



# Insight Retreat Center

## NEWSLETTER

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### Our Retreat Center Needs a New Well

IRC depends on well water and we now need a new well! Due to the lowering of the water table, our well output has decreased significantly and we now need a much deeper well. This unanticipated project is estimated to cost about \$50,000. Donations toward this expense will go a long way in helping maintain the financial stability and health of our retreat center.

We are very grateful for the generosity of all those who have contributed! We have raised \$37,500 so far. If you are inspired to contribute, it will support retreatants for many years to come!

**Donate By Check:** Make check out to IRC, write "Well" in the memo. Mail to:

Insight Retreat Center  
108 Birch St  
Redwood City, CA 94062

**Donate Online:**

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

Please indicate it's for the "Well"

Questions? Please email  
[admin@insightretreatcenter.org](mailto:admin@insightretreatcenter.org)

### 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](mailto:admin@insightretreatcenter.org)

## Dharma Service on Retreats

Gil Fronsdal

Many people are first motivated to participate in meditation retreats in order to deepen their own meditation practice or to address their personal suffering. At some point, this motivation can transform into a growing interest in supporting others to similarly deepen their practice and overcome their suffering. At this point, one may begin to practice for the benefit of others, not just for oneself. This expansion of one's motivation is often a natural outgrowth of Buddhist practice, as self-preoccupation lessens and one's capacity for empathy and generosity increases. Because they are intimately interrelated, the welfare of others can be seen as being as important as one's own welfare. In fact, the two can grow together in mutual support: as we benefit others, we are benefited, and as we are benefited, we benefit others. This is known as the "Dharma of mutual benefit."

Practicing for the benefit of others can take many forms. It can involve a dedication to mature further along the path of liberation so we become kinder, freer, wiser, and more generous people. It can also take the form of actively supporting others in their practice. When this support is offered through our time and personal labors, it is called "Dharma service."

Dharma service is central to meditation retreats at the Insight Retreat Center. Every morning all retreatants participate in a 20-minute period of "Sangha Service" where much of the basic cleaning of the center occurs. As the name implies, this cleaning is service offered to the retreat community. Dharma service is also how the registration, cooking, managing, and the many other larger operations of retreats are accomplished. Those who do this work provide the opportunity for others to benefit from retreat practice. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, Dharma service infuses a retreat with goodness, generosity and compassion that greatly support the deep inner work of meditation. It shows what is possible when self-centeredness and fear no longer dominate one's life.

Dharma service is as much about serving one's fellow retreatants as it is about getting the work done. It is work suffused with the good

intentions of those doing the work. Retreatants can often feel this goodness and so be inspired in their retreat practice. For those offering service, the work brings joy both in providing an outlet for one's goodwill and care, and in knowing one is benefiting others. Offering Dharma service so others may engage in Dharma practice is one of the most rewarding activities one can do.

Sometimes Dharma service on retreats is inspired by the wish to offer something back for the benefits one has received. It is an expression of the saying, "gratitude begets generosity." When expressed, gratitude has a chance to grow into its full potential as a nourishing and calming force.

Sometimes Dharma service is an opportunity to bring one's practice to activities that are as valuable for spiritual growth as meditation practice. Certainly, the service work one does and the interpersonal contacts it entails are a rich area for Dharma practice. While both the work done and the interactions we may have while doing it may be similar to what occurs in daily life, because they occur on retreat, there is a much greater ability to find the Dharma in the midst of Dharma service. This can bring great insights and doorways to inner freedom, including when our practice is applied to any personal and interpersonal challenges that may arise with the service work. In this way, Dharma service may allow us to grow in ways that do not normally happen in meditation. When we offer Dharma service on retreat, it expands the practice potential of the retreat. Dharma practice is enhanced through service.

