

# Insight Retreat Center

## NEWSLETTER

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### 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](http://www.insightretreatcenter.org/volunteer)

**Work Days:** 8/6, 9/10, 10/15, 11/12, 12/10

Register on the website Work Day page or go to [bit.ly/IRCworkday](http://bit.ly/IRCworkday). Questions: Eileen: [messinaeileen@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:gardening@insightretreatcenter.org)

**Resident Volunteers:** Several Resident Volunteers live at IRC for extended periods, participating in dharma programs and assisting with the various tasks needed to support the Center. If interested in becoming a Resident Volunteer, email [admin@insightretreatcenter.org](mailto:admin@insightretreatcenter.org).

**Service Leaders:** Though most of the work of running our retreats is shared by all the participants in the 45-minute period devoted to work meditation, the system also depends on five Service Leaders, experienced retreatants 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 a few hours each day, they spend most of the day in formal meditation.

Service Leaders can volunteer as often as it works for their schedule. If you're interested in being a Service Leader, fill out a Volunteer Form on the website or email [admin@insightretreatcenter.org](mailto:admin@insightretreatcenter.org).

## The Practice of Leaving a Retreat

by Gil Fronsda

The end of a meditation retreat is as important as any other part, and approaching it as a significant period of practice can lead to many benefits. The final stage of a retreat and the period following provide significant opportunities for insight and self-understanding. Instead of discontinuing the practice because calm, concentration or mindfulness has decreased, and immediately diving back into life, it is helpful to end a retreat with the intention to process, absorb and integrate the retreat experience. In this way, a retreat can have greater lasting value.

The transition associated with leaving a retreat begins when one's thoughts turn toward the end and leaving the retreat center. Increased thinking and excitement usually mark this shift. Generally, the influence of the end begins about six sevenths of the way through a retreat. For a seven-hour retreat, this may be an hour or so before the end. For a seven day retreat the transition may begin about a day before the end. For month-long retreats, it can begin as much as 3-4 days before the close. That the length of this period varies with the length of the retreat points to how it is a natural process.

Many people believe the important part of a retreat is attaining deeper experiences of concentration, calm, or clarity. When, near the end, one seems to be surfacing from whatever depth one has reached, it can be easy to conclude that the practice momentum is gone. Some people will then spend the last hours or days of the retreat just going through the motions, not seeing value in continuing to practice wholeheartedly. However, some of the most important insights and realizations on a retreat can occur as we come out of whatever stillness has been reached. Staying attentive and interested in what happens as we approach the end of the retreat increases the likelihood for these insights and realizations.

At some point near the end, mental patterns that receded or fell away during the retreat often return. Common worries and desires, personal problems or challenges, and increased self-consciousness may all reappear.

Because we are still on retreat, we have the opportunity to find a different vantage point from which to observe them. With more sustained mindfulness than available in daily life, we might be able to look more deeply at our mental tendencies, or notice parts of our mental ecology that go unseen in the busyness of daily life. It might be possible to shift the relationship to our feelings, emotions, and thoughts by viewing them with more equanimity, acceptance, and kindness. It can be possible to learn to observe what the mind is doing instead of getting entangled with it.

During this transition period, just as throughout a retreat, we can explore what we might be clinging to and how we might be able to let go. In fact, some forms of clinging may be most easily discovered near the end of a retreat. Simply asking oneself, "What am I clinging to?" may reveal attachments that underlie how the mind operates. One might also discover what lies beneath the attachments themselves by exploring, "Why am I clinging to this?" These important inquiries can be beneficial even though we may not be as concentrated or still as earlier in the retreat.

It is helpful to consider that a retreat continues after its official end for the same duration as its length. Thus, a one-week retreat continues for a week after its end; a month long retreat continues for another month. During this "second half" one may still experience the effects of the retreat. There may be unaccustomed energy and mood shifts. Particularly on the day the retreat ends one may become uncharacteristically energetic, perhaps talking quickly and lengthily. Some people become tired, in need of a nap or solitude, and some become over-stimulated easily if they do too much after a retreat. Sometimes even going into a supermarket may feel overwhelming. Occasionally people become easily irritated a day or two after a retreat because of the stark contrast with the calm and well-being of the retreat. Sometimes annoyance arises because all one's emotions are flowing more freely.

