Sunday, December 20, 2:30pm:
Mailing Party. Snake's home,

Thursday, December 31, 8pm:
New Year’s Eve Potluck Party at
the home of Clarence Wong,

Tuesday, January 5, 7:30pm:
Steering Committee Meeting
(open to all GBF participants),
at the home of Larry White,

Saturday, January 30, 7pm:
GBF Potluck Dinner at the home
of Bill Kirkpatrick,

Saturday, February 6, 8:45am-
12:30pm: A Morning of Meditation
led by Daishin David Sunseri, sponsored by GBF. Sitting and walking meditation, a short Dharma talk, and some group recitation. New and experienced practitioners are welcome. Held at the home of Neil Fang.

Bring a meditation cushion or bench. $10 donation, space is limited. To register, send your name, phone number and check (made out to GBF) to Neil at the above address.

Thursday Evenings—
New Format
For GBF Sittings

We are refocusing our Thursday evening sittings to emphasize in-depth learning from key books or Buddhist texts. The new format starts in January with the recently published book by Lama Surya Das, Awakening The Buddha Within (paperback, Bantam Doubleday Dell, $15). As usual we start at 7:45pm with brief socializing, followed by a 35-minute silent meditation, then tea, sweets and conversation leading to a discussion of sequential chapters in the book. The session ends with either a brief five-minute meditation or a dedication of merit at 10pm. The January meetings will focus on Chapter One, “We Are All Buddhas” and Chapter Two, “A Tibetan Prophecy.”

Meditation Groups in Sonoma County

There are currently two Buddhist meditation groups affiliated with GBF in Sonoma County. One group, for Gay men, meets in Santa Rosa (and sometimes in Graton). For more information, please contact Avery Freed.

A second group meets near the town of Sonoma every other Tuesday evening. Although at present group members are all Gay men, the group is open to Lesbians and non-Gay practitioners. For more information, contact Bob Hass,
“Having a wonderful time; wish I was here.”

from *Awakening the Buddha Within*
by Lama Surya Das

(Some Dharma centers use a mindfulness bell which is rung periodically, causing everyone to stop for a few breaths and sense where you are and what you are feeling at the moment. As you move through your day, ring a mindfulness bell in your mind and stop for a few breaths. This will get you closer to the above quote.)

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**How to Reach Us**

**GBF Sangha**
Send correspondence and address changes to: GBF, 2261 Market Street, #422, San Francisco, CA 94114. For 24-hour information on GBF activities or to leave a message, call 415.974.9878.

**GBF Newsletter**
Send submissions to: Editor, GBF Newsletter, 2261 Market Street, #422, San Francisco, CA 94114. If possible, include a DOS or Windows disk in Word or as a text file, along with your hardcopy.