



# Insight Meditation Society

## Sangha News - Winter 2009

### IMS Turns 33

*From Bob Agoglia, Executive Director:* Valentine's Day, February 14, 2009 is IMS's 33rd birthday. It was on this day in 1976 that teachers Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg and Jack Kornfield, together with a small group of helpers, moved into what is now our Retreat Center facility. Thanks to some generous supporters, they'd been able to raise the deposit needed to purchase the property.



I still take delight in hearing about the moment when these founding teachers first arrived in Barre to take a look at the premises. As they drove through the quiet, rural New England town, its motto, displayed on the common, suddenly came into view: *Tranquil and Alert*. Such a fitting sign for the location of a meditation center!



Tens of thousands of people have passed through IMS's doors since those early days to undertake the deep purification and transformation of mind and heart that silent retreat practice allows.

In honor of this anniversary, I recently asked Joseph Goldstein for an overview of IMS's history and legacy. Listen [here](#) to his responses.

### Visions and Aspirations

Last December, the IMS Board met to discuss possible future improvements to our Retreat Center facility and how to provide greater accessibility to retreats for those facing financial hardship.

To set the stage a little, the Board meeting took place 36 hours after one of the most severe ice storms in living memory had swept through New England. Since IMS was without power, and intermittently without water, we had to move the meeting to a nearby town. Meanwhile, staff at both our centers remained hard at work hauling in water, finding gasoline to fuel the generators, and making sure almost 100 yogis at the Retreat Center and the Forest Refuge were safe, warm and had enough to eat.



There is nothing quite like basic survival mode to remind us of the responsibility we have to conserve our resources and safeguard our facilities.

**Catskills Renovations** - As soon as is realistically possible, given the state of the economy, IMS intends to raise funds to fully renovate the Retreat Center 'Catskills' building. This dormitory, including the 'Gym,' is clearly showing its age. The time has come for much-needed upgrades, especially to air quality, heat retention and bathrooms. We will keep you informed as plans progress.

**Help Someone Sit** - Last year, about a third of all those who practiced at IMS received some level of financial assistance. So far in 2009, we are experiencing a significant increase in the number of requests for financial aid, due to the current economic downturn. In response, we are dedicating much of our fundraising this year, including our Spring Appeal, to meeting this need. Please support our efforts to offer the path of freedom to all, regardless of financial means.



### News Worth Noting

**New Altar** - As many of you know, our Retreat Center meditation hall was renovated in 2006. A new altar was always part of the plan, but it took some time for the design to be finalized and for the piece to be crafted. In late November, a beautiful walnut altar was installed, in harmony with the peaceful colors and lines of its surroundings. It now gracefully supports the statue of the Buddha and our relics of his disciples Sariputta and Moggallana.



*The new altar in place in the Retreat Center meditation hall.*

**Upgrading Woodland Trails** - Over the years, a system of walking trails has evolved throughout the more than 200 wooded acres surrounding both our centers. The woods are a significant element of the IMS landscape - for many who come on retreat, spending time outdoors in the natural world complements more formal meditation practices.

Now, because of a generous gift from a donor who loves to walk in our woods, work has been done to make these trails safer and more accessible for all. Accurately-scaled maps and easy-to-recognize markers have been placed at regular intervals on each trail and brush has been cleared for easier walking. Now more of us can enjoy the rich natural environs of the Retreat Center and the Forest Refuge with sure footing and clarity about where we are and how to get back in time for the next sit!



*Maps and position markers now make it easy for retreatants walking in the IMS woods to know where they are and to choose an appropriate route.*

**Ride Board** - Can you offer a ride to a fellow retreatant headed for the Retreat Center or the Forest Refuge? Or will you be needing a ride when you leave IMS? Would you like to share a limo or taxi? Help conserve resources by participating in our new online [Ride Board](#). Here, yogis can contact one another to arrange sharing rides to and from a course.

When you register for a retreat, your confirmation packet will include a password that will allow you to post on the Ride Board. You simply create an entry describing your offer or request. From there, you can communicate directly with others.

**In Full Swing** - Renovating the Retreat Center lower walking room and bowling alley corridor has continued at a steady pace over the winter months. The project is nearing completion - a ventilation system is being installed, and bathroom and trim work need finishing.



*The peaceful expanse of the refreshed lower walking area and new yoga room invites mindful movement.*



*Renovations have brought more light and a greater sense of spaciousness to the bowling alley corridor.*

### Program Highlights

**Ice Storm** - The photos below show a world of extraordinary beauty amidst widespread damage following last December's ice storm. Glittering ice coated branches, power lines and roads. Many trees in the area were shattered or toppled. The resulting power outage lasted for days, and called forth resourcefulness from the staff as they worked together to keep both centers running as smoothly as was possible, allowing those on retreat to continue their practice. After the power was restored, a mountain of laundry was waiting to be washed and rooms cleaned. One weekend course had to be cancelled, but all was ready to go for the annual New Year's Retreat.



