



# Insight Meditation Society

## Sangha News - Summer 2008

### Visions and Aspirations

*From Bob Agoglia, Executive Director:* Summer is now well and truly upon us in all its vibrant glory. This is a time of year at IMS when we hold a series of dedicated courses especially for teens, families, young adults and people of color.



In this context, I find myself imagining IMS and its retreats embodying the full racial and ethnic palette of black, brown, red, white and yellow colors and all of their beautiful combinations. This vision reflects the level of diversity that IMS has been seeking within our community. As part of our efforts to realize this vision we established the People of Color Retreat in 2003. It is now an annual event and one of our most popular courses.

We recognize, however, that IMS has been and continues to be a predominantly white community and, as such, contributes unwittingly to a sense of separation and disconnection felt by people from different racial, ethnic and religious heritages. This means that the voices and contributions of many people are missing as we work to make IMS a spiritual refuge for all who seek freedom from suffering.

We have therefore initiated an exploration of racial conditioning. Our staff, teachers and board members will all be involved in examining how this affects IMS as an organization, and each of us as individuals. It is our heartfelt wish that our collective learning will diminish our ignorance and make it possible for IMS to be a more welcoming and safer refuge for all - one where feelings can be expressed, experiences shared, and where the suffering of racism and other forms of oppression can be healed.

I am also pleased to announce that we have recently appointed four highly qualified board members, three of whom are people of color. We are confident that IMS will be enriched by their professional expertise and perspectives, and ultimately by the voices and contributions of a more diverse sangha. May our efforts be fruitful.



*Teachers and participants in this year's People of Color Retreat gathered for a group photo on closing day, July 3.*

### News Worth Noting

**Renovations Ahead** - Thanks to your generous contributions to our recent Spring Fund Drive, we have received almost 90% of our \$65,000 goal. This means we can move along with plans to renovate the Retreat Center's lower walking room and the 'Bowling Alley' corridor. Most of the project will be carried out next January, in between retreats, and will be finished before the start of our 2009 Retreat Center season. When the improvements are completed, you will find lighter and roomier spaces to support your mindful movement practice.

**Forest Refuge Cork Flooring** - We have gone ahead and replaced certain areas of the Forest Refuge flooring with a better cork material, as shown in the photo below.



**Decreasing our Environmental Footprint** - Throughout its life, IMS has taken care to conserve energy and to protect the environment. Our staff who live on-site share housing, (small) vehicles, computers, TV and phones. We thoroughly research and purchase the greenest cleaning and paper products, as well as energy-efficient appliances used in all areas of our operations. Our menu is vegetarian, and we do our best within budget to buy organic and local produce. We pay attention to fuel consumption with low thermostat settings in the winter and the absence of air conditioning in the summer. At the Forest Refuge, a range of advanced energy efficient systems were installed during its construction. And, we extensively recycle everything possible.

We continue to look for ways to reduce our carbon footprint, including exploration of alternative energy sources. As more is decided, we'll keep you updated.



## Program Highlights

**Recent Retreat Center Courses** - We hope the following reflection and images from our recent dedicated summer retreats convey the refuge, introspection, humor, joy and transformation experienced by participants.

*From Kestrel Cooke Slocombe (age 18 and a Teen Retreat participant):* **Reflection** - I can say truthfully that the recent Teen Retreat at IMS was a life-changing experience for me. It happened so gradually, so gently, that I didn't notice it happening - but now I see that it's such a deep change that I can't even imagine what I was like before.

Many of us are like rootless trees. Begging for nutrients, we wander over the land, branches up-stretched, searching for the sun. The winds blow strong, and some of us fall. Others manage to stand, branches shaking, all those new green leaves ripped away in handfuls. Some attempt to hold their branches stiff against the winds; those break off. And the worst part of it is the fact that we don't know what it is that we're missing. When roots exist, they're just as invisible as when they're lacking: they do their work beneath the ground. From the outside, one can see that a rootless tree is sickly and unsteady compared to a tree with roots, but one can't figure out why.

I was one of these rootless trees. I thought it was an inextricable part of my identity. On the Teen Retreat, with the strong but gentle guidance provided by the teachers and volunteers, all that was changed - the retreat helped me find my roots. I feel them there now, holding me steady and feeding me life. And the funny thing is that I know now they've always been there, waiting to grow.

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*The Teen Retreat: A new variation on walking meditation.*



*One of the People of Color Retreat yogis takes a quiet moment at the end of the course.*



*A retreatant's T-shirt says it all.*



*Participants in the recent Family Retreat enjoy storytelling in the meditation hall.*

**Currently at the Forest Refuge** - On June 30, the Forest Refuge welcomed back eminent Burmese meditation master Pa Auk Sayadaw. He is now in residence, offering the dharma for four months, until late October. Sayadaw's teachings focus on the development of the *jhānas* (states of strong concentration) that then become a foundation for insight meditation practice.



