



## The Four Noble Truths, or How to Start a KM Group

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I recently started a new KM group with fellow sangha member Jerry Lockwood to study the Four Noble Truths. Previously I had been in a neighborhood KM group, comprising people living in the same general neighborhood but without a specific focus. As the group came to an end, I wanted to continue to meet in a small-group setting with others who shared a deep commitment to daily practice. I thought that, if there were none with openings, I could start one myself. So I signed up for the next KM facilitator training.

Shortly thereafter Jerry started looking for someone to co-facilitate a group he wanted to form. Jerry had participated in a course taught by two of SIMS' local dharma leaders in 2008-2009 based on a curriculum consisting of suttas, commentaries, and online talks developed at Spirit Rock Meditation Center as part of the Dharma Foundations Course. Jerry had found the materials compelling and was looking for an opportunity to study them again in a group setting. When Jerry asked Pamela Johnson, who led the KM facilitator trainings, about a co-facilitator, she put us in touch.

I knew Jerry only by sight from Tuesdays nights. We met over coffee to talk about the materials and our intentions and see if we would be a good fit. After I reviewed the materials, we met again to talk about what was important to each of us in a KM group. We decided how many members we thought were appropriate, the best structure for the meetings, and logistics such as where the group would meet. (I live in south Seattle, and Jerry lives in Mukilteo!)

Our group now meets twice a month, in my home. We spent the first couple of sessions sharing how we became interested in Buddhism, the history of our practices, and our specific interest in the topic. We follow the typical SIMS KM-group format, meditating at the beginning, checking in briefly about our practices and lives since we last met, then taking a short tea break followed by discussion of the study materials.

So far, we are pleased with how the group is going and how we work together. What makes it work is an open-hearted respect for all the members and a deep interest in the subject matter. Although our members have a range of practices and experience, we are clearly united by a common spirit of sincere interest. And our connections deepen as we seek to understand the teachings together.

The benefits of practicing this way are many. I've had little prior experience reading suttas; the language is so different from contemporary Buddhist teachers and writers that I find myself having to practice patience just to stay with them. Having others with whom to share thoughts and experiences about often radical and complex ideas is a great help. And sitting in meditation with new friends helps my heart open.

At the end of each meeting we dedicate merit of our effort. Afterwards, we often remark on the gratitude felt for the opportunity to be a part of such a wholesome endeavor. Some members of the group participate in other KM or sitting groups, as well as having busy work and home lives. It is a testament to the perceived importance of the group that we prioritize using this time for serious and intensive exploration.