

Dharma Gathering 2023 **“Curious Mind, Resilient Heart”**

Through inspiring curiosity and developing our resilient hearts, this gathering will foster the deepening and nurturing of strong and enduring connections and community. The daily schedule will include meditation, workshops, discussions/inquiries, dharma talks and creative expression, infused with and weaving together the Zen and Insight traditions. The Dharma Gathering is suitable for people of all levels of meditation experience.

See the information later in this newsletter for more general information about the Dharma Gathering and what to expect.

The Dharma Gathering will take place from Friday, January 20th (end of the day) – Wednesday, January 25th, 2023.

There will be teachers from Southern Insight Meditation and Diamond Sangha – including Di Robertson, Julie Downard, Sean Weaver and Russell Walker. It’s great to work with both sanghas to present this.

Southern Insight Meditation is a non-profit, non-sectarian group run by volunteers to make 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.

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Kia ora koutou,

Welcome again to another SIM newsletter.

It’s been a while since we last published a newsletter. Apologies to those who rely on these to keep up with our activities.

This newsletter will give you an overview of upcoming events, particularly those coming up during our New Zealand summer months.

Hopefully, there is something here for everyone! 😊

The first and most notable item is early information about the Dharma Gathering 2023 happening in January.

Those of you who have been longer-term followers will know that every so often, we hold a Dharma Gathering (almost always in Summer), which is a different form of event from the more regular retreats we hold. In this issue of the newsletter, we provide some background information and invite you to think about this as an option for part of your upcoming Summer activities. It’s a really worthwhile time which is enjoyed by all.

Also, next year we will be holding a Yatra, something new for us – a meditative walking retreat. We provide more information below for you to read about that also.

Hopefully, everyone is enjoying the spring weather and finding the renewal of new life a joyful adjunct to their practice.

From all of us at SIM, we wish you well.

With metta,

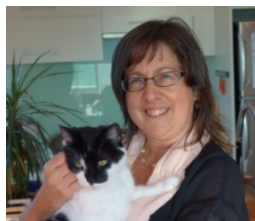
John 😊

About the teachers



Di Robertson has over 25 years of experience in insight meditation. She has taught meditation and mindfulness

beginners' courses since 2000 and retreats over the last 10 years. She has led a number of short retreats and co-taught longer retreats with senior teachers. She lives in Ōtautahi Christchurch and is a co-founder and trustee of Southern Insight Meditation. Di also works as an ecologist and counsellor and is a stepparent and grandparent.



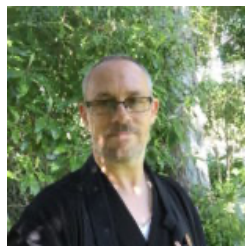
Julie Downard has been practicing meditation since 1991 when living in England. She has practised intensively with teachers in both

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.



Russell Walker Russell sat his first retreat in Bodhgaya, India, in 1990. He spent the next 10 years sitting retreats, studying the Buddha's teachings, and training

under and teaching with senior teachers at Gaia House, Devon, in the UK. He moved back to live in New Zealand in 2000. Meditation practice is integral to Russell navigating life, from appreciating what is sacred and profound to dealing with the mundane. He especially has a deep connection with, and love of nature. Russell currently works full time facilitating rehabilitation programmes and lives in Christchurch with his wife and two sons.



Sean Weaver Sean Eiji Weaver Sensei is a teacher in the Diamond Sangha Zen lineage. He will be joining us for the Dharma Gathering in January 2019. He has

been training in Zen since the 1980s and became a student in the Diamond Sangha in 1998. His teaching focuses on the intersection of Zen practice and social/environmental action. To this end, he and his wife Jo Campbell (Practice Leader in the Diamond Sangha) developed a version of 'stillness and action' Zen training they call 'Ekodo' (ecological way). They have run retreats over the years in Wellington and then Golden Bay, where they currently live. Sean and Jo have a strong sense of Dharma kinship with the Southern Insight Group.

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.

*Peace is every step.
The shining red sun is my heart.
Each flower smiles with me.
How green, how fresh all that grows.
How cool the wind blows.
Peace is every step.
It turns the endless path to joy.*

Thích Nhất Hạnh (1926 – 2022)

Zoom sitting group. Wednesday Evenings

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

We fully intend face-to-face sitting group to recommence at the Opawa Zendo soon, as well as maintaining the online format. In the meantime, we are still meeting online via Zoom on Wednesday nights from 7:15 pm – 8:30 pm. If you haven't dropped into one of these already and wish to know more, please get in touch with us by email, as detailed below.

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 with the words "sitting group updates" in the title.

Di. R. 😊

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 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, grow still, embrace solitude and 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, travel 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 could not 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; 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 life is threatened. 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 an average pace and suitable for all fitness levels. We walk together in silence and stop at regular intervals to take breaks and to 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 teaching, 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 lives, in close connection with each other and our environment. This is a wonderful new opportunity for those looking to deepen and extend their practice and their capacity for connection, joy, and equanimity.