*Pa Auk Sayadaw*

**Wait Lists** - Because many of our retreats are in high demand, you may find yourself placed on a wait list. Don't despair! Wait lists can move very quickly - confirmed participants in courses sometimes need to cancel and so spaces become available.

It's important, however, to let us know as soon as possible if you no longer wish to

remain on a wait list, or if you wish to cancel from a confirmed slot. This allows us to contact others who are eager to sit, should a place open up. If we hear nothing from you, we will assume that you still want to participate.

**Upcoming Retreats** - At the **Retreat Center**, space is still available in [The Engaged Mystic](#) retreat taught by Christina Feldman and Narayan Liebenson Grady, September 2-7. This course will focus on ways to integrate formal meditation practice into life outside of retreat.

This will be followed by [Cultivating a Happy and Peaceful Heart](#), a weekend led by Rebecca Bradshaw, September 12-14, suitable for both new and experienced meditators.

Places are also available in the [first three weeks](#) and [Part 1](#) of our Three-Month Retreat, September 20 - October 11 or November 1. Single rooms will be offered to all participants.

At the **Forest Refuge**, there are still some spaces for a [personal retreat](#) during November and December.



### Sangha Stories

Many thanks to those who sent us stories illustrating the positive effect of retreat life and practice. Here is one example - may it offer inspiration. We welcome further contributions (just a few paragraphs, please) - you can email them to [sanghastories@dharm.org](mailto:sanghastories@dharm.org).

*From Barbara Bennett in Colorado:* **Giving Back** - Ever since my first retreat almost 25 years ago, I have been deeply grateful for what meditation has brought me.

When I retired in 2004, I wanted to give back to the community in ways that involve meditation. So I now volunteer for Prison Dharma Network, offering meditation at the Boulder County Jail. We teach under difficult circumstances, with an ever-changing group of students and in a rather noisy environment. However, the work is very rewarding, and I hear regularly what a difference it makes in the students' lives. I

recently joined the board of Boulder Carriage House Homeless Community Center and, together with another board member, teach a meditation class for the homeless. We sometimes see the same students who came to meditation through the jail program, and hear similar stories: how they have used the practice to cope with chronic pain, to deal with the noise of sleeping at the shelter, or to face the suffering of finding themselves homeless and sometimes without hope.

These two classes are a great blessing in my life. I feel particular gratitude to IMS for introducing me to the power of silent retreat and the transformative power of service.

### Staff Sangha

**Job Openings** - Staff life at IMS offers a warm and friendly community and a rich learning experience. Please consider joining us! Right now we are seeking applicants for two [Cook](#) positions, as well as one opening in our Retreat Center [Front Office](#). If you have any questions, please contact Kelly Collett at [hr@dharma.org](mailto:hr@dharma.org).

### Sangha Survey

**Results of Last Survey** - Thank you to everyone who completed our last survey. We received a total of 493 responses to questions regarding our aspiration to provide single rooms for all retreatants at the Retreat Center. The following results lend support to this aspiration.

Of the 370 respondents who had attended more than one IMS retreat, 97% would prefer a single room with 82% stating this as a "Strong Preference." 78% said they were "Very Likely" to return to IMS for a retreat within the next two years.

At the time of the survey, 123 respondents had attended only one IMS course. Two-thirds had single accommodations, and one-third shared a room. Reasons for not yet returning primarily clustered around issues of time - either life has been too busy, people have been unable to take time off or not enough time elapsed since the retreat. Another theme was that IMS's location is too inconvenient or costly to get to.

Of those who had single room accommodations, 46% said that they were "Very Likely" to return to IMS in the next two years, while 16% said they were "Somewhat" or "Very Unlikely" to return. Of those who shared a room, 35% said they "Very Likely" to return and 30% said they were "Somewhat" or "Very Unlikely" to return.

**New Survey: Social Networking** - We are now seeking your input regarding an online social network that we are considering. This form of communication would allow retreatants to maintain a connection with one another after participating together in an IMS course. It would provide a forum for yogis to share retreat experiences and information, to support each others' meditation practice and to deepen a sense of sangha.

Please take a few moments to complete this anonymous and brief [survey](#). We use an internet service called Survey Monkey that ensures we will not be able to identify respondents' names.



We appreciate your feedback. All of us at IMS wish you good health and ease of heart.

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*IMS is a spiritual refuge for all who seek freedom from the suffering of mind and heart. We offer meditation retreats rooted in the Theravada Buddhist teachings of ethics, concentration and wisdom. These practices help develop awareness and compassion, giving rise to greater peace and happiness in the world.*

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