



Abiding in the Dharma Treasure

A Self-Guided Tour of
Định Quang Buddhist Temple



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Namo A Di Da Phat

In celebration of the ten-year anniversary of the construction of

Dinh Quang Buddhist Temple,

we bow with gratitude for all who have supported our community.

We are especially grateful to our teacher,

Ven. Ty Kheo Thich Thong Chanh.

Returning to and relying on the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, we aspire to practice deeply For the well-being of all.



Namo Sakyamuni Buddha

Dear Most Venerable Sirs of the Sangha,

Dear distinguished guests and lay devotees near and far,

Dinh Quang Buddhist Temple is in Springfield, Missouri, in the Midwest region of the United States, and is the main center of Buddhist activities for the Vietnamese and American communities. With the desire for Buddhism to become brighter and more widespread, we aspire to build a place dedicated to cultivating and nurturing the spiritual life, thereby forming a temple in the hearts of each one of us. However, as the ancient saying reminds us:

If not for a cold frost,
the cherry blossoms do not easily release their fragrance.

Building a Buddhist temple in the United States is not easy, financially or legally, but the tougher the task, the more meaningful and valuable it is. While there are always certain difficulties and obstacles, as Buddhists, we understand the universal natural law and are not discouraged. When facing challenges, we instead try harder, and always dedicate ourselves for the Buddha Dharma and for the ultimate benefit of all sentient beings.

We respectfully wish all Venerable Sirs good health, to always be the shade of an ancient tree that protects us on the path of service. And we wish all lay Buddhists to develop Bodhicitta, diligently learning to bring peace and happiness to yourself and your families.

Venerable Thich Thong Chanh, Abbot

July 20, 2022

On the Ten-Year Anniversary of Dinh Quang Buddhist Temple



Table of Contents

Part 1: Introduction

6-7	The temple's construction
8	Our aspiration
9	Temple etiquette

Part 2: Temple Grounds

12	The temple gates
13	Marble furnishings
14-15	Quan Am Bodhisattva
16-17	Fixtures and lotus ponds
18-19	Offerings of flowers, fruit, incense, and more
20-21	The south temple entrance
22	The four pillars
23	The Dharma Protectors
24-25	Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva

Part 3: The Dharma Hall

28-29	Practicing in the Dharma Hall
30	The shoe rack and the tea & coffee station
31	Donation box and generosity
32-33	The coat closet and temple robes
34-35	Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara
36	The Ancestor's shrine
37	The Teacher's shrine
38-39	Amitabha Buddha

Part 4: The Buddha Hall

42-44	Buddha Sakyamuni
45	The Buddha's Parinirvana
46-47	The three sages of the Western Pure Land
48-49	Medicine Buddha
50-51	Manjushri Bodhisattva
52-53	Samantabhadra Bodhisattva
54-55	Tieu Dien Dai Si (Burning Face)
56-57	Ho Phap Vi Da (Skanda)
58	Dhammapada posters
59	Why the swastika?
60-63	Dharma instruments

Part 5: Temple Holidays

66-67	Three main holidays and the Buddhist Flag
68-69	Tet (Lunar New Year)
70-71	New Year traditions
72-73	New Year blossoms
74-75	Vesak
76-77	Bathing the Baby Buddha
78-79	Watering seeds of understanding
80-81	Ulamana
82-83	Rose ceremony
84-85	Healing hungry ghosts

Part 6: Gratitude and Sharing Merit

88	Acknowledgements/Credits
89	Dedication of Merit



1. Introduction



Namo A Di Da Phat

Welcome to Dinh Quang Buddhist Temple!

The Temple's Construction

Dinh Quang Buddhist Temple was formed by the Vietnamese community in Springfield, Missouri. They extended an invitation to our Abbot, Venerable Thay Thich Thong Chanh, who arrived in 2010.

