

# Insight Retreat Center

## NEWSLETTER

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### IRC Update

Since our first retreat in October 2012, we have now had 6 retreats. Even though we are still developing and refining our systems, these retreats have flowed remarkably well with an atmosphere supportive of deep practice. This first year we have begun our retreat offerings gradually. Our first retreats have been very popular, partially because of backlog of demand, and we've had lotteries and waiting lists. We are still improving our processes and establishing a volunteer community to both take care of the center and to run our retreats. As we continue to develop IRC, we will be able to offer more frequent retreats and thus be available to more people. We have appreciated all the feedback we have received from the retreatants, which has been essential in these final stages of the renovation, in developing our work meditations, our retreat processes and in improving our communications.

### Wednesday Garden Days

We'd like to invite you to join us on Wednesdays, when weather permits, to help take care of the gardens and grounds of IRC—perhaps adopt an area that you take care of. You may come for the whole day or just morning or afternoon between 9am to 5pm. If you'd like to participate, please fill out a Volunteer Form on the IRC website and contact Betsy Blessing: [gardenblessings@gmail.com](mailto:gardenblessings@gmail.com).

## The Practice of Work Meditation

by Gil Fronsdal

At the Insight Retreat Center short work periods are integral to our meditation retreats. They help create the important balance between inner and outer mindfulness, between personal practice and practicing in community, and between stillness and activity. Learning how to include work within the path of practice can be one of the inspiring aspects of retreats.

Typically, retreatants participate in two work periods each day: a simple 15-minute task just before breakfast, called "sangha (community) service" and a 40-minute period later in the day called "work meditation." Silence is maintained during these work periods with the exception of brief exchanges needed to accomplish some tasks.

"Sangha service" is a time when all the retreatants work together to do the basic cleaning that cares for the center and the retreat participants. This includes such tasks as sweeping the deck, mopping a hallway, cleaning bathroom sinks, and dusting, etc.

The "work meditation" jobs are most commonly tasks needed to operate a retreat. Many of these jobs are done in small teams. Examples include preparing food for a meal, washing dishes or pots, doing kitchen laundry, etc. Care is given to assign jobs appropriate for each person's ability.

The terms "sangha service" and "work meditation" are meant to convey the importance of these periods. Two meanings of the word 'service' are implied when we refer to sangha service. Primarily it means an act of generosity in which one is serving the other participants of the retreat. By doing a simple daily task each retreatant contributes to the well-being and comfort of the other retreatants. Secondly, in the way people speak of a religious service, sangha service is a religiously significant act. Mindful cleaning can function as a kind of 'ritual' affirmation and reminder of how the highest Buddhist values can be found in our most mundane tasks.

The term "work meditation" indicates that this period of work is just as important a time for mindfulness practice as the sitting and walking meditation. The point is not to rush through the task so one can have more time for "meditation", but rather to use it as an opportunity to practice mindfulness in action. It is a time to observe and let go of the many attitudes, beliefs, and feelings that interfere with having a meaningful awareness of the task at hand, no matter what that task might be.

IRC retreats are entirely run by those who are practicing and training at the center. There is no staff apart from the practitioners. Retreatants form a mutually supportive community where everyone contributes their labors to help create the retreat environment. This mutual support becomes palpable and can be very nourishing. Working in this way emphasizes the important messages that we are all practicing together and that Buddhist practice includes caring both for others and for the place in which one practices.

An important aspect of work on retreat is learning to be mindful, calm, and focused in the activity. Just like sitting and walking meditation, work meditation is a practice of repeatedly bringing our attention back to the present moment. In this way, it provides a training much like the conventional meditation forms of sitting and walking.

Mindfulness of work includes becoming aware of how one engages in the work. For example, some people rush through their work because they believe it is important to

## Schedule of Retreats 2013

**Insight Retreats:** 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, except for discussions with the teachers and communication needed for work meditation.

