

What is a Sangha ?

By Dr. David Hopper (LVBS)

The word Sangha in the Pali language means assembly. It is similar in meaning to the Christian word church. In Christianity, the word church can be used to mean all Christians, a certain denomination, or a single congregation. In Buddhism, the word Sangha can mean all Buddhists, a particular sect of Buddhism, or all the members of a single temple or center.

Importance of Sangha

An important part of Buddhism is The Three Jewels, or Three Treasures, which is a declaring of your commitment to the Buddhist Path by saying:

I take refuge in the Buddha.
I take refuge in the Dharma.
I take refuge in the Sangha.

Many independent-minded individuals may find Buddhism interesting but don't feel any need to join a Sangha. While solo practice and study in meditation and Buddhism may be quite helpful but, practice with a Sangha is invaluable. Being part of a Sangha helps foster interconnectedness. It helps you realize that your practice isn't just about you and breaks down the barriers of the ego. The Sangha plays an important part in recognizing that your practice is for the benefit of everyone because self and other are really one not two. The ideal is to support one another and avoid just going along with the crowd.

If you can travel to attend a retreat occasionally, this would help boost your "solo" practice. Getting together with other solo practitioners to meditate or chant together is also very helpful. With the advancement in technology, it is possible to reach others through the internet and social media to create a virtual Sangha.

Thich Nhat Hanh says in his book *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* that "practicing with a Sangha is essential" and "Building a Sangha, supporting a Sangha, being with a Sangha, receiving the support and guidance of Sangha is the practice." The Buddhist path is a path of giving as well as receiving. Participating in the Sangha is a way of giving back to the dharma which becomes more precious to you over time. By sitting together in silent meditation, chanting together, maintaining a Dharma center together, and giving strength to each other, we break down the walls of our egos that separate us. The Las Vegas Buddhist Sangha has existed for 30 years and continues to grow and develop. Everyone is welcome to attend services at the center or other Sangha activities we hold. You do not have to be Buddhist or a member of our Sangha. We are all one.