Coming off retreat one may not see the full

*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](mailto: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](http://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](http://insightretreatcenter.org/e-giving)

## Schedule of Retreats 2016

**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.

### 2016

- **Aug 17–21** Insight Retreat with Richard Shankman and Nikki Mirghafori
- **Oct 7–10** Insight Retreat for People in their 20s and 30s with Max Erdstein and Matthew Brensilver
- **Oct 16–29** Experienced Students Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, assisted by Ines Freedman
- **Nov 3–6** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Max Erdstein (reg opens 8/3)
- **Nov 13–20** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Bob Stahl (reg opens 7/13)
- **Nov 29–Dec 4** Insight Santa Cruz Retreat with Bob Stahl, Jill Hyman, Bruce Hyman, Karen Zelin, assisted by Kim Allen (reg opens 7/29)
- **Dec 11–18** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella (reg opens 8/11)

### 2017

- **Jan 21–28** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Leigh Brasington (reg opens 9/21/16)
- **Feb 10–17** Experienced Students Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal (reg opens 10/10/16)
- **Feb 23–26** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Matthew Brensilver (reg opens 11/23/16)
- **Mar 17–26** Awareness and Wisdom Retreat with Andrea Fella and Alex Santos (reg opens 11/17/16)
- **Apr 16–23** Mindfulness in Early Buddhism, a Study and Practice Retreat with Ven. Analayo, assisted by Max Erdstein (reg opens 12/16/16) Please check our website for requirements for this retreat.
- **Apr 30–May 14** Two-Week Experienced Students Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella (reg opens 11/30/16)
- **Jun 25–Jul 9** Mindfulness of Mind Retreat with Andrea Fella (reg opens 1/25/17)

To register, for schedule changes, additions and more, visit:  
[insightretreatcenter.org/retreats/](http://insightretreatcenter.org/retreats/)  
or email [info@insightretreatcenter.org](mailto:info@insightretreatcenter.org)



## Reflections on a Question from a Retreat

by Andrea Fella

*Given impermanence, unreliability, and not-self, where do we find trust?*

This is a deep question—an important question for us. From our usual, everyday perspective we think things are trustable when we can take a stand on them. Yet the teachings point us in a different direction around trust.

Sometimes the deepest freedom and peace is called unshakeability of mind, which seems to convey an image of stability. Yet, as I reflect on this image, the way unshakeability feels to me is not like something solid, rather it is unshakeable because it's not landing on anything, there is nothing to shake.

The trust that develops as we practice is explored not in terms of “where can I land,” or “where can I find stability,” but rather in terms of what leads towards freedom from suffering. That trust is not about being anywhere or being anyone or having anything. Rather it is a trust that whatever is happening in this moment can be known, even as it is changing, even as it is slipping through. We open to a deep trust as we realize we cannot know what the next moment will be.

At one point in my practice, the experience of impermanence and unreliability was quite strong, and there was a lot of fear: “What is there to land on, with things changing so rapidly?” As I kept practicing with this, I realized that the fear was about the idea of the unknown. During one walking meditation, I determined to face this fear of the unknown. And yet, every single moment was known. Then that moment fell apart, and in the next moment, everything was known. An image came to mind of standing on the edge of a cliff – it was like I was being asked to step into the abyss with each moment. I had no idea of what the next moment would be. It was a bit frightening. As I took the step into the abyss, in the next moment, there I was, standing on the edge of the abyss. Each moment. Step. Everything was known. Each moment. Step. Always at the edge of the abyss.

So, we learn to trust that this moment can be known and non-clinging in this moment leads to freedom in this moment. We're not looking to trust a particular outcome. We're trusting non-clinging. We're trusting freedom.

## The Practice of Leaving a Retreat, cont'd

context of one's life. It is better to avoid making major decisions or coming to grand conclusions during this unofficial "second half of the retreat." Instead, if possible, it is helpful to spend ample quiet time during this period. Meditating, going for walks, and refraining from lots of email, TV, or computer time may allow deeper reflection about what is important.

The post-retreat period is a good time to integrate or digest the benefits, learning, or inspirations that came from the retreat. Living calmly and simply in the days after the retreat may let these stay current in one's mind so they can continue to ripen. Rushing back to a fully packed life may cut short this ripening. Taking time for reflection, journaling, or talking with a trusted friend about the retreat may also deepen the lessons of the retreat. Meditating two or three times a day in the days after a retreat can be very supportive for this integration process. Extra meditation can also help bring emotional and mental balance if one is feeling particularly sensitive after the retreat.

The entire meditation retreat is an integrated whole, so the formal closing period is part of the retreat's overall process. If one leaves before the closing talks, the breaking of silence, and the chance to say goodbye, one misses a significant opportunity. It can leave part of what is 'cooking' on retreat 'half-baked,' and short-change the important interpersonal aspects of a retreat. Retreat practice is a collective practice where retreatants mutually support and benefit each other. Buddhist practice, to fulfill its full promise, involves both personal and interpersonal development.

