

Insight Meditation Society

ANNUAL BULLETIN | 2024

The IMS/Spirit Rock Teacher Training Program

*A look at the selection process, curriculum,
and 2025–2028 cohort*

IMS's BIPOC Retreat Turns 20

*Reflections on the power of practicing
in community*

Finding the Words

The poetry of Joseph Goldstein





insight
MEDITATION SOCIETY

**Sorrow falls away
Like drops of water from a lotus
For anyone who overcomes this miserable craving
And clinging to the world.**

The Dhammapada, verse 336
Translated by Gil Fronsdal





**IMS is a spiritual refuge
for all who seek freedom of
mind and heart.**

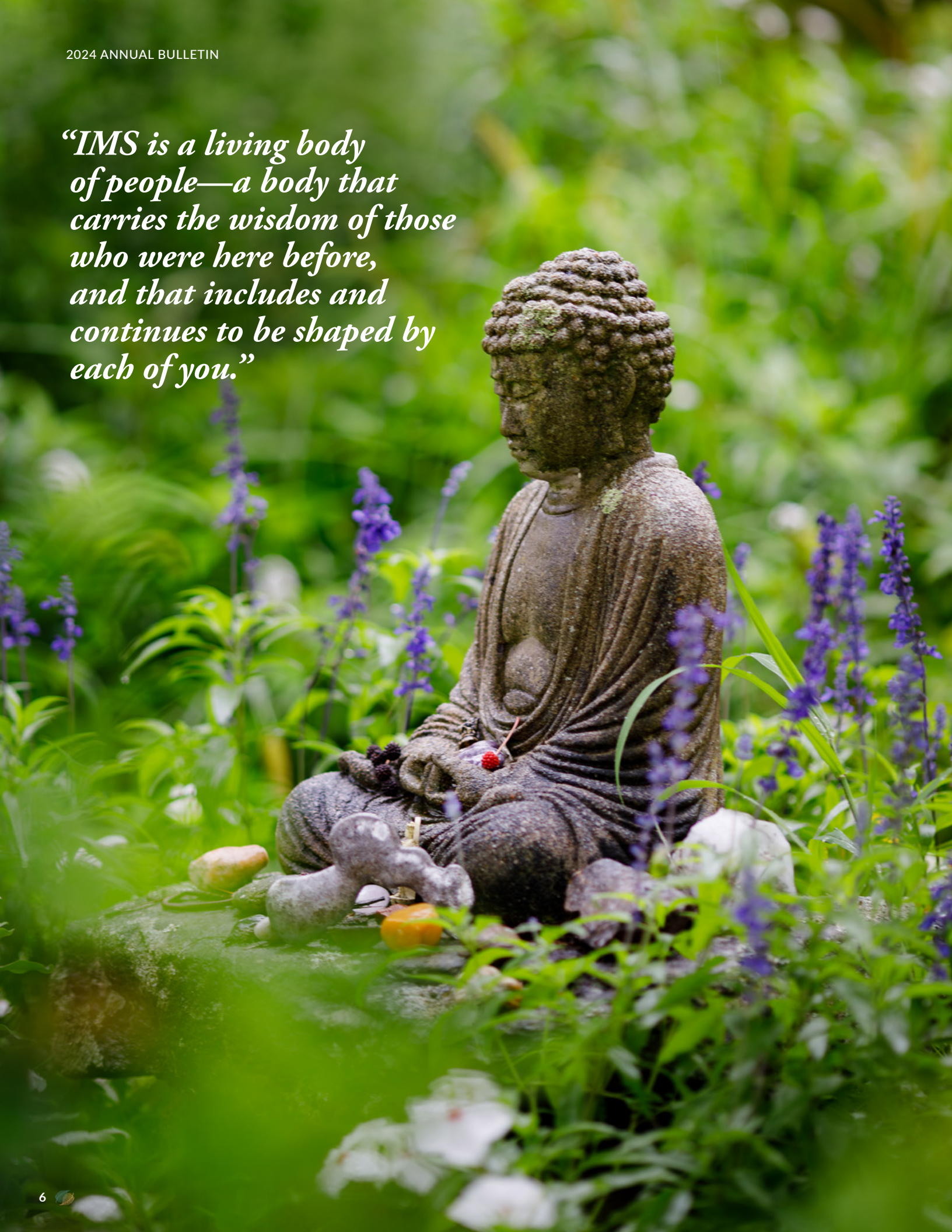
We offer meditation retreats and online programs rooted in the Theravada teachings of ethics, concentration, and wisdom. These practices help develop awareness and compassion in ourselves, giving rise to greater peace and happiness in the world.



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“IMS is a living body of people—a body that carries the wisdom of those who were here before, and that includes and continues to be shaped by each of you.”





Dear Friends,

Warm greetings from Barre in this tumultuous season of change. I hope you are well—your loved ones safe, your lives reasonably settled and at ease.

I'm writing the morning after our late-October board meeting, reflecting on how it felt to be with that group of wonderful individuals, a full third of whom are new to the board (though not new to IMS). I wondered how the group would gel as a new body, what new perspectives would emerge, and how they would land. Would everyone feel welcome and safe enough to speak their minds? The five long-term members who rolled off with our summer board meeting were also felt in their absence; their best qualities and the particular attention they each contributed—the humor, the intense caring, the generosity, the vulnerability—it was also in the room, and I realized they had become part of the DNA of that body, just as those who had served before them had. Everyone who serves there leaves a unique imprint, and invariably—given the mandate of that body and the qualities of people who are drawn to the labor—they make it better, more aware, more resilient.

And so it is with this extended community of friends and partners, joined by deep caring for the practice, the teachings, the teachers, and one another. That is what IMS is, in fact: a living body of people—a body that carries the wisdom of those who were here before, and that includes and continues to be shaped by each of you and all that you bring to the whole.

You'll see the theme of change and renewal throughout this edition of our annual bulletin. 2024 was an intensive planning year for the forthcoming Teacher Training Program, which IMS is undertaking in partnership with Spirit Rock. You'll read about that program and the teachers and processes that support it (p. 12)—and meet the 23 extraordinary individuals who have been invited to participate in this four-year intensive (p. 16). You'll also meet the new and returning members of the IMS Board of Directors (p. 11) and learn a little about what inspires them to serve. And of course, you'll hear all about the impactful work of staff here on campus and online.

It must be noted that 2024 was also the year we celebrated the poetry (and recent 80th birthday!) of our dear co-founder, Joseph Goldstein. Amy Gross's beautiful interview with Joseph is reprinted here, with thanks to our friends at Tricycle. We also couldn't fail to include a remembrance of a most lovely birthday party.

I know these things can feel small in the face of what feels like a momentous period on planet Earth. And yet, this is what we can do: be together, practice together, tend to the contents of our own minds, offer one another support through the teachings and through the ways we demonstrate our own capacity for kindness, compassion, and equanimity. Sending you our warmest thoughts and wishes for peace.

Thank you, truly, for your good hearts and countless acts of kindness.

With boundless appreciation,

Inger Forland
Executive Director
ingerf@dharm.org

Year in Review

Here's a look at transformations, improvements, and milestones at IMS in 2024.

On the Land

Land Conservation Goal Achieved

For many who come to IMS to unwind and recharge, their retreat experience begins well before they arrive on campus. Layers of tension and stress fall away as they drive over rolling hills, past picturesque forests and ponds, pastures and farms. The natural beauty that surrounds our centers in every direction is one of IMS's greatest assets, and as of this summer, a big chunk of that land is protected for generations to come.

IMS is one of five landowners and three land conservation organizations, led by Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust and Mass Audubon, which together have protected more than 800 acres of land in Barre through perpetual conservation restrictions (CRs). A collaborative effort years in the making, these CRs are held by Mount Grace, Mass Audubon, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (MDCR), the Barre Conservation Commission, and the East Quabbin Land Trust.

Some 280 acres of IMS's property are now protected by Mass Audubon and MDCR. IMS will continue to own this land, maintaining and managing it sustainably. IMS withheld from restriction land that it might want to develop in the future.

By selling these CRs, IMS had much to gain. "In addition to the benefits of wildlife habitat protection, carbon sequestration, and preserving the quietness of the



area that is so important to our mission, IMS received a net of around \$625,000 after the cost of surveys and our attorney," reports Pete Baker, IMS Operations Director.

