



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

SUMMER 2020 NEWSLETTER

Shelter in Place as Dharma Practice

By Trip Weil

Trip Weil has been practicing in the Theravadan tradition since 2004. He is a graduate of Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leader and Dedicated Practitioners programs. Trip serves on the board of San Francisco Insight, where he also leads sitting groups and teaches meditation classes. He is a psychotherapist in private practice in San Francisco, and a former attorney.

It's great to be with you all. What I wanted to talk about today is what I've been thinking about this notion of "shelter-in-place." Lately I've been trying to think about it as a Buddhist teaching, or as something that can even be taken as a Dharma practice. That's what I'd like to do today, explore "shelter-in-place" a bit.

To me the core of the message is extremely Buddhist: the idea that the place of greatest safety is right where you are. Or we could add another meaning, where we could see that "shelter-in-place" means "shelter is in place." It's here. It's available. It's established. It's already part of this moment. We can and do think of shelter as being something that we need to find somewhere else, and we are accustomed to looking for it somewhere else, thinking that it's going to be found in certain experiences, or in other people. So it's really kind of radical to think that "shelter" is right here in this place right now.

The first step in exploring that, really, is just to stop like we all did a few weeks ago. We just stopped. It's kind of amazing really how everything just stopped. When I was in training as a therapist, I remember one of the teachers early on talking about how especially new therapists will have a tendency to want to fix everything. And she said, "Here is what I want your mantra to be: 'Don't just do something. Sit there.'" And it feels like that was part of that early moment of the shelter-in-place, once we did all the things we had to do. It was just, "Don't do something. Sit there." It is a radical idea that instead of trying to fix things, we're just going to see what's here.

I'd like to read a poem. This is from the new book, "The First Free Women," a translation of the Therigatha, which are the ancient poems written by the first awakened nuns, a new translation by Matty Weingast. This poem is titled, I believe this is the name of the nun who wrote it, "Another Tissa." She says,

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Find your true home on the Path.
Find the Path right here—
in the center
of your
own heart.
If you keep
searching in the past
and searching
in the future,
you will search
and search.
But your searching will never end.

The invitation here is to think about what is our shelter. It's right here, right at the center of our own heart. When I think about the word, "shelter", in a Buddhist context, of course, an immediate association is the Three Refuges, refuge basically being defined as something that provides shelter. Or a dictionary definition I found was, "a condition of being safe or sheltered from pursuit, danger, or trouble."

So we have the three refuges as our Dharmic Shelters. The first refuge is the refuge of Buddha, the refuge of the possibility of freedom here and now. Then there's the Dharma refuge, which is "the refuge of the teachings." Dharma can be thought of as The Teachings, of course. But it is also the refuge of the truth of how things are. And then the Sangha refuge, the refuge of community and also our inter-connectedness.

So there is an invitation: How can we find shelter in the possibility of freedom, in simply the truth of how things are right now? Is there shelter in that? And in the community, this community, this beautiful community here that still exists quite strongly, quite robustly in the midst of all of this; our inter-connectedness is still so much a part of our moment-to-moment lives: the inter-connectedness that's behind sheltering-in-place. All our actions have these cascading effects in small ways that are so clear to us now... who you pass on the street might make a difference between sickness and health.

We have a vital teacher right now in training us to relax or even dissolve into reality, and really a great chance to see what actually provides shelter and what actually leaves us feeling vulnerable and exposed. And in just the strictest Dharma sense, we're really right in the heart of the Four Noble Truths, right?

Let's explore a little bit how we find shelter in Practice. I think about that poem I just read and the way it points to the path being at the center of our own heart, and to me

that's the key in Practice right now. It's just connecting to what's actually here in the center of my heart, trying to maintain an open and loving heart able to meet whatever arises, trying to stay present, just showing up for each thing that's coming up.

This isn't the shelter that abandons or rejects what's difficult. In fact, we embrace it. One of the things that I appreciated most, at the beginning of all of this a few weeks ago, was that it was like the Dharma spigot just opened, and suddenly people were connecting in different ways. I was reading a lot more online, getting emails, all that kind of stuff. As this Dharma spigot

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opened to respond to what is happening, one of the things I kept hearing was people pointing out how what was happening is a manifestation of the heavenly messengers of Aging, Sickness, and Death. I read about that a couple of times at the very beginning, when it was really clear that this was going to be impacting us. At first I remember my reaction was, "This is too soon. I don't want to hear about the heavenly messengers right now. I'm actually still really freaking out, and so I don't really want to be thinking about how death and illness are teachers somehow. Like, "Just keep it away from me."

