



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

SUMMER 2016 NEWSLETTER

The Heart of Buddhism

BY DALE BORGLUM

Dale Borglum is the founder and the executive director of the Living Dying Project. He's a pioneer in the conscious dying movement and has worked directly with thousands of people with life-threatening illness and their families for over thirty years. In 1981, Dale founded the first residential facility for people who wish to die consciously in the United States, the Dying Center. He has taught and lectured extensively on the topics of spiritual support for those with life-threatening illness, care-giving as a spiritual practice, and healing at the edge of illness, of death, of loss, of crisis. Dale has a B.S. from UC Berkeley and a Ph.D. from Stanford University. He is the co-author of "*Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook*" and has taught meditation for the past thirty-five years.

I'd like to talk today about "The Heart of Buddhism." There is a very famous scripture in Buddhism called the *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra*, or the Heart Sutra. In the Heart Sutra, it says "There is neither tainted nor pure." Let's think about that for a second.

We think of the Dalai Lama; he seems like he's pure. I'm sure it's not too hard to think of somebody who you think of as not being pure: Donald Trump, your neighbor. How can we understand what the Heart Sutra's saying, "There's neither tainted nor pure?"

There's a Buddhist meditation teacher in India who said, "The mind creates the abyss; the heart crosses it." When we look at the comparison between Donald Trump and the Dalai Lama, or between somebody you really care about and somebody you don't like too much, if we look at them with our minds, there is a difference, but when we look through our hearts, it is possible, with a different set of eyes, to see the place in which the Dalai Lama and Donald Trump are the same.

Everybody [here] just introduced themselves. There seemed to be a lot of Davids and Richards—and there are many different people in the room. Older, younger; bigger, smaller; more hair, less hair. Looking with those eyes, we see the differences, and very often with our judging mind we see the tainted, we see how we aren't approving of how we or somebody else is behaving. At times, maybe right after meditation, or you've been out in nature or you've just heard a perfect piece of music, you can look and you don't see those differences. You see with eyes where everyone really looks beautiful.

Another thing that is said in the Heart Sutra is that "form is emptiness and emptiness is form." Also, "form is form and emptiness is emptiness." But what does it mean, that form is emptiness? There are three qualities to the open heart, and one of them is the quality of emptiness. By emptiness, we don't mean that nothing is there. What we mean is that "I" am not there, so that, with the heart, we often start out with working with the heart as a dualistic practice: "I" am cultivating compassion for "other," "I" am feeling love for "other." But when we go deeply enough into the heart, when we go deeply enough into emptiness, then the I who is experiencing the love or the compassion or the equanimity begins to fall away. So that really a quality that is probably not talked too much about in Buddhism—really what we're talking about here is surrender. Can we surrender into the heart?

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.

I've done a lot of Vipassana practice, I've done a lot of Zen practice, I've done a lot of Tibetan Buddhist practice. But really, if I'm honest enough, all of that is, in a way, preparation for trusting my heart.

Much of Buddhism is about becoming present. Cultivating awareness or mindfulness. My first meditation teacher, Suzuki Roshi, has a wonderful quote. He said, "Life is like stepping into a boat that is about to sail out to sea and sink." If we look at our life as about to sink into the sea, from the mind, it's very frightening. We try to control; we try to make sure that we've got a life preserver. If we can trust that the heart will allow us to float through those sinking moments, then possibly we can set sail with a different attitude.

Suzuki Roshi also said, "The most important thing is finding the most important thing." Maybe here, at the beginning of the year, we could all think of, what is the most important thing for you? What is, not your heart's desire but your heart of hearts? In your deepest heart, what is it that you really want? I would guess that, for most people, it does have something to do with the heart, that your heart opens so that you connect more with those you love, you connect more with your own self, you connect more with the sacred, and trusting that quality of emptiness is really for many of us a long, gradual path.

