

# Annual Report 2008

## Vermont Insight Meditation Center

*Compiled by:* Jack Millett, President Board of Directors; Cheryl Wilfong, Treasurer  
Claire Stanley, Guiding Teacher

### **Practicing in Community, Teaching and Learning the Dharma, Living a Life of Compassion and Wisdom**

In 2008, Vermont Insight continued to strengthen and grow the roots of teaching and learning the Dharma in the midst of community, in the midst of our daily lives. A consistent group of students attended Sunday sittings, Tuesday and Thursday morning meditations, evening courses, and daylong meditation retreats. This consistent group established a base of approximately 40 core sangha members. By end of year 2008, our email listserv numbers were over 200, indicating interest and connection with VIMC from a wide range of people who live in the Southern VT, MA and NH area.

Sunday group sittings were attended by an average of 20 people with some Sundays reaching over 30, depending on weather conditions and season. There seemed to be a noticeable drop around the time of the stock market decline and the elections. However, attendance picked up post-election.

Two new offerings this year were the Thanksgiving sitting from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm and the New Year's Eve sitting from 7:00 pm to midnight. A small number attended these first time offerings. Cheryl, Drew and Rose led these sittings with meditations, discussions, mindful movement, and walking meditations. In 2009, the Thanksgiving and New Year's sessions will be an established alternative way to celebrate these holidays.

Morning sittings on Tuesdays and Thursdays continued with a steady 2-6 people attending. Evening courses maintained a steady group of around 15 for the Monday night group and 8 for the Thursday night group. Cheryl offered an additional Tuesday evening course in the spring on Lovingkindness with 7 participants. In the fall, she offered Aging Gracefully, a morning course, with 5 participants. And in Nov – Dec, Cheryl offered a Mindfulness and Depression course on Tuesday evenings for 14 participants. The Introduction to Meditation courses offered by Jack in the Spring and the Winter had 6 students in each class.

For the first time, Vermont Insight offered a meditation retreat or special dharma presentation every month of the year except for December. The teachers of these retreats were: Taraniya Ambrosia, Jack Millett, Claire Stanley, Chas DiCapua, Winnie Nazarko, Cheryl Wilfong, James Baraz, Leigh Brasington, Doreen Schweizer, Mu Soeng, and Kate Wylie. Attendance at the daylong retreats reached 216, up from 135 in 2007. James Baraz and Mu Soeng attracted groups of 40-45. Leigh Brasington offered a special evening with sutta story telling. Having Taraniya, James Baraz and Leigh Brasington teach at our center was significant for Vermont Insight as these teachers are well-known in the national and international Dharma community.

Another significant development for Vermont Insight came in the summer Tuesday night sitting groups. Cheryl Wilfong and Mary Mathias supported and maintained the ongoing sitting and

discussion groups throughout July and August with attendance ranging from 8 to 15 participants. Cheryl sent out the readings for each week electronically which many who could not attend the sessions found very helpful.

### **Pot Lucks**

The April Pot Luck was held at Cheryl Wilfong's house in Dummerston in celebration of her graduation from her community dharma leader teacher training course. This lovely spring Pot Luck was well attended by approximately 15 people. Good food and conversation was enjoyed in beautiful garden surroundings.

The Fall Pot Luck was held at Rose O'Connor's new condo in Brattleboro. Again around 15 people attended and spent an evening indoors sharing food and conversation in Rose's warm and cozy space.

All in all, we can easily say that practicing in community, teaching and learning of the dharma, and the ongoing development of the Sangha continued and increased in 2008 at Vermont Insight Meditation Center.

### **Practicing Locally, Connecting Globally**

#### *Vermont Insight joins the Brattleboro Interfaith Clergy Group*

In September, Jack Millett agreed to represent Vermont Insight at the Brattleboro Interfaith Clergy group (BIC). This group had been meeting for several years and had expressed interest in having Buddhist groups represented. Through his participation in this group, Jack has spearheaded involvement of the Vermont Insight Sangha in the feeding and support of local homeless people reported below. BIC has been quite involved in discussions of race in the community and in support for harmonious community relations in all of the Brattleboro area. Jack and Claire attended several of the meetings that took place over the summer of 2008 about racial incidents at the High School and wise community action in response to these events.

#### *Support for Local Drop-In Center and Overflow Shelter*

Vermont Insight joined members of other religious and spiritual organizations in collecting both food and money to support the local Drop-In Center that houses and feeds local members of the community who find themselves in need. VIMC has donated \$120 to date and has delivered two boxes of canned food and a blanket to the Drop In Center. Additionally, Sangha members have begun to volunteer to be trained and then to volunteer to work at the shelter this winter. Other Sangha members are offering one meal, sometimes two, a month to support the Overflow Shelter.

