



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2004

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.

Hidden Treasure

BY DAVID HOLMES

According to Tibetan tradition, the great spiritual master, Padmasambhava, is said to have hidden hundreds of scriptures, religious images and ritual articles throughout Tibet, to be discovered in the ripening of time by subsequent generations of masters. These *terma*, or "Revealed Treasures," are known today as the Nyingma lineage.

Could it be that such a hidden treasure lies right before our eyes in the Sutra of the Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma? That is in fact the audacious claim of David Brazier, a British psychotherapist and spiritual teacher to the Order of Amida Buddha, a community dedicated to socially engaged Buddhism.

In his book, *The Feeling Buddha*, David Brazier presents a convincing argument for re-examining this sutra, which contains the text of the First Sermon of the Buddha, delivered shortly after his enlightenment. In this sermon, the Buddha expounds the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

This is the most frequently chanted sutra in the entire Buddhist canon, and it has doubtless been so from the day it was first taught. Since its first redaction into Pali, this sutra has remained for more than 2000 years fixed and constant. What has happened is that the *world* has shifted around the sutra. The vernacular language has changed. The significance of a few key terms has been altered by the passage of time. The thread of continuity in the teaching lineage may have faltered.

And now, without fanfare, David Brazier quietly readjusts this cornerstone of the Buddhist edifice, revealing its original face. It seems preposterous.

But consider the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, once hidden beneath centuries of smoke of devotional candles. Who could have imagined that taking the restorer's brush to that ceiling would reveal the true genius of Michelangelo in such a miraculous frenzy of delicate pastels?

Unlike the Tibetan *terma* or the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma Sutra is a treasure hidden in plain sight.

David Brazier's provocative insight is that a radical shift in the definition of one key term, *samudaya*, and a consequent subtle shift in the meaning of two others, *dukkha* and *nirodha*, has obscured the message of the Buddha, with profound consequences to the subsequent historical development of Buddhist philosophy. He does not linger over a detailed analysis of how such an important misunderstanding could have occurred, nor does he attempt to build an airtight case for the rightness of his interpretation. He is, quite rightly, more concerned with showing how such a reframing of this core Buddhist teaching can help individuals cope with the afflictions of life, to see that their own struggles with desire and aversion are part of a natural process, one which does not go away after enlightenment. His purpose is to show that what the Buddha awakened to was a full understanding of this universal bondage to the thought of escape, and to a practice that holds the promise of true liberation.

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I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Although it challenges a central dogma of orthodox Buddhism, it succeeds in aligning this sutra with the *spirit* of Buddhism, the open heart of compassion.

My purpose, in this article, is to go somewhat further than David Brazier does by tackling the fourth Noble Truth, which in his analysis was left relatively unscathed. I hope to show that by reframing this fourth element, *marga*, or “path,” a more coherent and multilayered teaching will be revealed, closer to the one originally constructed with such infinite care by the Buddha, a teaching which details not only a full cosmology of sentient exist-

What the Buddha was able to generalize in this most astoundingly prescient insight (which is essentially the core insight of evolutionary biology, behavioral psychology, and of course Buddhist practice) is that all sentient beings, including human beings, are burdened by their reactivity to negative events. Until awakening to the Dharma, humans are enslaved by the power of their own minds. When confronted with an obstacle, a challenge, or an affliction, the human mind naturally seeks some mode of escape.

tence, a guide for engaged social action, and a curriculum of study for one’s personal practice, but also a specific meditation technique for facing with serenity and nobility all of the afflictions of life.

I also hope to shed some light on the question of how such a misinterpretation could have crept into the orthodox rendering of this sutra. Apparently, this occurred as a conflation of this text with the *paticca-samuppada* (dependent origination) material to which it bears a superficial resemblance in specific vocabulary, but not in meaning or intent.

Finally, I will present what I hope is convincing evidence for the rightness of this new interpretation in its precise parallelism with another source, one that has long been generally regarded by academics as a fanciful tale: the legend of the Buddha’s struggle with the demon Mara and his minions on the eve of his awakening.

