



GAY BUDDHIST Fellowship

SPRING 2019 NEWSLETTER

The gay Buddhist
fellowship supports
Buddhist practice in the
gay men's community.
It is a forum that
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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.

Awakening Joy

By James Baraz

James Baraz has been a meditation teacher since 1978. He is the creator and teacher of the Awakening Joy course since 2003. He leads retreats, workshops and classes in the U.S. and abroad, is Co-founding Teacher of Spirit Rock Meditation Center and Co-author of Awakening Joy, the book based on the course with Shoshana Alexander. He has also written Awakening Joy for Kids. For more information about the Awakening Joy course, taught on-line and live in Berkeley, CA, you can go to his website at www.awakeningjoy.info. James is also Guiding Teacher for One Earth Sangha, the website devoted to expressing a Buddhist response to climate change.

I want to say how happy I am to be here with you and sit with you. It's been quite a while since I've been here. I do remember being here before and enjoying it. I was wondering what to talk about. I was just speaking before with a couple of people. With a little bit of encouragement, I think I'm landing on sharing about awakening joy, and about this perspective or approach to practice as really a path of wellbeing and happiness.

I'll share with you a bit how that came about and some of the basic principles of the Awakening Joy course which I teach. Hopefully it'll be a useful perspective to keep within your own Dharma practice. When I first got turned on to the practice in 1974 at Naropa Institute, it was the first year at Naropa. That's where I met Joseph Goldstein. Jack Kornfield was also there that year. They'd both just come back from Asia. It was like a Buddhist summer camp; a spiritual summer camp.

Ram Dass was there. That's what brought me there because *Be Here Now* was a book that changed my life. I asked Ram Dass at the beginning, "What about meditation?" I had been doing TM for a few years before that. He said, "Go check this guy, Goldstein, out." When I first heard the teachings from Joseph it was like coming home—as perhaps everybody here has their own story about, when it clicked and said, "Oh my goodness, I think I found something that really rings true for me."

I had been in a lot of internal suffering, although my life looked okay on the outside. But I didn't like myself very much. I was very insecure and shy and Joseph was saying, "It's possible to not be run by your neurotic thoughts." That had never crossed my mind as a possibility before. I believed him and I said, "I'm going for it." Sometimes if you've had a lot of suffering, you're that much more motivated. I was very motivated and I did a lot of retreats for the next 10 years.

Really in my life outside, I was a school teacher for most of that time, fifth and sixth grade in New York. My life was just kind of supporting me for doing the internal work of going on retreats. I had what is called a long honeymoon period

where I just wanted to tell everybody, you just have to be mindful, you just have to be mindful. So much so that my friends would kind of slink away from me and give me a little bit of space. It took me a while to learn to have a little bit softer sell, but I did.

I was just so grateful for the teachings because they're powerful and transformative. Somewhere along the line I became very serious about my practice. Dead serious--and the emphasis is on the word dead, as can happen. I'll share with you a quote I love that points to the fact that this is not unique to me. This is from Ajahn Sumedho, the most senior Western monk in Theravada Buddhism. He was the major Dharma heir of Ajahn Chah and was Jack's elder brother when Jack first became a monk.

He says, "Sometimes in Buddhism, one gets the impression that you shouldn't enjoy beauty. If you see a beautiful flower, you should contemplate its decay or if you see a beautiful person, you should contemplate them as a rotting corpse."

This has a certain value on one level, but it's not a fixed position to take. It's not that we should just feel compelled to reject beauty and dwell on its impermanence and on how it changes to being not so beautiful and then downright repulsive. That's a good reflection on *Anicca*, *Dukha*, *Anatta*, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and the selfless nature of reality.

But it can leave the impression that beauty is only to be reflected on in terms of these three characteristics rather than in terms of the experience of beauty. People who can't see the beauty of the good or the true are really bitter and mean. They live in an ugly realm where there is no rejoicing in beauty and goodness and truth. But once you have true insight, then you find you enjoy and delight in the beauty and the goodness of things because truth, beauty and goodness delight us. In them we find joy.

