

Insight Retreat Center

NEWSLETTER

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Garden Days: Join us to help care for the gardens & grounds of IRC—perhaps adopt an area that you take care of. Email Betsy if you are coming:
gardenblessings@gmail.com.

Hours: 9 am to 5 pm. Come for the whole day or just morning or afternoon.

- Wednesdays: July: 10, 17, 24; August: 7, 14, 21; September 4, 11
- Saturdays: July 20, August 10, September 14 (these are during our regular “Work Days”, see below)
- Sundays: July 7, July 21, August 11, September 8

Work Days: Workdays are an integral part of taking care of IRC, and thus supporting retreats. Many of us who participate in the monthly work days appreciate the sense of community when we sit and work together this way. Whether working in the gardens or sweeping the floors, it’s inspiring knowing that days later retreatants will be doing sitting and walking meditation in those areas.

You are welcome to join us for the following work days, 9 am to 4 pm. Come for the whole day or just morning or afternoon. Contact Eileen Messina, 650/269-5801 or messina.eileen@gmail.com.

- Friday, June 21; Saturday, July 20; Saturday, August 10; Saturday, September 14

Moving Our Fences, Help Make New Paths:

We are in the process of moving some of our fences to maximize IRC’s outdoor space. In addition to the necessary clearing and clean up we’d like to develop new walking paths around the expanded perimeter of the property. If you have expertise in this area and would like to help, email insightretreatcenter@gmail.com

Practicing with the Retreat Schedule

by Gil Fronsdal

Most meditation retreats are structured around a schedule that includes the primary activities of each day. Posted in prominent places, the schedule indicates times for meditation and when the wake-up bell is rung, the meals are served, and teachings offered. As scheduled activities occur regularly throughout the day, the schedule is a companion to everyone on the retreat. It provides a supportive scaffolding for retreat life.

Every retreatant has a relationship with the schedule. People new to retreats are often surprised it fills so much of the day. Those with retreat experience often arrive with attitudes and intentions regarding the schedule based on previous retreats. Over the course of a retreat most people’s relationship to the schedule shifts. One’s changing relationship with the schedule can include a wide assortment of emotions: from feeling content and supported to being intimidated and resistant. These emotions and various other factors can influence how much or how little a person participates in the scheduled activities.

Our relationship to the schedule is an important part of retreat practice and can be a useful topic of discussion with a teacher. Rather than seeing it as an arbitrary or neutral backdrop for one’s meditation, the schedule is integral to the practice of the retreat. As such, it can teach us about ourselves, help develop inner strengths, and be a support for discovering freedom.

The Schedule as a Mirror

An important foundation for Buddhist practice is understanding the underlying beliefs, desires and reactions that motivate our mental, physical and verbal behavior. When unseen, these can operate in the background, subconsciously affecting all areas of our lives. When known, we have the opportunity to investigate and address them and learn how to be wise with them. Most importantly, we can discover an inner freedom in relationship to them.

The retreat schedule can be a mirror for understanding ourselves better. Observing how we participate with the schedule can provide insight into attitudes, beliefs, motivations and feelings that can go unseen if we are free of any timetable. If we are chronically late for scheduled events, we can ask ourselves “why?” If we regularly wait until the last moment to show up for a scheduled event, why? If we always arrive early, why? If we resist schedules, why?

The following questions can support self-discovery:

- What is your general attitude about the schedule?
- Do you consider the schedule helpful?
- Do you have any enthusiasm or anxiety about participating with the schedule?
- Do you approach the schedule as a rigid requirement or as an optional suggestion?
- What emotions and motivations influence how you follow the schedule? Are these emotions and motivations characterized more by ease or by tension?
- What role do expectations and imagined consequences have in how you follow a schedule?
- When you are challenged by the schedule, how can this challenge become a subject for greater mindfulness or self-awareness?

Continued inside

Practice with the Retreat Schedule, cont'd

- When following the schedule feels effortless, what does it teach you about freedom?

