



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

FALL 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.

Cultivating Joy

By Alistair Shanks

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.

So, the topic of my talk today is joy, and it seems appropriate because this time of year, June, the summer solstice is coming up in a few days, is always a time of year that brings me great joy. I love the light, I love the late evenings. It reminds me of when I was a child playing in Scotland and Canada. It would be light until 10 o'clock at night and of course I never wanted to come home. I just bring that up because that recollection is a source of joy for me. I'm going to start with a quote by a man named John Thorne who says, "Why we play as children is not because it is our work or because it is how we learn. Though both statements are true. We play because we are wired for joy. It is imperative as human beings."

And as I'm sure many of you are aware, joy is one of the *brahmaviharas* or divine abodes, sometimes called the great immeasurables, which is a phrase I really like. Qualities that are so valuable that they can't be measured. And of course, they are: loving kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. And joy is often taught and translated as sympathetic joy. It's not just joy for ourselves or for what may be arising in our own lives, but it's joy for the good fortune of others. Which is a really beautiful thing because it connotes a sense of generosity at the good fortune of other people. And the *brahmaviharas* are a way of cultivating these qualities. And as I'm sure you're aware, there are phrases that begin with the word *may*, "May I be happy, may I be peaceful." If you're talking about *metta* or loving kindness, and with joy, it would be, "May my happiness and good fortune continue. May they increase, may they never wane." And so, we send these intentions to ourselves and to others.

Joy is also one of the seven factors of awakening. These factors describe qualities or capacities that we already have. They're seeds of potential and we're invited to nurture them, to identify them and appreciate them and strengthen them. And they help us to free the mind from suffering and incline the mind towards liberation. I love this quote from Albert Camus. He says, "In the midst of winter, I at last found there was, within me, an invincible summer." Here we are in mid-summer. There's also this connection between joy and delight. And I think those two things are very, very connected, they're very similar. And what I hope to do in today's talk is to not talk the whole time. I want to have you guys have a chance to explore your own experience of joy in your lives. I'm going to be sharing some of the ways that joy arises in my life, that I notice it, that it impacts me.

And one of the ways that it's come up recently is a couple of weeks ago, I spent nine days in the Mojave Desert camping with some friends. And it's in a really remote part of the Mojave National Preserve in this little canyon. It's about 6,000 feet in elevation. And there is in that place just this palpable sense of stillness. And I'm sure that all of you have had experiences of still-

ness, maybe a moment during meditation, maybe watching a sunset or looking at a beautiful mountain lake, but just these moments where everything just is very peaceful and still. And for me, those are moments of joy. And this place called Caruthers Canyon is just imbued with that. You can't be there and not feel that sense of stillness. And for me, as I was there and just being there, it brought up joy.

It's possible for us to feel feelings of joy and not recognize it as joy. We just may feel good or happy about something. And it was back in 2005 that I was at a long meditation retreat at the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts. And I had been practicing joy as one of the *brahmaviharas*. As I was meditating, I had been practicing, "May my happiness and good fortune continue," and also projecting it out to others. And at that point in my practice, I had been spending a lot of time noticing my dark stuff, the difficult things, the things we struggle with. And I had been reading a lot of Pema Chodron and of course this is something that she emphasizes—that we have to be able to be present to confront the more difficult aspects of our nature.

I spent a lot of time looking at this stuff and noting it like, "Oh, that's sadness, that's anger, that's aggression," taking note of each struggle that I had. And one morning at this meditation retreat was the first snow. I went out to do walking meditation and the sky was a perfect clear blue, and the snow was white and pristine. And I just felt this sense of joy. And for the first time in my practice, I noted joy. I *recognized* it. I said, "Oh, this feeling is joy." And now that seems kind of almost silly, right? But I have never done that. I have never said to myself, "Oh, this is joy." And the reason that this is important is that the way the brain's wired, there's a thing called a negativity bias. You may have heard of this, but because of the way we've evolved to look out for danger is that we tend to notice and focus more on negative things than on positive.

