



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

DECEMBER 2009 / JANUARY 2010 NEWSLETTER

My Story

BY DON MOHIDIN

Well, I'd like to begin by thanking the sangha for this opportunity to speak. This is a rather intimidating position. It's not normal for me. I hope you'll bear with me. At any rate, before I get started, I'd like to recognize two very dear friends that have joined us today: Tom Dolan, who is Executive Director of Project Open Hand (Some of you may know that they provide hot meals every day for people with AIDS), and his partner, Larry Friesen, who's an architect. They are very, very long term, dear friends, and I hope that before we all leave today that you can greet them and make them feel welcome.

Well, everybody has a story, and I think there's some value in sharing our stories, especially within the context of sangha, because this is an opportunity for us to get to know each other a little better, to deepen our friendships and go beyond the pleasantries that we exchange after tea every week. It's in that spirit that I offer this talk. Throughout my early life, I came to some realizations about truths that I later learned were elements of truths of the dharma. Now, realizing these truths did not come about because of any special insight into the dharma. I don't possess that. But it just turned out that, the way events in my life unfolded, many of these truths just became obvious. And then I later learned that they're part of a whole mechanism of the dharma. And in the earlier years I didn't figure out how to put any of that together. It was just these disparate pieces of knowledge.

So, to begin with, I'd like to talk about the law of cause and effect, or karma. Early on in my life, actually before I was born, there was a decision made by two people whom I did not know, and those decisions were to have a profound effect upon my life and the life of many others. And those two people were my maternal grandparents. The decision which was to become a cause and have many effects was their decision to marry and to travel to India to become missionaries. In their words, they were "traveling to India to bring the light of the gospel to the heathen masses, the heathen masses of India that were living in darkness." So around the turn of the last century, they traveled to India and built a mission in northwest India, in a small town called Chufra, which is situated on the banks of the Ganges River.

They had six children, my mother one of them. And all of those children went on to become missionaries as adults, except my mother. She was kind of the rebel in the family. Instead of going out and becoming a missionary, she met my father, who was a Kashmiri man, and they lived up in Kashmir, in the northern part of India. Kashmir has been described by many Westerners as paradise on earth. It's situated at the foothills of the Himalaya Mountains. They lived on a houseboat, which reflected the Himalaya Mountains off into the background. However, the marriage was anything but paradisiacal. Between

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.

them they had four children, of which I was the last. By the time my mother was pregnant with me, my parents were in the process of divorcing. So my mother decided to come back to my grandmother's mission and have me.

Something that I should have said earlier was that early on in the last century there was a smallpox epidemic in India. It hit India hard, as well as many other parts of the world. My grandfather believed that taking a vaccination demonstrated a lack of faith that God would protect him. Well, he did come down with smallpox, and two weeks later he was dead. So my grandmother raised the six children, built the mission, and it was in this context that my mother went on to meet my father and then came back after my parents divorced. I arrived in the mission compound on the banks of the Ganges River. Another brown baby was not a source of joy at that time. My grandmother referred to my father as "that Mohammedan."

Well, soon after I was born, my siblings were staying with family members in various parts of Northern India, and my mother decided that we were all going to go to America. We traveled to Calcutta and received British-Indian passports and American visas, and then our entire family traveled across India from Calcutta to Bombay. The mission had an airplane that would ferry missionaries to and from America and their stations. So we met up with that plane in Calcutta along with a number of other missionaries. Our first leg of the journey was across the Arabian Sea from Bombay to Djibouti on the east coast of Africa. We then went to Kenya and stayed there a couple of weeks because the plane broke down and we were waiting for parts. Once we were under way again we went to Liberia and then Monrovia on the western coast of Africa, then traveled across the Atlantic to Trinidad and Tobago. Usually these flights were one a day. This was over a period of several weeks. So, when I was at the ripe age of 3 months old, I entered the United States in Miami, Florida, with my family. That's how I ended up in America.

My mother had no means to support four children, so the mission had arranged for my two older sisters to be placed in an orphanage in New Britain, Connecticut. This was an orphanage run by fundamentalist Christians. The orphanage did not accept children under three years of age, so I was placed with a family in Pine Bluff,

that she was his mother and was going to take him away from who he thought were his mommy and daddy. They traveled by train, and he cried the entire way across the country, and by the time he arrived in Connecticut, he was convinced that this woman was his mother, his mother who immediately abandoned him again into the orphanage. So he had a vivid memory of that experience. A few years later, when I was three, the same thing happened to me, but I have no memory of it. Those differences are sometimes a curse and sometimes a blessing. I think in my case it was a blessing.

