



# *Southern Insight*

Newsletter of Southern Insight Meditation, Christchurch, New Zealand

Newsletter 71

December 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.

### **Awakening Joy: Course begins 8<sup>th</sup> February 2022 – facilitators – Marion Boyd and Lois Cowan**

AWJ is an internationally recognized 10-week course developed by James Baraz, on opening to life with appreciation, resilience, and an open heart. See more about this in the newsletter and contact Marion and Lois directly if interested [loismcowan@gmail.com](mailto:loismcowan@gmail.com) or [marion.j.boyd@gmail.com](mailto:marion.j.boyd@gmail.com)

### **Summer Yatra Saturday, Feb 26 – Sunday, Feb 27<sup>th</sup> Woolshed Creek Hut, Mt Sommers with Julie Downard**

Cost \$50 per adult, \$15 for children (School age and under; limited places).

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 close on 11 February 2022. There is a link to practical details and a registration form [here](#) and more information later in this newsletter. Otherwise see our website [www.Southern-insight.org.nz](http://www.Southern-insight.org.nz)

### **March – May 2022 Non-residential retreats – see newsletter for more information**

### **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)

*Please note registrations for this retreat do not open until after February 2022*

**Costs:** retreats and courses are set to be as affordable as possible to cover the cost of the retreat itself. Teachers receive *dana*. \*A sliding scale or subsidised rates for those on a limited income is available. See also “top up” fund information in this newsletter. Please enquire.

**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*



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”

**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. We are also a charitable trust, and donations are tax exempt.

**Email:**

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

**Post:** 16 Ward Street, Christchurch

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

NOTE: We offset carbon emissions from teacher travel to our retreats through EKOS ([ekos.org.nz](http://ekos.org.nz))

Kia ora koutou,

Welcome to our final newsletter of the year. 2021 has been another year where the effect of impermanence has been writ large across society, with large numbers of people affected. With the Climate Crisis and the Covid19 crisis there has been a great deal of distress and worry affecting a lot of people.

For Southern Insight, the latter half of the year has seen most of our offerings move online, with the Spring Retreat successfully moving to an online format and the continuing success of our Wednesday night sitting group using Zoom. The feedback from those who have participated in both, has been strongly positive, with the new formats proving to fill a welcome niche to those who joined in.

In this newsletter we present an article on how to make the most of a self-organised, home-based retreat using resources available to structure your time and find a newer way of working. There is also a piece on walking retreats in nature. This will be a perfect introduction to those who are going on our Yatra in February next year.

In 2022, for the first time in a while, we will be holding a “winter” retreat, with Jill Shepherd at Staveley in early June. Registrations for this will open next year. Also, the Awakening Joy course will be run again next year. A short summary of what this involves, and the contact details are in this newsletter

Finally, whether you celebrate the Summer Solstice and/or Christmas (or other traditions), we wish you all well and hope you find some internal peace and time to relax and recharge over the next month or so. We will be back in the New Year, with more information and friendly ideas to help you.

With much metta,  
John & Meg 😊

## Other SIM events in 2022/23

We at Southern Insight are still making plans for 2022 and, as you are all very familiar with by now, we hope these will come to fruition but are holding these lightly. To find out more you can visit our website. Also if you receive this newsletter via email we will be using this network to keep people informed of all major retreat events. If you would like to know more about short local Christchurch events you can also subscribe to our "local events list". Simply email [southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com](mailto:southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com) With the words "local events list" in the title.

Here are some of the things we are working on.

### March-May 2022

We are hoping to take advantage of a visit to this side of the world by the wonderful senior dharma teacher **Yanai Postelnik**. This may include a short non-residential retreat and guest talks at our sitting group (in person or on zoom).

While much loved teacher **Sharda Rogell** won't be here in Aotearoa in person – we found her virtual presence worked very well and will be hoping to hold an event with her using this technology again.

### Spring 2022

The rapid conversion to an online version of our Spring retreat with Di Robertson and Jeremy Logan worked so well that we will be looking at repeating this. There is more about this new form of retreat practice and the unique gifts it brings in this newsletter.

