



# Gay Buddhist Fellowship

SUMMER 2023 NEWSLETTER

the gay buddhist  
fellowship supports  
buddhist practice and  
the spiritual concerns of  
the LGBTQIA+ community  
and its allies in the  
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the united states and  
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gbf's mission includes  
offering the wisdom and  
compassion of diverse  
buddhist traditions, and  
cultivating a social  
environment that is  
inclusive and caring.

## Rebuilding Trust

By Steven Tierney

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I want to start out today with reading you a poem that some of you have probably heard before, but it just will ground us in what we want to talk about today. It says, “There is a brokenness out of which comes the unbroken, a shatteredness out of which blooms the unshatterable. There is a sorrow beyond all grief, which leads to joy and a fragility out of whose depths emerges strength. There is a hollow space, too vast for words, through which we pass with each loss, out of whose darkness we are sanctioned into being. There is a cry deeper than all sound whose serrated edges cut the heart as we break open to a place inside which is unbreakable and whole, while learning to sing.” That’s by Rashani Réa, written in 1991. So, what I’ve been working on with myself and with others is the idea of the importance of trust.

We know in our community, we know in our *sanghas*, we know in the fellowship here that it’s important to be together—that we cannot actually practice a Buddhist path by ourselves. It requires that we walk with others, that we have connection. One of the things that makes sense then is that we need to have a developed sense of trust. You walk in on a Sunday morning for the first time, and you look around the room and you think, “Okay, I need to trust all these guys; that they’re here for the right reasons and that they’re going to operate from a wholehearted place.” And that’s a really important thing. I believe that, for me and many people that I know, the capacity to trust that way is a delicate tool. And I’m going to talk a little bit about why I think that and what we can do about that.

But if we start just thinking about our country, children are born in this country, and we all have an idea that they should be born healthy and safe and that they should be well fed and clothed and validated. Children should be told, “I love you and you’re special and you have a great deal of capacity.” But we know that for a lot of children that’s not true. And I’m not going to do a lot of doom and gloom, but we know that tonight in this country, one in seven children will go to bed hungry. The very basic stuff that we ought to be doing for children is not happening for a lot of them. And we know that for us, as gay men and our allies and other friends who might be here or listening on Zoom, that validation part from the time we were very young wasn’t offered to us. We were not told in the beginning that we were perfect and wonderful just as we were or even more damaging, we *were* told that until we were three years old or six years old and began to sing karaoke with Diana Ross and the Supremes. And my teamster father looked at me and thought, “You are special, but now you’re too special.” [He chuckles.]

So, we have this opportunity then to say, “The very people that should have told us it was going to be okay, didn’t,” sometimes because they were afraid or they just didn’t understand. And sometimes because they were trying to protect us, they thought, “If you actually are gay or transgender or bisexual or asexual, the world’s not going to be good to you. I’m going to do something about that,” and we’ll talk about how that didn’t work very well. There’s an old Buddhist saying that says, “We go up to achieve awakening and then we come down to trans-

form all beings.” And to me, that’s the core of my Buddhist practice. We come together and we sit on our cushions, and we achieve a moment of stillness so that we’re just in the present moment. And particularly here at GBF, it’s a gift. What a gift.

We’re in a room that we’ve chosen to come to with a whole group of other men here and on Zoom that have chosen to be here because we want to walk the Buddhist path. We all have different reasons why we want to do that. We know that the Buddhist path is a path of wisdom and compassion and a path of peace, ease and authenticity. These are the words. We’ve come here to practice peace, ease and authenticity. It really is an invitation to us, and I think, later in our practice, a requirement that we show up knowing through our sitting practice and through our study who we are authentically and then to lead that life.

We learn that through study. We learn that through working maybe with a teacher, we learn that through working with other members of the fellowship, we learn that through a consistent, steady, ongoing practice. And then we achieve, depending on our lineage, perhaps a bunch of quick little awakenings. When we all come together, we can all be awakened. We come together, we sit, we study, we talk to each other, we discuss and we achieve awakening, enlightenment. We go up to achieve enlightenment and then we come down to transform all beings. The Buddha said that each and every one of you—all of those faces on Zoom and all of these faces in this room—each and every one of you is a Buddha.

## We know in our community, we know in our sanghas, we know in the fellowship here that it’s important to be together—that we cannot actually practice a Buddhist path by ourselves.