In brief, the controversy centers upon the interpretation of the term used to summarize the second noble truth, *samudaya*, which in turn colors the interpretation of the

first noble truth, *dukkha*. The meaning of the agglutinative combination form *dukkha-samudaya* (in both renderings, the problematic element in the quest for liberation) therefore differs widely from one version to the other. The orthodox version would have it mean “the cause of suffering,” while this new rendering insists upon the contrary sense of “response to afflictions,” essentially reversing traditional cause and effect. This in turn affects the reading of the third and fourth noble truths, as we shall see.

With some range of variation between sects, the orthodox version treats *dukkha* as an amalgamation: “the whole mass of suffering,” “life is suffering,” “suffering pervades all of existence,” or some such equally dreary proclamation. The Buddha is said to have come to a full realization of the universality of suffering. He is said to have discovered its cause in “desire,” “craving for rebirth,” “thirst for sense pleasure,” etc. His radical insight is said to be his discovery that the whole mass of suffering could be brought to an end (including, unnervingly, *birth*, listed as the first in the series of sufferings) by the complete extinction of desire. The fourth Noble Truth seems, in this version, very much unrelated to the other three. The Eightfold Path appears here as a simple listing, without clarification, of eight areas of spiritual concern which, when somehow brought to perfection, would presumably lead the practitioner to a state

of such purity that he would be willing to renounce desire completely, and upon his death (never to be born again) enter final *parinirvana*.

I would ask you, at this point, to read the enclosed text of David Brazier’s translation of The Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma Sutra. There is not sufficient space in this article to weigh the relative merits of these two interpretations. In any case, the decision to go with one or the other, or to straddle them both for a time, is entirely yours. Why then make such a big ruckus about all this? Well, the short answer is that I think it is important that one is able to *believe* in the central dogma of one’s religion. That seems obvious enough. And I never was able to dispel my doubts about the teachings contained in this sutra until I read David Brazier’s book.

Consider this line from the end of the sutra, which is not in contention in these two versions:

When the Victorious One had said this, the five monks were filled with joy.

Not only the monks but even the spirits of the earth and all the celestial beings thunderously approved of the Buddha's teaching. I never experienced anything resembling joy in reading the orthodox version of this sutra. Rather it filled me with dread. It presents an exceedingly dour view of life that left me cold. I did experience *great* joy, however, upon discovering this new, life-affirming translation.

Now what is it that makes David Brazier's rendition of this sutra so much more joyful? Here, the Buddha's enlightenment was an awakening to the best news of all. He discovered that although life presents us with many obstacles, problems, and difficulties, and although we seem enslaved by our conditioned habitual reactivity—to the craving for relief which has been prompted by these afflictions—we have the capacity to find true joy by letting go of our attachment to the objects of craving, whatever they may be, and settling back into the peace of the present moment.

What follows now is largely composed of my own thoughts and speculations—informed, of course, by David Brazier's work—but without the seal of approval of this *new* orthodoxy. Most of these ideas come directly from the sutra itself, or from other Buddhist sources, as I have sought corroboration for this radical view.

DUKKHA-SAMUDAYA

Perhaps the best way to get at the distinction between the two contending definitions of *dukkha* is to understand that in the orthodox definition of “suffering,” the list of items, “birth, old age, sickness, death, grief, lamentation, pain, depression,” etc., is taken to imply “the whole mass of suffering.” In the alternate translation, “afflictions,” each of these words, individually, connotes a specific instance of a particular negatively charged occurrence, which acts as a stimulus to the body-mind, provoking a response in the form of either a reflex action, a plan, scheme, temptation or desire intended to subdue, distract, or otherwise address that particular *dukkha*.