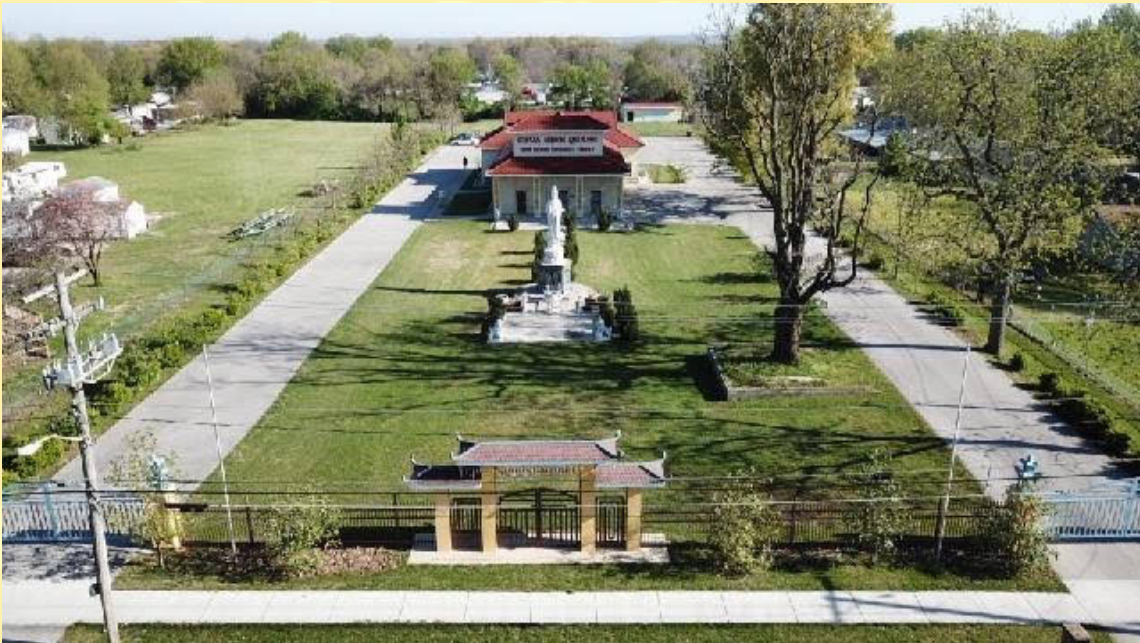


The community purchased land and held services in a converted house until the temple could be built.





Construction was completed in 2012, through the effort and generosity of the Vietnamese community in Springfield and around the world. It is situated on 2.3 acres with a tree-lined drive.





Our Aspiration

Dinh Quang Temple is an active monastery, a home for monastics and temple attendants.

We host services and activities for both Vietnamese- and English-speaking members, forming one temple community.

The sangha is diligent to cultivate a space in southwest Missouri where we can:

- hear the Dharma,
- build a community that is devoted to practicing the Buddha's teachings,
- and learn to embody compassion and wisdom.

As Venerable Thay teaches us, "With the desire for Buddhism to become brighter and more widespread, we aspire to build a place dedicated to cultivating and nurturing the spiritual life, forming a temple in the hearts of each one of us."

Temple Etiquette

Visiting the temple is a wonderful opportunity to join this practice, expressing gratitude and respect for the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. This includes habits and customs that we observe as part of our temple culture.

- While at the temple, it is customary to greet one another with hands together. This mudra, palms together and next to the heart, is a traditional symbol of respect and love. It acknowledges the potential for awakening in one another.
- Please remove your shoes inside the temple, especially within the Buddha Hall.
- Please refrain from extending your legs or feet toward a Buddha image or monastic.
- Please dress comfortably and modestly, in clothing that covers your skin from below the knees to the neck, especially within the Buddha Hall. (T-shirts are fine.) Otherwise, any style is welcome. Some people enjoy wearing formal clothing as an expression of their practice, while others prefer informal clothing.
- If you meet a monastic, you are invited to bow as you place your palms together and share the greeting, "Namo A Di Da Phat." This phrase is the Vietnamese translation of the homage to Amitābha Buddha and means "Homage to the Buddha of Infinite Light."





2. Temple Grounds



The Temple Gates

The border along High Street features a traditional entrance gate with three doors, for use by monastics (middle) and laypeople (sides). The gate is inscribed with the words, “Mindfulness is a source of happiness.” The community maintains the grounds with this spirit, hoping to make a space where people can feel well supported to cultivate virtue, generosity, wisdom, and love.



Marble Furnishings

The marble furnishings around the temple grounds are hand-carved from Vietnam, including incense bowls, lanterns, statues of lions, and the prominent Quan Am statue. The statue of Ksitigarbha is stone, an element associated with safety and protection.







Quan Am Bodhisattva

Bodhisattvas, “those set upon Enlightenment,” play an important role in Buddhism. In Theravadan traditions, the focus is mainly on Sakyamuni Buddha’s past lives on the bodhisattva. In Mahayana traditions, many archetypal, celestial beings who vow to aid all beings in reaching Enlightenment are venerated. The heart of the bodhisattva ideal is the cultivation of bodhicitta, awakening heart-mind for the benefit of all beings. All of us can aspire to the Bodhisattva path.