That’s the teaching. It’s that simple. We each have something called *Buddha nature* and it’s really, really important. We can choose to notice it or we can be uncomfortable with it and think, “Not me, he’s a Buddha and he’s probably a Buddha, but I’m just working on it. I’m too new here. I don’t know what that means.” But what the Buddha meant by that is that we are people who have agreed to live a life of compassion and wisdom and love; we’ve agreed to follow the teachings, to be disciples of the Buddha, to arouse *bodhicitta*, that mind of love and understanding that will allow us to fully live our lives as a Buddha.

One of the things that was said to me around this issue with trust is that if we heard those voices when we were children or adolescents or last Thursday at your job that said, “You’re too flamboyant, you’re not right, you’re not like the other boys, you’re not...,” we began to take them in. They were painful and alienating and traumatizing frankly, but we heard them, and they were coming from people who were supposed to take care of us and supposed to love us and supposed to help us figure out how to be in the world.

We heard those voices and then what happens after a period of time is that those voices become part of our brain. When we step into a room, we say, “Look at all these really wonderful men and they’re all very wise and handsome and terrific on a Sunday morning. I don’t fit in here. I’m too old, I’m not smart enough, I’m not Buddhist enough, I’m not whatever it is I

might be.” And it’s the chorus from people that have told me that over the decades.

But interestingly, the chorus is now my own voice in my own head. For me, that’s one of the main reasons we practice. [Taigen] Dan Leighton says it like this in an article called *Awakening the Bodhisattva*.<sup>[1]</sup> “A *Bodhisattva*, which is anybody who has decided to live the life of a Buddha, is a being dedicated to helping relieve the suffering for all, realizing universal awakening and leading all beings to the same awakening. Such practice cannot be merely about self-help or personal salvation. Bodhisattva practitioners are those who realize the deep interconnectedness of all beings.” It seems to me that in a country that says liberty and justice for all, and in a spiritual practice that says leading all interconnected beings to awakening, we should be like, wow, okay. It’s guaranteed both nationally in our country and in our Buddhist practice that we’re all good. Isn’t that fabulous?

But we also know that in 2023 in this country, there are 340 separate pieces of legislation floating around in various states designed to roll back our rights to be who we are, to love who we want, to love, to marry, to have children, and they want to criminalize family rights. They want to criminalize gender affirming healthcare. I’m not going to consume a lot of time on doom and gloom, I promise, but those are the facts. That’s the world in which we live. In a powerful book that I’ve been reading recently by a woman named Sonya Renee Taylor, *The Body Is Not an Apology*, the author says, “The idea of creating shame in people serves to the benefit of the people that create the shame.”

And she says, “No,” and she encourages us to recognize the voices that pose those dangerous thoughts, know that they’re all around us, that they are bred and that we are bred by them to feel shame. So sadly, sometimes the voices are coming from our own heads. I was talking to someone

the other day (it was actually in a recovery meeting) who was telling me that he didn’t cry, hadn’t cried in decades. As he thought about it, he said, “It’s because my daddy trained that out of me. He told me that I should be a man and men don’t cry. He told me that I should stop whining because men don’t whine. He told me many of those things,” and I thought, this leads to a bigger problem. If we’re not allowed to cry when we feel like crying, if we’re not allowed to hurt when we feel like hurting, if we’re certainly not allowed to talk about it to other people because we seem weak and needy and vulnerable and so forth, then it says that we can’t bring our authentic selves to the present moment. And we all know the experience of being one person at home and one person at the job; another person in the clubs and another person with your partner or friends or family. One could argue that many personas are all the authentic me, but I think one could equally argue that the work of our Buddhist spiritual practice is to come into the present moment as this present being.

There’s an article in *Tricycle* magazine that says, “Because clinging lies at the heart of suffering and because there’s clinging in each sense of self, [the Buddha] advised using the concept of *not-self* as a strategy to dismantle that clinging.”<sup>[2]</sup> Whenever you see yourself identifying with anything stressful or inconsistent, you remind yourself that it’s not self, that it’s not worth clinging to and it’s not worth identifying with.

