



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

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Working with Anxiety and Emptiness

By Dale Borglum

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 Meditator'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.

It's wonderful to be back and see so many familiar faces. I think I've been seeing you guys for probably ten years now, once a year. Today I'd like to talk about anxiety and emptiness and how working with anxiety can be the gateway to a full appreciation and experience of emptiness, which is a necessary experience for conscious living and particularly for conscious dying. A few months ago, I was lying in bed one night and I could tell I wasn't going to be able to go to sleep. My energy was a little bit disorganized. There wasn't anything in particular that I was worried about, but I could just sense that I felt some discombobulated energy. I felt a little bit anxious for no apparent reason, so instead of reaching for an herbal remedy or for some melatonin or something, I thought, why don't I just lie here and really feel the anxiety? What does it feel like in my body? And as I did that over the course of maybe 45 minutes or so, it began to dissipate. I began to feel this sense of spaciousness, of emptiness to the point where there were just a very few thoughts arising. The thoughts were clearly based in this delusion that I am thinking, and even that disappeared, and I couldn't even think anymore. It was really revelatory that anxiety seemed to be this fundamental gateway to other conflicting emotions that are often covered up by anxiety. And by being with the anxiety, it really revealed the nature of things in a very direct and wonderful way. Some of my teachers have said that, when we're on the spiritual path, we become even more anxious because we're letting go of who we think we are. So, being a spiritual warrior, if you will, is an anxious path.

It's who we think we are that is always dissolving, is always changing into the next thing. And to me, anxiety has been a difficult experience. I think for most people, because it's so constant that there's no contrast, we don't even notice that it's there. It's kind of like the bass line in a quartet, a jazz quartet, a string quartet where you hear the melody, you're listening to the saxophone or the violin or whatever it might be, but you're not really paying attention to the anxiety because it's always there. Freud said, "Anxiety is useful because it gets us to act," but I would suggest there's a real difference between acting because we feel anxious and acting because we feel whole and rich and full. So how do we really work with this anxiety and why is it the gateway to a true understanding of emptiness? The great philosopher Yogi Berra said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." [Laughter.] At least a couple of people laughed, that's a good sign.

Okay, so what is emptiness and why is it so important? Emptiness is often misunderstood. I'm sure that almost everybody in this room has spent time listening to talks about or studying the Heart Sutra where Buddha said, "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Form is none other than emptiness, emptiness is none other than form." The Christian theologian, Meister Eckhart said, "When the mind is empty of things, it is full of God. When it is full of things, it is empty of God." They're really saying the same kind of thing here. But this sense of emptiness is often misunderstood as nothingness, which is very daunting and not very friendly. Emptiness is really a way of perceiving things. It's a way of beginning to have a much clearer relationship with who we are. Reality is very uncomplicated; delusion is very complicated. We can understand emptiness, then we need to learn to experience it and then to stabilize it; to live in that place where

we're perceiving whatever it is that might be arising as empty in nature, particularly our sense of self.

It does seem ridiculous to think that I am empty. I mean clearly, that's ridiculous. I'm here in Fairfax, you're wherever you are. But when we think of ourselves or arising experience as real in the sense of there's a solid I, there's a "me" here—that's the delusion that causes all the suffering. In one of the Buddhist sutras it says, "When there is grasping itself, discrimination between self and others arises, emotions and afflictions then follow." Very direct: emotions and afflictions then follow. So, it's essential we distinguish between the self that exists conventionally and the self that doesn't exist at all as it is our grasping at the non-existent self that, as I said, is the source of all suffering. In our own day-to-day intuitions, when we're practicing, when we're just living our lives, we have this natural and legitimate sense of self that thinks, "I'm cultivating *bodhicitta*, I'm meditating, I'm doing this or that."

So, when embracing anxiety, all emotions are fundamentally healing messages. And the healing message of anxiety is: "Take a look at who you really are."

