



Insight Meditation Society

Sangha News - Fall 2009

The Healing Power of Mindfulness

From Bob Agoglia, Executive Director: Just 30 years ago, meditation was frequently viewed as a slightly suspect, fringe endeavor. Today, mindfulness and lovingkindness practices are widely recognized as powerful skills that can help many of us better manage stress, depression, anxiety and other debilitating conditions.



How is mindfulness finding its way into a wide range of therapeutic practices? What are the parallels and differences between how the teachings are offered in a retreat environment, and the mindfulness taught in a therapeutic setting? [Listen to Christina Feldman](#), one of IMS's guiding teachers, as she describes this chapter of Buddhism's unfolding in the West.

News Worth Noting

New Forest Refuge Teacher-in-Residence - As mentioned in our last issue, Myoshin Kelley is stepping down from her position as Forest Refuge Teacher-in-Residence at the end of this year. IMS has now appointed Sky Dawson to fill this role. Sky has been a dedicated practitioner and dharma student for almost 30 years and completed the IMS Teacher Training Program in 2005. A born and bred Aussie, she has been teaching meditation in Western Australia, where she has also had extensive experience in hospice and palliative care.

Sky will officially assume her Teacher-in-Residence responsibilities on November 1, 2010.



Sky Dawson (R) with teacher Kamala Masters.

Healing Racism - Throughout 2009, our staff and Board members have participated in diversity trainings. These have increased our awareness of how racism operates in the world, and what we can do to help take these barriers down, both in our lives at large and also here at IMS.



This photo, taken in July, shows trainers (L to R) Dr. Tricia McFarland, Cherry Steinwender and Rev. Myokei from the Center for the Healing of Racism in Houston.

Web Developments - Since we launched the option of [downloading and podcasting teachers' dharma talks](#) last April, over 7,000 people have downloaded or streamed more than 27,000 talks through dharma.org. In addition, over 2,200 people have visited our podcasting feed - thanks again to [Dharma Seed](#). Making the talks available in this way greatly increases access to the teachings, especially for those unable to attend IMS retreats.

In August, an IMS Flickr Group was set up and [a great collection of images](#) is growing. Do you use Flickr? Do you have photos of IMS and its environs? Join the group and add your shots to the pool!

Chimney Work - After many decades of weathering, repairs could no longer be sustained to most of the towering chimneys that rose above the roof of the Retreat Center's main building. So over the summer, several chimneys were removed to just below the roof. Where they used to be, new roofing was installed and covered with perfectly matching slates. The photos below show the work in process and the center's new, simpler profile.



Finishing Touches - Floral pattern drapes, fawn cushions and a dark spruce-green rug completed refurbishment of the new Welcome Room off the Retreat Center foyer. It's now an attractive and comfortable registration space when retreatants arrive, as well as for browsing dharma books and related materials before they leave.



Buddhadharma Forum - *Buddhadharma: The Practitioner's Quarterly* recently invited IMS's Executive Director, Bob Agoglia, and three other dharma center directors to take part in a forum about the impact of the recession on planning and activities at their respective centers. The resulting article, "Toughing It Out," appears in the current issue (Winter, 2009). The directors' comments reflect the resourcefulness of each center and their readiness to adapt to changing circumstances, while holding true to their most central aspirations.

Research Results - A few years ago, researchers from the Waisman Laboratory for Brain Imaging & Behavior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison came to IMS to study some of our Three-Month Retreat participants. Results of that research continue to be published - the latest example is in the current issue of the prestigious *Journal of Neuroscience*. This is the first paper on meditation in this high-profile publication, and its findings suggest that training in concentration practice improves our ability to sustain attention more and more effortlessly.

You can [access PDFs](#) of both these articles on our website.



Sangha Stories

Thanissara and Kittisaro, two teachers new to our Retreat Center schedule will be offering an upcoming 5-day retreat, [Wings of Awakening: Cultivating the Five Spiritual Faculties](#), December 11-16, 2009. They will return to IMS again next year, March 5-14, 2010 to teach [The Mysterious Way of the Heart: Where Wisdom & Compassion Meet](#).

Sangha News recently interviewed them. Based in South Africa, they have been deeply involved in improving the lives of those compromised by the spread of HIV/AIDS there.

