

Insight Retreat Center

NEWSLETTER

1906 Glen Canyon Rd
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831)440-8858
www.insightretreatcenter.org
info@insightretreatcenter.org

Work Days

Workdays are an integral part of taking care of IRC, and thus supporting retreats. There is a sense of community when we sit and work together and take care of our center. Whether working in the gardens or sweeping the floors, it's inspiring to know that days later retreatants will be doing sitting and walking meditation in those areas.

- Saturday, August 15, 9 am to 4 pm
- September 12, 9 am to 4 pm

(Lunch is included on these workdays)

Other work days will be announced on our website's Workdays link. Questions? Eileen: messina.eileen@gmail.com, 650.269.5801

Garden Days

To help with gardening and landscaping please contact the Landscape Manager at: gardening@insightretreatcenter.org.

A YouTube video of recent garden projects is available at: bitly.com/GardenVideoIRC

Volunteer: Help Care for IRC

IRC is run entirely by volunteers. The continuing support allows us to take care of the center and offer retreats. Join us at a Work Day or fill out a Volunteer Form online or email:

insightretreatcenter@gmail.com.

Resident Volunteers: Several Resident Volunteers live at IRC for extended periods, participating in dharma programs and assisting with the various tasks needed to support center activities. If you're interested in becoming a resident volunteer email insightretreatcenter@gmail.com.

IRC Email List

For future e-mail newsletters & updates, please subscribe to our email list at www.insightretreatcenter.org

Mindfulness of Meals during Retreat

by Gil Fronsdal

On retreat, "mealtime is meditation time." This little slogan speaks to the great value of practicing mindfulness during meals. The emotional and psychological nourishment of food is enhanced with mindfulness, and eating can be a significant activity for developing further mindfulness. Mindfulness of our desires, beliefs, and reactions before, during and after meals can reveal areas in which the path of freedom can open further. Careful attention to eating can also help us regulate our food intake so that overeating or undereating don't hinder our meditation practice. And when we wait in line and eat together with others, mealtime can be a time to experience the benefits and challenges of practicing in community.

Using mealtime to continue developing a thoroughgoing mindfulness can be a powerful support for our retreat practice. The physical activity of eating can provide an engaging focus for staying mindful and concentrated.

Mindfulness can be quite detailed as we stay attentive to picking up the fork, putting food on it, bringing the food into the mouth, chewing, swallowing and then picking up the next forkful. Some people find it easier to maintain undistracted mindfulness while eating than during sitting meditation. Eating mindfully in the calm and silence of a retreat can be an occasion for a heightened enjoyment of meals that encourages continuity of mindfulness. The activity of eating and the mindfulness can become mutually supportive joys.

Our relationship with food and eating is seldom simple. Retreats are an effective environment in which to become better aware of this relationship. In addition to noticing the act of eating, the silence and slowness of retreat life create opportunities to notice desires, emotions and beliefs that operate at mealtime. What are we thinking as we serve ourselves from the buffet line? What tensions or concerns appear at mealtimes? Are there multiple, perhaps conflicting, motivations around eating? Which motivations do we tend to act on? How do we respond when our preferences are not met? Can we learn something about ourselves from the amount of food we put on our

plates—is it too much or not enough?

Mindfulness of meals includes the thoughts and feelings we have before and after eating. We may start thinking about an upcoming meal well before the mealtime itself. What thoughts, feelings, and concerns fuel this thinking? We may judge ourselves after a meal for eating too much or the wrong food. What motivates us to take our eating so personally that we get upset with ourselves? What beliefs do we have about how we are supposed to be? What beliefs bring stress and lead to self-condemnation?

Time-honored Buddhist practices associated with food can support investigating these questions and greatly enhance retreat practice. They can also be effective ways to get the most out of mindfulness of eating. Discovering how to be free in relationship to food, eating, and all that happens around meals is an important area of the Buddhist path.

