

Insight Retreat Center

NEWSLETTER

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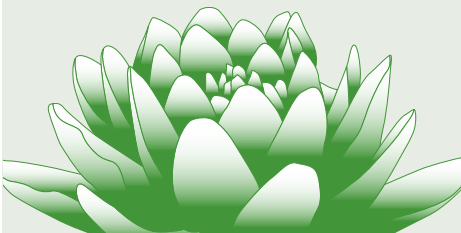
Caretaker Wanted

We are looking for a dedicated resident volunteer to take care of the maintenance and basic repairs of the IRC property and to manage larger projects.

A background in any of the following is helpful: construction, handyman, carpentry skills, or perhaps a homeowner who has experience maintaining a home with basic do-it-yourself skills. To learn more, please contact: admin@insightretreatcenter.org

Resident Volunteers: Several practitioners live at IRC for extended periods assisting with the various tasks needed to support the Center. Through their service and in living in a dedicated spiritual community, they have an opportunity to immerse themselves in retreat practice and also broaden the integration of their practice in daily life.

See other volunteering opportunities in the Volunteering section inside.



IRC Email List

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

Listening to Dharma Talks on Retreat

by Gil Fronsdal

The daily Dharma talk is an important part of insight meditation retreats, especially if one listens with mindfulness, focus, and a clear idea of one's purpose for listening. It's possible to listen to a talk with the same dedication given to sitting and walking meditation. This can cultivate a receptivity that brings many benefits beyond that of the instruction, understanding, encouragement, or inspiration a talk may provide.

That it is useful to cultivate a receptive state of mind when listening to a Dharma talk was well known in ancient times. Texts describe the Buddha as giving his most liberating teachings when his listeners were "ready, receptive, free from hindrances, uplifted and trusting." He understood this to be important enough that he sometimes focused on getting the audience ready and receptive by first offering teachings which "inspired and gladdened" them.

Because the benefits of a Dharma talk increase when we are receptive, it is useful to prepare for a talk beforehand. Meditating shortly before a talk can calm any agitation or preoccupation that hinders listening. Being seated well before the talk begins gives time to assume a posture conducive to listening, perhaps sitting in a way that is both comfortable and attentive. It allows time for the body to settle in, the mind to become quiet, and for us to assume an attitude of interest and receptivity.

Being receptive to hearing a talk is more than being willing to listen; it is also a willingness to learn something new and to be changed by what one hears.

Considering our intention and purpose for listening is also useful for becoming ready and receptive for a talk. This is especially helpful if our usual way of listening is dominated by preferences about what we like, dislike, agree with or disagree with. Bringing intention to how we listen to a talk can also correct for any excessively passive receptivity where there is no personal engagement or choice in how to listen. Dharma talks are not events in which we settle back and let someone else entertain us. The receptivity of listening to a talk is an active receptivity.

A common approach to listening to a talk is to focus on learning what is being taught. For this purpose we may bring with us a notebook to write down teachings that seem particularly useful to review later. Or we may choose to listen attentively enough to remember the content, recognize the structure and logic of the talk, and actively reflect on what we hear. This can be augmented by repeating or narrating in our own minds what we are hearing.

At times we may decide to allow the words to wash through us without lingering in thought about what we are hearing. This strategy works well if we listen with an open awareness while staying mindful in the body, as if we were listening through the body. Trusting that our mind will take in and remember whatever teachings are important for us at that time can help with this.

Sometimes, how the teacher is while giving a talk can be a greater teaching than what the teacher says. The teacher may convey a sense of calm, confidence, enthusiasm, compassion, or freedom that can be both inspiring and instructive. This may give us a direct experience of the point of what is being taught. When this is the case we can decide to focus on feeling, sensing, or attuning ourselves to the way the teacher teaches or to the quality of mind the teacher manifests.

Another option is to listen as a meditation practice focused on the words spoken and the voice speaking. Sometimes the tone, rhythm, and pace of a talk can help our mind become still, quiet, and concentrated. Some meditators find themselves more concentrated listening to a talk than in any other circumstances, including in meditation. Such concentration states can be particularly effective opportunities for certain teachings to penetrate deep into the mind, perhaps catalyzing significant insight.