Landscape and Trail Improvements

Conservation Works, a local company that builds and maintains our trails, moved a couple of the trails by Gaston Pond to higher ground this year so they stay drier for pedestrians. They also added bog bridges across areas that are particularly damp, and created a new section of trail west of Pleasant Street that makes it possible to complete that loop on the land without using the street. This added section improved the safety of the trail and made it accessible to the trail along the east side of Gaston Pond.

IMS has continued to make good use of a grant received last year from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. As part of a yearlong project, we have removed harmful invasive species, primarily

multiflora rose and bittersweet, along the stone walls and forest edge west of Pleasant Street, and planted several acres of wildflowers there. On the same side of the street, opposite the Teacher Village, we removed dilapidated chicken coops, hundreds of tires, and deteriorated farm equipment that remained on the property from its time as a farm. This stretch of Pleasant Street now offers a more inviting landscape.

Next up in IMS's forestry plan is an initiative to selectively thin unhealthy stands of trees, encouraging stronger trees to flourish over the next 50 to 100 years.

Tick Control

To address our concerns about ticks, we have taken several new steps to minimize exposure. Ticks like high, leafy vegetation, so we've removed those plants alongside our buildings and added more mulch to those areas. We've also deposited wood chips on trails, and installed new tick stations around campus, each equipped with tick spray, a brush, and a sign explaining how to check for ticks.

We now have a total of 15 tick stations on campus, including one at each building entrance and at the main trailheads, so people can check themselves and brush off their clothing as soon as they get off the trails and before they go inside.



One of IMS's 15 new tick stations on campus.



The removal of the dilapidated chicken coops along Pleasant Street created a more inviting landscape.



Several acres of wildflowers, above, now flourish where we removed invasive species. Below, IMS's new front entrance vestibule is safe and energy efficient.

In the Buildings

Retreat Center Facilities Upgrades

Our five-year project of staining and painting the exteriors of all our buildings will be largely complete this year, preserving the wood and making our buildings more aesthetically pleasing.

We've added a new vestibule at the front entrance of the retreat center, which will save heat in the winter and help keep the building cool in the summer. The inside door will remain locked, while the outside door will be unlocked, allowing packages to be left in the vestibule. That means delivery people won't need to ring the bell or carry packages into the hall, eliminating noise that could previously be heard in the meditation hall.



Our septic system received a major upgrade this year with the replacement of our main pumps. In addition to the new 10,000-gallon tank installed in 2021, this will ensure the functioning and longevity of our system.

We replaced our regular-size washing machines with two large commercial washers, allowing IMS to do all our laundry in-house. Canceling our linen service not only saves us money but also means that we can provide yogis with higher-quality towels and linen.

Forest Refuge Teacher Cottage Improvements

The cork flooring in the cottages, which was installed 20 years ago, was replaced with vinyl plank flooring.

We installed dehumidifiers in the cottage basements and had a mold remediation company treat the lower floors to ensure they remain dry and free of mold.

On the Schedule

Retreat Center Programming Highlights

May saw the return of IMS’s popular two-week retreat, now an annual program, “The Natural Clarity of Awareness,” led this year by Tara Mulay, Victoria Cary, Devin Berry, and Annie Nugent. “I think of it as a westernized, or modified, Mahasi retreat,” said Christine Marshall, Program Director. A classical Mahasi retreat closely follows the progression laid out in Mahasi Sayadaw’s *Manual of Insight*. This retreat is more relaxed, Christine says—including mindful movement, for example—but still follows that progression. Now an annual event, the 14-day program offers a similar schedule and guidance as IMS’s Three-Month Retreat, and can serve as a stepping stone for those who aspire to sit the longer retreat.

Two new nine-night retreats were added to the programming schedule this summer: Winnie Nazarko and Tara Mulay’s “Unification of Mind: Concentration Retreat,” followed two nights later by Sally and Guy Armstrong’s “The Nature of Awareness: A Retreat for Experienced Students.” The teaching teams decided to offer a combined 20-night experience for those who wanted to sit both

retreats; during the two days in between, the teachers offered morning instructions, held interviews, and sat with the yogis in the meditation hall.

Monastics at the Retreat Center

The Retreat Center was honored by the return of Ajahn Amaro, the abbot of Amaravati Monastery in England, who led a very special nine-day residential monastic retreat in May—offered at no cost to attendees, who weren’t even required to cover food or lodging. To support this generous gift, Joseph Goldstein and Guy Armstrong held an online benefit last September, a conversation in which they explored the people and practices that inspired the creation of IMS.

A second nine-day monastic retreat, “Where Wisdom & Compassion Meet,” led by Ayya Anandabodhi and Ayya Santacitta, will take place December 6–15 at the Retreat Center.

Giving Update

Monthly Giving Milestone

Sustaining the Sangha, IMS’s monthly giving community, reached a landmark milestone this year, increasing membership by 11% to surpass 1,000 members. Each month, 1,044 supporters from 46 states and nine countries now make an automatic gift to IMS, for a total of more than \$25,000. That \$300,000 a year represents a 9% increase in revenue and provides critical support for our mission to serve as a refuge for all seeking freedom of mind and heart.



Before the Rubin Museum of Art closed its New York galleries in October, IMS organized a special tour for sangha members on September 7. Guiding the group was museum docent Nitin Ron, MD, a neonatologist and meditator.

On April 17, Sustaining the Sangha members gathered online with IMS teacher Yong Oh to “take refuge in the lovely.” Yong led the group in an exploration of kalyana—turning our hearts to that which is beautiful and resting in this place.

Young Adult Scholarship Support

To make the IMS retreat experience accessible to more young people, we offer our Young Adult Retreat on a “You Choose” fee basis. This means that retreatants ages 18–32 can set their own rate based on their financial means. (For 2024 retreats, a minimum of \$25 per night is required, and this will go up to \$35 per night in 2025.) This year, 55 yogis attending the Young Adult Retreat—including 26 who were new to IMS—paid at the You Choose rate.

This generous offering is possible thanks to donors who share IMS’s commitment to supporting young adults in their practice. One donor endowed a scholarship fund for experienced young adult meditators who want to sit the Three-Month Retreat, whether in full or for Part 1 or 2. Another

donor made a significant gift last year to young adult scholarships that included an additional \$2,500 pledge if other IMS donors matched that amount, which they did. This donor will continue that pledge annually. To help unlock the matching funds, make a gift to IMS and designate it for YA scholarships.

Legacy Sangha and FreeWill

IMS’s Legacy Sangha now has more than 300 members. These dedicated supporters have made IMS part of their estate plan, helping to ensure that the Buddha’s teachings will be taught and practiced at our centers well into the future. We continue to partner with FreeWill, an online resource for creating or updating your will or estate plan, to help simplify this process for our community.

For more information about how to support young adult scholarships, or about the Legacy Sangha, FreeWill, or any of our IMS Giving activities, contact Director of Development Leah Giles at leahg@dharmia.org or (978) 355-4378, x 320. ■



Incoming board members, from left: Salma Abdulla, Gyano Gibson, Zeenat Potia, and Julia Wu.

Farewells and Welcomes on the IMS Board

The IMS Board of Directors’ two-day July meeting on campus this year was marked by transitions, as five board members rolled off and four new ones were added.

Leaving this summer were Muriel Jaouich, Gina LaRoche, David Ellner, Ben Rubin, and Tara Healey, IMS’s outgoing Board President. All these departing board members had served double terms—two consecutive three-year stints—with those in board leadership serving an additional year. Each member was set to step down in either 2020 or 2021, at the height of the pandemic, but was asked by the Governance Committee to consider another term.

“We needed the board to hold steady during that time,” says Inger Forland, IMS Executive Director. “Those who rolled off this year were with us through the perilous unfolding of COVID. It was tremendously important that we had such a seasoned and steady board for those years. They offered invaluable guidance and such strong support as we navigated a time of real uncertainty.”

Coming on to the board are Salma Abdulla, Zeenat Potia, Julia Wu, and Gyano Gibson. Salma, a former board member, has returned to serve as Board President. Gyano, a first-time member, served on the staff at IMS for almost 22 years, in areas ranging from communications to residential retreat programming, and retired in 2019 from the role of Development Director.