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

## Awakening Joy Course running again in 2022

AWJ is an internationally recognized course developed by James Baraz, on opening to life with appreciation, resilience and an open heart. Incline the mind towards well-being and gain deeper insight that will promote authentic joy. <https://www.awakeningjoy.info/>

Some word from James Baraz about the AWJ course. "I believe our task these days is to develop consciousness, love and caring in ourselves and

*help remind others of all the good inside and around them. I believe this motivates and empowers people to make this a better world. That is my vision and motivation for teaching this course. AWJ is based on a key principle: Our suffering or well-being is not solely determined by what's happening in our present circumstance but to a large degree by our relationship to what is happening. Whatever our external conditions, our joy and happiness is a choice we can make.*

*Participants repeatedly report on their increased abilities to cultivate well-being, allow positive feelings to co-exist with painful ones and chose greater happiness in ordinary daily life. The course is meant to be a nourishing experience; there's no guilt, no pressure, no failing.*

*It comes down to inclining the mind to choose well-being in our life. That choice is powerful when we understand where true happiness lies and commit to actually practicing and strengthening good habits that support that choice. It's all about practicing. Many people have taken the course several times to keep developing these tools of well-being."*

The AWJ course has been available in Christchurch, and has been well attended since 2014. In 2022 the AWJ course will **commence on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2022, running for 10 weeks**, co-facilitated by Marion Boyd and Lois Cowan. AWJ is open to anyone with or without an established meditation practice. For questions or to register contact [loismcowan@gmail.com](mailto:loismcowan@gmail.com) or [marion.j.boyd@gmail.com](mailto:marion.j.boyd@gmail.com)

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**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.

## About the teachers



**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.



**Sharda Rogell** has been practicing meditation since 1976 and teaching worldwide since 1987. She is a member of the Teacher's Council at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California. Along with her

training in the Theravada tradition, she has been influenced by the non-dual teachings of Advaita and Dzogchen. She has been a student of A. H. Almaas in the Diamond Approach for nearly 20 years and her primary interest is awakening the heart/mind with embodied presence.



**Yanai Postelnik** has been involved in spiritual practice and exploration for much of his adult life. Born in Switzerland, of mixed European and Asian parentage, he grew up in New Zealand. Yanai encountered the teachings of the Buddha and

the practice of Insight Meditation in Asia and began teaching at Gaia House, in the UK in 1992. He leads retreats in New Zealand, Sweden, Finland, Israel, the USA, and the UK. He draws upon wisdom from the breadth of the Buddha's teaching, loves to spend time in the wilderness when he can, and includes the transformative power of nature as one of his most important teachers. , regularly leading retreats in the natural world. Yanai is a member of the Gaia House Teacher Council, and a Core Faculty member of Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts.



**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.



**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](#).



*The mind can go in a thousand directions.*

*But on this beautiful path, I walk in peace.*

*With each step, a gentle wind blows.*

*With each step, a flower blooms.*

*From "Walk like a Buddha" by Thich Nhat*

## **Mindfulness in Nature – Walking Retreats**

Since the time of the Buddha committed practitioners have been engaging in a number of different practices to deepen their understanding of life and of our personal relationship to life. The one most of us in the Insight tradition are familiar with is of course the silent meditation retreat, where we take time away from our busy lives to stop, to grow still, to embrace solitude and to go deep, inquiring into life, allowing our hearts to open, experiencing the possibilities of who we truly are. Each rainy season monks and nuns across Asia, from the time of the Buddha to today, withdraw from the hurly burly of daily existence and take three months out to engage in

this practice. In between rainy seasons, other practices are taken up. Our own Dharma Gathering is a version of one of these – that of living in community and spending time studying and reflecting on the dharma, as it relates to our daily activities and also touching into that deep space of connection and non-separation.

A common thread for all of us in our practice is “returning to the marketplace”, taking the fruits of our practice back into the world, so that our time on retreat is not just for ourselves, but also for the benefit of others, and so that our retreat understandings are tested in the mettle of daily life, in “the real ball game.” And so another practice undertaken by monks and nuns, one that takes considerable courage in some cases, is that of pilgrimage, or yatra. They leave the monastery, travelling alone, and just walk. Usually there is some destination in mind, often a place of pilgrimage, but not always. In this way they spend time out among the wider world community, making the “holy life” visible to others, and offering teachings and blessings wherever they pass, making dharma teachings accessible to those who would not be able to travel to a retreat or monastery. While they are travelling they carry only their alms bowl and some sleeping gear, and they rely on the generosity of strangers. When this is forthcoming that’s great, and an opportunity for gratitude, and when it is not, there is an opportunity to develop equanimity. It is a real journey into the unknown. Sometimes the journey takes place in difficult or dangerous territory, where there is threat to life. Some of the stories of these journeys are incredibly inspiring.

Dangerous journeys notwithstanding, this is a practice which over recent years has taken root in the Insight tradition, with groups of practitioners spending some days on walking pilgrimage, living very simply, camping out at night and moving on the next day. I was fortunate to participate in one of these in France a couple of years ago, and found it a very beautiful practice, one that adds to the deep silence of a retreat by expanding and deepening the connection with nature, with others in society, and with the other participants, as the vicissitudes faced can only be overcome by really working together. It was a truly wonderful experience.

