



# Gay Buddhist Fellowship

SPRING 2023 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.

## Happiness

By John Martin

*John Martin teaches Vipassanā (Insight), Mettā (Loving Kindness) and LGBTQIA+ meditation retreats. He leads an on-going weekly Monday evening meditation group in San Francisco. He serves as Co-chair for the Guiding Teachers Council for Spirit Rock. His practice has been supported by twelve years as a hospice volunteer, including five years at Shanti Project during the AIDS crisis and seven years with the Zen Hospice Projects.*

I am happy to be here at the Gay Buddhist Fellowship. So many old friends, including friends I want to reach out to on camera who I haven't seen in years, and friends here in person who I can connect with and give a hug. And many folks I recognize from over the years.

It sometimes feels like we really live in a small town, being gay in San Francisco. And it's so great to be together in community, in a sangha. I was just reflecting this morning on the value and importance of the sangha. The Buddha said there's such an importance in our practice of being connected in sangha and supporting one another. I always look forward to every time I'm here with the group.

Today I want to speak about happiness. I think I spoke about happiness here three or four years ago, and my own understanding of happiness continues to develop with my practice. I'm both a teacher, but, more importantly, a practitioner. So, insights, understandings continue to arise with the practice, and it's nice to have the time to do a much longer retreat at Forest Refuge in March.

So, there are two kinds of happiness that I'll speak to today. There's basically the happiness of the world, the worldly happiness, the happiness that we experience when things are going our way, when we're healthy, have a good meal, time with friends: "worldly happiness." And then there's a deeper kind of happiness that we begin to open to with our practice of mindfulness, of being present, aware, cultivating what is wise and skillful. The word the Buddha used for this deeper kind of happiness is *sukha*.

It's more like a calm, contented, peaceful kind of happiness. It's ultimately independent of any condition of the world, a great kind of happiness: the idea that we can be happy even when we're sick, when things don't go our way. Maybe our finances aren't good or we have a difficulty at work. And maybe even when we move to the end of our lives. With our practice, we can find a peace and contentment that carries through, both in times when we're experiencing joy and good fortune and when we're experiencing difficulties and challenges in our lives, as well.

I want to talk especially about that second kind of happiness and how we can cultivate that happiness in our lives. It's really a choice we can make in cultivating what is wise and skillful and bringing more happiness, more *sukha*, into our lives.

So, the Buddha was known as the Happy One in his time. He lived 2,600 years ago, the Buddha, a human being, who fully realized the truth of the way things are. It was said that Buddha

could see into the entire depth of suffering, the suffering of the entire world--present, past and future. That's a lot of suffering to see. He could see that all, hold it with compassion--and yet he was known as the Happy One.

**“There are two kinds of happiness...the happiness of the world...the happiness that we experience when things are going our way...and then there's a deeper kind of happiness that we begin to open to with our practice of mindfulness, of being present, aware, cultivating what is wise and skillful. The word the Buddha used for this deeper kind of happiness is sukha.”**

So, seeing that suffering didn't cause him to be unhappy. He had let go entirely. He let go of wanting or needing things to be other. He let go of attaching to any preferences for the way he might have wanted them to be. He probably didn't want his good friends in the practice--other fellow teachers--Sāriputta, others--to reach the end of their lives. He wanted to continue to be with them, but he let go. He let go entirely of needing things to be other and realized an unshakeable kind of peace, an unshakable happiness.

And he shared the teachings that point us in this direction: the teachings that the practice is one that leads to more and more happiness. Buddha *said* this is a path of happiness. We do have to see *dukkha*, we have to see the unreliability, we have to see the cause of the mental suffering. But in seeing those things we actually open to a greater kind of happiness, open to this unconditional happiness.

**“It was said that Buddha could see into the entire depth of suffering, the suffering of the entire world, present, past and future...yet he was known as the Happy One...[he had]...let go entirely of needing things to be other and realized an unshakeable kind of peace, an unshakable happiness.”**

The Buddha didn't deny the happiness of the world. He practiced a middle way; he said there is a happiness that comes with things going well in our lives, a happiness when we're healthy, being in nature, having good food, being with friends. The Buddha experienced that kind of happiness, too. Not a problem; we can be present to enjoy it. The lurking danger, though, is we tend to hang on to those experiences. We hang on and begin to attach to *wanting to have* perfect health, to be happy. We attach to *the idea*, “If I can only get my finances--my 401K--perfectly set up, I'll be secure and safe and I won't have to worry anymore.” But

probably, if you do rely upon a 401K, you've seen the market dive a little bit in the last year, and things aren't reliable.

