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.

Finding the Muscle
from a lecture by Katherine Thanas

Recently someone asked, “How do you get rid of the pain?” An experienced meditator said, “The pain never goes away.” The great secret of Buddhist practice is we learn to open to the pain, the frustration, the suffering that never goes away. We might call this pain the gap between what's happening and what we are willing to accept... the gap between the moment that's here and a better moment we might imagine.

That's a different result from what we anticipate when we begin practice. Someone—a long-time sitter—told me recently that he was very disappointed with his practice. He recently “blew” it, got really angry, “lost” it. He was very disappointed in himself.
Possible Change of Sunday Sitting Schedule

In our September discussion periods, members of the Steering Committee will submit a proposal for your consideration, to change our Sunday sitting schedule. The plan is to eliminate the 9:30am sitting, and move the 10:30am sitting to 10am, which would allow time for our speakers to give lengthier presentations. Your opinions, preferences, and feelings about this idea are necessary before any changes could be made. Please come, and let us know what you think.

Submit to GBF

We always invite you to submit your essays, articles, poems, and letters, as well as artwork and photographs, for inclusion in this community newsletter. Our Sangha encompasses many talents and much experience, and we want to share your insights and creative energies. For submission guidelines, see the back page.

We think that when we've been practicing for many years we should have found equanimity, a calm mind, some place safe from the winds of anger, greed, and confusion. We think by now we should have calm sailing, that when we see some heavy-duty thing coming ahead, we should adjust our sails, monitor our breath, our posture, our state of mind, and sail smoothly through it.

What actually happens is that we are constantly falling out of balance and returning to balance again and again, until falling out is one movement with returning to balance. Maybe practice is learning to return to balance, rather than dwelling in balance.

When we practice for many years, we are more willing to know our experience, and to let it pass through us. The longer we sit, the bigger our stomach and heart become, and the softer our muscles and mental formations become.

We may think we should be centered and calm, but if we try to practice equanimity before we have met all the energies of our lives, circumstances that have not yet been resolved, nor completely met, await us. When the circumstances are ripe, frustration, or joy, or anger, rage, longing, whatever, pop up. If we don't let that stuff come up because we have prematurely found a place of ease, we do not see what has to be seen.

Expressing our anger, or our bully nature, or whatever, allows us to see, “Ah. Here's something I actually do. I can be a bully. I can really unload anger, or power-trip someone; I can kick someone around.” If we don't ever see ourselves enacting this, we continue to live our lives dually, deceiving ourselves. By denying or degrading fields of energy within, we bypass large parts of ourselves, perhaps the juicy creative energy of our lives.

When you have really known your experience, entered it, penetrated it—you don't hang on to it any longer. The secret power of that energy returns into continuous exchange with the universe. It is only when we don't really admit our energy that we are pushed around by its power.

Dogen Zengi says, “The Great Way of the Buddhas is ultimate reality, things as they are.” This great way is constantly being transmitted, without interruption. Today we are enjoying these beautiful apple branches, that Jim cut from the tree, but in order for the apple blossoms to grow, last autumn's leaves had to fall. The Great Way of the Buddhas is the actual way your mind is, the way your body is, your thoughts, your feelings, everything that's coming up for you as you sit.

The main precept of our practice-life is that “practice is not separate from enlightenment.” Right now is the only moment of our life and in this moment delusion appears, enlightenment arises. Inseparable, arising together. This moment is fully delusion. This moment is fully enlightenment.
The thinking mind grasps at things; its function is to discriminate, to distinguish, to discern, and label. So how do we practice the Buddha Dharma in the midst of the arisings of small mind? The great contemporary teacher Uchiyama-roshi says that how you do that is to "open the hand of thought."

We practice to notice the hand of thought grabbing onto our formulations, our judgments, our opinions; and to find the muscle to release the tension, open the hand, and let it all go. Finding the flexibility, the inner balance. That’s how we convert our Karmic life into Dharmic life.

Enlightenment is completely beyond our ideas of enlightenment and delusion. Enlightenment is freely coursing through our ideas of enlightenment and delusion. And the pain of our separation from our deep wide nature doesn’t end until we close the gap that separates this moment from our fantasies about it.▼

Katherine Thanas is Head Teacher at Santa Cruz Zen Center. This article first appeared in the February, 1995 issue of GBF Newsletter.
Would You Like to Join a Weekly GBF Dinner Group?

Some members of GBF have proposed forming two very informal weekly dinner groups: one in San Francisco, the other in the East Bay. Once a week, six or seven of us could meet and share a simple potluck dinner together. The meeting place would rotate from one person's home to the next. Many of us are single men, and it might be nice to know one another a little better, break bread together, and talk about our day around the dinner table. Right now, we're just trying to see if you have a strong enough interest to sustain this kind of thing. If you would like to explore this further, call Clint Seiter at 415.386.3088 if you live in San Francisco, or Howard King at 510.649.1697 if you live in the East Bay.

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship Meditation Instructions

by Eric Koval

These instructions are intended only for those who do not yet have a practice, or for those who want to learn a new one. If you already have a silent meditation practice, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, and if you plan to continue it, please feel free to practice it at any meeting or retreat of the Gay Buddhist Fellowship.

