



Insight Retreat Center

NEWSLETTER

Help Fund Renewable Energy for IRC

At a recent retreat, an extended power outage made it clear that our backup generator was not adequate for running retreats. When we bought IRC in 2010, we inherited an antiquated electrical system, and the time has come to upgrade it. Other recent power outages put such a strain on this 1947 diesel generator that it failed completely. And even when the generator was working, the building's electrical wiring did not power enough of the building to run retreats.

For 2020, we are committed to upgrading our electrical system so that 100% of our power comes from solar panels, with battery backup. We also plan to install a new backup generator fueled by propane, which is less polluting than diesel, and also to upgrade our electrical system so that retreats can continue to run smoothly when power outages occur.

We are enthusiastic about converting to renewable solar energy, and doubly enthusiastic knowing that the \$90,000 for the solar electric panel part of the project will dramatically reduce our \$10,000/year electric bill, hopefully to zero (sun permitting).

The estimated cost for this upgrading of IRC's electrical system is \$180,000. This will include:

- Solar Panels offering 100% coverage
- Battery Storage / Backup System
- Propane Generator
- Upgrading and Rewiring IRC's electrical system

\$17,000 has been raised so far. We'll proceed with the project as funds allow, doing as much as we can afford at one time.

Donations will fund needed equipment purchases and construction, and also help maintain the financial health of our retreat center. The cost savings from generating our own power will contribute to IRC's financial well-being for decades to come.

If you are inspired to contribute to renewable and secure energy for IRC, your gift will impact many people's ability to practice at IRC, and you will also be participating in the beautiful field of generosity that fuels IRC.

Thank you,
Gil Fronsdal

Donate By Check: Make check out to IRC, write "Renewables" in the memo. Mail to: Insight Retreat Center 108 Birch St Redwood City, CA 94062

Donate Online: insightretreatcenter.org/donations Please indicate it's for "Renewables"

Questions? Please email md@insightretreatcenter.org

Skillful Ways to Evaluate Your Practice: Part 1

Gil Fronsdal

This is the first of two articles describing skillful ways to evaluate your meditation practice. The second article will be published in the next edition of the newsletter, this coming summer. This first article will cover examining our motivation for practice and understanding oneself. These two you might consider evaluating the context for our practice. The second article will speak about understanding meditation instructions, aspects of balance, obstacles in practice, and insight, which are related more to the nuts and bolts activity of practice, and to its fruits.

After a person has been meditating for some time, it's important to evaluate how the practice is developing. Does it need adjustment or improvement? Is it the right practice to be doing? Some evaluation can be done on one's own, some with a teacher or with friends.

Taking a step back to assess our meditation needn't be seen as a difficult task. We are evaluators by nature, evaluating all the time, even if subconsciously. We decide what clothes to wear after considering a number of factors, not least of all the weather. Simply going for a walk requires a variety of considerations: How far will I walk? Do I need to prepare? If it is a long walk, do I need to pace myself? What is the best route, the best shoes?

In the same way, we can evaluate our practice. It's best to do this in a balanced way: not too little and not too much. We might not evaluate enough because of complacency, or excessive reliance on faith in the practice, or teachings that downplay the role of intelligent reflection. At other times, we might over-evaluate and tie ourselves up in knots.

Over-evaluating can undermine our progress, like the farmer who pulls out a corn seedling to see if it's growing yet. Imagine trying to learn to ride a bike while obsessing, "Am I doing this right? How do I look?" Sometimes we're looking for approval when we should be looking for balance, or expecting perfection when what is needed is lots of repeated practice.

Below are two factors of a useful list that can serve as a guide for evaluating your practice. While no two practitioners are exactly alike, these are general areas to check that can give you a good idea of where you are.