The Klingberg Children's Home was run by Reverend Haddon Klingberg. It was a fundamentalist Christian organization, and they maintained discipline with an iron fist. Twice a day we would gather. Boys were separated from the girls in the playroom, and there would be these daily beatings for disciplinary purposes. So we would all sit together and watch as kids would get beaten every day, twice a day. Sometimes Reverend Haddon Klingberg would kind of lose it, and I could see such intense anger on his face as he would paddle, and sometimes break the paddles on these black and blue bottoms of these young kids. That was part of how they maintained discipline.

One morning, well, every morning, after chapel—and chapel was girls sit on one side, boys sit on the other—and during all the years that I lived there I was not allowed to speak to my sister; boys were not allowed to speak to girls, girls were not allowed to speak to boys. So, one morning after chapel, just as we did every morning, we were down in the basement of the building and we were lined up in single file, waiting for a turn to brush our teeth in the bathroom. This daily routine was single-file, and we were to do this in silence. This was a long concrete hallway with a concrete floor and a painted brick wall, and every so many feet there were dim, single-light bulbs hanging down from the ceiling. I can remember one morning. We were doing this, and a boy named Craig was standing about three boys in front of me, and he whispered something to the kid in front of him, and the person who was looking after us detected that and placed his hands around his head and smashed his head into the brick wall. The kid collapsed on the floor. The man then leaned over, grabbed him and said, "You're faking. You're faking. I know you're faking." And I didn't see that kid for a very long time.

This was a lesson in karma: how causes have effects. And often these effects manifest in ways we have no ways of predicting. And sometimes the best intentioned efforts have effects that we don't know about.

Arkansas. My brother was also under three years and was placed with a family in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Well, my brother and I are very, very different individuals, and one of the things that differentiates us is that he has a near-photographic memory, and I have a terrible memory. There are large blocks of my life that I have no recollection of and only know about because people have told me about them later. When my brother was three and eligible to be placed in the orphanage, a woman came to his home and said

Another way they maintained discipline was called the Lock Up. There was a very small broom closet that was situated on the edge of the boys' dormitory. It was about a foot and a half square, just enough room for a child to stand in that room. And the child would be locked up there anywhere from five to seven days. They could not sit. They could not change positions. They had no access to food. No access to water. No access to personal hygiene. And one of the ways that discipline was maintained was when those five to seven days

were over, we were all gathered in front of that door. When it was opened, we watched the boy collapse out onto the floor. It's a very, very effective means of discipline. Very cruel, but very effective.

So I had a desire for something better. I didn't know what that was. I had no clue as to what the world was like outside of this orphanage. I just knew that there was something better and I wanted it. Every two weeks, on Sunday afternoons, after church, we had the opportunity of leaving the children's home. Not all the kids there were orphans, like

The lesson that I learned from that is that desire causes suffering and great desire causes great suffering. So my great desire to be where I knew I could never be was the cause of great suffering.

my family. If you had someone that took an interest in a child, the child was allowed to leave the orphanage on Sunday afternoons for about three hours. And my mother had a friend whom we all called Aunt Hildie, and she was devoted to our family. She was a very, very loving individual and a rich part of my life. Every two weeks on Sunday afternoon, she would drive up to the top of the hill to the orphanage and collect us kids and take us someplace.

I'm kind of missing the dharma part. But part of what I was saying earlier was that one of the lessons I learned was that suffering is integral to life. It's just part and parcel of life. But getting back to the Sunday excursion, this was a lesson in karma: how causes have effects. And often these effects manifest in ways we have no ways of predicting. And sometimes the best intentioned efforts have effects that we don't know about.