One benefit of engaging in some of the more responsible forms of Dharma service is having greater contact with the teachers of a retreat. Cooks, managers and teachers may have regular conversations and meetings about work and retreat issues. In this way these retreatants and the teachers get to know each other in wider ways than when one is an ordinary participant in a retreat. Teachers can be inspired by the example of generosity and mindfulness they see in the cooks and man-

*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 2018 ~ 2019

**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.

### 2018

- **December 9-16** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Andrea Fella (registration opens 8/9/18)

### 2019

- **January 27–February 3** Insight Retreat for Experienced Students with Gil Fronsdal and Adrienne Ross (registration opens 9/27/18)
- **February 15–18** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Max Erdstein (registration opens 11/15/18)
- **February 24–March 3** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, Tara Mulay and Andrea Castillo (registration opens 10/24/18)
- **March 10-17** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal, Bruni Dávila and Jozen Gibson (registration opens 11/10/18)
- **March 29–April 5** Mindfulness of Breathing: A Study and Practice Retreat for Experienced Students, with Bhikkhu Analayo, assisted by Max Erdstein (registration opens 11/25/18). *Please check that you meet the prerequisites for this retreat before applying*
- **April 12–21** Mindfulness and Wisdom Retreat with Andrea Fella and Alexis Santos (registration opens 12/12/18) A retreat in the style of Sayadaw U Tejaniya
- **May 12–19** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Ines Freedman (registration opens 1/12/19)
- **May 24–27** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Diana Clark (registration opens 2/24/19)
- **May 31–June 7** Insight Retreat with Sayadaw U Jagara and Nikki Mirghafori (registration opens 1/31/19)
- **June 19–23** LGBTQI Insight Retreat with John Martin and Teacher TBD (registration opens 2/19/19)
- **June 30–July 14** Mindfulness of Mind Retreat with Andrea Fella (registration opens 1/30/19)

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)



## 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:** To help take care of IRC, please join us on the following Work Days: **2018:** Aug 25, Sept 8, Oct 13, Nov 10, Dec 8 **2019:** Jan 12, Feb 23, Mar 23 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, volunteers are needed to help with gardening and landscaping projects at other times. Please email us at [gardening@insightretreatcenter.org](mailto: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](mailto: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.

## Dharma Service on Retreats, cont'd

agers. Furthermore, in becoming better acquainted with those offering service, the teachers can offer more personalized Dharma support. With more teacher contact, cooks and managers sometimes have unique opportunities to witness the insights, wisdom and compassion of the teachers. Along the lines of the saying, "Teachers teach more by how they are, than by what they say," those doing Dharma service often have frequent opportunities to witness how teachers conduct themselves, and so they can learn from witnessing the Dharma being enacted as much as from the Dharma being taught.

Just as we can practice meditation for an entire lifetime, so also can we do the work of Dharma service, when we bring as much mindfulness, ease, and liberating insight to doing service as we do to meditation. And as meditation reveals greater and greater dimensions of selflessness, so Dharma service is also a wonderful arena in which to discover and express this dimension in the rest of our lives. Selfless Dharma service can expand far beyond retreats; it can become what we offer the world wherever we go and whatever we do. In its full maturation, Dharma service is just service, and service is just life interacting with the deepest and most beautiful aspects of self and others.

## Your Questions About Practice

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

**Can you talk about the difference between "giving up" and "letting go"?**

**Gil Fronsdal responds:** In ordinary English usage "giving up" suggests a surrendering or ending something against one's wishes or one's choice. It often comes along with feeling discouraged or even despairing. In Buddhist practice, "letting go" is a choice based on understanding one will be better off by letting go and that "holding on" has stopped working or providing worthwhile benefits. One litmus test for determining the difference is that in letting go one feels better, lighter, perhaps even joyful. In fact, if one doesn't have some greater sense of well-being in letting go one has probably not let go fully or thoroughly; there probably remains something important that one can still let go, perhaps a subtle, unrecognized attachment. In the ordinary meaning of giving up there is no resulting sense of lightness, ease, or sense of well-being; there may even be a sense of failure, inadequacy, or resignation.

Letting go in daily life and in meditation should be done with wisdom and compassion. We can ask ourselves if we or others are really better off by our letting go. If not, and if no one is getting harmed, there may be no need to let go. Ideally, we only let go when it is beneficial and when we are ready to do so.

