



# Mid America Dharma News

*Offering Insight Meditation to the Heartland*

## Gradual Training: Interview with Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia

*In May 2015, Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia returns to the Midwest to lead a 4-day residential retreat in St. Louis, MO. The following is excerpted from a previous interview with her in Insight Journal.*

### **Insight Journal: How did you get into all this?**

*Gloria Taraniya:* Throughout my twenties and early thirties, I had been interested in facilitating change through political, social and economic systems. At first biotechnology seemed to fit nicely with my wish to improve human life; [it] offered hope for providing food for the hungry, medicine for the sick, and other good things. But, something was off the mark. Coming to this kind of clarity didn't happen overnight. I went through a period of frustration and discouragement.

I started doing yoga to calm myself and deal with the conflict I was having about work. My yoga teacher directed me to a weekend retreat on insight meditation. Talk about coming home! When I did walking meditation for the first time, I was ecstatic.

### **What was it about the experience that you found so compelling?**

When I took my first mindful step in walking practice, I realized that I had never really been aware of a single step I had ever taken. The meditation instruction was so simple: "Breathe, and know that you are breathing. Walk, and know that you are walking." The Buddha's teachings addressed cultivating presence of mind, as well

*[Continued on page 2]*

### In this issue

- 1 | **Interview with Taraniya**
- 2 | **Long Retreat Benefits**
- 4 | **Upcoming Retreats**
- 5 | **Retreats Thrive with Your Generosity**
- 6 | **Retreat Registration Information**

We offer 2 ways to register for our retreats—online or by mail:

#### **Online**

- ♦ Visit [midamericadharmadharma.org](http://midamericadharmadharma.org)
- ♦ Click the link Mid America Dharma Retreats
- ♦ Register for your preferred retreat by clicking *On-line Registration*

#### **By Mail**

- ♦ Complete and mail-in the registration form on p 7



*We post up-to-date info on our Facebook page. Comment or message us anytime – we love to hear from you!*

*[Continued from page 1, Gradual Training: Taraniya]*

as loving, kind, and generous states of mind. I felt as though the whole experience was calling me to live more fully, and to adopt a life for which at some level my heart had been yearning.

### **What do you find so compelling about the practice environment at the monastery?**

Living in community both revealed places where I needed to grow and pulled forth my natural goodness. I could see I still had a lot of rough edges! Monastic life provided a supportive environment to become aware of these and work through them.

I remember trying to engage a novice monk in unskillful speech—you know, having a less-than-kind opinion about somebody and wanting to get a nasty conversation going. His skillful reluctance to pick that up, his non-participation in the harm I was attempting to generate was very noticeable to me. I was left standing there with this crud all over me. The beautiful thing about this exchange was that I didn't get the sense of being reprimanded or criticized for my unskillful behavior. I sensed that the novice monk was standing back from it, allowing it, so that it could move through. I've experienced this kind of support over and over again at the monastery. One begins to understand what true spiritual friendship is. With such skillful support, your heart, your actions and speech start to incline towards the good.

### **And now where do your greatest interests lie?**

I am interested in the “gradual training” taught by the Buddha. He offered this model for laypeople and monastics alike, and it places a great deal of importance on foundational practices such as *dana* [generosity] and *sila* [virtue]. The more skillful I am in these, the happier I am, and the better my meditation! The happiness that comes from serving and living well affects my meditation tremendously over these months and years. ❖

*Excerpted from Insight Journal and available online at <http://awakeningbuddhistwomen.blogspot.com/2014/03/builder-of-bridges-interview-with.html>*

## The Benefits of a Long Retreat

*By Bridget Rolens*

Long retreats (7 days or more) have a distinct advantage over shorter retreats when it comes to deepening meditation practice. This has to do with the need of body and mind to have time to transition from busy-ness to stillness.

Few people find it possible to transition immediately from a high level of mental and physical activity to a state of calm and relaxation. Those who undertake the practice of silent meditation retreats have a similar experience.

