



GAY BUDDHIST Fellowship

SPRING 2021 NEWSLETTER

Connectedness in Each Moment

By Paul Rosenblum

Ryuten Paul Rosenblum Roshi began his Zen practice in 1968 at the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center. He lived there for 10 years and practiced with Suzuki Roshi up until Suzuki's death in 1971. He is a Dharma heir to Baker Roshi and Assistant Abbot at the Zen Buddhistisches Zentrum Schwarzwald. He leads seminars at ZBZS as well as in Berlin and in Vienna. He lives in San Anselmo, California.

Thank you very much. Thank you for including me in this gathering and for each of you to make the time for us to be together. So, we may say that Zen practice is about directly experiencing the most satisfying kind of aliveness. The path of practice is about how we may go about realizing this possibility in our everyday lives, regardless of the circumstances, whether they're comfortable or whether they're challenging circumstances.

There's a story about a fisherman in a remote village in ancient China. As was the custom with people in the village, each day they would go to the mountain stream that ran through the main part of the village and they would fish for their dinner. One day this fisherman showed up using a straight hook, rather than using a curved hook with a barb. He began fishing next to his neighbors, and they all started to make fun of him. They said, "What are you going to do with that? Why are you trying to fish with a straight hook?" And he said, "You may catch an ordinary fish with your curved hook with a barb on it. But one day I may catch an extraordinary fish with my straight hook." And it's said that he continued to fish in this way for 40 years. News of this unusual fisherman and his way of fishing spread throughout all of China, even to the Imperial Court. The Emperor was very interested to see, "What is this all about? What is this person doing? What's this straight-hook fishing?"

So he gathered together an entourage. They traveled up to the remote mountain village. Of course, he arrived to see this now old man with his line fishing with a straight hook, and he said, "Old Man, whatever were you hoping to catch with this straight hook?" And he replied, "I was hoping to catch you, dear emperor."

So we take this time together this morning, sitting quietly, each of us on our own and all of us together, putting our hook in this water. What are we hoping to catch? Maybe some piece of understanding, clarity or insight. Maybe relief from some difficulty or challenge we're facing. Maybe some way that we can help somebody who we care about deeply; who's having some difficulty. We don't know what to do. Maybe we'll find some way we can really be of help and support. Maybe we don't know why we're casting our line into this water of meditation. Maybe it doesn't matter to us at all. And we can't know. I mean, this is a story, so we can't know what the intention really of this old man fishing in this unusual way was. Could he ever have imagined that he'd catch an emperor at the end of his straight hook?

But there's the possibility in this slippery kind of situation, where we're numbed leading into the moment with what we know, with what we understand, with what we think works, with what makes sense to us. We're entering a moment in a wider way, wider margins on how we're approaching this feeling of directly experiencing the most satisfying kind of aliveness. And it marks a shift. It's a shift from relying on our habits, on our past or thinking what we know; our associations.

Enter in the present situation in our experiencing of it, not just for ideas about it. So the possibility of practice is not just to know ourselves as the idea we have of ourselves, but to know ourselves directly, which is much wider than those ideas. We don't have to get rid of the ideas, we just don't have to be

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limited by them. We could be open to possibilities much wider than what we can imagine. The possibility of fishing without a specific sense of what it is that we're going to gain, what the outcome is going to be. Being with you brings me to my great dear *dharma* brother, Issan Dorsey Roshi. Maybe some of you knew Issan. Maybe some of you know of Issan.

So, we were ordained together. He performed my marriage to my partner. And he was, for those who don't know, an extraordinary person. He was very interested in music and dance as a young person. He entered the Navy; with his lover got kicked out of the Navy and became a bartender in North Beach. He had great legs. He became a dancer, became a female impersonator, became a junkie and founded a commune. And he was an extremely good practitioner and teacher. Even after Issan stopped using drugs, he was always up for a good Tanqueray Martini before dinner. No question.

You may catch an ordinary fish with your curved hook with a barb on it. But one day I may catch an extraordinary fish with my straight hook.

