



# Insight Retreat Center

## NEWSLETTER

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### 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, February 28, 9am to 4pm.
- Sunday, March 15, 9am to 1pm.
- Saturday, April 18, 9 am to 1pm.

(Lunch is included on these workdays)

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

### 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. Current opportunities:

- **Gardening and Grounds:** If you are inspired to help, contact our Landscape Manager for times to come by: [gardening@insightretreatcenter.org](mailto:gardening@insightretreatcenter.org)
- **Facilities (Handypersons):** Help with the maintenance of the property.
- **Resident Volunteers:** Several Resident Volunteers live at IRC for extended periods, assisting with background work for running retreats and maintaining the Center. Different skills are needed at different times: garden/landscape, administrative, cooking, maintenance, etc.

Fill out a Volunteer Form on the website or email: [insightretreatcenter@gmail.com](mailto:insightretreatcenter@gmail.com).

### IRC Email List

For future e-mail newsletters & updates, please subscribe to our email list at [www.insightretreatcenter.org](http://www.insightretreatcenter.org)

## Mindful Postures

by Gil Fronsdal

*When walking, one knows one is walking;  
When standing one knows one is standing;  
When sitting one knows one is sitting;  
When lying down, one knows one is lying down.*  
~the Buddha

Mindfulness of posture is a particularly useful part of the Buddhist path to liberation. We can learn how to move out of postures that undermine us and into postures that help us feel more empowered and free. At first this may be done intentionally. As awareness and inner freedom become stronger, skillful postures become less something we assume and more something that arises naturally from the strength of our freedom.

"Mindful postures" are an important foundation for meditation. Our capacities for stability, confidence and resiliency can be more readily available when we assume postures that give these qualities a chance to appear. Mindful postures enhance awareness of our body by bringing a greater sense of embodiment or 'bodyfulness' to our mindfulness. In addition, they help prevent unnecessary discomfort in meditation.

Attention to posture is particularly useful during meditation retreats where we may stay with a particular posture continuously for longer times than we usually do in daily life.

When meditating we can bring attention to our posture in three general ways. First, we can use attention to posture as a window to an intimate knowledge of our inner life—our emotions, attitudes and intentions. Second, we can assume postures that bring physical and psychological benefits that support meditation practice. Third, we can find postures that avoid unnecessary physical discomfort. This can allow us to meditate for longer periods of time without having to work with pain.

### Self-understanding Through Posture:

Twenty-four hours a day throughout our lives we assume particular postures, sometimes consciously, most often unconsciously. Because posture often expresses attitudes and emotions we are experiencing, attention to it can bring a greater awareness of our underlying attitudes, moods, and feelings. For example,

such emotions as fear, anger, and resistance are expressed in our posture quite differently than happiness, confidence, and determination. With some attitudes the body pulls in, collapses, or tightens up. With others, it opens up, expands, and relaxes.

During meditation, subtle shifts in posture can arise out of aspects of our psychological state. Tense approaches to meditating translate into the body being held in tense ways. Resistance may be felt as a pulling back. Expectation and anticipation may come with a slight leaning forward. Complacency with meditation can manifest in a sinking posture. Calm enthusiasm for practice can show itself in a relaxed, alert posture. Contentment and happiness may come with a sense of lightening and uplift.

With regular meditation practice we can become increasingly familiar with the subtle variations in our meditation posture and the way these variations express how we feel. This is particularly so when we first sit down to meditate. We may be leaning, twisting or slouching more than usual. Our moods, attitudes and sense of vitality may be reflected in how upright we sit, how open the chest is, how and where the body is tense, which muscles don't relax, and what parts of the body feel energized.

### Posture as a Support for Practice

A mindful meditation posture can provide many more benefits than simply allowing us to be physically comfortable during a meditation session. It is possible to assume postures that support mindfulness, concentration, and other useful psychological states. Through attention to posture, our bodies can participate in the practice of meditation, making meditation much more than a mental activity.

Both mindfulness and concentration are supported by the attention required to take an intentional posture, i.e., an upright posture that takes some ongoing attention to maintain. Ideally such a posture would also provide a strong, stable base against the floor, cushion or chair. Over time, the intention to assume this

*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](http://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.

