



Insight Meditation Society

Sangha News - Winter 2010

Working with Karmic Knots

From Bob Agolia, Executive Director: It's been almost three decades since I first participated in an IMS retreat. Throughout the years, I've observed that some stubborn habits of mind are amazingly resistant to change!

Despite my years of formal and daily practice, mindfulness does not always immediately kick in, and I can find myself swept away by deeply ingrained thoughts and feelings.



I was talking about this recently with one of IMS's teachers, Rebecca Bradshaw. I learned that she is particularly interested in this very phenomenon: that many meditators report feeling discouraged when they encounter the same thought or emotional pattern still playing out in their lives.

It was remarkably helpful to hear Rebecca's view on making peace with our persistent, conditioned 'karmic knots.' [Listen here](#) to my interview with her.

Looking Back and Moving Forward

Also from Bob: Each January there are two constants on my work calendar. One is to participate in a much-loved annual tradition here at IMS - a week during which all the staff are on retreat together. Supported by volunteers, those who usually serve our retreatants have an opportunity to drink deeply of this precious practice themselves.

This year's Staff Retreat recently drew to a close. During it, I was reminded once more of the magic of refuge and stillness that IMS offers. I again experienced first-hand the refreshment that the teachings provide, and how they inevitably transform our lives for the better.



IMS staff and volunteers at the close of the annual Staff Retreat, January 2010.



Some fun in the snow.

The other aspect of my January work is a little more mundane, but nevertheless essential: it's to finalize the previous year's data. What the figures indicate to me is that IMS is both relevant and vital to people's lives.

The evidence is in the numbers - in 2009, we received a record 3,004 registrations for courses at the Retreat Center and the Forest Refuge. We provided almost 900 people with financial aid as part of our aspiration to make it possible for anyone to participate in a retreat, regardless of means.

Generous support from our community was also very strong. We exceeded our annual fall appeal goal, with more people contributing than ever before. Our *Sustaining the Sangha* monthly giving program continues to grow. And an auspicious 108 volunteers offered service, equivalent to employing three extra full-time staff.

Now, as I consider 2010, I feel great hope and confidence. My hope springs from the strength with which our community supported IMS last year, during a particularly difficult period of economic instability. I am confident that as long as IMS stays true to its mission and values, it will remain a spiritual refuge for all.



The seasons come and go, and the Buddha remains at peace.

News Worth Noting

IMS Turned 34! - February 14 was IMS's birthday. It has been 34 years since a small group of young meditation teachers and friends moved into the facility we now call the Retreat Center.

Below are two photographs from the first decade of IMS's history. One shows the 1976 'Parents and Friends' retreat. Offered by those involved with the fledgling organization, its purpose was to share the practice that had become an integral and invaluable part of their lives. And hopefully to reassure family and friends about that new beginning.

The second image is of the Dalai Lama's visit to IMS over 30 years ago.



Parents and Friends Course, 1976.



His Holiness the Dalai Lama is greeted at IMS in 1979.

Listen to the Teachings - These days, talks given during IMS retreats about the Buddha's teachings and the practice of meditation are available in various forms. Besides hearing them 'live' on retreat, you can download, stream or podcast thousands of dharma talks. Making them available in this way greatly increases access to the teachings, especially for those unable to attend a retreat in person.

Since launching these options for [teachers' dharma talks](#) less than a year ago, over 12,500 people have downloaded or streamed more than 55,000 talks through dharma.org. In addition, over 3,000 people have visited our podcasting feed. Thank you to [Dharma Seed](#) for providing these services.

More Online Presence - IMS now has a [Facebook Page](#)! We hope to keep it active with regular

updates of news and retreats. All posts from the page will automatically be [tweeted](#) as well. If this is a good way for us to keep in touch with you, please become a fan, join and/or follow as is helpful.



Passing the Baton - Chances are, if you've sat a personal retreat at the Forest Refuge, you've been aware of manager Marie Sakellarion's gracious presence in the Administration office. Now, after more than eight years of service, Marie has decided to move on. Eric McCord will be our next Forest Refuge Manager, starting March 1. He is well-known to many yogis and has been part of IMS since 1995, serving in many roles.



Marie Sakellarion and Eric McCord

Up and Away - After leaving her position as Forest Refuge Teacher-in-Residence last December, Myoshin Kelley and her husband Edwin packed up and headed off in early January for Minneapolis. When all their belongings were safely stowed on the truck, they took a moment to be photographed before setting out in a snowstorm. We hear they have settled happily into their new life. And IMS will continue to have the blessing of Myoshin's presence - she's scheduled to teach

again at the Forest Refuge this year in April, September and December.



Ride Sharing - Participants in IMS retreats are discovering the advantages of ride sharing. When you register for a course, you will receive a password to connect with fellow retreatants through the [ride board](#) on IMS's website. If you're coming to a retreat and can give others a ride, we encourage you to post your offer on the ride board. This form of generosity greatly benefits many of our retreatants.

Another way of reducing costs and environmental impact is to share a limo or taxi from and to the airport or bus and train station. This can also be set up through the ride board.



Yogis sharing a ride prepare to leave the Retreat Center at the end of a course.

Sangha Stories

We value your stories highlighting your retreat experience and its positive impact on your life. Please

email your contribution to sanghastories@dharma.org.