There's a teacher and author named Rick Hanson. He's a neuropsychiatrist. He wrote a book called *Buddha's Brain*. He points out that when we focus the mind on something, the more we focus on it, the more it develops neural pathways, it strengthens neural pathways. So you could think of this, you walk through a field every day, a field of grass, and if you keep walking the same path over time, you wear a path through the grass. And the brain is very much like that. It's the more you do certain things, certain practices, the stronger those neural connections become and the more inclined you are to continue doing them, to continue having those thoughts. So just the act of noticing that we're feeling joy strengthens that capacity.

Hansen says that you actually have to hold that thought for 20 seconds because the brain's tendency for negativity is so strong that it's going to default to that. So the longer you hold that thought of joy, "Oh, this is joy," and you feel it, and you try to get into the somatic expression of it, and to notice how it impacts you, the more you do that, the more you strengthen your capacity for joy. I experience joy as spaciousness or lightness, expansiveness. And this is something I'm going to invite you to do in a little while, is to explore what your physical and emotional response is to something like joy, your somatic experience of it. How you experience it in your body, and what the energy of joy feels like.

I have observed in myself that when I feel a negative emotion, what I feel in my body, what I feel emotionally in my heart is a contraction. Whether it's aggression, anger, sadness, fear, it feels like a holding, a tightness. You can see this in people when they manifest certain emotions. On the other hand, the more positive emotions like joy tend to feel like expansiveness, spaciousness, letting go. So I think this is something really important in a prac-

tice when you're practicing something like the *brahmaviharas*, when you're practicing joy, is to notice that somatic experience. Are you contracting? Are you expanding? And to really sit with that.

I think it's important to distinguish between joy and happiness. Happiness often to me seems like more of a state. And people will ask you, "Well, are you happy?" Or, "Are you happy with your life?" And it's a sort of overall general feeling of contentedness or satisfaction.

So just the act of noticing that we're feeling joy strengthens that capacity.

And I think the joy is perhaps a little more spontaneous or transitory. Your experience may be different. And this is just words, this is just semantics. It's how we label things. But for me, joy has a different flavor or quality than what we typically think of as happiness. Anne Morrow Lindbergh says, "For happiness, one needs security. But joy can spring like a flower, even from the cliffs of despair." So I spoke about this experience I had where joy arose for me, and I actually noticed it for the first time. And what I realized in that moment is that I had been experiencing joy all along. I just hadn't been able to notice them or label them consciously say, "Oh, this is joy." So the arising may happen, but the noticing may not.

And so I like to use this tripartite distinction of arising, noticing and cultivating. We can have joy arise and not notice it. We can have joy arise and notice it, and we can cultivate it. We don't have to wait for a spontaneous moment of grace for something to give us a sense of joy. Again, we go back to this idea of cultivating and of using the practices to reinforce the brain, the neural pathways, the tendency to experience joy, because the noticing, just that noticing, will reinforce the tendency for us to experience it.

Babies are a great source of joy. My son, who is going to be 13 next month, brings me all kinds of joy, noticing him growing up, developing. But when he was about two, three years old, he used to throw rocks in the pond, in Stow Lake, typical kid stuff. But what was so interesting about it is that he would throw a rock in and then he would kind of do this little jig, every time. And I started to think about it, it was like he was being electrocuted by joy. I couldn't think of any other way to place that. And of course it would bring me joy. It was like, "Wow, he's really enjoying that."

So again, to get back to Rick Hansen, he says, "Recent science makes it clear. Your brain takes the shape from what you rest your attention on." And again, this is the power of the practices of *brahmaviharas*, of *metta* or loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. The more you practice them, the more they become part of your regular experience. And of course, the Buddha said, "Whatever you think and ponder upon will become the inclination of the mind." So our minds are these amazing, malleable things. And the more we practice certain things like this, the more we're going to have those experiences.