That was the initial response. But it's actually really helpful, I think, to connect an aspect of this, that these are our teachers. And what we're going through is in one sense extraordinary, and in another sense, not that extraordinary at all. It's like just a different version of the same old same old. There's always a truth to how things are that we can hold in awareness. And that might be a simple truth: I'm sitting at a table, looking into a screen. It might be a very deep and profound and life-changing truth: having an illness, having Coronavirus. But there's always just some truth as to how things are that we hold in awareness. And that truth is unfolding or arising constantly, just according to natural laws, and that is completely unchanged. That's the same now as it ever was. And yet, of course, what's so extraordinary is that the ordinariness of day-to-day life, and the vulnerability that is always present, has been revealed. Like this is part of the order of things: that we're always vulnerable. And we know that; but there's a way that we also don't know that or we forget that. So part of what's happening

that's extraordinary is that ordinary truth is becoming so alive.

Here's a poem from Rumi, "The Tent":

Outside, the freezing desert night.
This other night inside grows warm, kindling.
Let the landscape be covered with thorny crust.
We have a soft garden in here.
The continents blasted,
cities and little towns, everything
become a scorched, blackened ball.
The news we hear is full of grief for that future.
But the real news inside here
is there's no news at all...

I love how he points to these two worlds, what he's calling inside and outside. And, of course, we actually live in both. Sheltering-in-place doesn't mean that we're able to avoid the world of change and uncertainty and loss. But it means that we encounter those challenges from an understanding that in some way they're not news. That line, "The real news inside here is there's no news at all."

**We have the opportunity to really see that path.
You can really ask yourself, with a lot of trust and faith — really ask yourself — what actually makes you feel better in this moment? What actually helps?**

There is something unchanging. There is something that is not new in all of this, not a deviation from what has always been. And when we understand that, we stay inside even as we venture outside. Inside with that understanding that there's a kind of safety and protection in connecting to what is inside in that "warm, kindling," even as we're outside in the vulnerability of it all.

I'll talk a little bit more personally about what it's been like to shelter in place for me, and I'd be interested to hear what it's like for you, too.

For me, it's meant more practice. There's a way that this time has started to feel a bit like a retreat, where so much has fallen away, and there's a certain kind of sensitivity into what's going on inside — inside me.

One of the things I've seen as I've been sitting practicing more is how scattered I often feel, and kind of disorganized.

And little things have been getting to me in ways that are really surprising, like I go from zero to 60 in terms of frustration, really fast. Something happens, and it's just like, "Ah, I can't take it." And then coming back from 60 to say 30 pretty quickly too, where it's like it calms down really fast. It's been really interesting to

notice that, just to think about how sensitive I am at the moment.

But I would say that lately, in maybe the past few days, things have started to feel a bit different, and there's a bit less reactivity, a bit more of a focus on what's happening moment to moment, even if what's happening moment to moment is some kind of difficulty, a fear or frustration or something that's unpleasant.

And I do feel like there's been a little bit more for myself lately, a little bit more of a kind of trusting attitude, of just returning to what's actually happening over and over. Which is a little bit paradoxical, right? because the world itself feels in some ways less trustworthy. And yet returning to that over and over is creating a certain kind of ease.

So it's really an interesting view from within, just getting to see a lot about oneself. I see how quickly and deeply I suffer when I need things to be any other way than how they are, how much I miss when I come from that perspective of, "things have to be different somehow," and how lonely I can feel when I'm in that kind of a space, or even lost, really lost. And then, by contrast, I see how it feels to be connected to things as they are. I see my heart opening as I think about all the suffering that's going on and what's happening. And the contrast for me is most clear between that kind of closed-down heart and the more open heart when I think about something that really is scary to me. Like, when I think about getting ill or dying or someone close to me dying or something like that, if I do it from this perspective of avoidance, it is incredibly constricting, and so painful, really hard to describe, in a way — but I imagine that is familiar, that we each have our own version of that.

And then it's really amazing how coming from a different perspective, just thinking like, "Yeah, probably people I know will get sick or are even already sick, will die, or even I can die" — when I think about it with that sense of openness, it's just completely different. It really is quite amazing. It's like I've always known that. Well, I can't say I've always known that to be true; I've known that to be true as long as I've been practicing. But there's something about this moment where we have both this space to really feel things, and also the vulnerability that is being reinforced over and over again; I think it's really creating a unique opportunity to connect to this truth in this way. When we can open to what's scary, it feels okay. It actually does.

