

Insight Retreat Center

NEWSLETTER

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Construction Begins!

The long anticipated renovation of our new retreat center is beginning. We have contracted with South Bay Construction to do the work. A great deal of work and consideration has gone into reaching this milestone. As we begin creating the meditation hall, retreat bedrooms, and new kitchen it is inspiring to imagine ahead to the retreats we will hold there. We anticipate that the building will be finished in the Fall with the first retreat offered in either November or December!

Our fundraising for the renovation has gone very well. We have raised 90% of what we need for the work! With the \$1.5 million we have raised so far, and a low interest construction loan, we need to raise another \$200,000 to be able to finish the project. We will also need funds to furnish the center with beds, chairs and kitchen equipment. Over the next months our fundraising committee will be working on a variety of approaches to raise the needed funds.

Donations

We are grateful for any donations to support the renovation of the Insight Retreat Center. Send check to: Insight Retreat Center ~ 108 Birch St, Redwood City, CA 94062 or donate online: insightretreatcenter.org/donations/

IRC Email List

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

The Dana of Dana Retreats

Gil Fronsdal

At the Insight Meditation Center, and soon, at the new Insight Retreat Center, we offer our residential retreats freely at no cost to anyone who participates. We do so because we believe Buddhist practice unfolds best in a field of generosity, gratitude, and goodwill. We also believe the freely given aspect of retreats exemplifies the remarkable inner freedom that Buddhism champions. By demonstrating an alternative to the dominant materialism and acquisitiveness of our culture, we hope these retreats inspire open-heartedness and open-handedness in the volunteers who put on the retreats, the donors who fund them, and the retreatants themselves.

When we offer a retreat we think of it as offering a gift to those who attend. This is one reason we use *dana*, the Buddhist word meaning “gift”, when we describe our retreats as *dana* retreats. The other reason we use *dana* to refer to our retreats is because all the support that allows us to put on a retreat has come as gifts. *Dana* Retreats are both gifts and gifted.

The staff and teachers who do the work of running the retreat do so as volunteers, providing the gift of their labor and time, so that others may experience the benefits retreats can provide. Because of this, retreatants often find themselves inspired knowing they are being cared for by the non-obligatory generosity of others. It is a kind of inspiration through which the benefits of retreat can sink in deeper.

Generosity, gratitude and goodwill thrive more easily when there is no pressure. We strive, therefore, to operate our retreat center well within our means. We are blessed by the many people who have been supporting our efforts.

In offering retreats freely we are happy that it removes a financial obstacle for some people. It frees us at IRC from having to administer scholarships and eliminates, for many people, the awkwardness of asking for a scholarship. Instead of having special scholarship fundraising efforts that benefit only some people, all our fundraising efforts go toward benefitting everyone who comes to retreats.

The majority of the financial support for our retreats and retreat teachers comes from the donations retreatants offer at the end of retreats. Retreatants are neither required to donate nor are there any dollar amounts suggested. But when they do make a donation their generosity is what allows others to participate in upcoming retreats. When people give knowing others will benefit, their giving can be a source of joy. Giving benefits the giver.

We could, of course, charge for our retreats. Not only is there is nothing inherently wrong with this, there is some wisdom in doing so. However, try this thought experiment: what difference would it make to you if you paid a required cost for a retreat prior to the retreat versus freely offering the same amount of money as a donation at the end?

While the clarity of knowing a set cost can have advantages, it doesn't allow people to experience the joy of being generous. When people pay for something there is often a belief that they deserve something in return, an attitude that can get in the way of the personal work meditation requires. Because people don't pay for our retreats, people are less likely to assign responsibility to others. Instead, people are more likely to feel gratitude that someone at a previous retreat offered the funds so they could attend the retreat.

Concentration & Relaxation

Andrea Fella

When we go on a residential retreat, we often hope that our meditation will result in a deepening of concentration: a quality of composure, collectedness, of settled attention.

But unfortunately, we can't force concentration to happen! We can, however, support the conditions that allow it to arise. This simple fact has been really helpful for me to remember. In our meditation practice, we often bring along the cultural baggage of an "I'm going to do this" mentality, and sometimes that attitude can get in our way.

Concentration arises when awareness becomes continuous, whether continuous on a single experience like the breathing, or continuous on a flow of changing experience. We can't force this continuity. We can, for short periods of time, forcefully hold our attention to experience, but this kind of attention usually results in brittle concentration that's easily broken.

So a useful support for our practice is learning how to create a container that allows concentration to develop without being forced. This tends to result in a more stable concentration.

Relaxation is one of the important aspects of that container. Relaxation is actually one of the main supports for concentration! When I first started meditating, I thought that you had to force the mind to focus. The idea that one could relax to facilitate concentration did not penetrate my mind for quite a while. But relaxation is quite important.

Relaxation in meditation does not mean spacing out! The mind can be both relaxed and alert. Relaxation can take time. Different people need different amounts of time to allow the body and mind to relax in meditation. Relaxation of the body and relaxation of the mind are mutually supportive; when the body is relaxed, it's much easier for the mind to relax.