This helps you to let go of it when you do this thoroughly enough. It can lead to awakening in this way and not self-

teaching, and we'll all be confused about "not-self." After all, I'm here. We're right there. There are two selves. So the not-self is not the question. But the question that the Buddha was trying to ask us is, "What would lead me to long-term peace and happiness?" And that, to me, is the gift of Buddhist practice. It is that sense of the interconnectedness of all beings. The teaching over and over again in the sutras and the koans and the words handed down to us from the Buddha and from Dogen and other lineage teachers is that we are in this together. The Buddha is quoted as saying in one interpretation, "It's not about you, it's about us." And so particularly for those who might be Zen students, the path is the bodhisattva path, which says, "We do not achieve awakening. We wait until all beings are ready to be awakened. We bring all beings with us." And so that's a really powerful teaching, particularly good when we think of our community. We were told that we weren't like other boys and that we weren't good enough, strong enough, fast enough, handsome enough by our parents and our siblings and our friends, who should have loved us. Then later some of us probably had the experience of finding the gay community and thinking, "Ah, I've arrived," and still we were not thin enough and muscly enough or rich enough or didn't have a nice enough whatever. Oh my god, another set of voices. [He chuckles.]

But that's when we come to *bodhicitta*, and *bodhicitta* is that awareness that we have inside of us that recognizes and seeks the truth and goodness, inspires our spiritual search, and motivates our practice. *Bodhicitta* is just making ourselves available. When we're sitting here on a Sunday morning or when you're sitting at your homes or home temples or wherever it is you sit during the week and we say, "I want to be fully present in this moment and I want to be fully available for other folks in my community." And then we realize the following: You know what? I grew up being somebody who was afraid and who was defensive and who developed some behaviors to be defensive, but at my core is the ability to love. And when I'm sitting on the cushion being present in this moment, it's like, "Ah, that's us. We have that. We don't need to be afraid here. We don't need to hang onto those skills here that told us that we needed to be protective at all times."

In the Theravada tradition there are two joined concepts that I really appreciate and love, and they are *samvega* and *pasada*. *Samvega* is spiritual urgency. For some of us when we come here to be in this group, we might feel that sense of spiritual urgency. This is a place of peace. This is a place where we're all together and we don't have to worry about all that other stuff that might be going on outside. And *samvega* comes from three things. One is a sense of distress and disillusionment about life as it's usually lived. The second one that arises in *samvega* is a sense of our own complicity or complacency. The third one is a determination to find a more meaningful way forward.

So, the first one is that there are some things going on in life. People are hungry, people don't have what they need. People are in various states, not so much here in California, but in various states, they're dealing with those 340 pieces of legislation where people have actually stopped, sat down at the table, taken out their laptops—I was going to say put pen to paper—and had meetings where they've thought about ways to pro-

mulgate hate into the law. It's not just by chance that stuff is going on. We should be distressed and disillusioned as a result.

And then the second piece of that is the sense that arises in us of our own complicity or complacency. And I have no judgments about that, but what I mean by that, and I think what the teaching means by that, is how often we walk by somebody or read about somebody who's in distress. If I pick up *The New York Times* and start to read one of those articles that's distressing, I put it down because I made an agreement with myself not to muddy up my mind and heart with news that's all too often disillusioning and distressing. But then as we're doing our practice and we're thinking about spiritual urgency, well, if we have all decided that we're not going to bother ourselves with all that stuff because it's overwhelming, when we think about the third piece of that, which is a determination to find a more meaningful way, what does that mean and how do we do that? The second part of that, and here's the good part, here's the part that really speaks to my heart, is the *pasada*. And it's a serene confidence that arises when you find a reliable way to address those other three concerns. For us, one of the very simplest things that the Buddha taught is when we sat together for 30 minutes, that was 30 minutes that the 50 of us were not causing any chaos in the world. That's right! There's a major contribution: 50 guys who, I'm pretty sure, are well-equipped to produce drama and chaos, but we decided to sit here and not produce anything! [He chuckles.]

To breathe in chaos and breathe out peace, we decided to allow our practice to be a filter for some of the chaos that we created. We often hear in the discussion part here at the fellowship and in some other places people say, "I was really uptight when I got in here today and now I feel much better," or, "I was really pissed off at my friend or my student and now I feel much better." And it's that second piece, it's the *pasada*, a serene confidence that arises when we find a reliable way to address those other three things. I don't have to put on my fatigues and go out and demonstrate in the street. But what I have to do is sit here, look at everyone and arouse *bodhicitta*, arouse that sense of love and compassion.