As many of you know, he started Maitri, the hospice. Maitri started because there was a young man named JD who lived in the laundromat around the corner from Hartford Street Zen Center. And JD had AIDS and no place to live and he was living in the laundromat. Issan brought JD home to the Hartford Street Zen Center and gave him a room. This was the beginning of Maitri. The Bay Area Reporter came to interview Issan about this movement that was becoming noticed particularly in the Bay Area of so-called Engaged Buddhism. And they asked Issan, "Well, what do you think about Engaged Buddhism? How is what you're doing involved in Engaged Buddhism?" And he said, "I don't really know so much about Engaged Buddhism. I just know if somebody falls down, I help them get up." Fishing with a straight hook, not knowing what we'll catch. Just the default position of what's right here, right now in front of us.

I joke if you want to send a letter to the Buddha, where do you send the letter? What's the Buddha's address? It's not the past, it's not the future, it's not the present. If you want to send a letter to the Buddha, you send it right here, right now. Somebody falls down, you help them stand up. And we had a meeting in the living room of Hartford Street Zen Center. That's where the Board of Directors of the Maitri hospice used to meet, as we had no meeting rooms. We were getting requests on behalf of people who needed a place to come and we were threadbare. We had very little money—we could get through each month and we could feed some people, but we had no money. As was Issan's way, we were meeting in the living room.

So, it's like people are walking through and they're going and getting a cup of coffee. There was somebody who said, "Oh, can I sit in on the meeting?" Issan, as was his way, said, "Of course you can sit in the meeting." And he looked kind of threadbare, but he was very committed to JD and would visit JD almost every day. We were worried about him; we thought he might be some homeless person who also needed some help, and the building next door to 57 Hartford street would be a perfect place to expand. We can have at least seven beds and we wanted to do this. But at this meeting we were completely flummoxed, "How are we going to come up with this [the money]? What will we do?"

At the end of the meeting, this man came up to Issan and said, "Oh, I'll buy the building." We were shocked. And he did. And as some of you know, we broke through the living room and upstairs, and this was the beginning of Maitri Hospice, having a home on Hartford street before its current home. No plan, no idea about doing something. Simply, no idea about helping people. Issan didn't have an idea about helping

people. Those years at Maitri I would spend time just sometimes to sit with somebody, see if I could get them a glass of water, whatever I could do. As many of you know when a situation becomes challenging, there's no room for superficiality. There's no room for the bullshit.

I remember once a young man came, Haitian, his name was Bernie. Bernie had the most fantastic sense of style. Every time I would come he had a different color of nail polish. And Bernie was as thin as a pencil. And the first thing that he did when he got his room, he had somebody help him, and up above his bed, he had a banner, which said, "Bernie's Party." Here's this guy who's as big around as my index finger, who's in the hospice, who wants to enjoy his life and enjoy my being with him. He's inviting me into his party, to "Bernie's Party." And Bernie was the first failure we had at the hospice because Bernie got better. We could not figure, nobody could figure this out—how he got better.

After about six months at the hospice, we said, "Bernie you're doing pretty good now." And he actually went back to Haiti and after more than half a year, I don't know what happened with Bernie. But there was the possibility to make contact in the midst of the challenges. Not rejecting the challenges. Not saying they're not real. Not trying to wish them away, "Oh, it's going to be okay." The guy's in a hospice. There's no room to say, "Oh, it's going to be okay." But to meet the moment directly, including, but not limited to, all our ideas about it. So I feel some gift in my remembering Issan this morning and all of the times [spent] with him. When he performed the wedding for my wife and me he gave us a big tall candle. And he said, "Every time you fight, you have to light the candle." He said, "You can't go to bed in the midst of a fight. You have to light the candle together." Because part of the wedding ceremony in Zen is each person brings up a taper and they light the main altar candle.

He said, "And if it starts getting really low, you've got to come and talk to me again." So on my altar today, seeing the candle Issan gave us, feeling the presence of Issan, in my *zazen* earlier this morning, and simply and directly meeting the moment. How do we do this? My first teacher, Suzuki Roshi, said, "Moment by moment, attention to breath and posture is true nature." I mean, this is an extraordinary thing to say. [He chuckles.] True nature, that's a big thing that's going to happen—we're going to get 10,000 candle-lit *bodhisattvas*, and they're going to raise us up to the heavens. No. It's moment by moment, attention to breath and posture, that's true nature.

"I don't really know so much about Engaged Buddhism. I just know if somebody falls down, I help them get up."

