



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

Newsletter

JUNE 1997

GBF Calendar

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

1 June, Sunday Sitting (East Bay),
10:30 am, at the home of Geoff
McEnany,

5 June, Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm:
meditation, at the home of Bill
Kirkpatrick,

6 June, (Friday) Steering Committee
Meeting, 4:00 pm: hike, 5:30 pm:
potluck, 7:15 pm: meeting at the
home of David Holmes,

8 June, Sunday Sitting (SF),
10:30am **NEW LOCATION:** SFBC,
37 Bartlett St. Paramananda, FWBO
will speak on "The Western Bud-
dhist Order" (see article on page 1).

12 June, Thursday Sitting, 6:30 pm:
potluck dinner, 7:45 pm: meditation,
at the home of Lee Robbins,

15 June, Sunday Sitting (East Bay),
10:30 am, at the home of Geoff
McEnany,

19 June, Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm
at the home of Mark Marion,

Two Speakers For June - "The Western Buddhist Order" and "A Report From The Dalai Lama/ Gays Meeting"

Our speaker on June 8th will be Paramananda, a teacher in the Western Buddhist Order who is one of four teachers at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, the host site for our Sunday Practice Sittings. He will speak on "The Western Buddhist Order & The Teachings Of Sangharakshita". This will be a great opportunity to learn more about The Friends Of The Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), one of the few Western based Buddhist traditions.

The talk will review the history of the FWBO, their approach to establishing Buddhism in the West and the nature of spiritual friendships. Paramananda is the current chairman of the SFBC, has been an ordained teacher for eleven years and is author of a book on meditation.

On the 22nd we will have a report and discussion about the meeting between the Dalai Lama and a group of seven gay and lesbian Buddhists. The issue of gay sexuality and traditional Tibetan teachings has been featured in our newsletter, gay newspapers and in our local papers over the past five months. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for June 10th and will likely generate more newspaper coverage. Come and help us sort it all out on the 22nd. ♦



Allen Ginsberg To Be Remembered On Gay Pride Weekend

On Friday, June 27th, GBF invites you to "drop in" to a house party that will offer all of us a chance to just relax and have some fun together (also part of the dharma). Since this will be the kickoff of gay pride weekend we feel it is appropriate to celebrate the life of one of our great, gay Buddhists who recently left us physically, Allen Ginsberg. Some poetry will surely be read, perhaps a video tape and a sharing of some personal encounters with Allen. Call us with ideas or suggestions for the evening

Please bring your own choice of drink and some light food to share so that you won't have to drag dishes with you to wherever else you are going. It will be held from 7:30 p.m. till 11:00ish at Larry White's digs,

New GBF Brochure ; Audiotapes To Follow

Over the past two years, we have been trying to describe GBF in a simple and clear way. This has now been done and brochures have been duplicated on great lilac colored paper. They will be made available at our Sunday Sittings. If you live elsewhere and would like some copies to share with friends, please contact us. Our thanks go to Bob Hass for seeing the project through to completion. Watch for the announcement of audiotapes of GBF Dharma talks in our next issue. ♦



Editor's Mind

by Alan Oliver

You can consciously choose a theme for an issue or a theme can emerge from separate decisions and chance circumstances.

Thus compassion has appeared among our June decisions. Toby Johnson's article on "The Male Buddha Of Compassion" seemed particularly appropriate for our gay community since compassion is one of the great central points of the Dharma and much in need of being expressed by people who are gay. We live in a type of exile from the dominant culture although that is changing. It still makes it difficult to show compassion sometimes. Also the need for compassion towards ourselves needs to be kept bright and clear in our minds. The article reminds us of the old teachings and myths of Buddhism.

We coaxed an article from Christopher in Hyden, Kentucky because it seemed appropriate in this graduation month. Again the theme of compassion came up in his article as he sought ways to help other students who might be gay, his mother and to others who befriended him. Perhaps from a little distance and safety after graduation there is even a hint that it could be extended to the "Christians" in the school.

Paul in his letter from prison reminds us of the difficulty of living the Dharma in prison and his efforts to share it with others and Daishin David Sunseri suggests in *Dharma Gateways* that living it is better than talking about it as difficult as that can be.

Please share with the Sangha your favorite "Gateway" quotes, and start writing down your experiences along the path. We need to hear them. Be the start of a new theme in a future newsletter. ♦

It's The Early Bird That Gets To Retreat And To Take the 6th

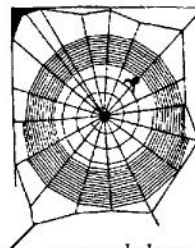
Now that we have got your attention with impossibly confusing mixed phrasing, we want to remind you to reserve time to attend GBF's 6th Annual Retreat at the Vajrapani Institute near Boulder Creek on September 5-7.

