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.

The Visualization of Home

Tony Richardson spoke to GBF on May 21, 2000. The first half of his talk appeared in the August 2000 newsletter under the heading "Me and My Lama." In the second half of his talk, Richardson guided us through a somatic visualization exercise.

A bit of preamble for this. One of the things that the Tibetans like to do is exactly the opposite of what we in the West have decided to do to be better people. The whole thing about psychotherapy and all that is, you know, the onion stuff, and the rings of the onion. You peel the rings of the onion off and therefore learn more about yourself. Tibetans are much more in favor of starting at the very center of the onion and moving out, whereas we're very much in favor of starting from the outside of the onion and moving in. Because the Tibetans are so interested in moving from the center of the onion, it's very disruptive to those rings of the onion. Those rings of the onion are the things we use everyday to say hi to each other and look in the mirror and recognize ourselves. So when Tibetans start to do stuff with you, or you start to do with them something on the center part, then there is a lot of disruption that happens, and it's an uncomfortable process. However, since we don't have a direct relationship with that center part of ourselves that we can so easily know, maybe if we grew up in another culture, part of the barrier is to look into those places. We don't do that much of that — we look at the outside much more, or the more superficial rings. We're not so practiced at it. I've been wondering how to help with this process without going all one side or the other. We seem to need our rings basically just to give ourselves some food and function every day, but we can get really caught in those things and spend all our time with them and not nurture the central part of us which is so essential to the change in Buddhism. So how are we to go about trying to do both of these? The guided imagery is an attempt to do that, distilled out of a little bit of practice, and it may not fit you and may not be something you want to do, but you may find it useful in that process.

The other thing I want to say is that the Tibetans do a lot of ritual
GBF Committees
We always want and need interested participants, so please, JOIN IN! Call the contact person on the committee, or talk to him (or anyone on that committee) at a GBF sitting or event. This is a great practice opportunity!

Steering Committee
Teng-How Bae, Patrick Barnett
Jack Busby Paul, Dowd
Justin Hecht, Hal Hershey
David Holmes, Tom Huley
Howard King, Michael Langdon
Robin Levitt, Lee Robins
Clint Seiter, Paul Shep
Jim Stewart, Mark Wales
Peter Washburn, Don Weipart
Larry White, Jim Wilson
Dexter Young

Social Committee
Clarence Wong,
Contact 415.929.2181

Newsletter
Michael Langdon, Editor
Greg King, Art Director
Howard King, Jim Stewart,
Editorial Consultants
Francis Gates, Nonprofit Mail
Snake Woolington, Mailing Party
Robin Levitt, Mailing List

Practice Committee
Alan Oliver, Contact
415.267.6970

Development Committee
Clarence Wong,
Contact 415.929.2181

Thursday Night Sittings
Bill Kirkpatrick 415.621.8549
Lee Robbins 415.552.9800
Martin Kung 415.440.9692
Larry White 415.626.8107

Newsletter Mailing Party
Snake Woolington,
Contact 415.929.6378

Hamilton House
Clint Seiter, Contact
415.386.3088

Website Committee
David Van Varden,
Contact 415.621.2010

Sunday Sitting Facilitators
Larry White, Contact
415.626.8107

where they actually place inside you, in the central parts of you, these seeds, if you like, that would be sitting in the middle of the onion. They'd be sitting right in the fertile soil in the middle, and they are happy for them to take life times or generations for these seeds to grow and push the onion in its way. And because of their culture, they have been very interested in it in the heart. Now I happen to think that for gay men we've got some other stuff involved. And it's a little lower than the heart. So I'm thinking that maybe we should start down there. So with that in mind, let's see how you do.