What the Buddha was able to generalize in this most astoundingly prescient insight (which is essentially the core insight of evolutionary biology, behavioral psychology, and of course Buddhist practice) is that all sentient beings, including human beings, are burdened by their reactivity to negative events. Until awakening to the Dharma, humans are enslaved by the power of their own minds. When confronted with an obstacle, a challenge, or an affliction, the human mind naturally seeks some mode of escape. This is *samudaya*, which is defined as:

...thirst for self re-creation which is associated with greed. It lights upon whatever pleasures are to be found here and there. It is thirst for sense pleasure, for being and not being.

The definitions of *dukkha* and *samudaya* are intended to show the ubiquity of such afflictions and the broad range of possible responses. The first four items in the list of *dukkha*, (“birth, old age, sickness, death”) are irrefutable occurrences in the natural course of life. They represent the cosmic scale, over which we can never have control.

The next two (“grief, lamentation”) denote loss of all kinds, small and large. Next come the three broad categories of negative emotional or bodily sensations (“pain, depression, and agitation”). Then follow the various frustrations of our desires (“being associated with what you do not like, being separated from what you do like, and not being able to get what you want”). Finally, the Buddha indicates that the presence of *dukkha* is also woven into the very fabric of our being, in the five aggregates of grasping: form, feeling, perception, impulse, and consciousness.

The word used to encapsulate the meaning of the second noble truth is *samudaya*. It has two roots, *-udaya*, meaning “to go up,” and *sam*, meaning “with” or “together.” Combining these roots produces “coming up along with” or “co-arising with” *dukkha*, hence “response to afflictions.”

How this came to be understood as “the cause of suffering” is somewhat baffling until it is placed in the context of another group of teachings from the vast Buddhist canon, the *paticca-samuppada* (dependent origination) material.

Also known as the *bhavachakra* (wheel of becoming) or the Twelfthfold Chain of Causation, these teachings expound the Buddha's understanding of the complex sequence of events that form the cycle of rebirth, reincarnation. It is true that the sutras on the theme of dependent origination share some of the terminology with the present sutra (specifically: birth, old age, sickness, death, and thirst). However, the genius of the Twelfthfold Chain of Causation lies in the specificity with which it links each cause and effect.

If the Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma Sutra is to be considered an abbreviated form of *paticca-samuppada*, as is often claimed, no reason is given why the Buddha did not clarify the matter here. As you can see, the sutra is only one page long. The Buddha could have (in fact he certainly would have) included the “missing” parts, if indeed there were any. Strike two for the orthodox view.

Enter Mara, “the Bad One.”

A seemingly rather fanciful recounting of Gautama's awakening appears in a later legend. It presents the Buddha in a heroic epic struggle with the forces of evil, who are intent upon keeping the Buddha from attaining his goal of liberation.

When placed alongside the Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma Sutra, however, this legend takes on a new significance. If one views this as an allegorical reenactment, perhaps designed by the Buddha himself or his early followers as an entertainment for a lay audience, we see that in every detail, specifically in the chronology of its scenes, there is a direct parallelism to the First Sermon. Verse for verse, line for line, all the entrances and exits of each of the cast of characters corresponds to David Brazier's interpretation of this sutra, and not to the orthodox interpretation.

Gautama enters the scene a completely bedraggled wreck of a man. He is in the midst of the most profound spiritual crisis of his life. In desperation, he has decided to take his last stand, so to speak, seated under the Bodhi

tree. He has no guarantee of success. He has spent the last six years of his life vainly attempting to liberate himself from suffering. When he seats himself under the tree, he is the personification of *Dukkha*.

My body reached a state of extreme emaciation. Because of eating so little my limbs became like the jointed stems of creepers or bamboo; my backside became like a buffalo's hoof; my backbone, bent or straight, was like corded beads; my jutting ribs the broken rafters of an old house; the gleam of my eyes sunk deep in their sockets was like the gleam of water seen deep down at the bottom of a deep well.