When there's a wholesome state that is here, maintain and increase that wholesome state.

I was in this space where I lost my joy for quite some time, even though I was a teacher of meditation. It was subtle, but it was there. Somehow it wasn't okay for me to have my natural celebration and gratitude for life which is just a part of my temperament. That was why I was so drawn to the book *Be Here Now*. Ram Dass and Neem Karoli Baba, who was a major awakening of my heart, is Ram Dass' Guru—in *Be Here Now*, Maharaj-ji as he's called. When I lost my joy somehow I felt it wasn't okay to let my natural love of life be expressed.

There are reasons for that kind of distortion. I'll share with you a couple of teachings where one could see how easy it is to get distorted in this way. One is the concept of *Samvega*. This is a very valued understanding. This is the definition of *Samvega*, from Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Samvega*, "the oppressive sense of shock, dismay and alienation that comes from realizing the futility and meaninglessness of life as it's normally lived. A chasten-

ing sense of one's own complacency and foolishness and having let oneself live so blindly and an anxious sense of urgency and trying to find a way out of the meaningless cycle."

Fun, right? You hear that and say, "Oh my goodness, let's get out of here as fast as we can." This is a very important and rich understanding that one can come to in practice, but it can easily be misunderstood. The key words in that definition come with realizing the futility and meaninglessness of life as it's normally lived. As it's normally lived, we get all kinds of messages about what real happiness is.

Here's one message, and this is an ad that somebody gave me many years ago just to see what we're up against. This is called the gold shivers [holding up an advertisement photo]. Beautiful woman draped in gold, very happy. Here's the ad. "The gold shiver is that electric excitement, that thrilling warmth, every new piece of gold jewelry ignites it once again. Nothing makes you feel as good as gold. What is the real substance of a new piece of gold jewelry in motion, pure and powerful from the first small shiver of excitement when a shimmering necklace of gold beads catches a woman's eye to the great shivers of delight when the coveted object actually becomes hers. Among life's pleasures, count this deeply felt euphoria as unique. The only way to get the gold shivers is by getting the gold." It's brilliant, isn't it?

You might not even care for jewelry, but you see that and say, "I'd like some of that too." Or you might say, "I'm a Bay Area conscious critical thinker. You can't put that over me." The thing is, it works. It works. That's why Coca Cola will pay millions of dollars for 30 seconds of your attention, so you can see happiness in a bottle. It's just getting that in your brain. Oh, happiness, Coke. All kinds of things get in there from supermodels who never think that they're thin enough, who starve themselves with being anorexic or bulimic, to men who get the message that they're supposed to be tough and strong or successful and rich, even though there's a part of us that says, "That's just *Mad Men*." It gets in there.

There's a deep kind of conditioning. The Buddha talked about it 2,500 years ago, even before it was brought to a science of how to manipulate the mind. The meaninglessness of life as it's normally lived. Another teaching that I'll share with you again to see how it can get distorted is the concept of *Nibbida*. Again, a very important realization, *Nibbida*. This is how it was traditionally translated in old Victorian English when the Pali Canon was translated into English many years ago. "*Nibbida* is in relationship to this body-mind process called the aggregates, the five aggregates, which is another way of saying body and mind. *Nibbida* is the principle that one should abide in the utter disgust of the aggregates."

Another translation, "One should dwell, engrossed in revulsion towards the aggregates." My God, I'm just trying to not wince when I look in the mirror. That's what it was like for me. They're saying, "you're supposed to cultivate disgust and revulsion for this body and this mind." Gosh, what is that about? But really this

is a very important concept. Words have tremendous power. A more accurate understanding of the word *Nibbida* is disenchantment. One should have disenchantment with regard to this body and this mind. That is, one is not to be so enchanted that you are caught in grasping and thinking, “That’s going to make me happy. Wow, I’ve got to have that.”

