



Insight Meditation Society

Sangha News - September 2010

Building a Diverse Sangha



From Bob Agolia, Executive Director: During our annual People of Color Retreat this past June, I was fortunate to spend some time with Gina Sharpe and Larry Yang, two of the course's teachers. We discussed identity retreats such as this, and also talked about IMS's wish to build a stronger and broader community of practitioners that better reflects the full richness and diversity of our society.

Listen [here](#) to their observations of how this aspiration is unfolding.



Gina Sharpe and Larry Yang

Sustaining Refuge

Also from Bob: Every day as I walk from the parking lot towards either the Retreat Center or the Forest Refuge, a sense of ease arises. It's like a complete out-breath, a feeling of peace, of coming home. I've heard others speak similarly of their arrival at IMS.

This, to me, describes a felt sense of refuge - and I frequently find myself reflecting on what it takes to sustain it. I see that all of us, whether sitting or serving a retreat, contribute to four essential components: the physical, the behavioral, the energetic and the qualities of welcome and belonging. The physical consists of providing a harmonious, simple and quiet environment as well as nutritious meals to sustain the body for practice. The behavioral involves the mindful and ethical conduct of our bodies, speech and minds. The energetic field is created by practicing a continuity of mindfulness, lovingkindness and generosity, both on and off the cushion.

And for some of our yogis, the group they practice with at IMS and the composition of their teaching team are of special significance. To sit with others of the same race, gender or age, for example, enhances the experience of belonging, especially for those who have been targets of oppression. This is why IMS is committed to offering annual

identity retreats for people of color, women and younger adults.

Spiritual refuge, as a foundation for awakening, lies at the core of IMS's mission. And *all* members of our community play a part in nurturing it.



Participants and teachers of our 8th annual People of Color Retreat gathered for a group photo on the course's closing day.

Dharma Updates

Teacher Training Graduates - In 2006, IMS and Spirit Rock Meditation Center initiated a Teacher Training Program to prepare another generation of teachers qualified to share the Buddha's teachings with anyone practicing meditation, whether experienced or new. This past summer, 22 trainees completed the four-year joint training. With their graduation, they become part of the strong body of insight meditation teachers, all contributing to the depth and breadth of the Western Buddhist sangha.



New teacher graduates

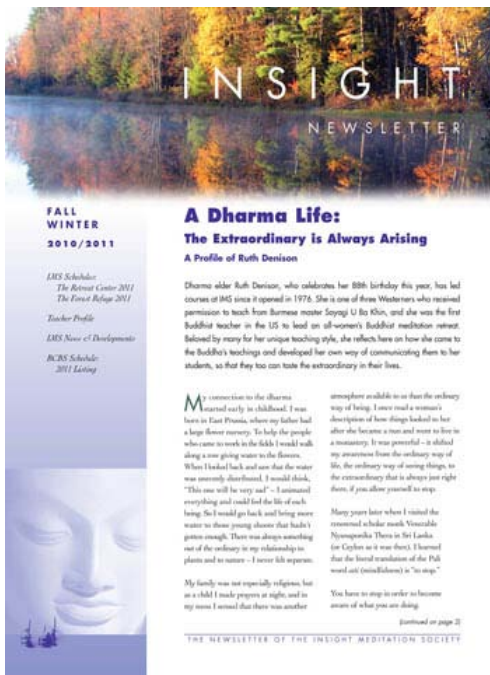
Online Teachings - Accessing IMS's online audio offerings allows you to get in touch with teachings on meditation practice before you come on retreat and after you return home. You can download or stream any of the recent teacher talks listed on our [Audio page](#), or automatically receive new talks by subscribing to a podcast. You'll also find links to teachers' guided meditations and selected picks.

Interest in our audio offerings has been growing in leaps and bounds - nearly 100,000 dharma talks have been downloaded or streamed from dharma.org since we launched this feature last year.

You can also stay in touch with teachings and our retreats via [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Insight Newsletter on Its Way - The fall issue of *Insight Newsletter* should reach your mailbox within the next couple of weeks. It features a profile of remarkable dharma elder Ruth Denison, who celebrates her 88th birthday this year. The publication also includes the complete list of 2011 Retreat Center courses; registration for all these will open on Friday, September 10.