What follows from this *dukkha* (not what causes it) is the arrival of Mara. Mara is the personification of *Samudaya*. The temptations offered by Mara are actually the churnings of Gautama's own mind. They are a catalog of very realistic possibilities still open to the prince, prompted by his depression, disappointment, and the extremity of his afflictions. He could easily give up this struggle, and he knew it. He could return home to the loving embrace of his family, to the security and power of the kingship which was his birthright. There awaited him all of the extravagant pleasures and sensualities of courtly life. This represents Mara as "thirst for self re-creation which is associated with greed."

Mara's vast armies arrive next on stage, hideous beings representing the numberless, ancient, twisted energies of habitual responses to affliction: lust, aversion, hunger, thirst, craving, sloth and torpor, cowardice, doubt, hypocrisy, stupidity, false glory, and conceit. All of these must have been entertained by the dispirited and exhausted Gautama.

Knowing that *samudaya* "lights upon whatever pleasures are to be found here and there," Mara next sends in his three beautiful daughters to tempt the Buddha: Tanha (thirst for sense pleasure), Raga (craving for being), and Arati (aversion, or craving for not being).

What follows is a piece of truly beautiful allegory. Mara wants Gautama's throne. In other words, he claims the right to continue to rule Gautama's life, as he always had done, through the power of *samudaya*. But the Lotus Throne of the Buddha's Blissful *Samadhi* is not for sale at any price. In the gesture which initiates for all time the defining practice of the Buddha Dharma, Gautama becomes the Awakened One by reaching down with his right hand and touching the Earth, which bears witness to his rightful ownership of that exalted state with a powerful roll of thunder as the Earth quakes and Mara vanishes.

An immeasurable light was now released into the world.

This gesture of touching the Earth is the most common representation in art of the Buddha's enlightenment. But what does it signify?

I believe that the meaning of this gesture is contained within the third and fourth noble truths. I also believe that the third and fourth noble truths, in parallel with the first and second, are to be read as an agglutinative combination form: *nirodha-marga*.

NIRODHA-MARGA

The roots of the third noble truth, *nirodha*, are *ni*, meaning "down," and *rodha*, which originally meant "an earthen embankment." The image is of something being contained and protected within what can be thought of as a fire pit.

Simply put, it points to the practice of containing the fiery energies of our thirst for escape, which hound us in response to our afflictions. The sutra reads:

The noble truth of nirodha, containment, is this: it is the complete capturing of that thirst. It is to let go of, be liberated from and refuse to dwell in the object of that thirst. Containment, yes; but where?

Obviously, these energies must be contained somehow within the body-mind itself. In order to reference the body-mind in detail, in order to address the wide range of afflictions and the infinite varieties of mental and emotional responses, a map of the interior landscape is needed. Later in his ministry, the Buddha would adopt a more neutral map of "the eighteen spheres of mentation" in this and similar contexts (the six sense organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind; the six sense objects: color, sound, smell, taste, touch, object of mind; and the six associated realms of perception).

In the First Sermon, however, I contend that the Buddha was referencing the energetic body-mind map most familiar to this particular audience of ascetic yogis—the classical yogic chakra system.

Before continuing in this vein, let us examine a striking enigma in the orthodox understanding of this sutra. Each of the three terms, *dukkha*, *samudaya*, and *nirodha*, are defined in a precise glossary provided by the Buddha himself right in the middle of the sermon. It is as if each of these terms were intended to be viewed as new coinages, each stamped with the Buddha's own regal imprimatur. He chose what must have seemed to him words whose etymologies were self-evident and therefore impervious to corruption. He further went on to define each of the terms fully and unambiguously in relation to this new Dharma. Despite his best efforts, however, error crept in.

But the fourth noble truth has been understood in a different way. It is not thought of as a path, precisely, although the word *marga* means precisely "path." Eight specific terms are listed, but there is no sense of the first term leading to the second term, etc., nor is the final term the goal. Rather, it is thought of as a set of eight distinct areas of practice which should be taken up as one walks the spiritual path. In the orthodox view, this is the path toward a future perfection, one which will culminate in the cessation of desire, and thence the end of suffering.

Nor does David Brazier upset this view of *marga* in any significant way. In his book, he devotes a chapter to each of the eight "limbs" of the path, of course reframing them in the light of this new translation.