I've done a lot of Vipassana practice, I've done a lot of Zen practice, I've done a lot of Tibetan Buddhist practice. But really, if I'm honest enough, all of that is, in a way, preparation for trusting my heart. I began practice because I wasn't happy. I have a Ph.D. from Stanford. I have a Ph.D. in Mathematics, and that was not a happy-making process for me, if you can take a guess. At the same time, then, I started meditating, because my mind was all locked up in categorizing, fixing, structuring, managing, the way that a mathematically-trained mind would do. I meditated enough that I wasn't so unhappy anymore. My ego structure became more efficient; I wasn't having bad dreams anymore. I liked people better, they seemed to like me at least a little better. At that point, my practice got kind of stale. I stopped practicing because I'd found what I was looking for: not being overwhelmed by suffering on a daily basis.

At that point, I began to notice that even though I was a little happier and I had a more efficient ego structure, that I wasn't really connecting with people in a way that I would like to. Occasionally, through serendipity, I would fall in love or I would meet somebody and something would happen, but I had a really deep intuitive sense that there was another way of meeting people.

Before I mentioned that there were three qualities of the open heart. The first one was the empty or spacious heart, the heart that is not filled with "I." The second quality to the open heart is the

warm heart, the heart that feels warm regardless of the circumstance. The third quality of the open heart is the connected heart.

Rumi said, "Grief is the garden of compassion." Grief is any emotion arising in response to feeling separate. Compassion is having the quality of feeling connected. One way we could talk about our spiritual practice is transmuting the experience of feeling disconnected or separate into being connected. That can't be done with the mind. Because with the mind we're going to see the tainted, we're going to look around and see how people are behaving badly, how people are lazy, how people are arrogant, how we ourselves are selfish. We will see those things with the mind. These things are part of the human condition. But I believe that the reason we're sitting here in this room together is to find those other eyes, those eyes of compassion, that heart of compassion, that can see the place where, not only do we have different people in the room, but there's just one heart, there's just one being, there's just one consciousness.

In a fundamental sense, life is nothing other than consciousness meeting one experience, after the other after the other. Usually we identify with the separateness: "I" am the person who is being aware of "that;" I am the person who's being aware of, right now, the sound of my own voice. I'm the subject, or sometimes we're identifying with the object: I'm the anger that you're aware of. What we're really saying here is that we are the consciousness that is experiencing things. You're not the subject; you're not the object. The consciousness itself.

Now, there are two main paths in spirituality: the path of wisdom, inquiry of understanding how things are, which is consciousness meeting experience. The other path is the path of devotion, and trying to find wholeness through surrender to the un-manifest or the absolute. I find that without bringing the heart into the path it's a very steep and difficult path, but that bringing the quality of heart into my own practice so that when I sit down and I meditate, and it's one of those days where there's a lot of thoughts, the mind is jagged, the body is restless, the body is tired, the mind is saying, "Oh, you're not doing well. You're failing." Or, on the other hand, is the heart saying, "Yes, Dale, I can even love, I can even have compassion for the part of you that isn't meditating in the way that matches up with your ideal."

Today is the day of Suzuki Roshi quotes, and he said, "After zazen, after meditation, we bow to the floor nine times. By bowing we are giving up ourselves. To give up ourselves means to give up our dualistic ideas. There is no difference between zazen practice and bowing. Usually to bow means to pay our respects to something which is more worthy of respect than ourselves. But when you bow to Buddha you should have no idea of Buddha. You just become one with Buddha. You are already Buddha himself. When you become one with Buddha, one with everything that exists, you find the true meaning of being. When you forget all your dualistic ideas, everything becomes your teacher and everything can be the object of worship."

I sat with Suzuki Roshi many, many times. He never mentioned love. He never talked about the heart, but he was one of the most loving people I'd ever met. When he laughed it sounded like a bubbling brook. It's one of the sweetest sounds you could imagine. His practice was to sit still and face the wall with your eyes open for many, many, many, many, many hours, and in that looking, eventually we see that the mind is changing. One of the basic tenets of Buddhism is impermanence. There's a moment of hearing, there's a moment of seeing, there's a moment of thinking. On and on and on. Always changing. What is it that is not changing moment to moment?