The first and most prominent image of a bodhisattva encountered at Dinh Quang Temple is of Avalokiteshvara, “One who hears the cries of the world.” This Bodhisattva of Compassion is known by many names and forms, such as Quan Am (Vietnam), Kuan Yin (China), Kannon (Japanese), and Chenrezig (Tibetan). The white marble statue that greets you as you enter the temple grounds is 17 feet tall and weighs 12 tons. It was carved in Vietnam and is one piece (plus the seven-foot base). It was installed in a special ceremony in June 2012.

She is depicted pouring the dew of compassion out of a vase. This is a blessing of peace and life on all beings and a symbol of purification and healing. Her right hand forms the seal of life mudra, with the ring finger touching the thumb.

She is wearing a crown that contains an image of Amitabha Buddha, from whose eye it is said she sprang to life. She stands on a lotus bloom. In all these ways, she embodies compassion and generosity, bringing serenity and peace with her to those who are suffering.



Below the marble statue is a base that features texts important in the devotional life of our community. These include:

- The Three Refuges, or The Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha);
- The Heart Sutra (Prajna Paramita), a key text that includes a prominent mantra; and
- Invocations to four Bodhisattvas (Ksitigarbha, Samantabhadra, Manjushri, and Avalokiteshvara).



The other fixtures, such as incense offering bowls and lanterns, feature phoenixes, peacocks, and dragons. Creatures with eye spots have often been associated with Avalokiteshvara, in connection with the Bodhisattva's practice of seeing, hearing, and healing the suffering of the world. The dragon is a symbol of transformation, whose roar awakens us from ignorance.





Lotus Ponds

Lotus ponds are found in front and beside the statue. The lotus reminds us of our capacity to cultivate insight and compassion. The seed grows in the mud, a symbol of suffering, yet the flower blooms above the water, just as Buddhist teachings and practice lead us on the path of liberation.





Offerings of flowers, fruit, incense, and more

Throughout the temple, you will see several common offerings. These are often associated with the four elements accepted in the ancient world: air (incense), earth (fruit, flowers), fire (candles), and water (bowls of water, tea, rice porridge, as well as ponds and fountains). Meditating on the elements helps a practitioner understand impermanence and dependent arising. All conditioned phenomena, including us, are made of constantly changing processes. The elements are also closely associated with meditations on the five aggregates (skandhas) and the arising of suffering in conditioned phenomena.





The South Temple Entrance

The south entrance features four pillars and two marble lions. The lions are a symbol of how wisdom can tame the wild mind to become both strong and calm. The Buddha Sakyamuni is also referred to as the Lion of the Sakya clan, and the Buddha's teachings are sometimes called "the lion's roar." Lion statues are often placed near entrances of temples as guardians. They can be seen both here and near the Quan Am statue.







The Four Pillars

The texts adorning the temple pillars mean (as translated by Dr. Khanh):

1. The sound of the bell brings loving-kindness & compassion.
2. To overcome barriers during our lives, or reach our ultimate goal, we need a focused mind, knowledge, and power over a long time, not just in a day or two.
3. The bright light from Buddha shines on our universe and opens our minds to understanding.
4. The solemn view and scenery of the Buddha eliminates our confusions & illusions.



Dharma Protectors

Representations of the Dharmapalas, or Dharma Protectors, also watch over the south entrance. These bodhisattvas have pledged to protect the Dharma and all who practice it. Their depictions remind us to also be diligent in maintaining and protecting our practice, remembering how valuable and precious it is.





Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva

Walking mindfully to the north entrance of the temple, we can view our second bodhisattva at the far end of the parking lot. Ksitigarbha (translated as Earth-Store Bodhisattva, “He who encompasses the earth,” or “Womb of the Earth”) is also known as Ti Ts’ang (China), Jizo (Japan), and Dizang (Tibet). He is known as a protector of children, the weak, travelers, and those suffering in hell.

He is usually depicted as a monk with a distinctive staff with jingling rings. Monastics would use the noise to warn creatures, such as small animals or insects, that a traveler was walking, so that they could get out of the way safely. The staff was also used to announce an alms round. Ceremonially, they were used in rituals and funerals. Symbolically, the rattling of the rings awakens us from delusion.



Ksitigarbha carries a wish-fulfilling jewel (cintamani) in his left hand. This jewel is often taught as a symbol for the Buddha’s teachings, which bring insight and an end to suffering.