#### *Support for Burma*

In March, Vermont Insight was able to raise funds to support the building of new houses for families who lost their homes in the devastating Hurricane that hit Burma in the early part of 2008. VIMC donated \$800. This effort was made possible through our connection with Myoshin Kelley a Dharma Teacher at IMS and the Venerable AriaNyani and ViraNyani, ordained nuns who had visited and taught at VIMC in 2007 and who were able to directly distribute our donation (multiplied many times by sanghas all over the world) directly to people in need in Burma. Another request for aid to Burma came in December through Carol Wilson from IMS and VIMC contributed \$250 toward a health clinic there.

## **Sustainability of Vermont Insight Administrative Structure**

At the beginning of 2008, Jack and Claire began to feel the strain of performing all of the many invisible administrative tasks associated with the smooth running of the Center. Primary areas of strain were the publicity of events, the registration for retreats, the ongoing phone, email and other correspondence related to the center, liaison with Elaine Johnson around the rental space, website development, marketing and publicity for VIMC.

As of August 2008, the Board supported the development of two committees to provide administrative support to Jack and Claire. The Publicity Committee and the Administrative Support Committee were successfully established. This was a much-needed shift for the health and sustainability of the organization and for the freeing up of Jack and Claire's energy in order to focus on other teaching that will provide for them to meet expenses and sustain their livelihood. Kevin O'Connor, Sue Dennison, and Fiona Cook volunteered for the Publicity Committee and Rose O'Connor and Suzann Jones for the Administrative Support Committee. Both committees are running smoothly with regular oversight from Jack (publicity) and Claire (administration). The goal is to have these committees running on their own in 2009.

The Board of Directors continues to explore ways to expand the capacity and sustainability of Vermont Insight. In establishing this organization, our vision included a permanent center that would be sustainable for a hundred years or more. Further discussion of this goal will continue in 2009. In order to fulfill this vision, the Board and Sangha members need to become increasingly involved in the long-term care, development, administration, and sustainability of the Center.

## **New Board Members**

The original five Board members agreed to ongoing terms and voted to increase their numbers by two new members. Two possible new Board members attended the first part of the Annual Meeting on September 18th. Another possible Board member attended the meeting in October. Vermont Insight is very pleased to welcome Mary Mathias as a new Board member in 2008. We continue to seek another new Board member.

## **Annual Appeal**

Letters for the Vermont Insight (first ever) Annual Appeal went out to the community in October. Results of the Appeal will be reported at the Annual Meeting, but it appeared to be a success, the returns already matched last year's Cushion Fund Appeal.

## **New Website and Email System**

Sean Conley, friend of Vermont Insight and benefactor, helped us move our website to a less expensive hosting organization. He also updated the site so that it is easier to be maintained and reviewed. Finally, he established a new email system for Vermont Insight through Google that has been running successfully since September.

## **Telephone, Mailbox, and Website Accounts**

Vermont Insight assumed the expenses for the phone, mailbox and website accounts. These expenses had been assumed by Jack and Claire in previous years. This small but significant shift symbolized the movement from an organization dependent on two of the co-founders to an organization standing on its own.

### **Recognition of the Invaluable Ongoing Support from Elaine Johnson**

We continue to be fortunate enough to have Elaine Johnson, the owner of Solar Hill, as a major supporter for Vermont Insight through her renting of the space to us for our activities. Also, Elaine had a full cabinet built to house the cushions and our other materials after the fundraiser. She allows us to use the grounds and the mansion for tea and walking meditation during retreats, and it is wonderful to have the woods available to us as part of the center. The hourly rental fee for usage of Solar Hill Neighbors' Hall space makes it feasible for us to afford a home for our Center. Elaine also supported the expanded morning meditations in Neighbors' Hall, moving that activity from the Pine Room. We also appreciate the cooperation of Neighborhood School house in sharing this space so that we can accommodate our activities and theirs in the space.

Based on input from Steve Krane, long-term Sangha member, the Board wrote up a card of appreciation to give to Elaine, signed by as many Sangha members as possible and presented it to her in September.

### **Financial Report FY08**

#### **INCOME**

Annual Appeal	1,480
Dana from Sitting Groups	2,741
Donations	1,095
Course Registrations	4,756
Day-long Retreats Registrations	3,232
Interest Income	159
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>13,463</b>

#### **EXPENSES**

Administrative Stipend	7,000
Retreat Support for Guiding Teacher	1,000
Professional Fees	160
Office Expense	1,820
Rent	4,378
Mileage for Visiting Teachers	354
Other Expense	100
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>[14,812]</b>
<b>Net Loss</b>	<b>-1,349</b>

Respectfully Submitted to the Board of Directors and to the Sangha