The Irish poet, David Whyte, says "Joy can be made by practiced, hard-won achievement as much as by an unlooked or passing act of grace arriving out of nowhere." So that's getting to that point we made a moment ago. "Joy is the act of giving ourselves away before we need to or are asked to. Joy is practiced generosity. If joy is a deep form of love, it is also a raw engagement with the passing seasonality of existence, the fleeting presence of

those we love, understood as a gift going in and out of our lives, faces, voices, memory, aromas of the first spring day or wood fire in winter.”

So I think that joy almost demands to be shared, and I think that it naturally happens. When I feel joyful, I’m much more open to people around me. I had an experience yesterday when I went to a grocery store in Oakland to pick up some things. And I just noticed how I was really open and connecting to other people in the store, and I was feeling deep compassion for them, but also a sense of joy. And this was just something, it just happened. That doesn’t always happen to me. I’m like a lot of people. I’ll go into a store and I’ll be like, “Why are these people standing in the aisle?” I’m like, “Come on, get your credit card out and start paying.” I get impatient. But yesterday, none of that happened. Yesterday I was feeling a sense of joy at just the humanity of others, the simple humanity. Christina Feldman says, “We can reframe joy for ourselves by thinking of it as something we can offer as a gift to the world, rather than something that we take or have to wait to receive.”

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So I think what I’d like to do now is I’d like to do a simple exercise. We’ll do this individually and everybody online can do this also. And so this is going to be this first notion of noticing. Noticing what we’re feeling, what joy feels like. So I invite you to just put a hand or both hands on your heart and you can close your eyes if that feels comfortable for you. And just start by feeling the warmth or the weight of your hand in your heart, in your heart center, what that feels like. And just hold it gently there. And one of the reasons I love this position of holding is that it feels like we’re holding ourselves with love or gentleness. And just feel the warmth. Notice any sense of love and care, almost like you were holding a child. And gently breathe into your heart.

You feel the sensation of the breath, any other sensations arising in the body. And now I invite you to bring to mind someone or something that brings you joy. Could be a pet, a child, a dear friend, a place in nature. So choose something that brings you joy, simple, uncomplicated, sense of joy. It might even be an activity or a situation or experience. And just allow yourself to inhabit that, to notice what it feels like in your body, in your heart mind. And again, the more we can connect with these feelings, the stronger and more available they can become. *(Pause)* Okay, now we can gently lower our hands and come back into the room. And I’d like to just open it up for a minute if anybody wishes to share what that experience was like, what came up for you.? Yes, Clint.

Clint: So this is a memory that happened many years ago when I was young and an avid backpacker. I was in Sequoia Park and I had separated from people I was hiking with. I came across a grove of sequoias off the side of the path. So I put my backpack down. I walked in and because of the canopy, there was no undergrowth. There were all these needles and dim light too. So I was walking in total complete silence among these looming shapes of trunks and trees that’ve been around for 3,000, 4,000 years, as opposed to my 20 something years. Even though it happened years ago, I still vividly recreate the sense

of peace and joy I felt being in this environment. It’s one of my special memories.

Shanks: Beautiful. Thank you. And nature for me, and I think for many people, is an ideal venue for contacting that sense of peace or stillness or joy. And I just want to point out that whatever joy or peace you felt was generated by your recollection, which is something that’s always available to us. And how great is that?

Cass: I brought to mind a person that brings me joy. And then as you continued to talk, you said “uncomplicated,” so I switched to my cardio walks in the park. *(laughter)* And that brings me uncomplicated joy, especially noticing the great cultivation of flowers and bushes in Golden Gate Park. That brings me a lot of joy.

Shanks: When we’re practicing these practices like *metta*, we’re trying to send loving kindness to people, we start with the easiest people and we work our way to the hard. And the easiest people are those relationships that we have that are hopefully uncomplicated. But as we all know, some of the people that we’re closest to are the most complicated - family relationships, partners, right? That’s where it gets really sticky. So yeah, human relationships are not simple. And so when we do practices like this, it is good if we can choose an uncomplicated relationship. And that may not always be that easy.