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship is an ecumenical organization composed of people from several different Buddhist traditions and lineages. Although the following instructions come from one of the Vipassana lineages, the practice of mindfulness or awareness is central to all of our traditions, so cultivating awareness should not interfere with either the spirit or the practice of your own tradition, whatever it may be.

Sitting Meditation

Posture. Sit or kneel in a position that feels stable, using a cushion, a meditation bench, a chair, or the plain floor. Try to keep your spine straight, in order to help keep your mind more alert. Don't force your body into a posture it isn't used to; rather, let it stretch gradually over time into the new posture. Don't hold your body in a position where it might be injured. In order to calm the mind, it's better to remain unmoving in sitting meditation, but to avoid hurting your body, shift positions if you feel much pain.

Mindfulness of Breathing. “Mindfulness,” the Buddha said, “is the pathway to the Deathless.” Close your eyes and turn your attention inward. Find that place in your body where breathing feels most obvious. For most people that's at the abdomen, or the nostrils, but it can be anywhere. Bring your attention to that place, and try to keep it there without a sense of forcing. Simply know the bare sensations of breathing, with as much directness and subtlety as possible. Let awareness of other things go. Your mind will wander in thought. As soon as you notice that you are wandering, without judgment let the thoughts go, and bring your awareness back to breathing with a kind of gentle, gliding motion in your mind. Don't try to stop thinking, a common error, because that effort will surely fail. Just let go of thought once you recognize it, and return to mindfulness of the breath. Be patient and gentle with yourself. Training our minds to be aware is very difficult, but success is certain if we patiently persist.

Extending Mindfulness. Once you find that your attention has begun to wander less, and can stay on the sensations of breathing with some stability, then try extending mindfulness to other sensations in your body. Use awareness of breathing as your anchor: start there, then extend your awareness to some other sensation, like tightness in the shoulders, and then return “home” to awareness of breathing. Notice clearly which sensations are pleasant, which are unpleasant, and which are neutral. Can you learn to be with them all equally, without reaction? (cont on page 7)
GBF Calendar
September 1999 San Francisco/Bay Area Events

Sunday Morning Sittings,
9:30am and 10:30am: San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett St, between 21st & 22nd, one block west of Mission St.

September 5 Jim Wilson
Monthly Speaker

September 12 Discussion

September 19 Steve Peskind
Guest Speaker

September 26 Discussion

'Steve Peskind, a student and practitioner of Buddhism since 1973, has been an HIV/AIDS counselor and educator since 1981. Steve is a co-founder of Coming Home Hospice, and the San Francisco Shanti Project, where he trained volunteers and co-facilitated the first support groups in San Francisco for people living with AIDS, and their families and friends. Steve is now a counselor for people living with Traumatic Brain Injury, a freelance writer, and a volunteer coordinator of the Buddhist AIDS Project (BAP). With BAP, he is currently writing and volunteer editing the anthology, Heart Lessons from an Epidemic: Buddhist Practice and Living with HIV, for Parallax Press.

Thursday Evening Sittings:
Have been suspended for an indefinite period, due to reduced attendance.

Tuesday, September 7, 7:30pm:
Steering Committee Meeting
(open to all GBF participants), Marty Cole's home, 237 Masonic (at Turk), SF, 415.885.1700.

Meditation Group in Sonoma County
A Buddhist meditation group affiliated with GBF meets near the town of Sonoma every other Tuesday evening. Although at present, group members include Gay men and Lesbians, the group is also open to non-Gay practitioners. For more information, contact Bob Haas, 707.938.8868.

Ongoing Meditation Group On Monday Nights
Led by Jon Bernie, a meditation teacher in San Francisco with thirty years meditation experience (including eleven years of Zen Buddhist training and seven years of Vipassana training). The group is free and open to all; donations gratefully accepted. Quaker Meeting House, 65 9th Street (between Mission & Market), 7pm-9pm. For more information, call Jon at 415.621.7314.

East Bay Meditation and Discussion Group
Wednesdays, 7pm–9pm:
Meditation, tea and discussion.
For more information, call Howard, 510.649.1697.

GBF Website
http://www.gaybuddhist.org
Local Dharma

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

GBF Homeless Project

If you are available to volunteer your time to the Hamilton Family Center on the third Saturday of any month, please contact Clint Seiter at 415.386.3088. A dinner is prepared by GBF volunteers, funded by GBF.

Your Thrift Store Donations Earn Money For GBF

GBF members can donate their quality cast-offs to the Community Thrift Store (CTS) and GBF will receive a quarterly check based on the volume of items sold. This is a great way to support our Sangha, and the community. Bring your extra clothing and other items to CTS 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. Tell the worker you are donating to GBF. Our ID number is 40. Information 415.861.4910.

Local Dharma

September 1999 San Francisco/Bay Area Events

Tuesdays, Thursdays, & Fridays, 10:30am: HIV Sitting Group, Hartford Street Zen Center, 57 Hartford St, SF. Information 415.863.2507.

