



Insight Meditation Society

Sangha News - Spring 2010

An Unhesitating Generosity

From Bob Agoglia, Executive Director: A few weeks ago, I sat down with Carol Wilson, one of IMS's guiding teachers, to hear more about her time spent in Burma and the inspiration she continues to draw from its rich Buddhist history and culture.



I was moved to learn of the generosity and kindness of the Burmese people in the face of daily hardships, injustice and brutality. I was struck by the dedication of nuns there - of their spirit of faith and their role in providing important services to their communities. I hope you too will find inspiration in [listening](#) to Carol's reflections.



Young nuns in Burma receive their education from older nuns.

The Power of the Dharma

Also from Bob: Last month I watched a wonderful film shown on PBS called 'The

Buddha' - perhaps you also saw it. As it portrayed the life and times of this extraordinary human being, I became aware of how much interest has grown in the profound teaching he transmitted 2,500 years ago: that meditation is a path to end suffering.

We see this interest reflected in the fields of education, science, medicine and mental health, where studies show the benefits of practice on the mind/body system. We notice it in the media, where mindfulness and its effects are frequently reported. Meditation is no longer considered the fringe activity that it was when IMS began in 1976.

Simultaneously, resources for people exploring meditative practices have grown exponentially - sitting groups, books and CDs and a huge range of online information are all available. Many can now begin to learn the practice right at home. As many of you know, IMS endorsed this broader access to the teachings a year ago by making a wealth of audio material accessible on our website. Since going live, about 55,000 dharma talks have been downloaded or streamed and 3,300 people have visited our podcasting feed.

I'm convinced, though, that these features act as supports, and not replacements, for what IMS does best: offering intensive meditation retreats. Whether we undertake a personal retreat at the Forest Refuge or a more structured course at the Retreat Center, powerful transformation through deep insight occurs. Its effects cannot help but ripple out into the wider world.



Retreat Center Improvements

Dining Area - As many of you have experienced, the Forest Refuge and Retreat Center dining rooms are the setting for significant moments in the daily IMS schedule - mealtimes! This year, our Spring Appeal aims to raise enough funds to refurbish the Retreat Center dining area so that we can upgrade its worn and cracked floor covering, reduce noise on opening and closing days and relieve congestion in the dishwashing realm. We plan to create a dedicated dish station in the back dining area, and install new environmentally-sustainable flooring as well as an acoustical ceiling treatment. We anticipate that these changes will improve the flow of movement after meals and offer a more peaceful setting for practice.

A Mindful Kitchen - For much of IMS's history, the Retreat Center Kitchen provided a

silent environment for just a brief time each day, during the yogi job period. Otherwise, it functioned as a regular workplace, with staff chatting as meals were prepared.

Recently, the cooks reflected on the fact that overheard conversations can impact many retreatants, especially since their time at IMS may be the only chance in a long stretch for extended silent practice. So the Kitchen staff has found a way to balance supporting mindfulness and stillness with conducting a normal work life: during courses, the Kitchen remains in silence all day, with only necessary talk taking place among cooks; between retreats, it functions more conventionally.

This arrangement has already brought benefit to the cooks themselves and the Kitchen as a whole - they report better focus and ease as they work together.



Stair Safety - As part of our ongoing safety efforts, new guardrails were recently installed on several exterior stairways around the Retreat Center main building. At the front portico, on the walkway beside the meditation hall and at the staff side entrance, these railings are providing greater support, especially in colder weather when conditions can be icy.



Materials on Display - The recently completed Retreat Center Welcome Room serves several purposes: registration on opening days, sales of publications and making available a variety of free materials, all related to the world of *vipassana*, or insight meditation. Here you can find out about retreat centers and sitting groups throughout the world, pick up copies of dharma periodicals and learn about practice in Asia.

Now, new shelving has been installed in the room to accommodate this ever-expanding range of material. A digital photo frame has been added to continuously display images of retreat life at IMS. At the end of your next course, take a moment to enjoy the pictures and browse resources for your practice.



Program Highlights

Spring Has Sprung - As the weather warms up, retreatants are enjoying meditating outdoors. Flowers are blooming, trees are leafing out and birds are singing! Teachers, both familiar and new, continue to offer the precious dharma.



At the Forest Refuge, Joseph Goldstein and Greg Scharf are teaching throughout May.



A yogi practices walking meditation.



Christina Feldman, Narayan Liebenson Grady and Maddy Klyne led the annual "Women in Meditation" retreat in March - its 26th year!



A variety of blossoming trees and shrubs lights up the Retreat Center 'back yard.'



