

# RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY

## Sitting is not just for civil rights leaders

By **DEMETRIA IRWIN**  
*Amsterdam News Staff*

Ten stories above Manhattan's West 27th Street, the soft pinks and yellows of a Thursday sunset dripped into paned windows and warmed a large room filled with 40 people sitting in silence. An occasional car horn, beeping truck or shuffling chair on the hardwood floor punctuated the silence, but for the most part, there was only the sound of breath entering and exiting the body.

On the second Monday of each month, New York Insight Meditation Center's "People of Color Sit" convenes from 7 to 9 p.m. Led by Gina Sharpe, participants sit sans shoes in folding chairs or on the floor.

Sharpe, a former attorney who's been studying and teaching the dharma for over 30 years, begins each session with an explanation about some of the basic teachings of Buddha.

"If you are only getting relaxation out of meditating, you are missing out," said Sharpe at the April class. Sharpe sees meditation as a way to know yourself and the world better. "Buddha teaches us four ways to meditate: walking, standing, sitting or laying down. We'll get to the laying down posture once you've been practicing for a while," joked Sharpe in response to a participant admitting his inclination to fall asleep during meditation.

The April class was a diverse mix of brown skin in

various hues. Twenty-somethings, empty nesters, executives, non-profit workers and students all sat for about 35 minutes after the reverberating ding of Sharpe's gong. Once the meditative sitting concluded, participants got the opportunity to stand up and stretch a bit. Sharpe asked for feedback from participants about their meditation experience. One young man, a first-time sitter, expressed his astonishment at being able to meditate for so long. "I've never sat with my eyes closed for that long without being asleep. I didn't even feel sleepy. I can't even really explain it. It was just like another level of consciousness," said meditation's newest devotee.

After taking in and responding to more feedback, Sharpe began to explain more Buddhist principles to the class, incorporating her own experiences into her talk. This prompted more questions and reactions, which Sharpe stayed to address well after the official 9 p.m. close of the class. Sharpe has a way of explaining the teachings of Buddha in a very real, relatable way that seems within reach of even (or perhaps especially) the busiest city dweller. Meditation is not just for modern-day hippies or for people wealthy enough to afford to "waste" time every day. The class, like many Insight offerings, is pay-what-you-wish. An unassuming box with a slit on top sits by the

door awaiting whatever anonymous donation people choose to offer.

Sharpe also co-facilitates a People of Color Retreat in Massachusetts, scheduled for June 28-July 3. Free round-trip transportation is provided on a first-come, first-served basis and the cost is just \$10 per day, but more generous donations from those who are able are appreciated.

*For more information on the retreat, call (978) 355-4378 or visit [www.dharma.org/ims/retreat\\_detail.php?id=107a](http://www.dharma.org/ims/retreat_detail.php?id=107a).*

*For more information on "People of Color Sitting" or other Insight offerings, call (212) 213-4802 or visit [www.nyimc.org](http://www.nyimc.org).*