We all need to find our own way to relax in meditation. For some people, starting with a relaxing body scan can be very helpful: consciously relaxing the muscles of the body in a systematic way. Once the body is relaxed, we see if we can relax the thinking mind. For others, meditating on ambient sounds can be helpful. Since we don't control these sounds, turning our attention to them can sometimes allow the body and mind to relax very naturally.

Setting up a container of relaxed attention is an important framework for the meditation. Once you find a balance of relaxation and alertness, you can learn how to open this relaxed attention to experience: Either directing attention to a particular experience like the breathing, or becoming aware of a flow of experience: of seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, touching, and emotions and thoughts.

When we can learn how to attend to our experience and not lose the relaxation, the mind becomes malleable, and we can skillfully choose to direct the attention to support a deepening of concentration. At other times, we can get out of our own way, and allow the meditation to take its own course very naturally.

I encourage you to take the time to explore what it means for you to have a relaxed attention: first of all to learn simply how to relax the body and mind, and then to learn what it means to apply this relaxation to an alert attending to your experience.

IRC Retreat Schedule

In our next newsletter we will list the first series of residential retreats at our new center. We are looking forward to offering more frequent retreats, as we now have long waiting lists for our current retreats. Seventy people applied for our March retreat at Hidden Villa, a retreat center that holds 28 retreatants. When IRC opens, our retreats will accommodate 40 retreatants, with private rooms. We will also be offering 2-3 retreats each month. We are happy that with our increased capacity and frequency of retreats we will accommodate many more retreatants each year.

The Dana of Dana Retreats, cont'd

Gratitude, in turn, can help people relax and trust, qualities that support meditation practice, and inspire people to do the inner work that meditation is about. Gratitude benefits the grateful.

It is a joy and privilege to support others to do the deep inner work that happens so well on retreats. Not only are we, at IMC, inspired to offer retreats, we are also inspired by the goodwill and generosity of the many people who support our retreat efforts. It takes a community to support awakening in each one of us.

Help IRC While Buying or Selling a Home

Carol Collins is an IMC sangha member and long-time local real estate broker, now retired. If you are selling your home, she can refer you to a realtor and negotiate a reduced brokerage fee. If you are buying, she can refer you to a realtor who will assist you in identifying properties, areas, loans, etc. Buying or selling, the realtor will make a donation in your name to our Retreat Center. Carol will be available as your consultant at no charge through the whole process. She has helped facilitate this process for sangha members in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and other Bay Area counties. If you have any real estate questions, or would like to discuss buying or selling your home, call Carol, 408/348-1385 or carolcollins888@gmail.com.

Other Ways to Donate

Amazon – Use this link:

<http://tinyurl.com/imc-amazon> when you make purchases at Amazon, or use the Amazon Search link on our Donate and Recommended Books pages. 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.

Have Lunch with Jack Kornfield

Jack Kornfield has generously offered to share lunch with the winner of our upcoming Online Auction (March 31 – April 22). Winner may bring one guest. Lunch will be held at a restaurant in Marin County (date to be arranged). Minimum bid \$1,000. Click on Auction link on our website or: www.charityauctionstoday.com/store/ircauction

'FUN'draising Event: Register Now!

Saturday, March 31, 6:30 to 9 pm at IMC, 108 Birch St in Redwood City
IMC's FIRST IPO (Insight Practice Opportunity)

The evening will feature **Wes 'Scoop' Nisker** performing pieces of his comic monologue, in which he investigates the human condition and the Initial Public Offering of all phenomena, also known as the Big Bang.
Wes will prove that raising money can be funny.

Hosted by CEO's (Chief Enlightenment Officers): Gil Fronsdal & Andrea Fella
After 25 years of success as a start-up in Silicon Valley, IMC proudly announces its first public offering of an IPO (Insight Practice Opportunity). Shares, laughs, and cake will be offered to raise capital for the renovation of our new Insight Retreat Center. Shares are expected to double in merit with every new retreat at our new Insight Retreat Center.

- 6:30pm—Reception with refreshments and hors d'oeuvres
- 7:30pm—IPO Launch
- 8:45pm—Dessert and Closing

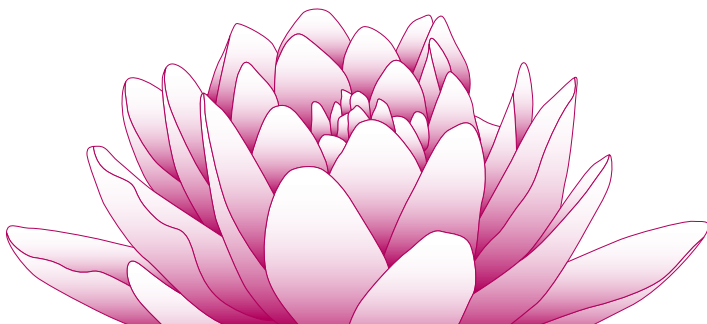
REGISTRATION: \$100 to \$500 suggested donation

- Make check out to *Insight Retreat Center*, write IPO in memo. Mail to: *Insight Trading at IMC*, 108 Birch Street, Redwood City, CA 94062.
- Or register online and receive a ticket by making a donation at: ircipo.eventbrite.com

Online Auction to Benefit IRC Opens March 31

IMC is holding its first Online Auction beginning on March 31 and closing on April 22. Many interesting and wonderful items and services have been donated. Some of the items include beautiful Buddhist art and artifacts, Adobe CS5.5 software, (including Design & Web Premium, Photoshop), a vacation in Aruba, bed & breakfasts, belly-dancing lessons, Indian cooking lesson, massages, and a jazz concert. Two very special items are a private lunch with Jack Kornfield and a private lunch with Gil Fronsdal.