What is it that's constant when we look from face to face or hear all the different names in the room here? It's easy to see the differences. It's easy to see the differences out there. It's easy to see the differences of our internal experience. But is there something that doesn't change, so that, when there's silence for a few moments, what remains? When there wasn't the sound of my voice, what is it that remains?

What Buddhism actually says is that we're not just connected, we are one. We are one in Buddha. We are one in the heart. In Buddhism there are what are called the four heavenly abodes, the *brahma vihāras*: loving-kindness, compassion, equanimity and joy. These are qualities that are done as concentration exercises, not something we're mindful of. Actually, in monastic settings, usually, people sit down and concentrate on the feeling of loving-kindness for days, weeks at a time, or the feeling of compassion. Most of us don't have time to sit down and do that for days or weeks at a time, but is it possible to take part of your life and make loving-kindness or make compassion or make joy or make equanimity a focus on compassion, so that you work with the quality of the heart?

Right now, what is the quality of your heart? Do you feel connected? Do you feel connected to me? Do you feel connected to yourself? Do you feel connected to the room? Do you feel a warm heart? Do you feel a spacious heart? Is there a lot of "I" who's mixed up there in your heart? Interestingly, these wonderful qualities, these heavenly abodes, have near and far enemies, and when one understands them I think it makes it easier to do this practice.

The far enemy of loving-kindness, through no surprise, is hatred. The near enemy of loving-kindness is attachment. It looks like loving-kindness, you could see somebody doing this, you might think they're being loving, but they're not.

You fall in love, as an example. One of the most obvious examples. Are you really feeling love or are you feeling attachment? Very likely it is a very complicated mixture of the two. Attachment wants something in return. Love asks nothing in return, so that this quality of asking nothing in return is not something that we can really do until we've created the foundation of being grounded, being centered, doing the practice that Suzuki Roshi taught, of just being present. Until we are mindful, until we have a strong foundation of mindfulness, it will be very difficult if not impossible to begin to open the heart in the way that we're talking about today.

The far enemy of compassion is indifference. "I don't care if you're suffering." The near enemy is pity, so we see somebody suffering. Are we feeling sorry for them, or does our heart really open? Do we still feel equal to them? In fact, the Dalai Lama says, "One of the defining qualities of compassion is the ability to equalize and switch yourself with somebody else." If I feel better than you or less than you in any moment, in that moment compassion becomes impossible.

Compassion doesn't necessarily make suffering go away, but it makes it bearable, it makes it meaningful. From the standpoint of the mind, we will see suffering wherever we look. As I was driving here today, coming down South Van Ness Avenue there's piles of garbage on the sidewalk, there's a guy sleeping next to a pile of garbage. It was lightly raining. The mind wonders what's going to happen to this poor guy. I can feel pity for him. It's easy to separate myself, to say, "Okay, he's there. I'm in my nice warm car that has heated seats." Right? It's coming up, right? My butt is feeling very comfortable; he's out there in the rain. I can feel sorry. Can I really, instead, go into my heart and feel connected with him and, even beyond that, feel one with him?

His suffering is my suffering. His joy is my joy. Maybe he's got more joy than I do. I don't even know. The tendency is to pull back to defend ourselves from the suffering of another human being.

In Orthodox Christianity, they talk about letting the mind drop into the heart, so that we still keep thinking, but each thought is colored by the heart. It's as if you're dyeing a piece of cloth.

I was in India with this fellow Maharaj-ji, who Jeff knows too, and is Ram Dass' Guru; some of you may know about him. I was sitting with Maharaj-ji with a friend of mine named Mohan and a bunch of Indian people, and Maharaj-ji said to Mohan, "Mohan, how much do you pay for milk in America?" Mohan made a quick calculation, and he said, "X number of rupees per kilo," and Maharaj-ji said, "My God, can you believe that!" He turned to the Indians. He was saying, "They paid so much money for milk in America!" He's going on and on, talking about how much Americans had to pay for milk. He turned to Mohan again and said, "How much was it again?" Mohan did that, and he went on and on and on. I'd just gotten my Ph.D. I'd just gone to India and I was thinking, "What's going on here? Why are we talking about the price of milk in America? I came all the way to India. Maybe this guy isn't who I thought he was."

