

Teacher Talking Points: Affinity Group Sitzings at IMS Retreats

- At IMS we are committed to creating an environment that is truly supportive and inclusive of all who come here – including those marginalized in dominant American society.
- While each of us comes to our practice with a multitude of challenges and traumas both small and large, certain communities in our larger culture are particularly diminished and marginalized due to historical and current realities.
- Attending retreats at IMS can be particularly challenging for people who identify as members of marginalized communities – whether that identity is visible to others or not. This is most often due to historical, systemic conditions of "otherness" and oppression, as well as different cultural and ethnic orientations influenced by race, sexual orientation and gender expression. Our retreat center is inevitably affected by its particular history including its culture, location, and infrastructure as well as unconscious bias in teachers, staff and yogis.
- IMS has committed to offering two Affinity Group Sitzings on each full day of a retreat: one for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and one for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Asexual and Intersex (LGBTQAI+) communities.
- For some, this offering is a welcome relief. Many self-identified BIPOC and LGBTQAI+ people appreciate and relish the opportunity to connect (in silence) with others who share their experiences.
- Some people may choose not to attend these groups, but they are offered once a day each for anyone self-identifying with either or both groups.
- For some yogis, this offering is confusing or even upsetting. Many questions can arise: What about our individual challenges? What about other groups that are marginalized in society? Aren't we all one?
- We invite you to consider that the Board and Guiding Teachers of IMS have put a lot of collective practice, training, thought, and care in our decision to create this opportunity. We believe this offering is a beneficial support. And this is in line with our mission to help develop awareness and compassion in ourselves, giving rise to greater peace and happiness in the world.
- Locations and times for affinity sits will be posted on the yogi board in the front hallway, and further instructions for the sits are included in the yogi binders in your rooms.
- We highly recommend that you read this very perceptive article by Kelsey Blackwell about why BIPOC folks need spaces where white people are not present.
<https://arrow-journal.org/why-people-of-color-need-spaces-without-white-people/>
- Final note to teachers on presenting this information: When there is a diverse teaching team it can be useful and supportive to have both a white teacher and a teacher (or assistant) of color or who identifies as LGBTQAI+ to introduce this offering into the retreat. This is in part because of the different lenses through which the information is conveyed, and in part to acknowledge the

projections by a diverse sangha.

*IMS will provide coaching if you have concerns regarding your ability or competence in communicating about the Affinity Sittings.