



As I was driving past Hagans' turnip paddock I noticed a harrier hawk circling around and then in an instant a large flock of starlings erupted out of the turnips and did a murmuration. It wasn't as big as the spectacular ones you see on YouTube, but there were probably at least a hundred of them, and they whizzed around until the harrier hawk gave up and flapped off. I stopped the car and watched, feeling very lucky indeed.

Lindsay

Enquiries:

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. We are also a charitable trust and donations are tax exempt. Our website is <http://southern-insight.org.nz>

A note on Dana: you may notice that most of our retreats mention the word "dana". The registration costs 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.

Greetings all,

If there is a theme to this newsletter it would have to be "*dharma everywhere*". Thank you once again, all of you who have sent in your poems, thoughts, ideas and experiences. There is so much going on right now, it really is very inspiring. And not just here in the South. We have been in touch recently with a group of keen Insight yogis from Auckland who want to get more organized. Folks at Southern Insight are very happy to share our experiences and to help others around the country connect to like-minded people. If you have a group you want to get off the ground, or if you would just like to know who else is in your area, send us an E-mail or use our facebook page (see details inside the newsletter).

Dharma everywhere means opening to the possibility of insight wherever you are and whatever you are doing. In the spirit of this, Julie has been introducing us to the practice of Yatra: walking meditation done in the outdoors in wild nature or the wilderness of the suburban streets. There is more about that in this newsletter.

In line with this, if there is a second theme to this newsletter it is opening to what autumn can bring to light. A time of endings, autumn can reveal to us what it is that we fear to lose but also what we love. Much gratitude to our web master Lindsay, for her observations on this, which I have poached to share with you all.

This newsletter also has updates about other activities that Southern Insight people are involved with, such as Awakening Joy, Mindful Parenting, and Climate Change action, as well as information about retreats and courses.

We put together these newsletters with you in mind, so we hope you enjoy.

.....Meg ☺

Mindfulness and Meditation Course



May June 2016 - Dates TBC
Led by Di Robertson

Venue: Addington Haven (corner Church Square and Grove Road, Addington) Christchurch
Cost \$120*

This six-week course provides instruction for insight meditation and mindfulness. The practices calm the mind and body, allowing us to live more fully in the present moment. When we cultivate this kind, curious presence, we become more at ease with our lives and able to accept and open to both unpleasant and pleasant experiences. Qualities of clarity, joy, wisdom and compassion arise more freely in the heart, adding to our resilience and wellbeing.

The classes include instructions, guided practices and discussions. The course is suitable for beginners or those wanting a refresher.

Di Robertson will teach the course. She has been practicing meditation for over 20 years, has undertaken many meditation retreats, and taught courses since 2001. Di is a steering group member, trustee and teacher for Southern Insight Meditation.

For further information and registration:
 Contact Di at diana.r@xtra.co.nz

*Subsidy available, if the cost is a barrier for attendance.

About the teachers

Jeremy Logan has studied and practiced insight meditation for the past twenty-seven years, and has been teaching retreats throughout New Zealand since 1993.



He lives in the Wairarapa and works as a counsellor, supervisor and facilitator of change programmes.



Di Robertson has over 20 years' experience in insight meditation, with intensive retreats and daily life practice in England and New Zealand. She has taught beginners' courses since 2000 and led several

half-day retreats. She lives in Christchurch and is a co-founder and trustee of Southern Insight Meditation.

Julie Downard has been practising meditation since 1991 when she was living in England. Over the past twenty-three years she has done intensive practice with teachers in both the Insight and Zen traditions



in India, England and California. Julie has been teaching on retreats and Dharma Gatherings for the past seven years. She lives in Christchurch, and is a co-founder and trustee of Southern Insight Meditation.

A message from Julie and Di....

Its 18 years since we organised the first SIM retreat and started the sitting group in Christchurch. Since then SIM has blossomed and the trustees and steering group of SIM have offered regular retreats with local and international teachers, as well as the range of

mindfulness classes, study groups, Awakening Joy courses, climate change engagement and action, and more.

In recent years we have stepped into fuller teaching roles with SIM, and are delighted by the support and encouragement we have received from the community /sangha. We are keen to support people's practice both on retreats and in daily life, including the opportunity for one-to-one meetings. We both know that the support we have received from teachers has greatly enhanced our understanding and facilitated opening, and that one-to-one meetings allow exploration of our practice, of being with difficulties, and finding what aspects of practice may be most beneficial at this time.