Motivation

First, ask yourself what your motivation is. Why are you practicing? Meditation practice flourishes when it is supported by clear intention. There are many answers to this question. Because no one else should decide for you what your goals are, it is useful to spend some time reflecting on this. I regularly advise people to

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More Ways to Donate

Donate Your Car: Make a tax-deductible donation of a vehicle you no longer want, working or not. The Center for Car Donations will handle pick-up and all paperwork needed, and IRC will receive 75% of the sale price. Tell them you want to donate to Insight Retreat Center. Call (855) 500-RIDE and a representative will schedule your pick-up appointment and guide you through the process.

Amazon Smile: a simple and automatic way for you to support IRC every time you shop through Amazon, at no cost to you. You can find a sign-up link on this page of the IRC website, or use the Amazon Search link on our Donate and IMC's Recommended Books pages.

Stock Transfer Gift: Follow the instructions available on the website to initiate a stock gift for IRC.

Matching Gift from Employer: If your company has a matching gift program, ask them for its matching gift form. Our legal name is "Insight Meditation Center of the Mid-Peninsula." We are a 501(c)(3) organization and our tax ID number is 77-0450217. Please send your donation and the matching gift form to Insight Meditation Center, 108 Birch St, Redwood City, CA, 94062.

IRC Email List

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

Schedule of Retreats

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.

- **May 22–25** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Nikki Mirghafori (reg opens 2/22)
- **Jun 4–7** Insight Retreat with Ines Freedman and Max Erdstein (reg opens 3/4)
- **Jun 17–21** LGBTQI Insight Retreat with bruni dávila and John Martin (reg opens 2/17)
- **Jun 27–Jul 3** Insight Retreat in Spanish with Andrea Castillo and bruni dávila (reg opens 2/27)
- **Jul 18–Aug 1** Mindfulness of Mind Retreat for Experienced Students with Andrea Fella. Prerequisites: at least four seven-day vipassana retreats, including at least two weeks in the style of Sayadaw U Tejaniya, and teacher permission. (reg opens 2/18)
- **Aug 12–16** Insight Retreat with Andrea Fella and Pamela Weiss (reg opens 4/12)
- **Aug 27–30** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal assisted by Diana Clark and others TBD (reg opens 5/27)
- **Sep 4–7** Insight Retreat with Max Erdstein and Ines Freedman (reg opens 6/4)
- **Sep 13–27** Experienced Students Retreat with Gil Fronsdal. Prerequisite: at least four seven day or longer silent vipassana retreats (reg opens 4/13)
- **Oct 1–4** Insight Retreat with Max Erdstein and Joanna Hardy (reg opens 7/1)
- **Oct 9–12** IRC Offsite Retreat in Spanish (*Retiro Residencial en Español*) at Hidden Villa with bruni dávila and David Lorey (reg opens 7/9)
- **Oct 11–18** Insight Retreat with Max Erdstein and Matthew Brensilver (reg opens 6/11)
- **Oct 25–Nov 1** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Paul Haller (reg opens 6/25)
- **Oct 29–Nov 1** IRC Offsite at Hidden Villa Metta Meditation Retreat with Diana Clark and Nikki Mirghafori (reg opens 6/29)
- **Nov 14–21** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Max Erdstein (reg opens 7/14)
- **Dec 6–13** Insight Retreat with Gil Fronsdal and Matthew Brensilver (reg opens 8/6)
- **Dec 16–20** Insight Santa Cruz Retreat at IRC with Bob Stahl and Others TBD (reg opens 8/16)

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: Feb 15, Mar 14, Apr 25, May 30, Jul 12 (Sunday), Aug 8. Register on the website Work Day page or go to bit.ly/IRCworkday. For info contact workday@insightretreatcenter.org, or call 831/430-9198.

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: 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. Contact newrvadmin@insightretreatcenter.org.

Skillful Ways, cont'd

discover what their deepest intention is. What do they really want? What is the heart's deepest wish? The practice can have greater value when it is clearly connected to what is most important to us.