Board newcomer Zeenat, a former publishing and strategic communications professional, is a meditation teacher who served on the board at Cambridge Insight from 2012 to 2019. Julia is a marketing leader at Happier (formerly Ten Percent Happier), and has more than 10 years of experience as a digital marketing professional in the health and fitness space.

“The diversity, experience, and talent of this board is remarkable,” says Inger. “IMS really has been so blessed by the commitment and heartfelt care of our board members—past and present, new and returning.”



Demystifying the IMS/Spirit Rock Teacher Training Program

We break down the selection process, what the training entails, and other frequently asked questions.

THE IMS/SPIRIT ROCK Teacher Training Program (TTP) has long been a source of mystery to those who are new to our respective communities, and even to those who've been around for some time. We often get asked about the application process, how cohorts are formed, and what trainees experience over the course of the four-year training.

Run by IMS and Spirit Rock for decades, sometimes separately and other times jointly, the TTP is the primary means by which lay meditation teachers become qualified to teach retreats at insight meditation centers and communities across the country and abroad. Many of the established teachers who guide IMS and Spirit Rock retreats—teachers you know and love—are graduates of the TTP.

In January 2025, the two centers will launch the first joint program we have run together since 2016. The six lead teachers are DaRa Williams, Rebecca Bradshaw, and Shelly Graf, on behalf of IMS; and Tuere Sala, Tempel Smith, and John Martin from Spirit Rock.

Here we take a close look at how the TTP cohorts come together, the program curriculum and cost, and how the new group reflects the ongoing DEI work of both centers.

How does the selection process work?

Rather than applying, candidates for the TTP must be nominated by established IMS or Spirit Rock teachers. This approach helps maintain the clarity of the transmission of the Dharma within the Theravada tradition, as well as upholding the integrity of the IMS and Spirit Rock retreat experiences.

“The teacher trainings all rely on established teachers nominating someone they have known as a student, whose practice they understand, whose maturity they understand, who they think is ready to move into a training to become an IMS/Spirit Rock teacher,” explains Guy Armstrong, an IMS Guiding Teacher who has held a lead role in three previous trainings.

The rigorous yearlong selection process begins when the TTP teaching team sends out a request for nominations to all IMS and Spirit Rock teaching faculty. After the six-month nomination period closes, the program leaders invite a portion of the nominees to submit an application and participate

in an interview. The teaching team then considers the applications and chooses a group of candidates to invite to the program. Lastly, the list is reviewed by the Guiding Teachers of both centers, to ensure all potential trainees meet the expected standards and criteria.

For the 2025–2028 training, 44 candidates were nominated between July and December of 2023, 30 from that group were invited to apply, and in June of this year, 23 people were notified of their acceptance into the program. “We find that’s a good-sized group for them to get to know each other well,” says DaRa, a program lead teacher, IMS board member, and emeritus Guiding Teacher. “Over the four years, the trainees form bonds that create a practice community, a learning community, a teaching community, and friendships. Once they’ve graduated, they often teach with one another.”

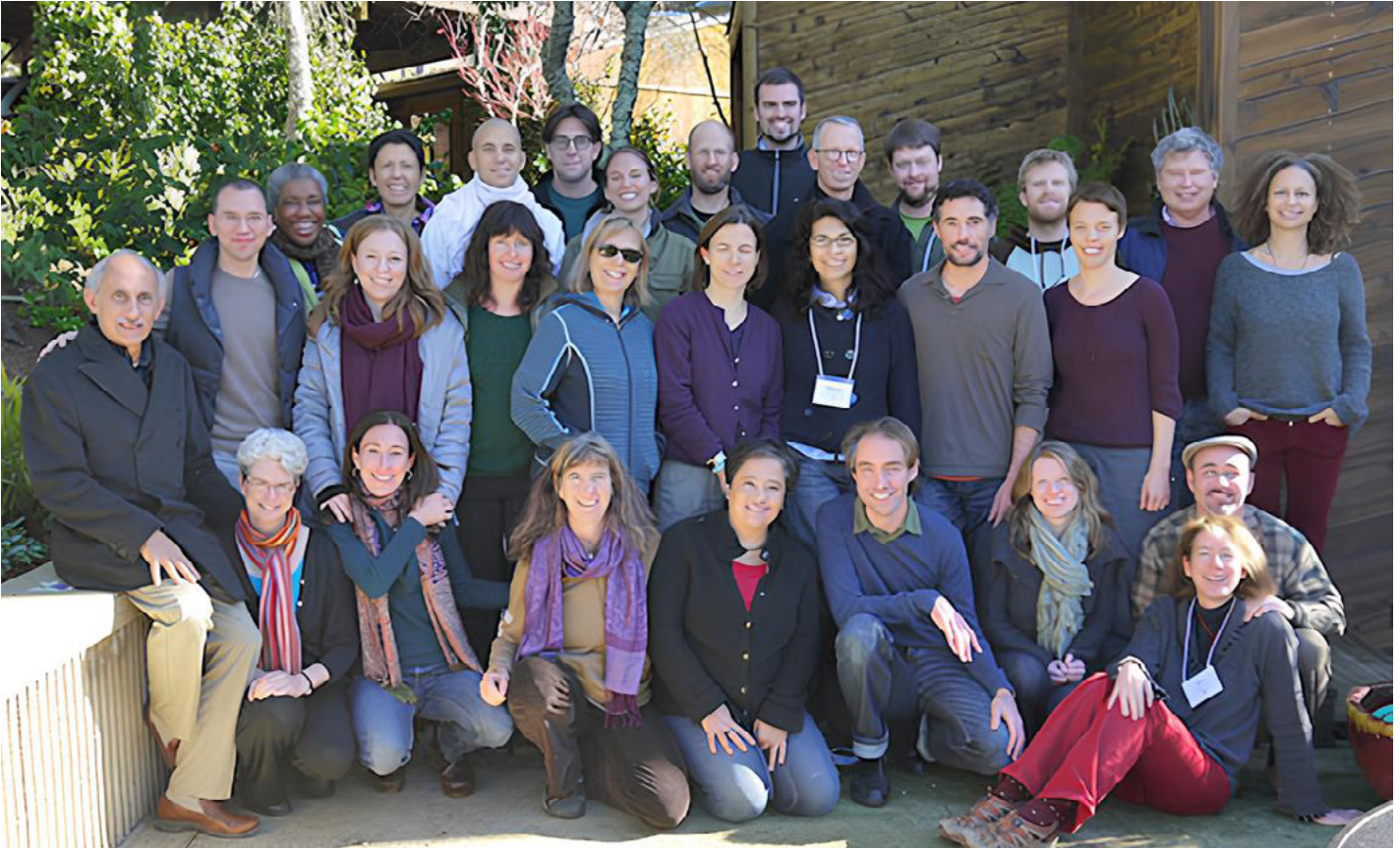
What are the criteria for assessing TTP nominees?

The teaching team looks for candidates who have a deep faith in the Buddhadharma, a demonstrated depth of practice, and impeccable sila (morality, or right conduct). A well-qualified candidate will be interested in teaching silent retreats rooted in the Pali canon/early Buddhist teachings. They will have identified any personal traumas and practiced with and worked through them, have demonstrated leadership skills, and have the capacity for self-sufficiency and empathy.

Selected candidates will also have a deep commitment to developing skills and competencies in the domain of diversity, equity, and inclusion. They will be willing to learn constructive feedback techniques and train to give and receive feedback skillfully. Finally, the team looks for candidates who already have a deep commitment to residential retreat practice, demonstrated by the substantial amount of time, effort, and resources they have devoted to this practice.

Does the teaching team consider diversity when forming a TTP cohort?

The group of trainees for the upcoming program is extremely diverse—across ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, geography, and socioeconomic background. Creating such a cohort was easy this



Teachers and trainees from the last IMS/Spirit Rock Teacher Training Program, 2013–2016.

year, because the pool of nominated candidates was already so diverse, says program lead teacher Tuere. “How naturally we pulled this group together is a testament to how much effort has been put into diversity in prior years,” Tuere says, referencing the work IMS and Spirit Rock have done to ensure yogis of all backgrounds and identities feel welcomed.