We have a vital teacher right now in training us to relax or even dissolve into reality, and really a great chance to see what actually provides shelter and what actually leaves us feeling vulnerable and exposed. And in just the strictest Dharma sense, we're really right in the heart of the Four Noble Truths, right?

I mean, first, there's difficulty or suffering or unsatisfactoriness. That's just everywhere. It's hard to miss that right now.

Then there's the cause. I think we really do have the opportunity to investigate our own suffering as it's coming up in a given moment, and really see the difference between what our experience is when there's an open kind of accepting attitude and when there's a closed, avoiding attitude. That cause of suffering is really so obvious.

Then there's the possibility of freedom. We're experiencing it lots of different times, I'm sure: just these moments of freedom, of release, of release from anxiety, or even joy, a sense of some sort of simple pleasure that just comes alive.

The world beyond longing and aversion is our shelter. That's our true shelter, and it is in place. It's here. We can tap into it. Maybe not live in it all the time, but it's available.

And then there's the path that leads to the end of suffering. We have the opportunity to really see that path. You can really ask yourself, with a lot of trust and faith — really ask yourself — what actually makes you feel better in this moment? What actually helps? And then see if there's a way to map that to our understanding of the Dharma. Maybe what helps in the moment is — I don't know — a scoop of ice cream? How does that fit? Is that real freedom? Maybe it is. Maybe it's not. We get to ask ourselves these questions, and we have a lot of space to do it.

I'm going to close. I want to leave time for people to talk about their own experience. I hope that will work with our group the way it is (online). I really want to hear from people. What's providing you shelter at this time from a Dharma perspective? Or what is it? What are those moments of freedom that you've noticed? What are the moments that you feel really caught, and how do you work with them?

So I'm going to close with a very famous saying. This is from the Third Zen Patriarch:

The Great Way isn't difficult
for those who are unattached to their preferences.
Let go of longing and aversion,
and everything will be perfectly clear.

When you cling to a hairbreadth of distinction,
heaven and earth are set apart...

I want to leave with the suggestion that the world beyond longing and aversion is our shelter. That's our true shelter, and it is in place. It's here. We can tap into it. Maybe not live in it all the time, but it's available. Or

going back to the poem from Sister Tissa, "Find the path right here in the center of your own heart."

Thank you for your attention and for listening. Let's see if we can have a discussion of some sort here. I think you know you can "raise your hand" through the participant windows...

Speaker 1:

Thank you so much for your talk. I find that I'm really grateful for my practice because it's the only time during every day when my body and my nervous system are actually at rest. I find that even though I don't have to be anywhere, or I can't be anywhere, I'm often on my computer. I'm doing a lot of Zoom meetings, Twelve-Step recovery, and also I'm Zooming with my students, trying to do distance teaching, so I'm buzzing all day, except for my practice. However, the minute I sit down and set my timer and go in, I have the worst time lately with falling into sleep, because my body is finally just letting go. I have to be careful, myself, because I am an addict to the core. I'm in recovery from compulsive eating, and I can just look over and see my refrigerator. When I heard your ice cream story, for me that would be poison. I can't do that kind of thing. So, instead of reaching for a substance or turning on porn or going online to shop or whatever, I just have to... [exhaling...] ahh, come back. A practice that's helping me is connecting with others. I have Buddhist friends, and every day we've been Facetimeing or calling and reading Pema Chödrön, Mark Nepo, Tara Brach, Norman Fischer... I'm reading a whole bunch of Buddhist readings; right now, we are into the whole idea that this is the path. This wretchedness is bringing us back to our practice: it is the path. Thanks for your talk, and thanks everyone for being on here. Namaste.

Trip Weil:

Thank you for sharing that. I appreciate what you're saying about returning to the path, and it's beautiful to hear that, for you, community is coming together around that with reading and connecting to different teachers. That's great. And also I appreciated what you said about eating and addiction. There is a way that, whatever we're going through right now, we really get to see so sharply whether it is taking us in a good direction or a bad direction. I think that everything is happening very quickly. If it's moving in a good direction, it moves quickly, and if it's moving in a bad direction, it moves quickly. So, if we just keep our eyes open, we're getting lessons all the time. Thank you very much

Speaker 2:

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for the talk. I really appreciate this. I relate with what a couple of you have been saying: it's so difficult to quiet the mind. I was expecting, "Oh, I'm going to be sheltered here with my family and I'm very fortunate to have my family, my home, and everything, my job." But the mind just does stuff; it doesn't allow me to focus, because of the anxi-

ety level. What I found very helpful is to touch base with others like yourselves, with friends and families, and it gives me a sense that, “Oh, it’s not just about me; it’s many of us; it’s all the same boat.” I really appreciate all of you for putting this together, keeping in touch, because I think human contact is something that I personally really need.

