



Gay Buddhist Fellowship

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2007 NEWSLETTER

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
San Francisco Bay Area,
the United States,
and the world.
GBF's mission includes
cultivating a social
environment that is
inclusive and caring.

Spirituality and Intimate Relationships: Monogamy, Polyamory, and Beyond

BY JORGE N. FERRER

In Buddhism, sympathetic joy (*mudita*) is regarded as one of the “four immeasurable states” (*brahmaviharas*) or qualities of an enlightened person—the other three being loving kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), and equanimity (*upeksha*). Sympathetic joy refers to the human capability to participate in the joy of others, to feel happy when others feel happy. Although with different emphases, such understanding can also be found in the contemplative teachings of many other religious traditions such as the Kabbalah, Christianity, or Sufism, which in their respective languages talk about empathic joy, for example, in terms of opening the “eye of the heart.” According to these and other traditions, the cultivation of sympathetic joy can break through the ultimately false duality between self and others, being therefore a potent aid on the path toward overcoming self-centeredness and achieving liberation. Though the ultimate aim of many religious practices is to develop sympathetic joy for all sentient beings, intimate relationships offer human beings—whether they are spiritual practitioners or not—a precious opportunity to taste its experiential flavor. Most psychologically balanced individuals naturally share, to some degree, in the happiness of their mates. Bliss and delight can effortlessly emerge within us as we feel the joy of our partner's ecstatic dance, enjoyment of an art performance, relishing of a favorite dish, or serene contemplation of a splendid sunset. And this innate capacity for sympathetic joy in intimate relationships often reaches its peak in deeply emotional shared experiences, sensual exchange, and lovemaking. When we are in love, the embodied joy of our beloved becomes extremely contagious.

Jealousy in Monogamous Relationships

But what if our partner's sensuous or emotional joy were to arise in relation not to us but to someone else? For the vast majority of people, the immediate reaction would likely be not one of expansive openness and love, but rather of contracting fear, anger, and perhaps even violent rage. The change of a single variable has rapidly turned the selfless contentment of sympathetic joy into the “green-eyed monster” of jealousy, as Shakespeare called this compulsive emotion.

Perhaps due to its prevalence, jealousy is widely accepted as “normal” in most cultures, and many of its violent consequences have often been regarded as understandable, morally justified, and even legally permissible. (It is worth remembering that as late as the 1970s the law of states such as Texas, Utah, and New Mexico considered “reasonable” the homicide of one's adulterous partner if it happened at the scene of discovery!). Though there are circumstances in which the mindful expression of rightful anger (not violence) may be a temporary appropriate response—for example, in the case of the adulterous breaking of monogamous vows—jealousy frequently makes its appearance in interpersonal situations

where no betrayal has taken place or when we rationally know that no real threat actually exists (for example, watching our partner's sensuous dance with an attractive person at a party). In general, the awakening of sympathetic joy in observing the happiness of one's mate in relationship with perceived "rivals" is an extremely rare pearl to find. In the context of romantic relationships, jealousy functions as a hindrance to sympathetic joy.

What are the roots of this widespread difficulty in experiencing sympathetic joy in the arenas of sexuality and sensuous experience? What is ultimately lurking behind such an apparently defiled behavior as jealousy? Can jealousy be transformed through a fuller embodiment of sympathetic joy in our intimate relationships? What emotional response can take the place of jealousy? And what are the implications of transforming jealousy for our spiritually informed relationship choices? To begin exploring these questions, we need to turn to the discoveries of modern evolutionary psychology.

Evolutionary Map of Jealousy

The evolutionary origins and function of jealousy have been clearly mapped by contemporary evolutionary psychologists, anthropologists, and zoologists. Despite its tragic impact in the modern world (the overwhelming majority of mate battering and spousal murders worldwide is caused by jealous violence), jealousy very likely emerged around 3.5 million years ago in our hominid ancestors as an adaptive response of vital evolutionary value for both genders. Whereas the reproductive payoff of jealousy for males was to secure certainty of paternity and avoid spending resources in support of another male's genetic offspring, for females it evolved as a mechanism for guaranteeing protection and resources for biological children by having a steady partner. In short, jealousy emerged in our ancestral past to protect males from being cuckolded and to protect women from being abandoned. This is why even today men tend to experience more intense feelings of jealousy than women do when they suspect sexual infidelity, while women are more likely than men to feel threatened when their mates become emotionally attached to another female and spend time and money with her. Modern research shows that this "evolutionary logic" in relation to gender-specific jealousy patterns operates widely across disparate cultures and countries, from Sweden to China, from North America and the Netherlands to Japan and Korea.