The impact of this work has been gradual, building steadily over the past decade and more. For example, at IMS’s Three-Month Retreat in 2013, 35% of the retreatants (45 participants) identified as BIPOC. Several of them—including Tuere, Devin Berry, Nakawe Cuebas Berrios, Tara Mulay, and Matthew Hepburn—went on to join the last TTP (2017–2021). After graduating, they began teaching at IMS, Spirit Rock, and centers around the country.

“That [2013] retreat set in motion many of the teachers you see today,” Tuere reflects. “As people got to see us and learn about us from being on retreat teaching teams, we attracted more diverse populations to those centers. Many, many people who were nominated for

this upcoming teacher training, including many who were accepted into the final cohort, came through those retreats.”

“That’s how diversity works,” she added. “It’s not something you do all at once. It’s something that grows out of the efforts, large and small, that you continue to do over time.”

Do nominating teachers stay involved throughout the training?

By submitting a name for consideration, teachers are making a considerable commitment to their nominee. For the 2025–2028 iteration, teachers who nominated a student agreed to be their candidate’s mentoring teacher throughout the program—meeting with them every other month, providing them with necessary mentoring, and including their candidate on their retreat teaching teams over the four years. They also agreed to maintain a close relationship with their trainee for at least a year after graduation.

Where and how often does the group meet during the TTP?

The program includes three weeklong retreats each year: one at Spirit Rock in Woodacre, California; another at IMS, at the nearby Barre Center for Buddhist Studies; and a third online. An exception to the annual online retreat will be during the first year, when the trainees will meet at the Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center in Ward, Colorado.

What is included in the program?

Over the next four years, a robust curriculum, mentoring, and retreat teaching experience will deepen the trainees' ability to transmit the Buddha's teachings of liberation. The TTP includes a training component and an apprenticeship component, which function like theory and practice. The training component covers four areas: the cultivation of the students' Dharma knowledge; the deepening of their Dharma practice, largely through sitting retreats during the program; the development of their teaching skills; and the deepening of their personal growth and maturity.

"The theory component of the program covers the teachings of the Buddha, sutta study, and contemporary Dharma books the trainees should be familiar with," Guy explains. "The teaching skills covered include everything from how to prepare a Dharma talk to how to run a community meditation practice group and conduct an interview group. Trainees are instructed on how to recognize the existence of trauma in students and meditators, and then, having detected trauma, how to respond to it and hold it."

The training also covers how to relate to students from a diverse range of backgrounds. "The yogi population increasingly comes from diverse backgrounds, and teachers need to understand how those backgrounds have influenced people and how we can best understand and relate to those backgrounds," says DaRa. "And because we on the teaching team and the trainees are so diverse, we bring that understanding and perspective to the program in part just by showing up as who we are."

During the apprenticeship component, trainees get a behind-the-scenes look at how retreats unfold from the teacher's point of view, as well as a well-rounded exposure to what's involved in teaching an actual

retreat. "They learn how a retreat gets put together, how the interview groups are formed, how interviews are assigned to different teachers, the different staff roles and how to relate with staff on a retreat, and what's required to hold a retreat container," Guy says.

In the first year of the program, trainees begin by sitting in on teacher group meetings with retreatants and perhaps leading chanting. In year two, as they move into the role of assistant to the retreat leaders, they may offer individual meetings with retreatants or a guided brahmavihara meditation. In year three, they might be asked to give a dharma talk, hold a Q&A after brahmavihara, or guide a group practice meeting with up to a dozen yogis. By year four, they may be functioning as a full teacher, giving meditation instructions in the hall or offering Q&A sessions for yogis, and some of them may be invited onto retreat teaching teams.

In addition to guidance from the primary teaching team, trainees also receive input from other senior IMS and Spirit Rock teachers, as well as outside consultants and experts in specialized areas. And because a grounding in psychological understanding is important for teachers, the trainees are often asked to complete a course in a trauma-informed modality—such as Somatic Experiencing, Hakomi Mindful Somatic Psychotherapy, or Indigenous Focusing-Oriented Therapy—to support them in skillfully working with trauma in the context of a retreat.

How much does the TTP cost?

"We're not charging the students anything for retreat time," says Inger Forland, IMS Executive Director. "The responsibility of training Dharma teachers is really one of the most important things we can hold as a major center in our tradition—and I know our friends at Spirit Rock feel the same. And of course, by helping to offset some of the real costs of the TTP, our

extended community joins in lifting up this new generation of teachers. It's quite beautiful." In addition, the centers are offering some financial support for trainees who are unable to cover travel costs.

The total cost to the centers for the upcoming TTP is \$720,000, and Spirit Rock and IMS are each responsible for half that amount. The price tag is \$160,000 higher than the last iteration of the TTP, as this time around, lead teachers will receive a modest monthly stipend for the program, rather than relying entirely on dana as in the past.

To cover our portion, IMS fundraises specifically for the TTP. The 2024 spring appeal brought in more than \$50,000 from 180 donors, leaving \$310,000 still to be raised. ■



To donate in support of the TTP and the next generation of Dharma teachers, scan this QR code.

Meet the Trainees

Learn a little bit about each student enrolled in the 2025–2028 IMS/Spirit Rock Teacher Training Program.



ISABEL ADON is an Afro-Latinx licensed clinical social worker who has been meditating for more than 25 years and has been a member of the New York Insight Meditation Center for 20 of those years. She leads BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ groups throughout the Tristate area, has served on the IMS Board, and is presently the Board President of Peace at Any Pace. Isabel is a Level 1 MBSR teacher and completed Somatic Abolitionist Training with Resmaa Menakem. She is trained in a variety of therapeutic modalities, including family systems therapy, dialectical behavioral therapy, focusing-oriented therapy, solution-focused therapy, and aboriginal/indigenous/cultural-centered therapy.



RONYA FAKHOURY BANKS is founding teacher of Asheville Insight Meditation group in Asheville, North Carolina, has been a practicing meditator for 38 years, and also spent time as a Theravada Buddhist nun. She is a graduate of the Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leader program, with Jack Kornfield and Chanmyay Sayadaw as her primary teachers, and serves as a mentor for Jack's Mindfulness Teacher training program with Tara Brach. Ronya works as a trauma-healing therapist, and has 25 years' experience as a business consultant and entrepreneur. Born in Kuwait, she is Palestinian-American and comes from an Islamic faith background.



BRETT BETHKE has been practicing insight meditation since 2010, when he attended his first retreat at IMS. He has a love of long retreat practice and deep trust in the potential for each of us to transform our suffering and realize greater peace, clarity, and compassion in our lives. Brett's interest in teaching stems from his desire to explore this possibility with others, with the goal of supporting practitioners to use the unique conditions of their own lives as opportunities for growth and understanding.



MARIO CASTILLO has been a dedicated Buddhist practitioner in the Theravada and Vipassana traditions for more than 15 years. He began attending the East Bay Meditation Center's Alphabet and People of Color Sanghas in 2009, and co-founded the Deep Refuge group Alphabet Brothers of Color in 2010. Mario is a graduate of EBMC's Commit to Dharma program and inaugural Spiritual Teacher and Leadership Training, and practiced as a Buddhist monk in Thailand with Venerable Acharn Tippakorn Sukhito. He received his PhD in sociology from UC Berkeley in 2023, focusing on organizational diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.



MELANIE HUITSE CHERNG (程慧慈) was raised in a Taiwanese family that practices Pure Land Buddhism. Communal and spiritual life are deeply intertwined for her—she remembers coloring outside the altar room door as a young child, while listening to her father chant at dawn. Mel has been offering meditation instruction to the BIPOC community at Cambridge Insight for the last decade, and loves learning different ways to hold spacious, non-hierarchical practice spaces that support rest and healing. She is a licensed acupuncturist, herbalist, and dancer, and she and her partner are currently rewilding their backyard with native plants. Mel identifies as a baby queer.



LISSA EDMOND began a dedicated dharma practice in 2008, and studies Vipassana and the Brahmaviharas as their primary path, with influences from Zen. Lissa is a teacher of meditation and mindful movement (qigong, yoga, etc.), somatic/trauma psychotherapist, and nurse practitioner (DNP, PMHNP-BC). Lissa identifies practice as a deep form of love and care, and shares compassionate, embodied, and trauma-responsive practices for the wellness and liberation of all beings.