Howie Cohn and Lila Kate Wheeler joined forces to guide retreatants along "The Buddha's Way to Happiness."



Yogis offer their respects to the ordained sangha at the end of the annual Monastic Retreat: Ajahn Amaro, Ajahn Punnadhammo and Bhikkhu Caganando.



Rebecca Bradshaw and Pascal Auclair were the teachers for "The Power of Presence."



Gaston Pond - a peaceful spot for reflection.

Future Courses - At the **Forest Refuge**, there are still some spaces for a [personal retreat](#) in July and August, and from October onwards.



Mindful walking at the Forest Refuge.

At the **Retreat Center**, Michele McDonald, Rebecca Bradshaw and Greg Scharf will lead two upcoming courses: a seven-day Metta Retreat, [Loving Friendliness](#), May 28 - June 4, followed by a nine-day insight meditation course, [Liberation of Mind and Heart](#), June 4-13.

As part of its diverse summer offerings, the Retreat Center will hold its annual [Teen Retreat](#), June 24-28. Within a structured and supportive environment, this special course, led by Rebecca Bradshaw and Chas DiCapua, provides an opportunity for people ages 14-19 to develop and value their natural spirituality.



Larry Rosenberg and Matthew Daniell (above) will return to teach "[The Art of Mindful Living](#)," a retreat for experienced students, July 9-16.

There is still space available in [Part 2](#) of IMS's annual Three-Month Retreat, October 23-December 4. Taught by Joseph Goldstein, Rebecca Bradshaw, Annie Nugent, Greg Scharf and Andrea Fella, this six-week course provides an opportunity for students to deepen the powers of concentration, wisdom and compassion.



*From IMS staffers Jill Shepherd & Charlie Stevenson: **Dharma in Prison*** - In 2007, IMS received a letter from an inmate at a nearby men's medium-security prison. He asked if a member of our "temple" would lead a weekly meditation group at the facility, and two or three of our staff members have been involved ever since.

We now meet with a core group of eight inmates every week, plus others who show up on a more sporadic basis. We chant the refuges and precepts together and practice sitting and walking meditation. Then we offer a dharma presentation and facilitate a group discussion. At the men's request for more in-depth teaching, we first studied the *Satipatthana Sutta* together and currently many of the group are participating in the Insight Meditation Correspondence Course. They have responded enthusiastically to this formal curriculum with written exercises and extra coursework to complete each week. When papers were handed back with comments for each participant, their appreciation of this individual attention was palpable.

In prison, *dukkha* - suffering - is an unavoidable daily reality, and the men are grateful for any tools we can offer to help them deal with their situation. From week to week, we witness their ongoing struggle to transform themselves in the face of a system that often frustrates their every effort. As one man described it, "It's like we live in a zoo, but it's always changing - one minute we're in the petting section, then suddenly it's the alligator pit."

Not surprisingly, establishing trust and a sense of sangha in this setting has been a huge challenge. After nearly two years of meeting together, some have reported that they now acknowledge each other with joined palms when they see each other outside of the group.

It's been a privilege to offer this form of service. The inmates' efforts to practice the dharma in such adverse circumstances have been a real inspiration, and the transformations we have witnessed have deepened our faith in the Buddha's path to freedom from suffering. In writing this, we are also acutely aware that we're speaking about - and on behalf of - men who don't have a voice and who are invisible members of our sangha. Equally invisible are all those who have been affected by their past actions. Often when we meditate together, we try to keep these people in mind too, so that the work we do as a group may benefit them, as well as those who are physically present in the room.

May all beings be liberated!



Staff Sangha

Retreat Center Office - These are the folks who handle all aspects of Retreat Center course registration and management. They help you sign up and confirm your retreat participation. They process scholarship requests, answer all kinds of questions about retreat life, coordinate with teachers, manage a myriad of course details and offer support in countless ways. For those of you who have experienced the seamless flow throughout your time here, these are some of our instrumental staff who make this happen.



Front row, from L to R: Jill Shepherd, Marilyn Rothman and John Holland. Back row, L to R: Roberta Lewis, Bryony Smith, Christine Marshall and Elizabeth Vigeon.

Job Opening - IMS is currently accepting applications for a position in Facilities as a maintenance worker. The Facilities team is responsible for ensuring our grounds and buildings are safe, pleasant and run efficiently.



Starting the spring spruce up of the Retreat Center Buddha Garden.

If you are interested in joining our staff and working in a friendly and caring environment, or if you know someone qualified for the position, please visit the [job description](#) on our website or contact Kelly Collett at hr@dharma.org.



Until our next issue in August, we wish you and your loved ones a happy and peaceful summer.

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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