



GAY BUDDHIST Fellowship

SPRING 2022 NEWSLETTER

The gay Buddhist
Fellowship supports
Buddhist practice and
the spiritual concerns of
the LGBTQIA+ community
and its allies in the
San Francisco Bay Area,
the United States and
throughout the world.
GBF's mission includes
offering the wisdom and
compassion of diverse
Buddhist traditions, and
cultivating a social
environment that is
inclusive and caring.

Mañjuśrī Morphs into Hotei!

By Jokai Blackwell

Jokai relocated to California from the UK in 2000 to study with Tenshin Fletcher Roshi at Yokoji Zen Mountain Center, located near Idyllwild. After completing formal study, encompassing over a decade of residential training and service, he received Dharma Transmission (full authorization to teach) in the White Plum Lineage of Zen Buddhism. He currently serves as Vice Abbot of Yokoji, Guiding Teacher for Long Beach Meditation, and as a Guiding Council Teacher at Insight Community of the Desert. Jokai emphasizes the direct experience of awakening using contemporary language and time-honored methods.

Thank you. Thank you for the warm welcome. It's very nice to be here in this virtual meditation hall. Beginning with a 30-minute sit is something that I really appreciate. Our practice so often comes down to this foundation.

It's an odd thing to hear one's bio, one of those things you're forced to craft, to put something together to send out. It always sounds a little odd, like it's talking about somebody else. If I were to give a very Zen response or a Buddhist response, I could say that I'm nobody, and I'm certainly nobody special.

Yet we navigate this world of form and appearances. So within that though, there comes the story and the résumé and the history. It was suggested to me, it might be helpful to flesh out my history a little bit with practice and go from there. I grew up in the north of Wales in the UK, in a very blue collar, ex-coal mining and manufacturing town, from which I was quite keen to escape at a fairly young age. I did begin a career and bought a house, had a relationship and was living in that area. But I felt dissatisfied, finding no meaning in my life.

That was an itch that grew more urgent over time. I'd been interested in cosmology and quantum physics and read about as far as a layperson can with that kind of thing. Then I was just thinking about going back to school and taking some prerequisite classes in order to try and study along those lines. At the evening classes I was taking after work, there was also a small Buddhist group, a lay Tibetan group, that was sitting. I went along and joined a couple of their meditation sessions.

I resonated somewhat with the meditation, although I found it very difficult to sit still. I remember being taught a *metta* practice, which I found difficult to use in my everyday life. Continuing with my reading around quantum mechanics, I became very interested in Zen. There was a book that I read about fuzzy logic, which is kind of non-binary computer programming, where instead of zero and one, there's an infinite spectrum between zero and one. Apparently the Tokyo subway system runs on this basis.

That was intriguing to me. In this book, the chapter beginnings had Zen *koans* as introductions. Immediately upon reading Zen *koans*, I had a real feeling of intimacy that I didn't understand or a feeling that I wanted to know what this means. I felt like perhaps I could, but it's out of reach. In reading about Zen, it amazed me that there we were, a couple of thousand years ago in Buddhism and in Zen, we had people who had a wonderful perception, understanding and expression of reality. It blew my mind. How could people understand in this way? It sounded like modern physics

and explaining reality. It was an urgency and an ordinariness about Zen in particular, which really intrigued me.

From there, I started sitting with a group in Liverpool, England, and attending annual retreats with Tenshin Fletcher, who is the abbot at Yokoji, where I still live, and a couple of other Zen teachers, before finally deciding to move out to beautiful California to study full-time at Yokoji. I came initially for five years. Practice then became not quite but close to 24/7/365, with the rigors of living at a Zen center. My meditation was originally grounded in breathing and posture, very important in the Zen tradition, particularly the Rinzai Zen tradition. We have to have a good appreciation and application of posture and breathing in order to become better concentrated and able to inquire more deeply. So I practiced this for a while. Then I also went into *koan* study.

I came to realize that there is really no paradox. But rather there is an aspect or a principle of reality which is nondual.

In our lineage, we have *koans*. These are recollections of interactions between Zen masters, or between a Zen master and a student, or put another way, illogical questions and answers and phrases and utterances, which really can't be resolved rationally. That became my principal study at Yokoji. Really, it tied into my original interest in quantum mechanics from a very amateur, armchair perspective.