The problem, of course, is that many instinctive reactions that had evolutionary significance in ancestral times do not make much sense in our modern world. There are today many single mothers, for example, who do not need or want financial—or even emotional—support from their children's fathers, yet still feel jealous when their ex-partners pay attention to other women. And most contemporary men and women suffer from jealousy independent of whether they want children or plan to have them with their partners. As evolutionary psychologist David Buss puts it in his acclaimed book *The Evolution of Desire*, most human mating mechanisms and responses are actually "living fossils" shaped by the genetic pressures of our evolutionary history.

Our Genetic Instincts

Interestingly, the genetic roots of jealousy are precisely the same as those behind the desire for sexual exclusivity (or possessiveness) that we have come to call "monogamy." In contrast to conventional use, however, the term "monogamy" simply means

"one spouse" and does not necessarily entail sexual fidelity. In any event, whereas jealousy is not exclusive to monogamous bonds (swingers and polyamorous people also feel jealous), the origins of jealousy and monogamy are intimately connected in our primeval past. Indeed, evolutionary psychology tells us that jealousy emerged as a hypersensitive defense mechanism against the genetically disastrous possibility of having one's partner stray from monogamy. In the ancestral savannah, it was as imperative for females to secure a stable partner who would provide food and protect their children from predators as it was for males to make sure they were not investing their time and energy in someone else's progeny. Put simply, from an evolutionary standpoint the main purpose of both monogamy and jealousy is to provide for the dissemination of one's DNA.

Transforming Jealousy Into Sympathetic Joy

The discussion of the twin evolutionary origins of jealousy and monogamy raises further questions: Can jealousy be truly transformed? What emotional response can take the place of jealousy in human experience? And how can the transformation of jealousy affect our relationship choices?

To my knowledge, in contrast to most other emotional states, jealousy has no antonym in any human language. This is probably why the Kerista community—a San Francisco-based polygamous group that was disbanded in the early 1990s—coined the term "compersion" to refer to the emotional response opposite to jealousy. The Keristas defined compersion as "the feeling of taking joy in the joy that others you love share among themselves." Since the term emerged in the context of the practice of "polyfidelity" (faithfulness to many), it encompassed sensuous and sexual joy, but compersion was only cultivated when a person had loving bonds with all parties involved. However, the feeling of compersion can also be extended to any situation in which our mate feels emotional/sensuous joy with others in wholesome and constructive ways. In these situations, we can rejoice in our partner's joy even if we do not know the third parties. Experientially, compersion can be felt as a tangible presence in the heart whose awakening may be accompanied by waves of warmth, pleasure, and appreciation at the idea of our partner loving others and being loved by them in nonharmful and mutually beneficial ways. In this light, I suggest that compersion can be seen as a novel extension of sympathetic joy in the realm of intimate relationships, and particularly in interpersonal situations that conventionally evoke feelings of jealousy.

The reader acquainted with *Vajrayana* Buddhism may wonder whether such an extension is novel at all. Has not the transformation of jealousy into sympathetic joy been described in the tantric literature? Well, yes and no. In *Vajrayana* Buddhism, jealousy is considered an imperfection (*klesha*) associated with attachment and self-centeredness that is transmuted into sympathetic joy, equanimity, and wisdom by the power of the Lord of Karma, *Amoghasiddhi*, one of the Five *Dhyani* Buddhas (Buddhas we visualize in meditation). From the green body of *Amoghasiddhi* emanates his consort, the goddess Green Tara, who is said to also have the power of turning jealousy into the ability to dwell in the happiness of others.

