

## A History of Seattle Insight Meditation Society



About twenty years ago there was a small group of dharma practitioners living in Seattle. Although they each came to the dharma through his or her own circumstances, they had a common desire: all wished for a local dharma teacher and a local dharma community in Seattle.

The group heard about Rodney Smith, a new teacher who had recently moved to Seattle from Texas to start a full-time job as director of Hospice of Seattle and approached him about a plan for creating a local sangha. After a great deal of planning, hard work, and dedication, they formed Seattle Insight Meditation Society (SIMS).

SIMS was incorporated in 1998. A newsletter, brochure, website, and t-shirt soon followed. Ellen McCown, Rodney's wife and life-partner, designed a SIMS logo depicting the Buddha's hand holding a flower.

SIMS's first home was in the basement of Keystone Congregational Church in Wallingford. Each week

Rodney offered a meditation and dharma talk. The sits were held on Monday nights and were most notably quiet. People entered in silence, sat in silence and left in silence. But there was something special about this silence and attendance at the weekly sits began to grow with the end of each beginning class series. Soon the basement was filled to capacity with many people sitting on the stairs leading to the basement. It became clear that we had out-grown the space.

As the numbers grew, we moved to Congregation Beth Shalom in Wedgewood. Beth Shalom brought with it a new home and a new night for the weekly sits – Tuesdays.



The energy at SIMS was also changing with people wanting to have greater connections with each other. Based on a model from Spirit Rock, we began forming several kalyana mitta ("spiritual friend") groups. The KM (kalyana mitta) groups provided a more intimate venue for people in the sangha, allowing members to further explore their own practices and meet other practitioners. Some KM groups met for six months or a year; others have continued for over a decade.

Small group discussions, social hours and an annual summer picnic were also added to the weekly sits and with the increase in attendance and dana, SIMS was able to bring more visiting teachers to the area for weekend non-residential retreats. One of the fundamental principals of the SIMS community was that it be an all volunteer organization. We all agreed that we would not offer something unless we had enough volunteers to support the offering. Support for SIMS and its offerings has remained consistently high.



When we outgrew Beth Shalom, we settled in at St Mark's on Capitol Hill in Bloedel Hall.

None of us could have imagined how SIMS would grow through the volunteer efforts of so many people. Practitioners from all over the Pacific Northwest (including Canada) were now able to sit with teachers such as Sharon Salzberg, Steve Armstrong, Phillip Moffitt, Christina Feldman, Kamala

Masters, Norman Fisher etc. on a regular basis. In addition, every year we invited a couple of new teachers like Anushka Fernandapoule and Will Kabat-Zinn. These non-residential retreats and evening talks attracted hundreds of dharma seekers. Without a permanent home, volunteers had to "carry and set up" SIMS at various other locations - primarily Bastyr University and Nalanda West.

Several experienced students, called Local Dharma Leaders, began offering classes and day-longs on various dharma based subjects, neighborhood sitting groups and private practice interview/discussions. They also began helping Rodney with the increase in teaching responsibilities. Dharma talks by Rodney and the visiting teachers were made available for download on the SIMS website, a resource that is visited by thousands of people throughout the world each year.



In July 2013, SIMS moved into a newly renovated space in the south downtown district offered by two of it's long time practitioners. This new space allowed SIMS to offer additional non-residentials, single night talks by up and coming teachers and monastics. We also added an Under 40 Sunday evening group and a Thursday morning drop-in group to our weekly sit schedule.

Rodney Smith, our beloved teacher, stepped down as guiding teacher in 2015 with Tim Geil and Tuere Sala becoming the interim co-guiding teachers, each of whom brought with them new ideas and offerings. SIMS began offering new family, teen, kids events and a yearlong intensive practice course for practitioners with 3+ years of experience.

In May 2019, SIMS moved yet again from SODO to our current home at the University Friends House.

SIMS has grown into a large and vibrant organization. Although our Monday night sit remains the hallmark of the organization, SIMS has expanded to include a family friendly Sunday morning sit, a couple of different KM groups, including Climate Change Action and Under 40

sits. Regionally, there is a Thursday night sit in both Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood and on the Eastside in Kirkland. SIMS continues to offer non-residential retreats, meditation classes and full support for practicing the dharma.

SIMS continues to be a welcoming community for all who seek the dharma. May the beneficial energies generated by our continuous practice become a cause towards the ending of suffering for countless beings and may it be a condition for the liberation of all beings everywhere; seen or unseen.