It is quite common during the first 2-3 days of a retreat for retreatants to experience “monkey mind” – attention jumping from one thought to another hindering the mind's ability to concentrate. Another common hindrance during the first days of a retreat is sleepiness. In a world where the demands of work and family mean less time for sleep, many yogis find themselves nodding off during silent meditation at the beginning of a retreat. By the third or fourth day of a retreat, meditators usually find that the body is less fatigued and the mind is more settled and attentive. Concentration and mindfulness are stronger making it possible to hold the attention on the object of meditation and gain insight into the Dharma – the truth of the way things are.

In 2015, Mid America Dharma will host an 8-day retreat in September with Shaila Catherine and Phil Jones (see [www.midamericadharma.org/retreats](http://www.midamericadharma.org/retreats) for details). This long retreat includes both a residential and reduced-rate commuter option to make this experience available to the wider sangha. We hope you will take advantage of this long retreat and wonderful opportunity to deepen your practice. ❖

## Mid America Dharma Retreats

### Robert Brumet ❖ *Dec 31, 2014–Jan 4, 2015*

*Conception Abbey, Conception, MO (near Kansas City, MO) – Residential*

*Fee Range: \$350–\$525*

*Registration opens October 1, 2014*



**Robert Brumet** has practiced Insight Meditation since 1988. He has been leading a local sangha and conducting meditation retreats throughout North America since 1995. In the early 1990s he received vipassana facilitator training from Shinzen Young. In January 2000 he graduated from the Community Dharma Leader training program, sponsored by Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Robert is one of the founding members of Mid-America Dharma. He lives in Kansas City and teaches at Unity Institute and Seminary near Lee's Summit MO.

► **LISTEN** to Robert's retreat recordings at [www.midamericadharma.org/audio.html](http://www.midamericadharma.org/audio.html)

### Jon Yaffe & Bridget Rolens ❖ *March 20–22, 2015*

*Maria Center, St. Louis, MO – Non-residential*

*Fee Range: \$60–\$90*

*Registration opens January 20, 2014*



**Jon Yaffe** began practicing Insight Meditation in 1999 and has been a co-leader of SLIMG since 2006. A student of Matthew Flickstein, he has completed two of his programs: "Teaching as a Form of Practice" and "The Two Year Training". He has served on the Board of Directors of Mid America Dharma since 2005, and currently serves as its President.



**Bridget Rolens** has practiced Insight Meditation since 1997. Her mentors include Matthew Flickstein, Ginny Morgan and Gloria "Taraniya" Ambrosia. Recognized by the Spirit Rock Teachers Council as a Community Dharma Leader, Bridget shares the Dharma through classes, workshops, and retreats. She also teaches Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in Missouri and Illinois and is the program facilitator for Masterpeace Studios' Mind-Body Stress Reduction program in Crestwood, MO.

► **LISTEN** to Jon's & Bridget's retreat recordings at [www.midamericadharma.org/audio.html](http://www.midamericadharma.org/audio.html)

## Mid America Dharma Retreats

### Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia ❖ *May 7–10, 2015*

*Pallottine Renewal Center, St. Louis, MO – Residential*

*Fee Range: \$315–\$475*

*Registration opens February 7, 2014*



**Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia** teaches within the Thai Forest Tradition, specifically the disciples of Ajahn Chah, and is a Lay Buddhist Minister in association with Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery in California. She served as resident teacher of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts from 1996 through 1999. Taraniya serves as a Core Faculty member at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies where she does most of her teaching. She has been a Dhamma teacher since 1990.

► **LISTEN** to Taraniya's retreat recordings at [www.midamericadharma.org/audio.html](http://www.midamericadharma.org/audio.html)

### James Baraz ❖ *June 12–14, 2015*

*Maria Center, St. Louis, MO – Non-residential*

*Fee Range: \$80–\$120*

*Registration opens March 12, 2015*



**James Baraz** has been teaching meditation since 1978. He leads retreats, workshops and classes in the U.S. and abroad and is a founding teacher of Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, California. James is co-author with Shoshana Alexander of *Awakening Joy*, a new book based on the online course of the same name. The *Awakening Joy* course has had over 12,000 participants and been praised by Oprah Winfrey's *O Magazine* and Bill Gates. In addition, James is on the International Advisory Board of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. He lives with his wife in the Bay Area, has two sons and three grandchildren.