If you would like to meet with either of us, on a dana (koha) basis, contact :

Julie at angulijulie@gmail.com or

Di at diana.r@xtra.co.nz

Julie and Di

Mindfulness in Schools

Pause Breathe Smile

The Mental Health Foundation (through Mindful Aotearoa) has developed an eight-week programme of mindfulness for schools, *called Pause, Breathe, Smile*. The three facilitators for this programme in Christchurch are all involved in SIM (Ann Huggett, Neave Ross-Wallace and Di Robertson) and between them have been delivering this programme in nine primary and intermediate schools since 2014.

The children's responses are very inspiring - as indicated by the following reflections:

"Thank-you for teaching us mindfulness. I liked the chocolate because it melted in my mouth. Pause Breathe Smile helps me when I am angry. My mindfulness jar helps me to sleep and I shake it every night. We love mindfulness".

Six-year- old.

"My favourite thing is doing "straight back-soft belly". It makes me feel relaxed and forget all of my worries and stresses. My second favourite thing is ringing the bell".

Ten-year-old

"When I noticed I was focussed it seemed like boredom, but not quite. It was just quiet and easeful and then I realised I actually felt very happy".

Ten-year old

If your local school may be interested let us know (diana.r@xtra.co.nz). Mindful Aotearoa are training new facilitators, and are particularly interested in training existing school teachers. <https://www.mindfulaotearoa.nz/programmes/pause-breathe-smile/> (Check out the NZ children explaining mindfulness YouTube clip).

Meditation, Swimming and Flying at the Dharma Gathering this year

Meditation retreats always seem to swarm with kindness. That muddle of love and kindness that is loving-kindness. This year's Dharma gathering was certainly no exception. It was, for me, all about love, filling the heart with love, and about mellowing (through seeing clearly) that Great Demon, Wanting.

One of the things I have been seeing more clearly is this: although I have, in the past, felt crushed by others, massively crushed, I have also crushed myself, ongoingly. (And I have crushed others, inadvertently and otherwise.) And I am seeing that by filling the heart with love, and bringing all the threads of myself into the very heart of me, my heart, wholesale, indiscriminate, bringing ALL of it in, with special emphasis on the bits I have hitherto pushed away, my inner and outer conflicts begin to heal.

I have been enjoying infinitely beautiful glimpses of a forgiving, generous, loving heart, that seems to extend beyond all known bounds, penetrating everything.

ANDdespite the amazing workshops, and the going about together in a big herd, and the fabulous, fabulous play they enacted, despite all this and much, much more, the universally acclaimed activity amongst the children was going swimming in their undies in a big dam we came across downstream.

But then swimming, as everyone knows, is flying, only in a thicker substance.

Guy



Awakening Joy – Ten Steps to Happiness

A happy fourteen of us are participating this year in version two of James Baraz's Awakening Joy course, which hones in on three of the themes from the original course: Loving Ourselves, Connecting with Others, and Compassion.

It's been very insightful spending the time delving deeply into the Loving Ourselves theme, starting with understanding how our beliefs about ourselves limit us and act as a barrier to our happiness and wellbeing. As one speaker, Vinny Ferraro, says *"no-one has ever hated themselves into becoming a better person. It's just not an effective strategy."* This seems so obvious and yet it appears to be a very common practice, familiar to many of us! It can be so hard to accept and forgive ourselves for who we are, and for the difficult patterns we've grown into as a way of coping with our world. James has offered potent practices to help us come to

a place of being able to relate to ourselves with love and kindness.

I especially enjoyed having the extra time on this theme to take it to its natural conclusion of seeing through the illusion of our separation from all of life, seeing that all the qualities which make up who we are, are paradoxically both yours and not yours. This allows the blossoming of our capacity to 'love the whole package,' to accept the whole human experience, and from there to extend our ability to be with ourselves to being able to understand others.

This year Di and I have added some extra practices to bring us into a felt understanding of that expansive, spacious, loving space of connection that so enhances our ability to be with the difficult in life. For me, as I grapple with the grief and fear around climate change and the possibility of the future we all face, the awakening joy practices are a real resource for establishing a solid foundation of groundedness and energy from which to open to the difficulty and to act. It strikes me that this is something that is so important for all of us, whatever our future might be.