At that moment, this thunderbolt came into my mind that, I can't describe how but I knew came from him, and what he revealed to me was, "We can talk about important things, but that just busies up the mind. Let's talk about trivial things so that we can then rest in this ocean of love and bliss," and in that moment this bliss opened up into my heart that remained for the rest of the day.

Right now, I could keep trying to talk about clever things and I should be doing that for about twenty more minutes, so I will do my best. But at the same time, is your mind getting busy? Are you getting lost in your mind because I'm saying interesting things, or maybe you're judging me because they're not interest-

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ing enough? Or, in this moment, can we be together in our one heart? Regardless of the content, and in fact, maybe the more boring the content is, the easier it is to go beyond the differences of moment to moment to moment and rest in that which does not change. So that as we get better at doing that, practice ceases being something that takes effort. It's something we rest in. As long as there's an "I" who is trying to meditate better or become a better person, we are a hundred and eighty degrees from the truth. Because there is no "I." It is an illusion.

Kalu Rinpoche, the Dalai Lama's meditation teacher, said ... It's my favorite quote of all time: "We live in illusion and the appearance of things. There is a Reality. We are that Reality. Knowing this, we see that we are everything, and being everything we are nothing. That is all." We're everything in the sense that I am you and you are me, and we're nothing in the sense that there isn't really an I who is separate.

I think that essential quality is much easier to find in a group than it is alone. We live in a culture that is actually trying to convince us of the illusion, and the work of the Dharma is going against a very strong current of our society. The Buddha's nephew Ananda came to the Buddha and said, "Oh, Buddha, I've heard that the Sangha, being with other seekers, is half of the spiritual path," and the Buddha said, "Oh no, Ananda. It is all of the path. Being with others who are on the path is all of the path."

I think a lot of that has to do with the heart. I feel that it's a bit awkward because I'm really not a Buddhist. I've done a lot of Buddhist practice to try to recover from being a mathematician, and I'm really more of a devotional person. Yet I really do think that at the foundation of Buddhism it is about the heart. It is about going into the mind, becoming present so fully, that the heart is revealed. Yet we live in what is primarily a Judeo-Christian culture that is a devotional culture, and in my humble opinion there are very few people that I have met who are Westerners who are fully out- and-out Buddhist, that they're coming to Buddhism as a way of often healing the wounds that have been inflicted on them by one church or synagogue or a temple or another.

Carl Jung said that to become a fully integrated person one must go back to the religion of one's childhood, which is a rather frightening notion, I think, for a lot of us. But I don't think it means you have to go back to Lutheran church, in my case, or Catholic, if that's your church, whatever it might be in somebody else's case, but go back to the essential quality of what was in our hearts as a child. The essence of Judeo-Christianity is about love. In fact, that's the essence of all religions. I'm giving sort of a pep talk here for the heart of Buddhism, going into your heart. How would one go about doing that?

There is a practice I've suggested of concentrating on the feeling of loving-kindness. Instead of being with the breath down in the belly or up in your nostrils, one can be with the breath in your heart. Breathe in love, breathe out spaciousness, breathe in compassion, breathe out spaciousness. There's another practice called Guru Yoga in Tibetan Buddhism, where you imagine in front of you a being of radiant golden light: the Buddha, the Christ, Shiva, the Mother, whatever appeals to you. If you're not religious in that sense it could be just a generic being of light, and you imagine this being right in front of you. You begin to imagine what it would feel like to be sitting in front of the Buddha, the embodiment of wisdom and compassion. What would that feel like?