In 2020, at the height of all of the street demonstrations (that were quite reasonable), a woman named Kimberly Jones was featured in a video that some of you may have seen. She was quite angry, an African-American woman, part of the Black Lives Matter movement. She was responding, she said, to people who complained that there were rioters in the streets (they were referring to them as looters). The folks that get all their information from Fox News and the newscasters who spread that around and the politicians who care about that, all started talking about, "You can't loot buildings and you can't burn down your own neighborhoods. That doesn't make any sense. You're breaking the social contract."

I don't know if any of you saw that video.<sup>[3]</sup> After you've had a cup of calming tea, you might want to watch it because her message is pretty good. But what she said is that we're not breaking the social contract. The social contract was broken, and she looked into the camera and reminded this reporter—who had encouraged her to speak—of slavery, of the Jim Crow laws, of redlining, of the school-to-the-prison pipeline, and of a poverty rate in the U.S. that's sixteen times higher for black than for white Americans.

What she said is, “That social contract wasn’t written by us, wasn’t designed by us and isn’t good for us. And so, we didn’t break the social contract, you did.” With a calm look on her face, she said, “You’re lucky living is all we’re doing.” The response to that, as you might imagine at the time, was all over the place. And it really touched my heart. I wish that nobody had to be that angry and I wish that nobody had to be that hurt. But her point was a good one, that there are social contracts that we are taught to live by, the social contracts that told us to be the little boys that didn’t cry, to be men that didn’t appear vulnerable or to be whatever else they told us to be. Anybody’s father wanted them to be a football player or basketball player? And if you became one, great for you, if that’s what you wanted. I was more interested in the pompoms and the cheer leading, which, back in my day (there now are male cheerleaders) was an oxymoron. I suggested that to my father at one point just to piss him off, and it worked. [He chuckles.]

But we have this social contract that tells us who and what we should be and it tells us that we should be something that they can tolerate, something that doesn’t make them uncomfortable. They tried to teach us to be something else. The fact of the matter is that Buddhism teaches us that our original goodness, our original nature, which we refer to as Buddha nature, is not some distant state that we can only hope to someday realize, but it’s the state of being that is available to all of us in this moment. It’s not who they told us to be, who they told us to love, how they told us to act, but it’s our capacity to live with authenticity that they too often tried to train out of us. And it’s that capacity that’s the core of our Buddhist practice.

I strongly believe that the message here today is affirmed by a statement on your website. It wonderfully says, “As practicing Buddhists, we cherish the unique potential of each individual and each individual’s unique mission in the world that only they can accomplish. We believe that each person has the ability to contribute positive value to society in their own unique way.” What a wonderful foundational statement. Stop trying to train us to be something we’re not. And instead look at the garden of men—men that are in this room and on those Zoom screens—and just celebrate that there’s one of us in here that can say anything, do anything, write anything, fix anything, build anything. That would not be me.

There are folks among the 50 of us that are here that can play any sport and do a good job, all that stuff. But what we also know is there are folks that will be fully present that will listen, that will accept what they hear and that is a really positive thing. I think that what I and some of you as well may have experienced is a break in that trust. Our capacity to trust, our capacity to believe that we fit in and belong no matter where we are, got taken out of us. But it can come back because if we believe that we’re all Buddhas, nobody puts the Buddha in the corner. If you bully one of us, or if you discriminate against one of us, or if that voice in our head, that self-negative voice regulates me to be quiet and to sit in the back and to not participate, that’s bullying the Buddha, that’s discriminating against the Buddha.

I think all of us are pretty clear that that’s not something we want to do. Sonya Taylor in her book<sup>[4]</sup> puts it this way, “When we are no longer on autopilot, we are forced to deal with the discomfort of new actions. Think of self-love, think of your

*bodhisattvas* as resistance against decades of old calcified thoughts. Old habits of self-shaming and thoughts and actions of shaming others are acting from a sense of failure or lack.” Anybody here ever act from a sense of failure or lack? “Become uncomfortable and unskillful. With *bodhicitta*, you will begin to feel that there is a path that you may walk.” There are some things we can do about it and I think I want to share some of those with you in the minutes we have left.