Wednesdays, 7:15pm: Evening Meditation. Gay Men’s Buddhist Sangha. Two 20 minute sessions with a short break between and social time after. All practitioner levels welcome. Information 415.207.8113.

Thursdays, 12:30pm-1:30pm: Mindfulness Meditation for People Living with Chronic or Life-Threatening Illness. Instruction, practice, talk led by Eugene Cash and Frank Ostaseski. Zen Hospice Project. Information 415.285.7502.

Sundays, August 1 & 15, 10:30am-12pm: East Bay Sitting Group for Gay and Lesbian People, 4120 Oakmore Rd., Oakland. Information 510.482.2860.

Saturday, September 18: A Path of Peace: A Day of Mindfulness in the Heart of Oakland, with Thich Nhat Hanh. Lakeside Park at Lake Merritt in Oakland. Information 510.527.3751.

Saturday, September 18, 8:30am-1:30pm: Morning of Meditation. Gay Men’s Buddhist Sangha. Information 415.207.8113.

Sunday, September 19, 9am to 5pm: Gay Men’s Buddhist Sangha Dharma Dialogue Session, Focus on Interdependency and Co-Origination.
Ask Dharma Daddy

Is Karma like fate? What does “Buddha” really mean? Why did Bodhidharma go East while Hsuan Tsang went West? What is a Koan? Why are Chinese monks celibate but Japanese monks married?

Send your questions on Buddhist doctrines and practices to Roger Corless, 1757 Algaroba Street, Apt. 301, Honolulu HI 96826, or by e-mail to <roger.corless@duke.edu>. Roger, a.k.a. Dharma Daddy, will do his best to enlighten you. Questions and answers will be printed in a subsequent issue of the newsletter. If there is sufficient interest, “Ask Dharma Daddy” may become a regular feature. Please do not send personal questions: Roger is not a therapist or a Dharma teacher, just a professor.

Spread the E-Dharma

One of the ways we spread the message of the Dharma is through our Website. We would like to invite you to share this opportunity to serve our Sangha as Internet messengers of the Dharma. If you are willing to share your time and energy in teaming up to update the website, please contact Dexter Young at 415.643.9776, email <jddy@aol.com>.

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Walking Meditation

Walking meditation is identical to sitting meditation, except that you are training your mind to pay attention to a moving body instead of a sitting one. Try to maintain awareness of the sensations of walking, bringing attention back when you see that the mind has wandered off into thought. In some traditions, formal walking meditation is done in a group; in others, it’s done alone. If you do it alone, it’s useful to move more slowly than usual, and to walk without a destination. Walk back and forth on some straight track about fifteen to twenty paces long.

Mindfulness in Daily Life

In every moment, during any activity at all, we have a chance to wake up by being present, and being present comes from being aware. Pay attention to sensations in all the body’s postures: sitting, walking, standing, lying down. Watch what your mind is doing in all its moods. Ask yourself, “What’s happening?” in order to stimulate mindfulness in the moment. Then ask, “How am I relating to this?” in order to see whether you’re caught or free. Is there reaction in your mind? Is there a way to let go? The Buddha said that freedom through mindfulness comes like slowly filling a bucket, drop by patient drop. Each moment of seeing clearly what is here and then letting it be, though it may seem inconsequential, is significant. One day the bucket overflows.

Mental Noting

A word about the practice of noting what is happening by labeling it with a silent thought. Some of our Buddhist traditions practice noting; others avoid it. You might experiment with it to see if it’s helpful to you or not. If you decide to try it, just identify whatever is happening in your body or mind by labeling it with one word spoken silently: “in,” “out” or “rising, falling” for breathing, “thinking,” “seeing,” “joy,” “tingling,” “anger,” “burning,” and so forth. When you are moving slowly in walking meditation, try noting each part of each step: “lifting, moving, placing.” The value of noting is to help direct mindfulness to whatever’s happening, and also to antidote thought without thought.▼

Eric Kolvig was a founder of Gay Buddhist Fellowship, and is now the resident teacher of the Santa Fe Vipassana Sangha in New Mexico. This article first appeared in the December, 1994 issue of GBF Newsletter.
Empty your mind of all thoughts.
Let your heart be at peace.
Watch the turmoil of beings,
but contemplate their return.

Each separate being in the universe
returns to the common source.
Returning to the source is serenity.

If you don’t realize the source,
you stumble in confusion and sorrow.

When you realize where you come from,
you naturally become tolerant,
disinterested, amused,
kindhearted as a grandmother,
dignified as a king.

Immersed in the wonder of the Tao,
you can deal with whatever life brings you,
and when death comes, you are ready.


How to Reach Us
GBF Sangha
Send correspondence and address changes to: GBF, 2336 Market Street #9, San Francisco, CA 94114. Send e-mail to <gbfsf@hotmail.com>. For 24-hour information on GBF activities or to leave a message, call 415.974.9878.

GBF Newsletter
Send submissions to: Editor, GBF Newsletter, 2336 Market Street #9, San Francisco, CA 94114. If possible, include a Mac 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: <chalburt@aol.com>. We do reserve the right to edit for clarity or brevity.