At first sight, it may look as if the green gods and goddesses of the Buddhist pantheon have defeated the green-eyed monster of jealousy. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent

that this perception needs correction. The problem is that the Buddhist terms translated as “jealousy”—such as *issa* (Pali); *phrag dog* (Tibetan); or *irshya* (Sanskrit)—are more accurately read as “envy.” In the various Buddhist descriptions of “jealousy” we generally find illustrations of bitterness and resentment at the happiness, talents, or good fortune of others, but very rarely, if ever, of contracting fear and anger in response to a mate’s sexual or emotional connection to others. In the *Abhidhamma*, for example, jealousy (*issa*) is considered an immoral mental state characterized by feelings of ill will at the success and prosperity of others. The description of the “jealous gods” realm (*asura-loka*) also supports this assertion. Though commonly called “jealous,” the *asuras* are said to be envious of the gods of the heaven realm (*devas*), and possessed by feelings of ambition, hatred, and paranoia.

Discussing the *samsaric* mandala, Chögyam Trungpa writes in *Orderly Chaos*, “It is not exactly jealousy; we do not seem to

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have the proper term in the English language. It is a paranoid attitude of comparison rather than purely jealousy . . . a sense of competition.” As should be obvious, all of these descriptions refer to “envy”—defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “to feel displeasure and ill-will at the superiority of (another person) in happiness, success, reputation, or the possession of anything desirable”—and not to jealousy, which is a response to the real or imagined threat of losing one’s partner or valued relationship to a third party. Since Buddhist teachings about jealousy were originally aimed at monks who were not supposed to develop emotional attachments (even those who engaged in tantric sexual acts), the lack of systematic reflection in Buddhism upon romantic jealousy should not come as a surprise.

Let us explore now the implications of transforming jealousy in our intimate relationships. I suggest that the transformation of jealousy through the cultivation of sympathetic joy bolsters the awakening of the enlightened heart. As jealousy dissolves, universal compassion and unconditional love become more easily available to the individual. Human compassion is universal in its embrace of all sentient beings without qualifications. Human love is also all-inclusive and unconditional—a love that is both free from the tendency to possess and that does not expect anything in return. Although to love without conditions is generally easier in the case of brotherly and spiritual love, I suggest that as we heal the historical split between spiritual love (*agape*) and sensuous love (*eros*), the extension of sympathetic joy to more embodied forms of love becomes a natural development. And when embodied love is emancipated from possessiveness, a richer range of spiritually legitimate relationship options organically emerges. As people become more whole and are freed from certain basic fears (e.g. of abandonment, unworthiness, or engulfment), new possibilities for the expression of embodied love open up, which may feel natural, safe, and wholesome, rather than undesirable, threatening, or even morally questionable. For

example, once jealousy turns into sympathetic joy, and sensuous and spiritual love are integrated, a couple may feel drawn to extend their love to other individuals beyond the structure of the pair bond. In short, once jealousy loosens its grip on the contemporary self, human love can attain a wider dimension of embodiment in our lives that may naturally lead to the mindful cultivation of more inclusive intimate connections.

Social Monogamy as a Mask for Biological Polyamory

Even if mindful and open, the inclusion of other loving connections in the context of a partnership can elicit the two classic objections to nonmonogamy (or polyamory): First, it does not work in practice; and second, it leads to the destruction of relationships. (I am leaving aside here the deeply engrained moral opposition to the very idea of polyamory associated with the legacy of Christianity in the West.) As for the first objection, though polygyny (“many wives”) is still culturally prevalent on the globe—out of 853 known human cultures, 84 percent permit