I’m curious about what tools we can use and what actions we can take as men—as gay men and as Buddhists—to repair broken trust. Because I believe that the folks that raised us, who tried to protect us, tried to box us in, tried to keep us safe, were embarrassed by us or genuinely thought we needed protecting from who we really were, whatever their motivation, well- or ill-conceived. For me, it broke trust with the people that should love me. It broke trust with the people at my schools and my jobs and my early religious experiences. I think as Buddhists, we have some things we can do about that. I’m going to just share a couple of those. One of those is a mantra practice.

A mantra is a word or phrase that we chant repeatedly that we can say over and over again when we’re struggling in meditation because our mind is wandering off or we’re thinking about where we might go for lunch or what bills we forgot to pay. What became a mantra for my sitting practice is “not now, not now.” It’s those two words over and over again and we return to our breathing, and we return to our

practice. I found with many mantras that we use in our practice that they are also good *out there*. When I rise from my seat or you rise from your cushions and we go into the world and we take the mind as it is with us, that’s a mantra that can be really useful.

The fact that another person is frantically disorganized does not mean that I have to have a crisis myself. They can go and scream and holler and I can just say, “Not now,” create a little space. Sonya Taylor says that not only does a mantra practice sort us out, but in fact it changes us. We have all heard about the pause between a stimulus and a response. There can be a pause. And in that pause, two things happen. One is the other person might get a chance to get centered a little bit and not keep screaming. Or if you’re somebody that usually has engaged in your life and you’re suddenly pausing and don’t respond, there’s little side benefit. It really can freak people out. I’m yelling at you in a way that usually gets you to panic and freak out and you yell back at me and say, “No, not today. Not now.”

Anything we can do to create that little pause allows changes in our neural pathways. Most of us have been on guard since we were little kids, especially those of us in this room and Zoom room. Now we each can say, “I don’t have to be on guard because I’m really not invested in your thinking. I’m not man enough, smart enough, fast enough, aging properly,” whatever it is. “I’m interested in what you have to say. But that’s not going to change my being fully present in this moment.” I don’t have to respond to that. That little mantra is one found in Hozan Alan Senauke’s new book. He’s probably spoken here as he’s abbot at the Berkeley Zen Center. He has a wonderful new book called *Turning Words*.<sup>[5]</sup>

He and his wife developed a mantra (and just tell me when you hear this mantra if it would work for you). When I first heard

**Our capacity to believe that we fit in and belong no matter where we are got taken out of us. But it can come back because...nobody puts Buddha in the corner.**

it, I started crying. But the mantra that she came up with is, “I will not abandon you.” Over and over they say that to each other. He actually has a video where he’s made up a song about not abandoning you. This simple vow to be present no matter what, no matter what, is such a powerful vow. I didn’t ever experience that. And I’m guessing some of the others of us didn’t experience that as we became dramatic, as we became flamboyant, as we became butch, as we became whatever it is we became at various moments on various days. People did abandon us; people did step away.

There were parties that we weren’t invited to. I was once told I was the perfect candidate for the job except they couldn’t hire a “sissy” for the job. It was 1975. And they used that word—very reassuring. But imagine someone saying what Alan and Lori say to each other. “I may not be able to give you all that you need or that you think you need, but I will not turn away from you no matter what.” That is a mantra that they repeat over and over again in their marriage. I’m not sure how long it’s been, but it’s been a very long time, and it’s fun to see them together so it seems to be working.

The Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh, whom all of you know, says that there’s a kind of precept in teaching that he calls the “north star precept.” This particular teaching, “I will not turn away from you no matter what. I am here,” or, “I will not abandon you,”

or “Not enough,” or whatever—what Thích Nhất Hạnh says is that we need a north star precept. And so that is to take something, one of the precepts that we study or the three refuges, the three treasures, and to put it in your own words, “I am living a life of peace, ease and authenticity.” Maybe that’s it. Allow me, Lord, to be in this present moment, to be nowhere else but here, with whatever is. A north star precept is one that you can use to guide you back to practice. I’m hoping that you’ve all experienced moments of serenity, moments of *bodhicitta*, moments of feeling the absolute joy of the interconnectedness of all the folks in GBF and in our other communities.

Thích Nhất Hạnh says that you should have a north star precept and it’s the star that guides you. You can always follow the north star. The most important thing is to take the precepts, or the refuges or whatever it is, and put them in your own words. I really encourage you in the next few days to sit down at your yellow pad with a pen, given the ages of some of us in here, or on your laptop, smartphone, or the chip that you have in your glasses, and come up with a mantra that you can use when times are tough. Getting on Muni (SF Municipal Railway) this morning, expecting it to be empty and instead finding it entirely filled with folks (it was a Petri dish this morning), I had to return to the mantra, “I will not abandon you, no matter what.”

