

Insight Retreat Center

NEWSLETTER

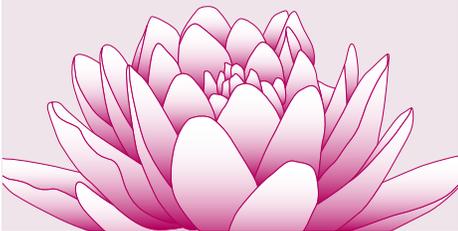
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Great News!

IRC is now debt-free! Our \$800,000 mortgage has been forgiven!

In 2005 Barbara Ryan made the very substantial donation that allowed us to consider purchasing a retreat center property. She did so in memory of her husband, Marty Marder (1934-2001). IRC was founded on the generosity of Barbara and Marty. Once we began renovating the center, Barbara also provided us with an essential loan of \$800,000. She and Marty's children have now converted this loan into another generous donation to IRC! This momentous gift will greatly help ease the financial demands of running our donation based retreat center.

Marty was a founding member of the Insight Meditation Center (IMC). He created IMC's "Sangha Neighbors," a group supporting community members in times of need. Those who knew him remember his great sense of humor, warmth and kindness. His goodness, generosity, and devotion to meditation practice live on in the offerings of the Insight Retreat Center.



IRC Email List

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

Preparing for a Retreat

by Gil Fronsdal

Being well-prepared for a meditation retreat supports a good beginning to your retreat. It facilitates an easeful settling into the practice and a more immediate immersion into the focused mindfulness of your direct experience. With adequate preparation you can begin the retreat with fewer and less compelling preoccupations, which might otherwise take an extended time to quiet down.

Before discussing some ways to prepare for a retreat, I want to mention that being unprepared doesn't have to be a problem. The experience of being unprepared offers its own benefits for mindfulness practice. We can learn how to be present and equanimous with the challenges of whatever arises. Being unprepared might provide an occasion to better understand important issues in our lives that can rise up at other times we haven't fully prepared. What is going on in our lives if we arrive exhausted? Are the personal issues that may appear at the beginning of the retreat important to address? Might we have been too casual or complacent in coming to the retreat? Were we unclear about our intentions in participating? From one perspective, being prepared or unprepared are simply two valid ways of starting a retreat. They each offer opportunities for practice.

Still, being prepared is generally more satisfying and can lead to settling in to the retreat more quickly. Preparation can be external, such as arranging the circumstances of our lives to be in enough order that they don't intrude during the retreat. And it can be internal, leading to our physical, emotional, and mental lives being ready to begin the retreat practice.

External Preparation

An unhurried life supports mindfulness practice. Your practice will be supported when you prepare for retreat far enough in advance that you aren't rushed or liable to forget something important in last-minute packing. Packing early for the retreat, you'll have the chance to confirm that you have everything you need. If retreat center websites or registration confirmations provide a list of things to bring, it's useful to check the list. Particularly

important is bringing adequate medication(s) if needed, as it can be disruptive to have to fill a prescription while at the retreat. It is also helpful to leave things that you won't need at home. In particular, it's good to leave reading material behind so you're not tempted to read what you brought along.

An unhurried life is also supported by taking care of family, home, or work responsibilities well before you leave on retreat. This can include having backup plans in place for any people you may have recruited to take on important responsibilities, such as the care of family members and pets, or covering important tasks and decisions at work. With a good backup plan in place you can avoid being contacted during the retreat.

Most insight retreats are designed as full-immersion periods of practice with no phone, text, email, web, or mail contact with the outside world. Such outside contact can stir us up with things to think about and emotions to process, hampering or disrupting the deepening of concentration. Therefore, part of preparing for a retreat is letting family, friends, and co-workers know that you will be unavailable. To some people you might explain the nature of a meditation retreat and why you will be unavailable but to others you might simply say you're taking a vacation in a place where you will be offline and unplugged.