Trip Weil:

Thank you. Can I add one thing, too? I wonder if it’s possible to find shelter even in that mind? Are there moments where you can just kind of observe the spinning mind, and what it’s like to be in those moments? Does it shift it for you?

Speaker 2:

It’s good. I do Tai Chi and meditation, and so I’m working with this image of cars in traffic and that my thoughts are like these noises in traffic that just keep passing by. And I have to let them go. I don’t have to identify with them. I don’t have to engage with them. That’s sort of my shelter, by looking at it like, “Oh, all right. Yep. There’s another car passing by.” There’s this traffic in my mind the same way you see physical traffic outside.

Trip Weil:

I love that image, traffic. Thanks.

Speaker 3:

Trip, you said something that triggered off a flood in my mind about getting stuck and stopping. In some ways an interesting piece of this for me is that it’s not really very different. In Buddhist terms, I was already going to die before there was Coronavirus; as soon as I was born that reality was there, and eventually I realized it, however reluctantly. But what happens for me (I have had many decades of dealing with insomnia) is that sometimes during the night, I wake up and my mind starts going off on all kinds of trips... thinking and being anxious. What I do is I turn to one or another of the six to eight Buddhist-authored books that are sitting next to my favorite chair — like Jon Kabat-Zinn’s “Wherever You Go, There You Are” — which are particularly helpful to read for a few minutes, and it shifts my mind back to what some call “Buddhism” but I just call it “sanity.”

Trip Weil:

Yeah, it’s so nice, isn’t it, to be able to tap into something that so quickly gives you a reminder of what you already know. And it’s great that you have your favorites there and can just go to them. Those middle of the night hours can be hard. That’s great.

Speaker 4:

Hi. Thanks so much, Trip, for a wonderful talk. Good reminders. For me, because I’ve worked from home for the past 18 years, it’s funny, but things are not that different. It’s really great to hear everybody’s insights about what can be learned, because a lot of these things I’m overlooking. I have to say that one of the things that has annoyed me is all the people who have suddenly

been so needy on Facebook. What I’m trying to remind myself of is I think a lot of us feel a loss of control or we’re seeking some semblance of control or agency, and that expresses itself in many different ways. If I see someone shaming others for not wearing a mask or shaming people for not social distancing properly, I try not to be too reactive and back off, and sort of have compassion for what’s perhaps triggering them, because I think we’re all being triggered to some degree. I think it’s really developed more compassion in people.

Trip Weil:

Yeah. And I think we can see that we’re all just reacting a lot. It’s amazing, really, to see just how it’s all unfolding.

Speaker 5:

Hello, everybody. I’m Nicaraguan, and I live in Nicaragua. I’m very appreciative of this opportunity to join you today. I wanted to share my perspective on the topic that you are discussing today. I feel, like somebody else said, that this is a huge opportunity for us to develop compassion in our hearts. I feel that we can all connect in some way or another to the suffering, the fear, and all of the anxiety that most of us are living in at this point. And I feel that has given me a lot of strength to continue to think about ways in which I can bring shelter to people. I have always had, or from very early in my life, a strong sense that I can be there for people, and I think this has become more of an obsession now, because I see a lot of people, like you said, going out of control and feeling either sad or afraid. So, I feel that I have sort of an important mission, so to speak, to think of ways to channel all the love and compassion I feel for others, to see in what ways I can help others more, and how I can shelter people more than I have up to this moment in my life. I feel I am embracing this new opportunity. I think it’s an opportunity for humankind, myself included, to continue to think of ways to serve others, to show my love to others, and to shelter others. I’m very thankful, again, to all of you. Thank you so much.

Facilitator:

I just want to close by saying thank-you to everybody for being here today. Thank you, Trip.

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All in-person Programs at GBF on Bartlett Street will be postponed indefinitely and are being offered online using Zoom Meetings. Visit our website at www.gaybuddhist.org for the Zoom link and password.

Sunday Sittings

10:30 am to 12:00 pm

Every Sunday at 10:30 am we meditate together for 30 minutes, followed by a talk or discussion till 12:00 pm. Everyone is then welcome to stay and socialize until 12:30 pm.