Out of the heart of the Buddha comes into you a beam of golden light that purifies you of any obscurations. Right now, there he is. It's not just a statue. This is actually the Buddha there. Can we feel his radiant nature? Out of his heart comes a beam of radiant golden light that purifies you of anything you imagined in your delusion that is preventing you from realizing your nature, and gradually your solid body of all those three hundred trillion cells or whatever it is, begins to be transmuted into cells of radiant golden light, so that you and I and we together are made out of exactly the same substance as the Buddha. There's absolutely no difference between your essential nature and that of the Buddha.

Then very gradually, you and I merge into his body. There is just one body, one body of this radiant light, and we rest there. Then when the mind complains and says, "Wait a minute! You're neurotic! You aren't the Buddha. He's trying to talk you into something, here." In that moment, you notice that thought and you realize that even that thought, even that complaining thought, even that neurotic thought, is a pure expression of your Buddha nature.

Going back to the *Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sutra*, "There is neither tainted nor pure." If you think of the thing that you did in 2015, the most embarrassing thing you did or the thing you wish you hadn't done: you treated somebody unkindly or you did something in secret that you wouldn't want anybody to know about, and you realize that that's neither tainted nor pure. It's just an expression of your Buddha nature. There's nothing to improve. Nothing to fix. Nothing to understand. Nothing to get. In my humble opinion, and don't tell anybody I said this, that the purpose of practice is you practice enough that you realize that there's no point to practice, that there's nothing to achieve. You can still keep sitting but it's not going to get you anywhere. Your mind will become calmer, but a calm mind and a restless mind are equally Buddha nature. There's no distinction.

Now, there are all these teachers who go around saying things like that. Krishnamurti was selected as a child to be the next Avatar, and he was trained and trained, and he fi-

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nally said, “I’m not the avatar,” and he became a teacher and he got very frustrated—he would say, “There’s nothing to achieve,” and he got frustrated that his students couldn’t understand there’s nothing to achieve. There are a lot of non-dual teachers running around the Bay Area saying, “You’re Enlightened already. There’s nothing to get,” and they’re frustrated that people can’t get that there’s nothing to get. But they’re saying that after they worked really hard to get something, right? Adyashanti did many years of Zen practice before he said, “Hey, there’s nothing to do!” Okay. So is there a way of going to the heart deeply enough that we don’t have to sit till our knees fall off, we don’t have to bow till we get calluses on our foreheads, that there’s a surrender into the heart? How deeply do you trust the heart?

In Buddhism, when we begin to practice, when we begin a day-long meditation or a longer practice period, people take refuge. “I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Sangha. For the second time I take refuge in the Buddha, for the second time I take refuge in the Dharma, for the second time I take refuge in the Sangha. For the third time I take refuge in the Buddha, for the third time I take refuge in the Sangha, for the third time I take refuge in the Dharma.” Maybe I did those out of order there at the end. Okay. If we really take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, practice is done. If you really take refuge in the fact that freedom exists, the Buddha exists, in this moment. Not the historical guy but the essential nature of liberation, Buddha-hood. If you really take refuge in the Dharma, that there is a way, and Dharma means many different things, but there’s a path of Dharma and there’s the wisdom of Dharma. And you take refuge in us together. If you really do that, you’re done.

The tricky part about the heart is, at least in my experience, the heart is almost always partly open and partly closed, and I work with my heart until it gets twenty percent more open than it used to be and I feel “Oh, now my heart is open. This is great.” But do we really go to that place, beyond the twenty percent, beyond the twenty percent? In Hasidim, there’s a poem that says, “When you sit down to pray, when you kneel down to pray, pray with such a heart that you’re willing to die during that prayer, so that the person who’s there at the end is not the person who’s there when it started.”

We all walked into this room at 10:30 or so this morning; we’re all going to be leaving in about twenty minutes. Is the person who’s going to walk out that door in twenty minutes the same guy that walked in the door an hour and a half ago, or whatever it is? There is some continuity, you have pretty much the same clothes on, your hair’s going to be the same color, the same neurotic structures are going to be there. But what are you going to be identifying with? Are you those neurotic structures? Are you that body with all those trillions of cells, or are you the essential quality of the heart?

Before we do end, are there any questions?