WYNN FRICKE co-founded Common Ground Meditation Center in Minneapolis in 1993 with Mark Nunberg. She served on Common Ground's board for nine years and continues her work there as a leader and teacher. She has practiced in the Thai Forest and Mahasi Sayadaw traditions and taught with Marcia Rose in her Self-No Self and the Creative Process retreats. Wynn served on the board of the Buddhist Insight Network for five years. A professional choreographer, Wynn is on the faculty of the Department of Theater and Dance at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota.



NICO HASE lived in a monastery for six years before earning a PhD in counseling psychology and becoming a full-time Insight Meditation teacher. He currently mentors mindfulness teachers, teaches online and in-person retreats, and speaks with students in one-on-one sessions. He and his life partner, Devon, are the authors of *How Not to Be a Hot Mess: A Buddhist Survival Guide for Modern Life*.



RAE HOUSEMAN is a meditation teacher and mentor who has been practicing for more than 20 years and has a depth of practice in both the Insight Meditation and Vajrayana traditions. Rae brings to their teachings a trauma-informed lens that includes cultural and ancestral levels of trauma. They believe that the practice is a powerful support for opening to our essential nature and living a more attuned and authentic life.



NAMU KANG is an explorer of consciousness in this brief interval between birth and death. His curiosity about how much freedom and beauty is possible has taken him to monasteries and meditation centers across Myanmar, Thailand, India, and the United States. In the past, Namu has managed products at Google, traveled the world making videos, and built software tools to help people be more mindful online. He loves long retreats and emphasizes the importance of enjoyment, play, and experimentation in practice.



GINA LAROCHE started her meditation practice in 2000, and was introduced to Insight Meditation while attending her first residential retreat in 2010. Deeply transformed by the Dharma, Gina integrates its teachings into her daily life and work. A 2017 graduate of the Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leader Program; founding teacher of Elm Community Insight in New Haven, Connecticut; and former IMS Board member, she co-holds the monthly POC sit at Cambridge Insight Meditation Center. Coauthor of *The 7 Laws of Enough: Cultivating a Life of Sustainable Abundance*, Gina is known for her compassionate teaching style and dedication to making mindfulness accessible to all.



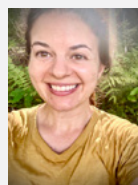
JEAN LEONARD, PhD, is a licensed psychologist, teacher, and mentor. She has been meditating since 2003, and her practice has been nourished by the core teachings of the Theravada and Chan Buddhist lineages, particularly the brahma viharas and Kuan Yin dharmas. Jean is a board member of the Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center and a trained Buddhist Eco-Chaplain, supporting individuals and communities impacted by the ecological crises of our times. She delights in pottery, poetry, and soaking in the wisdom of elder trees, and has a passion for nature practice, women’s sangha building, and practice related to aging, illness, and dying.



ANTHONY “T” MAES has held Dhamma as his heart’s compass since 2000. With deep connection to his Nuevomexicano lineage and multiracial working-class background, T intentionally supports practitioners of diverse backgrounds, exploring what it means to practice decolonized relational mindfulness. T studied Theravada Buddhism at Spirit Rock and East Bay Meditation Center, and with Thai Forest monastics in Ajahn Chah’s lineage in Thailand, and also trained in Organic Intelligence with Steve Hoskinson. His primary Dhamma teachers are JoAnna Hardy and Tempel Smith. He teaches at Spirit Rock, Insight Meditation Society, EBMC, Freedom-Together, Inward Bound, and as founding teacher of Dharma Homies Collective.



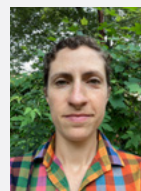
JUSTIN MICHELSON has practiced Buddhist meditation since 2000, including experience in the Theravada, Zen, and Tibetan traditions. Asked to teach by his root teacher, Rodney Smith, he began offering classes and retreats in 2016. He is trained as a Community Dharma Leader through Spirit Rock and as a teacher of Awake In The Wild nature meditation through Mark Coleman, and is the guiding teacher for Eugene Insight in Oregon. Justin is the author of the forthcoming book *The Dharma of Healing: The Path of Liberation from Stress, Pain, and Trauma* (Shambhala, June 2025).



Since falling in love with practice two decades ago, **ELENI MONOS** has spent multiple years in intensive silent retreat. In 2023, she completed over a year of continuous retreat. Eleni is gratefully mentored by Guy Armstrong, Kamala Masters, and Susie Harrington. A graduate of Spirit Rock’s Advanced Practitioner Program, she is currently part of an international leadership cohort funded by the Bess Foundation, centered on expanding Buddhist teaching in nature. Eleni is trained as a nurse and served for a decade in the ICU. She loves poetry, backpacking, and bringing the practice out of doors.



RAMONA LISA ORTIZ-SMITH, MBA, has 25+ years of cumulative meditation and Dharma practice in the Theravada tradition. A dedicated practitioner who has taken contemporary vows and lives as a lay renunciate, Ramona Lisa is a graduate of East Bay Meditation Center’s Commit to Dharma program and Spiritual Teacher and Leadership training, and Spirit Rock’s Dedicated Practitioners Program. A certified mindfulness teacher and mentor and Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy (IFOT) practitioner, she was recognized as a Dharma Relief 2 Fellow in 2023. Ramona Lisa weaves life experiences into her Dharma offerings with authenticity, kindness, humor, and joy.



MARGRIT PITTMAN-POLLETTA has been a practitioner in the insight meditation tradition since 2012. A qualified Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction teacher through the Mindfulness Center at Brown, and a certified Vinyasa Yoga teacher, she loves teaching and sharing the Dharma. Margrit is deeply committed to the integration of awareness and wisdom in daily life, as well as building inclusive community. In her free time, she enjoys biking around Brooklyn, where she was born and currently lives.



Driven by her curiosity and desire to understand the universe, and strengthened by the resilience forged by becoming a teenage mother, **FERNMARIE RODRIGUEZ** earned degrees in physics, mechanical engineering, and human-centered design engineering. After 15 years of corporate experience at companies including Microsoft, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and NASA, she felt compelled to shift focus towards the “inner universe,” leaving a successful career to embark on a global pilgrimage exploring ancient healing practices from diverse cultures. Today, she’s grateful for her background and for the insights she’s gained from Vipassana meditation practices, and is inspired to support others on their journey inward.



KATE SIBER is a friend, sister, daughter, aunt, wife, listener, avid reader, watcher of clouds, meanderer through the forests, appreciator of art and beauty, and lover of wild things. She lives in Durango, Colorado, where she serves as a community dharma leader for the Durango Dharma Center, offering talks and classes, co-stewarding the spiritual programming for the sangha, and constantly learning. She also works as a freelance journalist, correspondent for *Outside* magazine, and children’s book author. Her work can be found in publications such as *National Parks*, various *National Geographic* titles, and the *New York Times Magazine*.



AISHAH SHAHIDAH SIMMONS is a Black feminist lesbian survivor-healer, Theravadin Buddhist, and trauma-informed mindfulness meditation teacher. She has been studying and practicing Vipassana meditation since 2002, and has more than one year of cumulative silent retreat practice in the United States and India. Her primary dharma teachers are Tuere Sala and DaRa Williams. Aishah is also an internationally acclaimed filmmaker, author, and lecturer whose award-winning works, *NO! The Rape Documentary* and *Love WITH Accountability: Digging Up the Roots of Child Sexual Abuse*, break silences, offer healing paths for trauma, and explore ways to humanely disrupt the inhumane sexual violence epidemic.



ADAM STONEBRAKER, a dedicated practitioner of meditation since 1999, serves as the Guiding Teacher for Mountain Stream Meditation in Nevada City, California, and as a core teacher with Sacred Mountain Sangha. He has been sharing the dharma and somatic movement practices locally and internationally since 2012. Adam's approach is particularly inspired by the Thai Forest Tradition of Ajahn Chah, through his primary teachers, Kittisaro & Thanissara, the bodhisattva path, and the natural world. His teachings emphasize natural mindfulness, compassion, and a deep connection to the environment.



PEACE TWESIGYE is the Director of Buddhist Studies and the Thích Nhất Hạnh Program for Engaged Buddhism at Union Theological Seminary. Peace has taught meditation and Buddhadharma in the northeastern United States and in France. As a recognized Insight Dialogue teacher, Peace brings together meditative awareness, Buddhist wisdom, and our relational nature as a path to awakening. Additionally, Peace serves on the board of Lion's Roar Foundation.



