Greetings:

How are you, my dharma friends? I am well. I continue to pray for the best for all of you as you deserve all the happiness beyond compare that will please your mind-stream and aid your path. You have accomplished so much in this and all previous lives that your virtue is beyond compare. This is obvious by just noticing how many excellent teachers you have been blessed to meet in this life. Lao Tzu, in his Tao Te Ching, said:

A man of highest virtue
Will not display it as his own;
His virtue then is real.
Low virtue makes one miss no chance
To show his virtue off;
His virtue then is naught.
High virtue is at rest;
It knows no need to act.
Low virtue is a busyness
Pretending to accomplishment.

You, my friends, present the image of a learner. That is what makes you special. With all your collection of acquired knowledge, you are humble enough to correspond with a poor soul who struggles for every ounce of knowledge he can get. Again, you are special. Like Milarepa, I have committed many non-virtuous deeds that have destroyed countless eons of virtuous accumulation. All is not over, however, for there is no intrinsic nature to taint.

In order for us to be able to affect our nature, there must be a nature to affect. I dispute the notion that we have a nature that underlies all our obscurations. Many will find fault with me and argue that our nature is Buddha-nature. I both agree and disagree. What is this Buddha-nature we talk so much about?

There is an energy that is a continuous succession of awareness, awareness that is able to reflect whatever energy frequency with which it comes into contact. This energy is capable of building awareness upon awareness and thereby becoming a conscious awareness. Since every micro-moment that passes imprints new awareness, the resulting sum of this conscious awareness is constantly changing. So can there be any nature to point to? Is there any label that serves as a definition? Buddha-nature is all there is. That does not mean there is any intrinsic nature to us. Rather, we are
mere awareness without conceptual necessity. Concepts are what trip us up.

When we conceptualize, we process information by clustering together experiences and labeling the groups. We lose our ability to be fully aware; rather, we pass over many subtle aspects of our awareness and construct a generalized reality. Since time without beginning we have done this and have long since forgotten that what we truly are is beyond concept, label, or any kind of nature.

Of course, I’m using a concept to try and explain the non-conceptual. I’m giving a nature to that which has no nature. I’m actually speaking way beyond my realm of insight. I’m finding this all so helpful to me right now as I am gaining a little insight changed the way I perceive. I have changed my reality. When I sit to practice, I have the intellectual knowledge necessary to follow the practice through. I feel like I’ve been doing this most of my life.

The greatest impact has been in the way I view others. I wish comfort and happiness to everyone. My own well-being is irrelevant. Things will work out for me. What matters are those with whom I come into contact. This is how my life has played out the way it has. Nothing in samsara is new. We interact because we’ve interacted. What matters is how we react to the moment. Subtle nuances change our future existences. We can smile or smirk and change the course of a future. Nothing is by chance although nothing is predestined.

We have constructed our current life with meticulous care.

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into my current experiences. It all goes back to that non-concept and awareness I’ve mentioned.

I am so very fortunate to have been blessed with having met excellent teachers and dharma friends. During the past eight years I have been flooded with available dharma teachings. Now I can look within my conscious mind and see the change that has taken place. I have gained a torrent of intellectual knowledge. Some would find this unfortunate, but I see it as a life-saving miracle.

Prior to beginning my dharma schooling, I knew only survival from the perspective of one who believed in a self-existent “I.” This essence sought every gain, pleasure, praise, and fame imaginable. Every action was in pursuit of the eight concerns, or being rid of the other four. There were plenty of guilty feelings, and I’ve never really truly wanted to cause harm to anyone. However, my justification was that there were always immediate needs to attend to. There were nights when I cried and sobbed like a little baby out of the pain I felt for doing someone wrong. There were times I prayed for death so that I could start all over again. The only skills I really acquired were ones that would bring me up while someone else would lose. Granted, most people only lost peace of mind, but what greater loss can someone endure than their mental security?