In your example you said, “Go back to 2015 and pick your most embarrassing thing you did, saying that’s the same as a pure act. I can kind of get that, but at the same time, where does ethical behavior fit into that?”

That’s a good question. Understanding that it’s all Buddha nature is not a license to act irresponsibly. The fact is that the more we understand it’s all Buddha nature, the more we become compassionate. The three qualities of the awakened mind, the fully awakened mind, are clarity, that you’re right there with whatever is happening, emptiness, emptiness from self, there’s not a self-dualism anymore, and compassion activity that’s arising.

What Buddhism actually says is that we’re not just connected, we are one. We are one in Buddha.

I will agree that there’s a danger here, and there are some teachers who think they have some taste of Enlightenment, and they go around fornicating and scamming money and all kinds of things, because they’ve gotten a taste of that and they use that taste for their ego’s ends. But eventually the Dharma protects itself, so that the more you go into your heart and realize that even an action done out of fear or arrogance and an action done out of altruism, are neither tainted nor pure, equally, the more that will bring you to acting ethically and in the best interests of all beings.

The deeper you go into practice, the more we become one being. There is inter-dependence, and the suffering of the person next to you—In the Bible it talks about “loving your neighbor,” and actually the Aramaic word is not “the guy who lives next door to you,” but “the person who’s actually next to you.” Love your neighbor. The more you’re going to practice, you have to love the person next to you, because that’s what your nature is. God is love. Your nature is love. Your nature is whole. It’s untainted.

It’s not a straight path. There will be some confusion along the way, to be sure. But the less we judge ourselves, the better—One of the major impediments to the spiritual path is the super-ego, the judging mind. So for you to judge yourself for that thing you did last year, and say, “Okay, I’m not a good human being,” that just slows down the whole process of realizing who you truly are.

I’ve said I follow a devotional path. What does that mean? As Tom sort of implied during the introduction, I work with dying people, so one aspect of my devotion is serving other people. Mother Teresa—I’m not at all comparing myself to her, I assure you—I am not Mother Teresa in drag. Mother Teresa when she would pick a leper out of the gutter in Calcutta said she would see Christ in his distressing disguise. I work with dying people, and Trungpa Rinpoche said that until you come into intimate contact with death, your spiritual practice will have the quality of being a dilettante. I really believe that having a strong contemplative practice combined with an intimate relationship with death is the best practice for this troubled and confusing age that we live in.

Devotion starts out as, “I’m devoted to something outside of myself: a teacher, a teaching, a group.” But eventually we begin to find, just in the way I’ve been suggesting during this talk, that what I’m devoted to is not something separate from self, that in the beginning I invoke the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha. Or I invoke Maharaj-ji (Neem Karoli Baba), or I invoke the Mother. As practice deepens, I realize that what I’m devoted to is in no way separate from who I fundamentally am or who you are, and it’s that place where we are the one that I am devoted to.

I think that’s probably a nice place to bring this to an end. Thank you so much. Thank you all. ■

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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 12pm. Everyone is then welcome to stay and socialize over refreshments till approximately 12:30pm, 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.

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.

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GBF Yahoo Discussion Group

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The Gay Buddhist Fellowship is a charitable organization pursuant to Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3) and California Revenue and Taxation Code #23701d.

Calendar

Sunday Speakers

June 5 Benjamin Young

Benjamin Young began meditation as part of his spiritual practice when he was in his early twenties. Over the last forty-four years, he has studied many spiritual paths, pursued a number of meditation practices, led spiritual retreats and given spiritual talks. Benjamin traveled to India for two months in 2001 where he and a close friend took monk's vows. He has been practicing a Buddhist form of meditation called Anapanasati (Mindfulness of the In and Out Breath) for the past 20 years and assisting others in developing their spiritual practices.

June 12 Tom Moon

Tom Moon has been a practitioner of Vipassana meditation for fifteen years, and his spiritual home is Spirit Rock Meditation Center. He is a psychologist in San Francisco, working primarily with gay men. His chief commitment is in exploring the interface between Buddhist practice and psychotherapy.