But I discovered Schrödinger's (cat) paradox and the light wave or particle paradox and other things. I could never understand why I couldn't understand them. (chuckles) They were paradoxes, right? But then moving into Zen study, which also appeared paradoxical, particularly in *koan* practice, I came to realize that there is really no paradox; rather there is an aspect or a principle of reality which is nondual. That is really what comes out in many of the principal Zen *koans*, which demand a realization of nondualism. So those things really tie together at that point. It's a long study, *koan* study at Yokoji. You see, there are 700 of them, but some of them are repeated. So maybe about 650, but it takes some years to go through that process.

In the middle of my studies, I left the Zen center and worked in Los Angeles for a few years and pretty much gave up formal study or any kind of study really. After five years of living at a temple, I felt like I was ready for something completely different and worked in LA for some years. Then I hit a point in my working life where I was faced with a choice around the time of the financial crisis, 2008, 2009. I was working for a below-the-line talent agency in Hollywood. Somehow I'd managed to get a job there and to work my way into that.

During the time of the financial crisis, I was offered a choice really, when we were going to move to join a larger agency. The partnership was going to split. We were going to move to a different agency. I was in Hollywood agencies. It's like being in the shark tank when these things happen. It just happens over a course of the day or at night, and then you have to move very quickly. At first I said, okay, great. Let's do it. But then I remember going back to my office and looking through the skylight above my desk and having a realization, just a decision that it wasn't what I wanted to do.

What I wanted to do was to return to and complete my final studies in Zen. So I turned (right or left) at the crossroads there and came back to the mountain here with the goal to finish *koan* study and

my formal studies, and then to leave the Zen center. I was able to accomplish the first couple of things, finish the formal studies. But I'm still at the Zen center and it's 17 years rather than 10 years now. So I need to update the bio (chuckles). After *koan* study, my practice became just sitting meditation, which is called *shikantaza* (in the Zen school), sitting, just sitting. What can you say? Words fall short as we get into this practice, but sitting really without a method for meditative inquiry.

I thought that this, just sitting, would be like going on vacation at the Zen center, in comparison to working on *koans* or other methods. But I was quickly disavowed of that notion in starting to just sit and finish the goal-oriented aspects of the practice, which is really, really a tricky dynamic. In our (Buddhist) practice, the meditation practice, goal or ambition or aiming toward something can be a real double-edged sword.

So when the teachings constantly turn us back to looking at this ground of being in "the right now" and assure us that there is nothing to gain or to attain, then where does attainment and goal fit in there? So without goal or particular ambition after becoming a teacher or successor of Tenshin Roshi, and then embarking on just sitting as my meditation practice, naturally over time, there was a deep shift for me where ... A deep and something of a painful and difficult shift where my identity around being a Buddhist, identity around being a teacher or a student of Zen really began to become like a very thin veil, it started to dissolve.

I became interested in going out, coming down off the mountain, began to help with classes in Palm Springs, which later grew into my association with Insight Community of the Desert [in Palm Springs] and with others, starting to practice in a more ordinary way, and to explore what it means to live a life of "awakening," to live a life of realization, what that means when it's shorn of dependency on a strict tradition and a strong or a tight formula.

I'm very much still in this exploration now, figuring out what practice is. Looking at it now, in terms of practice, my preference is really to live as spontaneously and intuitively as possible with things that arise, with everything that arises. Again, with just hearing my awkward bio at the beginning, I heard the word "awakening." Even now, that word has become more of a *koan* for me. What is "awakening?"

It was an urgency and an ordinariness about Zen in particular, which really intrigued me.

Last night, I was dreaming about this and that. This morning, I woke up. It's really waking from a dream into another dream. It was a reality of being asleep and dreaming. Then it was the reality, and the dreamlike quality of being on a zoom call somehow connected throughout space and time. Reality seems ever more mysterious, not less mysterious in my journey. With practice, I have more questions around life than I really began with. It was more of an understanding of not knowing than knowing. Rather than awakening, I feel that my dharma, the way that I try to live from day to day, is to align with the reality of life. With the teachings, I like very much the first step of the Buddhist eightfold path—right view [right understanding]—to see things as they are.

