

Gay Buddhist Fellowship

APRIL / MAY 2003 NEWSLETTER

The gay Buddhist
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gay men's community.
It is a forum that
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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.

Buddhist Reflections on the New Gulf War

BY DAVID LOY

David Loy, a professor of International Studies at Bunkyo University in Japan, has been a Zen practitioner for over twenty years. He is the author of many books, including *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*, *A Buddhist History of the West: Studies in Lack*, and *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory*.

I think Buddhism can give us some special insight into why this crazy, stupid war has begun. A huge international antiwar movement has sprung up almost overnight because the "official" reasons for attacking Iraq simply do not add up. Despite extreme efforts to prove otherwise, no connection between Iraq and Al Qaeda has been discovered. Saddam is a brutal dictator? Of course, but since when is that something that bothers the U.S. government? We have supported and continue to support many brutal rulers around the world, as long as they serve our interests – as we armed and supported Saddam when he attacked Iran and gassed his own Kurds. If his weapons of mass destruction make him so dangerous, why have been they so difficult to find? And why aren't his neighbors more worried about them? Because Saddam's military threat is a fragment of what it was twelve years ago. There is indeed an extraordinarily powerful nation that continues to develop horribly destructive weapons, and continues to abrogate international treaties that would control them. But that rogue nation is not Iraq.

So what is really going on? This is where Buddhist teachings can help. Karma emphasizes the intentions behind our actions. We suffer, and make others suffer, because of the "three poisons" or roots of evil: greed, ill will and delusion. These must be transformed into their positive counterparts: generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom. These problems are collective as well as individual: there is institutionalized greed (e.g., corporations), institutionalized ill will (e.g., the military industrial complex) and institutionalized delusion (e.g., the media). We can see these three poisons motivating the new Gulf War.

Greed? For oil, of course, as well as an opportunity to remake the Middle East according to our own liking (or so we think).

Ill will? We are told that Saddam tried to assassinate Bush I. More important, probably, is that the Dad's old guard is back in power, and they want to finish the first Gulf War. They are still angry that Saddam survived it, whereas

the first Bush administration did not survive the next election. But there is another factor: the need to divert attention from the fact that Bush II and Co. have not been winning their war against terrorism. Bin Laden escaped and al Qaeda has regrouped. Afghanistan is descending back into chaos. More terrorist attacks are expected soon. Since this failure cannot be acknowledged, attention must be diverted to a new enemy. Another face must be found for evil—or, more precisely, a new target for one's anger

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and frustration. This is especially true for a presidency that only found a direction for itself on 9-11. The timing of the switch was perfect, and responsible for success in the midterm elections.

This motivation is not necessarily all conscious. We are all familiar with how it works. Your boss gives you a hard time at the office, so when you come home and your kid says something mildly irritating, you slap him.

Another factor that falls into this second category is the desire to test all those new weapons that the Pentagon has developed and deployed. True battlefield conditions are necessary to find out how well they really work. Afterwards they need to be replenished, which is profitable for arms companies, which brings us back to the first root of evil.

Delusion? This is where it gets really interesting, from a Buddhist point of view. For one thing, there is the collective ego-inflation that results from being the world's only hyper-power. Power is measured by its resistance. With nothing to challenge U.S. military dominance, what need is there for restraint? One is free to remold the world to the heart's desire. The whispered word is empire, yet in the long run such arrogance is self-destructive, because it forfeits all legitimacy.

But there is another, special insight that Buddhism has to offer here. It is connected with *anatta*, the “no-self” teaching. *Anatta* means that our core is hollow. The shadow-side of this emptiness is a sense of *lack*. Our no-self means we feel groundless, and that often makes life a futile quest to make ourselves feel more *real*. Individually, we seek being in symbolic ways such as money, fame, or through the eyes of our beloved. Yet there is also an important collective dimension that feeds ideologies such as nationalism and group struggles such as war. We are always relieved to discover that the sense of lack bothering us is due to something outside us – personified in the enemy, who therefore must be defeated if we are to become whole and healed.