Wednesday Night Live

7:30 pm to 9:00 pm

Similar to the Sunday format, without a formal dharma talk, we host a wide range of discussions which can include creative spiritual inspirations, pitfalls on the path, and applications of practice in everyday life. You are welcome to attend the Meditation (7:30 pm to 8:00 pm) only, and/or the Discussion (8:00 pm to 9:00 pm).

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.

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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.

Sunday Speakers

JUNE 7 - JD Doyle

JD Doyle serves as a Core Teacher at the East Bay Meditation Center (EBMC) and has served as a Board member and was the co-founder of the LGBTQI meditation group. JD is in the Spirit Rock Meditation Center teacher-training program and was in the Dedicated Practitioner Program (DPP2) and the Community Dharma Leader Program (CDL4). JD has practiced Buddhism since 1995 in the U.S., Thailand, and Burma. For over twenty-five years, they worked as a public school teacher focusing on issues of equity and access. JD holds a Bachelors degree in Environmental Studies from Cornell University and a Masters degree in Language and Literacy and Sociocultural Studies from the University of New Mexico. JD identifies as gender non-conforming. They are committed to celebrating the diversity of our human sangha, addressing the impact of racism on our communities, expanding concepts of gender, and living in ways that honor the sacredness of the Earth.

JUNE 14 - 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.

JUNE 21 - Open Discussion (Summer Solstice)

JUNE 28 - Rene Rivera

René Rivera is a leader and bridge-builder, working and learning in all the spaces in-between race, gender, and other perceived binaries, as a queer, mixed-race, trans man. René has been a student of the Dharma since 2004 and has been a part of the East Bay Meditation Center (EBMC) Alphabet Sangha since 2008. He has participated in the Commit to Dharma and Practice in Action programs at EBMC and the Community Dharma Leaders program at Spirit Rock. René is a community teacher at EBMC and also offers meditation and mindfulness instruction at other centers such as Spirit Rock Meditation Center, SF Dharma Collective, and others with a particular focus on offering the Dharma to QTPOC folk.

JULY 5 Open Discussion (Independence Day)

JULY 12 - 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 over 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 19 - Donald Rothberg

Donald Rothberg, Ph.D., has practiced Insight Meditation since 1976, and has also received training in Tibetan Dzogchen and Mahamudra practice, the Hakomi approach to body-based psychotherapy, and trauma work. He regularly teaches insight and lovingkindness meditation, and on transforming the judgmental mind, mindful communication and wise speech, working skillfully with conflict, and socially engaged Buddhism. He is the author of *The Engaged Spiritual Life: A Buddhist Approach to Transforming Ourselves and the World*.

JULY 26 - Dave Richo

David Richo is a psychologist, teacher, and writer in Santa Barbara and San Francisco who emphasizes Jungian, transpersonal, and spiritual perspectives in his work. He is the author of "How to Be an Adult in Relationships." For more information, visit www.davericho.com.

AUGUST 2 - Tom Moon - "Depression and Loneliness in the Gay Community."

Tom Moon is a native San Franciscan and has been a Buddhist practitioner for twenty-four years. He is a psychotherapist in private practice and works with a primarily gay male clientele. His chief professional commitment is to explore the interface between Buddhist practice and psychotherapy. Tom writes a bi-weekly column, "The Examined Life," which appears locally in the San Francisco Bay Times. An archive of these columns, as well as his spiritual manifesto, "Spirit Matters," can be found on his website, www.tommoon.net.

AUGUST 9 - Jennifer Berezan

Jennifer Berezan is a unique blend of singer/songwriter, producer, and activist. Over the course of ten albums, she has developed and explored recurring themes with a rare wisdom. Her lifelong involvement in environmental, women's, and other justice movements as well as an interest in Buddhism and earth-based spirituality are at the heart of her writing.

AUGUST 16 - Bill Weber

Bill Weber is a senior Vipassana practitioner and a graduate from Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leaders program. He has twenty-five years of extensive retreat practice and currently practices at home with his husband or sits with a small group of gay men. He is also a documentary filmmaker and video editor, whose latest projects are "To Be Takei" and "The Untold Tales of Armistead Maupin."

AUGUST 23 - Open Discussion

AUGUST 30 - David Lewis

David Lewis has been following the dharma path for 45 years and has a degree in comparative religious studies. He teaches Insight Meditation and enjoys sharing the dharma at several sanghas around the Bay Area. He is a proud long time member of GBF.

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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