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 San Francisco Bay Area, the United States, and the world. GBF’s mission includes cultivating a social environment that is inclusive and caring.

The Bodhisattva of Encouragement

This year, I have been going through all the books by my teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, and compiling quotes and excerpts from them. I’m not sure yet what I’m going to do with all these passages, other than to perhaps type them into a booklet for friends and acquaintances who have never read anything by “Thay” before. As “Dharma Daddy” and I are preparing for this year’s GBF Annual Fall Retreat, we both feel synchronistically drawn to share from the insights of the Lotus Sutra. So I thought I would share a favorite passage I recently came across from Thich Nhat Hanh’s new commentary on the Lotus Sutra. I think it speaks very profoundly to all of us in the GLBT communities. May we find healing in the practice of encouragement.

– “Buddha Boy” (a.k.a. Ji-Sing)

From Opening the Heart of the Cosmos: Insights on the Lotus Sutra

Thich Nhat Hanh

This is the practice of this great bodhisattva [the Awakening Being named Sadaparibhuta, the one who never disparages anyone but always encourages everyone] – to regard others with a compassionate and wise gaze and hold up to them the insight of their ultimate nature, so that they can see themselves reflected there. Many people have the idea that they are not good at anything, they are not able to be as successful as other people. They cannot be happy; they envy the accomplishments and social standing of others while regarding themselves as failures if they do not have the same level of worldly success. We have to try to help those who feel this way. Following the practice of Sadaparibhuta we must come to them and say, “You should not have an inferiority complex. I see in you some very good seeds that can be developed and make you into a great being. If you look more deeply within and get in touch with those wholesome seeds in you, you will be able to overcome your feelings of unworthiness and manifest your true nature.”

The Chinese teacher Master Guishan writes: “We should not look down on ourselves. We should not see ourselves as worthless and always withdraw into the background.”

These words are designed to wake us up. In modern society, psychotherapists report that many people suffer from low self-esteem. They feel that they are worthless and have nothing to offer, and many of them sink into depression and can no longer function well, take care of themselves or their families. Therapists, healers, caregivers, teachers, religious leaders, and those who are close to someone who suffers this way all have the duty to help them see their true nature more clearly so that they can free themselves from the delusion that they are worthless. If we know friends or family members who see themselves as worthless, powerless, and incapable
of doing anything good or meaningful, and this negative self-image has taken away all their happiness, we have to try to help our friend, our sister or brother, our parent, spouse, or partner remove this complex. This is the action of the bodhisattva Never Disparaging.

We also have to practice so as not to add to others’ feelings of worthlessness. In our daily life when we become impatient or irritated we might say things that are harsh, judgmental, and critical, especially in regard to our children. When they are under a great deal of pressure, working very hard to support and care for their family, parents frequently make the mistake of uttering unkind, punitive, or blaming words in moments of stress or irritation. The ground of a child’s consciousness is still very young, still very fresh, so when we sow such negative seeds in our children we are destroying their capacity to be happy. So parents and teachers, siblings, and friends all have to be very careful and practice mindfulness in order to avoid sowing negative seeds in the minds of our children, family members, friends, and students.

When our students or loved ones have feelings of low self-esteem we have to find a way to help them transform those feelings so that they can live with greater freedom, peace, and joy. We have to practice just like Never Disparaging Bodhisattva, who did not give up on people or lose patience with them but continued always to hold up to others a mirror of their true Buddha nature.

I always try to practice this kind of action. One day there were two young brothers who came to spend the day with me. I took them both to show them a new manual printing press I had just gotten. The younger boy was very interested in the machine, and while he was playing with it the motor burned out. As I was pressing one button to show the boys how it worked, the little boy pressed another button at the same time, and it overstressed the machine’s engine. The elder brother said angrily, “Thay [Teacher], you just wanted to show us the machine. Why did he have to do that? He wrecks whatever he touches.” These were very harsh words from such a young boy. Perhaps he had been influenced by hearing his parents or other family members use blaming language like this, so he was just repeating what he had heard without realizing the effect on his little brother.

In order to help mitigate the possible effects of this criticism on the younger boy, I showed the boys another machine, a paper cutting machine, and while he was playing with it the motor burned out. As I was pressing one button to show the boys how it worked, the little boy pressed another button at the same time, and it overstressed the machine’s engine. The elder brother said angrily, “Thay, don’t let him touch it, he’ll destroy this one too.” Seeing that this was a moment when I could help both boys, I said to the older brother, “Don’t worry, I have faith in him. He is intelligent. We shouldn’t think otherwise.” Then I said to the younger boy, “Here, this is how it works—just push this button. Once you have released this button then you press that button. Do this very carefully and the machine will work properly.” The younger brother followed my instructions and operated the machine without harming it. He was very happy, and so was his older brother. And I was happy along with them.

