



Insight Meditation Society

Sangha News - Fall 2008

Practice in Unprecedented Times

From Bob Agoglia, Executive Director: For many of us, these are unprecedented times. We have seen the effects of greed, hatred and delusion in the form of global financial upheaval, ongoing wars and environmental destruction. We have borne witness to the power of faith, hope and historic change in the national political process.



Navigating formidable challenges with clarity and kindness is one of the greatest opportunities we are now presented with. I like to imagine that each of us will be doing our utmost to bring the fruits of our practice into the world.



Last week, on the day after the election, I briefly interviewed founding teacher Sharon Salzberg. [Listen here](#) to her perspective on these times and to her practice suggestions.

News Worth Noting

Work in Progress - The first stage of the renovations to the Retreat Center lower walking room and bowling alley corridor is complete: old tiling and paneling has been removed, walls have been knocked down in the walking area and initial construction of the new downstairs yoga room has begun. This entire project has been made possible by your generous donations - we have achieved our \$65,000 goal! We plan to complete work in January 2009.



The bowling alley corridor and lower walking room areas are prepped for much-needed improvements in coming months.



History unveiled - this piece of wood came to light during the initial work in the bowling alley area. It is marked with the name of Colonel William Gaston, who originally built and resided in the mansion that is now our Retreat Center main building.

Meditation Research Continues - Increasingly, researchers in the scientific community are showing an interest in meditation, and their investigations indicate its many positive effects on the mind-body process. Over the last few years, several prominent researchers have carried out studies at IMS.

Another such project is now underway, conducted by the Yale School of Medicine. Its primary aim is to gather self-descriptions of mindfulness and *metta* (lovingkindness) experiences before and immediately after a period of extended retreat practice. The results will be used to develop more valid mindfulness measures than those currently available, and will shed new light on first-person subjective experience of the nature of mindfulness and metta. This data will strengthen future efforts to assess mindfulness skill acquisition and may contribute to advances in knowledge of how mindfulness and metta meditation practice lead to beneficial outcomes.



Program Highlights

Recent Retreats - On October 31, Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw and Venerable U Jagara departed from the Forest Refuge where they had taught *jhāna* practice for the last four months. Throughout Sayadaw's stay, members of the Burmese community from across the US travelled to IMS to pay their respects to this beloved teacher.



Ven. Pa Auk Sayadaw (center), Ven. U Jagara (L) and Ven. U Gositabhivamsa (R) at the retreat's closing ceremony.

In late summer, the Retreat Center hosted a full house of younger meditators attending the 'Investigating Life' retreat. This was IMS's fifth consecutive year of holding this course that aims to address the specific practice needs of 18-32 year olds.

"All the teachers of this retreat were inspired by the energy, investigation and curiosity of this up-and-coming generation. They are part of the grounding of Buddhist teachings in American soil," commented lead teacher Rebecca Bradshaw.



Current Retreats - This fall, long-term practice is a theme at both IMS centers. As the autumn colors built towards their peak, participants began to settle ever more deeply into the Retreat Center's Three-Month Retreat. Gaston Pond reflected the transformation from summer greens to vibrant reds, oranges, yellows and rich browns. As the season turned, the yogis' continuity of practice became increasingly quiet and tranquil.

This year, in addition to the two 6-week alternatives offered as part of the Three-Month Retreat, we provided a 3-week partial. This was much appreciated by those whose family and work commitments don't easily allow longer retreat periods.



There is a long-standing Halloween tradition at IMS's Retreat Center. Following the evening tea meal, yogis return to the darkened meditation hall to find glowing

pumpkins installed there. Artfully carved and placed by the staff, these jack-o-lanterns adorn the altar area and the window sills.



At the Forest Refuge, Myoshin Kelley and Patricia Genoud-Feldman (*below*) are teaching during the month of November.



Future Retreats - For those wishing to sit a retreat in early 2009, the following Retreat Center courses are open to new and experienced meditators alike.

Sharon Salzberg, Mark Coleman and Gina Sharpe will teach a 7-day [Metta Retreat](#), February 1-8. *Metta*, or lovingkindness, is a meditation that cultivates our natural capacity for awakening and opening our hearts.