Another part of retreat preparation is giving some consideration to what you will do in the day or two after the retreat is over. It can be helpful to plan ahead so that you have a gradual return to your usual life.

If you are going to a retreat center for the first time, study the center's website to see if it provides any additional information that might be important to know. The website may have a FAQ section or may post the typical retreat schedule.

Internal Preparation

One of the most useful preparations for retreats is getting adequate sleep beforehand. One reason to pack and otherwise get your affairs in order well before the retreat is so you

Continued inside

Planned Giving to IRC

A charitable bequest is a simple way to leave a gift to support the future of 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

The Legacy Circle recognizes those who include IMC/IRC in their estate and financial plans. Members are invited to an annual luncheon with the IMC/IRC Teachers.

For information, visit the DONATE page on the website. For questions or a consultation with a volunteer attorney, email legacy@insightmeditationcenter.org

Other Ways to Donate

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 — Make a tax-deductible donation of any vehicle, working or not. Center for Car Donations handles pick-up and all paperwork; IRC receives 75% of sale price. Tell them you want to donate to Insight Retreat Center. Call 877/411-3662 to schedule a pick-up and be guided through the process.

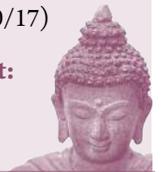
Ebay Giving Works — A simple and easy way to recycle your unwanted possessions and support IRC at the same time. Go to: insightretreatcenter.org/e-giving

Schedule of Retreats 2017

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.

- **Mar 17–26** Awareness and Wisdom Retreat with Andrea Fella and Alex Santos
- **Apr 7–9** Insight Retreat for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Adults with Kim Allen
- **Apr 16–23** Mindfulness in Early Buddhism, a Study and Practice Retreat with Ven. Analayo, assisted by Max Erdstein. Please check our website for requirements for this retreat.
- **Apr 30–May 14** Two-Week Experienced Students Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella
- **May 26–29** Insight Retreat for People in their 20s and 30s with Max Erdstein and Kate Munding (reg opens 2/26/17)
- **Jun 4–11** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Nikki Mirghafori (reg opens 2/11/17)
- **Jun 16–21** Insight Retreat in Spanish (Español) with Rebecca Bradshaw and Andrea Castillo (reg opens 2/16/17)
- **Jun 25–Jul 9** Two-Week Mindfulness of Mind Retreat with Andrea Fella (reg opens 1/25/17)
- **Jul 20–23** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Richard Shankman (reg opens 4/20/17)
- **Aug 2–6** Insight Retreat with Andrea Fella and Pamela Weiss (reg opens 4/2/17)
- **Aug 10–13** LGBTQI Insight Retreat with John Martin and Noliwe Alexander (reg opens 5/10/17)
- **Aug 17–20** Insight Retreat for People in their 20s and 30s with Max Erdstein and Matthew Brensilver (reg opens 5/17/17)
- **Aug 22–26** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and John Travis (reg opens 4/22/17)
- **Sep 3–10** Just Sitting, Clear Seeing: the Meeting of Zen and Insight with Max Erdstein and Brian Lesage (reg opens 5/3/17)
- **Sep 17–Oct 1** 14-Day Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal (reg opens 4/17/17)
- **Oct 6–9** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Shelley Gault (reg opens 7/6/17)
- **Oct 15–28** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, assisted by Ines Freedman (reg opens 5/15/17/0)
- **Nov 5–8** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Ruth King (reg opens 8/5/17)
- **Nov 12–19** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Max Erdstein (reg opens 7/12/17)
- **Nov 28–Dec 3** Insight Retreat with Bob Stahl and Insight Santa Cruz Teachers TBD (Reg opens 7/28/17)
- **Dec 10–17** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella (reg opens 8/10/17)

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



Volunteering ~ Helping to Care for IRC

IRC is run entirely by volunteers. The continuing support allows us to both take care of the Center and offer retreats. Join us at a monthly Work Day or fill out a Volunteer Form at: www.insightretreatcenter.org/volunteer

Work Days: Feb 18, Mar 11, Apr 15, May 27, Jun 24

Register on the website Work Day page or go to bit.ly/IRCworkday. Questions: Eileen: messinaeileen@gmail.com, 650/269-5801.