Please note that the Forest Refuge is already accepting applications for personal retreats next year.



Retreat Center Improvements

Backup Power - In December 2008 a wide swath of New England was devastated by an ice storm that left some areas without power for weeks. For several days, IMS's Retreat Center made do with just a small generator fueled to supply electricity for only very basic use. For most of the time there were no phones, heat or running water. We had no choice but to cancel an upcoming retreat, disappointing those signed up to participate.

The Forest Refuge already has a backup power system. Now the time has come for the Retreat Center to have its own reliable generator as well. Preparatory excavation and cable work commenced in mid-August and the new equipment will be installed soon in what was formerly a 4-hour parking area by Pleasant Street. Once completed, we'll be better equipped to keep all our yogis safe and sound, even when the elements strike!



Annex Sprucing - What a difference a coat of paint makes! As the photo below shows, the brick-red exterior of the Annex dormitory was refreshed with new paint earlier this summer, as well as the bridge walkway that connects it to the Catskills building.

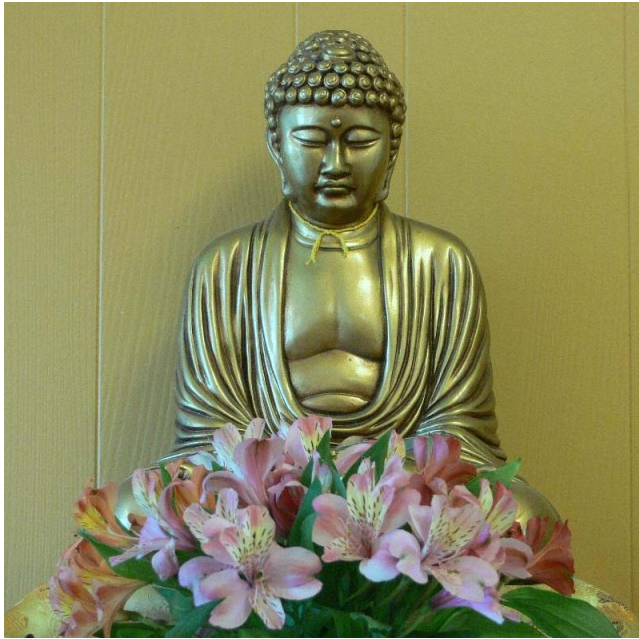


In addition, the Annex screened porch was spruced up with new flooring, new paint and new furniture, making it a more peaceful and attractive space for mindful walking or sitting.



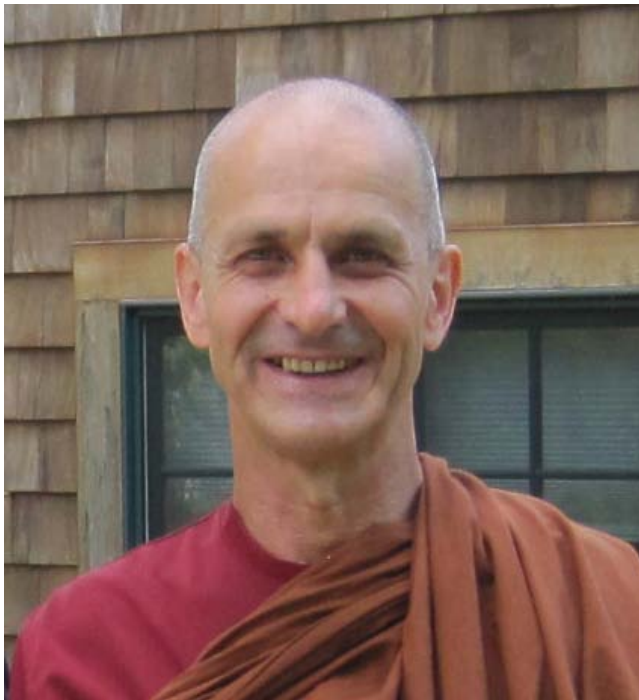
Dining Area - A modest refurbishment of the Retreat Center dining area will begin next January. With funds already raised from our Spring Appeal for this project, we plan to relieve the congestion around the dishwashing machines by constructing a dedicated dish station. As well, we will install environmentally sustainable flooring to replace the worn and cracked tiles. If donations allow, we will also improve the noise level on opening and closing days with an acoustical ceiling treatment.

