



# 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.

## On Chanting as a Buddhist Meditation Practice

by Jim Wilson

It has been my observation that Americans seem to be attracted to those styles of Buddhist meditation that take the form of silence and stillness. These include Vipassana, Zen, Dzog Chen, and other forms of meditative cultivation that center on sitting quietly and in stillness. One then turns the mind inward to enter into the specific practice. Sometimes I think that the attraction to these particular types of Buddhist meditation is due to the extremely busy and active lives that we lead. Silent and still meditations offer an antidote to the active distraction of so much of our lives.

The dominant form of Buddhist meditation in East Asia and Tibet, however, is some form of chanting. (I am not familiar enough with the Theravada countries to know if chanting meditation is used there.) This kind of meditation is much more widespread, and engaged in by far more people, than the forms of silent meditation. For example, the largest school of Buddhism in China, Korea, Vietnam and Japan is Pure Land Buddhism. The central practice of this form of Buddhism is chanting. In Japan, some of the largest traditions are those schools based on the teachings of Nichiren. Once again, the central practice of this tradition is chanting.

By chanting I mean the repetition of a short phrase, usually the name of a Bodhisattva or a mantra, most often done collectively, and having the form of a simple melody, or sometimes sung on a single tone. The simplicity of the melody allows for group participation; no one has to have a developed sense of musicianship in order to participate. The most widespread examples of chanting are:

"Namu Kwan Shih Yin Pu Sah" — Kwan Yin is a Bodhisattva representing infinite compassion. Kwan Yin is by far the most widespread and popular Buddhist deity. The ritual chanting of the name of this Bodhisattva is the common form of both worship and