Articulating attention in each inhalation and each exhalation, in each inhaling, breathing the world in, mixing it with what's here, then releasing it, returning it to the one that doesn't own it. It's marked by a shift from our reliance on thinking, to settling in the present situation. The context as it exists now. We're not in a general space. We're not in a habitual space. We're not defined by a linear sense of continuity. We're not defined by a fixed identity. All of these things are present. We don't need to reject them; we just don't allow them to define who we take ourselves to be in the moment. So for me, *zazen* is the ritual expression of the fact that we can truly be who we are, in our magnificence, in all our failures, in all our challenges, in all our doubts, in our joyousness, in our connection. It's all rallying around in the heart making one sound, the sound of each of us, as we are, and each of us, as we are together.

So practice is fundamentally to move in accord with the fullness of the life that's already here. If somebody says to you, "What's the best moment of your life?" You think, "Oh, well maybe when I'm able to

get through the challenge. When I get through the challenge, that's going to be the best moment of my life. When I'm no longer caught by my past, when I'm no longer trapped by my fears, my suspicions, the image I have of myself that limits me, that's going to be the best moment of my life." Zen practice is about making each moment the best moment of our life. Your address is the Buddha's address. Practice doesn't exist any place other than right here, right now, as wonderful and as crummy as that may be. And that's "Bernie's Party." Notice, Bernie was in the hospice. Bernie wasn't having a party on the street, crumpled over. Bernie functioned intelligently, he knew he needed to be in the hospice. This was very important.

There's a Sufi story about a very dedicated believer, a practitioner. He was asking God for some kind of sign, how to go, what to do, how to develop his way. He had a dream and the dream was, "Tomorrow go to the forest." So he went to the forest near his home, wandering looking for some sign. He saw a legless fox by a large rock, in a cool place by a stream, and he thought, "How can this legless fox survive?" So he sat at a distance and waited and almost at dusk, a lion came and the lion brought the fox some meat. And he said, "I understand. The all-providing God will take care of all my needs and wants, make everything complete and whole." And so he went home and he just waited, two days, three days, five days. And he was starting to starve waiting for the all-providing, all-knowing, all-strong God to provide. And he had another dream that night. The dream was, "Fool, be like the lion, not the fox. Function intelligently." To function intelligently is to give. It's to recognize the connection that we have with ourselves and with one another. When Suzuki Roshi first came to America, he was very surprised at how people handle things. When he would pick up or use something, he would do it with two hands. He said, "In America, people do things with one hand." He was so surprised. When he would give us something, when he passed something, he would bring it into his body and only then would he pass it to us.

So he wasn't just passing a glass of water, he was passing himself. And the thing about the two hands, the two hands were connected here [he motions to his chest]. When you watch a four year old with a big glass of milk, they take it with two hands. It's the attention not on us, it's the attention on the activity. Maybe you don't have two hands. There's a woman I practice with in Germany. I have the great good fortune to have her help me with service, offering incense and arranging the altar, these things. She only has one hand. She was born with just a part of one arm. And maybe some of you are familiar with this impossible Zen form of eating, *oryoki*. It's impossible to do it correctly. You have these nested bowls and a prescribed way of opening them, filling them, cleaning them, and then closing them up. And she does this with one hand!

I learned from her how to do things with the feeling of two hands, even if we don't have two hands. Whatever the challenge may be to know that the hands, the arms and legs—everything is connected here. We don't have an idea so much of who we are, of what we're doing, when we allow that to be "on our shelf." I can paint this idea, put it "on my shelf," and now I'm going to proceed with the day. And find out who, what, how this is today? When we don't have such a fixed idea, we can start to see ourselves in everything. We can allow the world to come forward into our experience. We can begin to feel, when we pick something up, it's not just about us. It's not just about catching something at the end of our hook. It's about the aliveness. It's present, waiting for us in each moment. And [lifting a glass of water to his lips] I'm grateful for the water.