Alex: What came to my mind was my cat. He is very cuddly. And I can see in his eyes when he’s in the mood to cuddle, he comes and looks at me, and then I say, “Yeah, come here.” And then he jumps at me and starts laying back and purring. That’s quite uncomplicated and very direct. And I feel like I’m purring inside. And we both are. And it’s interesting that I’m aware that he is aware, that I’m aware of our connection. Like energetically, he definitely enjoys that flow of energy. And we connect very directly through the energy as two sentient beings interacting, exchanging energy. It’s almost like having great sex, but nothing sexual. It’s more like energy. Very pleasant, sweet, circulating.

Shanks: Yes. Thank you. And pets can be very uncomplicated, especially dogs. I believe this is one of the enduring appeals of dogs is that they’re just so unconditionally loving. And so I think that’s a great way to give rise to feelings of joy and connection in that way, because that’s just the way they are. Uncomplicated. Thank you.

I want to just say a little bit about gratitude, because for me, I’ve always noticed this connection between gratitude and joy. That when I’m grateful for things in my life, it typically gives rise for me to feelings of joy. And gratitude is actually such an easy practice. It’s so easy for us, for most of us, to choose to identify one or two or a few things in our lives that we’re grateful for. And so I have a regular gratitude practice. One of the things I usually do when I turn out the light and put my head on the pillow is to say I’m grateful for my bed. I’m like, “Thank you. I’m grate-

ful for a warm, dry, safe place to sleep because clearly there are people out there on the streets who do not have a warm, safe, comfortable place to sleep. And I feel very fortunate that I have that.” So gratitude is the joy that we can feel for that.

There’s a lot of ways we can work with gratitude. You can do it at the beginning of meditation. I’ll just run down all the things that I’m grateful for, all the abundance in my life. And of course, we all have a mixture of struggles and problems, but we all also have many, many blessings. And so it’s very easy to just shift our focus. I’m going to focus on the things I’m really grateful for. I’m grateful I have four siblings and that we’re all very close. And I’m grateful for my health. I’m grateful to be fully able to walk around and do the things I want to do. It’s very easy for us to forget how valuable these things are until perhaps we lose them, God forbid.

We can’t defend our hearts and just open them selectively. They’re either open or closed.

You can make this distinction between uncaused joy, which is this spontaneous arising of grace, and caused joy, which is when we deliberately bring ourselves into a recollection of a joyful experience, or we deliberately cultivate it through a practice like the *brahmaviharas*. I also think that there is a connection between joy and wonder. And I’m thinking back to what Clint shared about the redwoods, is that you cannot stand in the presence of redwoods like that and not be in awe, not feel a sense of awe and wonder. And I think that when we feel awe and wonder again, naturally joy arises.

So I think I’d like to do another exercise. This is going to be another solo exercise, and this is cultivating gratitude, which again, can bring up these feelings of joy. I invite you again to just sit comfortably and to place your hand on your heart, just as we did before. And close your eyes if it’s comfortable. Recall a person who helped you, taught you, mentored you, or surprised you with kindness recently, or at some point in the past, you could alternatively bring to mind a loved one, a child, spouse, pet, anyone that you’re particularly grateful for. And to thank them silently in your mind for their kindness, love or help. You might even, like myself, have a list of people for whom you’re grateful, and you could go through the list one by one, thanking them by name. “Thank you for being a good friend. Thank you for the guidance and mentoring that you have offered me.”

I encourage you to even say the words “thank you” in your mind, and to notice the tone in which you say it. “Thank you. Thank you for how you’ve impacted my life. Thank you for what you’ve done to enrich my life.” Again, I encourage you to notice how this feels in your body. What sensations and feelings are arising for you. Okay, *(pause)* now we’ll come back into the room and lower your hands. And again, how was that? Would anybody like to share how that was for them? Yes.