Notice that your back is on something firm. Get yourself into whatever you feel is in alignment, with a sort of a connection between top and bottom somehow. Until you can take that little leap for granted, that you've got a connection between the top and the bottom, because we're not going to talk about it much, but just any sitting practice has already helped you with this. I'm interested and want you to be interested in your asshole. That's just a general interest of mine. And I want you to come down and see what you can notice about it. Any area around your ass, insides, outsides and what you can notice about you as an asshole. I don't mean that really, but down there, there you come. Now if you are able to notice the anal verge, if you like, it's held by structures all the way around, part of your perineum, that thing that stop you falling out when you stand up, not just the holding of your anal verge but that whole skin area. And if you move forwards – it's quite a long way in consciousness, but if you can move forward you will come to your genitals, to your testicles. And if you can, you notice that. And what is sometimes a bit more difficult is to move sideways out towards your hips, to the cheeks of your butt, and outwards. Now that's actually a diaphragm; it's skin of course and stuff like that, but there's also a set of muscles under there which is known as the perineal diaphragm. And if you want to notice it, you can practice whatever breathing cycle works for you, either breathing out or breathing in, and letting that part of your body, between where your asshole is, where your hips are, where your genitals are, come down to touch the thing you are sitting on. It's as though you were moving your hips apart, because you're bringing that stuff down to touch onto whatever you're sitting on. It's technically impossible to get very far with that, but you can get a sense of it as you either breathe out or breathe in. I like to do it as I breathe out; some people like to do it as they breathe in.

For those of you who want to be advanced, bounce any seed syllable off this sensation. You can pick OM if you like, just going OMMM joined together. (Group OMS together.) You can do it by just imagining that it's happening; you can do it by the breathing; you can do it with the seed syllable, whichever works best for you, or by rocking.

If we were to assume that this is
the base of us, the bottom part of us, and this made the base of a mountain if you like, and that the mountain moves from that square rhomboid base, and starts to move up as a number of small peaks and valleys so that it's not particularly a peaked mountain; its more sort of a flat mountain - and at the flat part the mountain starts to arise between where the front of the asshole is at the back and back of the bladder or penis is at the front. So what you're having is this little triangle wherein your prostate sits between where your asshole is and where your bladder is, the little prostatic triangle in there which no one pays much attention to except us guys. We like it very much. And imagine that there is a mountain arising and its peak comes up to where the lip is. Now this mountain is part of many different traditions, and in Tibetan Buddhism it's called the body mandala. It's often referred to as Mt. Samuru, but these are just things that you may read sometime or may already know about. But what you notice between where the perineum is and where the top of the mountain is - because it moves like a pyramid, a little bit like a triangle, there is space around it. And that space automatically becomes full of fluid. And so what you actually have - if you were to look from the top of you down, you would see just the top of the mountain, and it would look like an island in a sea. And you can design your island as you like, a big fat island if you like, peaks, peaks and valleys. You can have lakes, whatever, but in fact the island goes all the way down to this triangle, but you won't see that from the top. What you will see from the top is the surrounding sea and the island. Now that island is the center of the onion. That's the island where the seeds go. That's the middle part. There are many advantages to having a middle part, many useful things. That's home if you like. In Sogyal Rinpoche's book, that's where home is; that's where we come to. One of the things that happens to us when we get distressed is that we forget about our home. We forget about it. The whole point of going back and rebuilding this home or revisiting it or watching it form is simply a practice of, "There is a place in which there is home." Now if this metaphor is useful to you, I suggest you use it as often as you like. Try not to have it be only a useful metaphor in a particular place. If you do it easier when you do meditation or when you sit down or align yourself, fine. But it's okay to do it while you're walking around. You could consider doing this while you're having sex. You can consider doing this while you're having a shit, while you're breathing, while you're eating, while you're thinking, because it's a structure - that's all it is. It's not an effort; it's not something you have to make; it's simply a structure until it becomes simply something that is there. And if for you that is possible - that it should make itself and you should make it there, and it should be a place where you can come to - then it has some small advantages. And the small advantage is that there's a place to come to no matter how difficult the process of awakening gets, and it does. The process of awakening is wonderful, it's extraordinary, but for the body, it's very, very difficult, and so sometimes you need, even with your body so upset and even with your mind so busy, and even with your soul crazed by thoughts, you need another place. If this can be your place, then this is a useful exercise. If not, dispel it, throw it away, don't use it. Just give it a try, see what you think. (Group OMS).