But the problem arises when the sense of self is too extreme; when we start to think it's independent and autonomous, and it's not. Through meditative, analytical investigation, we can come to recognize that the root of all afflictions lies in our strong but mistaken clinging to what we perceive as an inherently real self. What I'm suggesting here is that by really beginning to feel this anxiety that's almost always there, we are beginning to come into direct relationship with the true nature of self, the empty nature of self. The Dalai Lama says, "A true understanding of emptiness of any inherent existence must touch on the very manner in which we intuitively perceive things." Like when we say this form, this material object, we feel as if our perception of the object before us is true, as if there is something that this term material object refers to, as if the perception we have somehow represents what is truly there in front of us.

A correct understanding of emptiness must reach that level of perception so that we no longer cling to any notion of objective, inherent reality. So that clearly in the West, the collective delusion—and in some ways the whole world has become the West—is that there is a separate, objective external reality, and that we are separate perceiving devices, human beings, sentient beings perceiving the solid reality. And what ancient Buddhist and Hindu tantric wisdom says is that that's backwards. That there's one consciousness flowing through its individual filters creating form. Emptiness is form, and form is emptiness. That we're creating form through an understanding of emptiness through consciousness itself.

So, it's really how we perceive our experience. You may have had a dream last night that seemed very, very real, but it was a dream. My guru, Maharaji, asked, "Is this world real?" He said, "It's completely real. It's completely a dream, and it's both at the same time." So that covers all the bases. Let's look then at how investigating anxiety can lead us to this direct perception of our true nature. We clearly see anxiety when we watch the wandering mind. Why is the mind wandering all the time? I've been at long meditation retreats where my mind gets very, very still. And then again and again, thoughts come, awareness of thoughts, thoughts dissipate, empty, spacious mind for a while, thoughts keep com-

ing back. And I really investigated why those thoughts keep coming back when I'm feeling so spacious, when the mind is so very clear.

And what really came to me was that right before thinking is anxiety, that it's too spacious, that the separate delusional self is getting very uncomfortable, and it wants to reify itself. Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." The ego believes that. If I keep thinking, then at least I know I exist. In Buddhism there are two levels of ego, two levels of how we suffer. The first one is the conventional "I'm suffering because of early childhood conditioning." I go to a therapist, I go to a body worker, and that helps deal with that kind of suffering. If I do enough therapy, I won't have so much of that kind of suffering.

The other level of suffering is the suffering that arises when we believe in a separate self. One could do a lot of therapy and not have much of the first kind of suffering, but still really believe in "I'm a separate me—look at how unneurotic I am." On the other hand, there are a lot of meditators who can go into this feeling of emptiness and not cling so much to a separate self, but they're still pretty neurotic. So ideally, we work with both levels of suffering, but it's very, very useful to be able to distinguish between the two of them. It's very useful to be able to see the difference between the suffering that's arising because I have this conditioning from long ago versus "I believe I'm a separate self."

So, when embracing anxiety, all emotions are fundamentally healing messages. And the healing message of anxiety is: "Take a look at who you really are." You're feeling anxious because you're living in this delusion. When we embrace anxiety, it begins to lessen self-absorption. The Christian theologian, Richard Rohr says, "All spiritual practice is about how we deal with our pain," and anxiety is this fundamental pain of living in the delusion of separateness. It often takes a lot of practice to equate a complete letting go of and going beyond anxiety with comfort, because we're learning to be comfortable without a ground to stand on, without a fixed place to perceive reality. We're pointing ourselves toward living without any boundaries or barriers at all. Suzuki Roshi said, "Life is like getting on a ship that's about to set sail out into the ocean and sink." We're on that journey where we know the ship is going to sink, but we have to get on it anyway.

Okay, so is it possible even right now to feel anxiety in a somatic sense? To me, the first step is letting go of trying to understand what I'm feeling, thinking about it, or asking, "What is the trigger that's causing me to feel what I'm feeling?" But can I in this moment feel what it's like somatically? And for me, and I think for almost everybody, this sense of anxiety leads to some tension in the shoulders. Shoulders have the word *should* in them. There might also be a tightness in the lower belly. So that the first step is: Can we *feel* that? Not in the sense that I've got to fix it or do something about it, but can I really lean into the feeling of anxiety? Can I feel the sense of pulling back from who I really am?