Matthew: Gratitude is a real big source of joy and a real big part of my daily practice. But even before I was introduced to the Dharma, I would do this thing. I’ve been fortunate. I’m grateful that I haven’t had to deal with clinical depression in my life, but what I did experience, and I still often do is what I call the blues, just going down, just like there’s no wind in my sails. And whenever I would have that experience, I just would start counting all the things I have to be grateful about. And around the time I got to 32, 33, 34, I’d forgotten what was bringing me down. Two other little things. Happy Father’s Day.

Shanks: Oh, thank you.

Matthew: And for all you fathers out there, wherever you may be, however you may be, happy Father’s Day. I just wanted to go back to the previous subject, which we talked about stillness. Yes. And it’s something that gives me a lot of joy, is I have ended up waking up almost every day, no matter what time I go to sleep, around 3:30 or four in the morning. And I love that time of day, and I love the stillness of it. And I ran across this quote by the wonderful Ruth Gordon. She said she was talking to Edith Evans, great actress, great brain. “She said something once to me that just blew the top of my head off. She said, ‘Harmony,’ which is something I was searching for ‘Harmony is the natural order of things, and we mess it up with our conflict and drama. I get up early in the morning when the harmony is the thickest before anybody has a chance to mess it up. And then I get to experience harmony.’” And I think that for me, those early mornings, there is harmony, there is stillness, there is joy. And it’s just to remember that it’s not trying to grasp onto it and keep it, but just be, it’s a great place to start every day.

Alistair Thank you. My Daoist teacher used to say that the best time to meditate was just before sunrise, because that’s when the psychic disturbances of the world are at their lowest. People haven’t woken up yet. They haven’t had a chance to mess it up. Thank you. Yes, Jim.

Jim: I’ve recently had a tsunami of dear friends dying, but I’ve been struck how in the gatherings of people, there could be spikes of great joy somehow in the midst of colossal grief. People’s humor and their openness, their broken heartedness makes them open to really an elixir of joy.

Shanks: Yeah. Thank you so much for bringing that up. My experience of loss and grief is that it cracked me open. That’s the only way I can describe it. It’s just you feel cracked open. And in being cracked open, you feel completely vulnerable. And this is not something that we typically think of as a good thing, to be cracked open and vulnerable. And yet we’re also, we’re unprotected from bad feelings of loss and grief, but also from the good feelings of joy. So we’re really available to everything, to all emotions. We can’t defend our hearts and just open them selectively. They’re either open or closed. And our hearts open and close all the time. But yeah, I’ve seen the ways in which grief can really create a lot of unexpected grace in the form of joy. Yes.

Margaret: I recently lost my beekeeping mentor, and it felt like I had lost my family member. He had helped me for 20 years with my beehive. And when a beehive gets full, it's really heavy. And so you need help lifting it unless you're super strong. I mean, a lot of beekeepers work together. And anyway, I had so much gratitude for him. Luckily, I had expressed it while he was still alive, but he was just an amazing person. And he just gave and gave and gave. But right after he died, I was really distraught. I thought, "What am I going to do?" And my beehives are in the community garden, and I had gotten an email that said, "We're going to do Earth Day." "Really?" Because I have a lot of opinions. But I was like, "No, Paul would've done it." So I immediately said, "Yes, I'll do it." And the whole time it was very cool because people always ask the same questions about bees, and it was not at all stressful. But I had worked myself into a state. But anyway, I honored him and I was so grateful, and I will always be grateful for him.

Shanks: Beautiful. Thank you. I think what I'd like to do now is we've got a little time to do a dyad. So we're going to break into groups of two. And I want people to talk about what your personal experience of joy is, because I've been saying a lot of stuff about joy. But this is an opportunity for you to explore or investigate how it arises in your own life. So the questions that I want you to ask or to answer, and I will repeat these, is, what makes you feel most alive? Because I feel when I'm in a state of joy, it's also a state of aliveness. How and when do you notice joy arising in your life? And what does it feel like in your body? So please, if we can just break up into groups of two. And so again, I'm going to repeat the questions that I'd like you to try to answer. What makes you feel most alive? How and when do you notice joy arriving in your life? And what does it feel like in your body?

