



# Southern Insight

Newsletter of Southern Insight Meditation, Christchurch, New Zealand

Newsletter 70

August 2021

## UPCOMING EVENTS 2022

All retreats are suitable for both new and experienced meditators and are accessible to people of any or no religious affiliation. The cost of each retreat covers food and accommodation. Teachers receive donations.

These dates are for your calendar – registrations do not open for these until 3-5 months before the event.

**Summer Yatra**                      **Saturday, February 26<sup>th</sup> – Sunday, February 27<sup>th</sup>**  
**with Julie Downard**

Cost TBC

Venue: Woolshed Creek Hut, Mt Sommers

Julie Downard will be leading a “mini-Dharma Yatra weekend” – a walking practice that will take us into Canterbury high country wilderness. Designed not to be too physically taxing, we are looking forward to offering what will be a fresh form of practice to many people, though it has ancient and traditional roots.

Registrations will open in November 2021. See website for further information

[www.Southern-insight.org.nz](http://www.Southern-insight.org.nz)

**Winter retreat 2022–**                      **Saturday, June 4<sup>th</sup> (end of the day) – Saturday, June 11<sup>th</sup>**  
**with Jill Shepherd**

Cost \$320 (160) \* plus dana

Venue: Staveley Camp, Canterbury

We are delighted to confirm that we will offer a retreat in 2022 with Jill Shepherd. More about this retreat will be available in the New Year. See website for further information [www.Southern-insight.org.nz](http://www.Southern-insight.org.nz)

## Future SIM events in 2022/23

**In Summer 2023** – we will hold a Dharma Gathering – January 20<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> with invited teachers from both the Insight and Zen traditions.

**Registration for our retreats:** please always check [online](http://www.Southern-insight.org.nz/) at [www.Southern-insight.org.nz/](http://www.Southern-insight.org.nz/). Any problems registering, then please email us at [Southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com](mailto:Southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com).

*Southern Insight Meditation is a non-profit, non-sectarian group run by volunteers with the aim of making available the teachings and practice of Insight (Vipassana) Meditation through retreats, courses and talks*



**Heather's statue had more luck than Julie's in the recent snow and frost!**

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**Email:**

[southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com](mailto:southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com)

**Post:** 16 Ward Street, Christchurch

**Website:** <http://southern-insight.org.nz>

Kia ora koutou,

Welcome again to another SIM newsletter.

As you all know, the country is again fighting another outbreak of the pandemic. We hope that amongst this, you are all keeping well in mind and body. Times like these, where our semblance of normality disappears, can affect us all in various ways. Please allow yourselves some time to look after yourselves and be compassionate to others. Below there are details of our online Zoom Wednesday Sitting group. You are all welcome to join. Hopefully, we can all offer each other a sense of sangha and togetherness and support during this time.

Conversely, the weather has changed to Spring, and the blossoms and flowers are showing themselves after the winter. It is so much easier to see and revel in the joy and gratitude for our wonderful environment. We hope you all can spend some time purely enjoying the season (hay fever and allergies notwithstanding! 😊).

This time we have a collection of interesting articles including a piece from our 'Zoom sangha' and from two of our long-time teachers that hopefully offer you an invitation for reflection and enquiry. Subhana Barzarghi, our dear friend from Australia, has a piece reflecting on practice in a time of lockdown. Julie also presents thoughts she shared at the recent Half-Day retreat in Christchurch regarding Service as Practice.

Finally, please keep a lookout for news on upcoming events and changes. Depending on the changes in this Covid world, as I'm sure you will understand, there is always the possibility that we have to change some of our planned events. We will do our very best to keep you informed promptly if this becomes necessary. We most deeply wish you all the best health and outcomes in this world we live in.

John & Meg 😊

## About the teachers



**Di Robertson** has over 25 years of experience in insight meditation. She has taught beginners' courses

since 2000, has led a number of short retreats and co-taught longer retreats with senior teachers. She lives in Christchurch and is a co-founder and trustee of Southern Insight Meditation. Di also works as an ecologist and is a stepparent and grandparent.



**Julie Downard** has been practicing meditation since 1991 when living in England. She has practised intensively

with teachers in both Insight and Zen traditions in India, England, California, Australia, France, and New Zealand. Julie has been teaching retreats and Dharma Gatherings since 2007. She lives in Christchurch and is a co-founder and trustee of Southern Insight Meditation.



