

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. Many of us appreciate the sense of community when we sit and work together this way. 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.

Please join us for the following work days, 9am to 4pm. See the IRC website "Work Days" link for details. Contact Eileen Messina, messina.eileen@gmail.com or (650) 269-5801 for questions.

- Sunday, Mar 23 (Lunch will be provided)
- Saturday, May 3 (Lunch will be provided)

Volunteer: Help Care for IRC

IRC is run entirely by volunteers. It's the continuing support of our volunteers that allows us to take care of the center and offer retreats. There are many ways to volunteer, but we particularly need to fill these positions:

- **Resident Volunteers:** Typically, three or four Resident Volunteers live at IRC for extended periods. They assist with much of the background work needed for running retreats and maintaining the building and grounds. Skills: any of the following skills are helpful—handyperson, gardening, grounds-keeping, housekeeping, and general office.
 - **Handypersons:** a couple of people with general handyperson skills to help with the maintenance of the property.
 - **Gardening and Grounds-keeping:** both skilled and unskilled people are needed to come by during non-retreat times to help maintain the landscape and grounds.
 - **Volunteer Coordinator:** Coordinates meeting and placing new volunteers; keeps track of and organizes current volunteers.
- To volunteer, please fill out a Volunteer Form on the website or email: insightretreatcenter@gmail.com

Community as Part of Retreat Practice

by Gil Fronsdal

In the West, residential group retreats are the most common form of meditation retreats. In these, community is important to the overall retreat practice, especially as much of the day is spent with others. Meditation, listening to Dharma talks, meals, and some of the work assignments are done in community. In retreat centers without single rooms, even sleeping is done in a room with others.

By practicing in community we benefit from the inspiration others can provide. Watching experienced practitioners can teach newer practitioners how to be wholeheartedly engaged in the retreat life. Seeing the steadiness, kindness, calm, and mindfulness of others can inspire us to call on these qualities in ourselves.

Meditating with others can be encouraging. Alone, many people would not have the personal discipline or inspiration to maintain a schedule of meditation throughout the day. Having others to meditate with can make it easier to keep going. This is especially so when doubt, inertia and other meditation challenges occur. The silent support of fellow meditators can provide the boost to work through the challenges.

Practicing with other people shows us ways in which we are not alone in the practice. Because meditation, especially on retreats, is an unusual activity, knowing that others are doing it can reduce concerns that we are doing something abnormal. Both when meditation is going well and when it is difficult, practicing with others can protect us from thinking we are special or unique: others may be experiencing the same thing. Knowing this helps us understand that our experiences are a normal part of the spiritual journey, to be met with mindfulness, wise humility, and compassion.

To practice as community is to practice with the attitude that we are all in the retreat together. We participate in the retreat both for our own benefit and for the benefit of others. We care for ourselves when we care for others and we care for others as a way to care for ourselves. How much we emphasize one side of this dynamic process varies from retreat to

retreat. Sometimes the focus of practice is more personal, other times it is actively to be of service to the other retreatants. For example, one may want to be a retreat manager or retreat cook, both significant ways of practicing on retreat.

Practicing in community provides direct lessons in how we live in mutual support with others. When everyone helps with the chores of the retreat we both support others and are supported by them. Experiencing these areas of mutual support can help us relax as we learn we are not alone on a path to freedom from social entanglements. It points to our profound interconnectedness while, at the same time, finding freedom from emotional interdependency.

Living and practicing in silence with others during a retreat allows for unique and wonderful connections to others. Because there is no social talking, people on retreat tend to become aware of each other in new ways. The many circumstances when we are with others in silence are times when closeness, familiarity, and appreciation grow without the need to speak. Small interactions like opening the door for each other, sharing a meal, washing dishes together, and spending hours meditating near each other in the meditation hall give birth to mutual appreciation.