polygyny—it seems undeniable that with a few exceptions, modern attempts at more gender-egalitarian and open relationships have not been very successful. Nevertheless, the same could be said about monogamy. After all, the history of monogamy is the history of adultery. As H. H. Munro wrote, monogamy is “the Western custom of one wife and hardly any mistresses.” Summing up the available evidence, David Buss estimates that “approximately 20 to 40 percent of American women and 30 to 50 percent of American men have at least one affair over the course of their marriage,” and recent surveys suggest that the chance of either member of a modern couple committing infidelity at some point in their marriage may be as high as 76 percent—with these numbers increasing every year. Though most people in our culture consider themselves—and are believed to be—monogamous, anonymous surveys reveal that many are so socially, but not biologically. In other words, social monogamy frequently masks biological polyamory in an increasingly significant number of couples. In her book *Anatomy of Love*, prominent anthropologist Helen Fisher suggests that the human desire for clandestine extramarital sex is genetically grounded in the evolutionary advantages that having other mates provided for both genders in ancestral times: extra opportunities to spread DNA for males, and extra protection and resources, plus the acquisition of potentially better sperm for females. It may also be important to note that the prevalent relationship paradigm in the modern West is no longer lifelong monogamy (“till death do us part”), but serial monogamy (many partners sequentially), often punctuated with adultery. Serial monogamy, plus clandestine adultery, is in many respects not too different from polyamory, except perhaps in that the latter is more honest, ethical, and arguably less harmful. In this context, the mindful exploration of polyamory may help in alleviating the suffering caused by the staggering number of clandestine affairs in our modern culture. Furthermore, to disregard a potentially emancipatory cultural development because its early

manifestations did not succeed may be unwise. Looking back at the history of emancipatory movements in the West—from feminism to the abolition of slavery to the gaining of civil rights by African Americans—we can see that the first waves of the Promethean impulse were frequently burdened with problems and distortions, which only later could be recognized and resolved. This is not the place to review this historical evidence, but to dismiss polyamory because of its previous failures may be equivalent to having written off feminism on the grounds that its first waves failed to reclaim genuine feminine values or free women from patriarchy (e.g. turning women into masculinized “superwomen” capable of succeeding in a patriarchal world).

Polyamory as a Path Toward Emotional and Spiritual Depth

But wait a moment. Dyadic relationships are already challenging enough. Why complicate them further by adding extra parties to the equation? From a spiritual standpoint, an intimate relationship can be viewed as a structure through which human beings can learn to express and receive love in many forms. Although I would hesitate to declare polyamory more spiritual or evolved than monogamy, it is clear that if a person has not mastered the

Gaining awareness about the ancestral—and mostly obsolete—nature of the evolutionary impulses that direct our sexual/emotional responses and relationship choices may empower us to consciously co-create a future in which expanded forms of spiritual freedom may have a greater chance to bloom.

lessons and challenges of the dyadic structure he or she may not be ready to take on the challenges of more complex forms of relationships. Therefore, the objection of impracticability may be valid in many cases. The second common objection to polyamory is that it results in the dissolution of pair bonds. The rationale is that the intimate contact with others will increase the chances that one member of the couple will abandon the other and run off with a more appealing mate. This concern is understandable, but the fact is that people are having affairs, falling in love, and leaving their partners all the time in the context of monogamous vows. As we have seen, adultery goes hand in hand with monogamy, and lifelong monogamy has been mostly replaced with serial monogamy (or sequential polyamory) in our culture. Parenthetically, vows of lifelong monogamy create often unrealistic expectations that add suffering to the pain involved in the termination of any relationship—and one could also raise questions about the wholesomeness of the psychological needs for certainty and security that such vows normally meet. In any event, although it may sound counterintuitive at first, the threat of abandonment may be actually reduced in polyamory, since the loving bond that our partner may develop with another person does not necessarily mean that he or she must choose between them or us (or lie to us).

More positively, the new qualities and passions that novel intimate connections can awaken within a person can also bring a renewed sense of creative dynamism to the sexual/emotional life of the couple, whose frequent stagnation after three or four years (seven in some cases) is the chief cause of clandestine affairs and separation. As recent surveys show, the number of couples who successfully navigate the so-called four—and seven—year itches is decreasing every year. Mindful polyamory (i.e., practiced with

the full knowledge and approval of all concerned) may also offer an alternative to the usually unfulfilling nature of currently prevalent serial monogamy in which people change partners every few years, never benefiting from the emotional and spiritual depth that only an enduring connection with another human being provides. In a context of psychospiritual growth, such exploration can create unique opportunities for the development of emotional maturity, the transmutation of jealousy into sympathetic joy, the emancipation of embodied love from exclusivity and possessiveness, and the integration of sensuous and spiritual love. As Christian mystic Richard of St. Victor maintains, mature love between lover and beloved naturally reaches beyond itself toward a third reality, and this opening, I suggest, might in some cases be crucial both to overcome codependent tendencies and to foster the health, creative vitality, and perhaps even longevity of intimate relationships. I should stress that my intent is not to argue for the superiority of any relationship style over others—a discussion I find both pointless and misleading. Human beings are endowed with widely diverse biological, psychological, and spiritual dispositions that predispose them toward different rela-