**Jeremy Logan** Jeremy has been involved in Insight Meditation since 1984, spending several years in the east and Europe learning and practicing meditation. He has been

teaching retreats throughout NZ since 1992. Jeremy currently lives in the Wairarapa, working as manager of a community counselling and family violence prevention centre and has a small private counselling practice.



**Jill Shepherd** began practicing insight meditation in 1999 and has lived and worked at several meditation centres and

monasteries in the US, Australia, England, and Thailand. She is a graduate of the IMS/Spirit Rock teacher training program in the US, under the guidance of Joseph Goldstein and Gil Fronsdal.

Jill currently divides her time between the USA, Australia, and New Zealand, teaching vipassana and brahmavihara retreats and offering ongoing study and practice groups focused on bringing the dharma into daily life. She also leads courses and non-residential workshops exploring the relational practice of [Insight Dialogue](#).

**A note on Dana:** you may notice that most of our retreats mention the word “dana”. The registration fees do not cover any payment to teachers for their teaching. They will receive only what you offer as dana. Dana is a gift by each person in the spirit of generosity to reciprocate the teachers' sharing of their depth of knowledge and expertise. The amount given is up to the giver.

*Continue to feel your steadiness and connectedness to the earth, as if you had taken the one seat in the center of life and opened yourself to an awareness of its dance.*

**Jack Kornfield – from “A Path with Heart”**

## **My long-awaited Aotearoa New Zealand Sangha**

Eleven years ago, I began living in Aotearoa, New Zealand. An exciting and very challenging time. Leaving Britain when you are over 50 years is not easy, but it felt then, and definitely feels now the right decision. I had spent the previous four years in Devon working as a volunteer and paid worker in Gaia House, an Insight Meditation retreat house. I missed my sangha. Whakatane is a wonderful small town, but there are no sitting groups and little interest in Theravadin Buddhism. Luckily I learnt about Te Moata from a teacher at Gaia, Yanai Postelnik and returned to retreats...but still no regular sangha...Until Covid.

There are so many hard, challenging effects of the pandemic, and yet there are some opportunities too. When I heard Southern Insight was bringing their weekly sitting group to zoom, I was so delighted. Suddenly each week, I could reflect on the dharma and sit and meet some friendly like-minded people. It felt such a privilege and made me realise what I had been missing all over again. It was amazing how quickly your board managed to sort out the tech and get this online zoom community running...much respect.

I was sad when after lockdown, of course, the community returned to the Zendo. The small group of us scattered across the country and abroad – hello to Yvonne in Sydney! – wanted to continue. Again, Southern Insight supported us; at first, once a month, now twice a month, we gather together. I have learnt Zoom tech...another useful new skill. I have even had the opportunity to lead the evening. It is such a special time on Wednesday evening when we can gather as our 'across New Zealand / Australia/UK community'. I feel so very fortunate to have a warm group to support me in learning more about the dharma and meditation.

Thank you SO much Southern Insight.

**Kate F Whakatane**

## **Zoom sitting group. Fortnightly Wednesdays**

As many of you are aware, during restrictions under Covid, the Christchurch sitting group met on Zoom and invited others to join from around the country. We were surprised how much connection we felt through the shared sitting time, dharma reflections and discussions in small breakout groups.

When Covid safety measures allow we will be back at our weekly face to face sitting group at the Zendo, but we continue to hold the Zoom sitting group, currently fortnightly on Wednesdays from 7:30-8:30.

Both sitting group formats are open to all and encourage us to keep the practice alive and integrated into our daily lives

**To join the sitting group mailing list,** email [southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com](mailto:southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com) with the words "sitting group updates" in the title.

**Di. R.** 😊

## **Lockdown practice...**

Seven weeks of lockdown in Sydney is getting tedious and restrictive, every day is Groundhog Day. Such tectonic plate shifts from how life used to be, my favourite café's that sold the best hot chocolate closed down, gallery openings - a thing of the past, movie houses all closed, picnic tables barred up with red tape. Then there is the signing in and out with QR codes at every shop. Who would think that QR codes would be the entry for a new way of life? Covid has shut down and sucked the culture and social life out of the city. Office towers are barely in use venues are hollowed out like giant empty seashells, the owners gone, moved house or died.

Still, I don't feel I can complain too much, living so close to the beautiful walking trails that meander through the bush and sandstone country around the Lane Cove River and National Park. I try to get outside every day, not just for some exercise, but to gaze into the great expanse of blue, to be



taken up by the horizon. To hear the birds and adore the twisted, tangled canopy of the angophora gums. Nature is a restorative refuge. The National Park and great north walk is only a 10min walk from out my back gate, down the gully, through the mangroves to the river's edge.

