



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

APRIL / MAY 2009 NEWSLETTER

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.

Extraordinary Mind

BY SCOTT HUNT

Scott Hunt, who teaches Buddhism at UC Berkeley, is the author of *The Future of Peace*. He gave the following talk on Easter Day in 2001. This transcript first appeared in the April/May 2002 issue of the GBF newsletter.

I didn't prepare a lot of remarks and just thought about what I would like to talk about this morning. I remember years ago seeing a psychiatrist friend of mine. I'd go in and sit down and say, "I don't really have anything to say today." And he'd say, "Oh, no?" It would just sort of come out. What I intend to do is make a few remarks and then let's talk, have a discussion. My teacher's name is His Holiness Mindrolling Trichen Rinpoche. He is considered the highest living yogi in the Tibetan schools. He's very close with the Dalai Lama, and because of his wisdom, I'm able to pass some things on here today.

Today is Easter or Tax Day, so the obvious topics are Christ rising from the dead, which is what I think is the ultimate symbol of optimism, or Tax Day, which is about a loss of money and impermanence. Two great topics, but I hate talking about money, so let's talk about the idea of Easter. I've actually been writing quite a lot recently about pessimism, and how pessimism has thwarted many of the higher goals of mankind, having peace in our hearts and peace in our communities. Pessimism has become very insidious in that we believe that peace isn't truly possible and in our Buddhist practice we should stop and question whether we believe liberation, the ultimate peace, is possible. I think most of us still harbor things from our Christian past, just from this culture, about prophecies of doom and the innate badness of man. Today let's focus on the other aspects of man: compassion and joy.

For many millions of people around the world today, Christianity is of course the best path and they're celebrating this joyous event. For me personally, Buddhism is the correct path. It is the path, for me, of true liberation. It is a path that is joyous and delightful. And one thing I wanted to say first off this morning: if you're undertaking a practice and you don't feel joy, then you should probably stop. If you find you're viewing the four noble truths, that there is suffering in life, the first noble truth, life is suffering—if you're viewing that from a pessimistic standpoint or if you're feeling sad in your practice or it's too hard or meditation is so hard and sitting is so hard, then stop, because liberation, the Buddhist path, is about joy.

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I read recently that “a man can’t cry unless he’s seen the face of God.” There’s much to weep for from the standpoint of ordinary mind. We use our ordinary conceptualizations. It’s particularly helpful if you stop doing that and approach your practice with extraordinary mind. I’ve spent about ten weeks together with some of you [in a dharma study class], and at the beginning of each session, we do something called the four transformations. The four transformations—and don’t worry about categorizations or how many numbers; Buddhism is full of numbers and categories—but the point is, when you approach your practice, approach it from an extraordinary perspective.

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You’re not just a person sitting down in front of a statue of Buddha or sitting in front of some kind of Buddhist text. You are Buddha nature; you are a potential Buddha: you have that within you when you sit down to do your practice. So you have to have an extraordinary view of yourself and why you are approaching your practice first of all. And even your surroundings, though we may see them as very ordinary four walls, the floor and a ceiling—that very place, because of the authenticity of your purpose, the sincerity of your purpose, that place becomes a pure Buddha realm, so you’re transforming your motivation; you’re transforming your surroundings. You even transform your teacher, somebody whose words came from their teacher, all the way back to the Buddha. Transform that person to look past their faults and really try to see the essence of the goodness in their words.

So now, I’d like you to just stop and look within yourself, and raise that awareness of Buddha nature, raise your awareness of that potential to achieve. You can feel that sudden joy, that sudden lightness. That Buddha nature is the kernel of faith. The last time I was here, we talked about the five spiritual powers, and the first spiritual power is faith. In a study group we had, I thought we would probably skip over that very quickly, but we ended up spending two or three weeks talking about faith, and I’ve realized as I’ve started to give teachings that faith is the

hardest thing for us to comprehend, especially in Buddhism. Faith in Christianity is often obedience; it is often faith in a savior. Buddhism is at first uncomfortable because the faith is in you, in your own potential. There is no savior. Buddha said, “You are your own master. How else could it be?” There’s no one that can change your mind; there’s no one that can get inside you and change the way that you perceive things. All the work must be done by you. It’s very difficult to have faith in ourselves, especially when we have failings and limitations and sorrow. Again, I’m coming back to the point that we need to examine whether we truly have faith in liberation. Have we

really experienced our Buddha nature? Do we really believe it’s possible to liberate ourselves?

