December 25, 2024

Through a series of serendipitous events, when my younger sister and I learned that there is a small group of sincere Dharma friends from Vietnam going to Taiwan to receive the Three Refuges and Precepts, we were very touched, especially since we have been working remotely with several Dharma friends in the Group for the past few years. Inspired by their sincerity and reverence for the Dharma, my sister said we should also go to see if we can be of any assistance. We connected with Dharma friends from Taiwan, with their full support and encouragement, we immediately booked tickets and started planning for the trip.

The Group consisted of 13 people registering to receive the Precepts for the Deceased. A couple traveled separately from Hà Nội to Taipei for the wife to receive the Precepts for the Deceased. The big group consisted of 12 members departing from Sàigòn to attend ceremonies in Taipei and Hualien. These 12 members each came from different regions of Vietnam, one traveled 33 hours by train from the North to reach Sàigòn with no vegetarian options on the train, another took 12 hours by bus from the central region of Pleiku, while others traveled from different parts of Vietnam to join the Group. They have varied professional experiences: accountant, entrepreneurs, construction & electrical engineer, lab technician, media content translator, project manager for online ed, real estate agent, rental property owner, sourcing developer, university operations coordinator, and tour guide.

Some members of the Group posses fluent foreign language skills, ranging from fluent English, Chinese, and even Korean. One member follows the ceremony schedule of CTTB, reciting Amitābha Sūtra on the odd lunar days and Eighty-eight Buddhas on the even lunar days. Some members recite the Śūraṅgama Mantra a number of times each morning and evening.

Some members of the Group have already been to the United States, England, Canada, Australia and Japan, one stayed in Korea for ten years, these members can obtain a visa easily; still there are other members who have not traveled overseas and it's harder to acquire a visa. The best option is to go as a tour group through a travel agency. The Group needed to provide required documents such

as adequate savings balance, employment contracts and copy of check stubs or proof of property ownership. When all the hurdles were cleared, finally all members of the Group were granted visas to come to Taiwan. Although officially classified as tourists, the Group asked for a private tour for four days mainly to attend the ceremonies in Dharma Book Distribution Association in Taipei and Amitābha Monastery in Hualien.

All members of the Group already took the Refuge and Precepts, but most requested to receive them again this time in Hualien. Being able to take part in the Refuge and Precepts Ceremony, they feel great joy and a sense of renewal; one member shared that he felt reborn again, turning over a new page in his life.

The Group was received with care by the Dharma Masters and lay community in Taiwan. The Dharma Masters prepared all the necessary arrangements to make the Group feel welcomed and at home, from providing heartwarming meals to preparing trilingual Precepts booklets so the Vietnamese Group can be part of the Great Assembly and not feel lost during the Ceremony. Everyone was very touched by the kindness and expressed deep gratitude toward the Dharma Masters and laity for the care they received.

Throughout their trip, the Group was mindful to maintain the Dharma practices of either reciting the Śūraṅgama Mantra, the Great Compassion Mantra or the Buddh's names and dedicated the merit to world peace and a smooth journey.

There were two tour guides accompanying the Group, one from Vietnam and one from the travel agency in Taiwan. There is a touching story to share regarding the tour guide from Vietnam who accompanied the Group. Initially she was assigned to lead a different tour, at the last minute she was reassigned to this Group. Learning of the Dharma Assemblies, she had a thought of wanting to help her stillborn brother. Consequently she dreamed of her stillborn brother beseeching her for help to relieve his suffering. She can feel the pain and suffering that her stillborn brother was experiencing and sincerely wished that she could help her brother attain liberation. Even before she was granted permission to receive the Precepts for the Deceased for her brother, she had a dream. In the dream, she followed in the footsteps of the Sangha wearing red and yellow robes. The next morning, her wish was fulfilled when she received

news that she could receive the Precepts for the Deceased. During the Precepts Ceremony, she was deeply moved and could feel the bond of kinship, the familial love and close connection spanning the two different worlds – the human realm and the non-human realm. She is profoundly grateful for the wholesome affinities that enabled her to help her brother be liberated from the non-human realm.

This was my 2nd trip to Taiwan after 26 years. I was happy to see the expansion of the very adorned Way Places in Taipei and Liu Giu and the recently built Buddha Hall at Amitābha Monastery amidst the backdrop of serene mountains and pristine air. The peaceful and beautiful scenery brings a sense of calm and clarity to one's body and mind.

It was a very meaningful trip filled with Dharma joy for my sister and me, we feel very blessed to have the chance to be part of the auspicious Dharma events and happy to be with the Group. We are deeply grateful to the Dharma Masters and Dharma friends in Taiwan for the kindness and warmth shown to us. We cherish the deepening of old friendships and dawning of new connections formed during this memorable trip. We wholeheartedly rejoice in everyone's merit and hope the Dharma seeds planted will flourish for generations to come.

Disciple Karen Huynh
Bow in Respect