So our family friend, Aunt Hildie, knew this family that lived in West Hartford, Connecticut, and they invited us one afternoon to go visit their family. They had a young son who was about my age, and my sister, brother and I followed this kid down to a recreation room in their basement. My mother and Aunt Hildie were upstairs with the parents talking. The kid showed us his toys, and we were pretty impressed. He walked up to the television and turned it on and switched the channels, which was, like, totally foreign to us. Wow. He said, "Yeah, I can watch any channel I want." We were pretty impressed. Eventually we were called to walk up the stairs, and I followed the young boy, the son of that family. And when we reached the top of the landing, his father opened up the door and put his hands around his son's head. I had an immediate flashback of Craig's head being smashed into that brick wall. Instead of anything like that happening, the father bent over and kissed his son on the top of the head, picked him up in his arms and we all went into the kitchen and had ice cream and cake. For me, I had seen the Promised Land. I now knew it was possible that a kid could be happy; he could live in a family with parents that loved him. And I wanted that.

And from that day forward, even with the best of intentions of that family, my life turned to utter despair and misery because I now desired what that kid had. That burned despair into me the way a brand burns a scar into the hide of cattle. And the lesson that I learned from that is that desire causes suffering and great desire

causes great suffering. So my great desire to be where I knew I could never be was the cause of great suffering.

Well, it turns out that the years kind of slogged on in this awful environment, and by the time my sisters were in high school, they would walk to school. The path that my mother took to go to work would sometimes cross that path, and so they would occasionally speak to each other on their way to their destinations for the day. It turns out that Haddon Klingberg would drive his empty car around

to make sure all his charges were in order. One day he saw my mother talking to my sisters and ended up calling my mother and telling her that she should not do that. So my mother got really upset and used that as the impetus to spring us all from the home. So here I am, about eleven years old, and we all go to live in this three-storey walk-up, and we're on welfare. Dirt poor. That didn't go very well, either. Eventually my mother kicked out all the kids, and I was the last to go. By the time I got to high school, I was living at a YMCA and working at night, pumping gas, just making enough money to afford that 35-cent school lunch.

That was a difficult time when I was on my own a lot. I thought, "Okay, I've got a handle on this. I've got control." Well, things are impermanent. Things don't last. A friend of mine used to drive me to school, and one morning, we got broad-sided by a car, a '55 Chevy with a bunch of high school students. The car slid across the road and we ran into a wrought-iron fence. I ended up in the hospital with a fairly bad back injury. So here I am, in the hospital, strapped in a bed, and the doctors have just told me, "You can't work for several months," and I'm thinking, "Oh God, what am I going to do now?" No home. No place to go. No money. No way to make money. And I sat there, sort of counting the holes in the ceiling tiles, trying to figure out, "All right. You know, this is a tough time. You've got to figure out what to do." It turns out that I was attending a Christian church in those days on Sundays. A family found out about my situation, and I went to live with them for my last year of high school. They were very nice people. After that I went into the army for three years and managed to stay out of Viet Nam.

So that was kind of a rough beginning, and it turned out that the lesson I learned was that things in life are impermanent. They don't last. And also, if you think you've got something solid to stand on and something to hold onto, your own ability to take care of yourself, that can be gone in an instant. We really have nothing solid to hang on to. The truth of emptiness is that there's nothing there.

After I got out of the army, I took some electronics courses and did some night school. I was fixing audio equipment, and one of the things I used to do on weekends was to ride my bicycle—this

was in Northern Virginia—into D.C. In those days, in the early 70's, Georgetown was the hangout for hippies. So I didn't ride my bike through Georgetown; I walked through. I liked hippies. And it turns out that I met this young man, who was the archetypal hippy: long blond hair, selling his artwork on the sidewalk, a beautiful man. We became friends. I tried to see him regularly out there selling his art. Eventually, we became roommates and got an apartment together. He had just come out, just before we met, and I was in the process of coming out just after we moved in together. We weren't

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lovers, but we ended up becoming very, very close friends. His name was Tom, and he's been variously described by people who knew him as someone who walked the earth differently than most people. He was a very warm and caring individual, and he had character traits that I so admired and wanted to emulate. I have to say that whatever humanity I possess I think I learned from Tom. He was a very rich part of my life. We knew each other for 22 years, and eventually he contracted AIDS, and the last two years of his life he had dementia. I sat by his bed and held his hand in the hospital room when he drew his last breath. Integral to life is suffering, and everything is impermanent. He was a rich part of my life and a very, very pure, pure person.