I'll leave you with an enticing tidbit, one of my favourite practices from the course, an exercise that helps grow our ability to hold ourselves with kindness and compassion in the face of difficulty and suffering. It was developed by Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer as an exercise for Mindful Self-Compassion:

1. Place your hand on your heart (this stimulates the vagus nerve and releases oxytocin, a powerful comforting hormone).
2. Say to yourself "This is a moment of suffering. This is really hard."
3. Then say "Suffering is a part of life". You can reflect on all the people in the world right now who are going through what you are.
4. Then say "May I hold my suffering with kindness and compassion."

With so much loving kindness to you all.

Julie

SIM Climate Action Group



The SIM climate-change group is a lovely mix of people with very varied interests. We have been meeting regularly in Addington for 18 months. We keep a focus on enjoying our engagement round this issue, and taking inspiration from a number of sources for the work that we are doing together.

We have a lot of fun, and our meetings include a surprising amount of laughing. We enjoyed being part of the Climate Parade in Christchurch last December, carrying the artwork that Julie and friends put together. The vigil prior to the march, which included some poetry reading, meditation and discussion with people from different faiths, was also an uplifting experience. It was incredibly heartening to see people across New Zealand and the whole world marching in support of action to protect our beautiful planet.

Since that time we've been meeting and continuing to find inspiration by starting to understand our own carbon footprints and to experiment in our own lives with more sustainable practices – both mentally and physically.

The group draws on the Awakening Joy practices to remind ourselves to notice the beauty of nature, and the great things that we all have in our lives. These, as well as mindfulness and compassion practices, sustain us as we open to how the life-giving air that connects and breathes us all is being affected by carbon emissions.

Group members have been involved in looking at energy, financial and trade systems through to changing diets, cycling and walking more or catching the bus, and noticing the enjoyable aspects of these forms of travel.

If you would like to join our group or even just stay in touch with what we are up to, email us at

Southern Insight and we'll add you to our list. We meet fortnightly on a Monday evening.

Chrys and Di

Ode to Cycling

Joy to feel
The cool breeze,
The sun's heat,
Or tingling rain,
Blood pumping
With my pedalling legs,
As the intimate morning air
Breaths me.

Green Hills
Opening flowers,
New leaves,
Sparkling grass,
Children talking,
Shop doors opening,
And butterflies
Capture my eyes.

Fellow cyclists smile
At shared pleasure
As we travel over smooth city roads
Past the cars,
Waiting patiently
To move on.

Mindfulness in Nature – Yatra - a walking retreat

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 market place”, 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 truly was a truly wonderful experience.

Southern Insight Meditation is now looking to open into this ancient form, beginning with something a little less ambitious, covering just an evening or half a day, offering the opportunity to experience the joy of simply walking safely in nature. 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 (it’s

not a slow walk!) 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.

Julie

Look out for upcoming opportunities to take part in “mini Yatra” over the coming months



Post earthquake painting by Sally Greenaway

I love broken things

I see beauty in the bent, the rotting, the decayed, and the shattered. I find splendour in things most would find terrifying. I think that things that are damaged are just exquisite because I know they are like me. They are not ruined forever; things that are broken have a funny way of being fixed and turning out better than before.

Jordan Sarah Weatherland – Author of “Naked Truth”

Leaning into Autumn



Autumn heart

I sometimes find that the autumn descent to the shortest day of the year is something like a coal chute that I have been shoved down and have to climb back out of, slipping and sliding, black, dusty, and blinking into the late August sunshine.

Those of you who feel the same might be comforted to know that we are not alone. Thanks to Lindsay and her knowledge of Chinese calligraphy, I learnt that the Chinese character for autumn is made of two parts: the character for standing grain or stubble and the character for fire, because it's the time of year when farmers burn off the stubble after the harvest so they can plant anew.

The character for worry or anxiety is also made up of two parts: the character for autumn and the character for heart: *autumn heart*

But Lindsay also reminded me that this is also a time of giving and hope...

... the colours and the clear skies and the way the ducks and geese gather in numbers, and the other birds. The bellbirds come back to the garden and set up shop so they can scrounge sugar water throughout the winter, and the blackbirds harvest all the berries and rosehips. And the fantails return and start cleaning up the spiders. And hedgehogs sniff and snuffle around in the dark, fattening themselves for the winter. Somehow the earth seems at its most generous in the autumn: "Here, take what you can to tide you over the winter."

It made me think that this autumn door that openness through the sadness of impending loss is also the way we can see most clearly what it is that we love. So this year I am going to take my time and recognise the gifts and the promise in the ending of things.

