



Insight Meditation Society

Sangha News - December 2010

Money as Dharma Practice

From Bob Agoglia, Executive Director: While Guy Armstrong was here to help lead Part 1 of IMS's Three-Month Retreat this past fall, he talked to staff about the Buddha's teachings regarding money and wealth. Many of us found the topic thought-provoking and even challenging.



We trust that members of our wider community will also find Guy's reflections on these teachings stimulating. In the following [interview](#), he shares his observations on attitudes towards money that are prevalent among meditators. He also clarifies what we can learn from the Buddha about the difference between self-indulgence and using financial resources for wholesome happiness.

Dharma Updates

Welcome, Sky! - At the beginning of November, IMS was delighted to welcome Sky Dawson as she officially took up her new role as Teacher-in-Residence at the Forest Refuge. She joins us from Western Australia where she has practiced and taught the dharma for many years. She has a professional background as well in hospice and palliative care.

We asked Sky to describe what she feels is unique about practicing at the Forest Refuge and about her own teaching style. She responded, "Whenever I've practiced myself at this center, I've found I've benefited amazingly from the solitude and seclusion that a personal retreat offers. Together with the teachers' guidance, support and care, awareness can quickly deepen in an environment like this and the mind responds by becoming very clear. Then it begins to be possible to look at different ways of living, where habitual patterns no longer rule us so completely. Transformation becomes a reality.

"In my teaching, I like to explore how we live our lives, whether we're on retreat or engaged in the world at large. Wherever we're practicing, we can find ways to be present and aware, and to live with greater care and kindness."



Sky Dawson (L) with fellow teacher Greg Scharf. Both are offering the dharma at the Forest Refuge throughout December.

Historic Nuns' Ordination - For the first time in the Western hemisphere, a full ordination of Theravada Buddhist nuns took place late last August in northern California. This was a landmark occasion, offering the highest level of ordination and conferring on each of the fully ordained nuns the ancient title of 'bhikkhuni.' A number of distinguished monks and nuns were in attendance at the ceremony, including beloved IMS teacher and elder Bhante Gunaratana. Ajahn Thanasanti Bhikkhuni, who has also taught at IMS, was one of the four nuns who received full ordination.

By way of background, this level of ordination has not been as readily available to nuns as to monks in recent decades, hence the historic nature of the event.

These newest members of the bhikkhuni community will help to ensure that full ordinations will continue so that the bhikkhuni sangha will grow. IMS is committed to supporting the full equality of women in both the lay and ordained communities of Theravada Buddhism.



Ajahn Thanasanti Bhikkhuni beams from the front row (second from left). Bhante Gunaratana is back row, fourth from right.

Joseph Goldstein Interview - IMS co-founder Joseph Goldstein recently spoke with ABC News reporter Dan Harris. In their 10-minute online [interview](#), Joseph describes the peacefulness of silence, the nuts and bolts of meditation and the insights that are possible through the practice.

Online Dharma Offerings - There continues to be great interest in the audio teachings available on our [website](#). These offerings are a wonderful way to stay connected from home with teacher talks given during retreats. You can also stay in touch via [Facebook](#), where we regularly post IMS news and photos.



News Worth Noting

Financial Assistance for Ages 18-26 - IMS is happy to announce a new endeavor to support the practice of young adults. Anyone aged 18-26 can now apply for a limited number of 'You Choose' fee spaces that we are making available for four 2011 Retreat Center courses. Rates for this option begin at just \$15 per night, although paying more allows us to continue offering financial assistance to as many people as possible.

If you are in this age group, and would appreciate an increased level of aid to help you sit an IMS retreat, please contact our registrars for more specifics about these particular courses and the application process. You can email registration@dharma.org or call 978-355-4378 ext. 175.

This new effort is in addition to the three existing 'You Choose' Retreat Center courses, the Forest Refuge 'You Choose' fee spaces and the various scholarship opportunities that IMS already provides each year. We are very much aware of the financial challenges and uncertainty that many of our sangha currently face, and are committed to offering the teachings to all, regardless of financial means. We will do our best to help you sit a retreat with us.



Improving Dining Room Traffic - Thanks to everyone who generously supported our appeal last spring, we've now garnered sufficient funds to improve the Retreat Center dining room.

Easing the way that traffic flows through this much-used space is our top priority. Some demolition work has already begun - the first stage in constructing a new dedicated dish station. Other heavy traffic spots, such as the dish pick-up and tea areas, will eventually be moved to more functional locations. We'll also replace the existing worn floor tiles with an environmentally sustainable covering.

Not enough was raised, though, to carry out all the elements of our original vision: at this time, we won't be installing an acoustical ceiling treatment to reduce noise levels.

Our intention is to complete the project by February next year with only minor impact, if any at all, on those sitting retreats.



For those of you who've sat at the Retreat Center, does this meal-time traffic jam look familiar?

Improvements are on the way!

Around the Grounds - In September, IMS experienced a spectacular hail storm which came and went with fury, leaving both beauty and destruction in its wake.