Well, I kind of just went on to the career track and did electronics work for the government in an oceanographic laboratory, designing oceanographic instruments for a while. I did that for a few years, and then Reagan became President and started cutting government spending, and so the lab that I worked at closed. I went to work for the University of New Hampshire, doing the same thing, building oceanographic instruments. They were funded by a National Science Foundation grant, and Reagan shut that down, so here I am out of a job again. After that I ended up working for the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, Maryland. I was living in D.C. at the time. This was before the satellite launched. I was working on the system of digitizing and making computer records of stars to eventually be used in the guidance system of the telescope. That turned out to be really interesting work, and I loved that.

After that, I moved down to Virginia. I had a partner by then who was alcoholic. He decided to go into treatment and we were going to move out of D.C. because he wanted to be away from the environment that created that alcoholism. So we moved down to Roanoke, Virginia, which was Tom's old hometown. This was before he died. I went to work for a fiber-optics communications company, doing engi-

neering work. They had a lot of government contracts, and a lot of them were for the military and defense industry. Eventually I became disillusioned with doing that kind of work, and after I got back from a trip out to the nuclear proving ground out there in the desert where they built all kinds of horrific weapons, I looked in the mirror one morning and said, "I don't want to do this anymore." I was project manager of a job at the time. I finished up the job and made sure that the company had that project done, and then I quit and spent a year. I bought some land and built a cabin out in the woods and

spent a year reading. I read literature, philosophy, religion, fiction, non-fiction, mind-candy, serious stuff.

It was during that time when I became acquainted with Buddhism because part of that year of reading was reading about various religions and traditions. That's how I came to Buddhism; it was initially through that reading. And it was during that time when some of the experiences that had taught me about suffering and impermanence and karma started to pull together. I couldn't do that indefinitely, so I went to work for a social service agency in their I.S. department for a few years, and then I went on to a cable company.

By now I'm in my mid-50's, and there's a recession on, and I started noticing that other mid-level managers and engineers were starting to leave. These were people that had been with the company for many years, had sterling work records, and all of a sudden they were out of jobs. So I kind of saw the writing on the wall and prepared for it. I had about eight months' worth of savings squirreled away in the bank, and I had a retirement fund and a 401-K and the land and all of that, and I thought, "Okay, I'm being prudent here. I have no debt. I'm ready in case I lose my job." Of course, eventually I did lose that job, and it was soon after that that I experienced a very serious heart attack. That night I was rushed to the hospital and lying on the table there in very, very intense pain while the doctor ran tubes up my arteries and tried to unblock the veins in my heart.

A few days before that—this was back when I actually owned a television—I had watched a documentary about Ram Dass, Richard Alpert. I don't know if any of you have seen it. It was called *Fierce Grace*. In that documentary, Ram Dass talks about his experience of having a stroke, and how his life up to that point had been this spiritual journey. But while he was experiencing that stroke, he was not in a spiritual space, and later on, he reflected on that. So while I was in the hospital there in this very intense pain, pumped

up with morphine, I started thinking about that documentary and how I could be in a spiritual space. And this is crazy, because up until the point when I thought about that, it didn't occur to me that I might not make it through the night. Here I am with a heart attack and doctors doing all this stuff, and so I finally realized that and said, "Well, you know, you might not live till morning." And I came to peace with the possibility of death and decided to have that spiritual moment, to have that become something that I could use to put the spiritual lessons that I learned earlier into some kind of practice.

I did make it through the next morning, obviously, but I ended up with a very damaged heart. So that made some serious changes in my life again. Here I thought I was well-prepared. I had the savings, and then I was told, "Now, you're 100% disabled; you can't work anymore." During the couple years it took for the government to actually approve my disability, virtually everything I had worked for my entire life—poof!—was gone. Pharmaceutical companies and the doctors had it all now. Again, suffering is an integral part of life. And everything is impermanent. Everything can just disappear overnight. These were lessons, as I said, which were not due to any kind of spiritual insight on my part. These were life lessons that just became obvious.

Eventually I came back to California, where I had lived in the 70's for about a year. And my very dear friends Tom and Larry were instrumental in making that happen. I can't really express the countless acts of friendship, love, and caring that they expressed. I'll tell you a quick story, just one of them, because there are so many.

