



# Gay Buddhist Fellowship

## Newsletter

November 1996

### GBF Calendar

Call 415/974-9878 for news about GBF and GBF-sponsored events. To skip the recording and leave a message, press 5.

3 Nov., Sunday Sitting (East Bay), 10:30 am, at the home of Geoff McEnany,

5 Nov. (Tuesday), Steering Committee Meeting, 7:00 pm, at the home of Larry White,

7 Nov., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Bill Kirkpatrick,

9 Nov. (Saturday), Relationship Forum, sponsored by GBF, 9 am-5 pm, Kairos House, 2128 15th Street (near Market), SF. Pre-registration required.

10 Nov., Sunday Sitting (SF), 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St. Speaker: Tibetan Buddhist nun The Ven. Robina Courtin.

14 Nov., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Lee Robbins,

16 Nov., Day of Meditation, 8 am-4 pm,

17 Nov., Sunday Sitting (East Bay). See 11/3.

21 Nov., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Mark Marion,

24 Nov., Sunday Sitting (SF), 10:30 a.m., 273 Page St., SF. Open discussion.

28 Nov., Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Edward Sams,



### Ven. Robina Courtin to Speak Nov. 10

Our speaker on Sunday, November 10, will be the Venerable Robina Courtin. Robina has been a Tibetan Buddhist nun for over 18 years, having received gelongma ordination in December of 1994.

Originally from Australia, she spent 10 years working for Wisdom Publications, and has also taught and worked at various centers around the world for the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition.

She is currently the editor of *Manala Magazine*, and lives in Soquel, CA. Robina commutes biweekly to lecture to her students at Tse Chen Ling Center for Tibetan Buddhist Studies in San Francisco. Her dynamic style and sense of humor are not to be missed! ♡

### Space Limited for Relationships Forum

In its discussions last month, the Relationships Committee shifted from a limited sign-up *workshop* format to a more open *forum* format. Unfortunately, we did not fully consider the space limitations of Kairos House, which we had already reserved and paid for.

Instead of postponing the November 9 event, we have decided to proceed as announced in the October newsletter, but with a limited sign-up. To attend, please call the GBF voice mail number, 415/974-9878, press 5, state your desire to participate, and leave a name and phone number.

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### Day of Meditation Set for November 16

On Saturday, November 16, 1996, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., GBF will sponsor a day of silent meditation practice at 3141 23rd Street (near Shotwell) in the Mission District of San Francisco.

The schedule will include sitting and walking meditation, some group recitation, and dharma readings. Please bring your own meditation cushion or bench, easy on-off shoes or sandals, and a *vegetarian* bag lunch (since the residents of the facility are vegetarians and request that no meat be brought on the premises). Tea will be served.

To register for this event, send your name and phone number to: GBF Sitting (11/16/96), 2261 Market Street #422, San Francisco, CA 94114. If you have any questions or need more information, please call Greg LeClair or Daishin David Sunseri at

This is a good opportunity for us to practice silently together for a whole day. We hope to see many people there. ♡

### A GBF Thanksgiving?

GBF is exploring the possibility of holding a Thanksgiving meal and celebration for members of our sangha. If there are enough people who would like to participate in celebrating Thanksgiving together, we will go ahead with the planning. If you are interested, please contact Clint Seiter as soon as possible at



## Dharma Centers

[Each center offers ongoing programs and activities. If interested, please contact them directly.]

