

Insight Retreat Center

NEWSLETTER

1906 Glen Canyon Rd
 Santa Cruz, CA 95060
 (831)440-8858
www.insightretreatcenter.org
insightretreatcenter@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

All About IRC

Community Meeting & Tea at IMC

Sunday, October 14, 11am to 12pm. At IMC after the dharma talk, 108 Birch St, Redwood City.

Please join us for an update and discussion about all things having to do with our new retreat center.

IRC Open House

Saturday & Sunday, November 3 & 4, 9am to 4pm.

Come by IRC and tour the grounds and facilities—see the transformation from retirement home to retreat center and have the opportunity to meditate in the new meditation hall. Refreshments will be provided.

Carpooling: Please carpool if possible. Check our website for carpool information www.insightretreatcenter.org.

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

Retreat Practice

Gil Fronsdal

In the years before he attained liberation, the Buddha devoted extended periods to meditation. He considered meditation so valuable that even after his awakening, he continued to practice it. Though his daily life involved time for both meditation and teaching, periodically he would retreat into the forest to meditate uninterrupted for weeks or months.

Many people over the millennia have followed his example by retreating to monasteries and wilderness settings to develop mindfulness, concentration, loving-kindness, and compassion — and, most important, to experience liberation. Like the Buddha, many have then returned to society and shared the benefits with others.

When Buddhist meditation was mainly the prerogative of monastics, spending long periods in the wilderness or in monasteries was the primary means of engaging in sustained meditation. Now that a growing number of lay people are practicing meditation, our modern world has given birth to “meditation retreats” and “retreat centers,” where people can take time out from their daily lives to benefit from deep practice.

Meditation retreats are powerful and nurturing places for developing one’s spiritual practice. With a schedule devoted to meditation, they foster a continuity that lets the benefits of the practice blossom. By separating participants from their usual responsibilities and distractions, retreats allow for a full immersion in the practice. As a way of “retreating” from our daily lives and habits, they make space for new perspectives and reflections to emerge.

In our Insight meditation tradition, the typical retreat is 7 to 10 days long, though some are shorter and others longer. Most of the day is devoted to meditation, alternating between sitting and walking. There is usually a rest period of an hour or so after each meal. The teachers guide and support the retreatants with daily dharma talks and a morning period of practice instruction. A few times during the retreat, participants meet with a teacher to discuss their practice.

Retreats are designed to create an environment of simplicity, minimizing participants’ activities and concerns. Participants spend most of their time in silence, free from phones and the Internet. While the lack of social conversation and external stimulus may feel alien at first, over time nearly every retreatant I’ve met has come to value the silence and simplicity, which are hard to come by in our harried, always-connected lives.

Even though all retreatants share the same pared-down schedule, their personal experiences vary considerably because of their different backgrounds, needs, intentions, and understandings. In a sense, there are as many retreats going on as there are participants. Some people discover the immense beauty of a peaceful and liberated heart. Others find themselves face to face with unresolved personal issues. Still others discover the value of slowly and systematically cultivating greater patience, mindfulness, or loving-kindness. The practice matures differently in different people at different times and in different stages of life.

From my experience as both a practitioner and a teacher, I have come to view the many functions of retreats as falling into four general areas: recovering, discovering, cultivating, and freeing. Sometimes an individual’s experience focuses primarily on one of

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Retreat Practice, cont'd

these. Other times, several or even all come into play. Yet in every case comes the possibility of great joy, peace, and purpose.

Recovering

Retreats are a great place to recover from the many stresses of life. For instance, for people who may be sleep deprived, retreats provide a crucial opportunity to obtain deep rest, often much better than they get on a vacation. For people who arrive carrying significant physical tension, retreats can promote much-needed relaxation. For those who have been too busy or preoccupied to tend to their inner lives, retreats are a safe place to let unresolved emotions surface and unfold. For example, retreats can be useful for someone who's grieving a significant loss. The many days of a retreat can also allow for old, long-avoided feelings to finally come into awareness. Sometimes healing can happen only after a backlog of tears has been fully shed.

Discovering

Retreats offer the opportunity to step out of regular activities and discover what is really going on in one's life. Emotions, thoughts, intuitions, understandings, and unexamined issues have an opportunity to show themselves when one is no longer racing around and distracted by busyness. A retreat can be a chance for people to catch up to their lives.

Uninterrupted mindfulness greatly enhances the discovery process. Sustained attention and calm can help people see the underlying principles they live by. Most people don't know all the reasons why they do, say, or think what they do. It's common for retreatants to discover with great surprise that fear, aversion, or desire pervades everything they do, both on retreat and in everyday life. People may also discover how frequently they interpret events through a single, deeply held belief or attitude that has no true validity. While these kinds of self-discoveries can be painful, seeing our underlying tendencies is an important part of becoming free of them.