Last time I was here, I mentioned that when you develop faith and you fail to take any action on the faith, it’s like being in a burning building and seeing the exit but failing to go outside the exit. Somebody said to me that they don’t like that analogy at all because it takes the delight and the wonderment and the curiosity out of Buddhism, and I think he was correct. Buddhism is full of a lot of parables, stories that seem a bit heavy-handed and harsh, and I want to keep coming back today to the point that this is really a joyous path. I want to hear from you today about where you may be failing to feel that sense of joy and curiosity and wonderment on the path.

I was writing the other day about pessimism and whether even in despair you can feel joy, and it’s often given to us in black or white, that we either feel joyful or we feel suffering. But that doesn’t comport with my life experiences because I’ve been all over the world and have been in refugee camps where children have lost their parents and seen their parents killed, and yet continue to play. I’ve stopped by the sides of the roads in India and sat with lepers and had lunch with them. They have no fingers and just stubs for feet and festering wounds and yet we managed to laugh and share and have a good time together. I’ve met victims who’ve lost their legs when they stepped

on land mines in Cambodia, and again, we were able to share and laugh. I guess my point is that it's within all of us to go back to the Buddha nature and to pull that joy out and to face suffering even when we're having challenges and adversity and feel that joy.

So let's talk a little about our conceptions of faith. Last time when I was here I talked about faith and how it is said that it's hard to meet a teacher in this life that you connect with and it's harder still to meet the Buddha, but it's the hardest thing of all to have true faith in the teachings, so we know it doesn't come easily. The importance is captured in Dilgo Kyentse's saying that if you have practice without faith in yourself, without true self confidence rightly understood, it's like sitting in a cave that faces north waiting for the sun to pour in. It just won't happen. So let's talk about what proper faith is. For some of you, this is repetitious, but just keep your mind open and maybe there will be something new in it.

We are trying to position our faith between cynicism and doubt, which we don't want, and blind faith, which we also don't want. If we have blind faith in the teachings or the teacher, we are giving up our Buddha nature; we are giving up our own mastery of our lives and our faculties. So when you read about all the abuses that happened in different sanghas, etc., you're reading about people who have come to the teacher and they've thought, "He looks a certain way," or "Isn't he exotic, from the East," or "Doesn't he have interesting command of different foreign words?"

you bring things home, until you really know in your heart that something is true, it is not so." Of course, the other wrong type of faith is this cynicism, this intellectualizing of everything in the dharma. For example, in the debate of King Melinda, someone approached the Buddha and said, "Okay, I think I want to follow you. You're resplendent, you give a certain kind of light, and you're a wonderful teacher, but I have some questions first, and if you can answer these questions, then I'll follow you. I want to know: Is the world eternal? Is the world not eternal? Does the Tathagata (the Buddha) exist after death? Does he not exist? Is the soul the same as the body? Is the body one thing and the soul another?" And these questions went on and on for a time, and it's said that the Buddha gave no reply whatsoever to the questioner, because the Buddhas don't waste words on unnecessary things.

There's also another story of the fourteen unanswered questions, in which a disciple was asking Buddha all these questions and Buddha picked up a handful of leaves and said, "Now tell me, are there more leaves in my hand or more leaves on the tree?" And the disciple said, "Of course there are more leaves on the tree." And the Buddha said, "Well so it is with the answers that I can give. There are more answers that I know than I can actually give to you." So again, we have to discover the answers; someone can't give them to us.

One of the main problems of having either kind of improper faith is that the ego plays tricks on us. On the

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They forget that they are the object of their own veneration, that they are the Buddha nature, that they're trying to become the Buddha, and that the teacher is only a teacher because the student says so. "You teach me now. You're my teacher." So we can't have blind faith in anything. We have to have proper investigation. The Dalai Lama tells us over and over again, "Even the words of Buddha are not true until you investigate them and make them true. Until

one hand, if we have blind faith in a teacher, we're just creating all kinds of stories, all kinds of scenarios about this exotic teacher from the east, this exotic teaching: "Look, I have this wonderful lama, and I sit a certain way and I wear a certain type of clothing and I have a certain type of Buddha," etc. All of these things can actually take us farther and farther away from just understanding the purity of mind. These are more labels, more conceptualizations

that we're heaping on our already crowded minds.