What does it feel like in your body right now? Does the mind tend to wander? Is there some sense of dis-ease in the body? And usually when we feel dis-ease, we fixate, as I said, on the trigger. We want to fix what's out there or blame what's out there—the weather, the traffic, the politicians—whatever it might be, instead of investigating what it feels like to be afraid; *here's* what it feels like to be anxious. Then the next step: Is it possible to feel compassion for the part of you who has been anxious? Can we let the heart be spacious even though we're feeling anxiety? And finally: The tantric understanding that even anxiety is a reflection of the sacred reality. It's beyond good and bad, pure and impure.

Finding this direct relationship with anxiety allows me on a moment-to-moment basis to keep coming back to who I think I am; how I get lost in holding onto the false self. Studies have shown this is no big surprise to anybody, that mindfulness leads to a

greater sense of wellbeing. If you feel mindful, you sleep better, you have better relationships, et cetera. And then not so long ago, further studies showed that if you add compassion, there's a much quicker movement into wellbeing. But recently, right before the pandemic, some researchers at Derby University in the UK found that if you meditate on emptiness, you have 24% fewer negative feelings than if you're just working with mindfulness itself.

So, meditating on emptiness in this way is essentially an analytic meditation of examining the following questions: Who's meditating? Who am I? Who do I think I am? Is there an actual solid self here?

So, meditating on emptiness in this way is essentially an analytic meditation of examining the following questions: Who's meditating? Who am I? Who do I think I am? Is there an actual solid self here? That seems to be an even more direct path to awakening than just mindfulness alone. Certainly, mindfulness will eventually bring you there, but being basically somebody who likes to find all the shortcuts I can, I like the idea that this is a sort of shortcut to finding out what's going on here. It's not really the path to enlightenment, it's the path of enlightenment that, by working with anxiety, we see who we are. It's not a place to get to.

I would like to apply what we're talking about here to conscious living, conscious dying. Nine days ago, a very dear friend of mine, Peter Kelsey, died in Boulder, Colorado. I was actually at his house for about a week before he died. He's somebody who's been on the Board of Directors of the Living/Dying Project who became a very dear friend of mine in a really short amount of time. As I was guiding him and we were just hanging out together, me and him and his family, it was so interesting, so provocative, so poignant to watch how Peter, but particularly his family members, were going in and out of holding onto, "Please, please don't die, please don't leave us." And then on the other hand, this relaxing into openness, relaxing into openness and back and forth.

Let me talk just a little bit about conscious dying and how what we've just been talking about leads to conscious dying. In fact, what is fully conscious dying? Firstly, if we're dying and we're not conscious at all, unconscious dying—in the sense of *not* being mindful and present—is being lost in emotions. I'm becoming the emotion. The sky of my mind is bounded by a window frame that's really small, so that I am the anger, I am the fear. In English, we say, for instance, I *am* afraid. In Spanish, *yo tengo miedo*, I *have* fear. In Tibetan, fear is here. So very often when people are approaching death, when somebody's family member is approaching death, fear, anger, frustration arises. And to the extent we're caught in the emotion, I *am* the emotion. That's not a very healthy, transformative way to be approaching death.

Secondly, the first stage of conscious dying: Can we be mindful? Can we be mindful of our emotions, mindful of our resistance? And to the extent we can do that, we're bringing embodied mindfulness, we're paying attention in an open kind of way, to that extent, then, we won't be caught in the emotions. The next stage is bringing compassion. Can we really have compassion for the part of our body that might kill us? It's not an easy thing to do, for sure. And finally, then there's this tantric stage of relating

to the emotions as healing messages rather than something that needs to be fixed. We're making this transformation from practicing because we want to die well—I don't want to die poorly, I don't want to die in fear—to practicing in richness. That means that whatever's going on, I can open my heart to it. Particularly having an embodied mindfulness, even when somebody's on their deathbed, being grounded, being centered, being embodied is the support for them being able to open the heart.