So, when we attach to needing things to be a particular way, attach to the preferences we have, attach our happiness to those preferences, then, inevitably, we suffer. We suffer because things are unreliable, things are constantly changing, and we can't make them stable and secure. And it's amazing the way the mind works. After all these years of practice, this mind here still latches on and wants things to be a particular way and thinks if things can just line up, there'll be a better, deeper kind of happiness. But we can't find that more sustaining kind of happiness through attachment to the material things of the world.

Last November I was really enjoying good health and really feeling strong and healthy and I avoided COVID for two and a half years and was exercising a lot and really feeling like, wow, this is great, I avoided it. Two weeks later...COVID. We can't avoid COVID...maybe so, with good luck...but we can't avoid getting sick. We can't avoid dying. Everything we know and love in the world will pass away. Everyone we know and love will pass away. There's ultimately no reliability.

I love the quote on your website, from Pema Chödrön. I'm going to start using it a lot, I think. It's so direct, speaks right to the deepest truth:

If you are invested in security and certainty, you are on the wrong planet.

That just nails it. There is no security and safety to be found in the material world. That's *dukkha*. That's the First Noble Truth: things are unreliable in the material world. Everything is constantly changing. We can't reach out and get what we want and keep it that way. It changes. We're going to get what we don't want, too, and we can't push it away or deny it.

We're going to get sick, we're going to have misfortune, we're going to have difficulties in our relationships. The politics of the country are not going to go the way we want them to go. This is *dukkha*. And then when we cling, when we hold on to needing things to be a particular way to be happy, then inevitably we suffer. And we can experience that right in a sitting; if we have an experience in a sitting, and feel a lot of ease and peace, and if we reach out and say, “This is it; I got it; I'm going to hang on to this,” the moment of hanging on, there's suffering and pop! it's gone. So that clinging, the holding on to what we like, the push-

ing away what we don't like, is the cause of our mental suffering. And the Buddha said that we can be entirely free of that. That's the Second Noble Truth, that clinging is the cause of suffering.

The Noble Truths are not some things to be realized in the distant future; they're things to be realized right in this moment. There's *dukkha* in this moment; everything is constantly changing. If we hang on, we have mental suffering. But if we see the suffering, see the hanging on and let go, we realize peace. Peace

is possible--the Third Noble Truth--peace is possible in any moment. *It's so immediate*

And with our practice of being present--aware, present in the body--more and more we can catch the times when things are going our way--we're enjoying time with friends--and maybe we begin to latch onto this and say, "I want this to continue on." But maybe we can just *see* that and let go and can be simply present to enjoy that good time without hanging onto it. We can actually be more fully present for our lives. *It's so immediate*. So, with a practice we can actually enjoy these times of worldly happiness more fully, if we're not holding on and not pushing away. But we do need to see where the mind gets caught.

I remember, as an example, that when I came into practice about 22 years ago, I came into practice because I had a lot of physical pain in the body. I hated it. I wanted to get rid of this pain, and I felt, "I can't be happy in life if I don't get rid of this." In addition, I had a lot of fear--difficult emotions--and I didn't want to feel fear. I just wanted to get rid of the fear and be done with it, have it never come back again. I was at war with what was present. My teachers at the time told me to open to the direct experience, to feel the sensations that I was experiencing as pain in the body, to see their changing nature, be present with them in an intimate, kind, gentle, compassionate way. And to do the same thing with the difficult emotions of fear, anger, grief that we all experience.

The amazing thing that we see with our practice--I saw--those sensations were constantly changing. In fact, it was the reactivity that was the cause of the pain. 99.9% of the pain I was experiencing was because of the reactivity, just not liking sensations that were simply unpleasant. I know that's not always the case; sometimes we can have real pain and even if there's no reactivity, there's real discomfort. But while I still have these sensations in my body--mostly they're neutral, sometimes unpleasant--there's very rarely reactivity that occurs. Once in a while there's a little reactivity, but if I see the reactivity--not liking it, not wanting it--it usually melts away pretty quickly.