Until we make this shift, we make a shift from associative thinking, to our experience, or physical or a felt experience in the moment. Moving in accord with the fullness of life, which includes our limitations but is also not limited by them. We establish our practice in our difficulty. We don't wait for the difficulty to be over. And we don't mean to make light of the difficulty, but it's the soil of our practice. I had a

great deal of physical difficulty sitting when I began. I couldn't get my knees down on the mat, forget *half-lotus*, back and forth, impossible. Couldn't even get my knees down on the mat! And I saw over the years, many of the students who had an easier time, who had great posture, could do all these things really well, much better than I, and left. I stayed. I couldn't do anything else. I couldn't do anything better. I stayed. My difficulties were the compost, the soil for my practice to grow.

And so when another person falls down and we help them get up, it's helping ourselves to get up. There are *bodhisattva's* vows, and we chant them in Zen practice. *Sentient Beings are numberless, I vow to save them.* To save others is to save the self. To save the self is to take absolutely impeccable care of the self as it's appearing in this moment, is to take care of everyone. When we don't feel simply a separateness, we can be distinct in who we are. We're all... I look at all these tiles [in Zoom], we're all distinct, but we're also at the same time connected. It's not one or the other. It's not a binary decision. It's to know simultaneously the distinctness and the non-separateness. It's a feeling of not having to leave anything out. So when we pick up the glass [picks up his water glass], we pick up our heart. We pick up our connection with the world. When we put it down, we set it down [sets the glass down] with that kind of feeling. And I'd like to share with you my "secret sauce" for practice.

Do we want to put our attention into more separateness, into more distinctions, into more stratification, into more alienation? Or do we want to put our attention into what's happening now?

My wife and I very much enjoy going to the Slanted Door—maybe some of you are familiar with the Slanted Door—for a special occasion. We take the ferry. We live in Marin and we take the ferry, go to the Ferry Building in San Francisco, and then we have lunch at the Slanted Door. And for those that aren't so familiar with it, it's Asian fusion, a Vietnamese heritage restaurant, with fantastic, inventive great food. There's a mung bean crepe on the menu that's great. I enjoy cooking and saw online there was his recipe for the mung bean crepe and I made an effort. It wasn't easy. I had to buy mung bean flour. I mean, the ingredients were not so easy to come by. I found all of the ingredients, and made the recipe. Failure. I couldn't make it. I tried several times. I thought, "What am I doing? Why isn't this working?" I couldn't make it. The next time we went to the restaurant, I said to the waiter (we had ordered the mung bean crepes), "I tried to make these crepes. Couldn't do it."

He said to me, "Did you think he would share that recipe with the public?" But I'm going to tell you my secret sauce, my secret recipe: default position is not our individuality, but our connectedness. Having no gap between ourselves and others, not having an idea of doing something, just simply doing it, being engaged in this connectedness. And then we can't do it. We don't do it. It's not happening. It doesn't happen for two days. We totally forget. My secret sauce is then we have the opportunity to begin again. And we can begin again on each breath, on each inhalation. Articulating a world outside of our habits, our beliefs or identities or preferences. Then we're turning that over to all of us together in this wide world to the one that doesn't know it.

So I'd like please to have some time to hear from you, if you have any comments about your practice now or anything that you would like to discuss please.

Asa: Hi.

Ryuten Paul: Hello Asa.

Asa: Hi, how are you?

Ryuten Paul: I'm doing pretty well. How are you?

Asa: I'm doing great. When you talked about this no separation thing, the first thing that comes to my mind is the fact that the very definition, the very nature of being an American is to live in a two-tier society, to live in a caste system. African-American people have been in a caste system for 400 years here. And so we live very comfortably with that separation. And I was just wondering if you had any thoughts about that?

Ryuten Paul: Thank you.

Asa: Sure.

Ryuten Paul: Yes, this is true. No question. And at the same time, we can also experience connectedness. So there may be structures, and the structures are not just personal structures. There are institutional structures that emphasize separateness, and it doesn't mean we have to accept those. And beginning by not accepting them is not accepting them in myself, is experiencing the truth of the distinctions and the separateness. I mean, I'm not in Oakland right now. That's a fact, but I also have the gift through this technology that I can see you. At the same time, we're separate, but we can also at the same time be connected. So then we start to have a choice. Do we want to put our attention into more separateness, into more distinctions, into more stratification, into more alienation? Or do we want to put our attention into what's happening now? That's what I meant by not to deny anything, but I can use what's here to try to create more connectedness, more a feeling of the relationship. Like I feel my hands aren't separate. My hands are connected right here [touches his chest].

