

Discovering the Roots of Buddhism in Vietnam: A Journey of Healing, Hope and Coming Home

We walked slowly, silently, mindfully, in the moist morning heat, following the dirt path through the ancient gate to the Sisters' hall. Bowing to the Buddha, we found our relaxed and upright position on the brown cushions, grateful for the cool touch of the ceramic tiles beneath our feet, and the light breeze offered by an occasional electric fan. We sat quietly, side by side with the Sisters, as waves of powerful emotions washed through us. The video recorder clicked on ... and there was Thây, his familiar voice saying "You have arrived, you are home".

Practicing with the Brothers and Sisters at our root temple, Tu Hieu, we enjoyed this deeply nourishing Day of Mindfulness on day 6 of an incredible 12-day journey through Vietnam. On our first day, we had gathered together in Ho Chi Minh City/Saigon to share our aspirations and apprehensions, before venturing uncertainly into the Saigon traffic to pay tribute at the monument to Thich Quang Duc, who immolated himself in 1963 to call the world's attention to the persecution of Buddhists under the Diem regime. This powerful and moving experience was just the first of many, as we traveled together from southern Vietnam northward.

Twenty-one of us in all, including our beloved dharma teachers, Chu Chân Huy and Trish Thompson (Chân An Dinh, True Concentration on Peace), and our gracious and tireless guide, Phuong, became the White Cloud Sangha. Even as we enjoyed morning sitting, exercise in the parks and dharma sharing, we were skillfully guided through temples and pagodas, old and new, receiving both formal and informal teachings from Chân Huy on their connection to our lineage and their role in our traditions. Through Chân Huy's gentle humor, insight and skillful translations, the thread of our lineage tracing back through the centuries became real, tangible, and a part of us.

Aware that our tradition embraces both the teachings of Master Lin Chi (nowhere to go, nothing to do) and the practice of engaged Buddhism, Trish facilitated visits to centers where amazing work of healing and transformation is underway. From laughing and dancing with the young clients at DAVA (the Danang Association of Victims of Agent Orange); to savoring a lunch of fresh mushrooms grown and picked that morning by women at Mushrooms with a Mission (a project that works with disabled survivors of landmine accidents, female-headed households and ethnic groups in Quang Tri province); to rolling up our pant legs in solidarity with new friends at the Mine Action Visitor Center as part of the "Lend Your Leg" campaign, we were inspired by the hard and loving work of so many to bring a brighter and more peaceful future to this beautiful country that suffered foreign occupation, oppressive rule and war for so long.

Along the way, we experienced the deep peace of Tu Hieu, the exhilaration of reaching the summit of Yen Tu, the joy of singing the Heart Sutra at Truc Lam Tri Duc pagoda, the awe of standing in temples dating back to the early centuries of the last millennium, and so much more; but most of all, we experienced the love and support of one another, forever the White Cloud Sangha.