Enter the dharma. In eight short years, I have flooded my mind with ancient techniques that have brought liberation to countless beings. I have drunk every word like an elixir. What good is mere intellectual knowledge? What has happened is that I have become socialized into a culture of virtue. When I dream, I dream of dharma. When I face a problem, I relate it to dharmonic principles and antidotes. When my mind is disturbed, I visualize, focus on the breath, fall into the awareness-state. By studying the dharma, I have every ache, pain, illness, gray hair, lost tooth, and erection is the result of our reactions in a previous life, constructed from the previous. I realize that the twelve links typically take three lifetimes to play out and that there can be a multitude of links playing out in this present moment. But I also know it is an empty theatre. The play has been rehearsing and rewriting over and over again like there is going to be a performance before royalty. How odd that we would spend so much time preparing our make-up, costumes, scripts, and movements for a show that serves no purpose other than to further trap us within a plot that doesn’t exist. All we must do is let go of the lie, let go of the illusion.

I have started my chemo and the other day I lay down wondering how I could feel so sick and still have so much noise and chaos around me. Couldn’t I get some peace? Then I thought of Je Milarepa and how much he suffered while serving his guru Marpa. How sad Marpa was at bringing so much pain and suffering on his heart son. Had he not experienced so much negativity, however, Milarepa would not have been a pure vessel. He would still have been tarnished from so many negative acts. When he finally learned what it was to love himself, as well as his guru, he could let go of the clinging that kept him bound. As I thought of this, I focused on the maple syrup circulating through my veins and realized that I brought the discomfort upon this vessel. It is part of the play I have spent so much time writing. Every ache, pain, and discomfort is the result of an act long ago performed. Now is the opportunity to experience it in a positive manner, to take the pain and discomfort and consciously experience it on behalf of another. I experience the results of what I’ve inflicted, so why not experience it as a selfless act?
I've realized that this isn't merely a mystical, psychological practice that doesn't really relieve anyone's pain. On the contrary, it is an act that truly will alleviate another's suffering as it closes the door on a cycle that has been going on for eons.

I recently had a birthday. This body is now a full half-century old. If this treatment works, I'll be around for a while longer. I want to write my autobiography. I think it may be helpful to one or two people. I even have the opening lines in mind: “So this is what it's like to be dead.” That's how it will open. I'll narrate my life according to the lessons learned. It'll be as though I'm dead and my life is flashing before my eyes. The end of it will not really be what people will be expecting. As I go through the things that changed my life into becoming a positive influence, I hope people will become a little sad knowing that it is a dying/dead man narrating the story. That is, until the very end when they discover that what is dying are the obscurations and what is left is a new life filled with love, peace, and selflessness. Maybe I'll get it done in six months or so. I'll start this week.

Well, my friends, I had better go for my evening meditation. I love and pray for you.

Delbert Ray Collett, a prisoner in San Luis Obispo, is the author of two previous contributions to the GBF newsletter, “An Empty View on Relationships,” which appeared in the December 2005/January 2006 issue of the newsletter, and “Defining Zhi,” which appeared in the June/July 2007 issue. You can write him at the following address:
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CMC State Prison
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San Luis Obispo, CA 93409-8103

Out of this Hell, I've Become Free

A Letter from Anzel K. Jones to GBF Member Dean Bellerby

Dear Mr. Bellerby,

I've just started to get your newsletter, though I'm not a gay man. I still have compassion for my fellow human beings. One of the reasons why I decided to get your newsletter was because all the gay men I've encountered were always insightful and upfront. With that in mind, I subscribed to your newsletter. I can say that I've not one complaint. Now on to why I write.

In your June-July issue I see on the calendar that you have Poetry Day on July 27, saying that you can bring a poem or prose selection that captures something you want to share with the men of GBF.

Happy is he who is forever faced with the hour of his death and prepares himself for the end every day. This is a quote that I lived by during the first nine years of my imprisonment, while I was on Texas Death Row. As an 18 year old immature kid I only thought that I had to live, live what was left of my count-down to death. So in living I prepared for death, knowing I did all I could in my limited confinement.