In order to fully understand the significance of this term *nirodha-marga*, we must consider the setting of this sutra, and the audience.

For six years Gautama had been studying and practicing

yogic austerities, most recently with a group of five of his friends, the ascetics mentioned in the sutra. This group included Kondanna, who was immediately awakened upon hearing the Buddha's words. Gautama had been the disciple of Kamala Alada and later Udraka Ramaputra. Although we do not have reliable or precise details of the particular austerities they engaged in, one may make the assumption that the goal of these practices was in accord with the general tenor of all esoteric yogic practices: namely, the awakening and development of kundalini energy, rising from the base of the spine, through the seven chakras, finally joining in union with Brahma, attaining cosmic consciousness at the level of the seventh chakra, the crown chakra, the thousand-petaled lotus, the Brahma Gate.

The Buddha begins the First Sermon with a direct appeal to the five ascetics, gently chiding them by comparing their lofty goal of escape from the earthly coil to that of the overindulgent pleasure-seeking which is "the way of ordinary folk." Both strategies he deems "unworthy" and

In each moment, as a particular *samudaya* of escape appears in one's body-mind, one is instructed to return that energy to the chakra from which it originated. One owns the thirst, but releases the object.

"ignoble," "not conducive to the real purpose of life."

He proposes the middle way of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right *samadhi*.

The term "right" has the sense of "whole" or "complete," as well as (importantly) "all moving in the same direction."

Combining these bits of evidence—the Earth touching gesture with its thunderous energetic release; the downward directed containment of *nirodha*; the lack of any further definitions for what constitutes right thought, right speech, right action, etc.; the fact that the audience was composed entirely of accomplished yogis; the immediate comprehension by Kondanna of the Buddha's meaning; an easy double entendre on the middle way as the pathway down the middle of the body; the fact that the *Dharma-chakra* (the "wheel of the law" from the title of this sutra) in yogic symbology is the golden ring of the light of consciousness spinning on the index finger of Vishnu's upper right hand (!), which is said to animate and harmonize the chakras of the body; that the word for "turning" in the title of the sutra also means "to flow, as water"; and that the list *just happens* to be in the correct sequence—let me propose the following possibility.

Nirodha-marga is the "downward containment path" through the seven chakras, from the crown through the base, grounding and containing the upward-flaring energy of escape from affliction. The goal of this path, Right *Samad-*

hi, is represented by the Lotus Throne upon which the Buddha sits. This fundamental layer of meaning offers direct instruction for the practice of mindfulness meditation.

Marga is a path, and Right Samadhi is its goal. *Samadhi*, from the Sanskrit for "union" or "putting together," means different things to Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists, and within Buddhism itself, there is no lack of controversy as to its meaning. But the *location* of the Buddha's *Samadhi* is crystal-clear. It is not "up and out" in some future or distant heaven. He touched the *Earth* in the Deer Park at Isipatana. It was the spirits of the *Earth* who cried out in gratitude, their delight resounding throughout the heavenly realms. The purpose of this *Samadhi* was to change the world.

Accordingly, when Kondanna later appears in the Surangama Sutra and is asked to describe his entrance into *samadhi* to the assembled bodhisattvas and mahasattvas, he speaks of this moment in the Deer Park as an experience which unified the mind, the body, and the world: ". . . the thoroughly perfect accommodation, unification, and harmon-

nization of the eighteen spheres of mentation in contact with objects through the sense organs" Wordy, but pure Zen!

Certainly the Eightfold Path encompasses the orthodox understanding of a defined set of specific areas of focus for spir-

itual growth. And the Buddha's goal in that teaching moment certainly involved coaxing these yogis back into a more "normalized" spirituality. Each of the words he chose to reference a particular chakra is a humble, grounding term.