BRETT WHEELER has practiced insight meditation for 15 years, and has taught meditation in prisons and free communities for the past 10. Mindfulness is for him an innate awakening to the present as a refuge from fear and self-centeredness. Given the many teachers who have supported his faith in the here and now of experience, he is excited to engage with others who are open to this same self-discovery and ethical care and intimacy with the world. He lives in Berkeley, California, works as a psychotherapist, plays the organ, and was previously an attorney and professor of German literature.



IMS's BIPOC Retreat *Turns 20*

Three teachers of color reflect on the power of practicing with their community.

DaRa Williams came to IMS for the first time in 2003, for a women's retreat. Out of 100 people, she and the friend who accompanied her to Barre were the only two women of color there.

"Of all the retreats I have ever sat, and I've sat many, that was the only one I ever left before it ended," DaRa says. "There was no connection for us there."

But just a few months later, DaRa attended the first people of color vipassana meditation retreat on the East Coast. Held at the Garrison Institute north of New York City, the program was taught by Ralph Steele, Gina Sharpe, and IMS co-founder Joseph Goldstein.

"That retreat changed everything for me," DaRa says. "Surrounded by other people of color, and especially Black people, all of us meditating, I realized at some point, 'Now, this feels like home. I can do this!'"



The teaching team, above, and a group photo, below, from this year's BIPOC Retreat.

DaRa went on to sit six more consecutive People of Color retreats at IMS, starting with IMS's first official POC retreat, also held at Garrison, in June 2004. We're now celebrating the 20th anniversary of that retreat—which in 2020 was renamed the BIPOC retreat, to emphasize that Black and Indigenous people are severely impacted by systemic racial injustice.

"Finding the Dharma in the POC community, outside of white view, allowed me the freedom to grow in the practice," says DaRa, who today is an emeritus guiding teacher at IMS. "The BIPOC retreats I attended were essential to my growth and development as a meditator and as a dharma teacher."

IMS teacher Ruth King, who sat her first POC retreat at IMS in 2007, recalls her very first POC retreat several years earlier, at Spirit Rock, as eye-opening. For the first time, she became aware of the tension she held in



her body when she was on retreats with predominantly white people. “It took being on a BIPOC retreat for me to experience the difference,” she says.

Ruth was raised in the Black community and in Black Christian churches, “where the experience is joyous and body-centered, and there’s music and vibrancy,” she says. “The path of silent meditation retreats is a very different vibe than that, and it’s a big switch for a lot of Black folks. So, on my first BIPOC retreat I was delighted to see so many other Black people, to feel joined with them in a practice that is so inward-focused.”

“I’ve seen how helpful it is when people are surrounded by community they feel safe and comfortable with,” says **IMS Guiding Teacher Kamala Masters**. “During retreats, people also feel supported and respected by teachers who are part of the non-dominant culture.” A biracial Filipino and White immigrant, Kamala came to America with her mother when she was two years old, and she grew up in neighborhoods mostly populated with people of color.

“I was raised in a Filipino household in the Sunnydale projects of San Francisco and then in East Palo Alto,” says Kamala, who has taught several BIPOC retreats. “When I feel community around me, my heart relaxes,” she adds. “And as a teacher, I’ve seen that when people’s hearts are relaxed and open, the Dharma can enter in ways that transform lives.”

In BIPOC retreats, yogis are mostly free of the external distractions around microaggressions, race, and being marginalized socially, politically, and in many other ways, explains Ruth, who taught at this year’s BIPOC retreat at IMS, as well as the 2022 BIPOC retreat. “This increases their capacity to soften and relax into the practice, to surrender to the beauty of the teachings, and to open to the fleeting moments of awareness. It’s an opportunity to connect intimately with the breath, and to reclaim the body.”

Having that space in which to sink deeply into practice has opened the way for many BIPOC yogis to make the decision to train as teachers. And, in turn, BIPOC teachers on the faculty of insight communities around the country and the world have welcomed new meditators of color, creating an ever-widening circle. When Ruth and DaRa were part of the teaching team at a Black women’s retreat at Spirit Rock this past spring, 97 women attended, and the waitlist was nearly as long as the list of participants.

“Some people question why we have affinity groups and BIPOC-only retreats,” Ruth notes. “They say, ‘We all ought to be able to be in a group together and figure this all out. Race shouldn’t be an issue, and we ought to be able to use whatever comes up in our practice.’ That’s true, for sure. But I think what’s even more powerful is, when that [issue] is not there, how that serves our capacity to meet wherever we are with more ease and connection.” ■



Finding *the Words*

In his 75th year, a surprising thing happened to IMS co-founder Joseph Goldstein: He began writing poetry.

Interview by Amy Gross



Photograph by Michelle Schapiro



A YEAR AGO, I was on a retreat led by Joseph Goldstein, and I admitted to him that I'd been feeling lonely. "I've got the antidote to that!" he said, as delighted as I've ever seen him.

"You do?" I asked.

"Yes. Write poetry! It comes out of the same space."

The same space: What could that mean? And how did Joseph come to write poetry? We ended the conversation with him promising to send me some poems and encouraging me to send him mine. So here we are now, he with pages of his poetry and I with a pile of questions.

"Joseph," I start, "I was so excited to have you prescribe an antidote to loneliness—and to discover you were writing poetry—that I didn't ask what you meant. What is that space?"

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN: There's a line that's relevant here ... [he rifles through his pages]. It's the title of my poem "Love of My Lonely Hours." That's the feeling.

*Years ago,
winter brought joy.
Now,
love of my lonely hours
fills the winter grey silence
and poems,
like Christmas candles,
illuminate the night.*

AG: So the poetry comes out of loneliness?

JG: We need to parse what loneliness means, because for me loneliness has more to do with the feeling of aloneness than feeling diminished or abandoned or contracted ...

AG: ... which is what most people would associate with the word lonely?

JG: Yes, but when loneliness transfigures into aloneness, there's a poignancy to that space and an emptiness and a stillness and a gentleness—it's all those qualities that give rise to poetry.

AG: After that retreat, when I would feel a stab of loneliness, I'd remember what you said, get interested in the feeling, and almost immediately feel that I was not alone. There was a sense of communion in that space, of listening, waiting and listening. I was in some kind of dialogue. I wasn't alone.

JG: So this ties into my one- or two-paragraph book [he grins] called *The Myth of Intimacy*. The myth of intimacy is that you need two people to have intimacy. But "intimate" is another word for this space—it's so intimate the way it's experienced; it doesn't need another person.

AG: You're reminding me of a line from Rumi: "There is a voice that doesn't use words. Listen." What are we listening to?

JG: To quote another poet, Pessoa,

*Live, you say, in the present;
Live only in the present.
But I don't want the present. I want reality.*

So in a way it's listening to—I was going to say messages, but it's not exactly a message. It's just opening to some underlying reality that may be obscured in the busyness of our lives. When we're in this quiet space, we are very intimate with what's going on. So, for example, one of the poems goes like this:

*Bird song
in the open sky
of my mind*

That came when I was doing walking meditation outside. The normal understanding of reality is that the birds are up there in the sky, and I'm here and I'm listening to the bird. But in that moment there was no separation between up there and in here. I think one other quality of the poetic mind space is that it's very sensitized. It's very delicate and sensitive to things that are normally covered over. It can be a moment of seeing something new or having a new perception. In aloneness, it has the space to flower. And it's appreciating the stillness and quiet in which the words can sparkle.

AG: Which reminds me of your poem about how you started writing poetry:

The Muse
*Something happened
in my seventy-fifth year—
a channel opened
to oceans of space,
where words sparkle
in their sparse delight
calling, calling, calling.*

You're being called. And you notice being called. In your teaching, you've often talked about Noticings Per Minute—"NPMs"—how, with practice, the number of thoughts, sensations, emotions noticed goes up. The more we practice, the more mind space is available to be aware, to notice. "The Muse" is saying that when you're alone, there's an openness, an undistractedness, so when phenomena arise, you've got the mind space not only to notice them but also to let them flower—flower into poetry?

JG: What I love about the practice of poetry is crafting language. That itself—there's great satisfaction in it. There was a big turning point when I first started writing. I showed some of the work to a really accomplished poet friend of mine, and she said something that changed my whole attitude toward writing. She said it was all about revision. I had been in this very enthusiastic, rather sophomoric state where I thought every word that came out of my mind or my pen was perfect from the start, which is ridiculous.

