



IWM Sangha News - 9/29/22

Change in Plans - benefit with Joseph Goldstein

The online benefit for IWM with Joseph Goldstein that was scheduled for November 12th has been postponed to the fall of 2023. The Board realized we do not have the bandwidth to proceed at this time; we look forward to setting up a committee to work on this in the new year. The idea for this event came from the Teachers Council and we are grateful to Joseph for his willingness to support IWM's efforts to raise money to invite new teachers to teach at IWM and help pay for lodging, supplement dana, and provide support for younger, more diverse teachers.

Board Members Stepping Down

The Board wishes to express our deep gratitude to **Bernadine Mellis** who has so generously served on the Board since 2019. Bernadine brought grace and wisdom to the many transitions that the Board and the sangha have weathered in recent years. Her warmth and multitude of talents have been a gift to all our collaborations.

We are also grateful to **Lauren Isherwood** who has been a provisional member of the Board and has decided to step down and shift her focus elsewhere at this time. Lauren has been instrumental in IWM's Circle of Care for a resettled Afghan family, took a turn during the pandemic coordinating Zoom hosts, and has been a stalwart schlepper and host as we navigated in-person offerings after a two-year hiatus.

The Board sends all good wishes to Bernadine and Lauren and their families. While stepping down from Board service, we know each will continue to seek ways to connect in sangha and we look forward to whatever comes next.

Sangha Leadership Gathering - Summary from September 10th Background

Over the summer, the Board reached out to some 35 sangha leaders with the heartfelt intention to raise up and support the cultivation of a

Beloved Community at IWM. In newsletters, the Board invited anyone interested in leaning into a leadership role to reach out to us to join the teachers, community dharma stewards (formerly known as practice leaders), committee leaders, and other key volunteers/sangha stewards who would gather. After all the difficulties of the past two years and amid ongoing crises of various kinds in the world we live in, the gathering was intended to lift up practices that center our values of inclusivity and radical welcoming, highlighting the ways we already connect in spiritual friendship and exploring new opportunities to find refuge in community.

On the afternoon of September 10, twelve people who were willing and able gathered in person outdoors at a pavilion at Nonotuck Park in Easthampton to practice together and discuss the current state and future evolution of Insight Western Mass. We started with lunch and informal chatting, then shared some information about ourselves, and then had three different go-rounds focused on the following questions, summarized below.

Session 1: Current state of the sangha in your experience ~ How can we build community?

People expressed a lot of different senses of where we are as a sangha, with most everyone agreeing that IWM is in a prolonged transition period due to many factors, including the pandemic, key people stepping down or back from involvement, and desire for more ongoing teacher support. Most people also expressed great gratitude for the center and the practice in their lives, and a desire to work on strategies for sustaining the sangha in this time.

Possible ideas about ways to build community that were mentioned:

-- More gatherings like this one! So great to be in person. Sharing food, dancing, being together. More topic-oriented town halls.

-- A community-wide book group/book read; suggested book is Radical Friendship by Kate Johnson. We agreed that day to make this happen. If you do not know about the book you can [see it here](#), but here is a brief description:

Grounded in the Buddha's teachings on spiritual friendship, Radical Friendship shares seven strategies to help us embody our deepest values in all of our relationships. Drawing on her experiences as a

leading meditation teacher, as well as personal stories of growing up multiracial in a racist world, Kate Johnson brings a fresh take on time-honored wisdom to help us connect more authentically with ourselves, with our friends and family, and within our communities. Each chapter ends with a meditation or reflection practice to help readers cultivate vibrant, harmonious, revolutionary friendships. Radical Friendship offers a path of depth and hope and shows us the importance of working toward collective wellbeing.

-- Other similar groups and offerings that would help us connect and continue to build community: Kalyana Mitta groups, study groups, White and Awakening in the Dharma programs, Beloved Community Builders, longer retreats? More ways for new people to get connected; offerings and/or groups for young people, BIPOC people, LGBTQ+ folks.

Session 2: Open discussion: What else should we be discussing, what do you think the sangha needs?

Much discussion happened about the two connected issues of funding and a guiding teacher or teachers.

Resolved to create as many opportunities as possible for more in-depth conversations about dana. Encourage people to attend Manny's retreat in November on this topic.

There was a suggestion to work on defining the values of our sangha with the idea that what we do would naturally follow from that, and a related idea to survey the membership to assess what matters to people, what kind of offerings they most want and would attend.

A few people expressed that the sangha's commitment to social justice issues and to a non-hierarchical decision-making structure are key values that set us apart and are attractive to people.

Several people expressed a felt need for more teacher leadership, whatever form that might take. While some spoke of peer-led study groups, others mentioned the need for increased teacher involvement as a focal point for bringing us together.

Closing: Are there ways you might be willing and able to steward our sangha as we sustain and grow IWM?

Many people present spoke up offering to work on some of the identified issues and proposals. Some spoke about a resting phase. Participants mentioned the following:

- touching base with different KM and affinity groups and others to check on their status and see if support is needed;
- helping to create quarterly gatherings like this one;
- sharing my dana story;
- next spring if 2-3 others are interested, would consider being a "community life" steward;
- working on an event to bring sangha together;
- in a few months might consider applying to join the Board;
- renew being a "Friend" (recurring contributor);
- calling a meeting of the Beloved Community Builders;
- inviting fellow teachers to meet;
- finding ways to support a new peer-led white and awakening group;
- creating a monthly dharma dialogue through the newsletter;
- possibly facilitating a new on-going Zoom gathering;
- continuing the stewarding we're currently doing.