People accustomed to being alone or acculturated to the lens of individualism may not appreciate how much community life is important to retreat practice. For some phases of Buddhist practice, the community aspects of practice can even become the most important. Practicing in community is an antidote to the hyper-individualism that is all too common. To be too focused on one's own practice and happiness is, paradoxically, a limitation on the growth of one's practice and happiness. To be mindful and caring of others is a way to soften hard boundaries between self and others. To find harmony in living with others can teach valuable lessons in non-clinging.

Of course, living in proximity with others can have challenges. Fellow retreatants can be

Continued inside

IRC Service Leaders

IRC is run completely by volunteers, with much of the work of running our retreats shared by all the participants, allowing most of the work to be done in the 45-minute time period devoted to work meditation. The system also includes having five Service Leaders, experienced retreat practitioners who both sit the retreat and serve the retreat in leadership positions as cooks and managers. Though the Service Leaders have more responsibility and devote more time, usually a few hours each day, they are still able to spend much of the day in formal meditation. Not only do they provide the essential work to help run the retreats, but also model the practice in their actions and communications. Together with the teachers, the Service Leaders help create a strong and healthy practice environment for everyone.

New Service Leader Coordinator

We'd like to welcome and thank Ted Weinstein, our new Service Leader Coordinator. Ted has already been serving as one of the IRC Registrars, so we very much appreciate that he's taking on this essential additional role.

During our first year, as we've been establishing our systems, Debra Chromczak, IRC's Retreat Coordinator, has been serving as both Retreat Coordinator & Service Leader Coordinator. She will continue as Retreat Coordinator, which in itself is one of our most demanding volunteer positions. Thank you Debra!

Help IRC when Buying or Selling Your Home

Carol Collins is an IMC sangha member and long-time local real estate broker, now retired. If you are buying or selling your home, she can be available as a consultant through the whole process at no charge, refer you to a realtor, and the realtor will make a donation in your name to our Retreat Center.

She has facilitated this process for sangha members in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and other Bay Area counties. If you have real estate questions, or would like to discuss buying or selling your home, contact Carol, carolcollins888@gmail.com or 408/348-1385.

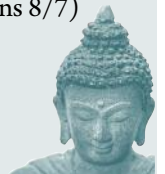


Schedule of Retreats 2014

Insight Retreats are opportunities to engage in full-time mindfulness training. A daily retreat 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.

- **Mar 13–20** Insight Retreat with Andrea Fella and Kamala Masters (Wait List)
- **Mar 28–30** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Daniel Bowling (Wait List)
- **Apr 5–11** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella (Wait List)
- **May 4–11** Just Sitting, Clear Seeing: Zen & the Art of Insight with Gil Fronsdal, Mel Weitsman and Max Erdstein
- **May 30–Jun 7** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Adrienne Ross
- **Jun 20–22** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Bob Stahl (reg. opens 2/20)
- **Jun 26–29** Meditation Retreat in Spanish with Rebecca Bradshaw, assisted by Andrea Castillo (reg. opens 2/26)
- **Jul 12–26** Mindfulness of Mind Retreat with Andrea Fella (reg. opens 2/12)
- **Aug 13–17** Insight Retreat with Andrea Fella and Pamela Weiss (reg. opens 4/13)
- **Sep 14–28** 14-day Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal (reg. opens 4/14)
- **Oct 10–12** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Carla Brennan (reg. opens 6/10)
- **Oct 15–17** Insight Retreat with Ajahn Amaro (reg. opens 6/15)
- **Oct 19–26** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Ruth King (reg. opens 6/19)
- **Nov 16–23** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Max Erdstein (reg. opens 7/16)
- **Dec 1–6** Insight Santa Cruz Retreat with Bob Stahl (reg. opens 8/1)
- **Dec 7–14** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella (reg. opens 8/7)

To register or for more information visit:
insightretreatcenter.org/retreats/
or email info@insightretreatcenter.org



IRC's First Retreat in Spanish

We're very pleased to announce that IRC will offer its first retreat in Spanish early this summer (June 26–29). The Dharma in Spanish program at IMC, led by Andrea Castillo, has been up and running for over two years, and the time is ripe for diving into a residential retreat. Though we expect that mostly people from local sanghas will attend, we hope that in the future, dharma students from Latin America will also travel to IRC to participate. IRC is the first West Coast retreat center to offer a Spanish-language retreat, and we are very happy to be pioneers in making the dharma accessible in this way.