June 19 Pamela Weiss

Pamela Weiss has practiced in the Zen and Theravada traditions of Buddhism for over 25 years, including several years of Zen monastic training. She completed teacher training with Jack Kornfield through Spirit Rock, leads a Wednesday evening sitting group at SF Insight, and teaches classes, workshops and retreats internationally. Pamela is also an executive coach and the Founder of Appropriate Response, a company dedicated to bringing the principles and practices of Buddhism into the workplace.

June 26 Eugene Cash

Eugene Cash is the founding teacher of the San Francisco Insight Meditation Community of San Francisco. He teaches at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and leads intensive meditation retreats internationally. His teaching is influenced by both Burmese and Thai streams of the Theravada tradition as well as Zen and Tibetan Buddhist practice. He is also a teacher of the Diamond Approach, a school of spiritual investigation and self-realization developed by A. H. Almaas.

July 3 Open Discussion

July 10 Laura Burgess

Ryuko Laura Burges, a lay entrusted Buddhist teacher in the Soto Zen tradition, lectures and leads retreats at different practice centers in Northern California. A teacher of children for 30 years, she trains other teachers to bring mindfulness practice into the elementary classroom. Laura co-founded the Sangha in Recovery program at Zen Center and has a particular interest in the intersection of Buddhism and Recovery. She is the abiding teacher at the Lenox House meditation group in Oakland.

July 17 Joe Rodriguez

Joe Rodriguez is a Soto Zen student from the Shunryu Suzuki lineage, studying under Furu Nancy Schroeder (Abiding Abess, Green Gulch Farm Zen Center) and serving as a board

member of the San Francisco Zen Center. As a business executive and a long-time LGBT activist, his practice is to bring awareness, compassion, and forgiveness to daily life. His topic will be "Healing our 'velvet rage' through self-awareness and loving-kindness."

July 24 David Lewis

David Lewis has been following the dharma path for over 40 years and has a degree in comparative religious studies. He started out in the Tibetan Shambhala tradition and has been practicing vipassana meditation since moving to San Francisco over 25 years ago. For the past 7 years he has been practicing intensively. David is a member of the Mission Dharma sangha, where he teaches an introduction to insight meditation class. He is a long time member of the Gay Buddhist Fellowship and also leads a weekly sitting group for seniors every Friday morning. David is a graduate of Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Dedicated Practitioners Program and has been on the teaching team for Spirit Rock retreats.

July 31 Prasadachitta Dharmachari

As an ordained member of the Triratna Buddhist Community, Prasadachitta teaches meditation, yoga and Buddhism at the San Francisco Buddhist Center. His practice and teaching grows out of a valuing of friendship and community. He is interested in the link between ideal qualities, such as love and clarity, as inspiring guides, and those same qualities as they manifest "imperfectly" in everyday relationships.

August 7 Open Discussion

August 14 Dhammachari Danadasa

Dhammachari Danadasa has been practicing with the San Francisco Buddhist Center (SFBC) community since 1993 and was ordained in 2011. His current area of exploration is the cultivation of metta (universal loving kindness) as a response to all the hatred, discrimination and bigotry in the world out there. Through personal anecdotes and experiential exercises Danadasa will explore our relationship to ourselves and others, with a particular emphasis on our deeply ingrained tendency see others as different from us.

August 21 Gary Ost

Gary Ost is a retired Episcopal priest living in San Francisco. He began his study of the dharma in 2008, starting with the Shambhala school of Tibetan Buddhism. Since then he has practiced daily shamatha-vipashana meditation. He recently declared his aspiration to help Christians understand Buddhism better and Buddhists to understand Christianity better. Gary has taken informal bodhisattva vows, and is studying the Lojong teachings of the 11th Century Tibetan monk Atisha. Out of those teachings he is currently exploring the transformative psychological effect of Tonglen, a personalized mantra practice accompanied by taking in and sending out the breath. He would like to share some of the benefits of this practice today.

August 28 David Lewis

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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, believing in the equality of all that lives.

—GBF Dedication of Merit