The hail rains down at the Forest Refuge.



The storm took place during the first few days of this year's Three-Month Retreat, and presented a dramatic display of impermanence for yogis settling into their practice. Here the RC front lawn is shrouded in mist just after the storm.



Hailstones and crabapples.



Walking along the more than four miles of trails through IMS's woods is a cherished part of the retreat experience for many yogis. To keep the paths safe and accessible, they are periodically cleared of debris, markers are repainted and faded signage replaced.



Program Highlights

Recent Retreats - IMS is always honored to host teachers from our monastic community. In October, Ven. Ariya Nani, a long-time Buddhist nun, was at the **Forest Refuge** offering the dharma together with Marcia Rose.



At the **Retreat Center**, our annual Three-Month Retreat is just ending. Integration days are underway, with quietly smiling faces all around.



The teaching team for Part 2 of the Three-Month Retreat: (L-R) Rebecca Bradshaw, Greg Scharf, Joseph Goldstein, Annie Nugent and Andrea Fella.



For Part 1 of the course the teaching team was (L-R) Sky Dawson, Joseph Goldstein, Sally Clough Armstrong, Carol Wilson and Guy Armstrong.



This year a long-time IMS Halloween tradition continued: staff carved jack-o'-lanterns for the Three-Month yogis and placed them in both meditation halls for a pumpkinny surprise!

Future Courses - At the **Forest Refuge**, spaces are still available for a [personal retreat](#) throughout much of 2011. Even if we are full at the time you wish to come, we still encourage you to apply as it is good to be on the wait list - cancellations can happen on short notice and spaces often open up.





At the **Retreat Center**, there are openings in several short retreats taking place in early 2011. Howard Cohn and Lila Kate Wheeler will teach [*The Buddha's Way to Happiness*](#), January 26-30. For psychologists and mental health counselors, 15 continuing education credits are available.

Two weekends are on offer in February. Pat Coffey and Gina Sharpe will teach [*Finding Joy and Inner Calm in Challenging Times*](#), February 11-13. (Of note, Gina was recently featured in an interview titled '[*The Beautiful Mind*](#)' in *Parabola* magazine.) Maddy Klyne and Chas DiCapua will lead [*Resting the Weary Heart and Mind*](#), February 25-27.

These will be followed by Larry Rosenberg and Michael Liebenson Grady who will teach their annual retreat, [*The Art of Mindful Living*](#), February 18-23.

Thanissara and Kittisaro return to offer [*The Mysterious Way of the Heart*](#), March 4-13. For this retreat, 27 CEs are also available for psychologists and mental health counselors.



Sangha Stories

IMS yogi Patricia Clark, MS, RN of Worcester, MA oversees residential recovery programs and also serves as clinical faculty in the nursing department of a local college. Sangha News spoke with her recently about how meditation and retreat life have helped her respond to the specific challenges of caregiving.

Learning to Love the Silence - I love my work in the human services sector, and yet it's inevitably stressful. Many of our clients are dealing with mental illness, addiction, homelessness. And these issues are complicated further by physiological stressors such as HIV and hepatitis.

It's a challenge for someone to stay with a program and pursue recovery. The percentage of people who are able to achieve sustained long-term sobriety is not great. But even if a client decides they don't want further treatment and leaves the program before they're stable, we like to think that we've planted a seed.

And with homelessness, you might think that if somebody's living on the street they must be longing for a home. But oftentimes that's not the case. Homelessness is a way of life, and people get comfortable with what they're used to. So it's not surprising that sometimes those in our programs initially may just want to leave and go back to a shelter or back to the street.

Relapse is common. As a social service worker you can begin to feel defeated and burnt out. As I start to feel anxious and disconnected I know that the solution for me is to deepen my practice.

I'd known about IMS since the '70s, and I wanted to try a retreat, but had so much fear around the silence. In my work and personal life, communication is such a big part of "me" - I'm talking all the time. I thought if I tried to be silent, I'd have a panic attack!

Finally I thought, I'm going to feel the fear and do it anyway, because I've wanted this for 20 years. And what happened on my first retreat at IMS was that when we went into silence, I fell right into it - it was such a relief. I felt only peace and joy and serenity. I had more comfort with myself and with the people around me than I could have imagined was possible.

My retreat time impacts everything in my life, and has had an enormous effect on how I am at work. Now I have tools to support me when defeat and burnout loom. I remember to stop and get in touch with the breath. That lets me feel my connection with others. I try to hear where they're coming from, and treat them the way I'd want to be treated. I can see that the issue at hand is not the end of the world. I have a better perspective.

Retreats support my practice, and practicing regularly keeps me well and helps me to bring my best self to my work.

We value stories highlighting your retreat experience and its impact on your life. Please email your contributions to sanghastories@dharm.org.



Wishing You Well

All of us at IMS wish you and your loved ones deep peace and abiding joy over the holiday season and the coming year.

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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