Among the many ways of listening to a talk, occasionally, and only occasionally, we can decide to use a talk as a break from focusing on exhausting personal issues or meditation challenges. As a wholesome distraction, the talk may provide rest, relaxation, and a reset

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

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.

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

Schedule of Retreats 2017–2018

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.

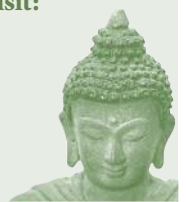
2017

- **August 17–20** Insight Retreat for People in their 20s and 30s with Max Erdstein and Matthew Brensilver
- **October 6–9** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Shelley Gault
- **October 15–28** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, assisted by Ines Freedman (retreat full, apply for waitlist)
- **November 5–8** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Ruth King (registration opens 8/5)
- **November 12–19** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, Mel Weitsman and Max Erdstein
- **November 28–December 3** Insight Retreat with Bob Stahl, Bruce Hyman, Jill Hyman, Karen Zelin (registration opens 7/28)
- **December 10–17** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella (registration opens 8/10)

2018

- **January 21–February 4** Experienced Students Retreat in the Tradition of Mahasi Sayadaw with Gil Fronsdal and Brian Lesage (registration opens 8/21/17)
- **February 24–March 3** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, Jill Shepherd, and Oren Sofer (registration opens 10/24/17)
- **March 18–25** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Matthew Brensilver (registration opens 11/18/17)
- **March 29–April 1** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Lori Wong (registration opens 12/29/17)
- **April 8–15** Metta Retreat with Nikki Mirghafori and Donald Rothberg (registration opens 12/8/17)
- **April 20–29** Awareness and Wisdom Retreat with Andrea Fella and Alexis Santos (registration opens 12/20/17)
- **May 13–20** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Paul Haller (registration opens 1/13/18)

To register, for schedule changes, additions and more, visit:
insightretreatcenter.org/retreats/
or email info@insightretreatcenter.org



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

Work Days: To help take care of IRC, please join us on the following Work Days: 2017: 9/2, 10/14, 11/11, 12/9 • 2018: 1/20, 2/17, 3/10 Register on the website Work Day page or go to bit.ly/IRCworkday. Questions: Eileen: messinaeileen@gmail.com, 650/269-5801.

Garden Days: In addition to our scheduled work days, volunteers are needed to help with gardening and landscaping projects at other times. Please email us at gardening@insightretreatcenter.org if you'd like to offer your time.

Service Leaders: Though most of the work of running our retreats is shared by all the participants in the 45-minute time period devoted to work meditation, the system also depends on the five Service Leaders, experienced retreat practitioners 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 about 3 hours each day) they still spend most of the day in formal meditation.

People who qualify to be service leaders can sign up to serve as cooks or managers as frequently as it works for them. If interested, please fill out a Volunteer Form on the website or contact admin@insightretreatcenter.org.

Resident Volunteers: See front page

Listening to Dharma Talks, cont'd

that refreshes us to reengage with the meditation practice of the retreat.

Two primary factors help us decide what approach we can take when listening to a Dharma talk. One factor is the purpose that the teacher has for giving the talk. The second is what is most suitable for ourselves and our practice at the time of the talk. Sometimes it is good to listen in a way that is receptive to the teacher's purpose. Other times it is best to listen in a way that supports the personal circumstances of our own practice and purpose at the time of the talk. Ideally we would find a good way to match the purpose of the teacher with our own circumstances as a meditator.

Teachers choose from many purposes when they teach. Sometimes their intention is to provide useful instruction for a particular phase of the retreat. Sometimes it is to provide encouragement and inspiration for the practice. Other times Dharma talks are given to place the practice in contexts or to provide perspectives that help meditators with the many changing experiences, challenges, and joys of retreat practice. At times, teachers tell stories that not only illustrate teachings but also move us emotionally in ways which let the teachings penetrate deeper or help us switch our moods to ones that are more supportive of our retreat practice. Occasionally, teachers may use a Dharma talk to model or transmit a way of being rather than imparting particular teachings. And sometimes all of these purposes can be present in a single Dharma talk.