If as you read this you can see a way you might want to help steward our sangha, please email us at leadership@insightwma.org. To sustain our sangha, we need many stewards!

Twelve of us spent four hours together that day and it's hard to capture in a summary all that was shared.

With much metta,
Hal, Holly, and Lucy
For the Board

Dharma Dialogue with Jennifer D.

Dear fellow Sangha members:

At the end of the IWM Leadership Meeting on September 10th, a friend turned to me and said she was struggling with her practice. I said that I was, too. Our jaws dropped open, and had we had more time that day, I think we would have gotten into some good deep sharing about what that actually meant for both of us. It felt awkward to me at first, because I haven't seen this person for years, except occasionally on Zoom. But

beyond my awkwardness was the intuitive and exciting realization that we were connecting on a whole new level together.

What did it mean that we are both struggling with our practice? Was it an issue of dissatisfaction with our own meditation, or something that was holding us back from joining groups in the weekly Sangha schedule, and staying for and sharing within discussion times?

For this first column, I have taken a closer look at those questions, (questions are so good!) and wanted to put out a possibility that may draw in more of us to look comfortably and compassionately at our own and each other's struggles. What does practice actually mean to each of us within our Dharma Community? Can we reach out and share our experiences, without giving advice?

Right now, my struggles include the intention of meditating every day for a short period of time, and paying attention when egocentricity tries to talk me out of doing it! (It succeeds occasionally.) Immediately following that, what arises is that there is the option of not letting myself believe I am a Bad Meditator, and just noticing, "hmmm... that's a thought a part of me has; nothing more, nothing less." Another intention that I bring to my meditation is to sit as physically still as I can muster, knowing that ours is a compassionate practice, and if, for example, my body is in pain, which it often is these days, how little can I move and still be focused and aware of any and all parts of my experience? (More questions!!)

If you would like to participate at any time in this ongoing dialogue, of course anonymity is always an option, please send something to leadership@insightwma.org for The Column, and we will see how it brings us another connection in a new and satisfying way.

Jennifer D., Community Dharma Steward

Sangha Stewards Deep Bow

Gratitude to sangha members who served from June through September in the following ways:

- Washing all the center blankets: Betsy A.
- Green Metta: Betsy H, Rick H, Diana R, Andrea Z.

- Zoom Hosts/In-Person Greeters and Schleppers: Catalina A, Suzanne A, Nancy B, Lucy B, Adam B, Joan B, Holly B, Hal F, Lauren I, Cathy R, Jill R, JM S.
- Hybrid Hosting and IT: Adam C.
- KM Facilitators: Ruth F, Melissa T.
- Community Dharma Stewards (CDS-led open practice and discussion on Monday evening and Thursday morning): Suzanne A, Holly B, Jen C, Jennifer D, Hal F, Peggy G, Jaya K, Leslie F. (mentored by Tara Mulay)
- Peer-led Tuesday morning open practice and discussion and Friday evening open practice: thanks to all who hold the space on Tuesdays and Fridays.
- Finance Committee: Lucy B, Jen G, (staffed by Fariba G)
- Programming Committee: Candace C, Hal F, Anne F, Manny M, (staffed by Jessica H and then Casper L)
- Space Committee: Lucy B, Holly B, Hal F, Michael G, Lauren I, Cathy R.
- Administrative/Teacher Liaison/Volunteer Coordination: Lucy B, Anne F, Cathy R.

Stewarding Our Sangha - Opportunities to Express Generosity

- **Hosts/Greeters:** In October we have an opening for an in-person greeter for a Dharma talk on **October 19th** with Rebecca Bradshaw at the Florence Civic Center. On **October 22nd** we're seeking a Zoom host for a half-day on-line retreat with Shelly Graf. To learn more or to volunteer, please email volunteer@insightwma.org.
- **Center Dana:** We are grateful for all the ways that members of our sangha give of their time, talents, and financial resources. We welcome any and all contributions. If you're inspired to give money - we'd be delighted to grow our numbers of **Friends of IWM** (recurring contributors) and always welcome one-time donations anytime - please [click here](#) to choose the amount you'd like to contribute as well as the frequency. Thank you for practicing generosity in this way.

In-Person/Hybrid Update and Advance Registration

Each offering will list if it's in-person (locations may vary), Zoom, or hybrid. Our COVID protocols currently require proof of vaccination and N95/KN95 masks. Check out our [website offering page](#) to learn more; watch for updates in our email blasts and on our website.

IWM requests pre-registration for courses and retreats. Unless otherwise noted, please plan to register 7 days before the start of a course or retreat to ensure it runs as scheduled.

Downloadable Flyers

Below are downloadable flyers in case you want to share them with a friend or post them on a public bulletin board:

- October Teacher Offerings: [click here](#)
- Fall Courses & Retreats:
- [Discovering Dharma Ease](#) with Michael Grady
- [Wise Effort: Keeping on with Love and Wisdom](#) with Shelly Graf
- [Death, Impermanence, and Climate Change](#) with Nick Boutros
- [Generosity/Dana](#) with Manny Mansbach

Feedback and Reflections

If any member of the sangha would like to share Dharma reflections in a future newsletter or as part of the Dharma Dialogue column with Jennifer D, or has comments, questions, or ideas you'd like to share, please contact: leadership@insightwma.org.

With much care and metta,
trellis, Lucy, Hal, Holly