Following the example of Sadaparibhuta Bodhisattva, I only needed three or four minutes to remove the complex of the younger brother and teach the older brother to learn to trust in the best of his younger brother and not just see him in terms of his mistakes. In truth, at that moment I was a bit concerned that the young boy would ruin the other machine. But if I had hesitated and not allowed him to try and follow my instructions, believing that he would destroy the machine, I could well have destroyed that little boy. Preserving the health and wellbeing of the mind of a child is much more important than preserving a machine.

You only need to have faith in the action of Sadaparibhuta and very quickly you can help others overcome their negative self-image. Never Despising Bodhisattva shows everyone that they have the capacity for perfection within themselves, the capacity to become a Buddha, a fully enlightened one. The message of the Lotus Sutra is that everyone can and will become a Buddha.


Gatha for My Beloved

My beloved,
All things pass away, and time is precious.
Let us cherish our togetherness now—
Each moment, each smile,
each day, each embrace—
before the sun sets
and darkness falls.

On this sacred day of
Buddha’s Awakening,
Remember, my heart-mate,
your bedroom is your zendo.
Taking care of the little details,
you take care of Life Itself.
Every day is sesshin,
and every dust particle swept
is the saving of all beings.

All things pass away
and the sun is setting.
Now is the time, my beloved,
now is the time for loving.
Time is precious
and darkness is falling.
Now is the time.
Now, beloved.

—Ji-Sing
December 8, 2004
Bodhi Day

Gatha = verse of mindfulness
zendo = meditation hall
sesshin = meditation retreat
Dear Dharma Daddy:
Can you please explain Mara?
—John

I would like to learn more about devas.
—Christopher

Dear John: and Christopher:
Mara is one of the devas. A deva is a male entity (the female is called a devi) who is very powerful and usually peaceful. (For more on devas and the other five realms of existence see the December 2004–January 2005 newsletter, front page.)

Mara is a deva who is extremely selfish. He is something like Q in Star Trek. He feeds on the Three Poisons (greed, hate, and delusion). To support his habit, he tricks humans into fighting, stealing, getting drunk, and so forth, and sucks up our negative emotions. Ah, delicious! If we refuse to act selfishly, we starve Mara and weaken his hold over us. We don’t need to believe in Mara literally to find the truth here. If we give up self-cherishing, putting others first (not with resentment, but because we value them as Buddhas), we will find that kindness, clarity, and insight will increase in us.

Dear Dharma Daddy:
I’ve been trying to study the Abhidhamma but have found it to be one of the hardest things I have ever done.
—Ricky

Dear Ricky:
This shows that you are very smart! I’d be worried if you found it easy. Abhidhamma is one of the most difficult parts of the Buddhist teachings. You need an experienced teacher to guide you through the mass of material. Since you are writing from prison, I recommend that you contact the Liberation Prison Project and/or Prison Outreach at San Francisco Zen Center (addresses at the end of this article). You can study at your own pace.

Despite its complexity, the heart of Abhidhamma is relatively simple. It is the search for the “building blocks” of samsara, cyclic existence. By penetrating meditative insight, we analyze samsara until we reach a point where no further analysis is possible. We have discovered the dharmas, the irreducible singularities of which samsara is made.

Samsara is like a prison in which, as Bo Lzoff says, we are all doing time. It is a prison we have constructed ourselves. Finding the dharmas helps us to see how we have trapped ourselves and, therefore, how to achieve liberation from samsara.

Dear Dharma Daddy:
Have there been any female Buddhas? What is the Tibetan Book of the Dead? Can I stop my mind from wandering when I meditate by saying OM MANI PADME HUM?
—Christopher

Dear Christopher:
All good questions! First, female Buddhas. A Buddha is a being who has attained perfect freedom, without having a teacher during that lifetime. It is usually said that one must be born as a male human being during that life, so most Buddhas are said to be male. However, having attained the Unconditioned (another name for nirvana) Buddhas are

Focusing the mind by using a mantra is not just an aid to meditation; it is meditation. Silent meditation is only one form, and it is not suitable for everyone, nor for any one person all the time. There is a tradition that the Buddha meditated while walking, and in many different positions besides sitting. Most of us do best if we mix silent sitting with walking, standing, and chanting meditation.
beyond the dualities of sex and gender. In art, they are often represented as somewhat androgynous, “fem” males. Many of the early disciples of the Buddha who became Arhats were women. An Arhat is exactly the same as a Buddha except that he or she has been directly taught by a Buddha. Their liberation is identical to that of a Buddha, and so an Arhat is a Buddha in all but name. The female Arhats composed verses celebrating their attainment, and these are preserved in the Pali Canon as the *Therigatha*, Hymns of the Senior Nuns. In the Mahayana texts there are many instances of women engaging monks in debate and winning, with the proclamation that the Dharma is neither male nor female. Despite these clear doctrinal statements, women have had a difficult time being accepted as equals. Because of this, the Bodhisattva Tara vowed that, although she had enough merit to be born as a man, she would continue to be born as a woman until all beings had become enlightened. (For more on Tara, see the December 2004–January 2005 issue of this newsletter, “Who is Tara?” starting on page 6.)

