

INTRODUCTION TO STARTING A KM GROUP

Cultivating Spiritual Friendships at SFVS

Kalyana Mitta(KM) is a Pali term which means “spiritual friend.”

Since the Buddha’s time, this concept of spiritual friendship, among individuals or within groups, has been a core element of Buddhism, strengthening community and deepening individual practice.

A KM group generally consists of 4-10 members who meet for 2 hours, twice a month. A group may be led by a pair of senior students or run collectively by all members (peer groups) taking turns sharing the facilitation role.

Dharma discussion topics and content (articles, books, podcasts, etc.) are chosen by the group. Groups bring together members of the dharma community to share experiences in a friendly, supportive environment.

The format usually starts with 5-10 minutes of meditation, followed by an opportunity to check in with each member of the group and a group discussion of an agreed-upon topic, or a discussion of a book, article, or dharma talk

Purpose

The Kalyana Mitta (spiritual friends) network was created to serve dharma students interested in having on-going support with a group of peers. For most sangha members, teacher contact is limited to retreat situations. Although there are a number of meditation sitting groups throughout North America, these gatherings generally focus on sharing silent meditation. Sitting groups that are teacher-led usually don't provide the opportunity for students to personally share and discuss issues they are working on in their own practice. The Spiritual Friends network addresses this need.

Group Focus

Some groups have a particular focus (such as right speech, relationships, or compassionate action, to name a few), while others more generally address how to keep practice alive and fresh in one's daily life. Each group seems to develop its own identity and style. When the organizer(s) first decide to form a group, the clearer they are on the areas they would like to explore, the more potential participants will know if they share those same dharma interests. If the members prefer to let the group develop in a more organic way, at the first meeting it will be important for everyone to say why they joined, what they hope the group focuses on, and what they hope to get out of participating.

Content

Discussions are based on material suggested and agreed upon by group members, which may include articles, essays, books, or recorded dharma talks. More free-ranging discussion may center on members’ experiences and challenges with meditation practice or topics such as service opportunities, engaged Buddhism, or anything else Dharma and/or practice related that interests the group.

How to get started

A KM group, by definition, is organized by a group of spiritual friends. It is important to note **it is not the responsibility of the sangha board or a particular dharma teacher to create KM groups**. Once a person or group of KM friends decide to start a group, you should clearly define your purpose and focus of the group and the logistical details of where to meet and when. Often the groups meet at a participant's house.

A form is provided in this KM group folder "New KM Group Form" to help you focus on these details. You can then send this form to those you think might be interested in joining your group. You can send out an announcement that your new KM group is forming via the SFVS e-blast, and the SFVS email group, just as some examples of how to get the word out.

Someone should be designated as the organizer to start with, to fill out this form and get out the word. Once your group is formed, you can further define roles and organizational format at your first meeting. You can continue to advertise on the SFVS website and e-blast newsletter that your group is open to new members until you have the maximum number that is conducive to in-depth discussions. Be sure to keep an email list of all contact information for members and encourage members to let the group know if they can't come to a meeting or for weather cancellations.

Covid-19 concerns: In this time of Covid-19, KM groups may be meeting via Zoom, and will need someone to be the Zoom host and send out zoom link information via email invitations. If you do choose to meet outside in a park, or in someone's outdoor patio, be sure to require wearing masks and social distancing until the threat of the virus has passed.