



## Living the Buddha's Teachings

By Tuere Sala

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The most profound aspect of Buddha's teaching is its interconnectedness. There is a famous exchange between the Buddha and his most senior student in which the student said to the Buddha that admirable friendship, companionship, and camaraderie were half of the holy life. The Buddha emphatically denied this and replied that admirable friendship, companionship, and camaraderie were the whole of the holy life.

The Buddha's reply points to what makes this practice so impactful in our lives. If the sangha is the whole of the practice, then how we take care of each other is the most important part of our practice. This does not mean that daily meditation and listening to and studying the teachings are not important. It means that, without the sangha, these efforts can become routine and hollow. The sangha is what brings the Buddha's teachings to life.

There is no better way to experience the aliveness of sangha than through volunteering. SIMS, which started out with a small group of practitioners and a single teacher, has grown to include a permanent location, hundreds of practitioners, and several teachers. We are currently one of the largest sanghas in the country. This only occurred because of volunteers. People like you and me who come a little early, leave a little late or work at home. All of us doing separate tasks and yet together we cultivated a vibrant sangha where hundreds have found refuge.

I first volunteered as a greeter for several introductory classes at Keystone. I then moved to being one of the sound-system volunteers when we were sitting at St. Marks (and I still have no clue how electronics work). I have been volunteering at SIMS for over 15 years as a greeter, a tea yogi at nonresidential retreats, a mentor, and part of the cleanup crew. I didn't volunteer for all these duties for my own egotistical benefit nor out of a sense of obligation. I volunteered, and continue to volunteer, because I wanted to personally support and insure that everyone who came to SIMS would have a well-cared-for place to practice liberation—just like I experienced.

If the sangha is not yet the whole of your practice, you may consider signing up for a small volunteering opportunity and get a taste of what is possible when it is.