**Accommodations:** Single rooms, shared or communal bathrooms, vegetarian meals.

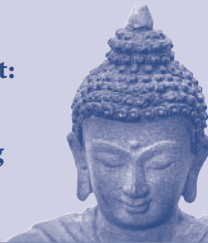
**Cost:** Our retreats are offered on a *dana* or freely given basis. A refundable deposit is required with registration.

- March 16–23, **Insight Retreat** with Andrea Fella & Gil Fronsdal.
- April 5–7, **Dharma Integration Weekend** with Gil Fronsdal & Andrea Fella.
- April 17–24, **Satipatthana Study & Meditation Retreat** with Analayo Bhikkhu & Gil Fronsdal. Co-sponsored by IRC and Sati Center.
- June 22–July 6, **Mindfulness of Mind Retreat** with Andrea Fella exploring the mindfulness practice taught by Sayadaw U Tejaniya. Approval from teacher required.
- July 26–28, **Dharma Integration Weekend** with Andrea Fella & Gil Fronsdal. Registration opens March 26.
- July 31–August 4, **Insight Retreat** with Andrea Fella & Pamela Weiss. Registration opens March 31.
- September 15–29, **14-day Insight Retreat** with Gil Fronsdal. Registration opens May 1. Requirement: attended at least three, 7-day silent meditation retreats and permission from teacher.
- October 20–27, **Insight Retreat** with Gil Fronsdal and Richard Shankman. Registration opens June 20.
- November 17–24, **Insight Retreat** with Gil Fronsdal and Paul Haller. Registration opens July 17.
- December 8–15, **Insight Retreat** with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella. Registration opens August 8.

To register or for more information visit:

[insightretreatcenter.org/retreats/](http://insightretreatcenter.org/retreats/)

or email [info@insightretreatcenter.org](mailto:info@insightretreatcenter.org)



## Fundraising

Now that we have a wonderful retreat center our gratitude for our many donors continues to grow. Thank you!

As an all *dana* retreat center our fundraising continues so we can maintain and care for our facility and operations. In particular we are hoping to raise funds to repair 400 feet of decking, add solar water panels on the roof so we can reduce our energy costs, develop a database that will simplify our retreat operations, and furnish the large community room at the center of our building. To contribute, please send check to: Insight Retreat Center ~ 108 Birch St, Redwood City, CA 94062 or donate online:

[insightretreatcenter.org/donations/](http://insightretreatcenter.org/donations/)

## Practice of Work Meditation, cont'd

finish as quickly as possible. Others take too long because they are overly absorbed in the work. Both rushing and going slow occurs from not engaging in the task with an alert, mindful presence.

One's mind is the same whether one is engaged in sitting meditation or in work meditation. Just as the mind will wander off in thought during sitting meditation so it can also wander while working. Just as the five hindrances can 'hinder' while one is seated in the meditation hall, so desire, aversion, dullness and weariness, restlessness and agitation, and doubt can hinder mindfulness and concentration toward the job being done. Just as one can overcome a wandering mind and the hindrances in seated meditation, so one can do so in work meditation. In fact, when one is focused on work tasks on retreat, it is possible for the mind to become concentrated, calm and energetically still. It is also possible to have deep insights.

On retreat one has the opportunity to notice one's attitudes while working that can often go unnoticed in ordinary life. A common discovery is the degree of self-consciousness one brings to a task. This can take the form of comparing oneself to others, being concerned with what others think, doing the job to prove oneself, or fearing being inadequate. Retreats are a safe place to experiment with letting go of such self-concern so that one can learn the pleasure of simple, direct focus on the task at hand.

Because work is a physical activity using one's body, work meditation helps to foster greater mindfulness of one's body. It can be a time when it is easier to let go of mental preoccupations so we can pay attention to our body and how we engage the body in the work. Becoming more centered in the body through work is a great support for sitting meditation. It helps mindfulness be 'bodyfulness.'