Thanissara & Kittisaro, what led you to offer HIV/AIDS support in South Africa?

We arrived in South Africa in 1994, just after the end of apartheid. While a great euphoria swept over the country, it was also a land devastated by turf wars, debilitating poverty and a sharp increase in violence. In the midst of this turbulent and heady mix, HIV hit the population, almost by stealth, taking full advantage of those whose ability to protect themselves was compromised by the particular legacy colonialism bequeaths.

The effects of AIDS literally arrived on our own doorstep in the dying, the sick and the destitute. For the most part, apartheid blinded the small, entitled white population to the overwhelming needs of the black majority. We were shocked to see this. Perhaps being less conditioned by South Africa's racial history we were more able to actively seek solutions. We felt that an ethical and compassionate response was to share the resources and knowledge we had to benefit the welfare of others - we didn't see ourselves as particularly different from those stricken by AIDS.

We now live in the midst of a pandemic which infects and affects over 70% of the population. With the help of sanghas in other countries we have been able to initiate two successful community-based HIV/AIDS programs, [the Khuphuka Project](#) and [Woza Moya](#). These offer home care of adults and children living with and affected by HIV and AIDS, and also help to develop innovative HIV and AIDS awareness and education programs.

How does your practice help this work?

Everything we have done in South Africa over the last 15 years - building and running a dharma hermitage, teaching hundreds of retreats, supporting impoverished rural students and schools, guiding seekers, initiating HIV/AIDS programs and negotiating a painfully conflicted relational field fraught with denial and splits left over from apartheid - has involved cultivating an attitude of letting go. Our inner practice is to meet 'what is' and try to respond as appropriately as we can. We have learned to not only lower our 'bar of expectation' but to throw it away altogether!

In all honesty, this process has been extremely tough and has often tested our capacity for faith, mindfulness, wisdom and compassion to the absolute limits. To sustain ourselves we have maintained a daily devotional practice and have sat retreats of a month of more every year. We have also worked towards maintaining a small community at the hermitage which is based in ethical observance, daily sitting practice and mutual support as we dedicate ourselves to awakening and to compassionate response in the world.

For more information about Thanissara & Kittisaro's work, visit their site: [Dharmagiri](#).



In this photo, taken at the launch of one of the AIDS outreach programs, Thanissara (L) and Kittisaro (R) stand on either side of their local 'saintly friend' Abigail Ntleko, who was presented with the 'Unsung Heroes of Compassion Award' by the Dalai Lama.

Program Highlights

Recent & Current Courses - At the Retreat Center, our annual longer fall retreat is almost finished. This year, instead of the usual Three-Month course, a Two-Month Retreat was held.



Joseph Goldstein teaching Part 1 of the Two-Month Retreat.



The entire teaching team for Part 1: Guy Armstrong, Joseph Goldstein, Carol Wilson, Sharda Rogell, Anushka Fernandopulle and Sally Clough Armstrong.

At the Forest Refuge this month, Carol Wilson and Myoshin Kelly are offering the teachings.



Carol and Myoshin share a laugh at the Forest Refuge.

Future Courses - At the **Retreat Center**, there are still some openings in upcoming courses.

Extending Wakefulness into Daily Life, December 4-6, 2009 is a benefit weekend led by Joseph Goldstein, Tara Bennett-Goleman and Dan Goleman. It will offer **eight CEs** for psychologists and licensed mental health counselors.

Over this non-traditional weekend, Joseph, Tara and Dan will engage contemporary and classical methods and perspectives that can deepen the integration of meditation practice into daily life. Several dimensions of awakening will be explored, from transforming emotional habits and raising ecological awareness to drawing inspiration from the meditative arts and from findings in contemplative neuroscience.

Tara is the author of *Emotional Alchemy* and is a pioneer in integrating mindfulness with cognitive therapy, allowing the transformation of disturbing emotions. Dan, who has been a friend of IMS since its founding, is the author of *Emotional Intelligence and Ecological Intelligence*.