Being quite a lazy practitioner, sometimes to have eight steps seems quite like a lot. If I can boil it down to that first one, then it's to see life as it is, see life as it is internally, externally, match-

ing reality and aligning with reality. That's really the principle for me of practice. I very much value the mechanics and the forms of practice, value the everyday commitment and showing up to the cushion or the bench or the office chair and doing the work of seated meditation. The beginning of the day, the morning, that's time for me to sit. Sometimes with living at the Zen center, it's morning, afternoon, and evening, but the morning sit is important for me to really lay the ground work for the day. For me, to sit well is very important, meaning we compose our body and arrange ourselves for sitting. Once that bell is struck, then it's time for meditation and to go really all in.

What is that? For myself, this "all in-ness" with meditation is to set aside the thinking mind or the impulse to add anything at all to the thought stream or to add or push away anything that arises in our being, whether it be internal, with feeling, sensation, thoughts, emotion, or whether it's perceived external with sounds or shapes, disturbances. Right from that bell, it's very important to me to cease picking and choosing and to allow right view, to allow all things to be as they really are. If I make that investment then in the meditation practice, I can really align with reality.

I can then see that and make that real when meditation is over. We move into the activity of talking and listening and answering emails and driving the car, and the thousand and one things that fill up the miracle of our days. So then practice becomes a matter of "every day-ness" but also an inexhaustible practice that never ends. I remember when I left the Zen center after five years, I must confess I thought I knew a thing or two. I thought I understood something about Zen or enlightenment.

My preference is really to live as spontaneously and intuitively as possible with things that arise.

There was some sense or an idea of attainment there (chuckles). But I still need the long years of really having to turn up over and over again to this life in order to really become acquainted with not knowing, with always being at the place of being a beginner. When I started again at Yokoji, we had these various statues, beautiful statues, around the temple. One that would really inspire me is Mañjuśrī, the *bodhisattva* of wisdom.

He sits in the Founder's Hall. He's sitting on a lion. He has a sword in his hand, a delusion cutting sword, and a really wise and intense look on the face, of being very awakened. I'd be very inspired with that for a period of time. Over the years though, now I'm much more ... I really like the statue of Hotei (chuckles), the big belly. Then I could say, "Yeah, I'm starting to go that way a little bit too (chuckles), the open shirt, the sack over the back." But most importantly, the big smile on the face and being out in the marketplace among people and things, and really bringing something of value to those around us. Now, I feel kindness and warmth is more important than wisdom.

Although I said that to someone some time ago, and they said, "That's the greater wisdom." Aha. So I thought I would just bring that in. I hope it's at least somewhat interesting to you to hear something of my own experience with practice, and perhaps where my practice is now. I'm interested to hear something from you, with any questions, with any comments, anything that you would like to share and bring to the conversation, if that's okay within the schedule and the structure that we have at the meeting. We could go ahead and do that now.

Jeff: Hi, Jokai. This is Jeff.

Jokai: Hi, Jeff.

Jeff: Thank you for an inspiring talk. Really. You had me at the beginning when you said, "...being nobody special," my teachers always talked about being nobody special. That's work of a lifetime.

I could say that I'm nobody, and I'm certainly nobody special.

Jokai: Yeah.

Jeff: Reality is non-dual and multiple things are true at the same time, and it's okay. It's all just fine. I want to know how in between the sits, what do you ... I know you live in alignment with things or aim to. Is there a practice that you go about doing at the same time to bring your awareness to the process or simply just being with what's happening?

Jokai: Yeah. Thank you. That's a good question. I do take time, certain moments in the day, where I will consciously move away from discursive thinking about things. I'm very busy for a guy who lives at a Zen center, a lot of concerns and responsibilities and that kind of thing. So I will have those moments where I'll make time to simply look at the sky. I'll look far off into the distance. I'll look at the mountains. I'm fortunate where I live, where pretty much every direction's a good view. Then to immerse in nature. So ways in which I'll move the lens away from just looking through the kind of "me identity" and doing things in order to recognize a much broader awareness, I think it's good to practice that muscle.