Accepting What is Given

First, we can practice "accepting what is given." This means to eat the food that is offered unless there is a health reason. Limiting oneself to the food provided simplifies eating by putting preferences and desires aside. We can also learn about the ease that can come when we are not preoccupied with food choices. We simply eat what is offered and learn how to be content. Not acting on strong preferences and desires highlights them so we can study them. That can give us a chance to better notice the beliefs and fears we have surrounding food and eating. We can learn how strongly we hold ideas around what we need to eat or not eat, about what we want and don't want. These understandings can greatly support our practice of becoming free.

The practice of eating what is offered can include putting aside efforts to optimize one's diet. For the days of the retreat it may not matter too much if we don't get our exact nutritional preferences met. By not focusing on nutritional optimization, a person may discover a more relaxed attitude around food, an attitude that is sometimes foreign to the many

Continued inside

Other Ways to Donate

New! Amazon Smile is a simple and automatic way to support IRC every time you shop through Amazon, at no cost to you. Go to insightretreatcenter.org/smile.

Donate Your Car — You can make a tax-deductible donation of a vehicle you no longer want, working or not. The **Center for Car Donations** will handle pick-up and all paperwork needed; IRC will receive 75% of the sale price. Tell them you want to donate to Insight Retreat Center. Call 877/411-3662 and a helpful representative will schedule your pick-up appointment and guide you through the process.

Ebay Giving Works — A simple and easy way to recycle your unwanted possessions and support IRC at the same time. Go to: insightretreatcenter.org/e-giving

Help IRC when Buying or Selling Your Home

IMC sangha member Carol Collins is a retired longtime local real estate broker with realtor connections throughout the state. If you are thinking of buying or selling a home she can refer you to a conscientious, highly qualified realtor who will, in turn, make a donation to our Retreat Center.

Carol is available as your consultant at no charge, investigating your requirements and concerns and the state of the market. She'll continue as your consultant throughout the buying or selling process. She has helped facilitate this for sangha members in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and other Bay Area counties.

It is common practice for realtors to offer up to 25% of their commission to the broker who refers them clients. When Carol receives the referral fee, she donates it to IMC/IRC in the name of the client. It is a win-win all around. The buyers or sellers receive an outstanding realtor. The realtor receives new clients. IMC/IRC receives the referral check, offered in the name of the client.

If you are thinking of buying or selling a home, please contact Carol Collins, 408/348-1385 or carolcollins888@gmail.com. More details at bitly.com/BuySellHome.

Schedule of Retreats 2015-2016

Insight Retreats are opportunities to engage in full-time mindfulness training. A daily schedule involves periods of sitting and walking meditation, instructions, dharma talks, work meditation, and practice discussion with teachers. Silence is maintained throughout most of the retreat.

2015

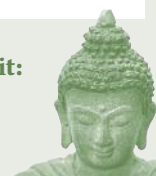
- **November 5–8** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Lori Wong (reg opens 8/5/15)
- **November 15–22** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, Nikki Mirghafori and Alex Haley
- **November 28–December 4** Mindfulness and Wisdom Retreat with Andrea Fella and Alexis Santos (reg opens 7/28/15)
- **December 6–13** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella (reg opens 8/6/15)

2016

- **January 15–18** Insight Retreat with Matthew Brensilver and Teacher TBD (reg opens 9/15/15)
- **January 24–31** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, Susie Harrington, and Brian Lesage (reg opens 9/24/15)
- **February 23–28** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Ines Freedman (reg opens 10/12/15)
- **March 6–13** Experienced Practitioner Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Max Erdstein (reg opens 11/6/15)
- **March 20–27** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Adrienne Ross (reg opens 11/20/15)
- **April 23–30** Insight Retreat with Andrea Fella and Greg Scharf (reg opens 12/23/15)
- **May 17–21** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and John Travis (reg opens 1/17/16)
- **May 27–30** Insight Retreat for People in their 20's and 30's taught by Max Erdstein and Teacher TBD (reg opens 2/27/16)
- **June 5–12** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Paul Haller (reg opens 2/5/16)
- **July 16–30** Mindfulness of Mind Retreat with Andrea Fella (reg opens 2/16/16)
- **August 10–14** Insight Retreat with Andrea Fella and Pamela Weiss (reg opens 4/10/16)
- **August 19–24** Insight Retreat with Ayya Anandabodhi and Ruth King (reg opens 4/19/16)
- **September 11–25** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal (reg opens 4/11/16)