Leading the retreat will be Rebecca Bradshaw, guiding teacher of the Insight Meditation Center of Pioneer Valley in Massachusetts. Trained at IMS, Rebecca has been teaching since 1993. She teaches at IMS, taught at the first Spanish language retreat in the U.S., and leads an annual Spanish-language retreat in Puerto Rico. Andrea will be assisting Rebecca with teaching.

The Spanish-speaking community within IMC is a diverse group, including people from many countries and many walks of life. Something very healing can happen when a diverse sangha comes together and cultivates good will for all. We invite all Spanish-speaking dharma students to apply for this retreat and share the practice and teachings together in just such a community.

Introducing Ruth King

Ruth King is a dharma teacher, life coach and author with a professional background in leadership coaching in the corporate world. She will be teaching a retreat with Gil in October of this year, her first time teaching at IRC. Ruth is based in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she leads a sangha, and is also a guiding teacher at Insight Meditation of Washington DC. Her strong interest in race and gender issues is reflected in her approach to teaching and in her book *Healing Rage—Women Making Inner Peace Possible*. More about Ruth can be found at her website: www.ruthking.net.

Living and Serving at IRC

By Kim Allen

As one of three Resident Volunteers supporting distinct aspects of IRC, one of my main functions is developing infrastructure that helps retreats run smoothly, including creating and refining yogi jobs, organizing housekeeping supplies, and serving as “temple concierge” for people arriving early for retreats or doing special projects. I’d like to share a bit about this unusual and fortunate lifestyle. It is quite a blessing to live at a retreat center, and I believe anyone who volunteers in support of IRC can enjoy many of these benefits.

I frequently hear “It must be so peaceful there!” IRC can be a noisy, busy place when workers or volunteers come to make repairs or improvements between retreats. Dozens of people may show up for Work Days, and life feels somewhat public. Still, each morning there is the sunrise over the vineyards, the calling of hawks, and the scent of the Douglas firs. Inwardly, IRC is a place devoted to peace through people’s good intentions. This feeling pervades the premises.

Living here offers me a multidimensional view of residential retreat, very different from simply “going on retreat” as a yogi. Retreats arise and pass within my home space, so I can be at a retreat that I am not on. Even if I am not sitting a retreat, I feel the changing energy. There is the initial phase of settling in and encountering hindrances, a slow deepening through the middle portion, and at the very end, the energy of daily life surges back. I’m affected by these energetic changes even living a more usual life, talking during meals with teachers, using the computer.

When I sit a retreat, I have the challenge of doing so while sleeping in my own bedroom. It took effort to learn to practice diligently in a “home” setting, but now I have confidence in being able to sit a home retreat.

One rich dimension of supporting retreat is accessible to the wider IRC community: being a Service Leader. Managers and Cooks help teachers support yogis directly during retreats. Serving as manager I’ve found that the need to respond to notes, maintain external alertness, and generally “hold the space” fosters flexibility of mind and an integrated mindfulness.

Many people at IRC broaden their experience by exploring these different ways of serving and sitting retreats. If retreat is important in your practice, I encourage this investigation. Volunteers come to appreciate that the atmosphere here is created with great care through everyone’s participation. The aim is to offer an environment where people feel safe and supported, so that practice can deepen and unfold naturally and beautifully.

This intention is expressed in countless ways. The physical environment, both indoors and out, work meditations, schedules, communications—all have been designed to offer a silent, safe, and supportive environment. IRC volunteers participate in all this through Work Days, extra projects, and administrative tasks. Keeping the sense of care in mind supports practice, helping to develop openheartedness and attentiveness, bringing feelings of joy, generosity, and appreciation.