Garden Days: In addition to our scheduled work days, we appreciate help with gardening and landscaping projects at other times. To volunteer, email us at gardening@insightretreatcenter.org

Resident Volunteers: Several practitioners live at IRC for extended periods, participating in dharma programs, practicing in community, and assisting with the various tasks needed to support the Center. We are particularly interested in candidates who can help with facility operations and repairs. To learn more: email admin@insightretreatcenter.org.

Service Leaders: Though most of the work of running our retreats is shared by the participants in the 45-minute time period devoted to work meditation, the system also depends on the five Service Leaders, experienced retreat practitioners who both sit the retreat and serve the retreat in leadership positions as cooks and managers. Though they have more responsibility and devote more time (usually about 3 hours each day) they still spend most of the day in formal meditation.

People who qualify to be service leaders can sign up to serve as a service leader as frequently as it works for them. If interested, please fill out a Volunteer Form on the website or contact admin@insightretreatcenter.org.

Preparing for a Retreat, cont'd

don't have to stay up late doing these things the night before.

You can also prepare your body. Engaging in physical stretching, such as yoga, during the week or two before a retreat can make it easier to settle into the many hours of meditation. A posture that works well for one meditation session a day at home may need extra support for managing the frequent sitting periods at a retreat.

Some people find it useful to begin meditating more often in the week or two before the retreat. This can help you ease into the many hours of meditation that you will be engaged in. If you don't have a daily meditation practice already in place, beginning one a week or two before the retreat is useful.

It's also helpful to spend time before a retreat considering your motivations for going. What purpose do you anticipate or hope the retreat will have for you? How motivated are you? How well do you understand the basic instructions in mindfulness meditation? If not very well, you might listen to audio recordings of retreat instructions (available at Audiodharma.org and Dharmaseed.org). Are you planning on following the instructions given at the retreat or do you have other plans for your practice? If the latter, let the teacher know at the start of the retreat.

While motivation and purpose are valuable, they can also lead to expectations, and expectations can lead to frustration. People often come to retreat with ideas or agendas for what should happen. They may have expectations about any number of things—the meditation experience they'll have, retreat life in general, fellow retreatants, or about which personal issues they will address during the retreat. While imagining what might happen on a retreat is normal, expectations about what should happen easily lead to disappointment and can distract us from noticing what is actually happening in our direct experience. So in preparing for a retreat it is highly recommended that you consider carefully what expectations you have. You might also consider transforming these expectations into simple aspirations or possibilities you're open to, without insisting on them or waiting for them to occur. Prior to the retreat, consider if you have any significant unresolved issues that might need to be addressed during the retreat. If there are any, it can be beneficial to spend some time contemplating them. This can include thinking of appropriate ways of putting them aside until the end of the retreat when you might have a much better perspective on them. It might also be useful to let the retreat teacher know about these issues.

In important ways, a retreat begins when you first think about going. Filling out the application, being accepted, making plans to go, and travelling to the retreat are all part of the retreat itself. Your thoughts, aspirations, and preparations for the retreat are tilling the soil for something to sprout in the field of your retreat. If you prepare for a retreat with care and love for your Dharma practice, you will undoubtedly prepare a good field where much good will grow.

Washing Dishes, Connecting with Hearts

At a recent IRC silent retreat I was responsible for rinsing the dishes and utensils and preparing them to go into the sanitizer each evening. It's a well-organized process. Diners line up to scrape remaining food off their dishes into bins, wash their plates and utensils in soapy water, then place the dishes in large tubs of clean water to rinse, leaving silverware in the soapy water. As one of two dishwashers, I stood on the other side of the pass-through collecting dishes, scrubbing off remaining food, and setting them in racks to go into the sanitizer. Towards the end of the period I collected the silverware soaking in the soapy water.