The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* should really be called *The Book of the Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate State which Liberates just by Being Heard*. The intermediate state (bardo) is the time between lives, between jobs, between relationships, or any other time of transition when we are confused and disoriented. The book is intended to be a guide to the bardo state and is part of a body of Tibetan texts known as death yogas. The idea is to study the book while we are in this life and visualize ourselves going through the dying and rebirth process. Then, when it happens, we can remain calm and not get lost in the confusion of images, so that we can attain a rebirth in which we can be helpful to other beings. The best English translation is by Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Shambhala, 1975). In the introduction to her translation, Dr. Fremantle explains why the popular version of W. Y. Evans-Wentz is unreliable.

Focusing the mind by using a mantra is not just an aid to meditation; it is meditation. Silent meditation is only one form, and it is not suitable for everyone, nor for any one person all the time. There is a tradition that the Buddha meditated while walking, and in many different positions besides sitting. Most of us do best if we mix silent sitting with walking, standing, and chanting meditation. Whatever works best for you is your best practice.
The Gay Buddhist Fellowship (GBF) invites you to our 14th Annual Fall Retreat

“You Are a Buddha”
A GLBT* Weekend of Mindfulness
September 16-18, 2005
(Friday Evening-Sunday Afternoon)

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship (GBF) will return again to the Vajrapani Institute for its 14th annual Fall retreat. This year’s retreat will be jointly facilitated by “Dharma Daddy” and “Buddha Boy” (a.k.a. Dr. Roger Corless and Br. Ji-Sing, M.Div.) with talks/discussions and practices based on themes from the Lotus Sutra. Roger is Professor of Religion, Emeritus, at Duke University, a leading scholar of inter-religious dialogue, and a regular contributor to the GBF Newsletter. Ji-Sing is the founder of Q-Sangha at the Metropolitan Community Church of SF and the spiritual director of Interfaith Buddhist Retreats (IBR). His main teacher is Thich Nhat Hanh, and he was ordained by him into the “Order of Interbeing” (Unified Buddhist Church) in 2003.

Vajrapani Institute is a Tibetan Buddhist retreat center amidst redwoods and clear streams, nestled in the beautiful Santa Cruz Mountains. As in previous years, we will enjoy Dharma talks by co-facilitators, meditation sessions, sharing circles, and vegetarian meals prepared by the friendly Vajrapani staff, plus journal-writing, mindful movement, chanting/singing and community ritual. There will also be free time to socialize with fellow retreatants and take mindful walks in the forest.

The retreat is open to members and friends of GBF, Q-Sangha, Interfaith Buddhist Retreats, and other GLBT Buddhist groups, including both beginners and long-time practitioners. *We welcome persons of all Buddhist or other faith traditions, ethnicities, ages, genders, and sexual orientations.

REGISTRATION: Cost including food and lodging: $155; Discounted cost for early payment (by September 1): $145. A very limited number of private cabins are available at $70 extra. — First come, first registered for cabins and retreat.

Map, directions, information for shared rides and on what to bring will be sent after registration.

Name: ________________________________ Phone: __________________
Street Address: ________________________________ City: ________________ Zip: ____________
E-Mail Address (print clearly): ________________________________
I am a member of: GBF ___, Q-Sangha ___, IBR ___, or other group (please name) __________________________
Carpooling:
Need ride? (y/n) ____ Can provide ride? (y/n) ____
Want to reserve a private cabin? (y/n) ____

Make checks payable to: Gay Buddhist Fellowship. Mail retreat forms and check to:
Kei Matsuda, GBF ’05 Retreat, 7341 Pebble Beach Drive, El Cerrito, CA 94530-1860.
For further information, contact Kei at: 510-237-5091 or GBFRetreat05@hotmail.com.
GBF Picnic on August 20

Celebrate the summer with a GBF potluck picnic at Tilden Park. The Lakeview Picnic site, next to Lake Anza, has been reserved for a picnic all day on Saturday, August 20. Take this opportunity to socialize with other GBFers in beautiful surroundings, eat great picnic fare, take a hike, toss a Frisbee . . . . We will start gathering at 11:00 a.m., and the actual picnic will begin at 12:00 noon. Tilden Park is located in the Berkeley hills just north of Highway 24. Take the Fish Ranch Road exit east of the Caldecott Tunnel, drive uphill, and turn right at Grizzly Peak Boulevard. Stay on Grizzly Peak until you reach the South Park Drive entrance. Turn right on South Park Drive. When you reach the first fork (Shasta Road), bear right. The Lakeview Picnic site will be on your left. If you reach Inspiration Point, turn back—you’ve gone too far. (You might also want to refer to http://www.ebparks.org/parks/tilden.htm for a map of the park.) These GBF picnics have been a lot of fun in past summers. Bring a tasty dish or a beverage to share. For further information, call Clint at (415) 386-3088.