tionship styles: celibacy, monogamy, serial monogamy, or polyamory. In other words, many equally valid psychospiritual trajectories may call individuals to engage in one or another relationship style either for life or at specific junctures in their paths. Whereas the psychospiritual foundation for this diversity of mating responses cannot be empirically established, recent discoveries in neuroscience support the idea of a genetic base. When scientists inserted a piece of DNA from a monogamous species of mice (prairie voles) into males from a different—and highly promiscuous—mice species, the latter turned fervently monogamous. What is more striking is that some people carry an extra bit of DNA in a gene responsible for the distribution of vasopressin receptors in the brain (a hormone associated with attachment bonds), while others do not, and that piece of DNA is very similar to the one found in the monogamous prairie voles. Although the implications of this finding for our understanding of human mating await further clarification, it strongly suggests that a diversity of relationship styles—both monogamous and polyamorous—may be genetically imprinted in humans.

Religious Decree on Sexual Behavior

I address the objections to polyamory because lifelong or serial monogamy (together with celibacy) are still widely considered the only or most “spiritually correct” relationship styles in the modern West. In addition to the traditional Christian prescription of lifelong monogamy, many influential contemporary Buddhist teachers in the West make similar recommendations. Consider, for example, Thich Nhat Hanh’s reading of the Buddhist precept of “refraining from sexual misconduct.” For the monks, this precept originally meant to avoid engaging in any sexual act whatsoever, and for lay people it was to not engage in a list of “inappropriate” sexual behaviors having to do with specific body

parts, times, and places. In his book *For a Future to Be Possible*, Thich Nhat Hanh explains that the monks of his order follow the traditional celibate vow in order to use sexual energy as a catalyst for spiritual breakthrough. For lay practitioners, however, Thich Nhat Hanh reads the precept to mean avoiding all sexual contact unless it takes place in the context of a “long-term commitment between two people,” because there is an incompatibility between love and casual sex (monogamous marriage is a common practice for lay people in his order). In this reading, Thich Nhat Hanh reinterprets the Buddhist precept as a prescription for long-term monogamy, excluding the possibility of not only wholesome polyamorous relations, but also spiritually edifying intimate encounters. (It is important to note, however, that “long-term commitment” is not equivalent to “monogamy,” since it is perfectly feasible to hold a long-term commitment with more than one intimate partner.) In *The Art of Happiness*, the Dalai Lama also assumes a monogamous structure as the container for appropriate sex in intimate relationships. Since reproduction is the biological purpose of sexual relations, he tells us, long-term commitment and sexual exclusivity are desirable for the wholeness of love relationships.

Despite the great respect I feel for these and other Buddhist teachers who speak in similar fashion, I must confess my perplexity. These assessments of appropriate sexual expression, which have become influential guidelines for many contemporary Western Buddhists, are often offered by celibate individuals whose sexual experience is likely to be limited, if not nonexistent. If there is anything we have learned from developmental psychology, it is that an individual needs to perform a number of “developmental tasks” to gain competence (and wisdom) in various arenas: cognitive, emotional, sexual, and so forth. Even when offered with the best of intentions, advice offered about aspects of life in which one has not achieved developmental competence through direct experience may be both questionable and misleading. When this advice is given by figures as culturally venerated as spiritual authorities, the situation can become even more problematic. What is more, in the context of spiritual praxis, these assertions can arguably be seen as incongruent with the emphasis on direct knowledge characteristic of Buddhism. It may be worth remembering that the Buddha himself encouraged polyamory over monogamy in certain situations. In the Jataka 200 (stories of Buddha’s former births), a Brahmin asks the Buddha for advice regarding four suitors who are courting his four daughters. The Brahmin says, “One was fine and handsome, one was old and well advanced in years, the third a man of family [noble birth], and the fourth was good.” “Even though there be beauty and the like qualities,” the Buddha answered, “a man is to be despised if he fails in virtue. Therefore the former is not the measure of a man; those that I like are the virtuous.” After hearing this, the Brahmin gave all his daughters to the virtuous suitor.