Flanking the statue are lanterns. The left base features a teaching from the Earth Store Sutra, including a mantra. The right base features instructions on how to complete a prayer ritual. These reflect popular devotional practices.



3. The Dharma Hall







Practicing in the Dharma Hall

The Dharma Hall hosts many of our activities, from classes to celebrations.

But whatever we are doing, we dedicate our time in the hall to practicing the Buddha's teachings and building our community. This is true whether we are studying the Dharma, drinking tea, eating a meal, or enjoying a song and a good conversation.

A bell of mindfulness is available nearby to call us back to the present moment.



The Shoe Rack

As we enter the hall, you will notice a shoe rack next to the door. We remove our shoes out of mindfulness and respect. It also reminds us that, just as we do not want to track dirt into the Buddha Hall, we also want to let go of defilements in the mind. While we mindfully remove our shoes, we also center and purify the heart-mind.



The Tea & Coffee Station

The tea & coffee station and kitchen are on the east side. Eating and drinking with mindfulness is an important part of practice. We often chant or use gathas (mindfulness verses) to encourage us to make mindfulness a part of every moment, including mealtime.

The kitchen also reminds us of the practice of donating food and preparing meals, which is part of the mutual dependence of laypeople and monastics.





The Donation Box & Generosity

We call this mutual dependence because the monastics embody and teach the Dharma, which is considered the greatest gift, beyond price and offered freely. In turn, the lay community responds with gratitude, happily supporting the monastic sangha. One of the 10 Recollections for monastics is, "My very life is sustained by the gifts of others."

Donation boxes are another reminder of the role generosity plays in our practice. Giving, whether of time, effort, goods, or money, joins together our awareness of impermanence with 1) the practices of letting go (literally in giving a gift, and spiritually in working with attachment) and 2) cultivating goodwill. We also cultivate the insight of interbeing, understanding that maintaining our temple is the work and the gift of the entire community. We extend this awareness and commitment to our social programs and daily lives.

The Coat Closet & Temple Robes

The coat closet is also an opportunity for practice. In addition to holding coats, we often place our temple robes here. The monastics wear brown robes for activities and formal yellow robes for ceremonies. At Dinh Quang Temple, participants at the Vietnamese-speaking service wear the traditional blue-grey robes common to temples in Vietnam and the diaspora. Participants at the English-speaking service wear brown robes. Our Teacher reminds us that we wear robes for many reasons, including:



1) Their simple colors invite and remind the community to practice simplicity and humility, both at the temple and in our daily lives.

2) They remind us to show respect to one another and our potential for awakening.

3) They invite us to be mindful of our habits. When you are wearing a robe, it is easier to notice when you are about to do or say something that you would like to restrain. The robe also helps us to focus the mind and remember and keep our aspirations, our commitment to acting with greater kindness and wisdom.

4) They remind us that we are a community and that we represent the temple. At times, we also wear the robes in public, such as at funerals or during hospital visits.







Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara

At the south end of the Dharma Hall, there are three important shrines. The central shrine displays a wooden carving of Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara.

After taking his vow to not rest until all beings are freed from suffering, he worked tirelessly over untold ages, until the ocean of suffering was emptied. Triumphant, he returned to the Buddha-of-Infinite-Light, Amitabha. But when Avalokiteshvara turned, he saw, to his dismay, that the realms of existence were already overflowing with suffering.

Overwhelmed by the reality of working with such anguish for untold ages yet again, he doubted himself. "I cannot keep my vow," he thought, and with the thought, split into a thousand pieces. But Amitabha gathered the broken pieces together and refashioned Avalokiteshvara with a thousand arms and eyes. Renewed, the Bodhisattva was empowered to keep his vow to understand and heal the suffering in the world.





The Ancestor's Shrine

To the west of Avalokiteshvara is the Ancestor's Shrine, featuring photographs of deceased members and loved ones of our local temple community. At death, a memorial is held every week for seven weeks, with further memorials at regular intervals, such as 100 days and the one-year anniversary of death. Rituals are also offered during holidays. This is an expression of our interbeing; we understand that we are the continuation of our ancestors.



The Teacher's Shrine

To the east of Avalokiteshvara is the Teacher's Shrine, which features the photos of teachers in our temple's lineage who have passed away. Honoring teachers is an essential part of Buddhist practice, remembering that they have made the Dharma available to us and committing to practice skillfully in gratitude for this gift.

