

## Sangha Voices: Charlesly Joseph

CIMC has a rich history of practitioners, teachers, staff, and volunteers all committed to practicing meditation together in community. Sangha *Voices* is way for us to deepen our connections and get to know one another better. We will be interviewing members of each of CIMC's many [Community Groups](#).

This month, Zeenat Potia spoke with **Charlesly Joseph**, a community Member of CIMC's **35 & Under Sangha**. This sangha provides an opportunity for those ages 18-35 to practice the dharma in a supportive community setting. Meetings are currently being held online one Sunday each month from 7:00-8:00pm.



Photo: Taken at Tiguex Park, Albuquerque, NM on the traditional homelands of the Pueblo of Sandia. The original peoples of New Mexico – Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache – since time immemorial, have deep connections to the land and have made significant contributions to the broader community statewide. I honor the land itself and those who remain stewards of this land throughout the generations and also acknowledge my committed relationship to Indigenous peoples.

### ZP: How did you first hear about CIMC?

**CHARLESLY:** I came to meditation practice pre-COVID as part of a treatment plan for mental and emotional health and found it to be very beneficial. I used to do formal practice with the Yoga for People of Color Sangha in Albuquerque and the Albuquerque Insight Meditation Center. Then COVID hit. I discovered CIMC in a list in *Tricycle* magazine of a growing list of online sanghas. I started attending the Wednesday evening dharma talks throughout the summer. Then I went to the website and saw other groups on the calendar. The POC group was helpful to me in dealing with and processing the racial truths that were coming to light in 2020.

Through the wonder of technology and the internet, I have explored many CIMC offerings, including the 35 and Under sangha, and started to deepen my practice. With Zoom, I don't have to fly to Cambridge to attend classes.

### ZP: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

**CHARLESLY:** I grew up in Connecticut, outside New Haven not too far from Boston, and went to college and medical school at Brown in Providence. This further deepened my connection with Boston, and I went to Red Sox games even though I'm a Yankees fan. I have lots of friends and connections in Boston and Cambridge. Then I came 3,000 miles to New Mexico for a residency in internal medicine. This is my home now, gentle, wide open living, and it's treated me very well.

I grew up in the Episcopal church but veered into cynicism in college mistakenly thinking that I had complete control over my life. But the profession of medicine is extremely stressful and that definitely weighed on me, as well as starting a family. I remembered that as a kid, I had experienced peace and joy, and returned to sports as a way to connect to that younger part of myself. I enjoyed going to church and speaking to the older, more experienced members of the congregation. They had a calmness about them. Coincidentally, my mother-in-law is a member of an Episcopal church just a few blocks away from where I live so I started

going again and after services, they had a meditation group. That's how I was first introduced to the concept of meditation, and I still attend Zoom church.

I'm so grateful that I have found like-minded people who are interested in introspection. Finding the Dharma was really a coming home for me.

### ZP: What purpose and value does the 35 & Under Sangha provide to you?

**CHARLESLY:** I've been able to share with peers who are going through similar experiences within a contemplative framework through this sangha. I went to school forever, and for so long achievement and being goal oriented was so primary to what I thought of as myself, but I might have overdone it.

One can suffer a lot as a young person in today's world. I am lucky that both my parents are still alive, but I have friends whose parents have gotten ill and died. I have experienced unexpected job loss and the challenges of starting an unconventional family. Both my kids are adopted, they are 8 and 5 years old. I'd like to support anybody who has gone through these processes of loss and coming to terms with life. Being able to share and have those mirrors reflect back to me has been especially helpful in these times of physical quarantine.

### ZP: Who or what is inspiring you currently?

**CHARLESLY:** I'm reading *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us about Race, Resilience, Transformation, and Freedom*, and the essays resonate with me as a Black identifying person. And, *Be the Refuge: Raising the Voices of Asian American Buddhists* by Chenxing Han is an eye-opening book which challenges the whitewashing of mainstream American Buddhism.

### ZP: Thank you, Charlesly! We are so lucky to have you be a part of CIMC's many sanghas.