

Santi Maha Sangha in Israel

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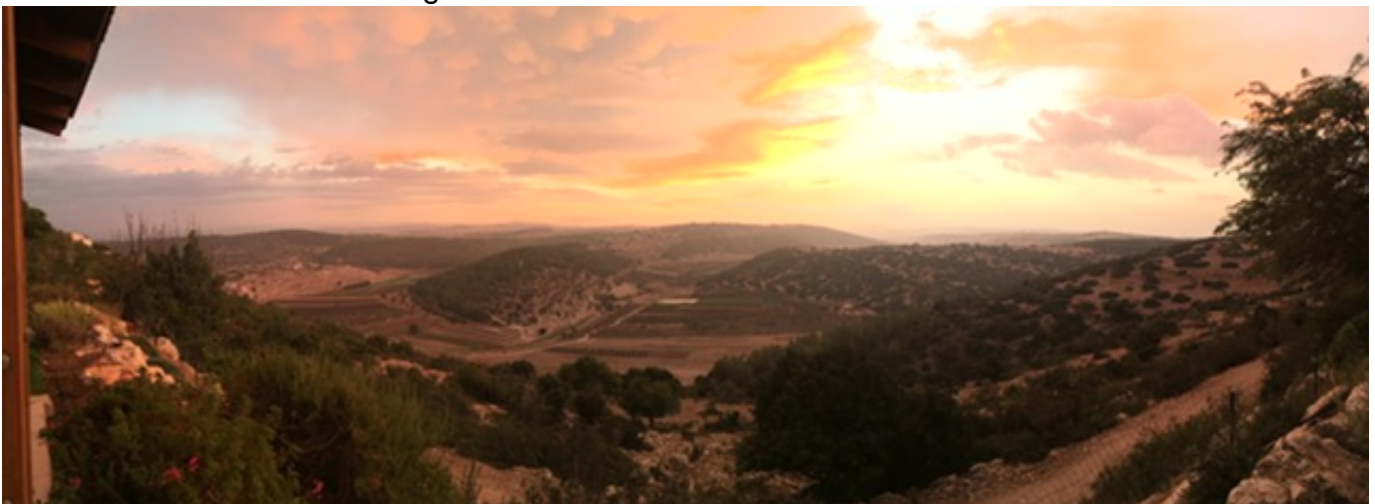
Series of Mind Meditations of Santi Maha Sangha Level One with Igor Berkhin

October 6-14, 2017

by Paula Barry

In a little Israeli town called Nofit, on the outskirts of Haifa, an intensive practice retreat on the Series of Mind Meditations of Santi Maha Sangha Level One took place. Eleven practitioners from America, Hungary, Russia, Ukraine and of course, Israel, gathered at the beautiful home of Shlomit and Itzik Rypshtein. We began the retreat on the full moon in October which coincided with the Jewish holiday of Sukkot that commemorates the forty years of the Exodus when the Jewish people left their enslavement in Egypt and journeyed through the desert to the promised land of Israel. During this time the Israelites dwelt in temporary structures covered in palm leaves and other materials of nature. In current times, to remember this journey forth from slavery, the Jewish people build a Sukkah in their yard and enjoy the harvest time by taking their meals there.

Our retreat was excellently conducted by Igor Berkhin, a Second Level SMS instructor from Ukraine who has emigrated from there and currently resides in Israel. For nine days we faithfully followed the instructions from the First Level Santi Maha Sangha book *The Ati Treasury of Contemplation* composed by our most precious master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. We started with the Meditation Instructions for practitioners of Higher Capacity. Beginning at 7am every morning we practiced for 8 hours a day in order to discover an understanding of the union of the Calm State of Mind or Shine and Lhagthong the recognition that both emptiness and the movement of thoughts are our naturally pure condition of the Nature of Mind. We examined our thoughts and tried to discern how the very thoughts themselves were no different than the nature of mind. We followed the instructions for practitioners of higher, medium and lower capacities. Igor precisely and patiently guided us through these profound practices. He encouraged us to share our experiences, our discoveries as well as our confusions so that we could learn from each other and slowly, slowly or in a flash discover something about our Real Nature.



We all helped our wonderful cooks Channa, Shlomit and Yael to prepare three delicious and abundant meals a day which we enjoyed together outside on the veranda. From the beautiful table

you could see Nazareth in the distance and from the surrounding hilltops on which sat Arab villages we could integrate with the songs of the mu'adhins from each of these towns calling the faithful to prayer in what could be described as either a cacaphony or a complex harmony. Here between practice sessions we talked with old friends and got to know new friends, united together by our practice of Dzogchen through the teachings of our Master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu.

One afternoon we went together to Nazereth, by some accounts the birthplace of Mary, and the place where the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive and become the Mother of Jesus Christ. We visited the Greek Orthodox Church where (according to many) the Annunciation took place. We sat in the pews and continued our practice in this holy place. Nazareth is now largely an Arab town, so we partook of the wonderful Middle Eastern cuisine and ate shwarma and falafel with all the many side dishes that traditionally accompany an Arab meal.

Then, by nightfall, back to our cushions to continue our journey of discovering the Nature of Mind. To quote Igor Berkhin from his Facebook post: "May it become a cause for firmly establishing the liberating power of authentic primordial knowledge in such an important chakra of our planet. Homage to the Teacher and to the lineage. Wonderful!"