Imagine dying with an open heart; imagine dying with a closed heart. And to die with an open heart very often for almost everybody requires having an embodied mindfulness because if we're not in our body, if we haven't the support of the lower belly—the *hara*, the *dantian*—the heart will stay open only when we feel supported by the environment. And when somebody's dying, very often the environment does not seem particularly supportive, of course. So embodied mindfulness, leading to compassion—compassionate relationship with what's going on—and then this tantric understanding. But then finally, fully conscious dying comes out of the first part of what we've been talking about here, which is a non-dual realization that there isn't a separate self, there isn't a separate external reality in the conventional sense. Yes, certainly when I hold up my tea mug here, it's a real thing. And if I put it down, you can hear the sound of it making contact with my desk.

At the same time, from the standpoint of form is emptiness, emptiness is form, it's not real in the way that the mind usually thinks about it and that our society collectively is lost in the delusion of what is real and what is not. So, we die into non-duality. We die into pure consciousness, pure awareness, and it is this fundamental anxiety that very often is what is keeping us from surrendering into that sense of openness. Instead of listening to that bass line in the quartet, we're always caught up in all the content of experience. Content is always changing. What is it that doesn't change? What is it that's there unchanging, birthless, deathless, form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Okay, so we have maybe about 20 minutes for questions as conversation. Why don't we jump into that?

Brian: I'm curious if you or the Living/Dying Project have a perspective on the use of morphine or other drugs in the dying process as it relates to conscious dying.

Dale Borglum: Right, okay. My friend Peter that I was just mentioning, he had long-term metastatic prostate cancer. His pelvis was broken, his femur was broken, his tailbone was broken. He was in an incredible amount of pain. Just getting up out of his wheelchair and getting into bed was excruciatingly painful. Taking huge doses of Oxycontin and hydrocodone, I don't know, I may be getting the names wrong here. So, pain doesn't lead to suffering. Cancer doesn't lead to suffering. Resistance to pain, resistance to cancer is what causes suffering. It's very important to distinguish between suffering and the causes of suffering. And my experience with so many people has been that using meditation as much as you can for fear of pain, and using medication for pain is good practice. The medical community is getting a lot better, but there still is the difficulty of conflating pain and fear of pain. And what's often being medicated is the fear rather than the pain itself. So that if there is so much pain that somebody is resisting, I can't deal with, I'm tightening, I'm tightening, then take more medication.

But it's a shame to be overly medicated because that often leads then to a diminishment of consciousness. So, enough medication so you can relax, be present, but not so much that you're interfering unnecessarily with consciousness. I went to the dentist a couple of years ago. I had some decay under a crown, so the dentist said, "I'm going to take the crown off. I'm going to drill on your live nerve there, and then I'll put a temporary filling on there. You come back in a week, and we'll put the new crown on and I'm going to give you a shot." I said, "I don't want the shot." She said, "It's going to hurt." I said, "I know." She said, "It's really going to hurt." I said, "It's fine. It'll only be 60, 90 seconds, I'll just relax." She called in her husband who was a bigger dentist, and he said, "It's really going to hurt." And I said, "Please, it's fine." And for 90 seconds there were very unpleasant sensations and I just laid back. I had the big advantage of knowing it was going to be done really soon.

That's a very big advantage. But I didn't suffer at all. I've often experienced that people dying with physical pain have an easier time dying than people that don't have pain or people that have something like nausea that keeps drawing them back to the body. Is it possible to use your relationship with unpleasant sensation? Even right now as we're talking, you've been on your butt, on a chair, on a cushion, on the floor, wherever you are for over an hour maybe, and maybe there's some discomfort in the body. Can you be with that without resisting, without turning it into suffering? And to the extent that we're mindful of sensations and have a spacious relationship with them, they often don't turn into suffering; they often dissolve.

