



Insight Meditation Society

Sangha News - November 2011

Busy Life, No-Self



From Bob Agoglia, Executive Director: Earlier this year, IMS co-founder and guiding teacher Joseph Goldstein spent several months in retreat. During that time, a nine-minute-a-day meditation technique came to him that can help deepen our understanding of the Buddha's teachings on *anatta*, the Pali term for the absence of an inherently existing self.

Even in the midst of our busy everyday lives, we can practice freeing our minds from this mistaken notion of a separate sense of self with three short meditations, each about three minutes long.



Joseph's fuller description of the purpose of this practice can be found [here](#) or in our latest issue of [Insight Newsletter](#). Now, Joseph has recorded an introduction to this practice and guides us through the three short meditations - you can listen to his complete offering [here](#). And for those who are already familiar with the background to this practice, a version of just the guided meditation is available [here](#).

Amazing Generosity

As you may know, IMS has been raising funds for a major building project - constructing a new Retreat Center dormitory and renovating the accommodation building known as the 'Catskills.' Our funding goal for this endeavor is \$2,350,000.

On completion of the project, we'll be able to offer accommodation privacy to each and every person attending our retreats. For many, a single room is the perfect space for meditating alone and for reflecting on the teachings. Some also appreciate the fairness of providing the same kind of housing to anyone participating in an IMS course. And for others, private sleeping accommodation is essential for a feeling of safety, and allows ease in taking care of various medical and physical needs.

We're delighted to report that we recently crossed the \$2,000,000 threshold: because of the wonderful generosity of our sangha, we're now almost 90% of the way towards our goal!

This represents a significant milestone - we're confident that the total amount will be raised soon, and that we can break ground, as originally hoped, in September next year. We're therefore moving full steam ahead with all of the planning and preliminary tasks necessary to achieve this. More news about the project is below.

IMS is most fortunate to have your support - thank you! May all share in our many blessings.



Gaston Pond in its fall glory.

Dharma Updates

Honoring an Extraordinary Teacher - Students of beloved dharma elder Ruth Denison gathered this past September for her final IMS teaching, practicing together and celebrating her 89th birthday. Following the retreat, teachers and staff paid tribute to her during a festive lunch.

Several of those present spoke of how Ruth's teaching has touched them, and of her unique gift for communicating the Buddha's teachings through the experience of the body. Ruth addressed the group and spoke movingly about the concept and practice of 'retirement.' The following is an excerpt from her notes:

"If you have the Dhamma, retirement is not relevant - it is a concept. Once the Dhamma operates through you, once your awareness is present, alive, full of love and the energy of the truth, nothing can ever be taken away. There is no identification with OLD. The letting go is natural and calm and bright and right, and nothing can impinge on it - there is no other meaning. But we mark these milestones of our lives with celebration and reminiscences, pulling in the joy and lessons from our long history together, and our happiness at being together, one more time, in this present moment. We can share together our Dhamma Joy, in the midst of what Dante called the 'Divine Comedy.'"

Ruth has taught at IMS ever since our doors first opened in 1976. It was a joy to honor her life-long service to the dharma.



Ruth Denison with Joseph Goldstein.

Another Teacher Farewell - Fred von Allmen, co-founder of the [Meditation Center Beatenberg](#) in Switzerland, also taught his last IMS retreat this past summer. He intends to concentrate his teaching from this point on in Europe. Fred has been associated with us since our very early days, either as a retreatant or as a teacher.



This photo from 1984 shows (L-R) Sharon Salzberg, Fred, and Joseph Goldstein hiking in Switzerland, shortly after Fred had finished sitting a long-term retreat at IMS.

Stay Connected - For many of us with our days full of busyness, the silence and tranquility of IMS's retreat environment can often seem far away. But help is at hand! IMS's online [audio offerings of teacher talks, guided meditations and interviews](#) provide an excellent way to stay connected and support our practice both on and off the cushion - not to mention deepening our understanding of the Buddha's teachings. Tune in to the latest talks covering a wide range of meditation-related topics, from our annual Three-Month course currently underway at the Retreat Center, and from the Forest Refuge.



News Worth Noting

Early Snow - On the last weekend in October, 15-24 inches of wet, clinging snow fell heavily over the Northeast, bringing down many trees and power lines. Fortunately, generators at the Retreat Center and the Forest Refuge immediately swung into action until power was restored 24 hours later.

The generators were able to supply electricity, but a challenge from a different quarter arose: the morning after the storm, town water service failed. Staff responded quickly and effectively to find other sources of water for cooking and for bathrooms, including hauling some from Gaston Pond while negotiating deep snow, fallen branches and downed power lines. Luckily, water service returned after 12 hours.



After the storm, the combination of sunlit fall foliage and snow brought a particular beauty to the IMS grounds.



Picnic tables for snow yogis? This shot gives an idea of how much snow fell in the area!

A Halloween Tradition - While it was snowy outside, inside a long-time Halloween tradition continued: staff placed pumpkins they'd carved especially for the yogis (retreatants) around the Retreat Center meditation hall. Yogis found the hall softly glowing with the candlelight from decorative jack-o'-lanterns.



Project Update - Preparations and planning for our major project to construct a new dormitory and to renovate the Catskills accommodation wing are now in full swing.

The new dormitory will be built first, once construction begins next September. Foundations will be laid and outside walls constructed before the freezing weather arrives. Work will then continue throughout the winter on the interior elements, and the building should be ready for occupancy early in the spring of 2013. At that point, we'll close down the Catskills and renovations will be carried out there over the following four months. The whole project should take about nine months to finish.