- BPF: Buddhist Peace Fellowship, P.O. Box 4650, Berkeley 94704. 510/525-8596.
- BSC: Berkeley Shambhala Center: 2288 Fulton Street, Berkeley. 510/841-6475 or 510/549-1481.
- BZC: Berkeley Zen Center, 1933 Russell Street, Berkeley 94703. 510/845-2403.
- CDS: California Diamond Sangha, P.O. Box 2915, Petaluma, CA 94953.
- CML: Community of Mindful Living, P.O. Box 7355, Albany 94707. 510/527-3751.
- DI: Dudjom International, P.O. Box 40155, Berkeley 94704. 510/849-9928.
- EGZC: Empty Gate Zen Center, 5707 Oakgrove Ave., Oakland 94618. 510/653-5991.
- EHMC: Enlightened Heart Meditation Center. 415/255-0798.
- GGF: Green Gulch Farm (SF Zen Center): 1601 Shoreline Highway, Sausalito. 415/383-3134.
- HSZC: Hartford Street Zen Center: 57 Hartford St., SF. 415/863-2507.
- LMB: Land of Medicine Buddha: 5800 Prescott Road, Soquel. 408/462-8383.
- NI: Nyingma Institute: 1815 Highland Place, Berkeley 94709. 510/843-6812.
- ODD: Orgyen Dorje Den/Bay Area Yeshe Nyingpo: 410 Townsend #406, SF. 415/826-7181.
- POL: PÖL Pema Ösel Ling: 2013 Eureka Canyon Road, Corralitos. 408/761-6266.
- RF: Rigpa Fellowship: 816 Bancroft Way, Berkeley. 510/644-1858.
- SBC: Saraha Buddhist Center, 3145 Geary Blvd. #515, SF. 415/731-5973.
- SCZC: Santa Cruz Zen Center, 113 School Street, Santa Cruz. 408/457-0206.
- SFBC: San Francisco Buddhist Center: 37 Bartlett St., SF. 415/282-2018.
- SFSC: San Francisco Shambhala Center: 1630 Taraval St., SF. 415/731-4426.
- SFZC: San Francisco Zen Center: 300 Page Street, SF. 415/863-3136.
- SMZC: Sonoma Mountain Zen Center, 6367 Sonoma Mountain Road, Santa Rosa. 707/545-8105.
- SR: Spirit Rock Meditation Center: 5000 Sir Frances Drake Blvd., Woodacre. 415/488-0164.
- TCL: Tse Chen Ling Center: 4 Joost Ave, SF. 415/333-3261.
- VI: Vajrapani Institute, P.O. Box 2130, Boulder Creek 95006. 408/338-6654. K

# The Local Dharma

November 1996

[Note: Sometimes schedules change, so we recommend you call to confirm events.]

3, 10, 20 Nov. and 5 Dec. "Dr. Ambedkar: 40 Years of the Dharma Revolution in India," a series of public talks (and slides) by Parama Bodhi of the Western Buddhist Order. On Oct. 14, 1956, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, chief architect of independent India's constitution, converted to Buddhism by taking the Refugees and Precepts from India's most senior bhikkhu, U. Chandramani. Dr. Ambedkar, in turn, administered the Refugees and Precepts to the crowd of 500,000 Hindu "untouchables," thus starting the mass conversion movement and revival of Buddhism in India. Today it is estimated there are up to 20 million ex-untouchable Buddhists in India. SFBC

8-11 Nov. (Fri.-Mon.) "Practicing Peace: A Mindfulness Retreat on Healing and Transformation" led by Maxine Hong Kingston, Arnie Kotler, Wendy Johnson, and Therese Fitzgerald. This retreat for veterans, their friends, families, loved ones, and everyone interested in peace and transformation will take place on Veterans' Day Weekend at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the Santa Cruz mountains. There will be an opportunity to sit, walk, eat, enjoy tea, and share the practice of mindfulness of our body, feelings, and mind. There will be guided meditations and writing exercises as a Sangha to help heal the wounds of war within our hearts. Cost: \$125-175. 4:00 pm (Fri.)-2:00 pm (Mon.) CML

14 Nov. (Thu.) "Singing the Pine Trees Home: An Autumn Evening of Tea and Poetry" with Randall Weingarten and Sarah Seiter. One of a series of evenings in the study of the Way of Tea (*Chanoyu*). Please bring a poem or two to share—your own or one by a favorite poet. Cost: \$15. Please register in advance; limited to ten people. 7-9 pm. GGF

17 Nov. (Sun.) "Translating Judaism, Translating Buddhism: a Jewish-Buddhist Retreat" with Rabbi Alan Lew and Abbot Zoketsu Norman Fisher. The encounter between the traditions of Judaism and Buddhism can magnify and freshen our understanding of both, and of ourselves. How does the practice of mindfulness relate to the practice of prayer? What is the existential dimension of a mitzvah? What does the word "God" really mean? The day will include traditional Jewish liturgy, Buddhist meditation practices, and discussion centered around texts of both traditions. Cost: \$35. Please bring a bag lunch. GGF