Sometimes you keep feeling them. It's not like we're relating to them to make them go away because right off the bat then we're setting it up as a confrontational event. But in the moment where you're feeling those sensations, that is your life, that is your experience. My other experience is that if people are taking morphine, it really interferes with the consciousness for a short amount of time, maybe for a week or ten days. And then the body starts getting used to it and one can get quite cogent even when you're taking a great deal of morphine. So, like my friend Peter, he slept a lot, but when he was awake, he was very, very alert up until the last few days of his life. Tom.

Tom: Dale, thank you so much for a really rich, rich talk and one that is so timely for me. I've recently connected with anxiety. I'm having a heart procedure on Tuesday. They're just going to do an ablation because I've had atrial fibrillation and tachycardia. And as I sat with it, while this occurs, when it arises in me, I've come to realize that there's an emotion that I feel in my heart before anything actually happens, before the heart gets out of sync or any of this stuff. And I started to observe it and connect with it. And I realized that it is anxiety. There is some anxiety that is arising in me and then the heart. I thought it was the other way around, I thought, oh, I'm anxious because I feel my heart doing this thing.

But I came to realize that it's actually when the anxiety comes up that the heart instantly reacts. And so, this points to what you said about the fact that these are healing messages, anxiety is a healing message. It's telling me something. I'm trying to connect with that. The surgery's going to go forward because I really think that atrial fibrillation is not something that you just toy around with. But I guess my question is, is this procedure going to disconnect me from these messages? What are your thoughts on that?

Dale Borglum: Well, if your recent understanding is correct that the anxiety precedes the symptoms, making the symptoms go away doesn't mean the anxiety is going to go away. You can have anxiety without having AFib. So, there's still this fundamental anxiety coming from the fundamental delusion of "I'm not who I think I am." If they hooked you up to a functional MRI machine and asked you to think about "I," all these different places in the brain light up. There's not one "I" center in the brain and they ask you to think about "not I," all these other places interspersed with the first set light up. The "I" is a concept. It's a very useful concept, it's a useful tool. The ego is a verb. It's something that is useful, but we tend to grab onto it in a way that causes a lot of suffering.

And I don't know how old you are, but you're an older person, shall we say. And the body's saying, how much longer am I going to be around? Here's something you really ought to pay attention to. I mean, are you the body that's going to die? Are you the body that has the heart that's doing these crazy dances instead of the usual dances? And I just turned 81, hard to believe. I've got a 21-year-old son who's off in Japan right now as we speak. And almost every client I work with is significantly younger than I am. So, I'm thinking, okay, I've done all these preparatory practices. I've been doing so much *bodhicitta*, there's so much compassion practice, so much mindfulness practice. When am I going to look directly at who I am? What's going on here? Maybe now is the time, and maybe now is the time for you to ask who is it that's having AFib?

Who is it that's being anxious? Instead of being caught up in experiencing the content—I'm hearing Dale's words, isn't that interesting or isn't that not interesting, depending on your viewpoint—one could focus on what's actually going on right now: there is this unchanging pure awareness that is so familiar, so ever-present that we don't even notice it because there's no contrast; it's always there and we're lost in the content. And being lost in it creates this fundamental anxiety. So just to take short bursts of time, not like a 20-minute meditation or 40-minute meditation, but for a minute or two, can you have awareness, watching awareness, nature of mind, rather than fixating on the content of experience?

There could be a sense the seer is seeing the seen and in Vipassana we let go of attachment to the seen, the content. We're aware of, mindful of our relationship with the content. And then when we get to deeper stages of practice, we let go of the subject. All that's left is seeing. It's not "I'm seeing that," just seeing is going on. But that's very

challenging to the ego because it's not existing in that moment. It's annihilated, it's a radical surrender of the ego. And of course, your heart's going to say, "Wait a minute. I don't like this." And according to Ramana Maharshi, for instance, the seed of the soul, this "I," the true "I" is located in the heart center. In a way, what you're going through is challenging; in another way it's a fundamental confrontation with the meaning of life, if you will. And I wish you all the best on Tuesday.