Developing Strengths

An important aspect of retreat practice is developing our inner strengths and character so that they support us along a path of mindfulness and freedom. How we participate with the schedule can influence this inner growth. Sometimes adhering to the schedule can develop discipline, patience and equanimity. Other times, deviating from the schedule can cultivate discernment, self-reliance and autonomy. Sometimes, following the schedule can free one from needing to choose what to do. This in turn can facilitate calm, steadiness and letting go. Other times, it is choosing to not follow the full schedule that provides calm, steadiness and letting go.

A Vehicle for Freedom

Buddhist practice reveals the freedom of an unfettered heart—a freedom that manifests in our relationship to everything we encounter inside and outside of ourselves. With freedom we discover an abiding ease, free of greed, hate, anxiety or delusion. The schedule of a retreat can facilitate this freedom by supporting an ongoing continuity of practice and by being itself something we learn to be free with.

The freedom of Buddhism is primarily understood in terms of what we are free from rather than what we are free to do. This is because when the focus is on freedom to act on our wishes and impulses, the attachments and compulsions behind these wishes go unexamined. By focusing on becoming free from clinging, we can see the roots of our attachments, and are more likely to look more deeply to uncover even the subtlest ones.

As a vehicle for freedom it is often wise to follow the retreat schedule as posted. The schedule has been designed based on many years of experience as to what works well for both individuals and for a group practicing together. Persisting with the schedule can ensure a continuity of practice through all the ups and downs we might go through while on retreat. It also provides an opportunity to learn how to be free in the midst of all the ups and downs. Skipping parts of the schedule too readily can allow us to miss this opportunity.

However, sometimes it can be useful to diverge from the posted schedule. For example,

Schedule of Retreats 2013-2014

Insight Retreats are opportunities to engage in full-time mindfulness training. A daily retreat schedule involves periods of sitting and walking meditation, instructions, dharma talks, work meditation, and practice discussion with teachers. Silence is maintained throughout most of the retreat, except for discussions with the teachers and communication needed for work meditation.

- July 26–28, **Dharma Integration Weekend** with Andrea Fella & Gil Fronsdal. (Waiting list)
- July 31–August 4, **Insight Retreat** with Andrea Fella & Pamela Weiss. (Waiting)
- August 15–18, 2013 **Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation Retreat** with Ines Freedman, Max Erdstein, & Kim Allen (Qi Gong). (Waiting list)
- September 15–29, **14-day Insight Retreat** with Gil Fronsdal. (Waiting list)
- October 20–27, **Insight Retreat** with Gil Fronsdal and Richard Shankman.
- 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.
- January 26–February 2, 2014 **Insight Retreat** with Gil Fronsdal & Leigh Brasington. Registration opens September 26.
- February 18–22, 2014 **Insight Retreat** with Gil Fronsdal, Mel Weitsman, & Max Erdstein. Registration opens October 18.
- March 13–20, 2014 **Insight Retreat** with Andrea Fella & Kamala Masters. Registration opens November 13.

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



sometimes taking a break from the schedule is the best support for the continuity of the practice when it allows us to return to the practice refreshed.

Sometimes, extending a period of sitting or walking meditation beyond the scheduled time allows for a deeper settling. By adjusting the schedule for oneself, some people free themselves from a tendency to obedience, always trying to do the “right” thing, or fear of judgment from others when not following the norm.

The retreat schedule has an important role in the community life of everyone on a retreat. Everyone is connected through the schedule. By participating in the schedule we support others. Because of this, when we diverge from the schedule, it is useful to consider how to do it so it doesn't detract from the mutual support retreats are built on. True freedom is not found in ignoring the well-being of others, but rather in developing a heart where care for others is an integral part of freedom. The retreat schedule is in the service of the greatest good for all who participate in a retreat.

No Distractions in Mindfulness Practice

by Andrea Fella

One of the great things about mindfulness practice is that there are no inherent distractions. Whatever we think is a distraction is simply something else to notice. At the beginning of a retreat, we often offer the instruction to settle the attention on the breathing to collect and quiet the mind. With that instruction, people sometimes have the idea that if anything pulls them away from the breath, it is a problem. The instructions that we offer are actually more inclusive: if we're paying attention to the breathing and some other experience is pulling us, or it feels like there is a conflict around being with the breath, then we don't need to stay with the breath, instead we can bring our attention to the very thing we think is the distraction.