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Namo Amitabha Buddha



Amitabha Buddha

The Buddha-of-Infinite-Light, Amitabha, is the principal Buddha in our temple's Pure Land tradition. His path to Buddhahood includes the story of when he renounced his kingdom to become a monk named Dharmakara (Treasury of Dharma). He made 48 great vows for the salvation of all beings. After five ages and fulfilling all these vows, he attained Buddhahood and established his Pure Land.

His 18th Vow became the basis of Pure Land devotion; he vowed to not enter Enlightenment unless sentient beings who recited his name up to ten times would be born in the Pure Land. We carry on the tradition that of the recitation of his name as both a mantra and greeting, *Namo A Di Da Phat*.

The 32nd vow is an example of the beauty and peace of Amitabha's Pure Land, where "the lakes, winding streams, blossoming trees, and all other properties" shine with jewels and are fragrant with perfume. It is the "most wondrous state surpassing all heavenly and human worlds," touching our aspiration to practice in a way that transforms the realm of suffering into a place of peace, stability, and love.

Pure Land practice is strengthened by three qualities of mind: sincerity, faith, and the aspiration to abide in the Pure Land. With a practice filled with these qualities, we find that we can also touch the Pure Land in this very moment.



4. The Buddha Hall





Buddha Sakyamuni

The Buddha image on the main altar is the focal point of the Buddha Hall and a representation of Buddha Sakyamuni, sometimes called the historical Buddha. In this image, he is seated in meditation in lotus posture and on a lotus blossom. The eyes are closed in concentration. The hands are in the dhyani mudra, symbolizing the enlightened mind. The image is a golden color, symbolizing purity, knowledge, abundance, and liberation. He is dressed in simple monastic robes. A half-smile is on his lips, a sign of equanimity and goodwill.

Siddhartha Gotama was born in Lumbini, Nepal, around 500 B.C.E. He was the son of Suddhodana, the leader of the Sakya clan (a tribal confederacy in Kosala). His mother was Maya Devi, but she died a week after Siddhartha's birth. So Gotama was raised by his young aunt, Maha Pajapati. When he came of age, Gotama married Yashodhara and they had a son, Rahula. Maha Pajapati, Yashodhara, and Rahula would all become disciples of the Buddha, as would Siddhartha's first cousin, Ananda.

Before the Buddha-to-Be was born, Suddhodana heard a prophecy that his son would either become a powerful king or a spiritual seeker and teacher. Wanting to direct his son's fate toward the kingdom, he tried to shelter Gotama from suffering and surrounded him with pleasure. So, the young prince spent 29 years within the walls of the palace. In contrast to the relative luxury and ease of palace life, Gotama eventually encountered the Three Marks of existence: sickness, old age, and death.



Disillusioned with a life oriented around sense pleasure, Gotama left the palace, as well as his wife and infant son, to seek Enlightenment. He went from teacher to teacher, learning from and surpassing them all. He also practiced asceticism in an attempt to find an end to suffering.

Gotama spent nearly 30 years dedicated to pleasure, then six years dedicated to asceticism, before understanding that neither of these paths would bring liberation. This is when he sat beneath a ficus tree, now known as the Bodhi tree, and vowed to not rise until he realized Awakening. It was there that he had the insight of the Four Noble Truths and achieved Buddhahood.

He spent the next five decades teaching the Dharma as an act of compassion. He stated that he only taught one thing: suffering and the end of suffering.



The Buddha's Parinirvana

In front of the large Buddha image is a smaller image of the Buddha reclining on his right side. Prior to parinirvana, the Buddha spent his final moments in this posture. He practiced the jhanas (meditative absorptions) to prepare for death and nirvana, bringing an end to the cycle of Samsara.

The image of the Reclining Buddha reminds us that we also practice to bring an end to suffering, following the Buddha in the cultivation of wisdom and compassion. It is also an invitation to reflect on our own impermanence, and to commit ourselves to practice deeply with the Buddha's teachings during each moment available to us.





The Three Sages of the Western Pure Land

The three statues immediately in front of the main Buddha image represent Amitabha Buddha (center), Quan Am (left), and Mahasthamaprapta (right). Amitabha reminds us of the capacity for Awakening within each of us. Quan Am embodies the power of compassion, while Mahasthamaprapta embodies the power of wisdom.

Buddhism in Vietnam includes many traditions, but Pure Land practice is very common. At the heart of these practices is reciting Amitabha's name, which we chant in Vietnamese as the homage, Namo Adidaphat. We train our minds by studying and reciting the Pure Land Sutras and calling to mind the power of Amitabha's name. As we practice together, we also create a community of the Pure Land wherever we are. Likewise, we can transform the mundane items we use every day into Dharma instruments. No activity is despised, because all activities can be a path of transformation.