19 Nov. (Tue.) "The Bodhisattva Precepts and Interdependence" with Tenshin Reb Anderson, Senior Dharma Teacher, Zen Center. Insight into the Buddha's teaching on interdependence is central to realization and awakening to actual reality. The Precepts are a pivotal part of creating the causes and conditions for our own insight. This exceptional teacher will illuminate these interwoven topics. Suggested donation: \$5-\$10. 7:45-9 pm. HSZC

23 Nov. (Sat.) Clearing the Land—"Living Peace Patch" Walk with the Living Peace Meditation Community. As we clear the land of non-native exotic plants, we are preparing the space for plants that nourish and support the lives of the birds and all native creatures. So too, as we become aware of old habits and perceptions, creating a greater spaciousness of being, we nourish our seeds of beauty, love, and compassion. Propagating wild strawberries which help to stabilize the dune habitat offers us a time of personal grounding and connection. At Fort Funston, SF. Information: Karen, 415/346-3923.

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# Ideas on International Activism for Engaged Buddhists

The summer 1996 issue of *Turning Wheel*, a publication of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, contained a number of practical suggestions for Buddhists who wish to study and apply principles of compassion and lovingkindness at an international level. We offer them here for members of the GBF community. We also encourage readers to send in their own experiences with engaged Buddhist practice and responses to books they have read on this topic so we may share them with others.

## 1. Study and Inquiry

We would like to suggest a few books from among the many that relate to Buddhist activism at the international level.

- *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* edited by Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. Kin.
- *Beyond Optimism: A Buddhist Political Ecology* by Ken Jones (Oxford: Jon Carpenter Publishing, \$17.95).

Also by Ken Jones, *The Social Face of Buddhism*.

- *Ancient Futures, Learning from Ladakh*, by Helena Norberg-Hodge (Sierra Club Books, \$12).
- *Seeds of Peace* by Sulak Sivaraksa (Parallax Press, \$12).
- *Freedom from Fear* by Aung San Suu Kyi (Penguin Books).

## 2. Personal Practice

Consider the ways in which you feel connected to people struggling in other parts of the world. Notice what strengthens those feelings of connection. Find newspapers, magazines, and radio or TV news reports that you trust, and follow the international news.

Correspond with friends overseas by mail or electronically. Support people in your own community when they travel to international conferences, and listen to their reports when they return. Host travelers from abroad.

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## Local Dharma

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29 Nov. (Fri.)-8 Dec. (Fri.) Rigpa Fellowship's Fall Retreat with Sogyal Rinpoche. This year's retreat will be at Konocti Harbor Resort and Spa on Clear Lake. Information: 510/644-3922.

2-7 Dec. (Mon.-Sat.) Sesshin Retreat at Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. This is a silent meditation intensive for experienced sitters to "still the mind" in a rigorous schedule which begins at 4:45 am with prostrations, 10 periods of meditation, chanting, mindful work, Dharma talks, and private interviews, ending at 9 pm. It begins at 7:30 on the first day and will end at 4 pm on the last day. Special arrangements can be made for those who cannot come for the entire retreat due to work commitments. \$200 SMZC ♥



## Contributors ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Thanks to the following people who helped with this issue of the *GBF Newsletter*: Alan Oliver, Bob Hass, Brian Shelley, Clint Seiter, Daishin David Sunseri, David Holmes, Jerry Gagnon, Ken Harper, Mark Marion, Robin Levitt, Steve Peskind, and Tom Moon. ♥

## In Brief

### Starting Times for Sitting Groups

The East Bay Sunday sittings begin at 10:30 a.m., and not at 10:00 a.m. as reported in last month's calendar. Also, beginning in November, the Thursday night sittings will begin at 7:45 p.m. rather than 8:00 p.m.