AG: That brings me to something I read in preparing for this conversation with you. In an anthology called *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism and Contemporary American Poetry*, the Zen priest and poet Norman Fischer mentions Allen Ginsberg's famous writing instruction: "First thought, best thought." Philip Whalen questions that, saying "'First thought, best thought' is different from 'first word, best word.'" Leading Fischer to confide to the reader: "Allen does a lot of rewriting."

JG: Exactly. I can see "first thought" as that spark of insight you might get about something. For example, I was just sitting with morning coffee, quiet, in that space of enjoying the solitude, and my mind and body went into noticing and feeling how everything was continually disappearing. That was the first thought for a poem, noticing that everything is swirling down the drain of time. But then there was a long process of building out from it and a huge amount of revision. So the final thing—final for now—was completely different from the first draft.

AG: When a moment of noticing arises, do you start playing with it in your mind, or do you pick up a writing instrument and go to a pad?

JG: I'll start off often with an insight, an abstract insight. Like with "The Drain of Time," the first thing I wrote was the line that you've heard many, many times: "The thought of your mother is not your mother; it's just a thought"—and then I noticed that that thought too had gone down the drain. So I was trying to build around that. But then I realized—and this is part of my own learning—it's a little too philosophical or abstract. For a better poem, I needed to bring it down into the stuff of the world.

AG: "No ideas but in things," William Carlos Williams said.

JG: "Show, don't tell," said one of the poets giving me feedback. So that's part of my learning. Because my mind is so philosophically oriented, my first scribbles often start with the more abstract, but then I cut that away. I really love that part of the process. I think of Michelangelo, who said that he cut away through stone to reveal the figure that was there. With writing, it's almost like sculpting space through words. Deletion is the best because then the poem gets pure and sparse.

AG: That taste for the pure and sparse seems to be a mark of contemporary poetry. In an essay in *Beneath the Moon*, Allen Ginsberg wrote "For most of the Moderns [Pound, William Carlos Williams, Jack Kerouac]...the motive for poetry has been purification of mind and speech. ...Real poetry practitioners are practitioners of mind awareness or practitioners of reality, expressing their fascination with a phenomenal universe and trying to penetrate to the heart of it." Poetry writing certainly sounds like a meditation practice: You go into the silence. Rilke says "you walk into yourself ..."

JG: Or walk into nonself or walk into emptiness.

AG: Rilke writes that solitude was the necessary condition for his poetry, and then, interestingly, he says this: "What is happening in your innermost self is worthy of your entire love." That's how I've come to understand meditation—as meeting every little thing that arises with love. Here's Rilke again: "There is only one solitude, and it is vast, heavy, and difficult to bear. What is necessary, after all, is only this: solitude, a vast inner solitude to walk inside yourself and meet no one for hours is what you must be able to attain."

Happy 80th, Joseph!

FIVE YEARS AGO, Joseph Goldstein was on vacation in Spain, listening to the poetry of Ocean Vuong, “when a creative channel opened, and poems came tumbling out.” It had been 50 years since Joseph first attempted to write poetry, while in the Peace Corps, and his rediscovery of the art has renewed his appreciation for the creative process as an aspect of the dharma practice. Since that moment in Spain, his poetry has continued to flow, and often takes the form of a contemplation on aging.

So when IMS threw Joseph a virtual 80th-birthday party in May—featuring Dan Harris and Sharon Salzberg and hosted by Lily Cushman—it was fitting that his poetry was a thread running through the evening. The event began with a beautiful montage of photos of Joseph, from childhood to today, created and set to music by Elizabeth Cuthrell, who wove Joseph’s poems throughout the homage.

John Clement set Joseph’s “Lazy Day at 76” to music, singing and playing guitar. Joseph’s goddaughter, Josie, and a friend of hers performed an interpretive dance based on three of Joseph’s poems, “Ode to Non-Being,” “The Mirror,” and “The Gaze.”

Almost 5,000 people registered for the event, and many guests shared stories and offered tributes, including Jack Kornfield, Rose Nisker, Jozen Tamori Gibson, Mark Epstein, Bhikkhu Analayo, George Mumford, Sally and Guy Armstrong, Sam Harris, Krishna Das, and Joseph’s older brother, Paul Goldstein.

The evening was full of surprises. Ram Dass’ Love Serve Remember Foundation shared rare film footage that not even Joseph and Sharon knew existed. The clip captured a 30-year-old Joseph giving one of his earliest dharma talks, at the 1974 Naropa Summer Institute—two years before the founding of IMS.

For the evening’s final performance, Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter Sarah Bareillis serenaded Joseph with his favorite Beatles song, “With a Little Help from My Friends.”

Many thanks to members of the sangha who made donations to IMS for Joseph’s birthday in lieu of sending gifts.

The IMS sangha feted our co-founder with an online evening of poetry, stories, music, and love.



Staff waved happy birthday to Joseph to close the virtual event.

Dreamscapes of the Mind: Poems and Reflections

As a birthday gift to Joseph, IMS printed a collection of his poetry.

The 36-page softcover includes 21 poems and almost a dozen short verses. Initially, we printed a small run of copies for Joseph to share with friends. But as his poetry began to generate wider interest, we have made copies available for a suggested donation of \$12 to support IMS’s Retreat Center scholarship fund.

Dreamscapes of the Mind

Poems and Reflections

Joseph Goldstein



For a copy of Joseph’s book, scan this QR code.

JG: I think people who are somewhat experienced in meditation have already gone through what is “vast, heavy, and difficult to bear.” For me, not only is it not difficult or hard to bear, it is a joy. I love that space. And that also could be a link between the meditative process and the creative process of writing.

AG: I happened to open Maxine Hong Kingston’s book *To Be the Poet*. She had decided she had written her last long book—now she was going to become a poet. She was going to be in the moment. She asked two of her poet friends how to get the poems coming, one of the friends being Tess Gallagher. Both said you have to clear a day. No distractions. It sounds like retreat.

JG: Clearing space is a beautiful image, but I’ll say that having done many retreats and so cleared a lot of days already, I think it need not be a whole day—clearing the morning would work, and sometimes it’s simply the quiet space of a few moments. The mind needs to be quiet, and depending on how much training one has had in quieting the mind, it takes less or more time to do it.

AG: For you, Joseph, in this space, what often arises is contemplation of aging.

JG: Which was not planned. That itself was interesting. I didn’t have it in my mind with a thought like “Oh, I want to write about the aging process.” These moments are just what came up.

AG: You’re asking a lot of questions. Here’s “Lazy Day at 76”:

*Morning coffee
and a first glimpse
into the unknown day,
waiting for that pulse of life
to push through the pale joy
of sitting,
doing nothing.
Going for a walk
is almost too much
on this day of questionable ease:
Is it simply resting up
to save the world
or the faint glimmer of decline?
I’ll decide tomorrow
if I awaken in the morning light.*

I remember your saying, decades ago, that meditation is practice for dying. I think about that a lot, more and more every year. One thing you’re doing in these poems is embodying ways to face the signposts with a level head, opening to the uncertainties around death.

JG: Yes, I just recently came up with “The Harbingers” as a title for the first group of poems because they were all harbingers of aging, dying, death. To me, practice for dying is implicit in all the questions about aging. There may be an unacknowledged acknowledgment of the fact that it’s coming, but it’s in there even if it’s not named explicitly.

AG: I teach mindfulness to a group of elders, and, frankly, I’ve been afraid to share your idea that meditation is practice for dying. I dodge it by saying it’s practice for aging.

JG: Right, but in your class, it would be interesting to test the waters, and drop the D-word a few times, because my impression is that people, as they get older, are very aware of death and that it’s coming. It may be a huge relief for them to talk about it. It’s like something Sharon [Salzberg] said early on. When she first came to Buddhism, she was so relieved to hear the first noble truth—that suffering was acknowledged. It’s kind of the same thing with death. I think people may be relieved to have that opened up. Especially as they get older, in one way or another people know that they’re going to die, whether they really let it in or not. How can you be a certain age and not think about it?

AG: I’m going to try it.