The schedule will include traditional practices of silent sitting and walking meditation on both mornings followed by sangha hikes and dharma dialogue in the afternoons. The focus of the dialogue periods this year will be on Buddhist approaches to relationships another step in the exploration of that part of our lives. More silent time is optional for individual needs.

Complete details and a registration form will be included in the July/August newsletter. This is a great opportunity for those members of GBF who live further away and can't make it to our usual programs. Enlightenment (at least a moment or two) guaranteed or your money back. We kid you not or do we? ♦

Contributors

Thanks to the following people who helped with this GBF Newsletter: Alan Oliver, Chris Alferitz, Jon Weaver, Scott Stalnaker, David Holmes, Mark Marion, Daishin David Sunseri, Tom Moon, Jack Carroll, Paul Veach, Toby Johnson - *White Crane Journal* and Christopher Osborne.



Letters: Voices From Indra's Net

Indra's Net was the mythological Net suspended over Indra's palace in which at each intersecting point in the Net was a jewel. The facets of each jewel reflected all the other jewels in the Net. The various facets of GBF opinion are reflected here.

Dear Editor:

I would like to thank you for publishing the article *Buddhism, Homosexuality and Renunciation*, by Ronald Martinez Lahoz in the March 1997 issue. I think it is one of the most thoughtful and level-headed considerations of sexual orientation and sexual conduct that I have read in a Buddhist publication. The fact that it is blessedly free from rant and cant contributes very much to its value.

On page five of the same issue you ask in regard to the "anti-gay letters" to the editor in *Tricycle*, "How should we respond as gay Buddhists?"

Perhaps we should respond as people who have confidence in the Buddha dharma and not look to make a special gay Buddhist response. If we are followers of the Buddha's way who are first gay/straight, male/female, European/African/Asian, and all the other "ors" that are rife in this world, then perhaps we have missed the point of Buddhadharma entirely. As human beings we all have to respond to situations, but should not we be responding as human beings in the light of Dhamma, rather than seeking a special-label-first response.

The difference between understanding our sexual orientation from within Dhamma, as opposed to considering Dhamma from the point of view of our sexual orientation first, may present many problems to our habitual mode of thinking. However, if we do not

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make that effort how have we understood Dhamma in any way that is different from those letter writers?

If our understanding of Dhamma has not been a metanoetic experience, a basic change of insight and an attempt to live by that insight, then we are simply going to engage in the same old "same-old", whether we are "gay Buddhists" or "anti-gay." How many carts do we have to put before the horse before we get a clue? A rewarding issue of the newsletter in any case.

Sincerely, Jack Carroll.

Editors Note: Does spirituality develop before sexuality in the cycle of birth-life-death? Are children aware of spirituality before sexuality? These are key issues to reflect over and answer. ♦

Dear Editor:

As a Theravada Buddhist inmate in a Texas State prison, things have not been easy. However, they could be much worse! On this unit we have had no trouble receiving written study material, as well as tapes from several monasteries and meditation centers. The problem is in getting approval to listen to the tapes as they are in the Christian Chapel tape library. This requires special arrangements which is sometimes hard to get because of the unique problems of prison life. However, there is a bigger problem. Prison policy requires at least 15 registered Buddhist inmates and an outside free person who has been approved by the prison to come and teach, in order to be listed as an established Sangha on the same level with other religious groups.

So, the Chaplain will not let us put up a one time flyer in order to contact other Buddhists in the

More Letters

prison. It seems our poster is "recruiting", while they are just "informing". They are organized, we are not. We are in a classic "Catch 22" situation. Many Buddhist inmates do not even know there is a dharma and meditation tape library. Although this may change if inmates see the ad for a teacher placed in the *GBF Newsletter*, *Turning Wheel*, or read this letter. Also, inmates who are registered Buddhists living in other units might be able to get transferred to this unit when we get a teacher. Religious freedom and all that! This would start the first Texas State prison Sangha.

Most prison inmates are new to Buddhism and do not have the support of outside Sanghas. So, one of the most important support (metta) an outside Sangha could perform is to establish written and verbal contact with Buddhist inmates and prison Chaplains. The central theme of the contact with prison staff should be spirituality reduces crime!

Recently, I was asked how my Buddhist practice has helped me? That was easy to answer! My meditation and study has greatly contributed to my positive mental and physical health. All the Buddhist inmates at this prison would like to thank you for your help.

With metta, Paul Veach. ♦

The Dali Lama Is Coming To Town!