On the other hand, our ego can play tricks by pretending we're having a spiritual experience when we're really not. We've referred to this as a facsimile experience. We do have one mystical experience and it really ignites us and sends us on the path. We feel very joyous, like we can dive into Buddhism now. In fact, we never go back to have that experience again; we never do the hard work to sustain such an experience, but we rather are pretty proud of ourselves for having it at one time and then we recreate all these stories, and have all these wonderful Buddhist things around us.

I have been in refugee camps where children have lost their parents and seen their parents killed, and yet continue to play. I've stopped by the sides of the roads in India and sat with lepers and had lunch with them. They have no fingers and just stubs for feet and festering wounds and yet we managed to laugh and share and have a good time together. I've met victims who've lost their legs when they stepped on land mines in Cambodia, and again, we were able to share and laugh. I guess my point is that it's within all of us to go back to the Buddha nature and to pull that joy out and to face suffering even when we're having challenges and adversity and feel that joy.

Scientists often become very mired in their egos by questioning the validity of everything. "Until I can measure it, and see it, I don't believe that it's true." And this is another egocentric view that we have to let go of.

Okay, we've talked about the kinds of wrong faith. So what is the proper faith? Firstly, faith has to be experienced. When I invited you before to look within and to somehow align with the feeling of higher awareness, some of you did it and some of you didn't. You just wanted to hear what I had to say. But everything I have to say is useless until you look into your higher awareness and feel some of these words resonate with the truth you're discovering in you at this very moment. So Buddha nature, what is it? That is something impossible to tell anyone else. You have to discover it yourself, but it is the seed of all enlightenment; it is the seat of higher wisdom that you have inside you.

There are said to be four stages of faith. Let me just discuss those very briefly. The first stage of faith, again faith

being self-confidence, confidence in your Buddha nature, is called clear faith. And in that stage in faith, we feel this great sense of joy that there is liberation from suffering and that we are making progress. The second stage of faith is called longing faith. Once we've discovered that joy and felt that liberation, we necessarily, I believe, have a desire to help other people, so we have this longing desire to help others and to keep improving ourselves so that we can help other people as well.

The third stage is confident faith. That's characterized by not having as much backsliding as you used to have, but

having a true understanding that this path is going to work for you and that this is the right path.

The fourth stage is called irreversible faith, and this is something that I would love to acquire in this lifetime. My teacher has it, and I hope to have it one day. That's characterized by the complete lack of doubt, so much so that you have an absolute unwillingness to renounce any of the truths you have found, even at the price of your own life. This is the faith that people like Gandhi and the Dalai Lama and others develop, and Christ, we should say, on Easter: the complete unwillingness to denounce the truth that you have found even at the cost of your own life.

Of all aspects of faith, the one thing that I want to leave you with today is that again you are the master of your own life, you have to create self-confidence, you have to believe that you can achieve. There's an equation that I believe encapsulates the entire Buddhist path: supreme self-confidence plus virtuous action equals supreme attainment. ■

dharmic verse

In this issue, we're offering you a second look at some of the poems that have appeared in the GBF newsletter over the past several years. We'd love to publish more poetry. If your Buddhist practice has inspired you to pick up your pen (or sit down at your keyboard), please consider sharing your work with the sangha. Send your submissions to editor@gaybuddhist.org or to Editor, GBF Newsletter, PMB 456, 2215-R Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94114.

Take enough vitamin C, they tell me,
and you can end up living forever.
However, leaving aside forever,
you can, they say, live a very long time.
Taoist immortals ate cinnabar,
many searched for the fountain of youth,
many prayers to heaven beg for more years,
such endeavors bring only dust and tears.
Where the soaring rocky mountains now stand
grand ocean waves once shifted shore side sand.
Where the desert heat now endlessly shimmers
once a green fern forest quivered with life.
The mayfly lives but a single season,
can you tell me the seasons of a star?
—Jim Wilson

wind moves upon the waters
and waves appear
rain descends upon the earth
and flowers bloom and blossom
two hearts embrace as one
and Buddhas rejoice in the ten directions
—Ji-sing

Facing East

The morning sun's first light
A shining glimpse of the universe
The forces that protect us

A butterfly lands
on the tips of my fingers
pressed palms

A vision
of the past, the present and the future
And it all comes down
to this one moment
this one breath
in and out

Through the murky waters
the lotus blooms

And in my grief
I smile
assured
of life's eternity

—Jeffrey W. Nelson

winter trees
seem softly sighing
echoes
of forest floor
leafy silences
lying atop one
another
summer's
notepapers
gathering
whitish
dust

—Frederic Millen

How to catch persimmons

for Li-young Lee

I went to the market
to buy some fruit.
peaches, pears, bananas,
but today I added a
persimmon.