Even if you all clearly have tuberculosis, the flu, or whatever else, I will not abandon you. I’m going to say good morning to people and Be Present. It’s that north star thing that says, when we were talking before about my own complicity and complacency, when I step into a situation and I go to my judgmental place, to my fear place and my defensive place because I was taught that I can’t trust new situations—what can I do to come

back? Lori and Alan [Senauke] have given me the mantra that I’ve been working with a lot lately, which is, “I will not turn away from you, no matter what. I am here.” And the short version of that is, “I will not abandon you.”

The second tool that I really want to offer you comes from some of the writings of Bell Hooks. Her books are about love and she uses the expression “enlightened witnesses.”<sup>[6]</sup> An enlightened witness is somebody who you invite into your life, who you invite into your practice. In Buddhism, we actually call that *kalyāna-mittatā*, a special friend in practice. But she says that these are enlightened witnesses and that they can help us with our health and safety and happiness. And those things can be taught by the witnesses because you invite someone in to look. I don’t know if any of you this week had occasion to say something to someone in the office or at a store or on Muni or even on the street and then walk away wondering if you handled that as skillfully as possible. If

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you’re like most of us, you probably found a way to walk another few steps and say, “Oh, what the hell.” That builds up a *seed store* as Thích Nhất Hạnh talked about, a seed store of karma in us. We have these enlightened witnesses who are our friends whom we can call upon, “The person in my office did such and such and I said such and such. What do you think?” If that person knows the kind of practice that you’re

trying to have, they can say, “I might have said something different.” Or, “You might have shut the hell up until you got out of there,” whatever it might be, but not in a way that’s condemning, just in a way that says there might be a different way to do something.

It’s a way of deepening our trust with other people. It’s like, here’s something I did that I don’t feel good about. Can I share that with you? With these enlightened witnesses we also share things that we did well, so that there is a record, a store of karma, of the good seeds and the bad seeds. Pema Chödrön, talking about this very thing, says, “The peace we are looking for is not the peace that crumbles as soon as there is difficulty or chaos. Whether we are seeking inner peace or global peace or a combination of the two, the way to experience it is to build on the foundation of unconditional openness to all that arises.”

So, I’m going to let it go right there, which was a lot. And in whatever time we have left, we want to talk a little bit about your experiences of rebuilding trust. Thank you everybody.

<sup>1</sup> *Lion’s Roar*, June 1, 2018

<sup>2</sup> *Tricycle*, Spring 2014, “There is no self,” Tanissaro Bhikku

<sup>3</sup> Youtube, CarJam TV Channel, David Jones Media, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> *The Body Is Not an Apology*, Sonya Renee Taylor, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> *Turning Words*, Hozan Alan Senauke, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Bell Hooks, Cultural Criticism and Transformation (video), Sut Jhally, 1997. ■

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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](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 \$1,100 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

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## June 4

**Prasadachitta** was ordained into the Triratna Buddhist Order in 2011 and he became the Chair of the San Francisco Buddhist Center in April 2022. He was born on a “back to the land” commune in rural Northern California and that background has inspired his engagement with others in building the SFBC’s rural meditation center called Dharmadhara. He also helped to establish a community of sangha members who support the retreats there. He supports himself as a documentary filmmaker and photographer but his real life’s work is training others who want to practice Buddhism within the Triratna Buddhist Community.

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## June 11

**John Martin** teaches Vipassana (Insight), Metta (Loving Kindness) and LGBTQIA+ meditation retreats. He leads an ongoing weekly Monday evening meditation group in San Francisco. He serves as Co-chair of 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 project.

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## June 18

**Alistair Shanks** is the Volunteer Program Manager at Zen Caregiving Project where he has worked since 2004, first as a hospice volunteer and training facilitator, and in his current position since 2016. He completed his clinical residency, (CPE), at UCSF and currently serves as a chaplain at both the Parnassus and Mission Bay campuses. He has a Master’s degree from the Institute of Buddhist Studies at the Graduate Theological Union and has presented at the Association of Professional Chaplains conference and Harvard Divinity School. Alistair has been a dedicated practitioner and teacher of the Daoist Internal Martial Arts of Tai Chi, Qigong, and Ba Gua for 27 years, something that has given him a deep appreciation for the wisdom and power of somatic practices to regulate and heal both body and mind. Past volunteer work includes leading mindfulness meditation sessions in the San Francisco County Jail and serving as a volunteer chaplain at Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital. He has played and toured internationally with several Bay Area bands for the past four decades.