It seems that originally the English expression "giving up" referred to making an offering to an altar where one lifts up the offering. As such it is similar to the word sacrifice that originally meant, in Latin, "to make sacred." If we associate healthy "letting go" with this sacred "giving up", then it may be easier to appreciate how when letting go is done in appropriate, healthy ways it is one of the profound Dharma practices that takes us into the "sacred" dimension of Buddhist practice, i.e., awareness that is free of all clinging.

### IRC Email List

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

## Heart Sustenance in the IRC Kitchen

*Former Resident Volunteer Thina Ollier and Kitchen Mentor and Cook Rachel Casper share ways dharma service in the IRC kitchen supports them as they support retreatants.*

**Thina:** On my first retreats at IRC, my attention was drawn to the kitchen, glimpsing the cooks mindfully going about their tasks, their steps light, silent and slightly brisker than those in walking meditation. I wondered if kitchen practice could teach me stillness in action. Serving as Assistant Cook for IRC retreats, I get to live that question.

**Rachel:** It's often a source of great joy for me to practice with other volunteers in the IRC Kitchen. Besides providing nutritious meals during retreats, we experience something more akin to practice in everyday life, moving from meditation to a work environment and back, creating a bridge between retreat experience and being at home.

**Thina:** Each morning, with the Kitchen Mentor, Cook, and a stream of retreatants silently flowing in to do their jobs, we prepare lunch and a light supper for the community. Though cooking for 50 people appeared daunting at first, my anxiety was quickly relieved. Working as a team eased my mind, and the simple pacing of tasks eased my body.

**Rachel:** Equipment sometimes breaks and ovens are unpredictable, and so we get to see our reactions and work with problems in the moment. Confidence and trust develop.

The Lunch Cook job allows focus on a specific task, becoming a lovely meditation in itself. Within the guidance of the recipes cooks can be creative, aware of tastes and textures, colors and presentation. Expanding awareness to encompass the whole kitchen, the whole retreat center, the meditation hall, and keeping our actions mindful and loving; these are some ways working in the kitchen is helpful to all.

**Thina:** In action and interaction with others, I see my patterns play out, hear my fears, taste all the sauces my story-telling mind creates, and do not ask for more. The attention and care brought to every interaction—with knife, carrot, tofu, and the Kitchen Mentor and Cook with whom I share smiles, suggestions, advice, a few kind words or jokes. If love is paying attention, the opportunity to love is infinite in the IRC kitchen.

**Rachel:** Although it can be physically tiring to lift large pans and produce bins, a flow or dance sometimes develops so that we all work in such harmony that it doesn't feel like work at all. This is where joy is made manifest.

**Thina:** I feel profound gratitude for the chance to bring sustenance to the community during retreat time, receiving great sustenance by serving. Yes, it is sometimes possible to be still in action, and the IRC kitchen is a great place to begin training.



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# Agendas in Meditation

Andrea Fella

As we become more familiar with meditation, we might think we know how practice should unfold. We can begin to carry hidden agendas into our practice.

One such hidden agenda is that the mind needs to be in a certain state in order to meditate. There might be a belief, such as “good meditation has a certain quality, a certain clarity or precision.” Such a belief might be based on familiarity with some of the states that come with meditation.

On one retreat, after doing walking meditation, I was headed towards my room for sitting practice and noticed the mind trying to create a state without thought in order to put itself into a meditative state. Noticing that, immediately there was a recognition: “What is wrong with this state? Why not be mindful of this?!” And I discovered I had already become effortlessly mindful as I was aware of the experience. Recognizing this easeful mindfulness was enough; nothing more had to happen.

Sometimes we associate mindfulness with directing the attention, believing that if we can’t choose an object for our meditation, there is a problem. Difficulty choosing an experience to attend to can happen when the mind is in a low energy or dull state, when it might feel like a real struggle to direct the attention.