Working from inside the kitchen I had only a partial view of the two lines of people waiting to wash their dishes. Mostly, I saw the retreatants' arms and their dinner plates. The first evening, the line moved very slowly. There was a lot of food being scraped into the buckets, but a lot of food being left on the plates that went into the tubs of dish water. It didn't take long before the water became quite disgusting. Even wearing long rubber dish gloves, it was unsettling to place my hands in that water to take out the silverware.

There seemed to be a correlation between the time we spent meditating and listening to dharma talks and the blossoming of loving kindness that permeated the retreat center. Beyond the dirty dish water I saw a beautiful thing begin happening. We arrived as individuals, but a sense of interconnectedness began to emerge. The simple act of cleaning a dinner plate became a river of kindness. Each night after dinner I was the blessed recipient of outstretched arms and the thoughtfulness of my fellow retreatants. Every night there seemed to be less food being wasted, diners cleaning their plates better before they went into the water. At first some just tossed their plates in the plastic tubs, but now they were waiting to hand them to me, mindful not to splash me with the dirty dish water. The tubs of soapy water became clearer every night and no longer looked disgusting. By the third evening I had very little cleaning to do, because nearly all of the retreatants were thoughtfully washing their plates before handing them to me. In silence, I received gifts from each one of them. A gift of kindness. A gift of thoughtfulness. I only saw their arms and hands ... but I really saw their hearts.

Jeri Hagiwara attended a retreat at IRC last year, and sent us this sharing about her work meditation experience.

Help IRC While Buying or Selling a 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 in your name to IRC. Carol can serve as your consultant at no charge throughout the buying or selling process. She has performed this service for sangha members in the Bay Area and Santa Cruz. Contact Carol at 408/348-1385, or carolcollins888@gmail.com.



A Challenge and a Relief: Electronic Devices and Retreat

Sitting a silent meditation retreat offers the possibility of becoming very intimate with the workings of your mind and body. A retreat center like IRC creates a supportive environment for letting go of the distractions that often keep us living in ideas and fantasies rather than in the awareness of here and now. Electronic devices have become a major source of such distraction. To help create the conditions for that intimacy to arise, at IRC all retreat participants agree to give up the use of these devices for the duration of the retreat. I think of it as a part of practicing noble silence. Those who feel it would be hard to resist can turn in their devices to the managers to be stored away during the retreat.

Outside of retreat, how long can you go during the day without checking your smartphone or other device to see if anyone called or texted, if anything happened you have to know about “right now”? Can you leave your phone in another room, not look at any screens at all for hours at a time, perhaps all day? For some people attending a week’s retreat, “unplugging” is a great relief, but for some, giving up their electronic connection to others and the world is an even bigger challenge than the prospect of not speaking. As a culture, dependence on instant communication and access to information has become so strong that addiction seems the most accurate word to describe it.

Working with this dependence as part of our practice on retreat can be really eye-opening. I’ve often felt a strong “need to know” arise in me, especially during the first day or two of a retreat. There’s anxiety in it, a sense I might be missing some crucial piece of information that could affect my life, or the world. I feel a tightening in my chest around my heart that moves up into my throat. I’ve sometimes told myself that taking a minute to see if there’s something I need to know will satisfy the craving, and then I’ll “just be done with it.” But I know enough about craving to recognize that giving in just gives it a little bump of energy so

that it pops up again before long. Making a firm decision to not give in, putting the phone away, it’s not long before I feel the benefits of unplugging from all the input. There’s a spaciousness, a relaxation in the mind. Attention can return to the simplicity of this moment, and intimacy with experience can build. Along with that comes a recognition that often in daily life, anticipating electronic input—some information or communication—creates a level of background tension in my mind and body. It’s a stressful “need to know” or to be available at all times—needs that I know are not based in reality, that rob me of ease and keep me at arm’s length from what is actually happening in my life.