When you can experience *Nibbida* you see it’s just a package. It can be a beautiful package as Sumedho talks about, to appreciate the aesthetics of it, but to not be so enchanted that you’re lost. *Nibbida* disenchantment is breaking the spell of that enchantment. I’m sure all of us know when you go beyond the package, particularly around other people or around ourselves, the real beauty lies in who’s in there besides the package. Some people have the Karma of being quite beautiful to look at, which can be heavy Karma in itself. Believe me, I’ve been with many beautiful, attractive people and it’s very heavy Karma, or difficult, challenging.

The Me Too Movement is the perfect example of that. Some people aren’t so caught up in the package, so *Nibbida*. But you hear that and you think, “Oh, I’m supposed to have disgust for this body.” I got very distorted. Conceptually I knew better, but inside, in the deep cellular way, it’s not okay to enjoy life or to appreciate the good or the beautiful. At some point I was fortunate enough actually to be in Lucknow, India, in 1990, and receive teachings from a wonderful teacher named Poonja-ji or Papa-ji. He helped me see through this as well.

There were a few other things that brought me back and woke me up to the fact that it’s okay to love life, and fortunately, instead of turning my back on Buddhism, what I did was take a deeper look and see, “Well, what did the Buddha actually say about happiness and wellbeing?” Sometimes it’s hard to cut through all the talk about *Dukkha*, about suffering, the four noble truths. There’s suffering in life, there is a cause of suffering, there is an end to suffering and there’s a path leading to the end to suffering. That’s a lot of suffering or focus on suffering anyway. You can forget that this is about happiness.

The Buddha was called the happy one, and the Dalai Lama who’s such a beautiful embodiment of this, he wrote a book probably many of you are familiar with called *The Art of Happiness*. He also wrote a book with Desmond Tutu called *The Book of Joy*. But *The Art of Happiness* starts out with this line, “The purpose of life is to be happy.” The purpose of life is to be happy. I find that’s such a powerful line, the purpose of life is to be happy. Just notice how that lands if you really take it in. Because when we can find true happiness, our own true wellbeing, which is different from the gold shivers, then all of the beautiful qualities that we’ve been gifted with in life naturally shine through and we experience it from the inside and every-body gets the goodies on the outside.

I took a look and I said, “Okay, well what did the Buddha actually say about happiness? Where can it be found? How can it be genuinely cultivated?” I looked at the teachings, and there were three particular teachings in the Pali Canon, teachings that have come down, particularly in Theravada Buddhism that are preserved, that struck me in a very profound way. One teaching is pointing to where real happiness lies and it’s on wise effort. Technically in the definition, there are four components of wise effort. The second teaching has to do with what are called unwholesome states or *akusala*, states of suffering, and *kusala*, states of happiness, of wellbeing, wholesome states.

The two, the unwholesome, *akusala* states like greed, hatred, delusion, envy, rage, confusion, all of those states that probably you’re somewhat familiar with. He says, “Guard against those states arising. If you can, don’t put yourself in temptation’s or harm’s way. When they do arise, which is naturally just part of being human, learn how to overcome them so they don’t overwhelm you.” Then the wholesome states, states like love, kindness, wisdom, compassion, generosity, patience, equanimity, peace he says, “Cultivate those states.”

Those are really important, valuable states that create the groundwork, the ground for awakening to arise. When there’s a wholesome state that is here, maintain and increase that wholesome state. He says that is a good thing. Now you might have the thought, “Well, hold on a moment. Doesn’t that sound like attachment?” Have you had that thought? Let me track you. Here’s the tricky part. When you have a wholesome state, if you think that increasing the wholesome state can happen by holding onto it, you’re gravely mistaken, because as soon as you get attached to that wholesome state, you want more. How do you keep it here? It’s just turned into an unwholesome state in your mind because unwholesome states are states of contraction and wholesome states are states of expansion.

Mindfulness, of all the mental factors—there are 52 mental factors in Buddhist psychology—mindfulness has the unique property of weakening the unwholesome states and strengthening the wholesome states.