**"That clinging, the holding on to what we like, the pushing away what we don't like, is the cause of our mental suffering... That's the Second Noble Truth."**

And over the course of the years of practice, the relationship to fear has changed. Fear is actually not the enemy. When we experience fear, anger, the call of practice is to accept it, to meet it with kindness, to take it up and hold it like the crying baby that wants attention. "Ah... anger, fear... meet with kindness, acceptance--compassion even." We don't so much get rid of fear or anger or grief or jealousy or rage. We change our relationships to those emotions so that they don't overwhelm us. We can meet them with acceptance, maybe even with a sense of peace. "It's like this; it's like this now." And see, we don't have to be overwhelmed by them. We can be present for them and then we can make the choice in how we want to act in the world. We may feel anger about something wrong in our lives, some way that

someone has mistreated us, done something wrong. We feel the anger and we reconnect in the body and stay with our intention to speak with kindness and care... even in the face of someone who's mistreated us. It's the call of our practice.

**"After all these years of practice, this mind here still latches on and wants things to be a particular way and thinks if things can just line up, there'll be a better, deeper kind of happiness. But we can't find that more sustaining kind of happiness through attachment to the material things of the world."**

And three ways that they come forward in our practice as we cultivate what is wise and skillful are **generosity, gratitude** and **sīla**--a sense of being in harmony with others. So, I'll speak a little bit about these three aspects of practice and the happiness that comes with them, the happiness that's a little bit more independent of the conditions of our lives and of the world.

**Gratitude.** It can be such a rich thing to take time in our lives to reflect on what we're grateful for. Few of us have ever been truly hungry in our lives, not having enough food. We can be grateful for finding this practice. Grateful for nature. Grateful for the time we live in. Finally, as we look back over the century, there've not been many times where a group of gay folks could come together safely like this. It probably couldn't have happened 50 or 75 years ago. There is so much to be grateful for.

And we can very consciously bring this into our practice, maybe

keep a list of things we're grateful for, or take time to express gratitude to others.

My husband opened to gratitude a few weeks ago. We make tamales every Christmas. He was born in Mexico

and the family tradition is to make tamales for everybody--great tamales! (He even makes a vegetarian version for me!) So, we made these tamales. And he bought a new steamer--for years he used something that really looked more like a bucket to steam his tamales. So he bought a fancy new steamer...and the tamales didn't come out the way he wanted and he was really hooked. "Oh! They didn't come out right! They didn't come out right!" Then at a certain point he finally said, "You know, if that's the biggest problem in my life, I've got a lot to be grateful for." And his heart just opened up. Sometimes when we see where we get hooked, see the problems we have and put them in the broader perspective of all the things we have to be grateful for, we bring forward a lot of happiness.

So... a little bit more... I want to speak now about the happiness that comes when we practice *sukha*, that contentment-peace. This kind of happiness which is independent of the conditions of the world, that we cultivate with our practice of being present and aware, cultivating intentions of letting go--letting go to accept our experience just as it is, letting go of attachments, cultivating *mettā*, kindness/care for ourselves, for others, and for every part of our experience, and cultivating an attitude of not causing harm through our thoughts, words, or actions. That's cultivating what is wise and skillful: letting go, *mettā*, and non-harming. There's a happiness that comes just with cultivating those intentions, which then also manifest in our actions.

And three ways that they come forward in our practice as we cultivate what is wise and skillful

Brother Steindl-Rast--I think it's not much of a secret that he's in our community--Brother Steindl-Rast is a gratitude expert. He says,

In daily life we must see that it is not happiness that makes us grateful, but gratefulness that makes us happy. Every moment is a gift.

We can very consciously bring this into our practice.

For many years in my work life, I would take time every Friday--have it on my calendar--to do my "gratitude time," when I would try and connect with employees and express my gratitude to the people I worked with. Maybe send an email or write a personal note. It brought forth so much happiness in my life and I think it supported happiness in others--to be seen and appreciated. It's a happiness that comes forward with gratitude: a happiness that's not based on attachments.

And then, **Generosity**. Generosity is giving without expecting anything in return. This has become so important in my practice. There's so much happiness that comes from practicing generosity. And when we feel the impulse to be generous, the defilements of greed, aversion and delusion are not present. The heart is open, *mettā* is present, kindness is present. Attachment is not present. We can appreciate those moments when we feel the impulse to be generous. The practice I follow, which I learned from Joseph Goldstein, is to pay attention to the impulse to be generous. Pay attention to it. I feel it like, "Ahh, I have a heart coming forward...the impulse to practice generosity."

