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.

Four Friends in Fellowship

BY HARLEY SHAPIRO

Last October, I was fortunate to experience another adventure in Southeast Asia. I spent four months traveling in four countries—Taiwan, Burma (Myanmar), Laos, and Thailand. Four special friends were my hosts during my time in their hometowns. They were all warm and friendly, graciously sharing their lives, families, and friends. I was able to arrange volunteer opportunities with NGOs, medical clinics, and schools, and to explore many aspects of the history, arts, festivals, spiritual practices, and everyday lives of these countries. I would like to introduce you to these men and share stories and photo images that illustrate the spirit and essence of their lives and cultures. It was wonderful to be able to exchange ideas and smiles with them. All four express their joy and zest for life every day. They all have an important impact on their communities that ripples out to the wider world. In their daily lives, they exhibit their knowledge and practice of the four noble truths and the eightfold path.

Harley Shapiro

Mr. Hummingbird  Shin  Peter Kim  Chai
Taiwan—“Mr. Hummingbird”

His nickname truly describes this man’s energy, productivity, loyalty, and knowledge. “Mr. Hummingbird” is a university teacher, religion and philosophy scholar, human rights advocate, and LGBTQ activist. I was taken under his wing as he connected me to community groups, events, and activities. He set up meetings for me with LGBTQ and HIV community organizations and groups. His wide knowledge of Taiwanese culture and spiritual practices allowed me to learn so much as I traveled around the whole island. We celebrated together during the October 2014 Taiwan Pride Parade and Festival, the largest LGBTQ event in Asia.
Burma—Shin

I met Shin Saisuku during the full moon at the Shwedagon Temple in Rangoon (Yangon). He graciously showed me around and explained all the rituals and ceremonies. We joined in chants with thousands of Burmese on this auspicious evening. His monastery was just two blocks from my hotel downtown, so for several days we explored the city together—temples, pagodas, stupas, markets, and even the old 1863 Jewish synagogue. We and some of his monk friends shared an early picnic at the lake across from the residence of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. (Monks do not eat food after 12 noon.) I spent time at his monastery, learning and teaching. Shin is from the Shan ethnic group in the North, and he had been a youth novice and then a monk in the big city to further his studies. When I traveled to Inle Lake, I was able to connect with some of his friends and family.
Laos—Peter Kim

In Vientiane, New Year’s Eve was celebrated by joyous thousands at an enormous public plaza reminiscent of New York’s Times Square. The ball dropped after bands played, and native and disco-pop dancers pranced as the new generations of Lao cheered the countdown. Two days later, I met Peter Kim at COPE (Co-operative Orthotic & Prosthetic Rehabilitation), which provides housing, education, and training, in addition to prosthetics, to victims of cluster bombs. Peter lost his eyesight and both arms/hands when he touched an unexploded cluster bomb. Between 1964 and 1973, the US Army dropped two million tons of bombs on Laos, the most heavily bombed country per capita in history. 260 million bombs were dropped, and 80 million remain unexploded in forests and rice paddies. 50,000 people have been injured or killed, fifty percent of them children. I was captivated and inspired by the stories that Peter shared of his life and faith. He has incredible strength, determination, positive energy, and humor, living his life with gratitude and dignity. Peter enjoys teaching, music and breakdancing, and he hopes to visit the USA to meet “California girls” and surf. Check out his youtube channel: peterkimfromlaos.
Thailand—Chai

I have known Chai for four years and was thrilled to visit him at his hometown monastery in Northeast Thailand. He is a college teacher of history and computer science, but when I visited him this year, he had taken a year sabbatical to be a monk in respect for his family tradition and honor. He was given permission to take several weeks to travel with me throughout the area, visiting friends and relatives, temples, monasteries, stupas, and pagodas, locations in mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes, forests, and rice fields. His kindness and good humor gave me an amazing opportunity to share in Thai culture. I was invited to speak to classes at his university and also at a college for monks. This was a lovely taste of Thailand, so far from the frenzied tourism, political turmoil, and civil strife enveloping Bangkok and other areas at the time.
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.
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 1/2 block  BART: 24th and Mission, walk 31/2 blocks

PARKING: on street (meters free on Sundays) or in adjacent New Mission Bartlett Garage. The Center is handicapped accessible.