To benefit the most from retreats, one's meditation practice needs to be part of a broader approach to spiritual growth that includes all aspects of one's life. Working mindfully helps create this breadth. By including work as part of a retreat we can learn that mindfulness, peace, and spiritual freedom are not just found in meditation, but they can be found in the activities of life as well. In fact, if found only in meditation, one's freedom and peace have not fully matured. Work meditation is one of the trainings that can help with this maturation.

# A New Retreat Teacher's Perspective

by Max Erdstein

Last November, I had the pleasure of assisting Gil as co-teacher for the first full Insight Meditation retreat held at the new Insight Retreat Center.

From the perspective of teaching the retreat, the most surprising thing to me was how utterly unsurprisingly it unfolded. Things felt remarkable smooth, from the new facilities to the new processes for managing the retreat, to the diligent and dedicated sitting and walking of the approximately 40 yogis in attendance.

IRC is situated in a stately mansion, formerly a nursing home, which has been entirely renovated and repurposed in a sensitive way. Thanks to the heroic efforts of dedicated volunteers led by Ines Freedman, IRC's managing director, the finishing touches to the massive building project came together beautifully just before our retreat began.

A number of yogis commented on the silence, serenity, and spaciousness of the meditation hall. Yogis explored the property grounds for walking meditation, and each slept in a private room.

We were nourished by simple and healthy vegetarian food, which tasted all the better knowing that it was prepared by volunteer cooks who simultaneously sat the retreat as yogis. Chris Clifford, IRC's founding kitchen mentor, assisted by Anna Oneglia, designed the entire kitchen process and was on hand to conduct the orchestral operations with wisdom, wit,

*Max Erdstein began practicing with IMC in 1999 just after graduating from Stanford, and has practiced Vipassana and Zen in the U.S., Japan, Thailand and Burma. He studied Buddhist chaplaincy with the Sati Center. He is being trained as a Dharma teacher by Gil Fronsdal and is participating in the Spirit Rock teacher training program. He is a husband and father of one girl.*

and aplomb. Therese Strum and Michelle Spurling pioneered the role of yogi cooks.

Because IRC retreats are organized and managed entirely by volunteers, we ask yogis to take on a more active role in running the retreats. Short work meditations are incorporated into the daily schedule, and these jobs — from cleaning to kitchen prep to laundry — are integral to the smooth operation of the retreat. Yogis seemed to glean much satisfaction from having the opportunity to support the retreat in this meaningful way.

In Buddhism, new teachers are often trained by living with their own teacher and "walking in their footsteps" — a form of transmission that is physical and energetic. As a new teacher being trained by Gil, I found this retreat to be a special opportunity for me to absorb and embody the way Gil supports the unfolding of the Dharma on retreat. To share the Dharma in talks and one-to-one practice meetings was a powerful experience for me, requiring the same kind of loving presence that we give to each breath on the meditation cushion.

As a new teacher, I felt inspired by the sincere and wholehearted practice of all the yogis I met. The youngest yogi was my 8-month-old daughter, who clearly enjoyed seeing many peaceful faces every day.

I look forward to sitting and teaching many retreats at IRC.

## Work Days

We are grateful to all of you who participated in the latest work days at IRC. It was quite joyful sitting and working together, with time over lunch to get to know each other. We cleaned, repaired and gardened, and it's impressive how much got done! We very much appreciated those who traveled and joined us from the Modesto sangha and others who came from afar!

We plan to continue with periodic work days or half days, often just before a retreat, as they are an integral part of taking care of IRC. You are invited to join us for the next work day on:

- Saturday, March, work afternoon: 1:30 to 4:30pm. Includes a 4pm sitting.
- Sunday, April 14, work day: 9am to 4pm

## Volunteers Needed

IRC is run entirely by volunteers, there is no paid staff. 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 volunteer positions:

**Housekeeping Manager:** Oversee the housekeeping at IRC. Help fine-tune retreatant jobs so cleaning gets done on retreats, and help organize cleaning volunteers at periodic "work days". Help streamline and improve the current procedures and coordinate with the inventory volunteers to make sure supplies are always available.

