

A “Surge” of Spiritual Friends

by John Killoran

Beginning with the February 20 class at River Road the Washington Community will be conducting a KM “surge.” As the new KM Coordinator, I will be at a table after every Wednesday class to provide information and answer questions and will visit other IMCW classes to make announcements about KM and invite people to get involved.

But what is KM? KM stands for *Kalyana Mitta* and it means *Spiritual Friend*. A KM group is a group of six to twelve people, usually closer to six, which meets to support one another in the practice of the *Dharma*. The groups generally meet for two hours, beginning with a thirty minute silent sit, followed by personal sharing, then open discussion based on the sharing. They meet regularly, generally about once every two weeks, and often continue to meet for years.

Jon Waterman, one of the teachers here at IMCW, has been involved with KM from the beginning. He helped start the first group in the Washington area, a group that is still in existence eleven years later. He is a passionate believer in KM. “We talk about taking refuge in the *Buddha*, in the *Dharma*, in the *Sangha*,” says Waterman. “Well, here’s the *Sanhga*.” “When a KM group works—it’s great! You end up feeling very connected. It’s a love-fest. You come away as *Kalyana Mitta*—spiritual friends.”

That has been my experience. I joined my first KM group a year and a half ago and immediately had six friends in IMCW. Before joining, I’d go to the Wednesday night meetings at River Road where I’d sit up in the balcony anonymously, then go home. Then I joined a KM group and I was no longer on the fringe. Suddenly I was part of a community.

My one concern when I was thinking about joining a group was that it was going to add to the busyness of my life. The last thing I wanted was to end up dragging myself to one more activity at the end of a hectic day, but it hasn’t been like that. A KM group is designed to help put your priorities in order.

I remember driving one Tuesday evening to the meeting feeling intensely unsettled. Something had gone wrong in my day. I kept thinking about it, wanting to figure it out and fix it. Then the bell rang—we start with a thirty minute sit--and after a few minutes I also started noticing the sound of water. There is a fountain in the apartment and when the talking stops all you hear is a slight trickling and splashing of water. There was a calm in the sound of the water, and over the course of the next twenty-five minutes the two traded places in my awareness, the sound of the water coming into the foreground, the disturbance moving off into the background. Then we began sharing, and by the time the meeting was over I felt full and eager and alive. I remember being struck by how my big, bothersome issue had become nothing.

“It happens as a result of an intention,” says Jon Waterman, talking about what happens in a KM group. “You go into it with the intention to create a space for something to happen that’s bigger than you or me. The sharing can result in a kind of meditation, a mindfulness meditation. When it happens the individual members of the group come into a sense of harmony. It’s like playing in a band.”

Right now there are people waiting to get into KM groups in Virginia, Maryland, DC, even West Virginia. But in some cases the numbers are not quite there yet. “You need a sufficient number in order to make a group happen,” says Bill Mies, who along with his wife Joanne was the KM Coordinator for the past five years. “You need to achieve a kind of critical mass.”

If you’re interested in learning more about a KM group, please contact me, John Killoran, at IMCWKMCC@GMAIL.COM or 202.518.5207.