This is the first thing, to see where real happiness lies. I’ll just invite you for a moment to try this. Go inside and think of what brings you joy. It could be anything, the simplest little thing or the big things. What brings you joy and how does it feel when you’re experiencing it, right now as you recall? How does it feel inside? Even just to remember it?

The Buddha says to cultivate these states—loving kindness, mindfulness, compassion practices, joy, equanimity—to cultivate them, and when they’re here, to maintain and increase them. Now, how do we maintain and increase them without getting attached?

Very simply, it's to put your attention on actually experiencing wholesome states when they occur. Rather than just knowing, [I am] feeling pretty good right now, going one step further and using mindfulness and letting yourself really get in touch with it and know, "Oh, this is what it feels like to feel good." Just that simple little turning your awareness to that wholesome state deepens it because that's one of the properties of mindfulness. That's why mindfulness, of all the mental factors—there are 52 mental factors in Buddhist psychology—mindfulness has the unique property of weakening the unwholesome states and strengthening the wholesome states.

Particularly when there's a wholesome state and you bring your attention to it, it amplifies it, it deepens it and neuroscientifically, and there is a reason why it is deepening your neural pathways. The Buddha talks about this in the second teaching that I found. The second teaching is about this. He said there's a gladness that's connected with the wholesome state.

What I'm calling joy is really wellbeing, from delight and exuberance to contentment to peace to equanimity.

He gives the example in this one discourse, where he says in the middle of a generous act that you think to yourself, "I'm being generous now." He says, "This is a good thing." Now he's not saying, "Check it out. Everybody see what a generous guy I am." He's saying, "Notice how good it feels for generosity to move through me." Buddha says in this discourse, "That gladness connected with the wholesome state, I call an equipment of mind to overcome all ill will and hostility."

So, for instance, you're having a bum day and then all of a sudden you see kids playing or somebody says, "Hi, oh, it's so good to see you," in a moment you feel gladness and it dissipates everything else going on before that. He also says that in gladness, one gains inspiration in the meaning, inspiration in the Dharma, in the truth, one gladdens the heart. So he says, "Pay attention to the wholesome state when it arises." In recent years neuroscience has corroborated all of these teachings. When you pay attention to a wholesome state, you deepen it. My good friend Rick Hanson has written a few books, *Hardwiring Happiness*, *Buddha's Brain*, about the neuroscience behind the Buddhist teachings. He gives a formula. You can take this with you. He says, "When you're feeling a wholesome state, pay attention to it for 15 seconds." You don't have to make a big show of it. Kind of just going, "So this is what it feels like. Feeling pretty good." Then this is his recommendation, "If you do that six times in a day... that's 90 seconds of wellbeing if you do that."

"If you do that six times in a day, over the course of a two-week period, you will notice a shift in your general demeanor." One because you're deepening your neural pathways and also because you're starting to be on the

lookout for what's good, which takes some practice because generally, we are more geared up, wired up to look for what's wrong.

We have this almond shape cluster of neurons in our brain called the amygdala, that scans the horizon for what's wrong and it's particularly activated under stress. We tend to see the negative. It takes practice to look for the positive. Some people are naturally that way, but for many of us, we tend more to be scanning for the dangers. This is sometimes known as a confirmation bias, where you will find what you look for. If you're looking for how everybody is going to disappoint you, you will get a lot of evidence to corroborate that, but your brain will miss all the times that that's not so.

If you look for the goodness in people, you will not only help bring it out, which has been shown to be so when you're around somebody who sees your goodness, you feel it just calls it out of you. But the more you look for it, the more you will find it because your brain has this confirmation bias to confirm what your hypothesis is. Oh, there's good inside there. If you don't look for that, if you look for how everybody is a jerk then watch out, you'll likely miss all the other times that doesn't ring true. I'm just thinking of this line by Albert Einstein. He says, "Perhaps the most important question a human being can ask is, 'Is the universe friendly or not?'"

