

## **From the Care-Taking Council A Practice Support Program for SnowFlower Sangha**

Newcomers naturally have many questions about the practice, but even "old-timers" have an ongoing need to deepen their practice. Sangha gives us ongoing sustenance. What else can help us on our path?

That's why the Care-Taking Council has been discussing mentoring programs and is offering the Sangha a two-tiered approach. The first tier offers new members (at their request) individual senior Sangha members who are available to answer questions. The second tier creates small, voluntary Kalyana Mitta groups to provide ongoing support for those who have been involved in sangha for more than six months. In addition, Sangha members are free to explore other avenues for supporting their practice. This may include developing a one-to-one mentoring relationship on their own with another Sangha member.

### **Mentors for New Members**

The purpose of mentoring is to ease a newcomer's entry into the practice. This mentoring relationship can clarify various points of personal practice and Sangha practice as well as address other questions and challenges the new member might have.

1. The mentors are volunteers. A number of sangha members volunteered at the Annual Business Meeting. We may need to ask for more volunteers if the need arises.
2. Mentors have taken the Five Mindfulness Trainings and have been active members of the Sangha for at least three years.
3. Mentoring Coordinators (MCs) will manage requests for mentoring from both Tuesday and Friday night Sanghas. These coordinators won't necessarily do the mentoring, but are contact people for new members. An MC talks with the new member and connects him or her to a volunteer mentor based on that discussion.
4. Contact information for the MC's is available on a paper to be put out at each Sangha meeting and online. The Sangha will regularly make this opportunity known; it is up to the new member to initiate contact with an MC.
5. The logistics (duration, frequency of contact, etc.) of the mentoring relationship are up to the mentor and mentoree.
6. Both the mentor and the mentoree are free to enter into and end the mentoring relationship. The MC will check in periodically with both persons.
7. As a general (but not firm) guideline, this mentoring relationship is intended to help the new practitioner for the first six months after starting to attend sangha. However, as stated previously, the mentor and mentoree will make their own decisions about duration.
8. The mentor will, after six months or so, direct the mentoree to the next available Kalyana Mitta group for ongoing practice support.

For more information contact our Mentoring Coordinators: Jane Peckham (829-2466) or Susan Pearsall (256-3304 days and 238-5929 evenings) They can help you meet with a mentor.

## **Kalyana Mitta**

Kalyana Mitta means "spiritual friends." Many sanghas have Kalyana Mitta groups. These groups can provide individuals with a more concentrated level of support in their practice than can be achieved simply by going to sangha meetings.

1. Participation in Kalyana Mitta groups is voluntary.
2. The intention is that these groups provide a safe environment in which those who have regularly attended sangha for six months or more can talk about, share and receive support for their practice.
3. Each group has approximately eight members. Our friends from the Madison Insight Sangha advise that this number is optimal for providing intimacy and a good group process.
4. During sign-up, as soon as one group fills up with that number of members, another group will start to gather members. The Kalyana Mitta Coordinators collect names and launch the group as numbers permit. A sign up sheet will periodically be available at Tuesday and Friday evening Sanghas.
5. Members are expected to commit to attending all group meetings unless they are out of town, sick, etc.
6. The exact format of meetings is up to the each group. The designation of times, days and locations of meetings is determined by the group.
7. To get started, a format for meetings could include these items:
  - a. Groups meet once a month for two hours.
  - b. Each group begins with a brief sit.
  - c. Next comes a "check-in." This is non-interactive, involving mindful speech and deep listening. The check-in covers how each member comes to the gathering and lists their needs. Members are encouraged to keep it short-- there will be more time for support later.
  - d. A second "check-in" round is the time in which members share (and potentially receive support) about specific practice issues or points of Dharma.
8. The above guidelines offer a starting point; groups may well develop their own format. Some groups may choose readings on a particular topic such as compassion or choose a book to read and discuss.
9. While members commit to the group, they are also free to leave if it does not suit them. However, members should be encouraged to leave during the first four to six months after the group is formed so that the group could better gel over time.
10. PLEASE NOTE: These groups are **not** meant to be emotional support groups. And yet, with the consensus of the group, that type of support could be available in cases of urgent need.
11. For logistical or organizational snafus or other issues, the Kalyana Mitta group may contact a Kalyana Mitta Coordinator. If the difficulty looms larger, the

Kalyana Mitta Coordinator can go to the Care-Taking Council. If the CTC decides that conflict resolution is called for, they can contact the Steering Council.

For more information, contact our Kalyana Mitta Coordinators: Linda Jordan (233-7500 or [thisislinda@sbcglobal.net](mailto:thisislinda@sbcglobal.net)) or Jim Roseberry (256-0506, [jim.roseberry@gmail.com](mailto:jim.roseberry@gmail.com))