**Time Commitment:** Average 6–8 hours a month plus overseeing periodic work days.

**Facilities Coordinator:** Overseeing the maintenance and repairs of the facility. Learning and keeping track of the major systems and arranging for their routine maintenance. Doing some minor maintenance and repairs. Overseeing any "handyperson" volunteers.

**Time Commitment:** 10–12 hours a month, plus periodic work days.

### Handyperson(s)

- A couple of local volunteers available for small repairs when needed
- Someone with a truck available for occasional hauling

To volunteer, please fill out a Volunteer Form on our website or send an email to: [insightretreatcenter@gmail.com](mailto:insightretreatcenter@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](http://www.escrip.com). The Group ID is 238528.

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# Recognizing Mindfulness

by Andrea Fella

At the end of a recent residential retreat, someone asked me for a simple practice to engage with in daily life. I offered the practice of becoming familiar with what it is like to be aware and mindful. When we more readily recognize the sense of being mindful, the many moments when we are spontaneously mindful start to stand out to us.

At times throughout the day, mindfulness happens effortlessly, often for just a moment. This occurs more than we realize, but we rarely notice it. Typically, there is a moment of knowing what is happening, and then we are pulled into thinking, planning, or reacting to it, or we are distracted by something unrelated. We see a snack and next discover we are eating it. A friend says something and we rush in with an opinion. We hear water dripping in the sink, so we shut the faucet off. We notice a stain the linoleum, so we stoop to clean it. In all these examples an initial recognition is overshadowed by a reaction, or even simply by a natural response to the situation. We rarely appreciate the mindfulness required for this recognition.

The Buddha understood the value of mindfulness. Mindfulness is not esoteric or mystical; it is simply an ordinary aspect of the way our minds work. The brilliance of the Buddha was to notice it, to highlight it, and to say: this quality is worth cultivating.

As we become familiar with the experience of being aware, spontaneous

moments of mindfulness become more apparent to us. We then have a chance to appreciate these effortless moments of recognition. By becoming familiar with the act of mindfulness itself, we can recognize that we are mindful more often than we realized.

One of the best times to explore what it is like to be present, aware, mindful, is the moment when we recognize we have not been aware of what is happening. In sitting meditation, this moment happens over and over again. We intend to be present for our experience, and then notice we have been lost in thought. The moment we notice we have been lost in thought is a moment of mindfulness; the simple recognition that we are now aware is a way to appreciate the sense of being mindful.

In our daily lives, we can also become aware of this moment of remembering. For example, we might be in the midst of reaching for a glass when mindfulness arises. We can then simply pick up the glass mindfully. The act of being aware can become at least as important as what we are doing or thinking.

Noticing when we have just been lost in thought, whether in sitting practice or in daily life, is a valuable opportunity to appreciate what the noticing itself is like. We can explore the difference between the mind that was lost in thought and the mind that is present and aware. We can't really know what it feels like to be lost

while we are lost, but when mindfulness returns, there can be a lingering memory of what it felt like to be lost: confused, spinning in thoughts, hazy, or disconnected. When mindfulness returns there is a clarity and brightness to the mind, which is pretty obvious once we start recognizing it. Once we start seeing this clarity, it becomes ever more apparent to us.

While we seldom notice awareness itself, it is not something foreign to us. Because it is a natural part of our experience, something within us is familiar with it. If you know you are reading this article, then awareness is already there in your experience. Don't look too hard for it. Just explore how your experience feels when you know you are aware. Over time, the experience of being aware can become as clear as what we are aware of.

As you become familiar with the experience of mindfulness, you will notice yourself coming back into mindfulness many, many times throughout the day. In the midst of an activity, you will suddenly recognize that you are aware of what is happening. You might be reaching for something, walking across the street, finishing a meal, or driving the car. Appreciating these moments creates the conditions for you to recognize these moments even more frequently. You don't have to wait; you start now.

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## 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 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 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, call Carol, (408)348-1385 or carolcollins888@gmail.com.

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## IRC Email List

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