I love the way things like this just raise the energy in the room. And I have to confess, I felt great joy seeing everybody just talking away. So I'd like to take a couple of minutes now for any questions, comments. What came up for you? Did any surprises? Did you discover things that you didn't know about your relationship to joy or how it manifests in your life?

Richard: We were both amazed at how much joy we get from other people, just the delight in who they are, friends, lovers, partners, just the miracle and delight of basic human goodness.

Shanks: There it is! Thank you.

Jeff: When I walked in this morning, I wasn't expecting it because I was really not planning on driving across the bridge this morning, too late to get a parking spot nearby. But I jumped in the shower anyway at quarter after nine and left by 9:30. Oh my gosh, I got to GBF at 10:00, and when I came in all the lights were on and there was this space filled with people happily finishing the setup for today's talk, and there was this great feeling, and it just totally swept over me. And I didn't call it joy at the time. I was just feeling very grateful I get to be a part of this.

Shanks: Yeah, wonderful. Yeah, we need human connection. Anything else? Yes.

GBF: Henry had shared something really cool. He said what brings him joy is swimming. I think we had a really cool discussion about how when you get really, really good at something, it becomes second nature and almost effortless. Like that kind of space right there really does bring both of us a lot of joy.

Shanks: Yeah, wow, swimming brings me great joy, and I'm going to be visiting my family in a few weeks in Canada, and I'm going to be swimming in the St. Lawrence River every day for two weeks. Anything else before we wrap up?

Stephan: Music.

Shanks: Oh, of course. Thank you. Yes. Music.

GBF: Food.

Shanks: Food. Yeah. And as we're engaged in those activities, as we're engaged in listening to music, as we're engaged in making or eating food, we can incline our minds toward that feeling of joy. Again, we may enjoy something and not really put the label on it. And it seems very simple, but that act of saying to ourselves, "This is joy" can be immensely powerful.

Okay, well, I would like to end with a poem, and this is a poem called, *Because* by the poet Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer.

"So, I can't save the world/ Can't even save myself/
Can't wrap my arms around every frightened child/
Can't foster peace among nations/ Can't bring love
to all who feel unlovable/ So I practice opening my
heart/ right here in this room/ and being gentle with
my insufficiency/ I practice walking down the street
heart first/ and if it is insufficient to share love/ I will
practice loving anyway/ I want to converse about
truth, about trust/ I want to invite compassion into
every interaction/ One willing heart, can't stop a war/
One willing heart can't feed all the hungry/ and
sometimes daunted by a task too big/ I tell myself,
'What's the use of trying?'/ But today, the invitation's
clear/ to be ridiculously courageous in love/ To
open the heart like a lilac in May/ knowing freeze is
possible/ and opening anyway to take love seriously/
To give love wildly/ to race up to the world /as if I
were a puppy adoring and un-jaded/ stumbling on my
own exuberance/ To feel a shock of indifference, / of
anger or cruelty of fear and stay open/ To love as if it
matters/ as if the world depends on it."

So thank you so much, and may you find and identify the moments of joy in your life more and more.

GBF: Thank you, Alistair.

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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).

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GBF members can donate their quality cast-offs to the Community Thrift Store (CTS) and GBF will receive a quarterly check based on the volume of items sold. This is a great way to support our Sangha, and the community. So far this year we have received over \$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.

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www.gaybuddhist.org

Mail correspondence:

GBF

2261 Market Street, #456-A

San Francisco, CA 94114

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Sunday Speakers

September 9 Open Discussion

September 10

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

September 17

Dale Borglum founded and directed the Hanuman Foundation Dying Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the first residential facility in the United States to support conscious dying. Working with Ram Dass and Stephen Levine, Dale helped found the conscious dying movement in the West. He has been the Executive Director of the Living/Dying Project in Santa Fe and since 1986 in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is the co-author with Ram Dass, Daniel Goleman and Dwarka Bonner of "Journey of Awakening: A Mediator's Guidebook," Bantam Books and has taught meditation since 1974. Dale lectures and gives workshops on the topics of meditation, healing, spiritual support for those with life-threatening illness, and on caregiving as spiritual practice. He has taught with Ram Dass, Stephen Levine, Joan Halifax, Robert Thurman, Joanna Macy, Jack Kornfield, Annie Lamott, Jai Uttal and many others. He has a doctorate degree from Stanford University. Learn more at www.livingdying.org.