Both are true. Where do I want to put my attention? And what's interesting is when we start to make that choice, different things start to happen. And what happens is we don't look at the external quite as much. We're all programmed. I mean, it's just the truth. That's called "habits." But we don't have to be limited by the habits. The more we know our habits, the more they can be there and we can be free of them. I can mention a quick story. As I said, I like to cook. I really do like to cook. And I go to a Middle Eastern market. (And I'm usually in California three months and in the temple in the *Schwarzwald* in Germany three months. I go back and forth.) And there's a man who owns the store.

And he said, "I haven't seen you. Where have you been? And are you okay?" So I said, "Yeah, yeah." And I told him, I was back from this three months when I was in Europe. He said, "What do you do?" And I said, "I practice meditation and I teach meditation." He said, "Would you teach me to meditate?" Well, let's get real here. I mean, I'm like, what am I going to do with this guy? So he has two older children. He's about my age, has two almost middle-aged kids, and he loves these kids—you can feel it. Then I said, maybe the best thing, the way I would teach you to meditate is treat everybody you meet the way you feel towards your children. What's that like?

What's it like when people meet you and they may not like you? They may have an idea about you. We recognize that, we're not foolish about it. But in our heart, we realize both hands are connected, and we start to treat others in that way. What ends up happening? It starts with treating ourselves that way. The love starts when we treat ourselves that way and people get it. But what's most important? I talked about directly experiencing the most satisfying kind of aliveness in each moment. That's what's always available at the end of the straight hook, and it doesn't always work out. "Doesn't always work out" is, this hand forgot that it's connected to this hand? They are separate. Sometimes it forgets. [Motions to the other hand] "What about me? Hey, come along with me." Then they can be connected again. Am I making sense, Asa?

Asa: Thank you so much. It's really helpful.

Ryuten Paul: Asa, I want to thank you. Thank you very much.

...and change doesn't mean that something's taken away. Change means that innumerable possibilities are present in each moment.

Jeff: Yes. Thank you for a wonderful talk, Roshi. You used the expression a few times "who we are," I want to ask you, who do you believe we are?

Ryuten Paul: Who we are, is continually, miraculously, mysteriously changing, and change doesn't mean that something's taken away. Change means that innumerable possibilities are present in each moment. I'm meeting the Jeff that I've had some emails with, but I'm also meeting with the Jeff that in relationship to me now is becoming in ways that I can't imagine.

Jason: I've been doing a lot of self-work lately and it's been very intense. And we met this really fantastic guy who is absolutely gorgeous, looks very fit. And he says, "I'm in love with my true self, but yada yada, I'm fighting the stranger." I'm like, "What stranger? Like the chameleon version, the stranger or the Billy Joel version is that... 'We all fall in love and we just... Yeah.'" But you never let your love receive the stranger in yourself. So, I basically think I have most of the low frequency stuff under wraps, except jealousy. I can't escape it. It's just how it is. Like I'll look on Facebook and I'll see a bunch of friends together with their shirts off and they're in wherever, Mexico or whatever. I'm jealous. I'm so jealous. It hurts my soul that I have to let it go.

Ryuten Paul: Yeah.

Jason: Yep. Breathing out through the nose, doesn't help.

Ryuten Paul: Yeah. Yeah.

Jason: I just want some... You know how your mom would come over to the bed because you just got heartbroken and you want to go to the prom with someone and she doesn't know what to say, so

she just rubs your back. That's it. That's so special and beautiful. I just need somebody to rub my back. [Jason cries]

Ryuten Paul: Yeah.

Jason: Life is suffering, they were right about that. Yeah. Sorry.

Ryuten Paul: Please don't apologize. There's no need to apologize to me.

Jason: Thank you.

Ryuten Paul: If I may make a suggestion please.

Jason: Yes, please.

Ryuten Paul: Your beads.

Jason: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ryuten Paul: Yeah.

Jason: What about them?

Ryuten Paul: I don't want to get into all my history, but I'm a bleeder. I'm a hemophiliac.

Jason: Oh, no.

Ryuten Paul: And I'm in the hospital. I mean, I'm a regular. I know the drill.

Jason: Oh yeah.