If you have items or services you'd like to donate for our upcoming auction, please fill out the Auction form on our website or contact Catherine Byers: cabyers50@gmail.com. See Auction link on the IRC website: insightretreatcenter.org



Zafus and Things

Tip for pain or fatigue in upper body

For some of us, the long periods of sitting and walking meditation can sometimes aggravate the mid-back, shoulders, neck or arms, causing fatigue or pain in those areas. Often, a simple prop can make a significant difference.



Roll a blanket or a large shawl the long-way, so it makes a thick roll, and tie it around your waist. Allow your hands to rest on the knot in front. If the roll is thick enough you might even be able to rest your elbows on it. This can be used either in sitting or walking meditation.

Experiment, as for some, it can work better if the knot in front hangs a little lower than the back.

This method is for persistent pain or fatigue, not for the more transient tensions which might be better served with mindfulness. ~ Ines Freedman

Gratitude

We have been very fortunate to have so many people supporting our retreat center. About 1000 people have donated money and many volunteers have generously given their time and skills in caring for the retreat center and in preparing for the renovation.

Volunteering

To volunteer, please fill out a form at: www.insightretreatcenter.org/volunteer

INSIGHT MEDITATION CENTER'S

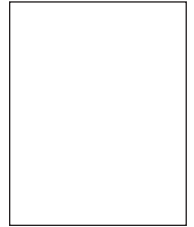
Insight Retreat Center

108 Birch Street

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Freedom for the Busy ~ Aaron Chavira

I'm pretty sure I wouldn't make a very "good" monastic. I'd likely find ways to be busy, to chock my schedule full of things and need Google Calendar to organize my day: to be "doing." That seems to be my temperament.

Like many of you, I skew towards the active side of things; so the stillness of retreats has been priceless in my bustling life as a medical student and before that as a Dot-comer. Life can sometimes feel like a busy ant farm—but for whatever bizarre reason, that also feels like the appropriate medium for practice to me. Retreats are an absolutely integral part of my life because they allow me to take a step back and get in touch with my deepest intentions: to gain perspective on "doing, doing, doing."

Recently, I've come to understand this mixture of social engagement and retreat practice as not just 'workable', but this may be the optimal avenue for me to develop wisdom. Social engagement – particularly around the pace of professional and family life—can feel like practicing in a pressure cooker sometimes. But when there is mindfulness, I'll notice and identify at least some of my clinging and impurities (there are far, far too many for me to list here). In turn, retreat practice seems to compliment this social practice extremely well; the stillness and silence of retreat allow me to deepen acceptance, patience, and understanding of the places where there is still clinging.

This back and forth process—between intense worldly practice and retreat practice—seems to bring balance and create a fertile ground for the development of wisdom in me.

I have noticed many of the most meaningful shifts and insights either begin in the stillness of retreat or after a retreat when re-entering the world. One seemingly inexhaustible theme in my practice has been

studying how I cause dukkha for myself. Earlier in retreat practice, I noticed a lot of how my interacting with others and trying to portray myself in a certain way—whether funny, intelligent, "Buddhist," or even just practicing correctly – caused me a lot of suffering. Over years of watching the cause and effect of this, its gravity has slowly lessened and there is much more ease now. More recently, I've been looking at the ways I cause dukkha for myself through what I put into my body: food, drink, media, thought, and with whom I spend my time. That old saying of 'garbage in, garbage out' seems to ring true; wholesome ingredients deliver well-being, while unwholesome ingredients deliver dukkha. But throughout all of this, it's the stillness and silence of retreat coupled with reintegration that catalyzes clear seeing for me.

It's my impression that lay practice is a bit of a fantastic experiment and that our mature practice will look unique because of our social engagement—i.e. family, jobs, mortgages, etc. Because of this I believe it's not enough for us to only look at existential truths (*anicca, anatta, dukkha*), but relative truths too. So when my Visa company tells me I forgot to pay my bill, telling them about the impermanence of my prime Visa APR doesn't help the situation. However, interacting with them kindly as they interrupt my busy day will at least incline me to ease and not anger. (They even waved the late fee a couple times.)

I believe freedom is available to any practitioner who is sincere and mindful, that it doesn't matter if one has three kids and a mortgage at home, an ascetic in a cave, or a monastic in community. Wherever we practice, we simply practice to the best of our ability. Taking time away for retreat to get in touch with one's deepest intentions, however, seems to be an important part of it all.

Aaron Chavira is currently an osteopathic medical student. He co-facilitates the Dharma Teens program at IMC and serves on the IMC board. He has been meditating since 1999.