While most things have shifted, closed down or change in our urban environment, those old walking trails that hug the river banks, layered with crustaceans, have been there for thousands of years. Those trails hold imprints in the soft mud of footfalls from forgotten generations. Walking on Gadigal country opens up a deep time perspective. We are here, but for a blip in time. I am reminded of the Buddha's comment to Subhūti –

*Life is like a tiny drop of dew, or a bubble floating in a stream;  
Like a flash of lightning in a summer cloud,  
or a flickering lamp, an illusion, a phantom, or a dream."*

*This is how to contemplate our conditioned existence in this fleeting world.*

*And Oh what a dream it is! Let's treasure each other and every moment of this wild ride.*

**Subhana Barzarghi**

### ...about Bhikkhu Anālayo

Those at the recent half-day meditation retreat will know that Julie based some of her meditation instructions on the work of Bhikkhu Anālayo. Bhikkhu Anālayo is a German monk who studied with Bhikkhu Bodhi in Sri Lanka and has devoted his life to both meditation and scholarship. He is prominent in the field of comparative study of early Buddhist texts preserved by the various traditions, and this work informs his meditation instructions.

Here is some information about where you can learn more:

- This web page hosted by the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies contains various guided meditations and links to his publications.

<https://www.buddhinqury.org/resources/offerings-analayo/>

- The instructions that Julie presented are based on the guided Brahmavihāra and Emptiness meditations. The associated book *Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation*, Cambridge: Windhorse, 2015, can be downloaded from the link on the Publications page (most of his books become freely available a few years after publication).
- Bhikkhu Anālayo has also provided guided meditations (and books) on Satipaṭṭhāna Meditation (*Satipaṭṭhāna Meditation: A Practice Guide*) and Mindfulness of Breathing (*Mindfulness of Breathing: A Practice Guide and Translations*), and an excellent series of lectures and meditations on Mindfully Facing Climate Change.

There are many more technical articles, books, and lectures that you may like to explore. In addition to the above website, links to his talks can be found here:

<https://dharmafeed.org/teacher/439/> and <https://www.audiodharma.org/teacher/208/>

Also, this link here describes his lifestyle <https://www.buddhinqury.org/article/bhikkhu-analayo-and-mu-soeng-a-conversation-on-study-practice-and-monastic-life/>

**Mike R.**

### Service as Practice

It's a common idea that formal meditation coupled with mindfulness in daily life is what our practice is all about. And it's true that this is very much the core of our practice and that without it, we really don't have a practice. But this is also just one of a number of equally important aspects of practice. One I'd like to explore further today is service to the dharma, compassion in action.

The Buddha was really clear on the link between meditation practice and service, and there are stories in the suttas which illustrate

this, including a teaching on four types of persons (*Anguttara Nikaya*).

*'The first person assists neither themselves nor others. Better is the second type of person, who assists others but not themselves. The third type of person, better again, assists themselves but not others.'*

If that seems surprising, perhaps we can sense that unless we include ourselves in our practice, the help we give others may not come from a skilful place, or we may burn out.

*The fourth type of person assists both themselves and others.*

Even more important is aiding both oneself *and* others – because ultimately, the purpose of our practice is to benefit all. Training our mind enables us to be of real benefit to others because our practice helps us serve in a skilful way, rather than from our ego.

### **What is your practice?**

Take a moment to reflect on your own practice and what it has meant for you.

For me, it's been a rock in troubled times – when I'm struggling with life, I return to this – this moment, this sense of grounded embodiment, the breath coming and going, resting on this earth, just being here now, with whatever is arising, and embracing and allowing it to be just as it is. I can't think of anything in my life that has offered me more than this as a resource for facing the difficult, staying balanced in the face of it, and finding a way through that is skilful and kind.

And in the good times, practice has taken me to deeper levels of understanding, discoveries, insights into the true nature of things that have brought great joy and freedom, a sense of connection, love, kindness, and compassion for others and myself.

So I invite you to think about what your practice has meant for you. Something keeps you coming back; some sense of benefit.

Maybe this is something you'd wish for others to be able to access too.

At the start of our practice journey, we may come with a wish to alleviate our own suffering, to benefit ourselves, to learn, to understand, perhaps to transcend. And there's no doubt that practice does offer us benefit. But as we continue, our heart naturally opens to include the plight of others. Listening to the nightly news, we find our hearts pierced by the suffering as if it were our own friend, our own mother, our own child. Our heart's response is a wish to alleviate the suffering of others just as we want to alleviate our own.