A while back, I was up in Guerneville, and I had to be rushed to the emergency room in Santa Rosa. My heart was beating very, very erratically. It was a half hour ride to the hospital, and my lungs started filling up with fluid. By the time I got to the emergency room, I was in pretty bad shape. They rolled me in, and there was a group of people around the desk, and these two nurses on both sides started cutting off all my clothes so they could attach the monitoring equipment and put the IVs and the oxygen and all that on. Well, it wasn't long after I was stabilized that Tom and

brings joy into your life. You can be in the most desperate of circumstances, but to have that is the source of joy. And throughout the difficulties, there was always something like that which was the source of joy. Even through times that seemed so incredibly difficult, I realized that happiness is possible in this life. It's not something you have to wait for enlightenment for. And so, I thank my dear, dear friends that helped make that possible.

In preparing for this talk, I tried to think of a way to tie together the dharma and these life experiences. I didn't end up writing anything; it just wasn't coming. But it so happened that this past week I was watching a video dharma talk on YouTube, of all places, and I came across a part of a dharma talk that I think really sums up well what I was trying to prepare and write. In conclusion, I would like to read this short section of that dharma talk, because I think it expresses well what I was trying to say.

This is by Ajahn Brahm. He's the abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery in Serpentine, Western Australia, and they're part of the Northern Thai Forest Tradition. This was quite a ways into this video dharma talk, but I decided to transcribe it. This is part of what Ajahn Brahm said:

Every experience has a Buddha nature, so it doesn't need to be rejected. It doesn't need to sound like, "I'm going to get this out of the way and go back to real life." Otherwise, how many hours, days, months, years of your life are you wishing away? To get this out of the way, to do what you think life really is. If you're one of those people always wishing away hours, days, weeks, years of your life, you're missing out. You only get so many years; you can't afford to waste even one day, one hour, one month. So, when you say every experience, every moment, has Buddha nature, you're valuing everything, even the painful experiences. When you have to go to have chemotherapy or have some terrible operation, that has Buddha nature; that's important. These are opportunities for awakening. Your body is out of your control. You should know that by now.

If you're one of those people always wishing away hours, days, weeks, years of your life, you're missing out. You only get so many years; you can't afford to waste even one day, one hour, one month.

Larry learned about that experience, and so what did they do? They did what any self-respecting gay person would do in that situation. They went shopping! After a long day's work, they made the two-hour drive from San Francisco to Santa Rosa. And I had new slacks and socks and shirts and a bathrobe and clothes and personal hygiene, and all these wonderful things. I have to say that the joy that comes from that kind of love is not that you get all this wonderful stuff. It is true what they say: gay people really know how to shop. It was wonderful stuff. But it wasn't the stuff; it was the fact that underlying those acts of kindness, which constantly occur—this is one of countless numbers of them—the basis is love, caring, friendship. When you're on the receiving end of those, it really

You just have to be with it. And the more you fight that body, the more you say, "I don't want to be sick, I don't want to have that chemotherapy, I want to be better—as soon as you want something else, you're creating mental suffering. When you respect the experience you have as being part of things and you don't discriminate between your nice experiences and the bad experiences, but you respect every experience, it's teaching you as a Buddha. It's a moment for awakening. Then you never try to wish away any part of your life. When you never wish away any part of your life, imagine how much peace, compassion and wealth [I believe that's what he said] you have in your life. Everything is now respected. ■

GBF

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Introducing Dharma Companions

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship no longer has a prison project. In its place, the volunteers who ran the BPF Prison Correspondence Committee have formed a group called the Dharma Companions.

Dharma Companions offers free Buddhist materials to all inmates, prison study groups, and prison libraries: Buddhist books, pamphlets, used magazines, including old issues of *Turning Wheel*, and some tapes. Our all volunteer staff will be happy to answer questions inmates might have about Buddhism or their personal practice. As so many inmates are practicing Buddhism without a teacher, we offer help in whatever way we can provide. We will try to answer your questions about Buddhism, and we can look up information that you need on Buddhist practices on the Internet. Please note that this is not a pen pal program; this is a Buddhist information service. Our volunteers are all lay Buddhists, not ordained priests, so we will be sharing what we know with you, not teaching you.