Ryuten Paul: And sometimes I don't have energy to do anything, nothing. But what you may consider doing, and it's not to get rid of these feelings. It's not, "I shouldn't be jealous." Why am I telling you? Your lower frequencies are in good shape. Now, this is what's happening. Can you take care of your jealousy as if it's as precious as your own hearing, your own eyes? And a way I encourage you to do it, and I know this from my own experience, being in the hospital a lot, is to allow your shoulders to count your beads. Can you imagine this? You don't have to do it with your hand.

Jason: Oh wow.

Ryuten Paul: It means your whole body is counting. When my beads are in my pocket, my pocket is counting the beads.

Jason: Nice.

Ryuten Paul: When my beads are in my hand, when my beads are by my shoulder, my shoulders are counting my beads. You have a challenge right now? It means not to deny the challenge. It's not to forget your practice, to allow your shoulders to count the beads. You're feeling the jealousy. You're looking at the picture on Facebook and you're feeling... you're seeing all these gorgeous people. And you're thinking [makes a growling sound]. To allow your shoulders to continue to take care of your practice. Does this make any sense to you? Does this seem possible?

Jason: Yeah, it seems possible. The circumstances were that I was paralyzed and I haven't walked yet, like officially, but I'm getting there a little bit at a time. They were impressed, because I could go like this, like with my feet on the walker. I'm like, "Oh, why didn't you say I can walk? Why didn't you say that I could do that?" So I will be able to walk again. I know, I can feel it actually. Because it happened on the right, my left leg shakes. Gotta laugh about it, I guess. Yep.

Ryuten Paul: I don't know that you have to laugh about it. I know that you don't have to leave your experience of yourself. That's always possible. Sometimes it's not a laughing matter.

Jason: It's true. That's very true.

Ryuten Paul: But there's always the possibility to return. This is my secret sauce, to return to your experiencing, your preciousness as an individual and connected in each moment. And this is why I say, "Let your shoulders count your beads." It means you don't have to lose your practice.

Can you take care of your jealousy as if it's as precious as your own hearing, your own eyes? And a way I encourage you to do it... is to allow your shoulders to count your beads. Can you imagine this?

David: Thank you. Ryuten Paul Roshi, thank you very much for your teachings. And for everybody who was here in the space with us today, for those who had questions—those are helping all of us learn and grow together. And we always encourage everyone who is able, to offer *dana* to support this work, including the quarterly newsletter and *dana* for our teachers.

Ryuten Paul: I would like whatever *dana* would ordinarily go to me to go to your organization. Please.

David: Thank you. That's very generous. Thank you very much.

Ryuten Paul: And I would like to make a dedication.

David: We are at that time, so I'll pass it on to you. Thank you.

Ryuten Paul: All beings, ten directions, three times. All buddhas, *bodhisattva-mahasatvas*. Wisdom beyond wisdom. *Maha prajña paramita*. Thank you.



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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).

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GBF members can donate their quality cast-offs to the Community Thrift Store (CTS) and GBF will receive a quarterly check based on the volume of items sold. This is a great way to support our Sangha, and the community. So far this year we have received over \$800 through members' generosity. Bring your extra clothing and other items to CTS at 623 Valencia St between 10am and 5pm, any day of the week. The donation door is around the corner on Sycamore Alley (parallel to and between 17th and 18th) between Valencia and Mission. Tell the worker you are donating to GBF. Our ID number is 40. Information: (415) 861-4910

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Sunday Speakers

March 7 — Open Discussion

March 14 — James Baraz

James Baraz has been a meditation teacher since 1978. He is creator and teacher of the Awakening Joy course (since 2003). He leads retreats, workshops, and classes in the U.S. and abroad. He is a co-founding teacher of Spirit Rock Meditation Center and co-author of *Awakening Joy: 10 Steps to Happiness* and *Awakening Joy for Kids*. He is a guiding teacher for *One Earth Sangha*, a website devoted to expressing a Buddhist response to climate change.

March 21 — Devin Berry

Devin Berry has been practicing Insight meditation since 1999. He regularly teaches at the Insight Meditation Society (IMS). Devin has undertaken many periods of silent long-term retreat practice. He is a community teacher at East Bay Meditation center in Oakland, CA where he co-founded both the teen and men of color sanghas. Devin recently relocated to western Massachusetts from the San Francisco Bay Area. He is deeply committed to the personal and collective liberation of marginalized communities knowing that the integration of reflection and insight, clarity, and wisdom give rise to wise action.