It might just mean to pause and be present and listen with a friend who's experiencing a difficulty in life. Maybe it's an impulse to offer something or offer money--share food, whatever it might be. And then have the underlying intention to act on that impulse; make it a resolve. It is such a rich practice. I will feel the impulse. And then I feel the pulling away, "Oh, no, that's too much money," or, "That's too much; I can't give that much." And then I am present for that aversion or the sense of desire that's arising and then I remember, "Oh yes, I have this resolve to practice generosity and to act on the impulse," and it brings so much happiness.

I was with a really good friend just before Christmas. I was in his house and saw his iPad on the coffee table, and that iPad was 20 years old!

---"Does it really work?"

---"Well, kind of."

---"Okay, I'm going to get you a new iPad for Christmas."

And it surprised me. It was a little bit more than I would usually spend on a Christmas present for a friend (well, a lot more), but the impulse to give had arisen and I had the resolve, and I recognized, "I have to act on this." And it brought me a lot of happiness to act on that impulse and to not let the forces of sense-desire and attachment get in the way of that.

And in the same way, my husband and I made all those tamales. Every year it's at least 100 tamales and we always feel like, "Okay, let's give some tamales to people we can't be with at Christmas." ---"Okay." And I make deliveries to a few friends and it brings a lot of happiness, the simplicity of just sharing food that we've prepared from the heart. The Buddha said there's happiness in the impulse to give, happiness in the giving itself, and happiness in the reflection afterwards. And again, this is a happiness that's not associated with attachment to the material world. There's no attachment in the moment that we offer generosity.

A story I like to tell is one of the purest acts of generosity that arose in my practice. It was many years ago, after I had attended my first *mettā* retreat. My first day home was in July--July can be very cold in San Francisco, as you know--and right near Market Street there were lots of homeless people. I turned the corner and there was a man I thought was homeless, without a shirt on--without anything on the top half of his body. All of a sudden, this voice spoke and said, "Oh! You look cold. Here, take my jacket."

**"The Noble Truths are not some things to be realized in the distant future; they're things to be realized right in this moment...If we hang on, we have mental suffering. But if we see the suffering, see the hanging on and let go, we realize peace. Peace is possible--the Third Noble Truth--peace is possible in any moment. It's so immediate."**

"Where'd that come from?" It was from my voice, but there was no thinking. It just happened like it could have been from someone standing behind me, and it really was startling to me, because there was no thought in that process. There was just the recognition of a need and the impulse to give, and it just happened. And it was humbling, because it was actually a moment of insight: there was no "me" in the generous action. There was no "I" doing the thinking or making the decision. It has really inspired me in my practice to watch for that impulse, because it's so pure and there's no "me" that's underlying it. I experience that a lot.

I know others of you have been hospice volunteers, too, but I learned to do this in my hospice volunteer work: to just watch for that impulse to be generous. "I see your beautiful heart," I would sometimes say with people I was with at the end of their lives. Or there would be the impulse just to reach out and touch someone's hand. Trusting that impulse. It comes from the heart, it

doesn't come from a thinking process. It's like we touch into our own basic goodness, touch into something purer than this thinking mind when we feel the goodness of our hearts. We feel the coming from the heart and we act on it.

And when we practice generosity, there's a sense of enoughness; like we have enough, we don't need to hang on. And that sense of enoughness deeply uproots the force of sense-desire and attachment to needing things to be a particular way, of needing more.

There's a great story I remembered in preparing this talk, about Leonard Cohen. I heard Leonard Cohen speak...who, as many of you know, was a great singer and performer, and was also a very dedicated Zen practitioner. He had spent a year in silence at Mt. Baldy Zen Center about 2005 or '07. I wasn't planning to listen to this program, but I turned on the radio and heard him being interviewed by Cokie Roberts of NPR. She was interviewing him about his year of being in silence.

A part of the story was that he had lost all his money. He had entrusted all of his money to someone to invest--probably a lot of savings from being a pretty famous performer--and he lost every penny! I don't know what happened, but all of that money was gone. And Cokie Roberts said, "How did you feel? How did you feel when that the money was gone?!" He said, "Well, it happened. It's what happened. I'm here now." And she said, "No, how did it *feel*?" She just couldn't get that his mind was not disturbed by that loss: that peace and contentment, that ease--the *sukha*. He had let go entirely and his mind-and-heart was not disturbed with that loss of the money. I was not intending to listen to all of it. It went through three or four rounds of these questions with the interviewer just not getting it. But there was no frustration even in Leonard Cohen's voice in responding to that.