Please contact us at:

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For inmates who wish to subscribe to *Turning Wheel*, both free or paid, please write to:

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We ask your help in two ways. One: please write your name, address, and ID number clearly on the envelope or in your letter. We often get packages returned because we misread your name or address. Two: please help us spread the word in whatever way possible about our change of name and address. Many resource lists continue to have our name listed as "The Buddhist Peace Fellowship Prison Project." We would appreciate your help in getting the new information out as widely as possible.

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

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Address changes or to subscribe or unsubscribe to the newsletter:

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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:

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/gaybuddhistfellowship

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

December 6 Jack Morin

Jack Morin, Ph.D., has been studying the mysteries of Eros for three decades as a psychotherapist and sex researcher in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is the author of *The Erotic Mind: Unlocking the Inner Sources of Sexual Passion and Fulfillment*, which offers a bold new psychology of desire and arousal based on his clinical experience as well as an in-depth analysis of over 7,000 anonymous descriptions of peak real-life encounters and fantasies. He is also the author of the international classic *Anal Pleasure and Health: A Guide for Men and Women*. He writes and lectures for lay and professional audiences about the paradoxes, challenges, and potentials of sexuality and intimate relationships.

December 13 Karen Van Dine

Karen Van Dine connected with the San Francisco gay community in 1985 as a member of Radiant Light Ministries, where she served as a prayer counselor. Through the AIDS Epidemic of the 80's and 90's, Karen worked with the San Francisco Healing Circle and R.L.M., leading meditations, memorials and assisting many in conscious dying. After her time as a student at Tassajara Zen Monastery and retreats with Thich Nhat Hanh, she founded the Living Peace Meditation Community in 1993. The L.P.M.C. began in connection with the San Francisco Center for Living and later moved into its own location when the center closed. She has been the primary facilitator for the L.P.M.C. for the last 15 years. Through her many years of meditation, she has deepened her personal practice, insight, and compassion. She has a profound heart connection with the gay community.

December 20 Arianna Weisman

Arianna Weisman has studied Vipassana Meditation since 1979 and has been teaching since 1988. Her root teacher, Ruth Denison, was empowered by the great Burmese master U Bha Khin. She is the founding teacher of Insight Meditation Center of the Pioneer Valley, and is the co-author of *A Beginner's Guide to Insight Meditation*. Her teaching is infused with her political activism and, along with Eric Kolvig, she has been leading retreats for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community since 1991.

December 27 Open Discussion

January 3 Daniel Rechtschaffen

Daniel Rechtschaffen is a psychotherapist and meditation teacher in the San Francisco Bay Area who integrates cutting-edge psychological techniques with ancient wisdom traditions. Daniel convenes a yearly national conference on mindfulness in education at the Omega Institute as well as being one of their core meditation teachers. Daniel helped develop the curriculum for Mindful Schools and now consults for schools and organizations to institute mindfulness based curriculum. Daniel began his meditation practice living at Thich Nhat Hanh's monastery in France when he was 19. Since then he has committed himself to intensive practice in the Vipassana tradition as well studying various movement and nature based awareness practices. More information can be found at nowcounseling.com

January 10 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.

January 17 Ösel Jennings

Ösel is a wisdom-treasure revealer (known as Tertön in the language of Tibet) and has so received direct transmission, teachings and empowerments from Buddha Padmasambhava, Buddha Stainless Wisdom, and numerous other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the Celestial Realms of Awakened Mind, which he has codified into the teachings of Lotus Speech Mandala, called *Perfection Everywhere: the Yoga of Being You*.

He has practiced and studied wisdom, yoga, medicine, philosophy, poetics, spiritual and energy healing as well as the sacred arts with 20 masters of all Dharma traditions. He has been authorized to give teachings and healing transmission by his Masters. His root Gurus are Kyabje Lama Zopa, the Gyalwang Karmapa, Anam Thubten and Dzogchen Choying Rabjam.

His talk will be called "The Yoga of Being You!"

January 24 Rik Isensee

Rik Isensee, LCSW, practices mindfulness-based somatic psychotherapy in San Francisco. Rik is the author of three self-help books for gay men. His newest book is *Shift Your Mood: Unleash Your Life! Your Pathway to Inner Happiness*. Rik will be guiding us through an experience exploring the intersection of mindfulness, body awareness, and the neuroscience of happiness. You will learn how to release emotional tension, and shift to the source of your own love and inner wisdom.

January 31 Open Discussion

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By the power and truth of this practice, may all beings have 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