

## ***Exercises/excerpts from “Steps to Liberation—the Buddha’s Eightfold Path” by Gil Fronsdal***

*Journal Use: Here are some ideas/explorations/exercises suggested from the book by Gil Fronsdal—choose whichever options you’d like to explore; you may like to write down your observations as you go along, in your journal—or, you may want to collage, or draw a picture, or lay down some color, or all or none of the above; please feel free to use your journal in any way desired...*

### **Right View**

- Spend some time noticing the primary views, orientations, or beliefs you live by. What role do views have in your life? Which are beneficial, which are not?
- Explore the difference between ease and relaxation. Relaxation has more to do with lessening stress; ease has more to do with inner peace and harmony. Notice the small moments when you have a sense of ease.
- What range of beliefs do you have about liberation or awakening?
- How important is the possibility of reducing and ending suffering for you?

### **Right Intention**

- Give yourself some time to notice and reflect on the role of lust in your life. For this purpose, consider lust as any strong desire or compulsion for sensual pleasure of any kind. What forms are you most motivated by? How much time and/or money do you spend pursuing comfort, pleasure, sensual gratification? What benefits may be available to you if you let go of attachments you may have to sensual pleasure?
- Notice and reflect on the role of ill will and aversion in your life. How frequently are you aversive, condemning, indignant? Also reflect on your relationship to goodwill, kindness...how often do you have goodwill for others? Are you interested in having more goodwill? Look for opportunities to act compassionately. Do a loving-kindness meditation every day.

## **Right Speech**

Focus on what is happening in your body as you speak.

Focus on what is happening emotionally as you speak.

Focus on your motives...why are you saying what you're saying?

- When you're speaking, are you focused on your words? Are you paying attention to the people you're talking to? Now, keep your attention anchored in your body...notice how this affects you.
- Truthful speech has two parts—listening well and speaking honestly. First, devote yourself to listening more carefully than usual. As you listen, notice your inner dialogue? Are you rehearsing what you're going to say? Getting easily distracted? Spend time noticing what it's like when you're anything less than honest. Find someone you can talk to about the role of honesty in conversation.
- During conversations practice “pausing and relaxing” before you speak. Write about some conversations in which you emphasized saying things that were pleasing, heartwarming or meaningful and notice how they affected you.

## **Right Action**

- Do you have exceptions to the precept of not killing? Do you have justifications or rationales for when it is okay to kill people, animals, pests? What are they? In what situations are you committed to not killing or injuring? What motivates this commitment? \*see “Cultivating Compassion” which can be found in the Articles page of IMCs website ([insightmeditationcenter.org](http://insightmeditationcenter.org))
- Are there things you take that are not given? Are there situations in your life where you exert inappropriate authority over others, or coerce people to do things they don't want or take more of their time than offered? Are there any, even subtle areas, where you are liable to take what has not been given?
- Practicing Generosity: look for opportunities to give things, time, compliments, the benefit of doubt, or other acts of kindness. Compare the practice of abstaining from taking what is not given with the

practice of generosity. How were the challenges and benefits similar or different?

### **Right Livelihood**

- What we produce and what we consume: what work or activities do you engage in to provide you with financial or material support? What do you produce? (what services do you provide?) What is your relationship to what you produce/provide? Does it benefit others? Does it help you become a better person?
- What do you consume? What do you buy or spend time doing in order to meet your basic needs AND sustain your lifestyle? What motivates you? Does your consumption benefit others in any direct or indirect way? [Does it harm other beings?] Are your patterns of consumption aligned with the Noble Eightfold path—Right Actions? Please find a buddy to have a conversation with.

### **Right Effort**

- Preventing: Reflect on states of mind, trains of thought, desires, and intentions you commonly experience that you'd be better off without. In what appropriate ways can you avoid the circumstances that tend to bring them up? When you perceive a sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch that could trigger an unskillful mental state, recognize clearly what you're perceiving...avoid getting involved with unskillful reactions to what you're experiencing through your sense doors.
- Overcoming: When you are experiencing an unskillful mental state, what are your preferred ways of overcoming it, of causing it to go away?
- Arousing: List three emotional states that you think are worthwhile cultivating. What wise ways do you know for arousing these states and attitudes? When is it beneficial and when might it be counterproductive?
- Maintaining: What are some causes and conditions that lead to your losing touch with skillful means states? For instance, if you're calm, how do you lose that calm?...If you're feeling goodwill for others, what undermines it?

## Right Mindfulness

- Mindfulness of the body: Is it difficult for you to be aware of your body? How often do you practice mindfulness of the body? What lessons have you learned through careful attention to your physical experience?
- Mindfulness of Feeling Tones: Everything we experience falls into one of three “flavors.” Pleasant, unpleasant or neither pleasant or unpleasant. As you live your life, are you more affected by one of these three, or all equally? Which influences your behavior the most? Nourish your inner life and instead of doing activities that bring pleasure, do things that bring satisfaction, meaning, or happiness to your heart.
- Mindfulness of mental states: Mental states are the general moods of our minds. When we repeatedly think or intend the same thing, it can condition the general disposition or quality of the mind. With mindfulness we can become skilled at recognizing the mental state of our mind. Mental states tend to persist...what are the common mental states you experience? What causes them to arise...to persist...to pass away? What beliefs or stories do you tell yourself about your mental states?
- Mindfulness of mental processes: This is a wisdom practice because it involves understanding the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that either bring inner freedom or lead us to be caught up in attachment. What are some reasons you get attached or obsessed? What are some attachments that you understand so well that letting go is relatively easy? What are the benefits of this? What are some stronger attachments that you can only let go of with considerable effort? What are some things you cling to that you can't imagine being able to let go of? Spend some time focusing on the seven factors of awakening: Mindfulness, investigation, effort, joy, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. Try to cultivate one each day. Write it down and display it in a prominent place...keep it present. Which are easier? Which are harder? What are the benefits?

## Right Concentration

- Right Concentration prepares the mind for a deep understanding and profound letting go.
- The experience of Concentration: Recall times when you have been concentrated, either recently or long ago. Think about how it felt—physical sensations, mind state, energy or vitality...develop concentration in your meditation practice this week...keep the mind on one object.
- Concentration and Hindrances: becoming skilled in concentration includes developing wisdom about the hindrances to concentration. The five hindrances of desire, ill will, sloth, restlessness and regret, and doubt are often listed as the primary obstacles to peaceful concentration. Which of the five are most common for you? Reflect on how you can reduce their power and frequency. \*there is an article for each hindrance on the Articles page of IMC's website ([insightmeditationcenter.org](http://insightmeditationcenter.org))
- Concentration and Wisdom: The primary purpose of concentration is to facilitate deep insight and understanding. In general, have you understood things better when you were concentrated and calm? What does being concentrated teach you about the choices you can make in each moment that lead to being caught or being free?