For details about how retreat lotteries work, please see the IRC website:
www.insightretreatcenter.org/lottery

To register, for schedule changes, additions and more, visit:
insightretreatcenter.org/retreats/
or email info@insightretreatcenter.org



Supporting IMC/IRC with a Financial Legacy

Now that IMC and IRC are established and thriving we have turned our attention to the long-term financial well-being of our centers. After years of encouragement from a number of people we now have a website explaining how to set up IMC/IRC as a recipient of charitable bequests. To recognize and honor these generous supporters, we have started a Legacy Circle whose members are invited to an annual luncheon with the IMC/IRC teachers.

A charitable bequest is a simple and flexible way that you can leave a gift to support the future of IMC and IRC for generations to come. It's easy to make a bequest by including Insight Meditation Center of the Midpeninsula as a beneficiary:

- in your will or living trust
- in your retirement plan or bank account
- in your life insurance policy

For more information, visit the donate page on our website. For additional questions, or to arrange a consultation with a volunteer attorney, please email: legacy@insightmeditationcenter.org

Mindfulness of Meals, cont'd

media messages we are exposed to. Inner peace is a nutrient at least as important as food.

Eating to Support Meditation Practice

A second practice of eating is to "not eat for entertainment, distraction, pleasure-seeking or conceit." Instead, eat in order to maintain and nourish the body to support the meditation practice on retreat. Don't eat too much or too little. Notice when hunger has been satisfied and consider eating only a couple of bites more. Limiting oneself this way may reveal the many desires and impulses that keep us eating after we are no longer hungry. Especially interesting is to study the motivation for taking second helpings during a meal. And noticing after the fact that we have served ourselves too much food provides physical evidence of desires that can otherwise operate unnoticed.

Mindfulness of the Body

The third practice useful on retreat is to be mindful of the body while eating. When sitting down to eat, first take the time to get centered in your chair and in your body. As you eat, stay aware of the many bodily sensations that come into play. Be mindful of what happens in your mouth as you chew. What happens in your throat and stomach when you swallow? After you have put a bite of food in your mouth, wait to fill your fork or spoon until you have chewed and swallowed. Periodically pause in your eating to explore the shifts in sensations and feelings found in the body.

Mindfulness of the body while eating leads to better choices. We can notice when we are full and so become less likely to overeat. We may also become sensitive to the subtle physical signals about what to eat—e.g. more protein, more fruit or vegetables.

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During retreats, mindfulness at mealtime includes more than attention to food and eating. Because we are eating in community, mealtime can be an important time to notice our relationships to other retreatants. Do we have a heightened concern about others during meals? Do we watch and judge others for what or how they eat? Are we worried others are watching and judging us? Or perhaps in order to avoid all these concerns we come late to meals and eat removed from others.

Sometimes people benefit from using mealtime as a break from the meditation schedule of a retreat, which can be wise if it provides needed relaxation or rest. It can relieve tensions that may occur with the schedule of ongoing sitting and walking meditation, and allow us to feel refreshed for the next meditation session. Relaxing and enjoying the meal can be a time to appreciate the gift of the food, the work of many people in the food preparation and cleanup, and being part of a community with fellow practitioners.

Practicing in Community

When we are part of a line of people at the serving table we can learn to support the community by having a relaxed, friendly attention to others who are also serving themselves food. We can give a bit of space to the people in front of us so they don't feel crowded or rushed. When a dish is running low, we can consider how much food to take so those after us can have some. Aware of the next person in line, we can return the serving utensil to a position where it is easiest for them to pick it up.