The sustained mindfulness cultivated on retreat can be likened to looking at our present experience through a microscope. The magnification allows us to see into the

universal characteristics of human life. This can be deeper and more transformative than any insight we might have into our unique personal psychology.

While on retreat we can also discover the direct benefits of relaxing, letting go, and seeing clearly. We might uncover and question the belief that clinging tightly or being tense is somehow helpful to ourselves or others. And we may come to appreciate that our hearts and minds function much better when at peace.

Cultivating

The mind is not a thing; rather it consists of many mental processes that are influenced by the conditions that bear on them. Our intentional mental activities are primary influences that shape which processes operate in our minds and how well they operate. If we frequently worry, we are in effect training the mind to worry more. If we spend much of our mental activity wanting things or being angry, then we're strengthening desire or anger. If we emphasize the mind's capacity for goodwill, we then cultivate greater goodwill. And if we regularly practice generosity and mindfulness, our capacity to be generous and mindful grows.

Taking responsibility for how our minds are shaped is a key part of Buddhist practice. If we don't take the initiative, our minds can be shaped by influences we may not want. One important way of taking responsibility is to cultivate those mental processes that bring out the most helpful aspects of our humanity.

A retreat is an ideal place for this. It provides the rare opportunity to devote much of the day to developing mindfulness, concentration, patience, equanimity, loving-kindness, and wisdom. It allows time to cultivate these qualities by repeatedly practicing the mental act of waking up to the present moment and refocusing attention.

As the mind is cultivated it has a greater and greater capacity for ease and peace. Rather than being overwhelmed by the difficulties of life, we have greater inner balance, strength, and wisdom to respond in useful ways to life's vicissitudes.

Freeing

In Buddhism, recovery, discovery, and cultivating the mind are not ends in themselves. They are important steps in freeing the mind from its afflictions. As Buddhists we find that it's possible to free the mind from its contracted states. It's possible to let go of clinging and the limitations that clinging creates.

While liberation can be experienced anytime and anywhere, retreats are one of the most fertile places for finding this freedom. Focusing fully on practicing meditation allows for the clear seeing and strength of mind that is needed before one can let go of clinging, fear, greed, and aversion. Retreats also provide an external support and sense of safety that can ease the initial feeling of vulnerability that may come when we release clinging. For people new to practice, this release may involve learning to let go of preoccupations with people and things. For people who have developed their capacity for insight, it may be learning to let go of their preoccupation with themselves.

A wonderful thing about retreats is that they tend to bring out the best in people. One reason is that sustained mindfulness practice helps us to be less reactive to experience and feelings than we are in daily life. In particular, retreatants are often motivated to resist impulses to participate in the unwholesome forces of their minds. This aspiration to be free tends to bring forth the most beautiful, wholesome forces of the mind. Retreats are places where people can grow in kindness, generosity, integrity, resilience, wisdom, and compassion.

The benefits we experience on retreat are not for ourselves alone. As we return to society, we naturally share these benefits with others. In this way, meditation retreats are the spawning ground for a larger, more pervasive transformation. By recovering, discovering, cultivating, and freeing, we become a positive force that can change the world.

IRC Retreat Schedule

We are delighted to be offering our very first retreats at the Insight Retreat Center!

Our retreats are offered freely at no cost to anyone who participates. Most of the financial support comes from the donations participants offer at the end of retreats. Their generosity is what allows others to participate in future retreats.

Insight Meditation Retreats

Insight Retreats are opportunities to engage in full-time mindfulness training. The 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 the work meditation.

Our retreats are internet and cellular-free. This means that in registering one agrees to refrain from the use of email, internet or phone during the retreat. Opportunities for responding to emergencies will be provided.

Registration begins three months prior to the start of a retreat. You can register at www.insightretreatcenter.org except where indicated.

- November 11–18 with Gil Fronsdal, assisted by Max Erdstein.
- December 9–16 with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella.
- December 26–January 1, A Saranataka Foundation Retreat at IRC with nuns from the Aloka Vihara, Ajahns Anandabodhi and Santacitta. See www.saranataka.org for registration information.
- January 27–February 3 with Gil Fronsdal and Mary Orr.
- February 27–March 3 with Gil Fronsdal and John Travis.
- March 16–23 with Andrea Fella and Gil Fronsdal.
- April 17–24, Satipatthana Study and Meditation Retreat with Anaalayo Bhikkhu and Gil Fronsdal. Co-sponsored by IRC and Sati Center.
- May 22–27, an Insight Santa Cruz Retreat at IRC with Mary Grace Orr, Bob Stahl, Jill Hyman, Jason Murphy, and Marcy Reynolds (Qigong). Register through www.insightsantacruz.org.
- June 22–July 6 with Andrea Fella. Approval from teacher required.