It may be too early for any of you to say, but if there's anything you want to say or ask about that -

GBF: That's probably one of the most important teachings I've had in a long time. That is wonderful, and there seems to be something missing, the next step maybe, and how it connects with the heart.

TR: Yes, let me do a really quick what happens. The next formal practice from that is to imagine that what we did was to make the center of the onion as the self. Then the next piece that needs to happen - see, we're going to dissolve the self in the end. The only place we can dissolve the self into really, at first from our point of view, is love. From the larger point of view, one would dissolve the self into nothing. But we ain't going to go to nothing. We've had too much of close to nothing, because feeling that you don't have a self is too horrible, so if you build a self first, then the next thing you do is dissolve it into love. Now that's the next part.
Local Dharma Centers
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 Dharma centers can offer to their practice.

Meditation Group in Sonoma County
A Buddhist meditation group meets near the town of Sonoma every other Wednesday evening starting at 7pm, and GBFers are always welcome. The group now has Gay and non-Gay practitioners. For more information, contact Bob Hass, 707.938.8868.

Ongoing Meditation Group On Monday Nights
Led by Jon Berne, 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), 7-9pm. For more information, call Jon at 415.621.2314.

GBF Website
www.gaybuddhist.org

But if you don’t have the self, then there’s no point in love; there’s nothing for love. And the next higher practice is that we start to vibrate that place, that island if you like, and we do practices around the heart, and then we have the heart drop a tiny little amorita onto the island, and it drops down onto the island. What you basically do is begin to turn the self into not just an island but into a more sophisticated, loving, compassionate being by just dropping these little drops, and it’s very beautiful, but if you don’t do that first — you also have to do some practice to hold the heart first. You can’t just drop your heart down there; it will be messy.

QBF: You said that Buddhists like gay men are subversive. What do you mean by that?

TR: Because, you know, order is on the outside rings of everything, right? And Buddhism is so much about the inside that the outsiders don’t matter in the same way as they do for other people who believe that outside is everything. So because for us, the experience arises from within, we keep shattering or changing those cycles. And that’s against the rules. What we’re supposed to be doing is making these rings proper, better, more like everyone else. So that’s a subversive act. That itself is subversive to a culture that’s trying to define itself as this. And we’re not interested in that. We’re interested in what — if you’re going to be this, where is that supported from here? And if it’s not supported from here, then it needs to change. Another way of saying it is, we’re into change all the time, into change. Cultures are not.

GBF: In the initial practice, the focus remains there or does it rise up?

TR: In this exercise, you do this particular practice. Now many of you already have islands, and you’ll get immediately bored with this practice. Who gives a damn? You’ve got one; you don’t care. When that happens, it happens. It just goes away; it’s gone. But in this practice, because it’s the practice of making the island, you stay there, and you do it over and over again until you forget it, it forgets you, you can’t be bothered, whatever. Gone. We’re not interested, really; once we have made a self, we’re not so interested in it, as is natural. The first thing you say is, “What do I do with this?” And that is often the next question: now what? But for any people who haven’t actually built the island at all, so much else of what they do is useless: there’s no place to put it all; there’s no home.

GBF: In Western esoterica, you build the island in the heart?

TR: In Tibetan Buddhism, you build it in the heart. And I just think gay men ain’t going to do that. We ain’t going to do that; we’re going to build it in our crotch. I could be wrong about that. We’ll see.

GBF: So this practice is an adaptation —

TR: Yeah.

GBF: Not field-tested?

TR: Not field-tested? No, you’re the field test.
Ask Dharma Daddy

This month we have two questions from Crixen of New York.