Tom: Thank you so much, Dale. Very helpful

Dale Borglum: Gandhi wrote his autobiography called *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Let's get real. It's like every moment is an experiment. Are we curious about what's going on? Are we really looking at who I am and what's my relationship with reality and content? Or are we just going through the motions kind of automatically? When I used to live back in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I went to a Vipassana retreat with Jack and Joseph—Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein—out in Western Massachusetts somewhere. And when we were driving back, me and my friends, we stopped at a Howard Johnson's restaurant right after this really intensive retreat. We went into the Howard Johnson's and it was like being in this surreal Italian movie. It seemed like everybody was asleep. It was like a zombie movie. Everybody was conditioned response. If you had a big enough computer, you could say, "She's going to order the Cobb salad and he's going to order the fish of the day." It was all conditioned and nobody was really present. And whether free will exists or it doesn't, that's a whole other conversation here. But whether it's physical pain, emotional pain, mental pain, or lack of pain, each moment is potentially this exploration of who we are and what it is that's actually going on. Good relationships, bad relationships; good politicians, bad politicians out there. Trump might be president and pull the plug on the war in Ukraine. Who knows what's going to happen? Maybe he'll be president from a federal penitentiary. Wouldn't that be interesting?

Henry: We have a question from Jim here in the room.

Jim: Great to hear you again. Thank you for all your years of wonderful teaching. I just returned from a college class reunion. We met when we were 18, and now we're all 75. The connections are passionate. The affection is so strong over the years and we're all falling apart. There's no hiding our ages anymore, but the consistency of the personal luminosity is stunningly touching. We all in some way are at some ground level; we experience each other as the same. Are we deluding ourselves?

Dale Borglum: We probably are deluding ourselves right and left, but no more in that situation than the other ones. Ram Dass had this line, he said, "When a bunch of old people get together, they have the organ recital," which is maybe what you...It could be that Tom is going in for his procedure and you are at your reunion and people are get-

ting older and falling apart. But what is it that hasn't changed? What is it that doesn't die? When Ramana Maharshi was dying, his devotees said, "Please don't leave us. Please don't leave us. We love you so much." He said, "Leave you. Where could I go?"

So, if in fact you think that you're this body and that's all you are, then death is incredibly bad news. But the fact that the bodies are aging gradually and falling apart, hopefully gradually, can lead us to investigate more deeply and understand that we have a body, but we aren't the body. We have a mind, but we aren't the mind. The Western worldview is that the brain creates the mind, which in turn creates reality. And the Western medical model is based on that. Whereas tantric wisdom, which has recently been mathematically proven by quantum mechanics, I mean three guys just got the Nobel Prize in physics for quantum entanglement, which is basically saying there's only one thing, there's just one. Maharaji kept saying, "*Sab Ek*"—all one, it's only one thing—and that this one thing doesn't die. I mean, it's all form, it's all matter, it's all energy. And thinking that we're the disintegrating body, of course is going to be quite upsetting to the ego structure. Trungpa Rinpoche said that, "Until you come into intimate contact with death, your spiritual practice will have the quality of being a dilettante." And I really believe that there's no stronger spiritual practice for this weird day and age that we live in than an inner contemplative practice combined with an outer relationship with death...like going to college reunions [*Laughter*].

Jim: Thank you, Dale.

Dale Borglum: You're welcome.

Henry: I think we're out of time for further questions at this point. Dale, do you want to say anything further?

Dale Borglum: Let me give myself a plug. We have a great website, livingdying.org. It's the most complete site on the internet for conscious dying and there is a lot of free material there. I have an every-other-Saturday Zoom group that has 670 people in it—a spiritual support group that is free of charge. The Living/Dying Project has free-of-charge online support groups for conscious dying, conscious caregiving, and conscious grief support. I have an online training program course that has a live component to it that goes into what we've been talking about here in much greater depth. We're always looking for new clients. If you know anybody who has a life-threatening illness or somebody that's grieving that would like some free-of-charge support from trained meditators, go to our website. And on the bottom of every page is our email address and our phone number.