Because if we have the confirmation bias that the universe is not friendly, it's dangerous, and of course you've got to be on the lookout. You don't want to be pie in the sky. Yeah, there's danger out there, but if you see underneath it, it's just people that are confused or ignorant, but life wants to support us when we can open to it. It changes our perspective on things. You probably notice how people who tend to help you feel relaxed because they see your goodness and that's what they're creating in that field. Of course, again, you don't want to be naive, but to really go through life that way is much more enriching. Okay, so that is the second principle. First, notice where happiness lies. Second, be aware of the gladness when you're feeling that moment of uplift connected with the wholesome.

As I say in the Joy course, many people have told me over time, the one thing that they remember from doing it are the words, "Don't miss it." Don't miss it. Don't go through life with blinders on. There is a famous expression, "Trust in Allah and tie your camel to the post." You don't want to be really naive, but don't miss all the good in life. As the Buddha suggests, "Maintain and increase those wholesome states because they help you have a container for all the hard stuff."

Then the third principle that the Buddha says that's confirmed in neuroscience, is that "Whatever one frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of their mind." Can you argue with that? It's all about habits of mind. And so if your confirmation bias is to see what's wrong, that will be the inclination of your mind. In modern neuroscience, there's an axiom that expresses this very succinctly: "neurons that fire together, wire together." It's all about practicing wiring the goodness and noticing what's good while we are tuning

in to taking care of what needs to be taken care of. So those are the three principles. What I then did, once I saw those, was to pick out ten wholesome states from the teachings that he suggested to cultivate and when you're cultivating them, when you're experiencing them, don't miss it. Over the course of time as you do that, you naturally start to incline your mind towards the good in life.

There are ten wholesome states that I saw can really be cultivated easily. The first is the intention to be happy. Intending is the basis of all Karma as the Buddha said. Intending, I tell you, is Karma through body, speech and mind and it's the second link in the eightfold path. Intention to be happy is one that doesn't come quite as naturally to many people. We all want to be happy. If you are somebody who says, "Well, I like being grumpy," that's just your way of being happy. Whatever turns you on, but if you look, you'll see that everything that you do comes from a place inside that says, "This will make me feel a little bit better," or "This, hopefully will make me feel not as bad." Even if it's misguided, there's a place that is coming from you which is the intention for greater wellbeing. Often, it's misguided, but to get in touch with where real happiness lies and to activate that real wholesome place that's rooting for your happiness—that's the key.

If you're just saying, "Oh, I'm in a feel good program," I say, "No, this is a feel everything program."

We all want to be happy, but often, we postpone it or think in less direct terms than "I want to be happy. Oh, when I find the right partner, then I'll be happy. When I become successful in whatever it is or make enough money, then I'll be happy. When I retire, then I'll be happy." But really, I want to be doing what I can for wellbeing right in this moment. That takes a little bit of practice. What I'm calling joy is really wellbeing. There's a whole flavor spectrum of wellbeing from delight and exuberance to contentment to peace to equanimity. It's not supposed to look any one way. All of these states are the steps of openness, *kusala*, and any flavor of that is fine.

In fact, sometimes when people think, "I'm trying really hard to be joyful," I say, "That's not going to work." Don't try hard to be joyful. Start by noticing when you're not miserable. "Oh, I'm not miserable. Oh, that's okay." The intention, however, to say, "I really want wellbeing," and putting that at the forefront is the key decision from which everything else follows. Then there is mindfulness itself, which as I said, weakens the unwholesome state and increases wholesome states. It's the direct way, as the Buddha said, to overcome sorrow, lamentation and grief, despair, and realize the highest happiness, mindfulness.

The third is gratitude, a very direct way to open the heart. The fourth is learning how to open up to the hard stuff. It's an essential piece. If you're just saying, "Oh, I'm in a feel good program," I say, "No, this is a feel everything program." You've got to learn how to use the sorrows and the sadness as part of your understanding and growing that you can be with everything. This is a basic premise the Buddha spoke of where he said that suffering can lead to faith, can lead to gladness, joy, peace, and enlightenment.

