

New York Insight *Kalyana Mitta* (KM) Groups

Kalyana Mitta is Pali for Spiritual Friends. New York Insight is interested in facilitating the interest of community members in having on-going support with their practice. For most Sangha members, teacher contact is limited to classroom or retreat situations. Although there are a number of sitting groups at NYI, these gatherings generally focus on sharing silent meditation. Sitting groups usually don't provide the opportunity for students to personally share issues they are working on in their own practice. It is our intention and wish that the establishment of *Kalyana Mitta* ("KM") groups in our community will address that need.

This idea springs from a *Kalyana Mitta* Network established by Spirit Rock Meditation Center and much of the material here is derived from the establishment of that Network. Once a KM group is established, it is our hope that you will register your group with New York Insight to be listed on our website

What are KM Groups?

NYI *Kalyana Mitta* Groups are peer-led groups that meet in homes or other venues. *Kalyana Mitta* is a Pali term that means "spiritual friend;" it can refer to anyone on the path of Dharma who is a guide, support or merely co-traveler. A KM Group usually consists of 5-12 members, an intimate enough setting for true exploration of Dharma topics. This deepens the development of daily life as practice.

We strongly suggest that all NYI KM Groups are co-led.

Who leads the KM groups?

Each group selects facilitators and agrees on hosting arrangements.

Facilitating in Pairs

One key guideline for the NYI KM Groups is that **pairs of facilitators** run them. This minimizes the projections, both positive and negative, by the other group members, as well as the positive and negative identifications of the persons leading the group. It also takes the pressure off one person to solely create a safe and rich space for discussion. When two people who enjoy talking about the Dharma are co-facilitators their enthusiasm becomes contagious to the rest of the group.

What kind of support is available to facilitators?

KM guidelines for new groups and an orientation for each new group
Mentoring from an experienced NYI leader

What are the KM Group meetings like?

Often, groups have a silent meditation, a "check-in" for all members, a discussion around a particular topic or reading and then a brief meditation before the meeting ends. Some groups focus on specific Dharma topics or readings while others have a special emphasis such as parenting, chronic pain and illness, addiction/recovery, meditative writing, health professionals, etc.

How do I start or join a KM Group?

Information about current KM groups will be continually updated on this webpage. Each KM group follows a similar meeting format, but each has its own particulars.

To request to join a group, please contact the facilitator(s) listed on the website.

To express interest in forming a new KM group, please read the Guidelines below before contacting NYI at nfo@nyimc.org

Guidelines for New York Insight Kalyana Mitta Group Facilitators

(adapted from the Spirit Rock Meditation Center KM Guidelines – with thanks)

Purpose of a Kalyana Mitta Group

A Kalyana Mitta Group serves dharma students interested in having on-going support with their practice. Sitting groups that are teacher-led usually don't provide the opportunity for students to personally share issues they are working on in their own practice. Kalyana Mitta Groups address that need.

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Group Focus

Some groups have a particular focus (such as parenting, relationships, classical study, 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 two leaders 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 leaders 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.

Practice Experience

The facilitators should decide what level of participants' experience they feel comfortable with. The leaders can establish their own guidelines when forming the group. For instance, participants in some experienced groups are required to have sat two retreats or have a regular sitting practice for at least two years. Other groups have formed to meet the needs of people who have recently discovered the practice.

Meeting Intervals and Commitment

Groups vary greatly in how often they meet. Some meet weekly, some every two weeks, some monthly. See what works for you in a way that will best provide continuity while not feeling like a burden of "one more thing to do." Ideally this should be a nourishing activity for the leaders.

Commitment to attend the meetings is a significant factor in the group's success. After the initial meeting, if a member decides to participate, it is recommended that for an agreed upon time frame, such as three or six months, they commit to attend every meeting unless business, travel or unforeseen circumstances make attending impossible. At the end of that time, the members can reevaluate their commitment and assess whether the group itself should continue.

Suggested Group Format

The format will be influenced by how long each meeting will be. But here are some suggestions:

- Groups generally meet for 2-3 hours.
- It is strongly encouraged that each meeting start with silent meditation for at least 30 minutes.
- Meditation should be followed with a personal check-in by each member. The check-in is a skillful way for each person to feel a connection to the group. The time spent on check-in varies greatly. The group can decide how much time it wants to spend on this part and how in depth the sharing is. Facilitators remind members of how long each person takes for their sharing, particularly if the check-ins are becoming too drawn out.
- After the check-in, the discussion topic or body of the meeting can take place. This might be sharing reflections on an article or book chapter everyone has read or some issue that the members have been consciously looking at since the last meeting. It's helpful for everyone to have a sense of how long the discussion will be.
- After the main discussion a very important part of the gathering will be taking some "process time" for members to express how the meeting was for them. Often this will just be for five or ten minutes, sometimes longer. It gives a chance for each person to give feedback about what is or isn't working for them in the group. The

process time can be a particularly rich practice exercise in using right speech. Saying what's truthful and useful, without blame, can make for a deeper sense of honesty and mutual commitment to waking up.

- Finally, a short sitting dedication of merit, chanting or loving-kindness meditation can bring a sense of closure to the meeting.

Practice Between Meetings

One of the most important aspects of the group is to nurture our Dharma practice in an on-going way. If the members are only looking at their practice during the group meetings, that becomes a very limited source of enrichment; it will reinforce the sense of separation between formal practice and daily life rather than moving toward the integration of the two. What happens between meetings is as significant as at the meetings. That is why it's important for members to be looking at/working with some Dharma issue that has come out of the group discussion.

Responsibilities of the Facilitators

The primary responsibility of the facilitators is to create an open and inclusive space for all present to share the Dharma path with others. A major factor toward that end is a feeling of safety for all. Rules about confidentiality, when the sharing is personal, should be agreed on.

Another aspect of safety is monitoring the energy of the group and flow of discussion. People vary greatly in their ease of speaking to a group. Some are shy, others extroverted. Making sure that everyone has a chance to be heard and that a few people do not dominate is essential to healthy group dynamics. The facilitators must be willing to take a more directive role when that is called for (e.g. someone is too controlling or the group is getting side-tracked). Some groups have even used a "talking stick" which is held by the current speaker.

If there is a sense that the vitality and commitment of the group members is waning then that needs to be addressed. Perhaps all members can take responsibility as "vibes watchers."

Checking-in for Support or Guidance

Finally, the facilitators should consider themselves and the group part of a larger network of Dharma friends. Toward that end, facilitators are encouraged to communicate regularly or as needed with the NYI KM Groups Facilitator.