*From yogi Andrea Menezes in Toronto: **Service Springs from Practice*** - About six years ago I took a leave of absence from my job as a Special Education teacher and sat my first Three-Month Retreat at IMS. The experience transformed my heart, giving me a deeply rooted faith in the teachings. It also strengthened my commitment to the practice.

Following the retreat, I spent six months in Ghana for the first time, volunteering as a teacher at Horizons Children's Centre. This is a home for 24 orphans and needy children who live together as a family. With the lessons I learned on retreat, I worked cooperatively with the children to establish three core values in our home - mutual respect, attentive listening and gratitude. These children inspired so much joy, generosity and love in me. It was the continuity of mindfulness that I was able to develop on retreat that enabled me to receive them fully into my heart. I could really see clearly that in the midst of all suffering, there are seeds of resiliency.

Since that time, I have had the precious opportunity to balance serving at Horizons and teaching in Toronto under the 'Model Schools for Innercities' initiative with periods of long-term, intensive retreat practice. Over the years, it has been such a gift to practice at the Retreat Center and at the Forest Refuge. IMS is a spiritual home for me - a true refuge. The silence of retreat life rejuvenates and inspires me to continue to express the dharma in everyday life. I am so grateful to be a member of this sangha.



The gong at the Forest Refuge hangs in the midst of winter silence.

From yogi Samuel Trumbore of Albany, NY: I recently sat at the Forest Refuge and offer this poem, inspired by my practice time.

You'll Get There!

Take comfort grasshopper,
You've tasted enough
to know the meal is delicious.
Your feet are firmly on the path.

When will you get there, you ask?
Just a matter of time.
Whether one, or seven or a hundred or a thousand lives
your time will come.
And what is that in the grand scheme of things?
A blink of the eye in astronomic measurements.

So relax. Watch the next breath.
Live the practice in nibbles
stringing them together.
Keep calmly knowing change.
Keep asking, "What's happening...now?"



With winter in full swing, this canny possum showed up recently. It had discovered good snacking beneath some Retreat Center bird feeders.

Program Highlights

Winter Retreats - Winter months at IMS offer a special time for practice. There is something about the silent, snowy landscape that easily invites a natural quiet and occasion for inner reflection.





In January, IMS held its fourth retreat for scientists and educators, with a focus this year on *metta* (lovingkindness) meditation practice. Towards the end of the course, participants broke into groups to discuss how the practice might be made relevant or more useful in their work environments.



Here one retreatant presents her group's reflections.

Future Courses - At the **Retreat Center**, space is still available in some upcoming courses.

[*The Mysterious Way of the Heart*](#), March 5-14, will be led by Thanissara and Kittisaro. This retreat will focus on establishing a healing foundation for insight into our mistaken identification with patterns of self, and will include Pali chanting and mantra recitation.

Thanissara and Kittisaro spoke with IMS about the course - you can listen to their interview [here](#).

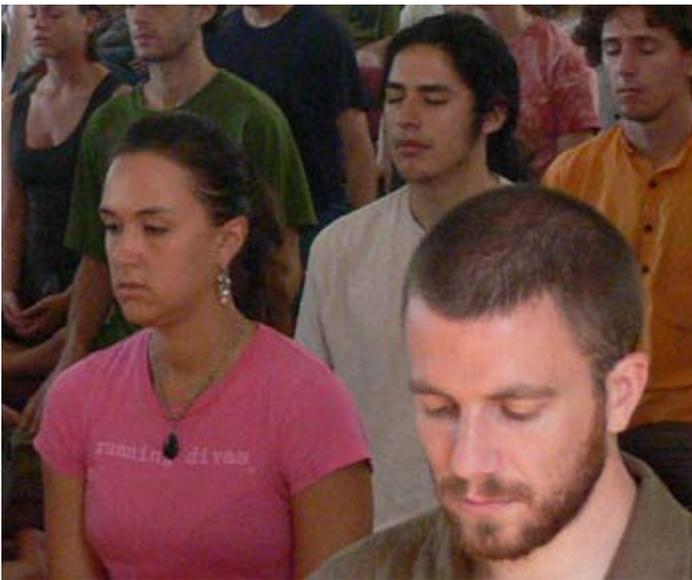


Thanissara and Kittisaro

Two shorter retreats are coming up in March and April. Howard Cohn and Lila Kate Wheeler will lead [*The Buddha's Way to Happiness*](#), March 31 - April 4. Their course will follow the Buddha's path of mindfulness, concentration and lovingkindness, illustrating how each of us can move from attachment to freedom, from confusion to clarity and from tension to ease.

Rebecca Bradshaw and Pascal Auclair will offer a 5-day retreat, [*The Power of Presence*](#), April 20-25. As mindfulness deepens, wholehearted presence is cultivated, giving us the opportunity to discover for ourselves what leads to happiness and peace.

Weekend courses are also available. Sharon Salzberg and Mark Epstein will lead [*The Platform of Joy*](#), April 8-11. The following weekend, Annie Nugent and Sky Dawson will offer [*The Wisdom of Letting Go*](#), April 15-18.



At the **Forest Refuge**, there are openings for a [personal retreat](#) this month and in March, and then from July onwards. We are still accepting applications for April, May and June, despite wait lists - sometimes cancellations come in from those already confirmed and spaces open up.



Until our next issue in May, we wish you and your families much happiness and good health.

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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