As many members of the GBF may already know, H. H. the Dali Lama will be in San Francisco in June for a conference on violence. While in our city, he will also meet with a committee to explore the relationship between Buddhist spirituality and Gay sexuality. These are issues very close to the heart of the GBF! There has been discussion in the Buddhist, Gay, and Gay-Buddhist communities about these topics. The GBF reflects many Buddhist traditions, and supports our brothers in the various Tibetan lineages in exercising patience, compassion, and metta as they search for insight, wisdom and knowledge related to these complex subjects. The GBF encourages and actively supports continued dialogue and research in all Buddhist traditions on the positive, vital link between Gay sexuality and Buddhist spirituality. ♦

GBF Mission Statement

Gay Buddhist Fellowship supports Buddhist practice in the gay men's community. It is a forum that brings together the diverse Buddhist traditions to address the spiritual concerns of gay men in the Bay Area, the United States, and around the world. GBF's mission includes cultivating a social environment that is inclusive and caring.

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GBF Calendar

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21 June (Saturday), GBF's Feed-The-Homeless Project at Hamilton Family Center. To participate, contact Clint Seiter,

22 June, Sunday Sitting (SF), 10:30 am. NEW LOCATION: SFBC, 37 Bartlett St. Report on the meeting with the Dali Lama and discussion.

26 June Thursday Sitting, 7:45 pm, at the home of Larry White,

(Note: this is a permanent change in location for the 4th Thursday Sitting.)

27 June, Friday Party, 7:30pm at the

From Ancient India - To Kentucky 1997

Avalokiteshvara The Male Buddha of Compassion

by Toby Johnson

Editor's Note: This article is reprinted in part from the Autumn 1996, issue of the White Crane Journal, with the kind permission of Toby Johnson. For those persons interested in learning more about the Male Reflection of the Buddha of Compassion, contact the Buddhist Church in America (BCA). The BCA is part of the Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land) tradition of Japanese Buddhism.

The name Avalokiteshvara means "The Lord Looking Down In Pity", and "The Lord Who Is Seen Within". We are all reflexes of the image of the Bodhisattva. The sufferer within us is that divine being. We and that protecting father are one. This is the redeeming insight. That protecting father is every man we meet. So it must be known that, though this ignorant, limited, self-defending, suffering body may regard itself as threatened by some other - the enemy - that one too is God... New life, new birth, new knowledge of existence (so that we live not in this physiques only, but in all bodies, all physiques of the world, as the Bodhisattva) was given us. This is the meaning of the image of the bisexual god. (Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, pps. 160-161.)

An ancient Mahayana Buddhist myth tells of a fellow who had worked his way through countless incarnations to become a bodhisattva, a stage of development just before becoming a buddha. In what promised to be his final incarnation, he was a young, beautiful, kind, gentle, and androgynous being called Avalokiteshvara, whose name means "The Lord Looking Down In Pity." As he was entering his final meditation, about to achieve his goal of lifetimes beyond number, he heard a groan go up from all around him. He came out of his meditation and asked, "What is this about? I was about to achieve Nirvana. Why the groan?"

All of nature answered in a single voice, "O Avalokiteshvara, we are happy for you that you are about to enter Nirvana, but we are sad for ourselves. Life is hard and full of suffering. What has kept us going was the thought of you. You are so kind and lovely. You have been a source of strength and inspiration for us. Now you are about to leave us, and so we groan."

Rapt with compassion, the young saint responded,



"Well, then I will not leave you, but shall renounce my own Nirvana until all sentient beings are likewise enlightened." Indeed, he went on to say, "It would be better for one to suffer than for all. Therefore, I vow to take upon myself all the karma and all the suffering of all sentient beings. I shall remain in the cycles of reincarnation until the end of time bestowing grace and mercy for the good of all."

According to one interpretation of the myth, when Avalokiteshvara made his great vow, all other sentient beings were at that moment ushered into Nirvana, leaving Avalokiteshvara alone behind to live out all their karma for them. This androgynous being then is the only being who is incarnating.

Though we all think ourselves to be different, separate individuals - all fighting, struggling, conquering, or succumbing to the exigencies of our unique karmas - indeed, we are each and all really manifestations of that one being, Avalokiteshvara, living out the vow and discovering that this is what Nirvana really is. Not the renunciation of the world, but the loving, compassionate embrace of all possible human experience. Thus the name Avalokiteshvara can also be interpreted "The Lord Who Is Seen Within."

Of course, this Buddhist myth from the first or second century of the Common Era is not about homosexuality and gay identity as we know them in the twentieth century (though one has to wonder if homosexually-oriented Buddhist monks down all the corridors of time

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