Finally, from the perspective of ongoing mindfulness practice, the "end" of a retreat is arbitrary. Bringing the practice into one's entire life includes practicing before, during, and after retreat. The practice continues in whatever new circumstances we come to. One of the great values of a mindfulness retreat is to have greater confidence and inspiration in being mindful wherever we are. Leaving a retreat is just another circumstance in which to be mindful.



## Your Questions About Practice

*Could you address the tension between accepting things as they are versus striving to improve ourselves or our surroundings, to make social change or justice? How do we balance those or work with those at the same time?*

**Gil Fronsda** responds: I don't have a simple answer that can cover all the aspects of this question. However, I do think it's useful to do something like meditation, where we learn how to be non-reactive, to have the mind be peaceful without any agitation. This could be described as coming to the zero point between negative reactions on one side and positive reactions on the other. It is resting content, for a brief time, without being for or against anything. It is being mindful, easeful and peaceful with what is. Conventionally this may look like "accepting what is."

However, from the point of profound rest, "accepting what is" is a mental attitude or a mental activity that we do. If we are "doing" acceptance, we are not yet at the zero point. While it may well be appropriate to accept what we can't change, in meditation we are looking to discover something more profound than acceptance; this is to be present for what is with equanimity, without reaction.

We don't have to accept something in order to be peaceful in relationship to it. Remaining non-reactive toward injustice does not mean we accept the injustice or that we turn off our analysis and evaluation of the situation. Hopefully it means when we respond to the injustice we can do so with compassion and wisdom.

Meditation is a safe place to experiment with meeting experience with equanimous awareness instead of reactivity. If we have anger, we neither accept it nor not accept it; we neither condone it nor condemn it. Instead we stay present for the anger without getting entangled with it.

Once we learn this zero point then it can become a reference point for seeing more clearly when the mind reacts to things. Knowing the satisfaction of being non-reactive can highlight when we are reactive, even in very subtle ways. Because we can better see the impulses to act and speak, we learn to have more choice with what impulses and motivations to act on. We operate less from habit or sudden impulse. We can have greater ability to respond to circumstances wisely and compassionately.

In this way, hopefully we can think more clearly, see more clearly, and become wiser

about when we act and don't act. The Buddhist practice is not about resting forever in the zero place or in "acceptance of things as they are". The practice is about learning to be in the world without greed, hatred, or delusion. I hope that those who grow in the practice are motivated to improve our world. With inner freedom, we can do so without reactivity or agitation.

## IRC Updates

**Landscaping.** Now that we've moved our fences to include the property that we purchased last year, we've continued to slowly make progress in developing and adapting the landscape in ways that support low maintenance and low water use.

We're very fortunate to have landscape architect Richard McPherson volunteering his time in guiding the long-term vision for our landscaping. Having sat a number of retreats at IRC, he's particularly inspired to add to the contemplative atmosphere at IRC.

**IRC Mortgage.** Even though we are not doing any active fundraising at this time, we have begun a "Mortgage Fund" to pay off our \$800,000 mortgage. We now have about \$10K in our fund. Thank you to those of you who have donated!

If you are inspired to donate to the fund, please go to [insightretreatcenter.org/donations/](https://insightretreatcenter.org/donations/) and whichever method you use to donate, please include a note that it's for the Mortgage Fund.

## 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](mailto:carolcollins888@gmail.com).

## IRC Email List

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

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## Life as a Resident Volunteer at IRC

*Josh Dultz, who has been serving as a Resident Volunteer at IRC for two years, talks about his experience here as he prepares to move into the next phase of his life.*

**You came to IRC after a couple of years training to become a monk at Abhayagiri. What was the transition like, moving into a center where the monks' rules weren't the organizing principle for how to live together?**

After Abhayagiri, I spent a year in a work exchange co-op housing situation, which was a bit of a culture shock. People moved more quickly outside of the monastery so I felt the need to speed up my thinking and speech. The lack of a set routine was also difficult to get accustomed to. In the monastery you don't have to think about the daily schedule, it's pretty much the same every day. Moving into lay life, I was responsible for creating my own schedule—and for my entire livelihood! In the monastery, your “job” is to study and practice the Buddha's teachings. Food, shelter, clothes, and medicine are provided by generous offerings of lay practitioners. Holding a job and a full-time school schedule as well as tending to community life, my mind felt overwhelmed and finding time for formal practice was difficult.