That is why war is sacred, and why we love violence. It seems to give us clear purchase on the sense of lack that otherwise tends to haunt us in an amorphous way. Violence focuses the source of our dissatisfaction outside us, where it can be destroyed. No wonder, then, that people tend to rejoice when war finally breaks out, as even Freud and Rilke initially did at the beginning of the First World War. We feel newly bonded with our neighbors in a struggle that is no longer unconscious but something we have some conscious control over. Our problem is no longer inside us, but the evil that is over there. In Afghanistan. Or Iraq.

When wars and revolutions do not bring us the salvation-from-lack we seek, though, we need repeated wars and continual revolutions. Since we can never fill up the hole at our core in this way and make ourselves really real, we always need a new devil outside us (or inside us: a “fifth column” of Islamic terrorist cells) to rationalize our failure and fight against. We hide this fact from ourselves by projecting our victory sometime into the future. If Afghanistan didn't give us the security we crave, defeating Iraq will. When that doesn't quell our festering sense of collective lack, we'll find some other evil to fight. North Korea, anyone?

The special problem today is that our increasing technological powers make this game increasingly dangerous. If we don't see through this cycle and stop it, we will destroy ourselves in the process of destroying others. Ultimately, our individual and collective lack can only be resolved

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spiritually, because that is the only way to realize our true ground. That is the point of the Buddhist path. We need to take our projections back into us and deal with them there. Instead of running away from my sense of lack, mindfulness training (such as *zazen*) makes me more aware of it. When I “forget myself” in meditation practice, the emptiness at my core can transform into a “peace that surpasses understanding,” into a formless, spontaneous fountain of creativity free to become this or that. And to realize my own Buddha-nature in this way is to realize that everyone else – yes, even terrorists, even Saddam — has the same Buddha-nature. Buddhism emphasizes non-violence so much because this path is incompatible with what has been called “the myth of redemptive violence,” the belief that sees violence as the solution to our problems. ■

The Buddhist Response to War

The following statement was issued by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship soon after the start of the American war against Iraq.

The war in Iraq has begun. Another war. The world itself is wounded, and people everywhere are grieving, anxious, angry, and confused. An endless river of suffering karma flows out of this technologized violence, whose victims are not machines but living beings, like ourselves. Unforeseen consequences of terrorism, regional war, and environmental disaster will follow quickly.

Our mission at the Buddhist Peace Fellowship is to embody peace in ourselves, in our communities and nations, and to oppose war everywhere. We must do all that we can to oppose this war in particular, to bring it quickly to an end, to limit casualties on all sides, and to help victims that include the people of Iraq, western troops, and ourselves.

2500 years ago Shakyamuni Buddha said:

**Victory breeds hatred,
The defeated live in pain.
Happily the peaceful live,
Giving up both victory and defeat.**

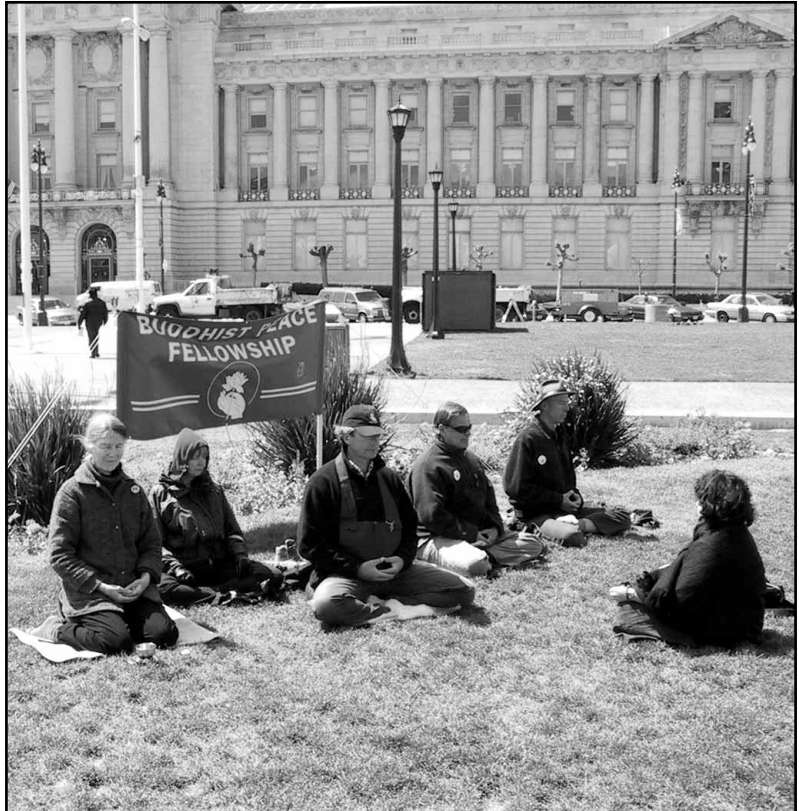
Dhammapada, Verse 201

There will be no victors in this war between the United States and Iraq. But there will be many victims all around the world. Behind all the posturing and lies and guns, there are contending and unspoken illusions of American Empire and a pan-Arab empire led by Iraq. Empire bestows privileges on a few and suffering on many. In accord with the Bud-

Security is only found when we recognize that all beings wish happiness, health, and meaningful life as we do.

dha's truth of impermanence, empires fall...without exception. We cannot put faith in empire, in wealth, in homeland security, or in our leaders' dissembling words. Security is only found when we recognize that all beings wish happiness, health, and meaningful life as we do.

We can also acknowledge that the work of peace has been wide and deep over these last few months. The debate has been unprecedented. Whole cities and countries have spoken out wisely. We have not stopped this war, but we may have limited it in ways we don't know. Our leaders know the whole world is watching. With our steadfast witness, we may help them yet to see themselves clearly.



Meditating for Peace: The Buddhist Peace Fellowship is holding meditation vigils for peace every day at the Civic Center from 11:30am until 1:30pm. If you'd like to join them, look for them on the lawn at McAllister and Polk. Dress warmly and bring your own cushion and a plastic mat (in case the ground is wet). The vigils will continue until the war ends.

In all seriousness we should consider this 1952 koan from Pogo: "We have met the enemy, and he is us." "Us" is each of us, and we are responsible for transforming our suffering. "Us" is also George Bush, Saddam Hussein, a grandfather in Iraq, a young mother in the U.S. Army in Kuwait, a schoolroom full of kids in Florida, on and on. We must help each being see each other being. So long as we cling to notions of "us" and "them," of empire, of tribe, our world will be lost in suffering. All people are chosen; all land is holy. Battles may happen, but in Buddhadharma the cloak of justice can never be cut to fit a war. ■

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An Appeal for Peace

BY THICH NHAT HANH

The following statement was issued by Thich Nhat Hanh on February 16th.

All of my friends and disciples on the five continents join me to humbly ask the government of the U.S.A. not to start a war with Iraq.

The war will bring destruction not only to the people of Iraq but also to the U.S.A. and to people all over the world. Please look into your own past experience with war to recognize the vast devastation that war creates for all warring parties, in terms of loss of precious human lives, destruction of the natural environment, and destruction of diplomatic relationships and peace between nations in the world. Please use your powers of reflection and understanding of the past and present situations in order to prevent such destruction and devastation to the peoples of the United States and for the protection and safety of people all over the world. Please look deeply into the interconnections between the U.S.A. and all nations in the world to see that war in one place will contribute to war in many places, destruction in one direction will lead to destruction in many directions.