March 28 — Melvin Escobar

Melvin Escobar is a bilingual/bicultural Dharma teacher, licensed psychotherapist, and certified yoga instructor. He is a graduate of EBMC's Commit to Dharma, and for more than a decade has served EBMC in a variety of roles, including on the development team for Resilience, Refuge and (R)evolution, a six-month leadership program for people of color. He has devoted 25 years to serving people from marginalized communities, drawing on his life experience as a queer man of color from an immigrant working-class background. Having encountered the priceless wisdom embodied in Buddhism and Yoga, he continues daily to learn the revolutionary potential of body-centered contemplative practices for personal and social healing.

April 4 — Open Discussion

April 11 — Kevin Griffin

Kevin Griffin is a Buddhist teacher and author of several books, including *One Breath at a Time: Buddhism and the Twelve Steps*, and his latest, *Buddhism & the Twelve Steps Daily Reflections*. A longtime Buddhist practitioner and 12-step participant, he is a leader in the mindful recovery movement and one of the founders of the Buddhist Recovery Network. Kevin is a husband, father, and musician. His album *Laughing Buddha* is a collection of rock and world beat tunes with Buddhist themes. For more information, see www.kevingriffin.net

April 18 — Kevin Martin

Kevin Martin, MA, has practiced in the Insight tradition for a decade. He is currently a student in the Dharmacharya Lay Ordination program guided by Ven. Pannavati Bhikkhuni and Ven. Pannidipa Bhikku. His socially engaged practice centers on uprooting patriarchal systems in dharma communities. In 2016, Kevin completed the Practice in Transformative Action program. Kevin is widely known for co-creating spiritual programs for men at East Bay Meditation Center where he serves as a community teacher. He also serves as a community teacher at Insight Richmond, based in the Bay Area.

April 25 — 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 cofounder 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 bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from Cornell University and a master's 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.

May 2 — Ryuko Laura Burges

Ryuko Laura Burges, a lay entrusted dharma teacher in the Soto Zen tradition, lectures and leads retreats at different practice centers in Northern California. A teacher of children for 35 years, she now mentors other teachers. Her children's book, *Monkeys in the Bodhi Tree*, will be published by Shambhala in 2022. Laura co-founded the Sangha in Recovery Program at the San Francisco Zen Center and is the abiding teacher at Lenox House Meditation Group in Oakland.

May 9 — Dharma Duo: David Hunt & Jason Torres Hancock

David Hunt is a middle-aged, white, queer, cis man who has been studying and practicing Buddhism for several years in different traditions, most recently in the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions. He grew up in the midwest, attended school in the east, and lived in New Orleans prior to coming to California in 2004. Professionally, he works at the intersections of performing arts (circus), education, and youth development as executive/artistic director for Prescott Circus Theatre, a 36 year old nonprofit in Oakland. His work as an educator and arts administrator has developed alongside training and performing in theater and circus. From 1994 to 2017, he performed juggling and on slack rope for theater, circuses, TV, and film (*Water for Elephants*), and in 2008, helped to create Circus Bella, an SF-based open air circus. David makes his home with his partner and dogs and has been a part of the parenting and caregiving for two college-aged not-really-anymore-children. He's been attending sessions with the Gay Buddhist Fellowship since 2016.

Jason Torres Hancock is a performing artist with a background as an actor, both in the United States and in England, and has performed as a dancer in ballet and modern dance in San Francisco, Chicago, Denver, and New York City. Since 2002, he has created dance/theatre works as a solo artist and for his performance collaborative, GROUP, focused on investigating the outsider experience shared by minority groups in American culture. He holds a M.A. in Mythological Studies with a Depth Psychology Emphasis from Pacifica Graduate Institute and a M.F.A. in Theatre: Contemporary Performance from Naropa University. At Naropa, he was introduced to Tibetan Buddhist contemplative practices and the lineage of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. He currently brings his diverse background in the performing and moving arts with contemplative practices to offer private sessions in Life Coaching and Movement Coaching. Jason has been a member of GBF since 2016.

May 16 — René 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 folx.

May 23 — TBA

May 30 — Open Discussion

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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