People new to retreats may find the silence during mealtime disconcerting. In ordinary life if we sit down at a table with other people and they are silent, don't acknowledge our arrival, and continue to look down at their food, this would probably be considered unfriendly. It can take a few meals on one's first silent meditation retreat to realize that fellow retreatants are not being unfriendly. Rather, as recommended, they are simply dedicated to staying mindful of their eating without being pulled into social interactions. After a few days new retreatants generally not only become comfortable with the silence and lack of social interaction at meals, they come to appreciate the relaxed way of being together with others that retreat meals provide.

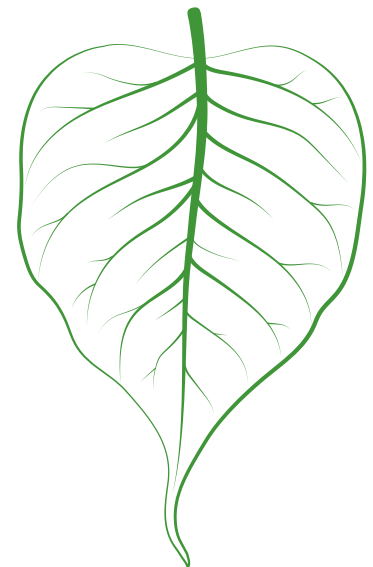
Over time, bringing mindfulness to all aspects of mealtime, including our underlying beliefs, can lead to greater and greater ease around food. We can learn to simplify our desires around food so that eating can become a simple pleasure harmonious with a settled, peaceful mind, rather than a source of either excitement or agitation. We can discover the joy of renunciation in relation to food. We can learn how a healthy, mindful attitude around food can be an important component on the path of freedom.

Introducing Susie Harrington and Brian Lesage

Gil will be teaching a retreat with Susie Harrington and Brian Lesage, two recent graduates of the Spirit Rock/IMS/IMC teacher training program, January 24–31 next year. Registration opens September 24.

Susie Harrington has trained in the Insight tradition since 1989 and began teaching ten years ago, after many years as a mountaineering and river guide and backcountry ranger. Her connection to wilderness deeply informs her approach to the dharma, and Susie teaches many retreats outdoors in nature as well as in retreat centers nationwide. The interface of psychology and spirituality is important to her understanding. She is also a student in the Diamond Approach and a practitioner of Hakomi, a somatic psychotherapy modality. Susie lives in Moab, Utah, where she leads a local sangha. Her website is DesertDharma.org.

Brian Lesage has practiced Buddhist meditation since 1988, first in the Zen tradition, where he ordained as a Rinzaï Zen priest in 1996. He also studied with Tibetan teachers, before training in the Insight tradition. He has sat many extended periods of retreat in Burma, Nepal, and India as well as in the US. Brian also has a private practice of Somatic Experiencing, a naturalistic therapy modality for healing trauma. Brian lives in Flagstaff, Arizona, where he is the guiding teacher for the Flagstaff Vipassana Meditation Group. He teaches throughout the U.S, often as a visiting teacher in sanghas in the Southwestern states. His website is LiberatingAwareness.com.



Continuity of Mindfulness on Retreat

by Andrea Fella

One of the great blessings of retreat practice is that we make space to set aside our usual worldly activities. On retreat our main work is to cultivate mindfulness and to practice meditation. We can engage with practice throughout the day, not only in formal sitting and walking periods, but also in the “in between times”: during meals, in our work meditations and sangha service, in having a cup of tea, while brushing our teeth, getting dressed, or even going to the toilet. All day long we have the luxury to explore: “How can I be mindful of this?”

Cultivating mindfulness in all our activities supports a steadiness of mind, which creates the conditions for concentration to develop. Not cultivating mindfulness during the “in between times” on retreat is akin to putting a kettle on and off the stove; it takes much longer for the water to boil. With a steadiness of connection to each present experience, the mind is less likely to react to sights, sounds, smells, sensations, thoughts, or emotions, and instead can become interested in the experience itself.

