

Kalyanamitta Groups / Some Basic Information

Kalyānamitta, a Pali word, means *admirable friend*, often translated into English as *spiritual friend*. In the *Upaddha Sutta*, the Buddha describes admirable friendship as "the whole of the holy life."

At its website, the Portland Insight Meditation Community describes kalyanamitta peer groups as those that

... bring together members of the dharma community to study and share practice experiences in a friendly, supportive environment. They are formed to provide peer support as you deepen your practice and understanding of the Dharma. Groups ... generally comprise ... six to twelve members to afford an intimacy not always available in larger sitting groups. They may have a variety of different "flavors," which could include a focus on a particular interest or study, sharing observations and challenges about meditative practice, or assigned readings that can be used to bring focus to discussions [www.portlandinsight.org/node/53].

There are no hard and fast rules for kalyanamitta peer groups, but guidelines usually include these suggestions:

- *Focus* Groups may form in particular for practice discussion or to pursue a course of study. Some kalyanamitta groups meet to plan actions or service and/or to support members' engagements with particular communities or causes (for example emigrants, people in hospice, housing, climate action). Focus may evolve over time.
- *Size* Most groups include six to twelve members, but size depends in part on focus. As members drop out, new ones are invited in, as appropriate or agreed upon by the group as a whole.
- *Frequency and duration* For most people, a meeting every other week or once a month, with occasional breaks, seems to work best. A regular schedule helps to ensure good attendance.
- *Format* Most meetings are two hours (or shorter), starting with a brief check-in and short meditation (10-20 minutes), followed by discussion. Meetings may end with a second, shorter meditation or other closing practice.
- *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, principles of sangha

governance, engaged Buddhism—or anything else Dharma and/or practice related that particularly interests the group.

- *Location* Groups usually meet in members' homes, rotating as convenient, or find a space that is easily accessible for all.

An ongoing group of limited size, with members committed to attend meetings as often as possible, is best for the creation of deep and lasting, supportive friendships. However, some groups may thrive by opening meetings to whoever wishes to become a member, with no restriction on frequency of attendance or duration of commitment. The overarching aim is always the same: better understanding and commitment to the Dharma, supported by wise and compassionate friendship.

Sometimes kalyanamitta groups are formed by one or two long-time practitioners who wish to guide practice discussion and/or sutta study for less experienced sangha members. These groups usually include four to ten people in addition to their leaders.

Mostly groups are formed by one or two people with a particular focus in mind. The Santa Fe Vipassana Sangha invites members who wish to create groups to 1) announce your idea for a group at two or three Tuesday night sits (be prepared to share your phone number and/or email address and to answer questions!), 2) approach one or two people you'd like to befriend and suggest an exploration for topic and format, and/or 3) request an announcement in the SFVS e-newsletter by contacting news@santafevipassana.org.

More information on kalyanamitta

Guidelines for kalyanamitta groups with leaders / www.spiritrock.org/kalyana-mitta-guidelines

Portland Insight Meditation Community guidelines / www.portlandinsight.org/node/159

Triangle Insight Meditation Community guidelines / triangleinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/KM-Group-Guidelines.pdf

Access to Insight kalyanamittata page / www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sacca/sacca4/samma-ditthi/kalyanamittata.html

Examples of kalyanamitta action groups / tricycle.org/magazine/Buddhist-climate-action-organizations, www.bpfportland.com (action groups may not identify as kalyanamitta groups, but the Dharma association and aspiration to spiritual friendship is similar)

Uppadha Sutta / www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn45/sn45.002.than.html

Dighajanu Sutta / www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN8_54.html (“... four qualities that lead to a lay person's happiness and wellbeing in this life,” including admirable friendship)

Kalyāna-mittatā in Wikipedia / en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaly%C4%81%E1%B9%87a-mittat%C4%81