**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](http://www.escrip.com); Group ID is 238528.

**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](http://insightretreatcenter.org/e-giving)

## 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](mailto:carolcollins888@gmail.com) or 408/348-1385.



## Schedule of Retreats 2015

**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.

- **April 5–12** Insight Dialogue Retreat with Gregory Kramer
- **April 19–26** Insight Retreat with Dhammaruwan and Max Erdstein
- **May 14–17** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Max Erdstein
- **May 20–25** Santa Cruz Insight Retreat with Bob Stahl and other teachers TBD
- **May 29–June 5** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, Nikki Mirghafori, and Matthew Brensilver
- **June 23–28** Insight Retreat with Rebecca Bradshaw and Andrea Castillo (registration opens 2/23/15)
- **July 5–19** Mindfulness of Mind Retreat with Andrea Fella (registration opens 2/5/15)
- **September 13–27** 14-Day Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal (registration opens 4/13/15)
- **October 17–24** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Ruth King (registration opens 6/17/15)
- **November 5–8** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Lori Wong (registration opens 7/5/15)
- **November 15–22** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, Nikki Mirghafori and Alex Haley (registration opens 7/15/15)
- **November 28–Dec 4** Mindfulness and Wisdom Retreat with Andrea Fella and Alexis Santos (registration opens 7/28/15)
- **December 6–13** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella (registration opens 8/6/15)
- **January 24–31, 2016** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, Susie Harrington, and Brian Lesage (registration opens 9/24/15)

To register, for schedule changes, additions and more, visit:  
[insightretreatcenter.org/retreats/](http://insightretreatcenter.org/retreats/)  
or email [info@insightretreatcenter.org](mailto:info@insightretreatcenter.org)



## Expanding Our Home: Buying the House Next Door

As of January, the Friends of IRC Campaign has raised \$220,000, almost one third of the \$750,000 needed to purchase the property next to IRC. Many people have expressed their support and encouragement for us to add this one-acre property to IRC's 2.8 acres.

We are grateful to the generosity of the person who purchased the property in order to provide us the time to raise the funds to buy it from him.

After operating IRC for two and a half years we understand how important owning the property and its house is for the long-term well-being of the center. It will allow us to house more resident volunteers, free up rooms for more retreatants, and add additional woodlands and trails.

Many thanks to all who have donated to the Friends of IRC campaign and to those who will!

To make a donation, go to [www.insightretreatcenter.org/donations/](http://www.insightretreatcenter.org/donations/)

~Gil Fronsdal

## Solar Water Heater Update

Even though we now have the funds for a Solar Water Heating system for IRC, we've had to postpone the project temporarily. Our volunteers have had their hands full with urgent repairs and we also have limited time for big projects between retreats. It's definitely something we are very excited about, and we hope to get to it in the near future.

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## Mindful Postures, cont'd

posture becomes second nature and seemingly effortless.

A reciprocal relationship exists between our bodies and our mental states. We are influenced by whatever mood or attitude our posture expresses. If we slump when sad, the slumping can reinforce the sadness. If instead we assume an upright, strong, stable posture, not only are we less likely to get lost in the sadness, we may be able to hold the sadness with a strong, stable awareness. When anxiety manifests in a tight chest, by sitting up straight with the chest wide and shoulders rolled back we are less likely to be under the influence of the anxiety. We may, in fact, call forth courage to face it directly.

A traditional instruction is to meditate with a posture that expresses dignity. Even if we don't feel it, we may benefit from sitting in a posture that expresses dignity through our whole body, with an upright balanced torso and relaxed face, belly and hands. Forgotten or buried senses of dignity may have a chance to surface. The statues of the Buddha meditating serve as an example of a posture that expresses a quiet dignity, perhaps even a soft regality. It can be a model for a posture of relaxed confidence, gentle strength, and non-entangled awareness.

On meditation retreats, it can be very supportive to assume an easy dignified posture throughout the day. By doing this while sitting, standing, walking and lying down we counter the influence of debilitating attitudes. We are more likely to call on our reservoirs of confidence.

### **Mitigating Discomfort:**

To avoid unnecessary discomfort when meditating it is important to find a posture that is personally suitable. No particular posture will be right for everyone. And no posture will always remain the right posture over time. For this reason it is useful to know a range of postural options and learn to adjust as needed. Becoming skilled in meditating in a variety of postures gives us greater flexibility and adaptability with our meditation. It facilitates alternating between postures during meditation retreats.