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## June 25 - Pride Weekend

### OPEN DISCUSSION

Each month GBF schedules an Open Discussion of dharma related topics which sangha members discuss in small groups. This enables participants to connect more as a sangha.

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## July 2 - Weekend of July 4th Holiday

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## July 9 - Part 1 of 3 “Intimacy and The Dharma”

**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.

**Rev. Daigan Gaither** (he/him) began Buddhist practice in 1995 in the Vipassana (Insight) tradition, and then began to study Zen in 2003. He received Lay Ordination in 2006 where he was given the name Daigan or “Great Vow,” and received Priest Ordination in July 2011. Daigan speaks internationally on a variety of topics particularly around gender, sexuality, social justice, and their intersections with the Dharma. He also sits or has sat on a number of boards and committees that serve community needs and further social justice causes. Daigan has a BA in Philosophy and Religion from San Francisco State University, and an MA in Buddhist Studies (with a

chaplaincy certificate and a certificate in Soto Zen Buddhism) from the Graduate Theological Union and the Institute of Buddhist Studies. You can find out more via his website [queerdharma.net](http://queerdharma.net). He lives in San Francisco, CA and identifies as a disabled, queer, white, cis male. Learn more at [www.queerdharma.net](http://www.queerdharma.net).

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## July 16 - Part 2 of 3 “Intimacy and The Dharma”

(see July 9 for speakers)

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## July 23 - Part 3 of 3 “Intimacy and The Dharma”

(see July 9 for speakers)

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## July 30

**Jetsun Zerdan Kelsang Phunrab** is an American Kadampa Buddhist monk. Zerdan has been ordained for 17 years, and a practicing Buddhist for more than 22 years. He was ordained in Ulverston, England by a Gelugpa monk, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Rinpoche. He began his ordained life by helping to create a Buddhist temple by teaching meditation and Buddhadharma in the Dallas - Fort Worth metroplex. Zerdan now lives a humble life in Eugene, Oregon, keeping his vows, maintaining a vegan and minimalist lifestyle, and sharing a warm, gentle heart and joyful attitude.

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## August 6

**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.

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## August 13

**Ryuko Laura Burges**, a lay-entrusted dharma teacher in the Soto-Zen tradition, teaches classes, lectures, and leads retreats in Northern California. A teacher of children for 35 years, she now mentors aspiring teachers. 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. Shambhala Publishers will be offering two of her Buddhist children’s books next year, a collection of Jataka Tales reimagined for today’s readers, and a book about Zen Buddhism for kids. Laura is currently working on a book about Zen Buddhism for adults.

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## August 20

**Donald Rothberg, Ph.D.**, a member of the Teachers Council at Spirit Rock Center, and a teacher at the East Bay Meditation Center, teaches retreats and groups on concentration and insight meditation practice, lovingkindness practice, transforming the judgmental mind, mindful communication, working skillfully with conflict, and socially engaged Buddhism. He has practiced insight meditation since 1976 and has also received training in Tibetan Dzogchen, body-based psychotherapy, and trauma work. He has helped guide many six-month to two-year training programs in socially engaged spirituality, both Buddhist-based and interfaith, and is the author of *The Engaged Spiritual Life: A Buddhist Approach to Transforming Ourselves and the World*, and the co-editor of *Ken Wilber in Dialogue*. <https://donaldrothberg.com>

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## August 27

**John Del Bagno** is a poet, spoken word performer, visual artist and gerontologist. He was ordained in the Triratna Buddhist Order for many years and was one of the founders of the San Francisco Buddhist Center. After meditating every day for over two decades, he turned to the Pure Land Way which relies on Amitabha Buddha and the recitation of the Buddha-name. His first book is a collection of his essays, poems and prints: *Hope from the Pure Land Way in Unnerving Times*. At GBF he will be reading his devotional poems to Amitabha Buddha and explaining how Amitabha brings us to enlightenment through the habit of reciting the Buddha-name. To view some of John’s work online, visit [www.purelandartwork.com](http://www.purelandartwork.com).

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