So, as we continue to cultivate our practice, purify our hearts and minds, then we, too, really make the commitment to being in the world in a way that's harmonious with others. That's *sīla*: not causing harm through our thoughts, words and actions. *Sīla* is often defined as "ethics," but I really don't like the word "ethics," because it can have a sense of following edicts or beliefs or rules, and that's not the Buddhist teachings on *sīla*. The Buddha said that *sīla* is to be understood in the context of different societies, different times, even different sub-cultures--like the LGBT subculture that we're in. Ultimately, *sīla* is about not causing harm to self or others. And, really, the deeper understanding is one of being in harmony with others--as well as with our own hearts--when we're not only not causing harm in the world, but actually doing good in the world and using our speech to promote harmony, to support folks in coming together. Taking actions that not only don't cause harm, but do good in the world. That's what *sīla* is really about.

And there's a happiness that comes with that. The Buddha called this "the bliss of blamelessness." And Mahatma Gandhi said,

Happiness is when our thoughts, words, and actions are in harmony.

Truly, over my years of practice, it just becomes more and more clear: every single action has a consequence. This is the law of *karma*: every action has a consequence. Sometimes we can take an action and no one sees it, no one else knows it. But--as you may have experienced in life--sometimes memories come back twenty or thirty years after the fact, and we say, "Ouch. I said that? I did that??" We feel the karmic impact...the immediacy. If we yell at someone--we're angry and we respond with anger and we speak harsh words--we know there's a karmic impact. We feel a rattled-ness afterwards, where the person lashes right back at us. That's the law of *karma*. There's a consequence of both skillful and unskillful actions. The more we cultivate what is skillful--kind, compassionate words, kind compassionate actions--we're also realizing the karmic benefits of that. The karmic benefits are more happiness, more clarity, more wisdom, our heart being more fully open in the world.

Well, I should wrap it up. So, our gratitude, generosity and *sīla* all come forward with our practice both naturally and as we cultivate these qualities. And the happiness that's independent of the conditions of the world comes forward. Cultivating an attitude of the intention of renunciation--letting go of attaching our basic happiness to our preferences--we can realize this deeper kind of happiness. Seng T'san, the third Zen patriarch, who lived in the 6th Century CE, said:

The Great Way is not difficult for those not attached to preferences.

He's saying there *are* preferences, but the way is not difficult for those not *attached* to the preferences. So that's what we're letting go of. We're letting go of *attachment*.

And then we cultivate *mettā*, that kindness which replaces ill will and aversion. It's a beautiful thing to cultivate in our lives, to cultivate for *ourselves*. Buddha said,

You can search the world over and you will find no one who is more deserving of your kindness than you.

And we bring this kindness to every part of our experience. Ram Dass, the gay mystic teacher said--and this is a statement both on cultivating kindness and renunciation,

Being peacefully in relationship to everything made me realize my happiness isn't based on the situation being this way or that way. My happiness is one which embraces my sadness and my love is one which embraces my own hate.

There's a lot of *dharma* in that quote. We cultivate the attitude of not causing harm through thoughts, words, or actions. And when we make that deep commitment, then we're actually supporting the natural arising of Compassion--Compassion that recognizes suffering, wishes it to end.

So, there are two kinds of happiness. There is a worldly happiness and there is no problem with it. We don't cling to it and we can enjoy it more if we don't cling. Then there's this deeper kind of happiness that comes forward, *sukha*, as we practice being present and aware, cultivate what is wise and skillful, with the possibility that we can realize this quality of a contentment, peace, happiness, entirely independent of the conditions of the world, entirely independent of the conditions of our lives. And with the possibility of being at peace even as we die, even as we're very sick, even as we experience great losses in our lives. Peace is possible in any moment. That's the key

**“We may feel anger about something wrong in our lives, some way that someone has mistreated us, done something wrong. We feel the anger and we reconnect in the body and stay with our intention to speak with kindness and care...even in the face of someone who's mistreated us. It's the call of our practice.”**



**Board of Directors**

Jeff Lindemood - President  
 Jerry Jones - Vice President  
 Grecia Haigwood - Secretary  
 Cass Brayton - Treasurer  
 Michael Altshuler  
 Richard Azzolini

**SUNDAY SITTINGS****Program Committee**

Jeff Lindemood  
 Chris Rusev

**Facilitator Coordinators**

Richard Azzolini  
 Cass Brayton

**Facilitators and Zoom Techs**

Richard Azzolini  
 Cass Brayton  
 George Gibbs  
 Grecia Haigwood  
 Mark Hoffheimer  
 Bob Lehr  
 Jeff Lindemood  
 Matthew Perifano  
 Henry Rabinowitz  
 Juan Rios  
 Lee Robbins