In each moment, as a particular *samudaya* of escape appears in one's body-mind, one is instructed to return that energy to the chakra from which it originated. One owns the thirst, but releases the object. If a response comes in the form of an impulse toward wrong speech, contain that impulse gently within the energetic center of right speech, the throat chakra. If greed, hate, or delusion arises from the base chakra of survival instincts, contain that energy in right mindfulness. Right action (the arms and hands being associated with the heart chakra — here picture Avalokiteshvara's thousand outstretched arms) should be action propelled by love, compassion, equanimity, and sympathetic joy. Let the creative energies of the second chakra not be entirely spent in the mad pursuit of sexual pleasure, but apply *some portion* of that energy toward right effort! ■

Note: I am currently writing a series of essays on the evolution of consciousness and evolutionary neurobiology in a Buddhist context. Your comments and observations would be most appreciated. My e-mail address is atruemanofnorank@hotmail.com.

The Sutra of the Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma

Thus have I heard. Once the “One who Enjoys the Spoils” of Victory” was staying at Isipatana near Benares. He spoke to the group of five ascetics as follows: Monks, there are two extremes which one who has left the house-hold life should not resort to.

What are they? One is devotion to sense desire and sense pleasure. It is demeaning. It is the way of ordinary folk. It is unworthy and unprofitable. The other is devotion to self mortification. It is painful and ignoble. It is not conducive to the real purpose of life. Giving up these extremes, the “One who has Been There” has woken up to the middle way which provides insight and understanding and causes peace, wisdom, enlightenment and Nirvana.

The Middle Way is the noble eight-limb way of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right samadhi.

The noble truth of dukkha, affliction, is this: birth, old age, sickness, death, grief, lamentation, pain, depression, and agitation are dukkha. Dukkha is being associated with what you do not like, being separated from what you do like, and not being able to get what you want. In short, the five aggregates of grasping are dukkha.

The noble truth of samudaya, response to affliction, is this: it is thirst for self re-creation which is associated with greed. It lights upon whatever pleasures are to be found here and there. It is thirst for sense pleasure, for being and not being.

The noble truth of nirodha, containment, is this: it is the complete capturing of that thirst. It is to let go of, be liberated from and refuse to dwell in the object of that thirst.

The noble truth of marga, the right path, is this: it is the noble eight-limb way, namely right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right samadhi.

“This is the noble truth of affliction”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

“Affliction should be understood to be a noble truth”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

“Full understanding of affliction as a noble truth has dawned”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

“This is the noble truth of response”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

“Response should be understood to be a noble truth”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

“Full understanding of response as a noble truth has dawned”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom,

knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught. “This is the noble truth of containment”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

“Containment should be understood to be a noble truth”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

“Full understanding of containment as a noble truth has dawned”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

“This is the noble truth of the Path”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

“The Path should be understood to be a noble truth”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

“Full understanding of the Path as a noble truth has dawned”—this was the insight, understanding, wisdom, knowledge and clarity which arose in me about things I had not been taught.

As long as I had not got a completely clear insight and understanding in all these three ways about each of these Four Noble Truths, I could not be sure that there was anyone in the world, divine or human, who had woken up to the highest and most complete enlightenment.

However, when my insight and understanding had become completely clear in all these twelve turnings of the wheel, then I knew for sure that there was someone in the world who had woken up to the highest and most complete enlightenment. Then I knew that the liberation of my mind was unassailable.

This is the last step. There is no further step.

When the Victorious One had said this, the five monks were filled with joy. In one of them, Kondanna, the pure Dharma Eye was completely opened. He saw that whatever can arise can be contained.

When the Victorious One had turned the wheel of the Dharma in this way the spirits of the earth cried out: Near Benares, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, the wheel of the highest Dharma has been turned and it cannot now be turned back by anyone, human or divine, anywhere in the world.

This cry resounded throughout the heavenly realms. The earth shook. An immeasurable light was now released into the world.

Then the Blessed One said: Venerable Kondanna has understood. And from that day on he was given the name “He Who Understood”.

GBF

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Cost \$410-\$310 sliding scale. Fee is for room and board. Teaching and staffing of the retreats is by donation made at the end of the retreat. POC scholarships are available by calling 415-488-0164 x 312.