We ask the U.S.A. to operate in harmony with the community of nations, making use of the collective wisdom and decision-making capacities of that community. Please help strengthen the U.N. as an organization for peace-keeping, because that is the hope of the world. Please do not cause damage or destroy the authority and the role of the United Nations; instead, support it wholeheartedly by listening to its recommendations. Please see the U.S.A. as an active member of the larger organization of the United Nations and seek to work together as an international community to ensure safety and well being for the people of the U.S.A. and for all people in the world. The United Nations, made up of many nations in the world, has the capacity to provide and support constructive settings to establish dialogue and to offer conditions for maintaining peace and security for all nations in the world. Please reveal the great strength and wisdom of the U.S.A. by showing the world that it is possible to resolve conflict without the long lasting destruction and devastation caused by war. We will all be very grateful. ■



*He abused me, he beat me,
He defeated me, he robbed me.*

**In those who harbor such thoughts
Hatred never ceases.**

*He abused me, he beat me,
He defeated me, he robbed me.*

**In those who harbor not such thoughts
Hatred finds its end.**

**At any time in this world,
Hatred never ceases by hatred,
But through non-hatred it ceases
This is an eternal law.**

—the Buddha

We Cannot Solve Human Problems by Fighting

BY HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

The following is the English translation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's views on war, issued on March 11, 2003, nine days before the beginning of the U.S. war against Iraq.

The Iraq issue is becoming very critical now. War, or the kind of organized fighting, is something that came with the development of human civilization. It seems to have become part and parcel of human history or human temperament. At the same time, the world is changing dramatically. We have seen that we cannot solve human problems by fighting. Problems resulting from differences in opinion must be resolved through the gradual process of dialogue. Undoubtedly, wars produce victors and losers, but only temporarily. Victory or defeat resulting from wars cannot be long lasting. Secondly, our world has become so

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interdependent that the defeat of one country must impact the rest of the world, or cause all of us to suffer losses either directly or indirectly.

Today, the world is so small and so interdependent that the concept of war has become anachronistic, an outmoded approach. As a rule, we always talk about reform and changes. Among the old traditions, there are many aspects that are either ill-suited to our present reality or are counterproductive due to their shortsightedness. These we have consigned to the dustbin of history. War too should be relegated to the dustbin of history.

Unfortunately, although we are in the 21st century, we still have not been able to get rid of the habit of our older generations. I am talking about the belief or confidence that we can solve our problems with arms. It is because of this notion that the world continues to be dogged by all kinds of problems.

But what can we do? What can we do when big powers have already made up their minds? All we can do is to pray for a gradual end to the tradition of wars. Of course, the militaristic tradition may not end easily. But, let us think of this. If there were bloodshed, people in positions of power, or those who are responsible, will find safe places; they will escape the consequent hardship. They will find safety

for themselves, one way or the other. But what about the poor people, the defenseless people, the children, the old and infirm? They are the ones who will have to bear the brunt of devastation. When weapons are fired, the result will be death and destruction. Weapons will not discriminate between the innocent and guilty. A missile, once fired, will show no respect to the innocent, poor, defenseless, or those worthy of compassion. Therefore, the real losers will be the poor and defenseless, ones who are completely innocent, and those who lead a hand-to-mouth existence.

On the positive side, we now have people volunteer medical care, aid, and other humanitarian assistance in war-torn regions. This is a heart-winning development of the modern age.

Okay, now, let us pray that there be no war at all, if possible. However, if a war does break out, let us pray that there be a minimum bloodshed and hardship. I don't know whether our prayers will be of any practical help. But this is all we can do for the moment. ■

*Translated and issued by:
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Darkness cannot drive out darkness;
only light can do that. Hate cannot
drive out hate; only love can do that.
Hate multiplies hate, violence
multiplies violence, and toughness
multiplies toughness in a descending
spiral of destruction. . . The chain
reaction of evil—hate begetting hate,
wars producing more wars—must be
broken, or we shall be plunged into
the darkness of annihilation.

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

GBF

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Annual GBF Hike to Chimney Rock

Come join us on a short but quite spectacular hike and picnic at Chimney Rock in Pt. Reyes Park on Saturday, April 26. Chimney Rock is famous among nature lovers for its incredible springtime displays of wildflowers. Drake's Bay on one side and the Pacific Ocean on the other provide dramatic backgrounds. We might also visit the Pt. Reyes lighthouse. The hike is short (about a mile each way), but the drive up, while beautiful, isn't; be prepared for an all day excursion. This will be a pot-luck picnic so please bring a dish to share with others. We will be carpooling from the GBF Center (37 Bartlett St.) at 9:00 a.m. Bring warm clothing (it gets windy up there), a blanket, and sun block. Rain cancels. For more information, call Clint Seiter at (415) 386-3088.