Dear Dharma Daddy:

Christians have original sin, and Buddhists have what I call original delusion. How did it happen? How did we inherit our deluded view, when naturally we're innocent, i.e., enlightened? Who screwed up and when?

Technically, it's called beginningless unawareness. So, already you get the point: the question "Who screwed up and when?" is a non-question. We are conditioned to believe that everything has a beginning. Western thinking is largely based on a combination of Biblical and Hellenistic viewpoints that, despite their differences, are alike in seeing the world as going back in time in a more or less linear fashion to a definite starting point. It seems like common sense to us that there must have been a time when time began. But, is that really common sense? When we trace an event back to its causes, and back and back, to the causes and causes, what, in fact, do we find? More causes. We never actually find a beginning. We may think this is just because we have limited minds, but the Buddha also, we are told, found the same thing. He called it samsara, cyclic existence. Existence is circular, and a circle does not have a beginning.

An analogy I like is that of the complex iterative function in Mathematics. If we take an equation and keep plugging the answer into itself, iterating, or repeating, the same function, and display the results as color-coded areas on a computer screen, we get beautiful abstract shapes such as the Mandelbrot Set. We can keep iterating the function as long as we wish; until we become tired or run out of computer time, there is no natural end to the process. Figures such as the Mandelbrot Set are said to be infinitely deep but bounded. They are infinite, because they go on, in theory, forever. They are deep, because the iterations take us further in, not further back. They are bounded for the same reason they don't spread out: they keep imploding, going further in. A surprising feature of the figures is that every so often, amongst the changing shapes, a shape emerges which is similar to, although not precisely identical with, one we saw earlier in the process. Isn't this like samsara, our experience of life? Samsara is infinitely deep, or beginningless, and it is bounded, that is to say limited or conditioned, and we keep doing similar things and getting similar results.

What about original innocence? The teaching that we are already enlightened is popular in some forms of Mahayana, especially in East Asia. In Japan it is called hongaku shiho, Fundamental Enlightenment Thought. If we are already enlightened, why do we need to practice? The classic solution was given by Zen Master Dogen, who taught that fundamental enlightenment

GBF Homeless Project

If you are able to volunteer your time to the Hamilton Family Center on the second Saturday of any month, please contact Clint Seiter at 415.386.3088. GBF volunteers prepare a dinner, funded by GBF, for homeless families.

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. So far this year we have received over $800 through members' generosity. 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.

GBF needs you to contribute your services to the Sangha as a Host for Sunday morning satsangs. Sign up to help provide a hospitable setting for our members to come together. Call Justin Hecht for information: 415.673.0283.
(hongaku) and manifest enlightenment (shikaku), and therefore practice (sitting) and attainment (liberation), are non-dual. We sit as a Buddha, he said, not to become a Buddha.

However, hongaku shiso is unknown in Theravada, and it is not at all universal in Mahayana. Recently some prominent Japanese scholars of Buddhism mounted a sophisticated critique of hongaku shiso. Their position is called Hiban Bukkyo, Critical Buddhism. You can read their arguments, with some thoughtful responses, in Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism, edited by Jamie Hubbard & Paul L. Swanson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

If, as the Critical Buddhism scholars and the Theravada teachers maintain, the Buddha never taught hongaku, the problem of how hongaku and shikaku are related does not arise.

Dear Dharma Daddy:

This may be pure hearsay, but is it true that Buddha supported (or, at least, did not actively oppose) the caste system in India, specifically, the Untouchables, whom he believed were so because of past karma?

The quick answer is, yes, it is pure hearsay; the Buddha did not support the caste system. Everything we know about him indicates that he opposed it. Yet it is also true that the Buddha taught that our rebirth, whether as Harijans (Mahatma Gandhi's name for untouchables, or Brahmans, or gay New Yorkers, is the result of our past karma.