**Host Coordinator**

Jerry Jones

**Hosts**

Richard Azzolini  
 Cass Brayton  
 Mark Hoffheimer  
 Greg James  
 Jerry Jones  
 Dave Limcaco  
 Matthew Perifano  
 Stephen Teeple  
 Tony Wilson

**NEWSLETTER****Coordinator of Editors**

Michael Murphy

**Editor for this Edition**

Gary Ost

**Design & Production**

Jim Lengel

**Mailing List**

Joe Castrovinci

**Newsletter Mailing**

Jack Busby

**MAIL**

Tom Hart

**LARKIN STREET YOUTH CENTER VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR**

Clint Seiter

**WEBSITE**

Henry Rabinowitz

**Google/Facebook Moderator**

Tom Bruein

**Audio Archive**

George Hubbard

**RETREAT COORDINATORS**

Richard Azzolini  
 Jerry Jones

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](http://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

## How to Reach Us

[www.gaybuddhist.org](http://www.gaybuddhist.org)

Mail correspondence:

**GBF**

**2261 Market Street, #456-A**

**San Francisco, CA 94114**

To contact Gay Buddhist Fellowship with general questions, suggestions for speakers, address changes, or to subscribe or unsubscribe to the newsletter: [gaybuddhistfellowship@gmail.com](mailto:gaybuddhistfellowship@gmail.com)

If you would like to join the GBF Google Group email list, please go to

<http://gaybuddhist.org/v3-wp/email-list/> for instructions.

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 5

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 marked his fifth year teaching with Arinna Weisman and Leslie Booker for the annual Dhamma Dena (Joshua Tree) Queer Retreat.

---

## March 12

Bob Stahl, Ph.D., has founded eight Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs in medical centers in the SF Bay Area and is currently offering programs at El Camino Hospital in Mt. 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 co-author 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*.

---

## March 19

Steven Tierney is Professor Emeritus of Counseling Psychology at CIIS. Steven began his Buddhist practice in 1993 and is now an ordained priest in the Soto Zen lineage of Suzuki Roshi. He is a licensed psychotherapist in private practice in San Francisco, specializing in addiction and recovery, life transitions, and resilience. His therapeutic approaches are grounded in mindfulness-based, trauma-informed therapies. He is the co-founder and CEO of the San Francisco Mindfulness Foundation. Dr. Tierney is a certified suicide prevention and intervention trainer and offers community-based workshops to promote safer, healthier communities.

---

## March 26

Open Discussion

---

## April 2

Alan Levin, M.A. L.M.F.T., is a long-time explorer of the interface of psychological and spiritual development, social/political activism and the ceremonial use of entheogenic plants and other substances. He has been a licensed psychotherapist since 1985 and established a non-profit ecopsychology training program, Holos Institute, in California. He has been meditating and teaching different forms of meditation for several decades. He now resides with his wife in Rockland County, NY and together they work at Sacred River Healing. He is the author of *Crossing the Boundary - Stories of Jewish Leaders of Other Spiritual Paths* and leads a webinar series, *Staying Sane While Making the World Better*.

---

## April 9

Open Discussion (Easter)

---

---

## April 16

Jennifer Berezan is a visionary artist, activist and producer. Her work expands artistic boundaries, blurring the distinctions between musical styles, politics, and spirituality. She is a maestra of collaboration and makes music that changes how we experience ourselves and the world. She recently released her 11th album, titled *Belonging*.

---

## April 23

Liên Shutt (she/they) is a priest lineage holder in the Shunryu Suzuki tradition. Born to a Buddhist family in Vietnam, she received her meditation training in the Insight and Soto Zen traditions in the U.S., Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam. She was a founding member of the Buddhists of Color in 1998 and currently is the guiding teacher of Access to Zen, an inclusive, anti-oppression sangha and non-profit in the SF Bay Area. She lives on Ohlone land, currently called San Francisco, with her partner, exploring waterways and forests as often as they can. Visit [accesstozen.org](https://accesstozen.org) for ways to connect and practice together.

---

## April 30

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.

---

## May 7

Bill Weber is a senior Vipassana practitioner and a graduate from Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leaders program. He has 25 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*.

---

## May 14

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.

---

## May 21

Open Discussion

---

## May 28

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.

---

**GBF NEWSLETTER  
2261 MARKET STREET #456A  
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94114  
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

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