Sunday Speakers

December 7  David Lewis
“The Four Foundations of Mindfulness: Part Four”
David Lewis has been following the dharma path for forty years and has a degree in comparative religious studies. He attended his first retreat in the Shambhala tradition at the age of seventeen and has been practicing Insight Meditation since moving to San Francisco over twenty-five years ago. David teaches an Insight Meditation course at the Mission Dharma sangha, led the Gay Buddhist Fellowship’s 2013 fall residential retreat, and facilitates a weekly meditation group for seniors. He is a graduate of Spirit Rock Meditation Center’s Dedicated Practitioners Program.

December 14  Steven Tierney
Steven Tierney, Ed.D., LPCC, is a Soto Zen priest in the lineage of Suzuki Roshi. Dr. Tierney is a psychotherapist, a psychology professor at California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), and the co-founder of the San Francisco Mindfulness Foundation, which provides mindfulness-based addiction-prevention and recovery services in San Francisco. He can be reached at sttierney@aol.com.

December 21  Walt Opie
Walt Opie has practiced intensive insight meditation, including many residential retreats, since 2005, with prominent teachers including Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, Ajahn Sumedho, Sayadaw U Tejaniya (of Myanmar/Burma) and many others. He is a graduate of Spirit Rock’s Community Dharma Leaders’ (CDL4) training program. He leads the weekly Berkeley Dharma and Recovery meditation group. In addition, he worked in the Spirit Rock Communications Department for seven years. Walt is currently enrolled in the Sati Center’s Buddhist Chaplaincy Training Program and serves as a volunteer with Buddhist Pathways Prison Project, bringing Buddhist practices into California state prisons.

December 28  Open Discussion

January 4  Open Discussion

January 11  Heather Sundberg
Heather Sundberg began teaching meditation in 1999. She has completed the four-year Spirit Rock/Insight Meditation Society Teacher Training. Beginning her own meditation practice in her late teens, for more than twenty years, Heather has studied with senior teachers in the Insight Meditation and Tibetan traditions, and has sat one-three months of retreat a year for the last fifteen-plus years. She is a teacher for Mountain Stream Meditation Center in the Sierra Foothills, and also teaches classes, daylongs and retreats nationally, especially at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. For more information, visit www.heathersundberg.com.

January 18  Mushim Ikeda-Nash
Mushim Ikeda is a meditation teacher, community peace activist, writer, diversity facilitator, and the mother of a 23-year-old son. She has done both monastic and lay Zen Buddhist practice over the past thirty years, in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and South Korea. Her poetry, fiction and essays have been published widely in journals and anthologies such as Tricycle and Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming against the Stream. Mushim was coeditor of Making the Invisible Visible: Healing Racism in Our Buddhist Communities. Her work has been featured in two documentary films, Between the Lines: Asian American Women Poets and Acting on Faith: Women and the New Religious Activism in America. Mushim is a core teacher at the East Bay Meditation Center in downtown Oakland.

January 25  Stuart Sovatsky
Stuart is degreed from CIIS and Princeton. He has lived the “inner marriage” kundalini bhakti tantra for forty years, and chanted Sanskrit benedictions privately for Yanay Drnovoe (chair of Unaligned Nations of the World) and for Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in India. He is author of Advanced Spiritual Intimacy, which has been endorsed by Robert Thurman and Ken Wilber. In 1977, he received the only federal grant to bring meditation into a juvenile facility. He will lead a kirtan meditation and discuss Beyond Types, The Shared Gender Inner Marriage Mystery.
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, believing in the equality of all that lives.

—GBF dedication of merit