Site surveying was completed in October and detailed architectural and engineering plans are now in process.

To prepare the site of the new dormitory, the secondary parking lot near the Annex has been discontinued. To compensate, we extended the main parking area along Pleasant Street.

Once construction and renovations are done, there'll be space for loading and unloading luggage near the dormitories, and the former Annex lot will be transformed into landscaped lawns.

Many of our community have expressed their appreciation that everyone who comes on retreat at IMS will soon be guaranteed a single room. It's an exciting time as we see this vision begin to take form - all thanks to your generosity.



During last spring's Monastic Retreat, Ajahn Sucitto conducted a ceremony of blessing and gratitude for some trees that needed to be removed to make way for the new dormitory. In order to utilize the timber from them in the construction project, they were taken down in September so that the lumber can be milled and dried in time. In this photo Ajahn Sucitto, center, Ajahn Jayanto (L) and Ayya Medhanandi Bhikkhuni (R) began the ceremony with chanting.



Ajahn Sucitto blessing one of the trees.



This view looking toward the Reflection Pond shows the new parking lot extension along Pleasant Street.

Beauty and Contemplation - The circle bed on the front lawn of the Retreat Center had become an overgrown tangle during the last few years. Over the summer it was cleared and re-planted with a variety of small trees

and shrubs, and a beautiful quartz boulder was brought from the Gaston Pond woods. Now the path that encircles the garden offers a more peaceful place for a meditative walk.



Program Highlights

At the **Forest Refuge**, the four-month retreat with revered Burmese meditation master Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw ended last week. It's been an outstanding experience to host Sayadaw, his teaching assistant Venerable U Jagara, along with Venerable U Ghosita, their support staff and all the deeply committed yogis for this rare and very special time.



Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw (center) stands with Venerable U Jagara (L) and Venerable U Ghosita (R). In the front row are some of the wonderful volunteers who supported their stay.

At the **Retreat Center**, Part 1 of the Three-Month course closed two weeks ago. Those yogis who are here for the entire three months were then joined by Part 2 retreatants for the current six-week section.



The Part 1 teaching team (L-R): Carol Wilson, assistant Spring Washam, Guy Armstrong, Andrea Fella, James Baraz and Sally Armstrong.



The Part 2 teachers are (L-R): Greg Scharf, Winnie Nazarko, Myoshin Kelley, Rebecca Bradshaw and Annie Nugent.



Each summer, almost one hundred 18-32 year olds gather for the Investigating Life retreat, receiving and passing on the flame of the dharma.



Bhante Buddharakkhita (R), a member of this year's teaching team for the popular People of Color Retreat, shares a laugh on closing day with some of the course participants.

Space Available - At the **Forest Refuge**, we'll be welcoming Patricia Genoud-Feldman back to teach in January together with Teacher-in-Residence Sky Dawson. You can listen to [Purifying the Mind and Heart](#), a talk by Patricia on recognizing and liberating ourselves from the greed, hatred and delusion that can plague our minds.

Then in February, Susan O'Brien and Rebecca Bradshaw will be teaching for the month. Listen to Susan speaking on [Compassion](#) and to Rebecca's talk on the [Four Noble Truths](#).



At the **Retreat Center**, early 2012 offerings include a weekend led by Mark Coleman and Spring Washam, [Living a Mindful and Compassionate Life](#), January 13-16. Nine CEs are available for Psychologists and Licensed Mental Health Counselors. Listen to a recent talk from Spring Washam, [Freedom Through Letting Go](#).

Next in the calendar is another weekend course, [Living an Awakened Life](#), February 2-5, taught by Sharda Rogell and Lila Kate Wheeler. Listen to one of Sharda's talks, [What Needs To Be Done: Wise Action and Karma](#).

Then, March 9-11, Annie Nugent will lead a weekend retreat on [The Five Spiritual Faculties](#) that will focus on balancing and strengthening the meditative qualities of confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. Listen to Annie's talk, [Trust in the Unfolding Process of the Dharma](#).

For anyone involved in the broad areas of the mind and social sciences, Sharon Salzberg and Guy and Sally Armstrong are offering an [Insight Meditation Retreat for Scientists and Educators](#), March 16-23, with 22 CEs available for Psychologists and Licensed Mental Health Counselors.



Serving at IMS

Staff Position Available - Would you like to join the Retreat Center's friendly Kitchen team? We are currently accepting applications for a [Retreat Center Cook](#).



IMS's fruitful apple trees delivered a bountiful crop this year. These apples await our cooks' creative culinary talents!

Volunteer Opportunities - There is still an opening for a [Working Guest](#) in our Facilities department for the month of December. During the winter, tasks include snow removal and indoor housekeeping activities. Given that December is a holiday month, we can offer some flexibility regarding dates, if needed. If you are interested but can't commit to the whole month, you are welcome to apply as long as you can offer at least two weeks of service.

Month-long positions for Working Guests throughout 2012 have been [posted](#). But please be aware that these spots are filling fast!

Wishing You Well

Until our next issue in early 2012, all of us at IMS wish happiness and peace to you, your families and your communities throughout the coming holiday season.



You can find an [archive of Sangha News](#) and links to its audio interviews on our website.



IMS is a spiritual refuge for all who seek freedom of mind and heart. We offer meditation retreats rooted in the Theravada Buddhist teachings of ethics, concentration and wisdom. These practices help develop awareness and compassion in ourselves, giving rise to greater peace and happiness in the world.

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