We have another lesson with the presence of Quan Am and Mahasthamaprapta. The combination of compassion and wisdom is intentional. A common analogy in Buddhist teaching is that these two qualities are like the wings of a bird; our practice is incomplete without both wings.







Medicine Buddha

In front of these three sages are seven small statues of the Medicine Buddha, Bhaiṣajyaguru. He is holding a jar of medicine nectar.

Medicine Buddha helps us cultivate the aspiration for everyone to have wellbeing in themselves, free from inner or outer harm. This aspiration becomes part of our practice, growing from the insight that we cannot cultivate this goodwill and then act in ways that undermine the wellbeing of ourselves and others.

When we participate in the Medicine Buddha chant, then, we do not separate it from our practice. We express our respect and gratitude for the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha). We practice the precepts and Mindfulness Trainings. We bring mindfulness into our daily lives, suffused with compassion and lovingkindness. In this way, we not only aspire to the healing that comes from Bhaiṣajyaguru; we also apply the medicine.





Manjushri Bodhisattva

To the east of the Buddha altar is a mural depicting the Bodhisattva Manjushri.

His name means “Gentle Glory;” he is also known as Wenshu (China) and Jampalyang (Tibet). He is associated with wisdom and insight. He carries a scepter, which he uses to cut through delusion and ignorance. This is a gentle act of compassion, removing obstacles that bar the way to liberation.

In his other hand, he holds a scroll of the Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya). This is a foundational text in our temple’s tradition; it both supports the cultivation of wisdom and is a symbol of it.

Manjushri rides on a lion, a symbol of how wisdom can tame the wild mind to be both strong and calm. He is considered the patron of agriculture, as well as science. All of these attributes connect with the aspiration to cut through ignorance, opening the way for insight, understanding, and Awakening.







Samantabhadra Bodhisattva

To the west of the Buddha altar is a mural depicting the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra.

His name means “Universal Virtue/Worthy;” he is also known as Fugen (Japan) and Puxian (China). He is associated with the Lotus Sutra and teaches that wisdom is only wisdom when practiced, and that a practice is truly beneficial when it benefits all living beings.

He made ten great vows as a bodhisattva, including offering respect to all Buddhas, praising the Tathagata, making generous gifts, and repenting of evil karma. The final vow, to transfer all his merits to the benefit of all beings, has become an essential practice for those who undertake the Bodhisattva path.

He rides an elephant, perhaps recalling the elephant that appeared to Queen Maya (the mother of the Buddha) to announce the Buddha’s birth. He holds a lotus flower and a book containing the Lotus Sutra. All of these attributes connect with the aspiration to join our practice with the path of service, contributing to the alleviation of suffering in ourselves, others, and the earth.

Tieu Dien Dai Si (Burning Face)

In the shrine at the southeast of the Buddha Hall, Avalokiteshvara is depicted in a fierce form he takes to bring compassion to the Hungry Ghosts. In this form, they will listen to him, and he can feed them with the nectar of compassion.

The shrine becomes a focal point during the Hungry Ghost Ceremony. This ritual includes several important elements, such as mudras (gestures with specific meanings) and dharanis (chants for healing and protection) that open the throats of the hungry ghosts, so they can receive compassionate offerings. Ksitigarbha is also invoked with a petition to lead the hungry ghosts to Avalokiteshvara. Tieu Dien Dai Si (Burning Face) is a reminder of the importance of skillful means and the insight that compassion can be cultivated for all beings, no matter their suffering or circumstances.









Ho Phap Vi Da (Skanda)

Across from the Burning Face shrine, on the southwest wall, there is a shrine to Ho Phap Vi Da (Vietnam), also known as Wei Tuo (China) or Skanda.

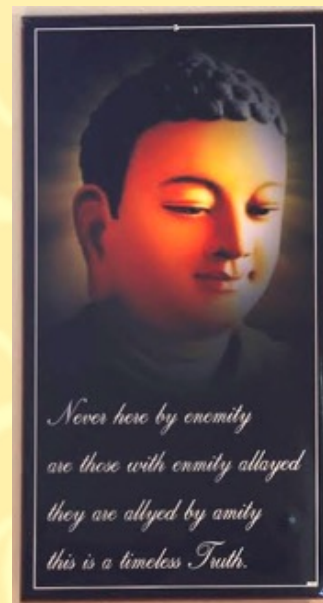
He is a Bodhisattva and one of the 24 guardian deities described in the Golden Light Sutra. He is depicted in full armor and with a sword. There are a number of stories and legends about him, including his efforts to reclaim the Buddha's relics after they were stolen by demons.