This practice is much easier on the body, not requiring sitting still for long periods, and there is

a real energising that comes from being in nature instead of inside a building. It's also good for our health! The terrain is not difficult, and the walking is at a normal pace and is suitable for all levels of fitness. We walk together, in silence, and stop at regular intervals to take breaks and to just be still in nature, opening ourselves to the world around us, this wonderful world that supports and sustains us.

On longer walks there is the same opportunity as on a retreat for teachings and group discussions and sharing. There is a tangible sense of being in something together, of supporting each other as we make our way through the world, through our life, in close connection with each other and our environment. For those looking to deepen and extend their practice, and their capacity for connection, joy and equanimity, this is a wonderful new opportunity.

*Southern Insight Meditation has made a couple of small forays into this ancient form, with some evening and half day events offering the opportunity to experience the joy of simply walking safely in nature. In February 2022 we will be offering a weekend yatra, staying overnight in the Woolshed Creek tramping hut. Book early to avoid disappointment as places are limited.*

**Julie D.**

## **Retreating at home – creating a radical “no” in everyday life**

*The Buddhist path (or any spiritual practice) is described as “going against the stream.” That’s how the Buddha described it 2,600 years ago, and there was no social media then. Now it’s like going against the tsunami.*

*...All of these require me to cultivate awareness and presence, which requires me to slow down, which requires me to create space and time for meditation or other contemplative practices. “No” requires pausing. Pausing is a radical “no.”*

Two quotes from Sebene Selassie – from “You Belong: A Call for Connection”

Going through our drobox collection of newsletter bits and pieces I came across these two quotes from Sebene Selassie (thanks John 😊). These were perfect for my mood as just

two days before I had spent four hours putting together the newsletter only to discover to my horror that an update on my laptop meant that none of my work had been saved. This is an especially busy time, and this was a real shock. I brought my hands to my face and felt the tightness in my throat and tears in my eyes. My “home IT support” partner Mike took charge, and I went out to the garden and started to gather some fallen leaves and branches from the week’s heavy rain. I breathed in the damp and warming air. I listened to the calls of the cuckoo and the kingfisher. By the time he came to me with the bad news that it was all gone I was ok with this. Really – I was ok. I would leave it and begin again another day. That pause, created a vastness of distance and space that belies the time it took and the re-orientation to the wider world around me gave me a far happier set of choices than I would otherwise have had.

Small moments like this play out in so many ways in daily life. There is an experience and an almost immediate response. The art of pausing – injecting space – generates as Selene Selassi says – a radical opportunity to reject habitual paths that lead to suffering. While discovering how to become more connected, more at ease and more spacious is one of the common blessings of going on retreat, learning how to translate this into life that faces a tsunami of stimuli is proving to be the new and fertile exploration ground for many dharma practitioners.

The Covid 19 pandemic and the coincidence of online technology is changing not only how we temporarily run retreats – it is making it possible for us to build practice for ourselves that is uniquely shaped to our own lives. There are many ways in which we can do this and here are some thoughts that SIM steering group folk have been trying out themselves -

- Identify a time for ‘a season of practice’ (perhaps the 12 weeks of summer or autumn) where you will aim to increase your connection to practice in different ways. This inclines your mind towards this and makes it more likely you will pursue different options.
- Go on retreat in your home. This doesn’t have to be elaborate and could be as simple as changing the time you get up or go to bed or spend at lunch (more time not less!).

Other things that help with this are simple food, turning off devices, creating a sitting or walking space. This retreat could be a weeklong – or a day long. It could involve half an hour a day or three of four sits. You can set a schedule and some gentle “bells” to remind you.

- [Dharma seed \(https://dharmaseed.org\)](https://dharmaseed.org) is a tremendous resource. You can listen to talks from teachers around the world and can even listen to whole retreats – including daily instructions and guided meditations.
- Attend an online retreat. Online retreats offer a unique opportunity to bring the wisdom of meditation practice into the daily lived experience. There are so many to choose from and even those here in Aotearoa so you don't have to struggle with uncomfortable time zones. Some comments about the SIM spring online retreat are below.

We do not know what 2022 will bring and for the first time in over 20 years Southern Insight will not be running a retreat over the Summer. We hope you find some space and opportunity for practice that brings you ease, peace and joy.

😊 Meg



## Spring turn around – the first SIM online retreat

I attended the Spring retreat (rapidly pivoted online due to Covid restrictions) last week. I had felt quite disappointed to not be doing a “Proper” retreat, and I now see I had developed an attitude of online retreats to be a “Lite” version of a meditation retreat. So it was a pretty happy surprise for me to discover that this is a very valuable and worthy retreat model on many levels.