It is a good idea to receive instruction in meditation posture from a variety of different people, each who may know different aspects of meditation posture. Because there are so many physical details that go into meditation posture, even longtime meditators who have a comfortable posture can often benefit from hearing posture instruction.

Sometimes it is useful to have another person look at your meditation posture. This person may see aspects of your posture you can't see or feel yourself. They may be able to point out where your posture is out of balance. Some people will feel themselves sitting completely straight while meditating even though their torso is leaning or their head tilted. Any lean or tilt will build a strain over time.

While being comfortable in meditation is useful, it is important to avoid using physical comfort as the only guide for meditation posture. This is because what may be comfortable, at least in the short term, may perpetuate unhelpful postural habits. It may also prevent the strengthening of muscles that support good posture. Also, at times, discomfort may signal the release of muscular tension, so avoiding such discomfort can interfere with further release and relaxation. This means that sometimes it is useful to continue to sit and practice with discomfort rather than avoiding it. Other times it is appropriate to shift the posture only enough that the discomfort becomes manageable as a good subject for mindfulness.

It is important to give careful attention to physical discomfort that arises in meditation. This may provide clues to how a particular posture can be improved in subtle ways. It also may help us understand whether the discomfort might cause an injury. While it is rare to get injured from meditation, it does happen, especially when meditators force themselves to sit through pain without careful attention. Generally, pain that is potentially injurious will feel different than pain that is non-injurious. There will be a subtle "danger" signal connected with the pain. If pain comes with any sense of possible injury, it is important to move. And if it is not clear whether or not some physical pain may be harmful to endure, it is best to change one's posture to alleviate the pain. One clear sign that a meditation posture might be injurious is if physical pain connected to meditation continues for more than five minutes after getting up from a meditation session.

In conclusion, regular meditation practice is a way to develop a meditation posture that brings ongoing benefits. Slowly, imperceptibly, the body will settle in, develop muscles, and release tension. Equally slowly we can develop a greater body awareness that supports a good posture. Sometimes a body that has settled into an upright, dignified meditation posture is called a "yogic body", a form of posture that can bring such benefits as an integration where the entire body feels harmonized into a peaceful, energized whole.

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## Introducing Nikki Mirghafori and Matthew Brensilver

In May, Gil will be teaching a retreat with Nikki Mirghafori and Matthew Brensilver, two of the newest crop of teachers being trained through the Spirit Rock/IMS/IMC program.

Nikki is a research scientist who studied computer science at UC Berkeley, and has been meditating since 1991, in the Insight tradition since 2003. She has studied jhanas and vipassana intensively in Burma with Pa Auk Sayadaw, who instructed her to teach, and has completed teacher training programs at both Stanford's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education and UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center. Nikki has a deep connection to metta and compassion, and teaches the Compassion Cultivation Training developed at Stanford. She is a familiar teacher at IMC and has begun teaching in residential retreats at Spirit Rock and other centers. She is mentored by Gil.

Matthew Brensilver was introduced to Buddhist practice in the Tibetan tradition, then began study with Shinzen Young in 2003. He was trained to teach by Noah Levine, and teaches regularly at Against the Stream in San Francisco, as well as at UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center. Matthew has served as a Buddhist Chaplain and has been involved with Spirit Rock's Teen Retreats since 2008. In a recent interview Matthew said, "I'm coming to trust kindness more than anything we think we know about the world." His teaching is characterized by open-heartedness and willingness to be completely honest. Matthew is also mentored in his teaching by Gil.

Matthew and Nikki are both serving on the Monday Night Teaching Team at Spirit Rock during Jack Kornfield's sabbatical this year. It's a great pleasure to have them joining Gil for this retreat.



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## Behind the Kitchen Door

*At the end of IRC retreats, yogis often marvel at the organization of the practical side of running things there—detailed instructions and clearly defined jobs that can be completed in a reasonable amount of time, the way people cooperate to complete tasks. The most complex aspect of all our shared service takes place in the kitchen. Because everyone serving in IRC retreats is a volunteer, the kitchen systems have been carefully designed to make it possible for people who don't think of themselves as cooks to do all the prep and cooking of our tasty, nutritious meals—and to complete all their tasks in the morning, so that the rest of the day they can fully participate in sitting and walking practice. At each retreat there are three Service Leaders in the kitchen—a Kitchen Mentor who trains the cooks and oversees all the yogis doing food prep, and a Lunch Cook and Assistant who do the actual cooking of the meal. The two volunteers who currently serve as Kitchen Mentors are Chris Clifford, who developed the role and many of the kitchen systems, and Michelle Spurling, who Chris trained during some of IRC's earliest retreats. They offered to share about their experience of what goes on in the kitchen.*