► **LISTEN** to James' dharma talks at <http://www.dharmaseed.org/teacher/86/>

# MAD Retreats Thrive with Your Generosity

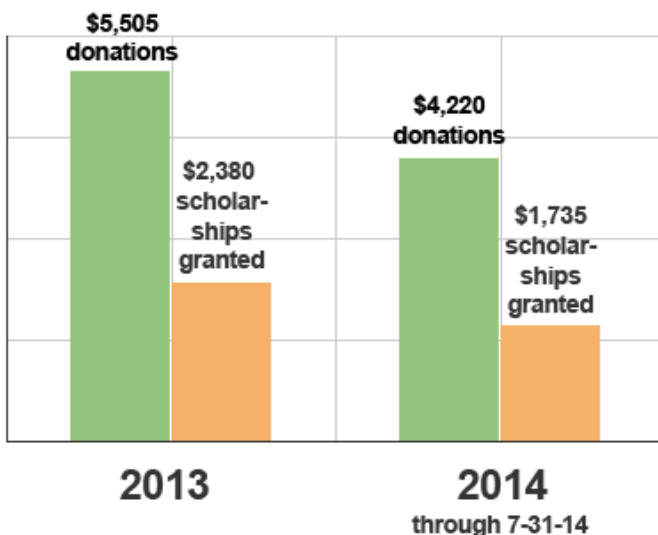
By Marnie Hammer

A few years back, the MAD board faced a quandary. We wanted to price each retreat affordably for as many people as possible. But covering just the basic costs (space rental and food) left MAD with little to no funds for publicity, teacher travel and insurance, or room and board for the teacher and the retreat manager. We struggled with pricing each retreat fairly without losing money.

A board member recalled other retreat centers such as Insight Meditation Society (IMS) and Spirit Rock offered sliding scale payment options: the lowest price covered essentials and then went up to cover all costs plus a little extra for scholarships.

We gulped, figured out our basic and additional costs, and began offering sliding scale fees for our retreats. So many of you need to take a bow, get a pat on the back or a hug of appreciation. You have proven that generosity starts with trusting you, our sangha.

This grand experiment has allowed MAD to keep the base retreat cost low enough for most and still receive funds from those who can pay more. Because of your generosity, MAD can freely offer scholarships and reasonably priced retreats to the entire community. ❖



## Retreat Basics: The Five Precepts

We ask everyone participating in our retreats to make a commitment to follow the Five Ethical Precepts. These are a foundation for our practice.

The precepts create the community of harmony and safety which is so necessary for our work of turning inward, to explore and train the mind to be happy and free of distress. The self-restraint we show by following the Precepts is essential to settle and focus the mind.

Through this we develop confidence in our worth and ability to do the practice. Following the Precepts bestows a sense of happiness with our own goodness.

### The Five Precepts

- ☞ I undertake the training of refraining from taking the life of any living being.
- ☞ I undertake the training of refraining from taking what has not been given.
- ☞ I undertake the training of refraining from any form of intentional sexual activity.\*
- ☞ I undertake the training of refraining from false and harmful speech.
- ☞ I undertake the training of refraining from intoxicating drink and drugs that lead to heedlessness.

\*A more general form of this precept is "I undertake the training rule to abstain from sexual misconduct," but at retreat we commit to the fuller version stated above.

## Retreat Registration

**Insight Meditation** offers an easily accessible way to free the mind from the distortions of self-centeredness, negativity and confusion. Through concentrated awareness, we see that our experience is a constantly changing process, in which all aspects of life are accepted with increasing balance and equanimity. This insight leads to the possibility of living each moment fully, with compassion and genuine freedom. Insight Meditation requires no belief commitments and is compatible with religious affiliations. Unless specified, no previous meditation experience is required.

**Retreat Format:** Periods of sitting meditation and/or dharma teachings alternate with walking meditation. Retreats are held in silence, with talking only during specified teaching periods. Beginners should be present from the start of the retreat to receive initial instructions. Please bring a meditation cushion or bench and a soft floor pad for meditation. Standard chairs are available and may also be used. Wear comfortable, loose fitting clothes. Please do not wear or bring strongly scented lotions, perfumes or incense.

**Residential retreats** begin with check-in at 4 pm on the first day and run through lunch on the last day. Participants are guided through group or private interviews and daily general lectures. Meals are plain vegetarian. A tea table is provided.