JG: I’ll be interested to hear how it goes, and maybe you’ll say “Boy, Joseph, that was a stupid idea.” Since we don’t know how people will respond, you put it out and have to be very sensitive to the response. Some people won’t go there, and that’s fine. But other people may want to.

AG: Another remark about writing struck me as relevant to what you’re doing. Here’s the Native American poet Joy Harjo: “Poetry is going to the places that have no words and finding the words.” And that too can describe what happens on retreat,

in meditation. You can be overtaken by a feeling and respond with curiosity: What is it? Where'd it come from? And then you find the words to understand what arose.

JG: Well, I think that one of the experiences people have on retreats is a very intimate experience with the breath, with the body, with emotions, because there's no separation. That's kind of the essence of intimacy: nonseparation. It's just oneself getting out of the way. The Chinese poet Li Po ended a poem with these words: "We live together, the mountain and me, until only the mountain remains." So that's kind of meditative. When we take ourselves out of the picture, then all that's left is everything. To me, that is the definition of intimacy.

AG: This ties right into Norman Fischer on what meditation can do. "The grip on self can very naturally loosen, the grip on meaning loosens, and there is the possibility of entering wholeheartedly into a dark or unknown territory."

JG: Or into a light and unknown territory.

AG: Yes! Once again, you're reframing the emotional tone from frightening to delightful. In fact, Fischer goes on: "An interesting footnote is that it is not a struggle. It is the release from struggle." After that retreat with you, I was sitting at my table facing the water and sky. The table is white, it's shiny and reflective—and a bird in the sky streaked across it. It felt like it streaked through me too. There was a recognition of nonseparation, and the possibility of doing something with that sensation—it was a poetic moment. There wasn't the agony of writing or the anguished-writer self. It was a gift.

JG: Yes, that's exactly my experience. Something happens, or there's a perception or an insight, and it sparks that interest in expressing it. So where's your poetry?

AG: I have nothing to show—I make notes, I pull away from them. But our conversation gave me the courage to be curious: When a friend who is a poet and meditation teacher offered an evening of teaching poetry, I actually dared go to it. And then I signed up for a Ruth Ozeki writing workshop at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. Before our conversation, I would have been too writing-phobic to participate. At the end of the retreat, Ruth asked us to say what our

plan for writing was. I said "I am never going to write something for publication, and I'm going to really enjoy writing." She looked a little startled.

JG: That makes perfect sense. ■

Amy Gross is a contributing editor at *Tricycle* and the former editor-in-chief of *O, The Oprah Magazine* (from 2000 to 2008). She sat her first IMS retreat—Joseph's 10-day Vipassana retreat—in 1995, and she has been back (almost) every year since. She has been teaching Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction since 2010.

This interview originally appeared in the Winter 2023 issue of Tricycle: The Buddhist Review.





Retreats for *Everyone, Everywhere, All at Once*

IMS Online expands access through hybrid programming.

IF THE BUDDHA were alive today, he'd almost certainly be live-streaming his dharma talks.

“The Buddha taught different people in different ways,” says Alexandra Cain, Director of IMS Online since October 2022. “He even answered the same questions from different people in different ways, because he wanted to respond to each person in a way that would speak to them to help them on their path. IMS Online gives us the opportunity to do that. The more we explore and offer different teaching styles, the more people we can serve according to their learning styles.”

To reach people where they are—spiritually and geographically—IMS provides fully online programming, residential retreats onsite in Barre,



and hybrid retreats, with participants joining both online and in person. The first hybrid retreat was with Joseph Goldstein in May of 2023, followed by hybrid programs in August and December. This year, IMS offered four hybrid retreats, and four are scheduled for 2025, with Rebecca Bradshaw (April 14–21), Devin Berry (May 28–June 2), Kamala Masters (August 4–13), and Narayan Helen Liebenson (August 15–17).

Launching hybrid programming was a complicated feat of technology and timing, and the IMS Online team was gratified to receive an overwhelming amount of positive feedback. “One email came from a woman who’d been practicing with IMS for a very long time and is now in her 90s,” Alexandra shared. “Joseph had been her teacher for 30 or 40 years, but she just couldn’t make it to Barre anymore, and she was so

grateful for the opportunity to do his retreat from home.”

For those who Zoom in, a hybrid retreat is essentially a virtual version of the experience, with remote access to all talks and sits in the meditation hall. In some programs, those online can also participate in Question and Response sessions with the teachers. The format creates space for yogis who can't make the trip to Barre due to work, family obligations, finances, distance, or physical limitations. It also allows entrée for those who get waitlisted for popular residential retreats due to high demand. All IMS Online programs offer closed captioning and transcripts of talks.

“I think of hybrid retreats as one more access point for people to enter the meditation hall,” Alexandra says. “The aesthetics of the meditation hall add a lot to the experience of being on retreat, and you can't easily replicate that in your own home or apartment, so the hybrid retreat adds that dimension.”

For people who are considering a residential retreat, the hybrid version offers a chance to participate from home before making a bigger investment of time and funds. It's also a great way to get to know new

teachers, who often inspire remote yogis to come sit with them in person.

“We have more BIPOC teachers, more Spanish-speaking teachers, and more LGBTQIA teachers than ever before, and elevating their voices is one of our goals at IMS Online,” Alexandra says.

Yogis can attend half-day, one-day, and three-day (or longer) hybrid retreats, plus weekly all-online classes and sanghas, including BIPOC, Insight Recovery, Metta, Monday Night Meditation, and Nature Sangha. Alexandra notes that 67 online programs were scheduled for 2024, up from 64 in 2023 and 45 in 2022. New options include In the Buddha's Words, a sutta study series; Sharon Salzberg's Fireside Chat series; and a 30-Day Meditation Challenge in the new year for folks to reinvigorate their home practice. Captioning and transcripts for online programs further expand accessibility

“We're offering as many kinds of learning experiences and practice opportunities as possible,” Alexandra says. “Our goal is to help people find the online format that works best for them, because we know”—just like the Buddha did— “that one size doesn't fit all.” ■



Nourishment *by the Numbers*

Curious about what passes through our Retreat Center kitchen **each year?**

At every retreat meal, IMS aims to offer options that are nutritious, delicious, and free of herbicides and pesticides. Whenever possible, we serve food that is organic and locally sourced. Here's a peek at how much we use, where it comes from, and what happens to the scraps.



500 gallons

of local milk from Hancock Dairy Farm in Barre and High Lawn Farm in Lee, Massachusetts

2,000 bagels

from One Mighty Mill in Lynn, Massachusetts, milled and baked onsite with organic flour



1,000 pounds

of locally produced wildflower honey from Autumn Morning Farm in Barre

10,000 eggs

sourced from Gus Dickson, who has been selling eggs locally in Barre for more than 35 years

800 pounds

of seasonal organic produce from Many Hands Farm in Barre

1,500 pounds

of potatoes from Jekanowski Farm in Hadley, Massachusetts

Images (top to bottom): Hancock Dairy Farm, Autumn Morning Farm, Many Hands Farm





15,600 gallons

of food waste, which is collected weekly by nearby Carter & Stevens Farm, which turns it into compost to fertilize their fields—including the IMS hay field that they manage for us

1 ton

of handcrafted, small-batch organic, non-GMO soybeans grown on Maine and New England farms, from Heiwa Tofu, a small family business in Rockport, Maine

2,000+ loaves

of bread baked at IMS using regionally grown and milled organic flour from Farmer Ground Flour in Trumansburg, New York

2 tons

of eco-certified apples from Klein's Kill Fruit Farms in Germantown, NY, and IPM (Integrated Pest Management) apples from Pine Hill Orchards in Colrain, Massachusetts

2 tons

of local organic carrots, beets, and parsnips from Winter Moon Roots in Hadley, Massachusetts



Images (top to bottom): High Lawn Farm, Many Hands Farm, and Maple DuBois, collecting our compost for Carter & Stevens Farm.



Thank You

We offer our sincere gratitude to all who support and sustain IMS so that it may continue to be a spiritual refuge for all who seek freedom of mind and heart.

We acknowledge and thank our board of directors who generously donate their time and expertise to IMS.

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**One who makes merit rejoices in this life,
Rejoices in the next,
Rejoices in both worlds.
Seeing one's own pure acts brings joy and delight.**

The Dhammapada, verses 15-16
Translated by Gil Fronsdal



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