Other legends describe his devotion to Princess Miao Shan, a manifestation of Kuan Yin Bodhisattva. Skanda was a military general who loved the princess, but knew it was impossible to be her partner. Nevertheless, and impressed by her kindness, he devoted himself to her protection. Together, they built a temple and kingdom. However, her father was enraged; he sought out and killed them both. Yet they were transformed into bodhisattvas, and Skanda vowed to protect Kuan Yin.

Dhammapada Posters

The Buddha Hall is also decorated with posters that feature words from the Dhammapada, which means “The Path of the Dharma.” It is an early compilation of 423 of the Buddha’s sayings, arranged in 26 chapters.

It famously begins, “All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a person speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows them, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. ... If a person speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves.”





Why the swastika?

You may notice that some of the Buddha images and objects include a swastika on them. Many western Buddhists have discontinued using this symbol, due to its association with Nazism. However, its use as a holy symbol predates fascist usage by thousands of years. It has been found in the archaeological record around the world and continues to be used in many cultures today.

The swastika was already in use before the advent of Buddhism as a symbol of well-being and good fortune. It can be traced back to circa 3000 B.C.E in India and Central Asia. Etymologically, the word derives from the Sanskrit *svastika*, “conducive to well-being.”

Because the swastika is formed by placing spokes in a circle, Buddhists saw in it a reminder both the wheel of the dharma and the cycle of samsara. Buddhists also adopted the swastika as a symbol of the Buddha’s footprints and it can frequently be seen at the opening or closing of inscriptions. The symbol is also called “The Seal of the Buddha’s Heart” and is sometimes placed on the chest in Buddha images.



Dharma Instruments

Monastics and lay leaders use several Dharma instruments during services and ceremonies. They all serve the purpose of symbolizing and reminding us of the Buddha's teachings.



Temple Bells

The most commonly used instruments are bells, which come in many shapes and sizes. The large temple bell calls us together to begin a special service. The small inkin (on a rod) is normally used when the bell master is moving or bowing.



Small bells are used in services, often to guide the chanting.





The hammered bronze bells, with their beautiful resonance, are used throughout services, and also as bells of mindfulness.

However, any bell can call us to the present moment, and bells have long been revered as a reminder to awaken. This is why you may observe practitioners bowing to a bell.

We also pause whatever we are doing when a bell is invited, giving full attention to the sound. The lingering, beautiful sound welcomes us back to the present moment.



Wooden Fish

Known as a mokugyo (Japan), muyu (China), mock gnu (Vietnam), or shingnya (Tibet), the wooden fishes are used as an aid in chanting and recitation to help practitioners follow the same rhythm and tempo. The fish, with ever-opened eyes, are a symbol of alertness/wakefulness. They are joined together at the handle, where they embrace a pearl as a symbol of unity.



Dharma Drum

The monastics and temple members are also trained in using other Dharma instruments, such as the temple gong in the southeast corner, the temple drum in the southwest corner, and various small bells.





5. Temple Holidays







Three Main Holidays

Dinh Quang Temple celebrates three main festivals each year:

- Tet, the Lunar New Year (the first day of the the first month of the lunar calendar);
- Vesak, commemorating the birth, life, teachings, and parinirvana of the Buddha (the first full moon of the lunar month Vesakha, or the first full moon of May in the Western calendar); and
- Ulambana, commemorating parents and ancestors (the 15th day of the seventh Buddhist lunar month).

The actual date of celebrations at Dinh Quang Temple varies according to our community's needs. Visiting the temple during these festivals is an especially good way to experience traditional Vietnamese Buddhism, deepen our practices, and build our temple community.

The Buddhist Flag

During festivals and other special occasions, the gates and driveway are decorated with Buddhist flags. These flags have six vertical bands, one for each color associated with the Buddha's Enlightenment:

- Blue (compassion),
- Yellow (the Middle Way),
- Red (the fruits of practice),
- White (the Dharma's purity),
- Orange (the Dharma's wisdom), and
- a band containing the five colors together (truth).

The flag is also a symbol of unity, being used by Buddhists around the world after it was adopted by the World Fellowship of Buddhists in 1950.