Arriving at IRC, this transition became much easier. I was more acclimated to lay life by then, and the IRC resident volunteer (RV) community had a bit of a monastic tone, a kind of “lay renunciate” model. The IRC RVs weren't living traditional householder lives, with families or full-time jobs. Instead, they were living, working, and practicing with each other in support of the retreat center, within a container that included its own daily schedule. We shared a strong commitment to generosity, the 5 ethical precepts, and meditation practice, sharing the intention to deeply learn and practice the Dhamma.

**What are the most rewarding and challenging aspects of living in community with other volunteers?**

For me, the most rewarding aspect is being able to offer and receive support. Support comes in many forms: having fellow practitioners to sit with in the meditation hall each morning, support with our duties and work projects, and being able to talk with each other about Dhamma study, practice, and our life experiences.

The most challenging aspect is also incredibly rewarding—learning to adapt to meeting, working, and living with very different personalities. Different perceptions can lead to conflicting views about what should or shouldn't be done within the community. But I am learning that this doesn't need to lead to contention. Continually rubbing up against such differences can incline the mind to become more flexible and open. Instead of being threatened by them, differences can become interesting, even entertaining: we learn about many perspectives.

A friend compared living in community to being one of many rocks in a tumbler; though rubbing against each other can cause friction and may hurt a bit, it also smoothes our rough edges. Looking back, I can confidently say that moving through the beauty and challenges of community life has increased my tolerance, acceptance, and inclusivity. But to do so requires a wise intention, concerted effort, and a ton of patience. One of my teachers, Ajahn Pasanno, explained that Tibetan Buddhists have a practice of doing “10,000 prostrations”; the Theravada monastic community has a similar practice in living with each other, the “10,000 frustrations.”

**What mind and heart qualities are important for people serving as RVs?**

Generosity and flexibility are the first things that come to mind. Generosity is vital because the retreat center is fueled by it, through donations and volunteerism. And generosity makes the cultivation of friendship easier because care and respect flow naturally from a giving

nature. Care and respect for others are a big part of making communal life harmonious and pleasant.

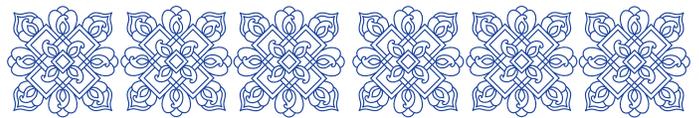
In living and working with a variety of people, projects, and schedules, our expectations, views, and agendas inevitably get challenged. Flexibility is essential. To avoid unnecessary stress I may need to let go of expectations around holding to a “fixed” schedule, how a specific work project should turn out, or how others respond to things I say.

At IRC the fruit of cultivating these qualities doesn't only affect the individual, but directly influences and supports the retreat center, a container in which thousands of beings are offered support to deeply practice the Dhamma.

**As you prepare to leave, can you say something about ways you think the experience is informing your approach to life?**

Living as an RV has been an incredibly rich and valuable experience. Moving so frequently between retreats and daily life, I notice more durability in my practice. Formal practice blends more into daily life, and daily life informs my formal practice. This is bringing significant results, from being more successful in my studies and work projects, to attending more skillfully to interpersonal relationships. As mindfulness and concentration strengthen, insights arise within mundane daily activities. Aspects of impermanence, suffering, and not-self become apparent as I move throughout the day, which helps keep my mind grounded in reality. The result is more peace; not an ecstatic kind of bliss that can be developed through concentration (which is also great), but a feeling of ease in relation to these truths, sensing them to be ordinary rather than shocking.

I will soon learn more about what effects the IRC RV experience has had through how I relate to what's next on my journey—student life at UC Berkeley, majoring in Southeast Asian Studies, concentrating on Buddhism. But now the heart feels buoyed up. I am most appreciative of having been given the opportunity to live and work with this outstanding group of people, a crew of warm-hearted individuals intent on growth along the path, who have become family to me. I am immensely grateful for all their support and examples, and for the opportunity to work with and learn from Gil and from Ines Freedman, IRC's managing director. Being an RV at IRC has been a golden opportunity to integrate formal and daily life practice while nurturing dear friendships through living in community. It has been an invaluable support for growth along the path.



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### Introducing Leigh Brasington

From January 21–28, 2017, we are happy to welcome back Leigh Brasington, who will teach his second IRC retreat with Gil. Leigh began his meditation practice in 1985 with the late Ayya Khema, a German-born Theravada nun and respected teacher of concentration practice. Leigh is Ayya's most senior American student. He began assisting her in retreats in 1994, and teaching on his own in 1997. A main focus in his teaching has been the deep states of concentration known as jhanas. Interested in study of the early Pali Canon, Leigh also leads sutta study courses. He is the author of *Right Concentration: A Practical Guide to the Jhanas*. His website is [www.leighb.com](http://www.leighb.com).

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