Many people have been motivated by their suffering to look for a deeper meaning in life, which led them on their spiritual path. That's how it works. So to really see suffering, and in a different context, rather than, "if I were running the universe, I'd do a much better job than this and this is a terrible mistake," to, "okay, this is what I've been given. How can I use it to deepen my heart and my compassion and open up to the hard stuff?" That's the fourth step.

Fifth is integrity—what the Buddha called the bliss of blamelessness, *sila*, the foundation for wellbeing. The sixth is the joy of letting go on many, many levels. Whether it's about stuff, or about busyness in your life, or about the ideas that we have that limit us, or the control that we never had in the first place, letting go is the key, he said, to true freedom. The seventh is learning to love ourselves, which is so crucial. It is a key point in this whole process because until we do, we're looking for confirmation from everyone outside. As we see all the goodness inside, it shines through. The eighth is our connection with others, love and kindness, *metta*, forgiveness, playfulness, *mudita*, sympathetic joy, that joy of connection. The ninth is compassion, compassionate action to express our caring in the world. The 10th I called the joy of simply being, where you're not trying to cultivate anything. It's already here, just resting in the moment.

That's what the Buddha talked about, cultivating all of those beautiful states, so that you can access the Buddha inside that's in there all along. That's why when you take refuge in the Buddha, it's not just in that inspiring being that lived so many years ago, but the Buddha right inside of you, here and now. This is what you're bringing out, not just for yourself, but for everyone in your life.

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Sunday Sittings

10:30 am to 12 noon

Every Sunday at 10:30am we meditate together for 30 minutes, followed by a talk or discussion till 12pm. Everyone is then welcome to stay and socialize over refreshments till approximately 12:30pm, after which those who are interested usually go somewhere local for lunch. Our sittings are held at the San Francisco Buddhist Center, 37 Bartlett Street (look for the red door near 21st St between Mission and Valencia Streets).

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.

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

How to Reach Us

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The Gay Buddhist Fellowship is a charitable organization pursuant to Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3) and California Revenue and Taxation Code #23701d.

Sunday Speakers

March 3 Joe Goode:**Start Simple: Buddhism and Art Practice**

Joe Goode is the artistic director of The Joe Goode Performance Group, and a professor in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies at UC Berkeley. He has had a meditation practice since 1979, and has incorporated Buddhist principles and meditation practices into his choreographic works. His work blends theater, dance, and spoken word, to focus on the fallibility and imperfection of being human, believing that the creative impulse is a step toward the alleviation of suffering.

March 10 Eugene Cash

Eugene Cash is the founding teacher of the San Francisco Insight Meditation Community of San Francisco. He teaches at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and leads intensive meditation retreats internationally. His teaching is influenced by both Burmese and Thai streams of the Theravada tradition as well as Zen and Tibetan Buddhist practice. He is also a teacher of the Diamond Approach, a school of spiritual investigation and self-realization developed by A. H. Almaas.

March 17 Open Discussion

March 24 Dale Borglum

Dale Borglum is the founder and Executive Director of The Living/Dying Project. He is a pioneer in the conscious dying movement and has worked directly with thousands of people with life-threatening illness and their families for over 30 years. In 1981, Dale founded the first residential facility for people who wished to die consciously in the United States, The Dying Center. He has taught and lectured extensively on the topics of spiritual support for those with life-threatening illness, caregiving as a spiritual practice, and healing at the edge of illness, of death, of loss, of crisis. Dale has a BS from UC Berkeley and a PhD from Stanford University. He is the co-author of *Journey of Awakening: A Meditator's Guidebook* and has taught meditation for the past 35 years.

March 31 John Martin

John Martin teaches Vipassana (Insight), Metta (Loving Kindness), and LGBTQI themed meditation retreats. He leads an on-going weekly Monday evening meditation group in the Castro, teaches both an Advanced Practitioners Program group and a Dedicated Practitioners Group and is the co-guiding teacher for the LGBTQ+ Sangha at the Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City. John serves on both the Spirit Rock Teachers Council and the Governing Teachers Council. He has had a dedicated practice while being engaged in the working world and emphasizes practice for daily life. He completed the SRMC/IMS/IRC 4-year teacher training in 2016. John served as hospice volunteer for many years, first with Shanti Project and more recently with Zen Hospice Project.