As the Buddha’s advice illustrates, several forms of relationship may be spiritually wholesome (in the Buddhist sense of leading to liberation) according to various human dispositions and contextual situations. Historically, Buddhism hardly ever considered one relationship style intrinsically more wholesome than others for lay people and tended to support different relationship styles depending on cultural and karmic factors. From the Buddhist perspective of skillful means (*upaya*) and of the soteriological

nature of Buddhist ethics, it also follows that the key factor in evaluating the appropriateness of any intimate connection may not be its form but rather its power to eradicate the suffering of self and others. There is much to learn today, I believe, from the nondogmatic and pragmatic approach of historical Buddhism to intimate relationships—an approach that was not attached to any specific relationship structure but was essentially guided by a radical emphasis on liberation.

Beyond Monogamy and Polyamory

It is my hope that this essay opens avenues for dialogue and inquiry in spiritual circles about the transformation of intimate relationships. It is also my hope that it contributes to the extension of spiritual virtues, such as sympathetic joy, to all areas of life and in particular to those which, due to historical, cultural, and perhaps evolutionary reasons, have been traditionally excluded or overlooked-areas such as sexuality and romantic love.

The culturally prevalent belief—supported by many contemporary spiritual teachers—that the only spiritually correct sexual options are either celibacy or monogamy is a myth that may be causing unnecessary suffering and that needs, therefore, to be laid to rest. It may be perfectly plausible to hold simultaneously more than one loving or sexual bond in a context of mindfulness, ethical integrity, and spiritual growth, for example, while working toward the transformation of jealousy into sympathetic joy and the integration of sensuous and spiritual love. I should add right away that, ultimately, I believe that the greatest expression of spiritual freedom in intimate relationships does not lie in strictly sticking to any particular relationship style—whether monogamous or polyamorous—but rather in a radical openness to the dynamic unfolding of life that eludes any fixed or predetermined structure of relationships. It should be obvious, for example, that one can follow a specific relationship style for the “right” (e.g. life-enhancing) or “wrong” (e.g., fear-based) reasons; that all relationship styles can become equally limiting spiritual ideologies; and that different internal and external conditions may rightfully call us to engage in different relationship styles at various junctures of our lives. It is in this open space catalyzed by the movement beyond monogamy and polyamory, I believe, that an existential stance deeply attuned to the standpoint of Spirit can truly emerge.

Nevertheless, gaining awareness about the ancestral—and mostly obsolete—nature of the evolutionary impulses that direct our sexual/emotional responses and relationship choices may empower us to consciously co-create a future in which expanded forms of spiritual freedom may have a greater chance to bloom. Who knows, perhaps as we extend spiritual practice to intimate relationships, new petals of liberation will blossom that may not only emancipate our minds, hearts, and consciousness, but also our bodies and instinctive world. Can we envision an “integral bodhisattva vow” in which the conscious mind renounces full liberation until the body and the primary world can be free as well? ■

Jorge N. Ferrer, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of East-West Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco. He is the author of *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality* (SUNY Press, 2002) and co-editor of *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* (SUNY Press, forthcoming).

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2007 GBF Annual Fall Retreat Dates Set

GBF will have its annual fall retreat during the weekend of October 12th-14th. We will return to the beautiful Vajrapani Institute in Boulder Creek, California. The retreat will start Friday evening and will conclude after lunch on Sunday. Watch for registration information in a future issue of the newsletter.

GBF Prison Outreach

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship will send a free copy of the book *Queer Dharma Volume 2* to prisoners interested in further Buddhist study. In this book gay men write openly and honestly about how they have integrated their sexuality and spirituality via Buddhist practice. Please send a letter to the GBF requesting a copy of the book. Allow 1-2 months for the book to arrive.

The following organizations send out newsletters to prisoners on request:

San Francisco Zen Center (SFZC)

Prison Outreach Program

300 Page St. San Francisco, CA 94102

SFZC offers free Buddhist literature and finds pen-pals for inmates interested in regular correspondence about Buddhist practice.