September 24

Tetsugen Tom Baker is a Soto Zen priest in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki-Roshi. He was ordained by Shinky Mark Lancaster at Dragon's Leap Temple in 2017. He practices in the "Marketplace Priest" tradition. Long active in the Meditation in Recovery group, he was a founder of the off-shoot monthly Zen Men in 2015. Tom works in the Geriatrics Division at UCSF and specializes in Palliative Care and end-of-life issues. He married his husband Gary Dexter in November 2012.

October 1

Dhammchari Danadasa has been practicing with the San Francisco Buddhist Center (SFBC) community since 1993 and was ordained in 2011. His current area of exploration is the cultivation of metta (universal loving kindness) as a response to all the hatred, discrimination, and bigotry in the world out there.

October 8

JD Doyle serves as a core teacher at the East Bay Meditation Center (EBMC) and has served as a board member and was the cofounder of the LGBTQI meditation group. JD is in the Spirit Rock Meditation Center teacher-training program and was in the Dedicated Practitioner Program (DPP2) and the Community Dharma Leader Program (CDL4). JD has practiced Buddhism since 1995 in the U.S., Thailand, and Burma. For over twenty-five years, they worked as a public school teacher focusing on issues of equity and access. JD holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from Cornell University and a master's degree in Language and Literacy and Sociocultural Studies from the University of New Mexico. JD identifies as gender non-conforming. They

are committed to celebrating the diversity of our human sangha, addressing the impact of racism on our communities, expanding concepts of gender, and living in ways that honor the sacredness of the Earth.

October 15

David Lewis has been following the dharma path for 50 years and has a degree in comparative religious studies. He teaches at several Buddhist sanghas around the Bay Area and offers a weekly meditation group for seniors (currently on Zoom) at Open House, a nonprofit serving LGBTQI+ seniors. He's always happy to return to the Gay Buddhist Fellowship, where he gave his first dharma talk around 15 years ago.

October 22 - GBF Retreat Open Discussion

October 29

David Richo, Ph.D., is a psychotherapist, writer, and workshop leader. He shares his time between Santa Barbara and San Francisco, California. Dave combines psychological and spiritual perspectives in his work. His latest book is "Ready: How to Know When to Go and When to Stay." (Shambhala, 2022). The website for books, talks, and events is www.davericho.com.

November 5

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 nondual 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.

November 12

Sean Feit Oakes, Ph.D. (he/him, queer, Puerto Rican & English ancestry, living on unceded Pomo land in NorCal), teaches Buddhism and somatic practice focusing on the integration of meditation, trauma resolution, and social justice. He received teaching authorization from Jack Kornfield, and wrote his dissertation on extraordinary states in Buddhist meditation and experimental dance. He teaches at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, East Bay Meditation Center, Insight Timer, and locally. SeanFeitOakes.com

November 19

Larry Robinson has been a practicing Buddhist for 47 years, mostly in the Zen and Vipassana traditions. He is a member of the Occidental Laguna Sangha in Sebastopol, studying with Bruce Fortin in the lineage of Suzuki Roshi. A long-time environmental and social justice activist, he is a retired ecopsychologist and former mayor of Sebastopol. He serves on the board of directors of the Center for Climate Protection and the board of trustees of Meridian University. His "large and foolish project" (in the words of Rumi) is to restore the soul of the world through reawakening the oral tradition of poetry. He is also the founder and producer of "Rumi's Caravan."

November 26 - Thanksgiving 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