If we can recognize the teacher's purpose we then have the option to adjust ourselves accordingly. With instructions, we can focus on learning and remembering them. When practical teachings and perspectives are offered we can reflect on when and how these may be useful for us. When a story is being told we might allow ourselves to get absorbed in the story. When we recognize that we can receive the most learning and inspiration from how a teacher is, we can turn our attention to hearing, observing, or feeling the teacher's quality of being more than reflecting on what is being spoken about.

We can also consider our own personal circumstances in deciding how to listen to a talk. If we are in need of instruction, encouragement, inspiration, or new perspectives, we can decide to listen attentively to what is being said. If our own meditation practice has a lot of momentum or if some personal challenge is unfolding in significant ways we may choose to continue with our practice without paying attention to the particular content of the talk. If it seems we are getting concentrated in listening to the talk we might give ourselves over to this concentrated listening, allowing the mind to get more and more settled and calm. If personal qualities of the teacher are meaningful, we might let this register deeply.

Over time, people who go on retreats will learn a range of ways listening to Dharma talks. The more approaches to listening we cultivate, the more we can benefit from the many dimensions of Dharma talks. When we enter into the practice of listening to Dharma talks, we join the millions of people for whom, for 2500 years, the primary contact with Buddhism has been through listening to Dharma talks. Our sincere wish to live a good life can build on the sincerity of those whose listening has kept the teachings alive since the time of the Buddha.

Your Questions About Practice

You are warmly invited to send your questions relating to retreat practice to news@insightretreatcenter.org. A teacher will choose one or two to respond to in each edition of the newsletter.

Can you talk about remorse and regret in the context of our practice?

Gil Fronsdal responds: For me there's a difference between regret and remorse. I see remorse as a feeling of sadness or heavy-heartedness that comes along with wishing I hadn't done something. If, in fact, one has harmed oneself or someone else, it is healthy to have some remorse. It is not healthy to ignore the fact that we have intentionally or unintentionally caused harm. Understanding the effect or impact we have had, saying we're sorry, and making any amends or personal changes that are appropriate is useful. I call that remorse. Remorse is forward-looking when we consider how to do better in the future.

I reserve the word "regret" when remorse is weighed down with self-criticism, shame, and anger. Regret is a hindrance. In fact, it is paired up with restlessness to be the fourth of the five hindrances: "restlessness and regret." Similar to the way Buddhism considers guilt an unhelpful emotion, regret is considered unhelpful when it keeps us living in the past with self-criticism. When regret occurs it is helpful to be mindful of it with compassion and equanimity. In a sense we use mindfulness to pull away from being stuck in the regret. With compassion, calm, and wisdom we can spend some time noticing the kinds of thinking that keep us stuck in regret. We can consider what we might let go. And if we can let go of over-identification and attachment, the regret may transform into remorse.

Remorse facilitates learning, growth and healing. It's a step toward further growth to understand, "It's unfortunate that I did that, I don't feel good about it." When we bring our mindfulness to remorse we can learn to not be troubled by the discomfort that accompanies it. When we recognize remorse, it can be useful to consider clearly what happened and then to resolve to do better in the future. We might also consider whether it is appropriate to forgive ourselves or to apologize to someone else. When we practice with remorse this way it is not likely to be a hindrance as we continue to walk the path of liberation.

Roshi

*I never really understood
what he said
but every now and then
I find myself
barking with the dog
or bending with the irises
or helping out
in other little ways*

—Leonard Cohen

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.

Understanding Delusion

by Andrea Fella

Buddhism teaches us that suffering and unskillful states of mind arise out of three basic roots: greed, aversion and delusion. While greed and aversion are often fairly easy to recognize in our experience, delusion is much harder to recognize! Learning about some of the different ways that delusion happens can help us recognize it.

One form of delusion happens when we are disconnected from experience; we could say this kind is an absence of mindfulness. We might experience this as being lost in thought, or caught by sleepiness or restlessness.

One of the easiest ways to get familiar with this form of delusion is in the moment mindfulness returns after the mind has wandered. In that moment there can be a lingering sense of what it was like a moment before, when the mind was disconnected, caught, or absorbed in its world of thought. This lingering sense gives us a little taste of what this form of delusion feels like. Many different states of mind can have this disconnected quality: sleepiness, restlessness, dullness, spacing out, or daydreaming, to name a few. But because it is possible to recognize these states with mindfulness, they are not fundamentally delusional. We could say we are habitually disconnected in these states. In becoming mindful of sleepiness or spacing out there is no longer disconnection!