Serving as a retreat manager, sometimes I need to use my phone for urgent messages for ill retreatants or their doctors. In the middle of one retreat when I turned on my cell phone to call a doctor, three text messages appeared on the screen, two of them from students who had forgotten I was incommunicado that week. A desire to reassure them rose up in me, along with that contraction in my heart and throat. In the midst of retreat, when my mind and body were calm and there was a lot of mindfulness present, that urge revealed itself as not only stressful but unnecessary.

At the end of retreats Gil often suggests that we pay attention to the times when there is peace or ease in the mind and then notice what we give up that peace for. Probably many of us find that it’s the call of our electronic devices that we choose over our ease. Intentionally giving up dependence on them not only allows deeper connection to our experience during the retreat itself; it also can begin to teach us to be more wise in our use of them during daily life.

Newsletter editor Shelley Gault teaches and helps lead the Open Door Sangha in Santa Barbara, and often manages retreats at IRC. She shared her perspective on this aspect of retreat practice.

Your Questions About Practice

Submit your questions about practice to news@insightretreatcenter.org. A teacher will respond to one or two in each newsletter.

Could you share some tips or tricks for maintaining continuity of mindfulness throughout the day?

Andrea Fella responds: An important exploration around this question is to hold it lightly, not imagining “this is what I’m going to do, be mindful all day long.” You might have that as an aspiration, but it’s helpful to have an attitude of play around it. What would it actually mean to bring mindfulness to any activity during the day? Is it possible for mindfulness to be present in every experience? How? Investigate with a playful attitude.

One tool or trick that I play with is to notice where mindfulness gets lost. As you go through the day, notice the areas where mindfulness disappears—the “in between” times, like in your yogi job, or walking to your room, between sitting and walking, times like that. Often people report that mindfulness disappears in the bathroom. There was one period in my practice when I noticed I often got lost in the bathroom, looking at myself in the mirror. And I’d wake up and ask myself, “How did I get lost?” There might be particular times when you wake up regularly, maybe recognizing as you start your formal walking, “Oh! Last time I was mindful was when I got up from the sitting.” So, explore where those habitual gaps are for you.

Rather than trying to grip onto mindfulness when you notice these areas where it gets lost, it can be more useful to become aware of how it happens that it does get lost. For instance, you might regularly notice that it gets lost when you go into your room. So, as you’re approaching your room, pay attention to what arises, where the mind goes, when you lose mindfulness. Again, there’s a sense of play, of curiosity, of interest in that

It’s an exploration.

Another tip is around sensory activity. A favorite exploration of mine is during “open” walking meditation, when I’m taking a walk around the property for example. Seeing is a great tool. I will notice the difference between “seeing” and “looking”. Seeing is something that happens if your eyes are open and you have normal vision. Looking requires effort, it narrows the focus, makes the field smaller. You might be walking and simply seeing, and then a bird goes by, and the mind moves from seeing to looking. If you’re not attuned to the difference between seeing and looking, that’s a place where the mind tends to go off, and you’ll lose mindfulness. But if you are aware of that difference, then when the bird appears you notice the movement from seeing to looking, and you maintain mindfulness. In seeing, there’s a relaxed receptivity, just letting the visual field go by. Then when the attention narrows in, that’s looking. You don’t need to stop trying to look, but notice when seeing is happening and when looking is happening.

You can practice the same thing with hearing, the difference between hearing and listening. Often when the attention gets pulled from simple hearing (being receptive to sounds) to listening (actively moving attention out toward sounds), just like with seeing, that’s a place where mindfulness will slip away, and so that can be a fun place to play. I want to emphasize maintaining a playful attitude as you explore the obstacles to continuity—in places you habitually lose mindfulness, in sensory activity—rather than trying to force the mind to be continuously mindful.