**Registration:** Information about retreat site, starting times, etc., is available online or will be sent after you register.

**Fees:** Retreat costs are listed under each retreat heading and on the mail-in registration form at the end of this newsletter.

**Sliding Scale:** Each retreat cost is listed as a range. The lowest fee listed is the base cost of providing the retreat for each retreatant. Any amount paid above that will be a tax-deductible contribution used to defray retreat expenses, scholarships and other activities.

**Residential:** a minimum deposit of \$75 must accompany registration; full payment is due at the start of the retreat. Non-residential retreats: please pay the full fee when you register.

**Registration Opening Dates and Deadlines:** ... are listed on the specific retreat pages. Registrations are not accepted prior to the beginning date for each retreat. If the registration fee for a residential retreat is not received by the deadline, there is a \$25 late fee.

**Refunds:** We will refund fees if requested before the deadline. Refunds requested later than this are made at the discretion of Mid-America Dharma's Board of Directors.

**Scholarships:** We do not want inability to pay to prevent you from attending, and have established a scholarship fund to provide assistance where needed. Deferred payment is also available. You can read about and apply for assistance when registering via any of our retreat websites or the registrar can mail you written materials. Applications must be received by the Registrar no later than three weeks prior to the retreat.

**Dana (or generosity):** Our retreats are led by teachers who freely give the teachings without any payment. All retreat fees go for retreat expenses, such as facility rental and meals. It is central to this tradition that students support teachers through their donations. There is no expected amount, but please give to the extent you are able. Dana is completely voluntary.

Mail-in Registration Form

Retreat registration is available online or via mail. To register online, go to [www.midamericadharm.org/retreats](http://www.midamericadharm.org/retreats).

To register by mail, send this form with a check payable to: **Mid America Dharma, c/o John Flaherty, 455 E. 80th Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64131**. If registering for multiple retreats, please send a separate copy of this form with payment to the registrar for each retreat. A \$75 deposit is required for all residential retreats. Please register as early as you can, as this greatly helps our planning.

\_\_\_\_\_ Dec 31, 2014–Jan 4, 2015  
**Robert Brumet**, Residential  
Conception Abbey, Conception, MO  
Fee range: \$350–\$525

Fee Amount \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Mar 20–22, 2015  
**Jon Yaffe & Bridget Rolens**, Non-Residential  
Maria Center, St. Louis, MO  
Fee range: \$60–\$90

Fee Amount \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ May 7–10, 2015  
**Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia**, Residential  
Pallottine Renewal Center, St. Louis, MO  
Fee range: \$315–\$475

Fee Amount \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Jun 12–14 2015  
**James Baraz**, Non-Residential  
Maria Center, St. Louis, MO  
Fee range: \$80–\$120

Fee Amount \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Required of ALL Retreatants:**

Please check the box below to indicate you agree to honor The Five Precepts during your retreat. The Five Precepts assure everyone has a safe & wholesome retreat experience (see page 5 for details).

**Yes, I agree to honor The Five Precepts during retreat.**

**For Residential Retreatants only:**

Gender: M F

Will you arrive after 7pm on the first day? Y N

Is this your first insight meditation retreat? Y N

Do you snore? Y N

If you have special needs, please contact the registrar at [registrar@midamericadharm.org](mailto:registrar@midamericadharm.org) or (816) 523-5061.

Mid America Dharma  
455 E. 80<sup>th</sup> Terrace  
Kansas City, MO 64131-2120

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Columbia, MO  
Permit #286

*Address Service Requested*

## Mid America Dharma Upcoming Retreats

- Dec 31, 2014-Jan 4, 2015*..... Residential Retreat, **Robert Brumet**, Conception Abbey, Conception, MO
- Mar 20-22, 2015*..... Non-Residential Retreat, **Jon Yaffe and Bridget Rolens**, Maria Center, St. Louis, MO
- May 7-10, 2015* ..... Residential Retreat, **Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia**, Pallottine Renewal Center, St. Louis, MO
- Jun 12-14, 2015* .....Non-Residential Retreat, **James Baraz**, Maria Center, St. Louis, MO

*For the latest information on retreats and a full listing of Midwestern Buddhist groups please visit our website:*

**[www.midamericadharm.org](http://www.midamericadharm.org)**