Prison Dharma Network (PDN)

PO Box 4623

Boulder, CO 80306

Prison Dharma is their newsletter and is available to prisoners free of charge. PDN is a nonsectarian, contemplative support organization for prisoners and prison dharma volunteers.

Kindness Foundation

PO Box 61619

Durham, NC 27715

The Human Kindness Foundation's free newsletter, *A Little Good News*, is sent three times each year.

Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) Prison Project

PO Box 3470

Berkeley, CA 94701

The BPF will send quarterly journal *Turning Wheel* for \$10/year and free dharma books to prisoners. They have a dharma Pen-pals program.

Your Thrift Store Donations Earn Money for GBF

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 \$800 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. Information: (415) 861-4910.

Calendar

Sunday Sittings

10:30 am to 12 noon

Every Sunday followed by a talk or discussion, at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett Street (near 21st St between Mission and Valencia).

MUNI: 14 Mission or 49 Van Ness-Mission, alight at 21st St, walk 1/2 block.

BART: 24th and Mission, walk 3 1/2 blocks. **PARKING:** on street (meters free on Sundays) or in adjacent New Mission Bartlett Garage. The Center is handicapped accessible.

August 5 Wes Nisker

Wes Nisker, the co-founder and editor of the international Buddhist journal *Inquiring Minds*, has practiced vipassana meditation for 30 years. He is the author of *Buddha's Nature: Evolution As a Guide to Enlightenment and Crazy Wisdom: A Romp Through the Philosophies of East and West*. In addition to leading a regular sitting group in Berkeley, he teaches classes in meditation and philosophy at Spirit Rock and at other locations around the country.

August 12 Poetry Day

Back by popular demand, Poetry Day is an invitation to members to bring a reading from a favorite poem or prose selection that captures something you want to share with the men of the GBF.

August 19 Dharma Duo

GBF members Peter Dell and Mark McClelland will speak.

August 26 Ray Dyer

Long-time GBF member Ray Dyer has been a professional body-worker and caregiver for over 20 years, and has led many mindful touch workshops during that time. He pioneered using massage to care for men with HIV, and volunteered on the AIDS ward at SF General every week for seven years. He will lead us in an experiential, diad-structured, very safe and supportive process exploring touch as a foundation for mindfulness and community. This will be an especially gracious space for anyone who has any longstanding issues about touch to ease towards healing.

September 2 Discussion

September 9 Eve Decker

Eve Decker began Vipassana meditation practice in 1990. She has recorded and toured since 1993 with the original folk trio Rebecca Riots (www.rebeccariots.com). In 2006 Eve released a solo CD based on Buddhist teachings titled "Commentary on Perfections of the Heart" (www.evedecker.com). Since that time she has perfor-

med for numerous occasions at Spirit Rock, Insight Meditation-Center in Redwood City, James Baraz' Berkeley sangha and Joy class, and the Berkeley Women's Sangha, and with Bread and Roses. Eve will be joined by her friend Kent Welsh and brother Ben Decker to share original dharma inspired songs.

September 16 Dharma Duo

GBF members Bill Chiles and Daniel Roskin will speak.

September 23 Eve Siegal

Eve Siegal, M.S., CMT, is a body-energy therapist, co-active life coach, popular presenter, and Tibetan Buddhist practitioner. Since 1989, she has helped a wide variety of people learn how to transform obstacles into radiant aliveness and personal fulfillment.

September 30 Carol Newhouse

Carol Osmer Newhouse has studied Insight Meditation for more than twenty years and has been teaching for ten. Her root teacher is Ruth Denison, who was empowered by the great meditation master U Ba Khin of Burma. She has also studied with Dr. Rina Sircar at CIIS and Dr. Thynn Thynn in Daily Life Practice. She is the founding teacher of the Lesbian Buddhist Sangha in Berkeley.

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GBF Yahoo Discussion Group

There is now a GBF discussion group for the general membership (and others) on Yahoo. Join the discussion at:
www.groups.yahoo.com/group/gaybuddhistfellowship

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

GBF NEWSLETTER
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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, and live believing in the equality of all that lives.

—GBF dedication of merit