As with all GBF sittings, participants are requested to arrive five to ten minutes early. Doing so creates an intentional calmness and harmony that is most conducive to group meditation. ♥

### Second Mailing Party Coordinator

GBF is seeking a second person to help coordinate the monthly newsletter mailing "parties." This person would alternate months with the current coordinator, Mark Marion, in hosting the get-togethers. To find out more about the job or to volunteer, please contact Mark at

♥

### New Mailing Party Volunteers Needed

GBF would like to increase the number of people we can count on to help with our monthly newsletter mailing "parties," which are held the last Sunday of each month from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Since the get-togethers occur on the same day as our Sunday sitting, many sangha members have found this to be a convenient time to help. The mailing parties are a fun way to help the sangha and to get to know some of your fellow GBFers a little better. If you can assist on a fairly regular basis, please contact Mark Marion at

♥

# Meditations in an Emergency



by Jerry Gagnon

*[From the author: "I wrote the following pieces, along with many others, a few years ago at a time in my life when the suffering I perceived around me seemed hopeless. Buddhism offered me a path and a promise. As I continue to study Buddhism, I find myself embracing aspects of Christianity as well, hearing in the words 'Be still and know' the same message as Buddha's and Dogen's." ]*

## Right Thought, Right Action

The unfortunate effect of abstract words like God [good] and evil is that we tend to externalize them. We assume God is out there and we're apart from God. We perceive evil as something or someone else. In doing so, we fail to realize our capacity to unify these poles of dualism.

Our character is revealed through our actions, words, and thoughts. If I act in a way that is harmful to myself and others, it may be described in moral terms as evil, or it may be viewed in nonjudgmental terms such as ignorant or unskillful.

We understand that there is willful harming of others and ourselves. This can take the form of ecological destruction of the forests, oceans, and rivers. It can also manifest as physical violence, or mental and emotional duplicity.

But there is also willful good, and that too can be a dangerous thing. The willful good of the missionaries in California destroyed the culture of the Indians and introduced syphilis into their population. During the Inquisition, willful good manifested as religious fanaticism, resulting in widespread torture and killing of persons convicted of heresy against the Roman Catholic Church.

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How then do we know if our actions are truly good? We must look closely at the results of our actions. Is someone's life better as a result of our work? Have we relieved suffering? That, it seems to me, is the definition of good work, and not how many "souls" have been saved or how many temples have been built.

The work of the artist may be seen as a celebration or spreading of "the word" of good. The carpenter makes shelter; the gardener brings seeds to harvest. All of these are equally good.

## Interbeing

We're freed when we say good morning to the beggar, not seeing him or her apart from our pain. We're freed when we tend to the dying in the AIDS ward or the cancer ward. We're freed when we help our children read and write. We're freed when we step forward and say no to pollution, war, and starvation. Each of us can do something. Each of us can contribute.

We're freed when we embrace our mutual condition of being human. With that freedom comes the power and the choice to enhance our culture and community by being a participating member—and not someone who lives in a gate-guarded mentality.



## Repetition and Ritual

Perhaps the most difficult part of accepting religious notions of discipline is the idea of ritual, which involves endless repetition. Nothing is more tedious to someone used to composing or writing or some other creative pursuit that thrives on inspiration. Yet life itself involves endless repetition.

The process of repeating certain thoughts, prayers, or actions may lead us to a deeper level of understanding. Prayer, japa, or meditation on a mantra are tools to help us transcend our dilemma and lead us away from our preoccupations. Chanting, the repetition of songs of praise, or the recitation of vows can be equally helpful.

Having created form, in the shape of music, poetry, or art, or in the structure of religious discipline, we may then honor that form, knowing it comes from chaos and returns to chaos, just as the forms of our bodies return to the elements.



## Enlightenment

We have to go "a little crazy" once in awhile. That's what my grocer tells me every time he gets my bill mixed up. This "craziness" is very different from the kind of anger which leads to violence. It is a letting go of the need to be right, good, or enlightened.

We don't have to strive to be divine; we are divine, even in our imperfect lives. More than this, we are simply human, and that is enough. We don't have to put labels on it.

Washing the dishes, drying them, and returning them to the cupboard is a ceremonial act of our everyday lives, and is not apart from anything we may call enlightenment.