This will be followed by another 7-day course, [The Twelve Insights of the Four Noble Truths](#), taught by Phillip Moffitt, Adrienne Ross and Hugh Byrne, February 13-20. Their retreat will explore the twelve insights described by the Buddha that lead to a fuller understanding of the path to liberation.

A weekend retreat, [Wisdom and Compassion](#), will take place February 20-22, offered by Annie Nugent and Deborah Ratner Helzer. It aims to strengthen our ability to embrace everything in life as food for freedom.

At the [Forest Refuge](#), space is still available for a [personal retreat](#) during December, January and February.



Sangha Stories

We appreciate receiving stories highlighting your retreat experience and its impact on daily life. Here is one example - may it offer inspiration. We welcome further contributions (just a few paragraphs, please) - you can email them to sanghastories@dharm.org.

From yogi Nina Gimond in Florida: **Retreat Experience Ripples Out** - I sat my first retreat at IMS in 1995. Afterwards, I returned to my job as a teacher's aide in a kindergarten. It was the start of the school year, and one 4-year-old boy was taking it very badly, screaming and crying and kicking. So I spent the morning holding him in my lap, leading him around to the various activities, and talking calmly and encouragingly to him.

For some time he continued to cry loudly and pretty much non-stop. But as the morning wore on, he gradually took more interest in what was going on around the classroom, stopping his crying now and again, and letting go of my hand to approach a group at play. Finally, he seemed able to leave me for good, and quite spontaneously a marvelous feeling of pure love welled up in me, overwhelming any other sensation or thought. I remember standing there thinking that this had to be an 'after-effect' of my retreat, a benefit of committed practice. It was something of an epiphany - for so many years I had worked at this job, never dreaming of such a connection with the children in

my care. Thanks to my retreat and meditation, my job was something I could actually find fulfillment in, and could become a part of my ongoing broader practice.

I have done several retreats since and keep a regular formal practice. This has taught me to let go of hurtful feelings I may experience in dealing with others. I can honestly say I am more tolerant and forgiving than I used to be, and have greater compassion for everything, even little insects I see struggling.

Staff Sangha

Job Opening - We are currently accepting applications for a [Maintenance](#) position in IMS's Facilities department. If you - or someone you know - has some landscaping and maintenance experience, and are interested in joining our warm and friendly staff community, please contact Kelly Collett at hr@dharma.org.



Sangha Connections

Do you have your own website or blog? If it is appropriate, IMS would greatly appreciate your including a link to our site, www.dharma.org/ims. If you need any assistance, or want to know more, please contact Marc Hamel at march@dharma.org.

Sangha Survey

Results of Last Survey - We received a total of 275 responses to questions about whether online social networking would be helpful for connecting retreat participants after an IMS course ends. The following results led us to conclude that we should implement a pilot social network next year - the retreat we have selected for this is the

course for 18-32 year olds.

While 65% of all 275 respondents said they were not currently members of any social networking site, this finding varied greatly with age. Of the 26 respondents under 31 years of age, only 23% were not members of a social networking site. This finding went up to 75% of the 191 respondents over 45 years old. For those who were members of a social networking site, twice as many belonged to Facebook as to MySpace.

Despite the finding that most respondents over 45 were not members of a social networking site, 65% said they were Very or Somewhat Likely to use social networking if IMS offered it as a forum to share retreat experiences and information. Not surprisingly, 85% of those under 31 said the same. Overall, for all age groups, 69% of respondents said they were Very or Somewhat Likely to use an IMS social networking opportunity. Thank you to everyone who completed our last survey and for informing our future decisions.

New Survey: Retreat Scheduling - We are now seeking to learn about the factors that help you decide which retreat to attend at IMS. Please take a few moments to complete this anonymous and [brief survey](#). We use an internet service called Survey Monkey that ensures we will not be able to identify respondents' names.

We appreciate your feedback. All of us at IMS wish you a joyous holiday season.

IMS is a spiritual refuge for all who seek freedom from the suffering 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, giving rise to greater peace and happiness in the world.

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