When we have something we've found to be of great value in this way, the response of the loving heart is to want to share it. There's a saying that gratitude is the in-breath, and generosity is the out-breath. When we truly appreciate something, our natural response is to want to give. Our practice starts to shift from "what I can get" to "what can I give?" Practising to benefit ourselves is only half the practice.

Practice at the deepest level is not about improving things for ourselves – not about enhancing this sense of a 'somebody' who is going to be liberated and get enlightened. Ironically, it's this very self that we are liberated from and enlightened to the nature of. And that understanding's not so very far away – we get a glimpse of this, when the veils fall aside even for a moment, that sense of freeing, of softening, of the heart opening, of being larger, more spacious, more equanimous, steady, not being so caught in our experience.

When we truly understand this, the heart's response is to ask, 'how can I serve?' Our love for all beings and gratitude for what the dharma has given us is so strong that service is the natural response. The suffering of others is just as if our own back were aching.

While there are many things we could choose to serve, looking around the world today, we

might see that certain practices provide us with the nourishment we need to replenish ourselves, enabling us to keep serving and acting in the world. Dharma practice is one of these nourishing practices - it gives us the perspective to be able to hold the pain we feel when we encounter others doing harm. It uproots the very basis for many of the crises the world is facing – greed/wanting more – and leads us to the avoidance of hatred – and thereby to the only way we’re going to make it through, by working together instead of turning against each other. Dharma practice does this by waking us up from our ignorance. There is no greater thing we can serve.

### **Where can we offer service?**

So one place we can serve is in the retreat setting. Generally, on a retreat, our practice takes the form of gradually expanding our awareness out further and further – we start with what’s easy to be with, breath, body, and then when the mind is a little more settled, we extend to include sound, difficult sensations (pain), feelings, and then mind – thoughts, stories, ideas, opinions. Each step comes as our capacity to be with our experience increases. And we come to the end of the retreat practising choiceless awareness, allowing the mind to go where it will, able to stay present with it.

We add in some physical tasks to develop mindfulness around during the work period. We might engage in some speaking practice towards the end of the retreat. Then we go home and try to cope with an onslaught of experience which includes relating to others, working, driving, planning, managing our finances, and caring for others – all of which are also practice. Most of us struggle with this transition.

On retreat, the natural extension of our inner practice is to include more and more of this external input while still in a retreat setting by taking on a role that involves some aspect of service. Cooking on retreat – leading a team of yogis in the kitchen. Managing a retreat - holding the space for everyone. Both of these

bring in all of the activities above. We can have the idea that if we do a service role on retreat, we’re somehow missing the retreat, but that’s just not true. We’re simply having a different kind of retreat – you might even think of it as the advanced version.

One friend, a long-time practitioner of dharma, was reflecting recently on her memories of serving on retreats, managing and cooking, and commented, “how much I learnt in those roles, doing daily life tasks in space that’s held for hearing teachings, seeing my patterns coming up – it was a precious place to learn and reflect.”

If you’ve been on three or four weeklong retreats and you haven’t been on a retreat in a service role yet, then you might really be missing out in your practice.

### **Service and sangha**

A key thing about service to the dharma is that it is about joining the community. When we start serving is when we truly become part of the sangha, the community of practitioners who not only practice, but take care of each other, take care of each other’s practice, and support each other’s ability to sit by providing what’s necessary. A dear dharma friend says, “I fell in love with the dharma and wanted to be part of that, to facilitate that for others. If you want to be connected, service is a good way to achieve that. Especially in these times.” Service brings connection into community.

The moment we step into the sangha in that way, we’ve just brought so much more power to our practice – we’re putting more of our energy and time into the dharma, and our practice is much more on our mind. We’re interacting more often with people who are practising, and we’re interacting with them in a way that’s about practice. We’re doing that even at times when we might not feel like it, so it holds us, supports us in that way because we’ve committed to being there for others. Meg, one of our trustees who has given enormous service to the dharma, recently told

me: “Service was my doorway into practice. Giving service in this way brought me more intimately into the practice and experience of others. It showed me that my suffering is not unique. By helping others, I came to normalise my own experience. Service made me do stuff when I didn’t want to because I’d committed to it. It put the dharma into the centre of my life for the good *and* the bad times.”