It's essential I think to practice that muscle, to continue to refine. I mean, in my studies, when we talked about what you brought up, the nondual there, a lot of my *koan* work was in order to bring enough heat and energy to be able to see into and experience that principle of non-duality, to go past or transcend the "me identity," maybe you could put it that way, which we can do intellectually somewhat. We can do experientially somewhat sometimes, to some depth. Then sometimes we can really see that, see through that very deeply. If we can see through it deeply, then that becomes something that is much more apparent in daily life.

You don't forget, if you could put it that way. I bring that up in a sense of thinking and responding and living the Jokai life with all of its moving parts, but still having that background awareness that all of this is a changing form appearing in empty space. That really helps to not get so fixed or stuck or believing in it, on the basis of form. Does that ...

Jeff: Yes. Yeah.

Jokai: Make sense?

Jeff: Yeah. It's bringing figure and ground more together.

Jokai: Then we kind of have to break it down. We have to unpack in practice maybe – form and emptiness, or duality and nonduality. We can look at things as absolute or relative, look at things from this perspective. But then ultimately, there's integration of those principles. It's not like we're dealing with two worlds, although it can feel

...I really like the statue of Hotei, the big belly...the big smile on the face and being... among people, and really bringing something of value to those around us. Now, I feel kindness and warmth is more important than wisdom.

that way or appear that way. So then how do we integrate that which is nobody with the somebody?

Jeff: Yeah.

Jokai: Right? So it's like, okay, I've got my form-based life, including this body, which will die. I've got my name and my history. I need to remember my passwords to log into my bank (chuckles), all of it. How does that function within the ground of this nobody or nonbeing? How does that really integrate in a way which aligns closely with reality and reduces suffering, which is really our central message, if the Buddha could boil everything down, to reduce suffering. How can we do that? Then through doing so, be of use and bring value forth. So quite a project!

Jeff: Thank you. Thank you.

Grecia: Chris.

Jokai: Go ahead, Chris.

Chris: My question is how do you work with the *brahmaviharas* in your life? There are four very deep areas to work both meditatively and in one's life, with lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. I know within the Zen tradition, they come out a little bit when you study the *paramitas*. I really appreciate your wanting to understand your reality in the world. But how do you incorporate that aspect of Buddhism, which is big, that often isn't talked about or even isn't seen as a practice within the Zen community?

Jokai: Yeah. Thank you. Another good question. With practices, I mean, we're extremely fortunate with the wealth and quality of practices, which have stood the test of centuries and millennia. So I like practices like that, that have a real track record of being beneficial for human beings. On the personal side, then when I mentioned about trying to live more spontaneously, reality-based and living in response to things, that in itself carries a shadow where we can fall into living life on autopilot and trusting that everything is the dharma. If we do that or I do that, then sometimes it's like that boat doesn't have a rudder, isn't aiming anywhere. You can drift into some choppy waters.

I think it's a danger for dharma teachers, maybe particularly people in Zen. At such a time, it's very important to take feedback from reality, from people, from the world and our own hearts, and to see where things are not working or see where some trouble or some difficulty is arising. Then when trouble or difficulty or lack of clarity is there, to bring light to that, to see what that is to the best of our ability, and then to apply skillful practice. Of course in Buddhism, we've got a whole pharmacopoeia of wonderful practices, which we can apply to any sticking point that might be coming up in the way that we understand, the way that we live.

I think that within the Zen tradition, for myself, I was such an arrogant, thick-headed kind of practitioner getting into it. But I needed something very strict, tough, and hard in terms of the training to beat me up. That was

helpful for me, but it carries a lot of shadow with it as well.

I see that more and more now. It doesn't work for everybody. It's strong medicine which can make the patient worse or even ... I mean, for me, I availed myself of some of the stricter lessons of the Zen tradition. But as a teacher, those aren't methods which I'm particularly interested in propagating.

Chris: Okay. Thank you.

Jokai: Thank you.

Christian: Yeah. Just a quick one, Jokai. I'm wondering, can you talk just a little bit about how you work in your practice with clinging when you encounter clinging in your everyday life, out in the world? Just talk about that a little bit.