As Thich Nhat Hanh says, “Mindfulness is a kind of energy that helps us to be aware of what is going on.” I was mindful, but mindful of my limited life, so I partook in the wrong liberation of my last days on earth.

As it is, I was granted a commute of my death sentence to life, and I made a promise to myself to really enjoy life. During this time, I came upon a book called Be Free Where You Are by Thich Nhat Hanh, in which he states, “There is no happiness without freedom, and freedom is not given to us by anyone. We have to cultivate it ourselves.” Once I was able to apply that to my daily life, I was really—after almost twelve years of being locked up—able to say, “I am free!”

I'll close with this and I'm gone. I was sent to death row a child and grew into the man I am now, whom others look to for support and structure. But out of this hell, I've become free.

My freedom, which once I thought was a given Isn't but a shame.
An ill-conceived thought I had in my mind of Where I was able to go and do.
Never could I fathom that if one isn't spiritually And mentally free, then he isn't.
He's just a slave in sightless chains.
I've become mindful of my walk, talk, The very air I breathe.
But only through an awakening did I become aware Of my freedom.
Stop, my fellow man, woman and child.
Stop, I implore you, to be free!

Anzel K. Jones is a prisoner in Texas. You can write to him at the following address:
Anzel K. Jones 1306203
P.O. Box 9200
Telford Unit
New Boston,TX 75570
Engaged Buddhism

By Clint Seiter

Every Sunday, Gay Buddhist Fellowship offers the public the opportunity to meditate with the GBF sangha. However, along with contemplative practice, GBF participates in community outreach programs as well. One of these exercises in engaged Buddhism includes a team of GBFers providing a monthly meal at the Larkin Street Youth Center.

The Larkin Street Youth Center was formed in the early 1980's to address the growing problem of homeless youths forced to live on the streets and often survive by acts of theft, prostitution and drug trafficking. The center provides these kids with the tools they need—through housing, medical care, education, and job training—to permanently reclaim their lives.

On every third Saturday of the month a crew of GBFers comes to the center and, using the center's kitchen, prepares a meal for the kids living there. The menus are planned in advance and the ingredients are purchased beforehand with funds provided by GBF. The intent of the project is to provide “comfort food,” balanced meals made from scratch that are tasty as well as nutritious. Menus include casseroles, pasta dishes, meat dishes (with vegetarian alternatives), salads and vegetable dishes, and homemade pies or cakes, all made there in the center's kitchen.

This project succeeds on several levels. The kids love our meals and the team of cooks has gotten to form a small, tight-knit community of its own. While everyone works diligently at chopping, peeling, measuring and combining ingredients, the atmosphere is more of an informal party than a work project. We have been preparing meals for the Larkin Center for almost three years now (and before that, eight years at the now closed Hamilton Family Center), and this project has proven to be a rewarding experience for all participants.
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.

Note to Readers

Send us poetry you have written that is related to or inspired by your Buddhist practice. We will include some of these poems in future issues of the Gay Buddhist Fellowship newsletter. If we receive enough poems we may devote an entire newsletter to poetry. You may submit your poetry either by email or regular mail at the addresses listed below.

How to Reach Us

www.gaybuddhist.org

For general questions about GBF write to:
inquiry@gaybuddhist.org

To contact Program Committee with suggestions for speakers and comments:
www.gaybuddhist.org/programs

Mail correspondence:

GBF
PMB 456
2215-R MARKET STREET
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94114

Address changes or to subscribe or unsubscribe to the newsletter:
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
Sunday Sittings

10:30 am to 12 noon
Every Sunday at 10:30am we meditate together for 30 minutes, followed by a talk or discussion till 12 noon. Everyone is then welcome to stay and socialize over refreshments till approximately 12:30, after which those who are interested usually go somewhere local for lunch. Our sittings are held at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett Street. (Look for the red door near 21st St between Mission and Valencia Streets).

MUNI: 14 Mission or 49 Van Ness-Mission, alight at 21st St, walk 1 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. The Center is handicapped accessible.