The sense of being distracted from the breath can happen different ways. For instance, we might be attending to the breath, and a sudden sound happens: someone coughs or sneezes, or a car door slams outside; the attention very naturally leaps to the sound and then the sound ends just as suddenly. People often say that such sounds distract them from their meditation. But what actually happened in that situation? First, the mind was paying attention to the breathing, and then a sudden sound arose and the mind paid attention to that. Often, right after the sound ends we start thinking: "Who made that sound that disturbed my meditation? I need to get back to the breath. I was so settled before that sound happened." The sound is long gone, yet the thoughts continue. The thing actually disturbing us in that situation is the thoughts! If we can simply recognize that sound is happening, just for a moment, then when the sound ends, we can just notice the next experience: perhaps a body sensation, or an emotion. Or we might choose to reconnect with the experience of breathing, without adding any fanfare about how distracting the sound was.

Another way we might experience a sense of being distracted from the breath: we are paying attention to the breath while another experience is happening simultaneously: a body sensation, a pain or an itch. We might notice the experience, consciously let it go, and come back to the breath. Yet the experience pulls us again, and again, making it difficult to stay with the breath. At times it might be possible to stay with the breath, but it feels like we're forcing the attention on the breath. If there is a feeling of conflict between the breath and another experience, it might be time to turn our mind-

ful awareness towards that experience, what ever it is, and simply let go of trying to stay with the breath.

Aside from assorted "distractions" at our senses, we sometimes feel disturbed by states of mind, like restlessness, dullness, sleepiness, or anxiety. We might have the idea: "I can't meditate with the mind in this state." We might think we have to change the state of the mind in order to meditate, or just give up the meditation altogether and wait for another time when the mind is less sleepy or anxious. If this happens, we might be holding to some idea of what meditation is: we might think meditation means being able to choose to pay attention to the breath and to stay with the breath. That is one form of meditation, but sometimes our mind is not in a state to be able to direct the attention in that way. For instance, if you have the thought "I'm too sleepy to meditate," I'd like to suggest that you might have enough awareness to turn your attention to the sleepiness itself!

Mindfulness is like a mirror; it reflects whatever comes in its path. A mirror is not impacted by what it reflects, it simply reflects; beautiful things, ugly things, large things, small things. Sometimes a mirror is coated with steam, and we might have the view that the mirror isn't reflecting very well. In that situation, the mirror is not reflecting what we would like it to reflect; yet if we think about what is actually happening, the mirror is doing its job perfectly. It is perfectly reflecting every drop of water on the surface of the mirror; it is just not doing what we want it to do.

Certain states of mind, like dullness or sleepiness are like the mirror coated with steam. Sometimes we can rouse some energy, which might shift the mind into a brighter state, which might be like opening the bathroom door to allow steam to clear from the mirror. At other times there is very little we can do about a sluggish dull mind, and it may not be possible to direct the attention to a particular experience, such as the breath. Yet it is possible, more often than we might think, to actually recognize the mind is dull or foggy. Mindfulness can clearly know dullness, much as the mirror perfectly reflects the steam.

Does it feel like something is disturbing your meditation? Perhaps that very disturbance is asking for attention.

—*Transcribed and edited morning instructions from a recent retreat*

Water Conservation at IRC

IRC's water comes from a shared well system with seven of our neighbors. This summer the water levels have dropped, and we are doing all we can to conserve water. All our new toilets and shower heads are ultra-low water use, but now we need to convert the older 15 toilets and shower heads also. We are considering developing a water catchment system (rain water harvesting) to utilize the roof run-off water for watering the landscape. This requires purchasing and installing a couple of 5,000 gallon water tanks.

We ask that those of you sitting retreat at IRC, especially during the dry summer months, minimize water use to what's absolutely necessary.