For more information about how to register call 415-488-0164 x 354 or email retreats@spiritrock.org after August 6. ■

Help Needed With Gay Prisoner Outreach

BY DON WIEPERT

“Prison Dharma,” the recent issue about the practice of gay Buddhists in prison, received many favorable comments, from the Fellowship, folks in the larger Buddhist community, and from many inmates. The articles were culled from my contacts with gay prisoners over the past six years. During this time, the mail has grown from a monthly average of twelve to forty pieces. The work and results are extensive:

- In cooperation with the San Francisco Zen Center, many prisoners have received books and other materials.
- The prison mailing list for the newsletter was recently revised, but over 60 men replied that they still wish to receive it, and 20 or so have been added since then. In responding to the request about prisoner interest, many men and women wrote about how important the newsletter is to them, both as a dharma contact and message from the outside.
- We also have contact with several prison sitting groups facilitated by gay men who rely on books and materials supplied by the Zen Center and other Bay Area Buddhist communities.
- Advocacy is also sometimes required, to help with problems with indifferent staff, mailing rooms, and general prejudice

I now find that I cannot continue to do this task alone, because of changes in my life and other personal demands on my time and practice. I am requesting that several members assist in the work. The work could easily be organized as a collective activity, since the work breaks down into separate tasks. These include retrieving mail, answering pen pal requests and newsletter requests, updating the mailing list, and corresponding with prisoners about dharma issues and other problems.

I can be contacted by e-mail at gdwiep@earthlink.net or by phone at 415-503-0524. ■

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.

October / November GBF Sunday Speakers

October 3 **Open Discussion**

October 10 **Furyu Nancy Shroeder**

Furyu Nancy Shroeder has been with the San Francisco Zen Center since 1976, was ordained a Buddhist priest in 1986, and is a dharma heir of Tenshin Reb Anderson. She is currently *tanto*, or head of practice, at Green Gulch Farm.

October 17 **Diane Elrod**

Diana Elrod, an active member of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), is a PhD candidate in Buddhist Studies at the California College of Integral Studies. She will speak about the Nichiren tradition.

October 24 **Rob Schmidt and Stuart Goodnick**

Rob and Stuart head the Tayu Meditation Center in Sebastapol, which teaches the "Fourth Way Meditation Practice" based on the teachings of Gurdjieff.

October 31 **Carol Osmer 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.

November 7 **Open Discussion**

November 14 **Bill Weber**

Bill Weber is a senior Vipassana student who is currently training in the Community Dharma Leaders program at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Also a film editor and director, Bill co-directed the award-winning documentary *The Cockettes*.

November 21 **Losang Monlam**

Venerable Losang Monlam is a monk and spiritual program coordinator for the Tse Chen Ling Center for Tibetan Buddhist Studies in San Francisco.

November 28 **Roger Corless**

Roger Corless is Professor of Religion, Emeritus, at Duke University. Having retired to the Bay area, he contributes to the GBF Newsletter under the nom de plume Dharma Daddy. He is the author of several books, including the widely praised *Vision of Buddhism: The Space Under the Tree*.

Green Gulch Retreat

Ji-Sing (an ordained member of Thich Nhat Hanh's "Order of Interbeing") is facilitating a *Day of Mindfulness* retreat on "The Cultivation of Gratitude" on Saturday, November 20, 10am-5pm, at the beautiful Green Gulch Farm Buddhist Center in Marin County (car-pools arranged upon request). \$40-\$60 sliding donation (\$30-\$50 for IBR members, limited \$20 scholarships available on need-only basis). Organic vegetarian lunch included. Please register early (max limit: 50 persons). Contact Ji-Sing at InterBuddha@aol.com or 415-235-5881 (cell) for a flyer and registration form.

How to Reach Us

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GBF Yahoo Discussion Group

There is now a GBF discussion group for the general membership (and others) on Yahoo.

Join the discussion at:

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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