Understanding the value of continuity of mindfulness, we have to make some effort to support it. This effort needs the quality of gentle persistence to cultivate a moment-to-moment attention. The idea of practicing mindfulness all day can feel overwhelming, and it’s possible to wear ourselves out through over-efforting or gearing up to try to stay present for long stretches at a time.

Effort that supports continuity of mindfulness has a light touch; just enough effort to be present for this moment. It doesn’t take much effort to experience half a breath, to feel the contact points of your hands, to notice a sight, a sound, or a sensation. We make just enough effort to connect with a moment of experience. And then we do it again, and again, and again. Supportive effort lies in connecting over and over again, rather than trying to hold our attention on experience.

This kind of effort is analogous to riding a child’s kick scooter. To start you need to put your foot down and push lightly against the ground; just a gentle tap. You probably have to make several light taps to get the scooter going, but as momentum starts to build, you learn what it feels like for the momentum to carry you. You learn to recognize when you can ride for a while without tapping. Then, as the scooter starts to get a little wobbly, you make a few taps again to stabilize the momentum.

The effort towards continuity of mindfulness is like that. We gently connect to experience: What is here now? And now? And now? This light touch of effort supports a momentum of mindfulness and we become familiar with the experience of this momentum. We begin to recognize when we can back off of a conscious effort to stay present, and allow the momentum of established mindfulness to simply receive experience: to know a breath, a sight, a sound, an emotion, a sensation. We also begin to recognize when the mindfulness gets “wobbly,” and can gently re-engage with the effort to actively connect with experience. This kind of gentle, persistent effort allows continuity of mindfulness to develop very naturally, without leading to exhaustion.

As mindfulness becomes more continuous, we begin naturally to investigate and be interested in experience, and start to more deeply understand the relationships between different aspects of experience. For example, while cleaning a toilet, we might see the arising of a thought, see an emotion connected to that thought, and see how both impact the body. We naturally begin to understand that there is a cause and effect relationship between mind and body, and that there is a differ-

ence between a thought, an emotion and the body. In fact, as mindfulness becomes more continuous, deep understanding and insight can happen at any time, not just in the formal sitting and walking practice.

Because the retreat schedule emphasizes formal sitting and walking practice, we might believe they are the most important of the retreat and that it is less important to be attentive throughout the day. Yet we miss a valuable opportunity that retreats offer if we don’t explore the gentle persistent cultivation of continuous mindfulness.

Your Questions About Practice

You are warmly invited to send your questions relating to retreat practice to news@insightretreatcenter.org. A teacher will choose one or two to respond to in each edition of the newsletter.

Question: I’ve heard meditation is supposed to be peaceful. But the idea of sitting with my busy mind without doing anything doesn’t sound peaceful. And then when I do it, it’s actually quite challenging. Could you speak to that?

Gil Fronsdal responds:

Practice can be challenging. I hope it’s still valuable to sit with an agitated mind. I think more important than getting calm is to discover what is true, to really see what’s happening. It’s not so common for people to stop and see and recognize clearly what’s going on with them, within themselves. This can be particularly true if you’re not peaceful; the pull of mental agitation can distract you from what is actually going on. Ironically, sometimes trying to make yourself calm or becoming inspired by a Dharma talk or Dharma reading may also interfere with really getting to know yourself. It is really important to have a good overview of yourself and how you are. If you are not peaceful and your mind is busy, take the time to recognize and study this. Only after this might you know how to proceed.

I had a friend who was an athlete, with very tight muscles, almost muscle-bound, and when he did his first meditation session it was very painful, excruciating even, to sit still and not move for a whole meditation period. But after the meditation he felt real for the first time. He felt he’d never been real with himself before, never been connected with life. The pain forced him to finally meet himself and to be in touch with something true in a way he never had before. So he kept practicing. Years later he still meditates.

It’s not that you should sit with agitation, pain and difficulty for its own sake. But I think it’s more important to meditate as a way of meeting yourself and being honest about what’s actually present than it is to be calm. It is helpful to discover what happens through such honesty. So if you are not peaceful, get to know this. Doing so is a path to peace.