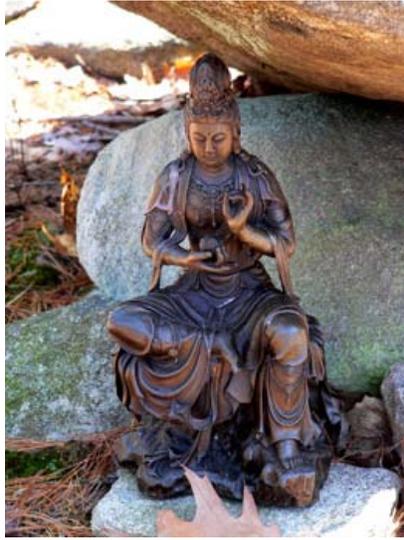
Space is also available in the *Metta (Lovingkindness) Retreat for Scientists & Educators*, January 8-15, 2010. In this retreat, taught by Sharon Salzberg, Guy Armstrong, Sally Clough Armstrong and Mark Coleman, participants will receive an in-depth training in metta meditation. The course is open to researchers, educators, therapists and others involved in the broad areas of the mind and social sciences, and will offer **fifteen CEs** for psychologists and licensed mental health counselors.

Nothing is more imperative for our world than for humanity - in all its diversity - to live and work together in greater harmony. Metta practice can help to form a foundation from which empathy and emotional intelligence can arise, allowing us to respond to others with greater compassion.



Richard Shankman and Bob Stahl will be teaching an insight meditation retreat, *Uncovering the First Foundation of Mindfulness*, January 29 - February 3, 2010. This course will explore six groups of practices that comprise the Buddha's teachings on mindfulness of the body, the first of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. While many meditators may be familiar with using the breath, the four postures of the body and mindfulness of physical activities as meditative tools, other practices may not be so well known. This retreat will include teachings rarely taught in the West on the 32 parts of the body, the four material elements and nine cemetery meditations.

Richard is the author of *The Experience of Samadhi*. Bob currently directs MBSR programs in five San Francisco Bay Area medical centers.



At the **Forest Refuge**, there are spaces for a [personal retreat](#) from January onwards. Since the Forest Refuge is much fuller now than in its early days, it is considerate to plan your retreat dates carefully and to commit to the time for which you sign up. Please keep in mind that if cancellations are made too close to the day a room has been reserved for you, it is often too late for those on the wait list to make last-minute arrangements to come.



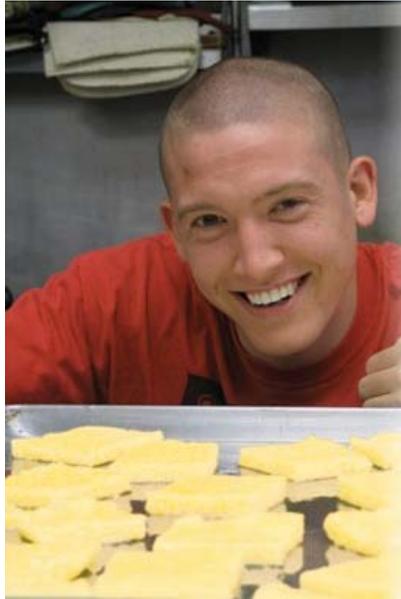
October snow coated roofs and briefly blanketed gardens at the Forest Refuge.

Flu Prevention - With winter soon upon us, we ask anyone getting ready for a retreat to observe some common sense precautions that will help us prevent the spread of illness at IMS. Basically, if you are sick with flu symptoms before your retreat starts, please stay home! Let us know if this is the case - our cancellation policy in such circumstances is generous. For the Retreat Center, call 978-355-4378, and for the Forest Refuge, call 978-355-2063.

If you start to experience flu-like symptoms while sitting with us, please see our office staff as soon as possible. It is essential that everyone at IMS cleans their hands frequently and thoroughly, and covers any coughs or sneezes.

Staff Sangha

Job Openings - IMS is currently accepting applications for two positions - a Retreat Center cook and a maintenance/landscaping worker. We offer a warm and friendly work environment in service of awakening. If you or someone you know is qualified, please apply or spread the word. For more information, please visit [Current Openings](#) or contact Kelly Collett at hr@dharmadharma.org.



Until our next issue in February, we wish you and your families a happy holiday season and a joyous start to 2010.

You can find an [archive of Sangha News](#) and links to its audio interviews on our website.



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

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