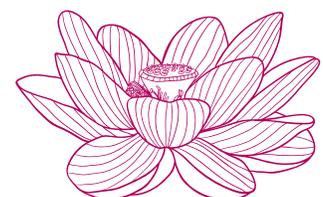
Fundraising Requests

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:

- Install a water catchment system (rain water harvesting) to collect run-off water from our roof for landscape use. This involves re-routing our gutters and downspouts and installing a couple of ~5,000 gallon storage tanks.
- Upgrade 15 old toilets and shower heads to ultra-low water use.
- Repair or replace 400 feet of decking.
- Add solar hot water: install panels on the roof so we can reduce our energy costs.
- Develop a database that will simplify our retreat operations.
- 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/



Managing a Retreat

by Shelley Gault

When I first signed up to serve as one of the managers at an IRC retreat in March I had the idea that there would be two separate things going on—doing management tasks, and dipping into the silence. I wondered how skillfully I'd be able to navigate between the interactive, outward-focused manager role and being an inward-looking yogi on silent retreat. Anticipating having a restless mind that would be slow to settle when the time for sitting came, I decided “this one is just about service” as though that meant it wouldn't be a “real” meditation retreat for me. I created a false dichotomy, but pretty quickly I saw through it. Sure, there was activity and interaction, and then there was stillness and silence, but mindfulness was there in either case, moving from inside to outside as needed. It was all of a piece, a flow.

Sometimes after more complex interactions with someone it took a while for my mind to settle during sits, but even then there wasn't a sense of switching hats—it was more like shifting gears. Because we were on retreat, bringing attention to the gear change was deliberate. That deliberateness was great training for everyday life, where attention is always moving between what's going on “out there” and what's happening “in here.”

Years ago one of my teachers said something that has stuck with me ever since: “True service is listening.” It might seem a curious thing to say, because listening is so receptive, and service implies activity. But I believe the teacher was pointing to the need to be fully present in any situation in order to respond in the most helpful way. I understood “listening” to include not just what happens with our ears but with all our senses, and with our aware-

ness. For me there's sensitivity implied, and also readiness to act. It's opening ourselves as much as possible to what is going on—which is (no surprise) a way of describing mindfulness. And there's the explicit intention to be of service. Managing a retreat is a great field for practicing this kind of listening.

Sitting at the registration table greeting retreat participants as they arrived, listening to them, getting a feel for how they were feeling—nervous, excited, tired, the full spectrum of attitudes we bring to retreat—touched my heart and inspired a kind of protectiveness. It seems to me the most important aspect of the manager's role is not any of the specific, straightforward tasks, but helping create a container of safety and care that allows yogis to meet their own minds and hearts without armoring. The whole volunteer “staff” team—two managers and four kitchen staff—shared with the teachers in creating that container, which also held us, of course. Serving on that team, supporting each other, sharing our challenges and joys, added another rich layer to the whole experience.

There was both a sense of responsibility and a deep contentment in connecting with other yogis and giving them practical help, all within the retreat container. I felt close to all the participants, much like we were creating a family together. The sangha service period every morning was a delightful expression of that. Serving as a manager added hugely to the retreat experience for me, bringing love right into the middle of practice in an active, expressive way. It was a gift to be able to do it, and I'm very much looking forward to the next time.

Shelley Gault has been meditating for over 30 years, the last ten in the Insight tradition. She has completed Spirit Rock's Dedicated Practitioner Program and helps to lead her local sangha in Santa Barbara, organizing events and teaching classes and daylongs. The natural world is her oldest dharma teacher, and she volunteers at a large public garden, teaching kids about botany and ecology. Just recently she became a grandmother, a role that delights her.

Help IRC when Buying or Selling Your Home

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

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

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 (but other positions are needed also):

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.

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

Facilities Coordinator: Oversee the maintenance and repairs of the facility. Learn and keep track of the major systems and arrange for their routine maintenance. Do some minor maintenance and repairs. Oversee 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.

To volunteer, please fill out a Volunteer Form on our website or send an email to: 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. The Group ID is 238528.

IRC Email List

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