Another form of delusion happens when we are unaware of views, beliefs, opinions, agendas, or biases. Many of these unseen biases are based on personal, familial, and social or cultural conditioning. We all have views about the world, other people, and ourselves. Often they are completely subconscious; we may not even know we have a view: we simply believe the view to be true. In this form of delusion, we can be aware even as we are unaware of biases that influence awareness. We often meet experience through an unseen perspective that influences what we take in to experience, and how we take it in.

One form of this kind of delusion relates to what psychologists call selective attention. Our minds have the capacity to focus selectively on something and ignore other experience. This is a useful function of our minds, helping them stay on the task at hand. Yet quite often when we are focused we are unaware that our minds are ignoring other experience, and believe that our senses are accurately taking in what is happening around us.

In one study on selective attention, participants were asked to watch a video in which people tossed a basketball to each other; they were asked to count the number of times the ball passed between the players in white jerseys. Most could do this accurately. However, most participants did not see a person in a gorilla suit walk through the basketball players. This not-seeing is form of selective attention, and is a natural function of our minds. However, when told about the person in a gorilla suit, and shown the video again, some participants denied that it was the same video! This is delusion, the belief that our senses take in the world in an accurate way.

Some beliefs or agendas, if made conscious, are easy enough to see through. For example, once participants are told there is a gorilla in the video, it is hard to not see the gorilla! But some of our views are so deeply entrenched that it is hard to see them as views, and it is difficult to see evidence to the contrary. Deeply entrenched views like this can create real suffering in the world.

For example, a pervasive view in American culture is “America is the land of opportunity. If you work hard enough you can achieve your goals.” This view denies differences of circumstance, opportunity and of oppression. It leads to a delusion in the dominant white culture that can’t see the way cultural systems give invisible advantages to white people, and corresponding disadvantages to people of color. This view creates deep suffering in our society.

Due to views, beliefs, biases, or agendas, our minds take in certain experiences and not others. We may not be able to prevent this, and yet we can become aware that our minds are influenced by such views. One way to open to this is through curiosity about beliefs, especially when we are struggling. We can ask ourselves: “What is being believed right now?” This simple practice can begin to expose subconscious views. Only when views become conscious can we begin to recognize ways they might be biasing our experience.

A third form of delusion could be called human delusion: deeply held views that human beings share. This form of delusion manifests as three basic misunderstandings: we tend to take what is impermanent to be permanent, to take what is unreliable as a reliable place to find happiness, and to take what is not self to be self. This is the most insidious form of delusion: it is especially hard to see through because largely we all share these views.

As with personally conditioned views, we can be aware and mindful, and still completely unaware that these views are distorting how we meet and relate to our experience. Meeting experience through these powerful filters we do not even question the beliefs that underlie them.

Mindfulness can help us explore these human delusions: but rather than trying to adopt a view of experience as impermanent, unreliable, and not self, instead be curious about what seems to be permanent or stable, explore what seems to be reliable, and investigate what feels like “I”, “me” or “mine.” Investigating in that way, the underlying distorted perspectives start to reveal themselves.

The more curious we are about how delusion works, the more we can actually recognize delusion, in the moment, as it happens, particularly as we become aware of belief. Seeing delusion working begins to free us from delusion.

Andrea recently offered a multi-week series on the topic of delusion. It is available at: <http://bit.ly/2t371Dn>

Welcoming Back Mel Weitsman

Sojun Mel Weitsman was one of the earliest western students of Suzuki Roshi, beginning his studies at San Francisco Zen Center in 1964. In 1967, Roshi asked him to go across the bay to Berkeley to lead the zendo there. Ordained as resident priest in 1968 and given dharma transmission in 1984, Mel has served as Abbot of Berkeley Zen Center (berkeleyzencenter.org) for over 32 years. He’ll be teaching a week-long retreat at IRC with Gil and Max Erdstein for the second time November 12–19. Mel has been an important teacher for both Max and Gil, and in 1995 Gil received Dharma Transmission in the Soto Zen lineage of Suzuki Roshi from him. We are very pleased that he is returning to teach again at IRC.