I enjoy meeting all the “Dharma people” who come here. As I sit for my daily meditation in the beautiful hall at IRC, I can feel the good intentions of people’s practice, and I know that the Dharma has found a new channel to flow through. This place is a gem among the many beneficial offerings of the greater IMC community.

Kim Allen has practiced in the IMC community for more than 10 years. She lives at Insight Retreat Center, teaches a group in Los Gatos, and offers Dharma talks at several groups. Interested in both natural and human systems, she has also worked in environmental sustainability and taught qi gong.

IRC Finances

After our first year, IRC is in the black. Retreat donations didn’t quite cover our costs, but the shortfall was made up by other donations. If we can hold more retreats, the cost per retreat would go down. This requires continuing to refine our systems and broadening our volunteer base.

We have a number of projects we’d still like to do, such as installing a solar hot water heater, renovating the teacher rooms, replacing our aging decks, renovating and furnishing the Council Room, adding a storage shed plus a number of carpentry projects.

We also would like to start building a reserve to ensure the long-term stability of our retreat center. This includes paying back our \$800,000 mortgage.

To contribute, please send a check to: Insight Retreat Center ~ 108 Birch St, Redwood City, CA 94062, or donate online at www.insightretreatcenter.org.

Community as Part of Retreat Practice, cont’d

distracting. They can be noisy or inconsiderate. Romantic attractions and hostile aversions may occur. Concerns about what others think about us may be preoccupying. But rather than taking these challenges as unwanted, they are best seen as material to practice with, as opportunities to find inner peace independent from what is happening around us. The simplicity, calm, and heightened mindfulness of retreat life facilitate working through some of the common interpersonal issues that can be ever present in daily life. It can lead to a freedom where our wellbeing is not dependent on how others behave.

Appreciating the role of community in group retreats expands the value of meditation retreats. It supports a growth of inner freedom that goes hand-in-hand with a growth in interpersonal warmth and compassion.

Other Ways to Donate

Amazon – Click on the Amazon Search link on our website’s Donate page, IMC’s Recommended Books page, or use this link: <http://amzn.to/donate-imc> when you make purchases at Amazon. A small percentage will go to help support IRC.

E-Scrip – Register your grocery club card and credit/debit cards with E-scrip and the participating merchants will donate a small percentage of your purchases to IRC. You keep all your credit card rewards. Register at www.escrip.com. The Group ID is 238528.

Ebay – A simple and easy way to recycle your unwanted possessions and support IRC at the same time. Go to Ebay Giving Works (givingworks.ebay.com); use Insight Meditation Center of the Midpeninsula as your charity (our parent organization). Choose the percentage of your sale you wish to donate by sliding the amount from left to right. Ebay will refund the same percentage of the seller’s fee. List your item as usual. Your donation is tax-deductible.

IRC Email List

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

Patience

by Andrea Fella

Patience supports mindfulness practice when it is joined with gentle persistence and active exploration. Such patience allows for our practice to simply unfold, neither discouraged about nor anxious for results.

As the Indian Vipassana teacher Munindra-ji said, "When the fruit is ripe, it will fall from the tree." For me, this image has been very helpful when it seemed nothing much was happening in my practice. Sometimes an apple looks red and ready to pick, and yet it doesn't release easily from the tree. The ripening, the sweetening of the apple takes its own time and isn't always apparent from the outside. Yet it releases from the tree in an instant. Similarly, the path of practice has a gradual nature, though freedom may come in an unexpected moment. We can think that freedom is the only thing that is important, yet it would never happen without the many, many subtle moments of "sweetening" that came before it. The nature of fruit is to sweeten, given good conditions for the tree it grows on. Cultivating good conditions requires patience and gentle persistence, and in our practice we patiently cultivate conditions that support the deepening of mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. As wisdom ripens, we experience the fruits of practice.

The Thai teacher Ajahn Thate talked about the patience of a farmer. This patience is the sort that knows you can't plant a crop one day and expect to have yield the next. A farmer tends his fields and knows that certain tasks need to be done promptly when the time is right. When nothing is needed, the farmer simply lets the crop grow on its own, sometimes imperceptibly. But when the crop ripens, a farmer can't delay the work of harvest. The patience of a farmer is not about being slow or casual. It is about taking time, paying

careful attention, and doing the work that needs to be done, when it needs to be done.