Julie D.

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 2023, we will offer a weekend yatra, staying overnight in the Woolshed Creek tramping hut. Book early to avoid disappointment, as places are limited.

Curious Mind, Resilient Heart.

The Dharma Gathering is back! Summer is on its way, and it's that time of year when planning the annual leave needs to happen. Those who have been to previous gatherings will know what a delight they are. They will be getting their registrations in early for this very joyful event - a rare opportunity to go on holiday with your sangha and make some wonderful connections.

As with the last Gathering, Southern Insight offers this in conjunction with the Diamond Sangha Zen group. Suppose you've been getting this newsletter for a while and thinking it would be good to sit a retreat but haven't quite mustered up the courage. In that case, a Gathering is much easier. Everything is optional; there's not so much sitting, and you can talk to other participants (so you find out much sooner that everyone is experiencing much the same thing you are) and to the teachers. The workshops are stimulating and relevant, and creative expression of the dharma is explored.

We are sad that this Gathering will not include young children, as we have in previous years, due to the complexities of managing events in Covid times. For the same reason, numbers need to be limited to 40, so if you want to join us, get in early.

The daily schedule will include meditation, workshops, discussions/inquiries, dharma talks and creative expression, infused with and weaving together the Zen and Insight traditions.

A Typical Dharma Gathering Daily Schedule (This may vary):

- 6 am Early Morning Yoga
- 7 am Sitting Meditation
- 8 am Breakfast – silent time ends
- 9 am Work Period
- 10 am Workshop
- 12 pm Sitting Meditation
- 12.30 Lunch
- 2 pm Discussion Group/Deep Inquiry
- 4 pm Sitting Meditation
- 5 pm Dinner
- 7 pm Dharma Talk
- 8 pm Sitting Meditation
- 9 pm Silent Time begins

There will be plenty of time over the meal breaks for conversation, and the meditation hall will always be silent outside of workshop times for those wishing to do formal practice.

Sangha

*I've felt the deep caress of a sangha heart
Throbbing in unison
Shoes left at the door
Who you are or who you're not
It coaxed me in with a gentle wave
Soft and warm like a giant jelly
I melted in as salty tears
Seeped from my heart to my cheek*

*And I joined
That luminous soul*

Questions about the Dharma Gathering form

Subhana Barzargi first introduced Southern Insight to the idea of a Dharma Gathering. Here she answers some typical questions about how this differs from more traditional retreats and what this form of practice has to offer.

What is the purpose behind a Dharma Gathering?

A Dharma Gathering is a different model and way of sharing the dharma to the silent intensive meditation retreat model. A Dharma Gathering is not conducted in silence. Although it does have some silent meditation, it also includes workshops, discussion forums, dharma talks, and open inquiry sessions, which provide numerous opportunities for discussing the teachings. Another significant benefit of such a gathering is that it cultivates a stronger sense of community and facilitates networking amongst like-minded people. It is also a lot of fun, and there are plenty of opportunities to hang out with good friends. The purpose of the gathering is to cultivate a depth of inquiry into the heart of awakening with more emphasis on how these wise and compassionate teachings are integrated into the political, social, cultural and environmental spheres of our daily lives to bring about a culture of awakening for the welfare and benefit of all beings. There is a greater emphasis on engaged Buddhist practice.

What benefits are there for participants, and is a Dharma Gathering an appropriate entry point for people new to the practice?

The Dharma Gatherings benefit both experienced practitioners and especially people relatively new to Buddhist teachings. Experienced practitioners can feel free to discuss and ask questions about practice as the workshops provide many stimulating opportunities to share one's experiences. For new students, it is a gentle way of entering the practice and establishing connections.

Winter Retreat

This previous June, we held a Winter Retreat with Jill Shepard and Julie Downard teaching. This was the first retreat we had held for quite a while at that time of year. It was successful, with good feedback from participants. Here are some thoughts from one of those participants.

I'm Seth Reid, and I attended the one-week silent retreat at Staveley by Southern Insight. It was my first retreat, and although I had done a decent amount of meditation, I had a lot of fear, anxiety and doubt going in. The first two days were very challenging as I faced my extremely busy mind, some deep-seated self-loathing and triggers of trauma from my younger years.

But with the help of the very compassionate and kind teachers, I was able to stay in the silence with myself and grow. It was truly a life-changing experience for me, and I'm grateful I had the support of the sangha and could stick it out. I wrote a very short poem on the third day when I was starting to feel a little more settled, describing the experience of overcoming those first few days.

*The fear fell away
And in its' place stood sadness
As I felt the pain, it fell away
I found peace inside the darkness*

Registration for retreats

For Online registration for all our retreats, visit 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 total 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.

Are you 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

Sliding scale of payment:

Retreat costs are set to be as affordable as possible, and longer retreats include 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 on the sliding scale for a retreat. We encourage people to use 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 the wait list) if cancellation occurs after the final registration date but before 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.