Jokai: Yeah. I appreciate the difficult questions. We're all living the human condition, and we're all subject to this clinging. My litmus test for any attachment is to have a cost benefit analysis and to see whether it's a useful attachment or not and to see whether it's an attachment that's causing further difficulty or not.

I'm reminded of something that the Buddha said in his (I think) eight guidances for *Bodhisattvas*, "Want little, know how to be satisfied, enjoy peace and tranquility. Remember who you are." Now "Want little" is interesting, not "want nothing." That's not realistic for human beings.

"Want little." Desires are what we may enjoy having come into our life. Maybe that's what opens the door towards clinging, and attachment too. So then that second one, know how to be satisfied. Can we be satisfied? If we encounter something that we cling to, and it's never satisfactory, then we have a real clear flag there. If we're clinging to something and circumstances are worsening, and this one here and that one there is beginning to suffer, then that clinging is clearly causing further problems. Then that's where that honest cost-benefit analysis comes in. If I'm clinging to something or I'm attached to something, is that worth the cost for myself and others? So not measuring it to a strict standard of, "I should not cling," period.

Christian: Thank you.

Jokai: Thank you.

Mark: Hi, Jokai. Thank you so much for that wonderful talk. Thanks for talking about the nonduality and your experience with that. I'm so touched by that. There's such a yearning for that and a belief. Sometimes in meditation, we experience that or we open our hearts. I wonder if you could recommend one of your daily practices that I could do to experience that while walking around and while being in the world.

Jokai: Right. I think as I mentioned before, sitting is really the engine room for that, that helps to create the foundation. It's important for looking at nonduality not to hope for or

look for some event, something that's going to come forward, although that's difficult for us.

It's like, "Okay. I'm really going to see into nonduality or emptiness right now." By positioning ourselves like that, we guarantee we don't see it. Right? So that's the challenge that we have. So first in the sitting, not looking for something. Really not looking for something, not pushing anything away, not holding anything close. Of course that doesn't preclude other practices, breath awareness practices or other practices that we may incorporate. But keeping that light broad, and recognizing the broader awareness where these practices appear-- have that broad, aware, vast look from the vantage point

Meditation is to set aside the thinking mind or the impulse to add anything at all to the thought stream.

of meditation. Let go of the separation between internally and externally perceived as much as possible. In this walking around, it's really bringing in the same thing.

We're walking, then we're walking. We may be thinking about things. But as much as possible, practice that muscle that allows in sight, sound, feeling and a broader focus. So as human beings, we're very prone to getting small and narrow in our heads.

In my experience, if we're too focused in on the "me" and what's going on with me and my challenges, this hogs the bandwidth. The "me identity" is always dissatisfied on some level. Or, if not dissatisfied, is worried about becoming dissatisfied. So then in walking around and doing things, having that intimacy with the environment that is connected with aspects of self, which are not internal "me" self, the ground, people and things, buildings, animals, sky, the world around us. So that we're really intimate with the environment and those things that appear in it.

That way, the bandwidth of "me" that's going on continues but it's not taking up all the space. We can see that it's important, but it's only relatively important. Nothing's absolutely important.

Mark: Great.

Jokai: Of course it's easier to say, right, than it is to practice this. But that's why we call it practice. So if we're getting too immersed in "me" and thinking about me, okay, what is a practice I can bring in now, a mindful practice and engage. Whether that's cleaning up the kitchen or sweeping outside or doing a project or getting out there in the world and doing things. What can I be engaged in now that just moves me into greater intimacy with my environment? To do so really frees us up from that myopic view of self.

Mark: Great. Thank you.

Jokai: Thank you.

Grecia: We might have time for one more question or comment before we wrap up.

Ricky: Hi, Jokai. Thank you so much. Your talk was inspiring in many ways. I really appreciated just your honesty and authenticity around your experience with Zen as a very regimented and strong medicine and the way that the shadow for some folks can show up and be more aggravated in that process. I've avoided Zen and been more into Insight practices and *vipassana* practices for that very reason. When I was about 16, I went into Catholic seminary and studied to become a monk, like very old-school Catholicism, Latin mass, all those things. So very strict.