How to Plan an Activity or Event with GBF

At the March All Sangha Meeting, members made a number of excellent suggestions for a variety of activities, including book discussion groups, mid-week sitting groups and social activities. The Steering Committee enthusiastically endorses these kinds of activities. There are four ways you can promote an event:

1. Create your flyer with the pertinent information to be made available at our Sunday meetings;
2. Put out the word on the Internet with our yahoo group;
3. Announce the event on Sundays;
4. Ask that the event be publicized on our bi-monthly newsletter.

If you need assistance organizing an event, consider asking someone in the sangha to help. The Steering Committee is seeking volunteers for an Activities Committee that would coordinate and publicize these monthly events. Service on this committee should not involve a huge time commitment, since publicizing an event involves little more than facilitating with the publicity steps listed above. If you’re interested in volunteering for the Activities Committee, please contact a member of the Steering Committee.

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.
AUGUST / SEPTEMBER GBF Sunday Speakers

August 7    Ven. Robina Courtin
Ven. Robina Courtin was ordained as a Tibetan Buddhist nun at Kopan Monastery in 1978. She has worked full time since then for Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, first as editorial director of Wisdom Publications and then as editor of the FPMT magazine, Mandala. She is now director of Liberation Prison Project, which supports the Buddhist practice of thousands of prisoners in the USA and Australia. (For more information on the Liberation Prison Project, see www.liberationprison-project.org.)

August 14    Blanche Hartman
Blanche Hartman is the former co-abbess of the San Francisco Zen Center. She is a dharma heir of Mel Weitsman and has been practicing Soto Zen since 1969.

August 21    Ven. Robina Courtin

August 28    Open Discussion
We’ll be discussing a chapter from Shambhala: the Sacred Path of the Warrior, by Chogyam Trungpa, the very great teacher who brought Tibetan Buddhism to the United States and founded Naropa Institute in Boulder and who was the teacher of Pema Chodron. The chapter is on, among other things, the tradition of lungta, the energy of the windhorse, the energy of natural goodness.

September 4    Open Discussion

September 11    Bill Weber
Bill Weber is a senior Vipassana practitioner and a recent graduate from Spirit Rock’s Community Dharma Leader program. He teaches beginning meditation classes and daylongs. He has studied for the past ten years with Gil Fronsdal and Eugene Cash, among others, and has extensive retreat practice. He is also a documentary filmmaker and video editor whose recent work includes co-directing and editing The Cockettes and editing the HBO documentary Last Letters Home.

September 18    CJ Grant
CJ Grant has been studying and practicing Theravadin and Tibetan Buddhism since 1971. In 2000, he traveled to most of the important Buddhist shrines and holy sites in order to experience both the ambience and the spiritual aspects of the sites and to deepen his understanding of the tradition and the practice. He has lived and participated for extended periods in both Theravadin monasteries and Hindu ashrams.

September 25    John Bright
John Bright was first introduced to the teachings of Chogyam Trungpa in 1972. An active member of the San Francisco Shambhala Center for more than ten years, he currently serves on the Board of Directors and as Director of Shambhala Training in the immediate Bay Area (San Francisco and Berkeley). (He also serves on the Northern California Shambhala Board of Directors.) John is a self-employed cabinetmaker with one daughter and two grandchildren.

Sunday Sittings

10:30 am to 12 noon
Every Sunday followed by a talk or discussion, at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett Street (near 21st St between Mission and Valencia).

MUNI: 14 Mission or 49 Van Ness-Mission, alight at 21st St, walk 1/2 block.

BART: 24th and Mission, walk 3 1/2 blocks. Parking: on street (meters free on Sundays) or in adjacent New Mission Bartlett Garage (75¢ first hour, then $1 per hour, $5 max). The Center is handicapped accessible.

Miss a Dharma Talk?
You can listen to it on the Internet. Audio files of Dharma talks are available on the GBF website.

How to Reach Us
For 24-hour information on GBF activities or to leave a message: 415 / 974-9878

World Wide Web Site
www.gaybuddhist.org

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For address changes or to subscribe or unsubscribe to the Newsletter send email to:
mailinglist@gaybuddhist.org

GBF Newsletter
Send submissions to:
editor@gaybuddhist.org

GBF Yahoo Discussion Group
There is now a GBF discussion group for the general membership (and others) on Yahoo. Join the discussion at:
www.groups.yahoo.com/group/gaybuddhistfellowship
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