Fund-Raising Status

Now that we are more than halfway through the renovation, we are pleased that it looks as if we will be within our budget for the work. We are now turning our attention to furnishing the center in anticipation of our first retreats this year. This means that our fund-raising efforts are focused on the final \$100,000 we need to have a fully functioning retreat center. We hope that many of our supporters will be inspired by the near-completion of the renovation to help with this final step. Donations at this time will go toward the furnishings, equipment, and supplies that you may actually use on retreat!

While we do not need to fully equip the center in order to start retreats, the bare minimum cost is \$65,000. This includes 43 beds with mattresses and bedding; chairs for the bedrooms, meditation hall, and dining room; cushions and mats for the meditation hall; tables for the dining room; the audio system; equipment and supplies for the office and kitchen, etc.

Your donations at this time will be greatly appreciated by all the participants at our first retreats. And if you have access to discounted commercial kitchen equipment or other items we need in bulk, please let us know.

To donate online: www.insightretreatcenter.org
Contact us at: insightretreatcenter@gmail.com

Taking Retreat Practice Home

Andrea Fella

As we settle into a retreat, from time to time we might experience states of calm, peace, happiness, and joy. Leaving retreat and returning to our daily lives, we sometimes feel that these states are very far from our experience. In your daily life, let yourself be open to the possibility that this kind of mind state does happen throughout your day, perhaps in small ways. We can start to realize that beautiful mind states are more present than we thought they were. Noticing even small moments of happiness and calm will start to have a cumulative effect. That's the way mindfulness works—in being mindful of small moments of happiness, conditions are created that encourage such states of mind to arise more and more frequently.

Local Volunteers Needed

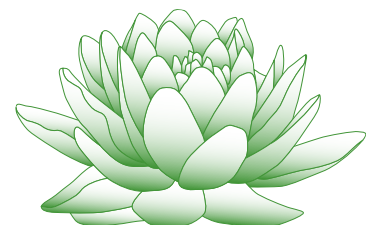
To volunteer, please fill out a form at: www.insightretreatcenter.org/volunteer
Questions? (408)663-1906 or email: insightretreatcenter@gmail.com.

Facilities Manager(s)

A couple of local people who will focus on the care of our building. This includes keeping track of the major systems: heating, cooling, electrical, plumbing, gutters, etc., and either doing or arranging for their routine maintenance when there are no retreats. It would be nice if the facility managers could do small repairs.

Handyperson(s)

A couple of local volunteers available for small repairs when needed. As we have 25 toilets plus many more sinks, it would be helpful to have one person inspect the plumbing monthly.



INSIGHT MEDITATION CENTER'S

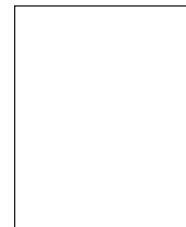
Insight Retreat Center

108 Birch Street

Redwood City, California 94062

www.insightretreatcenter.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Almost There!

The renovation of IRC is going well. We anticipate finishing on schedule in October. We have scheduled our first retreats starting in November through the first half of 2013. In preparation for opening we are giving considerable attention to how to organize and operate our new retreat center. Because IRC, like IMC, will be fully run by volunteers, practice as service and service as practice will be an integral part of the center.

We aim to foster a strong sense of community among the volunteers and supporters of IRC. We are planning special weekend retreats, perhaps called Dharma Integration Retreats, which will combine teachings, meditation, group discussion, work periods, and social time. These retreats will provide a setting to enhance the integration of Buddhist teachings, such as wise speech and action, into participants' lives.

Many people's volunteer efforts and support have brought us to where we are now. Ines and Bruce Freedman have been diligently working together with the contractor and architect on all the details of the renovation. Our design committee has met regularly to discuss aesthetic issues. Betsy Blessing has been leading crews of volunteers to care for the gardens and grounds. Our program and operations committees have met to plan our retreat schedule and procedures, especially all that is needed to create meals for up to 40 retreatants at a time. A database committee and a web team have started work on the crucial but often invisible systems that we will need for registration, accounting, website management, and communication.

Our intention is to create a self-sustaining organization that aims towards simplicity and ease, sustained by our mindfulness practice and our care for each other.

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.