*The day after the storm, Three-Month Retreat participants found the sun sparkling on ice-laden trees.*



*Bowed and fallen trees, torn branches and downed wires made Pleasant Street almost impassable the day after the storm. Soon power company crews from many states converged on New England, and the days of clean up and recovery began.*

**Future Courses** - A retreat can be one of the greatest gifts we can offer ourselves. It provides an opportunity to quiet the mind and draw on a deep inner well of tranquility, wisdom and compassion. The meditative tools we learn at centers like IMS can better help us manage times of uncertainty and challenge.

Coming up at the **Retreat Center**, space is still available in the 7-day course, [Living Freedom](#), April 3-10. Taught by Carol Wilson and Rodney Smith, the retreat will emphasize the theme of liberation and help us nurture a living experience of freedom.

Immediately after this, Howard Cohn and Sharda Rogell will lead a 5-day retreat, [The Buddha's Way to Happiness](#), April 10-15. Following the Buddha's path of mindfulness, concentration and lovingkindness, we can move from attachment to freedom and from tension to ease.

Later that month, Rebecca Bradshaw and Greg Scharf will lead a 5-day course, [Love & Wisdom](#), April 24-29. Participants will have the chance to explore both these qualities as paths to profound acceptance and peace.

An 8-day retreat, [Relaxed Openness: Embodying Presence](#), will take place May 2-10. Yanai Postelnik, Myoshin Kelley and Patricia Genoud-Feldman will guide us in wise attitudes of practice that foster a steadfast trust in the naturally-emerging wisdom of our hearts.

Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg and Susan O'Brien will lead an [Insight Meditation Weekend for Scientists](#), September 17-20. This retreat is specifically designed for

neuroscientists, cognitive scientists, psychologists and others working in the broad area of the mind sciences.

At the **Forest Refuge**, there are still some spaces for a [personal retreat](#) during March, May, June and beyond.



*A cedar waxwing finds a very berry feast at the Forest Refuge.*

### Sangha Stories

If you would like to share a story highlighting your retreat experience and its positive impact on your life, please email it to [sanghastories@dharma.org](mailto:sanghastories@dharma.org). We value hearing from you.

*From teenager Elliot Cash of NY: **The Power of Presence*** - The first time I was on a retreat at IMS, I hadn't yet been born; I was curled up inside my mother's womb. As a child, I attended the Family Retreat each summer with my parents and sibling. As I got older, my parents encouraged me to consider the Teen Retreat, and I agreed to give it a try. Now, at 17, and having been to three Teen Retreats, I cannot fully express the impact these events have had on my life. I can, however, attempt to describe one particularly meaningful moment.

Last summer, during a sit toward the end of the Teen course, I was going about my normal routine: settling the mind, focusing on the breath, and letting ambient sounds come and go. Suddenly I experienced a first in my meditation practice - I was uncontrollably happy.

Feelings of total relaxation, of fullness, of being in the right place and doing the right thing, were produced. Experiencing this happiness was extremely powerful - it wasn't about beating a video game or buying a new pair of shoes, but was pure joy in its simplest form, joy about nothing at all. Added to that was the awesome presence of 60 other teenagers meditating all around me, which brought sensations of absolute comfort, safety, belonging, and most of all, positive energy. I was radiating positive energy - everyone in the hall was. I was at the pinnacle of my spiritual, mind-altering high. *Breathe in, breathe out...* and a couple of minutes later, I was back to the struggle of staying in the present.

While this deep happiness only lasted a short time, it was gratifying to know how rewarding it is. It has given me the curiosity to become more mindful on a day-to-day basis, whether it's taking a deep breath every so often to remind myself of *now* or noticing subtle scenes of beauty while walking down a sidewalk.



## Sangha Survey

**Results of Last Survey** - Thank you to the 294 readers who completed our last Sangha Survey. 60% of those responding told us they participated in a retreat at IMS in 2008 and 65% said they are planning to come in 2009. Only 3% said they are not planning to attend a retreat at IMS this year, with the rest saying they're not sure.

With respect to the factors that are likely to affect decisions about which retreat to attend, we learned that the most important aspect for almost half of the respondents (47%) is who is teaching a particular course. This was followed by the retreat dates (33%) and the course length (20%).

We also learned that half of the respondents did not have a preference about whether to sit at the Retreat Center or the Forest Refuge. A third preferred the Retreat Center and 13% preferred the Forest Refuge.

Finally, we learned that almost two-thirds of respondents prefer a retreat duration of 7-9 days, followed by 6 days or less. Another quarter of respondents stated a preference for one or two months, while 11% said they preferred three months or longer.

Until our next issue and a future survey, all of us at IMS wish you safety, peace and happiness.





For an archive of *Sangha News* and links to its audio interviews, click [here](#).

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*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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