Meg and Lindsay

Internet ramblings –

This newsletter I thought I'd write about some of the websites and facebook pages I've found that might be of use to others with an interest in Buddhist teaching and associated wisdom.

www.gratefulness.org is a website well worth exploring. Brother David Steindl-Rast fronts the website, which is a treasure trove of reading, poetry, videos, and reflections on living gratefully – one of the pillars of happiness. One of my favourite videos is one called *A Good Day*. A five-minute watch, it will make your day glow even if you have seen it before. Find this by googling Brother David's name.

David Whyte is one of my favourite poets and he has a facebook page (www.facebook.com/David-Whyte-213407562018588) on which he posts poetry and prose from his many books. There are some wonderful reflections and poems to be found here. His website is a good place to check out his books.

The website of the Mind and Life Institute (www.mindandlife.org) provides a range of resources that represent a series of dialogues between those involved in contemplative practice and those involved in studying the brain and other aspects of human existence. It provides a range of fascinating resources that look at the science of mindfulness.

<http://www.oneearthsangha.org/> is a website for anyone with an interest in climate change and how Buddhists around the world are responding to the issue. Again there is a range of audio, video and written resources to help you learn more about the phenomenon of climate change and also to learn about how to live with the enormity of the problems that we face both individually and as a society.

There are a number of incredible Buddhist resources available including Buddhnet (<http://www.buddhanet.net/>) which is a general Buddhist education site, and Dharmaseed (<http://dharmaseed.org/>) which provides teachings from a Western Vipassana (Insight) tradition. In the latter you can find and download talks by a range of wonderful Insight teachers and all at your fingertips, ideally for a donation.

That's it for this time around. Enjoy your explorations.

Chrys

Southern Insight Meditation Steering Group

If you have any questions about retreats or other events, or would like to get more involved, here are the contact details of the steering group, all of whom would be happy to talk with you:

<i>Di</i>	338 7070
<i>Dermot</i>	381 4617
<i>Sarah</i>	027 669 3824
<i>Chrys</i>	338 0313
<i>Lois</i>	3326106
<i>Meg</i>	328 8052
<i>Rachel</i>	382 2019

E-mail: southern.insight.meditation@gmail.com

Post: 16 Ward Street, Christchurch

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

E-mail is generally checked weekly. For a more immediate response, call one of the steering group members listed above.

Registration for retreats –

We offer two options for registering for our multiday retreats: e-mail and post. Instructions are below:

Email registration:

1. Visit www.southern-insight.org.nz/ and download a pdf or Word file of the registration form.
2. Complete this form by hand or on your computer.
3. Send a scanned version or Word file via e-mail to: Southern.Insight.Meditation@gmail.com with the words “*Registration for XXX retreat*” in the title.
4. **Please note on your form whether you are paying online or by cheque and how much you have paid.**

Your \$50 deposit can be paid online (see instructions below) or by cheque posted to the address provided in the retreat information.

5. You will receive a response acknowledging receipt of your registration, along with more information about the retreat.

Postal registration

1. Go to our website (<http://www.southern-insight.org.nz/>) and download a pdf of the Registration form. Alternatively, email [Southern Insight](mailto:Southern.Insight.Meditation@gmail.com) and request a form by post.
2. Complete the registration form and post to the address shown for that retreat
3. **Note on your form whether you are paying online or by cheque and how much you have paid.**

Your \$50 deposit can be paid online (see instructions below) or by cheque posted with the registration form.

Please include your return address for correspondence (a stamp addressed envelope is appreciated).

Online payment instructions

Account for payment: Southern Insight Meditation...

Account Number: Kiwi bank 38-9017-0230890-04

Please note the following in your payment:

In the *Particulars* box, put the initials of the teacher followed by “rt” and the year (e.g. JLDR2016 for Jeremy Logan & Di Robertson retreat).

In the *Code* box, put how many people you are paying for (e.g. 1 person).

In the *Reference* box, put your name

e.g. Particulars Code Reference SB RT 2015 2 people J Smith

Please note on your registration form that you have paid your deposit online and say how much you have paid.

Refunds of Deposits

The deposit for retreats is refundable up to the closing date of the retreat booked, less a \$10.00 charge for administration costs. Deposits cannot be refunded after the retreat closing date. That money will be put into the Top-Up Fund.

Top-Up Fund

The top-up fund is for those who are unable to afford the cost of a 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, thanks to the generosity of others who attend our retreats, is currently in a healthy state.

To pay less than the full retreat cost, you must talk with a committee member before coming on retreat.

If undelivered, please return to:
13 Dacre Street
Christchurch