On another retreat, my mind was in a very low energy state. I was aware of the low energy, yet I was still trying to direct attention to particular aspects of experience. It was a struggle. At some point, I recognized a natural awareness of sounds and sights was present without any attempt to “do” it. Without choosing what to pay attention to, a very easy mindfulness was already happening.

At times, we may believe that “I’m too dull, or too sleepy, or too restless to meditate.” It may be hard to direct the attention to a particular object when the mind is in these states, yet perhaps it is possible to be aware of restlessness or dullness itself.

A familiar analogy describes mindfulness being like a mirror that reflects experience. In the analogy, the reflecting power of the mirror is not changed by what it reflects, does not depend on what it reflects. Similarly, the quality of mindfulness is not changed by what it is mindful of, does not depend on what it is mindful of. To carry the analogy one step further, think about that mirror in a room full of steam. When we look in the mirror to try to see ourselves, the image is fuzzy and obscured because of steam on the mirror. We might take a towel to clean the mirror so it can do its job—or more accurately, so the mirror can fulfill our agenda for it! The mirror is actually doing its job perfectly: it’s reflecting every drop of water on its surface. It’s just not doing the job that we want it to do, not reflecting what we want it to reflect. Similarly in certain states of mind, whether dullness or restlessness, mindfulness may not be meeting the experience that we would like it to meet, yet can still meet the experience of dullness or restlessness itself.

Another agenda around practice can be related to the way mindfulness and attention work together to explore our experience. There are so many different ways that these two work together, but perhaps we limit ourselves to familiar ways of being mindful. We might have an agenda that we need to keep the attention steady on one object. That is one way for the mind to attend to experience, but mindfulness and attention can also be felt as a steady flow from one experience to another. Or, it is possible that the attention might feel jumpy: it picks up on one experience, and then another experience bursts in. Attention and

mindfulness can be panoramic and broad, taking in a wide range of experience, or microscopic and narrow, taking in a specific experience.

In certain states of meditation, we might feel separated from an experience, as if we are looking at it from a distance, and in that separation there can be a sense of balance and freedom, of not being bound up in the experience. As a result of experiencing this balance, we might try to create a similar sense of separation, associating it with the sense of balance, and as a result believing “separation from experience is what meditation is supposed to feel like.” Yet there are times when the mind is balanced and attentive, and we don’t feel separated from the experience; we can feel that we are right inside of the experience. Our assumptions and agendas about what “good” practice is might keep us from recognizing a new way of being with experience.

Sometimes we can choose how mindfulness and attention are working, and sometimes we can’t. If there is struggle with the practice itself, and you have a sense that “I can’t meditate with this; I must be doing this wrong,” it might be interesting to recognize that an agenda or belief is functioning in the moment. If you are consciously aware of those agendas or beliefs, you probably have enough awareness to be mindful, in a simple way, of whatever is already happening! There might be the possibility of simply being with what is already unfolding, as it is.

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## Welcoming Bhikkhu Analayo

In March 2019 Bhikkhu Analayo will offer a practice and study retreat on mindfulness of breathing at IRC. Analayo is a German-born Theravadan monk and scholar who has done important comparisons of Pali and Chinese early texts of Buddhism. His scholarly work relates to both the theoretical and the practical aspects of meditation, and his books on the Satipatthana Sutta have become required reading for serious students of Vipassana meditation. His interests also include study of the place of women in Buddhist monasticism, and he is a supporter of full Bhikkhuni ordination for women in the Theravada tradition.

Ordained in Sri Lanka in 1995, Bhikkhu Analayo received his Ph.D. there and is presently professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hamburg in Germany. He is also core faculty at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Massachusetts, and teaches at retreat centers throughout the U.S., Europe and in Sri Lanka. His main teacher has been Bhikkhu Bodhi.

We feel very fortunate that Bhikkhu Analayo will be teaching this retreat at IRC next spring, his third visit to our Center. Here is a link to an interview with him that took place at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in 2015: [www.spiritrock.org/the-teachings/article-archive/interview-bhikkhu-analayo](http://www.spiritrock.org/the-teachings/article-archive/interview-bhikkhu-analayo).

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## 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).

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