Henry: Thank you.

Dale Borglum: You're welcome.

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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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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

December 3

Steven Tierney (Kai Po Koshin) is a Dharma transmitted teacher in the lineage of Suzuki Roshi. Steven practices with: Meditation in Recovery, Great Spirit Sanghai SFLGBTQA Sangha, Gay Buddhist Fellowship and the Harford Street Zen Center. Steven believes that we can find wisdom, compassion and awakening wherever good people come together for practice, healing, service and joy. Dr. Tierney is a psychotherapist in private practice and Professor Emeritus in Counseling Psychology at CIIS.

December 10

Eugene Cash is the founding teacher of the San Francisco Insight Meditation Community of San Francisco. He teaches at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and leads intensive meditation retreats internationally. His teaching is influenced by both Burmese and Thai streams of the Theravada tradition as well as Zen and Tibetan Buddhist practice. He is also a teacher of the Diamond Approach, a school of spiritual investigation and self-realization developed by A. H. Almaas.

December 17

Dharmachari 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.

December 24

Open Discussion (Christmas)

December 31

Open Discussion (New Year's Eve)

January 7

Eve Decker has been practicing Insight Meditation since 1991, and has taught groups, daylongs, and short retreats since 2006, particularly at Spirit Rock, the East Bay Meditation Center, and elsewhere in the Bay Area. She is a graduate of UC Berkeley and of Spirit Rock's Path of Engagement and Community Dharma Leader training programs, and has been trained in the Hakomi approach to body-based psychotherapy. Eve is also a singer/songwriter who has combined the power of music and dharma practice. Her most recent CDs are *In: Chants of Mindfulness & Compassion*, and *Awakening Joy - The Music*. Find her at <https://evedecker.com/>

January 14

Michaïel Patrick Bovenes is a metaphysician, published author, spiritual healer, and the founder of Soul-utions, his unique personal empowerment teachings. His online courses and live events have helped thousands of people find greater inner strength and personal peace. Since 1991, he helps people transform their stress into strength and their struggle into greater freedom, confidence and positive change. Soul-utions is not a religion, it's a conscious relationship with your Soul. Soul-utions focuses upon activating your inner power to create the changes you desire by aligning with your true purpose, inner wisdom, and empowered destiny.

January 21

Open Discussion

January 28

Trip Weil has been practicing in the Theravada tradition since 2004. He is a graduate of Spirit Rock's Community Dharma Leader and Dedicated Practitioner programs. Trip serves on the board of San Francisco Insight, where he also leads sitting groups and teaches meditation classes. He is a psychotherapist in private practice in San Francisco and a former attorney.

February 4

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.

February 11

Kevin Martin, aka Thando, is a Vipassana meditation teacher with a decade of experience. He learned metta practice from his teacher's insight and cherishes witnessing life's aspects others fear experiencing. Thando's teaching philosophy is that life is our best teacher, and we should continually transform through cycles of death and life. His teaching style is practical and adapts to the student's understanding. Thando means Love in Xhosa, a South African culture and language. While studying abroad in South Africa as a college student in 2009, Thando received his name from a Xhosa elder who identified 'love' as a virtue that would be his lifelong call to action. Since the passing of his elder, Thando has taken this name as a lifelong commitment.

February 18

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 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. He lives in San Francisco, CA and identifies as a disabled, queer, white, cis male. Learn more at www.queerdharma.net

February 25

Pamela Weiss is a dual-lineage Buddhist teacher in Soto Zen and Theravada, and the author of *A Bigger Sky: Awakening a Fierce Feminine Buddhism*. She sits on the Spirit Rock Teacher Council, and teaches through San Francisco Insight, San Francisco Zen Center and Brooklyn Zen Center. Pamela lives in San Francisco with her husband and little dog, Grover. Find her at www.pamelaweiss.com

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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