I know
nothing about this fruit:
when ripe? how to eat?
what to eat, leave? It
sits on the windowsill turning
in my mind, an orange flame,
the emperor of itself, of
geometry and beauty.

How
can I wait till never to
eat it? how many leagues
must I walk to find
the sutras burning at
its heart, at the tanyu hub
of its golden wheel?

Now
that I've caught it
how to let it go?

—Alfred Robinson

GBF

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GBF Day-Long Retreat

The GBF is sponsoring a day-long meditation retreat, "Exploring Mindfulness and Community," on Saturday, April 18, 2009, from 10:00 am to 4:30 pm, at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 38 Bartlett Street, San Francisco.

Come join your sacred brothers in a day of meditation and fellowship. There will be four meditation sessions (two with brief instruction), walking meditation, chi kung, small and large group discussion, ending with a Sufi circle dance. Sangha members will facilitate. A delicious lunch will be served by sangha member and chef extraordinaire Richard Azzolini. The GBF will cover the site expenses but we request \$20, or what you are able, to cover the cost of food and refreshments. Please send your check made out to GBF to Ray Dyer, 343B San Carlos, San Francisco, CA 94110. To reserve your spot, make sure he receives it by April 15, 2009.

This will be a special event. Join us!

Annual GBF Hike to Chimney Rock

No kidding, has another year already gone by? Okay, guys, it's time once again for GBF's famous and spectacular spring wildflower hike/pot luck picnic at Chimney Rock in Point Reyes Park on Saturday, April 25th. 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 potluck 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.

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.

Calendar

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 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

April 5 Alan Senauke

Hozan Alan Senauke is vice-abbot of Berkeley Zen Center in California. He lives at BZC with his wife, Laurie, and their two children. Since 1991 Alan has worked with the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, where he presently serves as senior advisor. He continues to work as a socially engaged Buddhist activist, most recently founding the Clear View Project, developing Buddhist-based resources for relief and social change. In another realm, Alan has been a student and performer of American traditional music for more than forty years.

April 12 David Lewis

David has been a member of GBF for the past two years. He has studied the dharma for 35 years, first in the Vajrayana tradition and more recently in the Vipassana (or Theravada) tradition. He is currently enrolled in Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Dedicated Practitioners Program and just completed his first 30 day retreat. The title of his talk is "Buddhist Personality Types."

April 19 Eve Decker

Eve Decker, dharma musician and founding member of the award winning Bay Area feminist folk trio Rebecca Riots, brings her music and reflections to the GBF for the second time on Sunday, April 19th at 11 am. In a five star review of Eves 2006 Buddhist-themed solo CD, *Commentary on Perfections of the Heart*, *Tricycle Magazine* said, "Deckers melodies, and her luscious, inventive phrasing, give (her songs) the power of a transmission." Join Eve for a morning that will feature performances of her original dharma songs as well as singalongs, rounds, and more.

April 26 Open Discussion

May 3 Sean Feit

Sean has practiced meditation in the Rinzai Zen and Theravada Buddhist traditions since 1993 and yoga since 1995. He studies meditation and mindfulness with Jack Kornfield, Sylvia Boorstein, and Eugene Cash, yoga with David Moreno and Alice Joanou, and piano with Myra Melford. He was a monk in Burma in 2002 and maintains a regular intensive retreat practice. His yoga teaching emphasizes breath and concentration in asana, focusing on alignment and devotion. Sean is a member of the performance company Circo Zero and teaches piano to adults.

May 10 To Be Announced

May 17 Open Discussion

May 24 Lis Longfellow and Larkin Street Youth Center Resident(s)

May 31 Dana Testimonials

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:

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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

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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