We offer heartfelt thanks to all those who have generously supported this endeavor.



Program Highlights

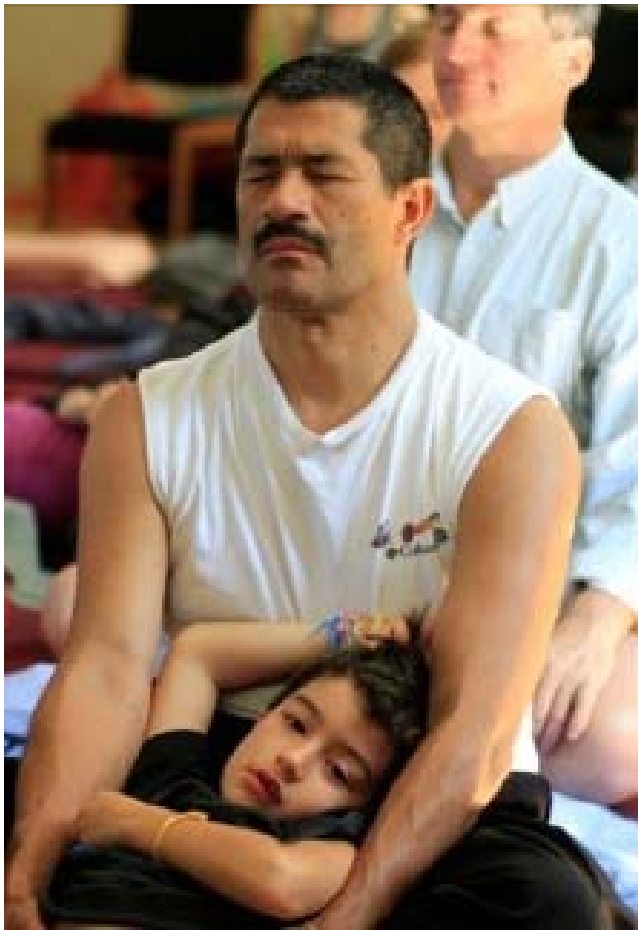
Recent Retreats - At the **Forest Refuge**, Sayadaw U Vivekananda (*below*) offered the dharma to a full house of appreciative *yogis* (practitioners) throughout the month of June.



Summer is a busy season at the **Retreat Center**, with many courses following each other in quick succession. Dedicated retreats for people of color, teens, families and young adults take place during this time.



This small stupa, shown here aglow with candlelight, formed a central part of the closing evening ceremony for this year's Family Retreat. Ajahn Kusalo, one of the teachers, envisions the building of the stupa as a way to deepen a sense of sangha among course yogis, young and old alike. Many hands helped to create this beautiful addition to the Retreat Center's Yogi Park. Each summer, Ajahn and Family retreatants will augment the structure.



Held by the practice: in the RC meditation hall, a young Family Retreat participant rests secure in his father's lap during a sit.



The last day of the retreat for 18-32 year olds, "Investigating Life."

Future Courses - At the **Forest Refuge**, there are some spaces available for a [personal retreat](#) from October onwards. For the current month of September, we are still accepting applications despite wait lists - cancellations can come in from those already confirmed and spaces open up.



Throughout October, Ven. Ariya Ñani and Marcia Rose will be in residence. Ariya Ñani was born in Switzerland and ordained with Sayadaw U Janaka in 1992. Based in Burma, where she translates for foreign meditators, she travels and leads retreats worldwide. Marcia is the founder and guiding teacher at [The Mountain Hermitage](#) in Taos, NM.



At the **Retreat Center**, space is still available for three December courses. Rodney Smith and Narayan Liebenson Grady will teach [Insight Meditation and the Heart](#), December 10-17. Annie Nugent will offer an insight meditation weekend, [Living the Buddha's Teachings](#), December 17-19. This will be followed by our annual New Year's Retreat, [Embodying the Heart of Wisdom](#), led by Yanai Postelnik and others, December 28 - January 6, 2011.