Sunday Speakers

February 1 Dharma Duo with Chris Shelton and Peter Fitzpatrick

Chris Shelton, a trained artist and practicing architect with a Christian past and a decade long Buddhist practice, strives to bring themes of service and generosity to his professional and personal creative work. Using Buddhist precepts, he aims to support the greatest amount of life in people, places, and the vast and stunning natural world.

Peter Fitzpatrick is a 43-year-old Irish recovering Catholic and Alcoholic. He began exploring Buddhism and yoga at the suggestion of his therapist as a venue to become more open to realizing his true self and hopefully relinquishing the old habits and stories he had constructed as a defense to his childhood.

February 8 Jurgen Mollers

Jurgen Mollers has been practicing Insight meditation for about 15 years. A native German, he came to California in 1992 for post-doc work in philosophy. He is a graduate of Spirit Rock’s Dedicated Practitioner Program, and is teaching meditation to incarcerated men. In 2003, he founded a company, Storyzon, that helps people preserving life stories. His talk will be on the connection of memory and mindfulness.

February 15 Larry Yang

Larry Yang is a Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leader and leads meditation retreats tailored for men, people of color, the LGBTQ communities, and people in recovery from addiction. He co-leads a meditation group for the LGBTQ community in San Francisco and is a psychotherapist and a consultant in cultural competency.

February 22 Open Discussion

March 1 Dennis Manuelito and Darren Taylor

Dennis Manuelito and Darren Taylor will speak on “Native American Two Spirit History: Past, Present, and Future.”

Dennis Manuelito, whose lineage is Diné (aka Navajo), was born and raised on the Navajo Indian Reservation in Northeastern Arizona and Northwestern New Mexico. Dennis has worked with Native people and their respective communities throughout the United States, primarily in the HIV field. He is presently the Director of HIV Services at the Native American Health Center in San Francisco. In addition, Dennis is involved in spiritual gatherings of the Native Community in the greater San Francisco Bay Area.

Darren Taylor is a member of the Anishnabe Nation from Curve Lake First Nations, Ontario, Canada. He is presently embarking on a project to capture the lives of contemporary and traditional Two-Spirit people throughout North America in print and photograph. In addition to this project, Darren volunteers at the Native American AIDS Project, is involved with the Two-Spirit History Project at the Native American Health Center and with the planning committee of the Two-Spirit Wellness Gathering, which will be held on June 26, 2009, in San Francisco during Pride Week.

March 8 Richard Shankman

Richard Shankman lives in Oakland, CA. He has been a meditator since 1970 and teaches regularly at dharma centers and groups throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. Richard is a co-founder of both the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies and the Community Partnership for Mindfulness in Education, which brings mindfulness training into the Oakland inner-city schools. Richard is the author of The Experience of Samadhi. His teaching schedule may be found at www.richardshankman.org and he may be contacted at Richard@sati.org.

March 15 Open Discussion

March 22 Rev. Shoyo Taniguchi

The Honorable Reverend Shoyo Taniguchi is the resident minister and leader of the Southern Alameda County Buddhist Church in Union City, CA. Her role is to spread the teachings of the Buddha by providing education, spiritual guidance, counseling, and leadership to the Sangha. Her sangha is a member of the Buddhist Churches of America. This sangha belongs to the Jodo-Shinshu Hompa Hongwanji Ha tradition of Buddhism. It is one of the largest Buddhist institutions in Japan. Rev. Taniguchi has been performing marriages of same-sex couples for decades and recently gave a dharma talk to the Lesbian Sangha in Berkeley.

March 29 Donald Rothberg

Donald Rothberg, a member of the Spirit Rock Teachers Council and the core faculty of Saybrook Graduate School, writes and teaches classes, groups, and retreats on meditation, daily life practice, and socially engaged Buddhism in the San Francisco Bay Area and nationally. He has been an organizer, teacher, and board member for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and is the guiding teacher for a two-year Spirit Rock program, the Path of Engagement. He is a co-editor of Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers and author of The Engaged Spiritual Life: A Buddhist Approach to Transforming Ourselves and the World.
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