Here are some of my discoveries:

- Learning that I can let go of many my rituals and behaviours and create a peaceful and meditative space myself at home. This experience also gave me lots of ideas and strategies to broaden and deepen my own home practice.
- Realising that meditating in a group by Zoom works just as well as meditating in a hall. It's both similar and different, and both models are equally valuable.
- Seeing and hearing from others present that they would not have been able to come to the In Person retreat for many and varied reasons, and they were very pleased to have this online version to attend and to have the opportunity to engage with Sangha.
- I found myself to be less distracted and I experienced higher levels of spaciousness and quietness, with this retreating at home by Zoom.
- I slept well in my own cosy bed.
- My virtuous feelings as I didn't need to use any fossil fuels getting to the retreat.

Marion B.

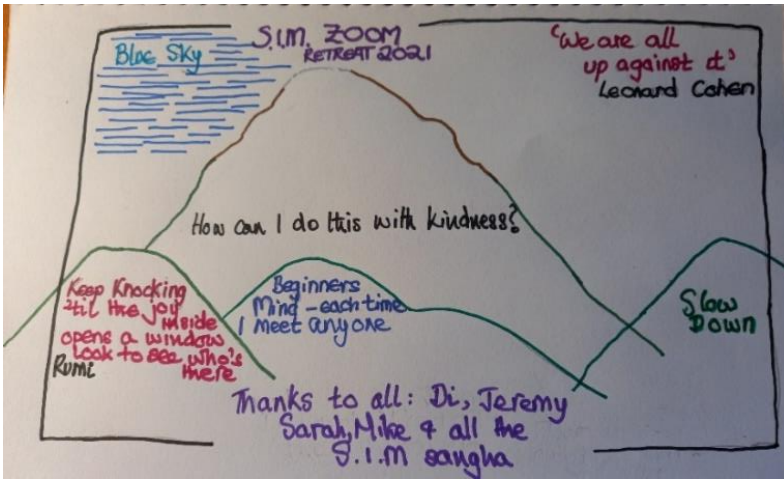
The online retreat was really good. And surprisingly had extra benefits of a very quick sense of connection, supportive community - possibly from seeing everyone's faces so many times a day instead of averted eyes and backs of people's heads. So not as intense isolation experience. Plus integrating the Presence Practices into home setting and home life rhythms of house chores and cooking.

And my husband felt like he was kind of on retreat too because he also works from home office and had the no talking space. We just talked at mealtimes instead of our usual in-passing. I work from a home office so my office still feels infused with the Presence and support of the sangha community.

Wonderful support for surfing waves of grief that fairly easily flowed through.

Namaste

Kathy H.



Kate F. shares her Spring online retreat experience pictorially!

## Sitting group – Zoom and in-the- room Wednesdays

Zoom Zoom....some will be feeling Zoomed out, but we are also grateful for this technology for keeping some of us connected in the SIM community. This year our sitting group moved between various combinations of meeting in the Zendo in Ōtautahi / Christchurch and on Zoom and settled with weekly Zoom sessions for the final third of the year. We started trialling the Zoom sitting group at the first lock down in 2020 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.

Thank you to all those who have joined us on Zoom, weaving us all together across Aotearoa and beyond, through these pandemic times. And much gratitude also to those who took on roles in making the Zoom (and occasional Zendo) sitting groups a warm and inclusive weekly event (Russell, Kanya, Kate, Meg, Lois, John and Mike). Thank you for your teachings, Zoom facilitation, tech support, presence and for saying Yes!

In the New Year we will look again at how we can best offer the connection and practice support of sitting group both in person and on Zoom. Now we'll take a break and return, **on Zoom, on Wednesday 19th January 7:30 pm**, all welcome (email us if you want to receive the Zoom link details).

I hope you all have a happy, peaceful and replenishing year end and be inspired

as we were at our last sitting group by some words borrowed from Ajahn Chah:

*Christmas is a holiday that celebrates the renewal of generosity and kindness.*

Look forward to being together in some form next year.

With much metta

Di

## Remember this place?

Some of you may remember the old Vicarage in Governor's Bay where SIM used to hold retreats. You may recall the rambling lavender and rose filled garden, finding your way down the creaky stairs in the dark to visit the bathrooms, and of course that 1970s psychedelic carpet!



We outgrew this space in the early 2000s but had many wonderful retreats here with Subhana Barzarghi, Jeremy Logan, Russell Walker, and even Yanai Postelnik and Sharda Rogell held retreats with us here.

After the earthquakes the building was unoccupied for a while and disappeared – literally! If you are passing and are game for exploration that involves crawling through trees and brambles it turns out the old vicarage is still standing...and yes..the carpet is still there!



## 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