Howard DePorte and Clint Seiter enjoying last year's hike to Chimney Rock.

GBF Spring Potluck

Come join GBF for a long overdue potluck on the evening of Saturday, May 3. Bring a dish to share with others and come socialize with fellow GBFers. Kirk Phillips has graciously offered to host the event at his apartment at 1132 Haight St., right across from Buena Vista Park (cross street is Lyon). Festivities start at 7:00 p.m. For further information, call Clint Seiter at (415) 386-3088. Don't miss this opportunity to get to know one another in our sangha a little better! ■

Prisoners Urgently Need Buddhist Books

The most frequent request from gay Buddhist prisoners, other than for pen pals, is for books. In many prisons, they are circulated among small sitting groups and are used in daily and group practice. All books are welcome, particularly those suitable for beginners. If you have any available, please call Don Wiepert at (510) 540-0307, or email him at GDWiepert@aol.com. Don will arrange to collect them and get them to prisoners. ■

Calendar

San Francisco / Bay Area Events

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.

April / May GBF Sunday Speakers

April 6: Jim Wilson

April 13: Carol Newhouse

Carol Osmer Newhouse has studied Insight Meditation for more than twenty years and has been teaching for ten. Her root teacher is Ruth Denison, who was empowered by the great meditation master U Ba Khin of Burma. She has also studied with Dr. Rina Sircar at CIIS and Dr. Thynn Thynn in Daily Life Practice. She is the founding teacher of the Lesbian Buddhist Sangha in Berkeley.

April 20 Donald Rothberg

Donald Rothberg has practiced Insight Meditation since 1976 and has written and taught widely on socially engaged Buddhism and transpersonal studies. He is on the faculty of the Saybrook Graduate School, where he has developed a program in Socially Engaged Spirituality. He has been an organizer, educator, and board member for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF), particularly working as a mentor for its Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE), since its inception in 1995. He is also a meditation teacher, working with two small groups in the East Bay, and is helping to develop a new dharma center in the East Bay.

April 27 Open discussion

May 4 Jim Wilson

May 11 Noah Levine

Noah Levine is a teacher in training with Jack Kornfield at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. He teaches a weekly group in San Francisco and regularly teaches daylongs at Spirit Rock. He also teaches meditation in juvenile halls and at San Quentin prison. He is the author of *Dharma Punx*, a personal memoir to be published in late May. It recounts his life's transition from street punk drug addict to recovering addict and Buddhist practitioner.

May 18 Open discussion

May 25 Phillip Moffitt

Phillip Moffitt began studying raja meditation in 1972 and vipassana meditation in 1983. A member of the Spirit Rock Teachers Council, he teaches vipassana retreats throughout the country and is the founder of the Life Balance Institute. He writes the Dharma Wisdom column for *Yoga Journal* and is the co-author of *The Power to Heal*.

Miss a Dharma Talk?

You can listen to it on the Internet.

Audio files of dharma talks are available at 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

GBF Sangha

Mail correspondence:

GBF

PMB 456

2215-R Market Street

San Francisco, CA 94114

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.

Steering Committee Meeting

The next Steering Committee meeting will be May 4, 2003, following the Sunday sitting, at the San Francisco Buddhist Center.

Volunteers Needed

Volunteer host needed one Sunday per month. Contact Peter at (510) 531-7131 or PeterSFO@aol.com.

Other Positions. We also need volunteers to organize potlucks, to help record dharma talks, to publicize the sangha, and to serve on a practice committee. If you're interested in helping out, please send an email to **volunteers@gaybuddhist.org**, or you can volunteer in person by approaching any Steering Committee member at one of the Sunday sittings. ■

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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2215-R MARKET STREET
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94114

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