This is the patience of our practice. It isn't simply settling back and waiting for something to happen. Rather we practice like a farmer, doing what needs to be done, knowing that we don't have control over the ripening of the practice, and allowing the path to mature in its own time. Often, we don't even really know what the fruit of practice will be. Both the fruit of our practice and the time of its ripening depend on conditions: the conditions of our mind, the conditions from our past, the conditions of how we meet this moment.

The suttas offer another analogy about the gradual nature of the path. This analogy speaks to what we let go of in the course of practice:

Suppose there were a seafaring ship bound with rigging, that had been worn out in the water for six months. It would be hauled up on dry land during the cold season and its rigging would be further attacked by wind and sun. Inundated by rain from a rain cloud, the rigging would easily collapse and wear away. So, too, when one develops and cultivates the Noble Eightfold Path, one's fetters easily collapse and wear away.

—Samyutta Nikaya 22.101

The images of the gradual ripening of fruit, and of rigging slowly wearing away speak to me, since much of my own practice has unfolded gradually. Sometimes a sweet quality of mind ripens in its own time; sometimes a clinging wears away in its time.

Each day the fruit ripens a bit and a bit of the rope wears away, but we can't see it happening. Yet months later the fruit comes off the tree easily, or you try to pick up the rope and it simply falls apart in your hands. Our practice unfolds in a similar way, as a gradual,

slow maturing of good qualities and wearing away of the habits and patterns that hook us and cause our struggles. We have small recognitions of release, of space, of equanimity. We get tastes of the fruits of the path. And yet the unfolding is happening as we apply ourselves to the practice, whether we are aware of it or not.

Burmese Buddhists have a saying: "Patience is the road to *Nibbana*." Practice requires patience of us because we don't have control over the results, because the results happen in their own time. Settling in to this truth supports us in practice. Recognizing the quality of patience itself also supports us. On one retreat I was experiencing a particularly painful contraction around my heart. I explored the experience in meditation; opening to and allowing the painful contraction, and yet not noticing much change. The thought that popped into my mind during this time was a bit of wisdom, as I look back at it: "At least I'm cultivating patience." There was a sense of willingness to persist with this difficulty, and a recognition that the beautiful quality of patience supported my ability to meet the difficulty.

As patience deepens, a sense of allowing and acceptance permeates our experience. We recognize the very thing we are struggling with is actually the doorway to wisdom and freedom. Acceptance does not mean passivity. It means understanding that the experience of this moment is the natural outcome of causes and conditions. The patient application of energy and mindfulness cultivates skillful conditions for both the present moment and the future. We can make a skillful choice in this moment. But we cannot rush the process of change.

Your Questions About Practice

You are invited to send your questions relating to retreat practice to news@insightretreatcenter.org.

Can you explain a bit about deep insight? Does it have characteristics? Is it wordless? Is there feeling? How is it different from story?

Gil Fronsdal responds: The deep insights of Insight Meditation involve a direct perception of universal characteristics of our human experience. Arising in deep, settled meditation, such insights are in contrast to the often useful insights into aspects of our life which are unique to ourselves. These personal insights include understanding our unique life conditioning or life stories which may explain why we react, think, and behave in particular ways. The universal insights of insight meditation

are perceptions of impermanence, not-self, and unsatisfactoriness. No matter what one's personal circumstances are, these three aspects of our experience are shared with all people; they are the common denominators to all human experience. Similar to how seeing a sunset is mostly wordless, these deep insights are a direct perception that doesn't require words and doesn't necessitate any particular kind of feeling. Similar to how one might directly know that one can't make a fist to grasp water, so perceiving these three characteristics shows that it is not necessary or even possible to successfully cling to anything. In this way, seeing the deep insights of insight meditation is a support to learning to release the grip of clinging. It is a way to set the heart free.