**Shelley (a Retreat Manager):** *Can you talk about how you came up with the systems? There are so many aspects people might not notice—having the prep simple enough for the choppers to finish in 45 minutes, recipes that allow two cooks to get a full meal for 45 people cooked and on the table in two hours, creating menus that work together as leftovers for supper.*

**Chris:** There was a series of meetings with the teachers where we talked through how to get everything done and still leave time for the cooks to practice. We'd all been on retreat a lot at other centers and had a pretty clear idea of what work was needed.

I owe many thanks to Anna Oneglia and Surya, longtime Spirit Rock retreat cooks who offered recipes and lots of advice in the beginning. In choosing recipes, I picked the simplest things I knew how to cook, and tried to balance and vary the ingredients. Michelle and I are working up some new meals to hopefully alternate with the originals. We need to keep it fairly uniform to support the volunteer ordering and shopping tasks and use ingredients efficiently.

**Michelle:** The system was initially intimidating but I wanted to learn it well and do a good job. Chris has been so patient, encouraging and supportive in teaching me. There haven't been significant changes in the system, mostly fine tuning here and there—making things as efficient, economical, eco-friendly and simple as possible.

**How did you come up with the idea of the "supper yogi" who puts together the evening meal?**

**Chris:** We wanted the kitchen Service Leaders to have the rest of the day after lunch to practice, so we went with simple evening meals that can be prepped in the morning, then reheated and served by a single yogi as work meditation.

**Whose idea was it for the teachers to cook breakfast?**

**Chris:** Gil really wanted to do that and both he and Andrea say they still really enjoy it.

**How has taking on this role affected your own practice?**

**Michelle:** Being in this role helps integrate practice in daily life. In formal meditation, I'm training to be at ease no matter what. On the cushion there's easier access to wellbeing, keeping things simple and letting go. Being active in the kitchen can be wonderful, stimulating and it also can stir things up. Usually the work itself is simple and pleasant but at times it can feel difficult, especially if my energy or mood is low. Most people seem happy to be here and are appreciative and supportive in the kitchen. Though we are all doing the best we can, sometimes we are not

so skillful with each other and feelings can get hurt. Knowing how sensitive we can get on retreat, I try to be more careful with myself and others. Finding balance and ease in all of this is the practice for me. Having the amazingly functional, smooth systems of IRC, meetings with teachers and dedicated skillful volunteers both seen and unseen also help immensely.

**Chris:** It's an incredibly rich way to practice. You are usually doing something fairly simple with your hands, and there's a bit of a dance with several other bodies moving through the kitchen space, so you have two or three hours to work with just coming back over and over to simply being in the body and yet having a broad awareness of what's going on around you. Of course fresh examples of all our "stuff" (judgments, doubts, opinions, mistakes, etc.) always crop up in working with a team, but then we have the rest of the day to sit with things and process them. And the whole situation is being held in a shared and supportive context of mindfulness and metta. We also have a couple of tea-time meetings with teachers during the week to share how it's going.

**What does it take to be a kitchen mentor?**

**Michelle:** It takes someone who is flexible, well-organized, efficient, plans ahead and can improvise when needed. A KM should enjoy being in the kitchen, understand the system well and keep things flowing smoothly. I also think it helps to care and know about nutrition and cooking for good health.

**Chris:** The KM sets the tone for the kitchen as a place of mindfulness practice in the midst of activity. And you need to have a broad view of the whole "food flow" from receiving and verifying the grocery deliveries through storing away the leftovers. But you don't actually cook much, the job then is to let the other volunteers do as much as they can and be there as a safety net.

**The way the kitchen works with all volunteer cooks and support contributes a lot to the sense of close community that characterizes retreats at IRC.**

**Michelle:** The kitchen is the most interactive place on retreat. It's like a good dance when we are all in sync, moving around each other with good timing, cleaning up after ourselves and keeping to the schedule. When everyone shows up and does their part, there's a lot of ease and joy.