At times our intention is well-articulated; at other times it may not be obvious. Chances are you've experienced both of these ways. Sometimes, early on, I intuitively knew I wanted to sit, but I didn't know why. I just knew there was a strong pull towards practice. At other times, the reason was clear: I knew I suffered and that I wanted to be free of my suffering. Sometimes I was aware of conventional suffering; sometimes, although free of conventional suffering, I had a clear insight that there was a deep, inner dissatisfaction, that suffering was at the core of the way my mind worked. I wanted to somehow find it, touch it, and understand it. Meditation was the only route I knew to reach this core, and I was highly motivated to do so.

Our motivation can be to awaken and cultivate beautiful qualities of the heart and mind—love, peace, courage, compassion, insight, understanding, the pursuit of the truth and liberation. Developing these qualities does not need to be for oneself. Sometimes my primary motivation to practice has been not for my own sake but for other people. In fact, I believe that if you practice only for yourself, you are unlikely to sustain your motivation over many years. A significant way to fuel meditation practice is to do it with the wish that it will somehow benefit others as well as yourself.

We all have long-term and short-term motivations. Experiences of realization may be worthy long-term goals, but in the short term modest aims such as cultivating small but noticeable improvements in concentration, non-distraction, compassion, or patience can be useful. We can also become aware of small, immediate movements toward letting go and experiencing freedom. I have found there is a beautiful way in which practicing with immediate, realistic goals allows for a steady maturing into

some of the more developed areas of meditation practice.

It's also important to discern whether your aspiration is appropriate for you given your present life situation. If because of time limitations, opportunities, abilities, or disposition the goals you have set for yourself are unrealistic, the primary result will be frustration, a state counterproductive to a practice meant to increase freedom from suffering. While grand aspirations can inspire us – there is no need to be afraid of our heart's deepest wish – it is important to consider which steps are realistic at each step along the way. For example, if our body carries a lot of tension, it may be important first to focus meditation on deep physical relaxation. Or, if our minds are easily distracted, cultivating mental discipline might be needed before hoping for enlightenment.

Understand Yourself

While motivation is important, does your aspiration match who you are? You might read a book that convinces you that you should do A, B, and C, but those may not suit your life at this time. Or maybe what your teacher is telling you is not a fit. For instance, if we should be focusing on our personal ethics, it may not be appropriate to spend a lot of time with a teaching that emphasizes ultimate liberation.

Do you know how you learn best? Some people learn best by reading, others by listening, others by watching, and others by doing. Some do best when there is discipline and structure. Others learn best through playfulness, self-direction, or intuitive experimentation. Some people find reading and studying helpful; others may not. Extroverts might find it helpful to discuss their meditation with friends; introverts may find they work best when they have quiet time for personal reflection. Knowing yourself in these ways makes it more likely you'll find an approach to meditation that suits you. Since it is important not to tailor a meditation practice around personal preferences and attachments, it can be useful to ask a meditation teacher or another meditation practitioner for feedback about your approach to the practice.

A Question from a Retreat

You are warmly invited to send your questions relating to retreat practice to news@insightretreatcenter.org.

Question: I'd like some advice on how to deal with debilitating fear. I have some painful changes coming up and need to do a lot to prepare, and there is this fear. I sit and breathe into it, and it's not working very well for me right now.

Gil Fronsdal responds: Certainly, this is a situation that can use lots of compassion, our own or the support of another person. And whether compassion is available or not, one important aspect of our practice is that instead of "dealing with" our fear, instead we meet it, get to know it. Meet it with your whole body, letting your body feel it. Meet it with the full clarity of recognition, recognizing it repeatedly as "this is the experience of fear." One of the things I'm hoping people learn to do in the mindfulness practice is to sit with what arises in a very honest way. Don't run away from it, don't get worried or get angry about being

afraid. What I encourage is to not give into those secondary things—just sit with fear itself, allow it without being for or against it. This is a powerful thing to do, and it is a way to become stronger than your fear. You don't get stronger than your fear by "dealing with it" and finding solutions by meditating or going to therapy to make it go away. There's something very powerful about confronting it, allowing it, and being with it until we can be simultaneously afraid and then free enough to do what our life requires of us.

