



# Gay Buddhist Fellowship

The 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 the world. GBF's mission includes cultivating a social environment that is inclusive and caring.

## Constructing the Body Of the Buddha from a Single Leaf of Grass:

### Mindfulness and Work

by Jeffrey Schneider

*Jeffrey Schneider, the director of the San Francisco Zen Center's facility on Page Street, has been practicing in the Zen tradition since 1978. He spoke to us on February 14<sup>th</sup>.*

In early December of this year I was invited to go to the Austin, Texas Zen Center where a friend of mine is the priest, and they were having their first *sesshin*. *Sesshin* is a seven-day meditation intensive, and the December one ends on the day we celebrate the traditional anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment, so this is a big deal. I was invited to go down there to help them put together their first *sesshin* and to be the head cook, which actually turned out to be the only cook. But, in the Soto Zen tradition, work is a very intrinsic part of our practice. We don't make a great deal of separation between work or our daily lives and our more formal meditation practice. So, in order to prepare for this job, although I have cooked for many *sesshins*, I decided to reread the *Tenzo Kyokun*. The *Tenzo Kyokun* was written by Dogen Zenji (Zen Master Dogen). Dogen Zenji was a Japanese monk who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century who traveled to China, studied there, and brought with him to Japan the Soto Zen tradition, from which I come. He wrote extensively on practice and Buddhism, and one of the things he wrote was called the *Tenzo Kyokun*, which means, *Instructions for the Head Cook*. The *tenzo* was the head cook. So I was invited to Austin to be the head cook, the *tenzo*. In order to prepare myself – it's considered a teaching position, by the way, sort of the same as the head of the meditation hall – so in order to prepare myself, I reread the admonitions that Dogen had written for us almost 800 years ago.

And I found that they were so pertinent to all areas of my practice that I wanted to use this text to talk about what Dogen said. This is not about meditation per se; it's about taking the mind of meditation, that we develop in our meditation, into the rest of our lives. So it's very practical in some ways, for those of us – all of us, actually – who live in the world, and not just perhaps in a mountain monastery someplace. So I'm just going to pick out little things here and there from the text, read them to you, and give you my take on them.

He says, "Baoning Renyong said, 'Use the property and possessions of the community as carefully as if they were your own eyes.' The *tenzo* should handle all food he receives with respect, as if it were to be used in a meal for the Emperor. Cooked and uncooked food must be handled in the same manner." I'm told, though I haven't read it myself, that in the rule of St. Benedict, which is one of the earliest writings governing Christian monasticism, St. Benedict says that the pots and pans in the kitchen are to be handled with the same respect as the holy utensils on the altar which receives the body and the blood of Christ. And, you know, in our meal ritual, in the Zen tradition, we have a line in the chant that talks about