And importantly, in serving, we create joy – the joy of serving others and bringing something good into the world. We become part of a rather amazing group of people. As one retreat cook said recently, “I consider it a privilege to cook for Southern Insight.” A group of people who are offering something really special.

These teachings have been around 2600 years. The only reason they are still alive today is that men and women just like us throughout the ages have offered service to the dharma – supporting others to practice, running retreats, leading groups, studying together, bringing teachers in so we can hear the teachings. The only way the wheel of the dharma continues to turn is because people keep it turning. You’re reading this because the good people at Southern Insight put together a newsletter several times a year – and enormous gratitude to them.

And these teachings are needed now more than ever. This sangha, Southern Insight, is such a blessing. I’ll close with a story involving Ananda, who spent his life as the Buddha’s personal attendant.

.....Ananda was reflecting one day on the value of sangha, and on how important it is. Having a moment of epiphany, he said to the Buddha, “Sangha is *half* of the practice!” And the Buddha listened to him and replied: “Do not say that, Ananda, do not say that. The sangha is the *whole* of the practice.”



**Reflection:** where does the practice of service fit into your own practice? Is the dharma something important enough to you to want to make it available to others? How might you serve the dharma?

*Adapted from a talk on finding balance in our practice, given by **Julie Downard** at the Practice Half Day in August 2021.*

## **Giving back – carbon miles for teachers on SIM retreats**

Recently, SIM decided to look at all the air travel relating to bringing teachers to our retreats. Many teachers came specifically for us, and many we nabbed when they would be in New Zealand already. Meg and Rachel, and I sat together with a pile of old newsletters and made a list of the flights involved in bringing teachers to Christchurch over the past 23 years. I repeatedly marvelled at the devotion and energy of the SIM family, running so many retreats!

Having collated a fairly accurate list, we contacted Ekos to offset the carbon for these flights. Ekos is “committed to helping reduce carbon emissions” through helping with measuring carbon footprints and developing and implementing carbon reduction plans. As well as this, Ekos works to offset people’s carbon emissions via the establishment and protection of native forests, here and internationally.

Our contribution came to \$2 453.61. Just a little drop in the bucket from SIM, but many drops can make a downpour.

**Guy W.**



## Registration for retreats

For Online registration for all our retreats

visit [www.southern-insight.org.nz](http://www.southern-insight.org.nz)

### Online registration:

1. Visit <http://southern-insight.org.nz/about/how-to-register-and-pay-for-our-retreats/> to find the online registration form.
2. Complete this form and pay your deposit.
3. Payment of \$50 is required to confirm registration, and many people choose to pay the full amount for the retreat when they register. **Please note on your form whether you are paying online and how much you have paid.**

### Online payment instructions

Account for payment:

*Southern Insight Meditation*

Account Number:

*Kiwi bank 38-9017-0230890-04*

Please note the following:

- *Particulars* box: put the initials of the teacher followed by "rt" and the year (e.g. JSrt 2020 for Jill Shepherd Summer retreat).
- *Code* box: put how many people you are paying for (e.g. one person).
- *Reference* box: please put your name, e.g., J Smith

### Having trouble registering online?

If you have any difficulties registering online or would like to post a cheque rather than pay by direct debit, then please feel free to call the retreat contact person (see website for specific contact for the retreat you are registering for) or email us at

[southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com](mailto:southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com)

### Sliding scale of payment:

Retreat costs are set to be as affordable as possible, and longer retreats including a sliding scale. The actual cost of the retreat is the higher amount, however, it is possible to pay a subsidised rate, for those on a limited income, anywhere from the actual cost down to the bracketed figure.

### Top-Up Fund

The top-up fund is for those who find even the sliding scale rate is a barrier to coming on retreat. Southern Insight aims to make retreats as accessible as possible to all, and it is possible to pay less than the lower amount in the sliding scale for a retreat. We encourage people to make use of this fund, which is currently in a healthy state, thanks to the generosity of others who attend our retreats.

*NB: To pay less than the sliding scale, please talk with us before coming on retreat.*

### Refunds of Deposits

The deposit (or full payment if already received) for retreats is refundable up to the closing date of retreat registration.

Retreat payment can be refunded (less deposit or \$25 admin fee if a position can be replaced from wait-list) if cancellation occurs after the final registration date but prior to the day before the retreat start date.

We cannot refund the payment if cancellation occurs later than this. Exceptions for compassionate grounds can be made at the discretion of the steering committee.

If undelivered, please return to:  
13 Dacre Street  
Christchurch

