



# Insight Meditation Community of Western Massachusetts

(formerly known as Insight Pioneer Valley)

## IWM Sangha News - 12/29/22

Here at IWM, we're bringing in the New Year with lots of opportunities to learn and to deepen our practice and our connections. There's a beginners' course ([starts Jan 5](#)) as well a course for those with some prior experience that will focus on working with fear and anxiety ([starts Jan 10](#)). We have an opportunity to begin 2023 with a half-day retreat ([Jan 1](#)) and end the month with a Friday-Sunday non-residential retreat ([Jan 27-29](#)). Throughout January, our Wednesday evenings include Dharma talks and opportunities to practice with four guest teachers, several of whom we'll be welcoming back to IWM. During the week, there are [daily opportunities](#) to practice in community. We are also very excited to be nurturing our IWM community by coming together to read and discuss Kate Johnson's book *Radical Friendship* as part of our [IWM Sangha-Wide Common Read](#)! While most of our January offerings are being held on Zoom, the [January 18th](#) Dharma talk and the [non-residential retreat](#) will both be in person (with the Dharma talk being offered as a hybrid). We are grateful for your presence.

### Letter from Jean Esther

Dear Sangha Friends,

During these long nights and shorter days of winter's entry, I think of the 'long long night' of living in this pandemic. Who knew 3 years ago how much our collective lives would soon be radically impacted by a colossal change that would last and continue for this long?

More recently, I have been having a number of conversations with some of you who are saying how much you miss coming to Easthampton to sit and practice together in person. For some, this has been a considerable loss that even Zoom meetings can't replace.

We have actually been deeply fortunate to have a small group of devoted people, namely IWM Board, Dharma Stewards, Teachers, Staff and Volunteers who have kept classes, day long and 1/2 day retreats and drop in sits going steadily on Zoom for almost 3 years. A deep bow of gratitude to each of you and to all those who have been able to attend these scheduled events. It really does take a village to keep a center like ours active.

I have been on leave myself since last Spring. In starting to meet together again with others, I feel the preciousness of what it is to have a local sangha and the number of conditions required to keep it thriving. It certainly has taken extra effort to support the Center in these more challenging circumstances of the reality of Covid 19.

For the 1st time in 3 years we will have our annual non-residential retreat IN PERSON at Amherst Community Co-housing! There is a small crew dedicated to making this happen. We will have Covid protocols in place doing our best to support people's safety and well being. Rebecca and I are delighted at the thought of being in community with you in person this year on 1/27-1/29. If you are interested , please register as soon as you can as we wish to keep it a bit smaller.

A weekend retreat can be so deeply nourishing spiritually, emotionally and physically. It is a time we can slow down, simplify, and align ourselves with the natural rhythms of our body, mind and heart. How precious it is to imagine absorbing

that indelible support of the sangha practicing together, IN PERSON as we reconnect with the buddha within ourselves.

One of the many learnings from the pandemic is recognizing that I no longer take for granted the opportunity to gather in community. When I have this opportunity, I look around and feel tenderness, love and gratitude for each person and for these windows of time with them, not knowing or assuming they will be available or possible in the future. This brings the moments in these encounters profoundly alive, profoundly precious.

If the conditions are meant to be, I look forward to being in community with you on January 27-29th.

With Love and Good Wishes for You in 2023,  
Jean Esther

### **Circle of Care**

The Circle of Care's one-year commitment to our Springfield Afghan family is winding down now. The family is very resourceful and they are doing well independently. Getting to know them and providing support this past year has been an enriching experience for all of us who were involved from IWM. Catholic Charities continues to serve many new refugee families and welcomes your donations and support. For more information, contact Keegan Pyle, (413) 537-4926, [k.pyle@diospringfield.org](mailto:k.pyle@diospringfield.org), or go to <https://diospringfield.org/welcoming-refugees-resettlement-project/>

### **Dharma Dialogue with Jennifer D. Awareness**

Awareness is what's left when we stop doing everything else! I remember my Zen teacher saying something like that 35 years ago. Expressions like that can be repeated across many lines of

religion and spirituality with variations, but all can point back to something similar. The first questions that arise for me are: “Who is it that is Aware?” “Is there an ‘I’/ego that is a separate self that would identify Awareness as its own?” My understanding of Awareness in our practice is that there is a sense of Noticing, but not necessarily someone who Notices. Being in the present moment includes whatever is happening right here, right now, and in my experience, that can either be vast or limited, depending on how I am practicing. Glimpses of the present moment seem to occur, and then pass away as does everything that arises; every thought, feeling or body sensation. Is there an Awareness OF thoughts, feelings, and body sensations? If not, how do we know we are having them?

Many questions to ponder, with no intended answers here. I would love to hear from other Sangha members to continue this dialogue about Awareness, or about anything else you would like to discuss. Exploring together, with no advice given, and nothing right or wrong implied.

If you would like to respond, please send an email to: [leadership@insightwma.org](mailto:leadership@insightwma.org)

As we continue our journey and explore our spiritual path,

With Metta,  
Jennifer D.  
Community Dharma Steward

### **Dharma Dialogue - Response from Rachel R.**

Accepting Jennifer D’s invitation to reflect and comment on her December newsletter piece:

*“For me, it is easier to access the information that Body has to offer if I am looking from the Heart. The words come to me,*

*silently in practice or aloud in daily life as I practice one of the five precepts, " I will refrain from harsh and false speech, internally and externally."*

This totally resonates with me, and I am glad to say the volume of my inner critic has turned down a lot over the past few years, as I am increasingly able to look at it ‘from the Heart’ as Jen says, with a kind and compassionate attitude, less identified with what the IC has to say. What a blessing! As I read her piece what also came to mind in regards to Right Effort is the following excerpt I’ve been reflecting upon for awhile now, from the tiny little book titled *Don’t Look Down on the Defilements They Will Laugh At You* by Ashin Tejaniya:

*“In our context, Right Effort means to keep reminding yourself to be aware. Right Effort is consistent effort. It is not energy used to focus hard on something. It is effort that is simply directed at remaining aware, which should not require much energy.”*

Amid the many definitions and writings on Right Effort, this one resonates especially with me. It’s helped me relax when I notice the mind wander; no need to strive. The tuning of the lute.

### **Downloadable Flyers**

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

- January Offerings: [click here](#)
- Upcoming Courses & Retreats:
- [New Year’s Day Retreat](#) with Rebecca Bradshaw
- [Beginner Course](#) with Candace Cassin
- [Living Dharma: Working with Fear and Anxiety](#) with Michael Grady
- [Coming Home to the Refuge of the Dharma](#) with Rebecca Bradshaw and Jean Esther

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## Feedback

If you have comments, questions, or ideas you'd like to share, please contact us: [leadership@insightwma.org](mailto:leadership@insightwma.org).

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

Newsletter blast also included sections on:

- [Opportunity for Year End Generosity](#)
- IWM Sangha-Wide [Common Read of Radical Friendship](#)