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The Impulses that Move Us

Andrea Fella

As mindfulness becomes steadier, we can begin to see the impulses that move and motivate us: mental urges to take action. Every action of body, speech, or mind is preceded by a such an impulse, which is subtle, yet can be noticed. We can know we're going to move before we move. We can know we're going to speak before we speak. We can even know we're going to think before we think.

We sometimes call this impulse an intention; yet this intention is not necessarily a conscious choice. It may be connected to a conscious choice in the moment but it also might simply be conditioned with no connection to a conscious thought. For example, we might sit for a while and thirst arises, conditioning the desire to relieve thirst, conditioning the intention get up and get some water. In this process a conscious choice to get up might have happened, or it might not! Sometimes we can see that intentions simply arise; it's just a process unfolding. As mindfulness becomes more steady and more simple, we can see this conditioned process.

In meditation, intention may be easiest to see in relation to body movements like lifting a hand or straightening the spine. Before the movement happens, it's possible to recognize a subtle impulse: you know you're going to move before you move. Sometimes we can also see an intention connected to not moving: an intention to keep our eyes closed or hold our bodies still. The impulse is a subtle aspect of mind that can be noticed, yet often it is not something to try to see: in fact, trying to see it might get in the way of the seeing!

Intentions don't arise randomly. They are conditioned, and they arise with a motivation: a reason we want to act. Sometimes a motivation can be based in greed, aversion, or delusion. How

many times do we move with complete unawareness, delusion perhaps participating in the motivation? How many times do we move out of aversion, wanting to get away from an unpleasant experience? How many times do we move out of greed, wanting to have a pleasant experience? Wholesome mind states can also motivate action: wisdom motivates, love motivates, compassion motivates.

When we become aware of an intention to act before we act, sometimes we also become aware of the motivation accompanying the intention. If the motivation is based in greed, aversion or delusion, the awareness of it might allow us to simply witness the reactive motivation: open to it, relax, observe, allow, and learn about that motivation, without actually following through on it, simply watching it arise and pass. The mind observes this arising and passing and learns from it, which in turn strengthens intentions for mindfulness and wisdom.

Intention and motivation are intertwined with the cause and effect cycle of our experience, shaping our experience in each moment. We often strongly identify with intention. It feels like, "I am the one choosing, I am the one deciding, I am the one acting." As we become aware of the arising of an intention and the arising of the motivation accompanying the intention, we can begin to understand these choices are not-self, because we can see that no one decided for an intention to arise, it simply arose based on causes and conditions.

As awareness becomes steadier, it can become possible to notice intention and motivation, but it's not necessarily something to try to notice. Just continue practicing with a relaxed, allowing awareness, which can naturally begin to notice subtler experience such as intention.

IRC Offsite Retreats

Over the seven and a bit years since our first retreat here at IRC at the end of 2012, the number of retreats each year has grown, so that more participants can experience the deep practice silent retreat makes possible. But still the number of people who apply for retreats now far exceeds the space and time we have to accommodate them. Almost six thousand participants have attended retreat at IRC since November of 2012, but thousands more have not been able to because of space constraints. One way we are exploring to address the need for more retreat opportunities is by offering offsite retreats.

This year we are offering three retreats to be held in other venues. Max Erdstein will be teaching a retreat in May at Jikoji Zen Center in Los Gatos. David Lorey and bruni dávila will offer a retreat in Spanish in October at Hidden Villa in Los Altos Hills. Diana Clark and Nikki Mirghafori will also be offering a retreat at Hidden Villa, at the end of October. Both Jikoji and Hidden Villa are lovely venues that we used often before the purchase and development of IRC. These three offsite retreats will allow more people to participate in the culture of generosity and gratitude that is so deeply a part of IRC and IMC.

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 qualified Realtor. Carol will contribute her entire referral fee to our Retreat Center, and can serve as your consultant at no charge throughout the buying or selling process. She has helped facilitate this for sangha members in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and other Bay Area counties. If you have real estate questions or are thinking of purchasing or selling a home, please contact Carol at carolcollins888@gmail.com or 408/348-1385.