I watched the shadow come up in myself. I watched the shadow also destroy so many young men that I was on that journey with at such a young age. So I still struggle with that spiritual perfectionism and finding ways to hold truly the paradox, like the mud and the lotus, right.

To hold both and not just favor the lotus, not just favor the pretty and beautiful, but to also honor the hindrances and the greed, the aversion and how those things are both part of me and probably will be for this incarnation. I'm just curious if there's anything you would offer around how to hold space for those ways in which the shadow can show up in practice and be held and not just maybe treated as something to push away, but how to work with that, if that makes any sense. I'm sorry my question's not clearer, but ...

Jokai: No, no, no. That's fine. I appreciate it. It sounds like you are answering that question. That's your life. You're understanding that and expressing that. Maybe that's why it doesn't come out as a question that requires some kind of answer. You *are* doing *that*. It's never a matter of separating these aspects too cleanly, where we have hindrances, or mud and lotus. It's like these things are, of course, mutually dependent. Each of us has up to this point, lived our unique journey of karma, which could not have been different, hasn't been different, and just isn't. It went down exactly how it all went down in order for each of us to arrive here, now at this point of realization.

So from an absolute perspective, it all unfolds, the mud and the lotuses, all together, just the way that it needs to, as difficult as that is. But then when we break it down on a human level, you have the experience of seeing the darker side of these hierarchical or cold systems, no matter how well-intentioned these may be, and then you have the experience of seeing the other side of that. From that place, you are now a practitioner that can embody these principles and express it to a new generation who hopefully won't have to go through the same slings and arrows. In the same way, it's kind of how it is for me.

How do I take the difficult aspects, the things that just seem plain bad or wrong around the tradition? Yet I was able to use that in some way to be positive, but not to repeat that going forward. I think the way that we do that is being able to hold these experiences with an open heart and an open mind, and then to use that embodied experience in order to help support and connect with those who are right in front of us now.

Ricky: Thank you.

Jokai: Thank you.

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GBF has resumed in-person meetings at 37 Bartlett Street. Our Sunday meetings will be both in-person and on Zoom. 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.

Information: (415) 861-4910

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Find us on Facebook [@gaybuddhistfellowship](https://www.facebook.com/gaybuddhistfellowship)

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

March 6 - Bob Isaacson

Bob Isaacson is president and co-founder of Dharma Voices for Animals, an organization of those committed both to practicing the teachings of the Buddha (the Dharma) and to speaking out when animal suffering is supported by the actions of those in Dharma communities and by the policies of Dharma centers. He has practiced the Dharma in the *Vipassana/Theravada* tradition for more than 17 years. Bob currently teaches the Dharma, leads two sanghas, and leads day-long and weekend retreats in the San Diego area, having been trained in Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leader program. He was a civil rights-human rights attorney for 25 years, specializing in defending people against the death penalty.

March 13 - René Rivera

René Rivera is a meditation teacher, restorative justice facilitator and leader, working and learning in all the spaces in-between race, gender, and other perceived binaries, as a queer, mixed-race, trans man. René teaches heart-centered, trauma-informed meditation, at the East Bay Meditation Center and other meditation centers. He has co-led the first residential meditation retreats for transgender, nonbinary, and gender expansive people. René is a restorative justice facilitator for the Ahimsa Collective, working to heal sexual and gender based violence.

March 20 - Padmatara

"Meditating With Inner Demons/Protectors"

Padmatara began meditating in 1989 and became interested in Buddhism in Brighton, England around the same time. She was ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order in 2005. She loves to share her practice with others through teaching and study, especially on retreats. She has also trained as a focusing guide - a kind of mindful, body-oriented therapy. Padmatara became Center Director of the SFBC in 2010, and shares the role of chair with other members of the Council.

March 27 - Open Discussion

April 3 - Amida Cary

Amida Cary directs the Retreat Guide Training and the Retreat Concentration of the Inayatiya Inner School of North America. She supports a network of retreat guides and oversees training for those interested in becoming retreat guides. A primary focus is encouraging retreatants to enter deeply into the transformative process. Amida has immersed herself in the study of the ancient art of alchemy and the Sufi retreat process with Pir Zia and Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, and has taken and guided many retreats. She worked closely with Pir Vilayat developing and publishing his curriculum. Amida helped Pir Zia found the Suluk Academy and served as a mentor and teacher within it. Currently she lives in New Mexico where she is exploring the path of light and rewilding a small patch of land in her environs.