**Chris:** That was an essential part of Gil's vision for the place, but I also think so far it's worked out better than anyone's dreams. It's been a real revelation to many Service Leaders how well it supports their practice to do this combination of active service in the morning alternating with retreat practice the rest of the day. When the cooks and the Resident Volunteers are seen sitting and walking with everyone else, and many other retreatants have served in the same way, it's clear that we're all taking turns doing this for each other and the wider community.

*Chris Clifford, a former software engineer, has managed long retreats at many locations, and began cooking when a regular retreat cook needed time off. Practicing in the Insight tradition since 1995, she teaches at IMC, where she is one of the administrators for both the Online Meditation Course and the Eightfold Path Dharma Mentoring program.*

*Michelle Spurling has been a Resident Volunteer at IRC almost since it opened. She began Insight practice in 2004 and has completed the Buddhist Chaplaincy Training offered by the Sati Center. She always longed to cook but had little opportunity before coming to IRC, where her passion has found an outlet.*

## Your Questions About Practice

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

**How do you stay in the present moment when it's physically painful (not a posture issue)?**



**Andrea Fella responds:** One reason it's hard to stay in the present moment when there is physical pain is that we are reactive to the pain. We react with fear, confusion, aversion, the feeling of being out of control. The reactivity is what tends to keep us from staying present. So we need to start by distinguishing the reactivity to pain from the actual physical pain itself, and then explore whether we can be present for the reactivity. One of my teachers, Sayadaw U Tejaniya, suggests if you are reac-

tive to pain, it's not helpful to try to pay attention to the pain itself, because it's being experienced through a lens of reactivity, which usually exacerbates the pain. So, instead of trying to be with it, turn towards the relationship you have with the pain, the emotional reactivity: what does it feel like to be fearful, confused, angry, out of control?

Sometimes when physical pain is quite strong, even if we are trying to turn towards the reactivity, the pain pulls the attention, almost with a magnetic force. It's as if the attention narrows down and the pain becomes the entire universe of our experience. In that kind of situation, I have found it helpful to consciously try to expand the field of attention to include the many other things that are happening at the same time: this can be a simple recognition: "yes, there is physical pain" and then consciously acknowledging "... and seeing is happening, and hearing is happening, and other body sensations are happening." There are so many things happening in the present moment; if we can expand our field of attention, that helps the mind recognize that pain is not all there is in the world! This can help the mind to relax around the pain, and stay present.

And then sometimes it's helpful to turn the attention to something else entirely. Attending to pain for long periods of time can weary the mind. So, we can explore it for a little while, perhaps in the ways that I've suggested, but at some point it may be helpful to redirect the attention to give the mind a break from the pain, if that is possible. For example, take a walk in nature and let the attention take in a whole different perspective. Or turn the attention to an area of experience where there is no pain: perhaps the sensations of the hands, the feet contacting the floor, or the experience of hearing.



## Ginger Tofu à la IRC

Chris and Michelle share a popular recipe from the IRC kitchen:

- Tofu 1lb. extra firm

### Sauce Ingredients:

- fresh fresh ginger 2 Tbs
- garlic 2 peeled cloves
- miso 1/3 cup (we use yellow miso)
- sesame oil ~1/2 tsp, enough to coat the honey cup
- honey 1/4 cup
- brown sugar 2 tsp
- rice vinegar 1/4 cup
- tamari 1/3 cup
- water 1/3 cup

### Final Garnish:

- scallions 2-3 chopped in small rounds

### Instructions:

Ideally use a glass baking dish or loaf pan just big enough for tofu to fit.

Preheat oven to 375°.

Slice the tofu into 8 rectangular slices. Arrange in an overlapping row in the pan.

Coarsely chop the ginger and garlic in either a small electric chopper or by hand.

Whisk all sauce ingredients in a bowl with a whisk.

Tip: Coat the measuring cup for the honey with the oil, then measure the honey and it will slide out easily.

Pour the sauce over the tofu. Optional: let the tofu sit in the marinade for 20 minutes or so. Periodically baste the tofu with the sauce.

Bake uncovered for 35–45 minutes, basting every 15 mins or so. Ovens vary, so check often, and if the tofu is looking dark, turn heat down or off.

Garnish with scallions and serve. Serves 3–4

At IRC, we serve with Quinoa and steamed Bok Choy with sautéed mushrooms.