Some Hindus taught that one was born into a certain caste as a result not only of karma but also of a certain cosmic principle according to which the members of different castes were originally generated out of different parts of a primal giant called Prajapati or Mahapurusha. Not all humans are created alike, this teaching said, and those lower down the caste system were intrinsically less valuable than those higher up. (The caste system, it should be noted, has been outlawed in the Republic of India today.) The Buddha accepted the view that our birth state is the result of karma but he rejected the view that there is anything intrinsic about our birth state. He himself was a Kshatriya (a member of the warrior caste) and many of his disciples apparently were Vaishyas (members of the farmer or merchant caste). He taught anyone who would listen, he received anyone into the Sangha who earnestly desired to practice, and he ate with them. A strictly observant caste Hindu would not have done any of these things.

The Buddha often seems to have had problems with Brahmans who gave themselves airs because of their caste. He said that one could only truly be called a Brahmin if one were virtuous and pure in one's life. Being a Brahmin had nothing to do with birth. In The Dhammapada, an early collection of sayings of the Buddha (which is, by the way, an excellent introduction to Buddhism), there is a chapter called The Brahmin (literally, the Brahmana) in which the Buddha says, amongst other things:

Not by matted hair, or by clan
Or by birth does one become a brahmana
In whom is truth and dhamma
He is the pure one, and he is the brahmana (Verse 393)

This quotation is from The Dhammapada, translated with notes by John Ross Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), which, because of the careful scholarship of the translators and the inclusion of the commentaries, is by far the best version of the text available. (Some popular versions, such as the Penguin Classics translation, are best avoided by the serious student.)

What all this means for GBF members is that, although some people may despise us for our sexual orientation, regarding it, perhaps, as an intrinsic disorder, the Buddha is concerned only with the authenticity of our practice.

Send questions on Buddhist teachings and practices to
Dharma Daddy,
c/o GBF, 2215-R Market Street,
PMB 456, San Francisco CA
94114, or by e-mail to
roger.corless@duke.edu
GBF Calendar
San Francisco/Bay Area Events

The February GBF speakers are as follows:

February 4: Jim Wilson
February 11: Julie Henderson¹
February 18: Open discussion
February 25: Don Weipert²

¹Julie Henderson has studied somatics, somatic psychotherapy, and Vajrayana Buddhism for 26 years. Under the influence of her Tibetan teachers, and at their request, she teaches traditional skills of mind training in a form usually more accessible to Western mind.

²Don Weipert, a retired college psychotherapist with a Zen practice, represents GBF at the SF Prison meditation network, coordinates GBF prison outreach, and teaches Yoga in SF County jails.

East Bay Sitting.
1st & 3rd Thursday of each month, 7:30-9:00. Half-hour sitting followed by tea and discussion. For more information, call 510-649-1697.

Next Steering Committee Meeting.
February 8, 2000, 7:30 p.m., at the home of Lee Robbins, 4433 17th Street, San Francisco. For more information, call 415-552-9800.

WINTER RETREAT
MARCH 16-18, 2001
VAJRAPANI

Our GBF Retreat this winter will be a time for all of us to meet together in sangha, meditate, and join in dharma talks with Jim Wilson and Lama Thubten. Jack Busby and Jim Wilson will offer the Refuge Vows, and Lee Robbins will lead a mindfulness meditation.

Please send your fee of $145.00 (no one turned away for lack of funds) to:

Retreat GBF
2215-R Market Street, PMB456
San Francisco, CA 94114

Please include special dietary needs and if you need or can give a ride. An information packet will be sent out March 5, 2001.
By the power and truth of this practice,
may all beings have happiness
and the causes of happiness,
may all be free from sorrow
and the causes of sorrow,
may all never be separated from the sacred happiness
which is without sorrow,
and may all live in equanimity,
without too much attachment
or too much aversion,
and live believing in the equality
of all that lives.

-GBF Dedication of Merit