April 7 Open Discussion

April 14 Susan Moon

Susan Moon is a writer, editor, and lay teacher in the Soto Zen tradition. She leads Buddhist retreats and teaches writing workshops in the U.S. and abroad. Her books include *This Is Getting Old: Zen Thoughts on Aging with Humor and Dignity*, *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from 25 Centuries of Awakened Women*, with co-editor Florence Caplow, and most recently, *What Is Zen? Plain Talk for a Beginner's Mind*, with Zoketsu Norman Fischer.

April 21 Eve Decker

Eve Decker has been practicing Insight Meditation since 1991, and has taught groups, daylongs, and short retreats since 2006, particularly at Spirit Rock, the East Bay Meditation Center and elsewhere in the Bay Area. She is a graduate of UC Berkeley and of Spirit Rock's Path of Engagement and Community Dharma Leader training programs, and has been trained in the Hakomi approach to body-based psychotherapy. Eve is also a singer/songwriter who has combined the power of music and dharma practice. Her most recent CDs are "In: Chants of Mindfulness & Compassion," and "Awakening Joy - The Music."

April 28 Charles Halpern

Charles Halpern is a lawyer, activist, author, educator, and meditation practitioner. He also served as the founding dean of CUNY School of Law, and as a faculty member of various prominent law schools across the country. Halpern is considered a pioneer in public interest law, responsible for various entrepreneurial and educational initiatives that contributed to legal, academic, social justice, and contemplative communities. Halpern's book, "Making Waves and Riding the Currents: Activism and the Practice of Wisdom," tells the story of how he brought public interest activism, mindfulness, and meditation into law schools and courthouses across the United States.

May 5 Kevin Griffin

Kevin Griffin is an internationally respected Buddhist teacher and author known for his innovative work connecting dharma and recovery, especially through his 2004 book *One Breath at a Time: Buddhism and the Twelve Steps*. He has been a Buddhist practitioner for over thirty-five years and a teacher for two decades. With teachings firmly based in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, he reaches a broad range of audiences in dharma centers, wellness centers, and secular mindfulness settings.

May 12 Pamela Weiss

Pamela Weiss has practiced in the Zen and Theravada traditions of Buddhism for over 25 years, including several years of Zen monastic training. She completed teacher training with Jack Kornfield through Spirit Rock, leads a Wednesday evening sitting group at SF Insight, and teaches classes, workshops and retreats internationally. Pamela is also an executive coach and the Founder of Appropriate Response, a company dedicated to bringing the principles and practices of Buddhism into the workplace.

May 19 Rev. Keiryu Liên Shutt

Rev. Keiryu Liên Shutt is a Dharma Heir of Zenkei Blanche Hartman in the tradition of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Born into a Buddhist family in Vietnam, she began her meditation practice in the Insight tradition of Spirit Rock. She was a founding member of the Buddhists of Color in 1998. Her Soto Zen training began at Tassajara monastery where she lived from 2002-2005; after which, she practiced monastically in Japan and Vietnam. Drawing from her monastic experiences, she endeavors to share ways in which the deep settledness of traditional practices can be brought into everyday life. Liên's strength as a teacher is in making Zen practice accessible to all.

May 26 Open Discussion

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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, believing in the equality of all that lives.

—GBF dedication of merit

MORE INSPIRATION READ *Awakening Joy in Kids* by James Baraz and Michele Lilyanna EXPLORE awakeningjoy.info for downloads and courses. Create your nourishment list. Instead of just leaving the arising of joy to chance, it's helpful to remember what awakens it in you. To a large degree our experience of joy is supported by how much we actually nourish our spirits. Nourishing our spirits is usually connected with engaging in healthy activities and experiences. The journey of awakening joy begins with setting a clear intention. Although we all want to be happy, most of us don't place an explicit wish for that at the center of our lives. We think if we are successful, rich, or liked by others, happiness will come.