April 10 - Bob Stahl

Bob Stahl, Ph.D. has founded eight mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs in medical centers in the San Francisco Bay Area and is currently offering programs at El Camino Hospital in Mountain View, California. He serves as an assistant professor of the practice in the Department of Behavioral and Social Sciences in the School of Public Health at Brown University Mindfulness Center and formerly at the Oasis Institute for Mindfulness-Based Professional Education and Training at the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Bob teaches MBSR teacher trainings and Insight Mindfulness Meditation retreats worldwide and is the former guiding teacher at Insight Santa Cruz and a visiting teacher at Spirit Rock and Insight Meditation Society. He is coauthor of five books: *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook (1st & 2nd editions)*, *Living With Your Heart Wide Open*, *Calming the*

Rush of Panic, A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook for Anxiety, and MBSR Everyday.

April 17 - Open Discussion

April 24 - Dorothy Hunt

Dorothy Hunt serves as spiritual director of Moon Mountain Sangha and was the founder of the San Francisco Center for Meditation and Psychotherapy. She is the author of *Only This!*, *Leaves from Moon Mountain*, and *Ending the Search: From Spiritual Ambition to the Heart of Awareness*, as well as articles published on non-dual wisdom and psychotherapy. She teaches at the request and in the spiritual lineage of Adyashanti, who invited her to share the dharma in 2004. Dorothy has a long and deep connection to the teachings of Ramana Maharshi and the nondual teachings of Zen, Advaita, and the Christian mystics. She invites a deep welcoming of the human expressions of the mystery. A licensed psychotherapist since 1967, Dorothy has now retired from her private practice. She is a mother and a grandmother. For more information, please visit: dorothyhunt.org or Dorothy Hunt - Moon Mountain Sangha on YouTube.

May 1 - Ian Challis

Ian Challis teaches at Insight Community of the Desert, Palm Springs where he is a founding member and past guiding teacher. He has sustained a committed practice since 2005 and was authorized to teach through Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Community Dharma Leader Program. He is also a qualified teacher of MBSR. 2022 will mark his fifth year teaching with Arinna Weisman and Leslie Booker for the annual Dhamma Dena (Joshua Tree) Queer Retreat.

May 8 - Francisco Morillo Gable

Francisco has been devoted to Dharma since 2003. Thanks to this, he made an unexpected recovery from an accident that had rendered him disabled. He studies and teaches early Buddhism with the scholar and monk Bikkhu Analayo. He is in teacher training at the Insight Meditation Center with Andrea Fella and Gil Fronsdal. His primary interests are teaching underserved groups and bringing the Dharma to the greater Spanish-speaking world.

May 15 - Frank Ostaseski

Frank Ostaseski is an internationally respected Buddhist teacher and visionary co-founder of the Zen Hospice Project, and founder of the Metta Institute. He has lectured at Harvard Medical School, the Mayo Clinic, leading corporations like Google and Apple Inc., and teaches at major spiritual centers around the globe. His groundbreaking work has been featured on the Bill Moyers PBS series *On Our Own Terms*, highlighted on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and honored by H. H. the Dalai Lama. He is the author of *The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully*.

May 22 - Syra Smith

Syra Smith is an artist, facilitator, and mindfulness educator interested in deep ecology and manifesting a culture where we can turn toward fearless abundance and generosity. A lifelong meditator and San Francisco Bay Area native, Syra began her meditation practice as a teen in 1988 and has been practicing in the Theravada Buddhist tradition since 2009. She graduated from the East Bay Meditation Center's Commit to Dharma program in 2011 and became a Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leader in 2017. Syra teaches insight meditation and mindfulness throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond and proudly serves as Core Teacher with the San Francisco LGBT Sangha. She co-leads the Midday Dharma Collective at San Francisco Insight and is a resident teacher with the women's community of Assaya Sangha. For more visit: <https://www.projectroot.org/syra-smith-meditation>

May 29 - 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