Registration is already open for the first Retreat Center course of the 2011 season. Sharon Salzberg and Gina Sharpe will teach an [Insight Meditation Retreat for Scientists and Educators](#), January 8-11. Suitable for anyone involved in the broad areas of the mind and social sciences, participants will receive in-depth instruction in mindfulness practice as a foundation for the development of wisdom and compassion. Recent studies have demonstrated the positive influence that these qualities can have on our lives and in our society. Ten CEs will be available for psychologists and licensed mental health counselors.

As mentioned earlier, registration for all remaining 2011 Retreat Center courses begins on September 10.



Sangha Stories

Two IMS meditators, Rafi Santo and Amber Bemak, are involved in social justice work. They describe here how time on retreat has informed and motivated their engagement in the world.

Rafi Santo has attended a number of retreats at IMS and helped found the Young Adults Sangha at New York Insight Meditation Center. He is the former Director of Integral Activism at the Interdependence Project and Senior Program Associate for Global Kids.

"When you look at what's going on in the world, it's a challenge not to be extremely angry and harrowed. The activists I know care passionately about the issues they're involved with, but we've found that if you try to make changes from a motivation of anger, if you're fueled by reactivity, you'll burn out - quickly. Being on retreat helps me clarify my intention with regard to activism. It's important to me to be coming from a place of compassion.

"There is a relationship between your quality of mind and the work you do in the world. If you're speaking with the CEOs of a company that is doing something destructive to the environment, you can bring awareness to that moment. It will change how you respond if you are able to put yourself in their role and consider how things look to them.

"Conviction in the efficacy of agency is a vital prerequisite for action. This is something that you can see when you're on retreat - if you put in effort, there will be a shift, and your practice becomes more powerful. I keep going back on retreat to get grounded, to understand how reality operates. The clearer I am, the more effective I'll be at making change in a world that needs it."

Amber Bemak literally took her first steps as a baby during an IMS family course. Over

the decades since, she has returned frequently to practice at either the Retreat Center or the Forest Refuge. Currently she is an independent filmmaker and teaches video production and media literacy to teenagers internationally.

"Time on retreat has provided a foundation for my work with urban teens. The students gain concrete video-making skills, as well as developing the ability to analyze and deconstruct the media that we watch. At the same time that we're focusing on filmmaking, I emphasize the importance of listening to and understanding each other's stories, which is based on the Buddha's teachings of compassion and kindness.

"I love my students and believe in them - that's the basis for my teaching style. If teens are really listened to and believed in, they will be able to embody their best potential. They have a lot to say, and what they have to say is important. Finding a way to channel their thoughts and ideas through creative expression has so far been extremely beneficial for many of them, emotionally, creatively, and also through feeling more empowered in the world. It is crucial for the world we live in right now to have a diverse range of voices that are being heard in the media, and that people learn how to represent themselves."



Staff Sangha

Facilities Department - IMS's Facilities department has a lot of ground to cover, literally. They ensure that our entire property - almost 100,000 sq. ft. of building space on over 200 acres of land - is kept clean and well cared for. Two teams, Maintenance and Housekeeping, are responsible for everything from repairing leaky faucets, squeaky doors and clogged toilets to stocking cleaning supplies, mowing lawns and training yogis

for their work-as-practice periods. Larger construction projects to improve our two centers also fall into their domain. Tasks must be carried out with sensitivity, balancing the inevitable noise that accompanies some jobs with maintaining the quiet and tranquility that's so central to the IMS refuge.



Our Facilities crew: Front row, L-R: Shen Pauley, Kathleen Conrad, Terry McCue and Mark Dillon. Back row, L-R: Mike Gensler, Don Pray, Tom Houston and Sherril Mason.

Job Openings - IMS is currently accepting applications for a Retreat Center cook. Our cooks are responsible for preparing and serving tasty, nutritious vegetarian meals each day for yogis, teachers and staff.

If you are interested in joining our staff and working in a friendly and caring environment, please act soon because the application deadline is September 8. For more information, visit the [job description](#) on our website or contact Kelly Collett at hr@dharmia.org.



Until our next issue in November, we wish you and your loved ones good health and happiness.

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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