Tết (Lunar New Year)

Chúc mừng năm mới! (Happy New Year!)

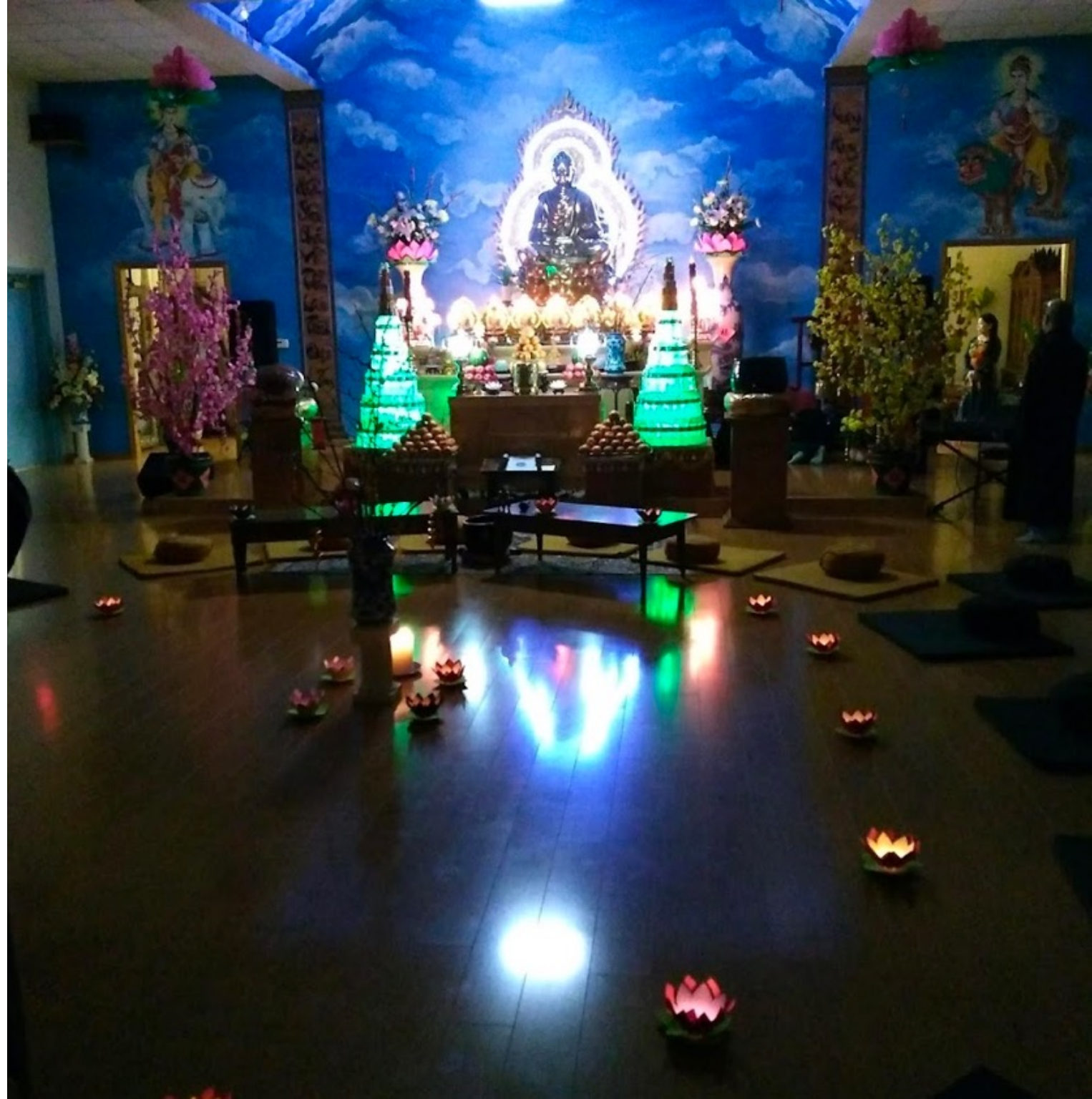
Though not an official religious holiday, the Lunar New Year is a wonderful opportunity to cultivate joy. At our celebrations, we call to mind our loved ones' presence, both living and dead. We celebrate the relationships and memories that have brought about the good and beautiful things in our lives, even as we nourish forgiveness and healing for the suffering.

It is also a time for reflection. Looking back, we can see where we have grown, and where we have not. Looking ahead, we aspire to practice in a way that brings healing to places of suffering in and around us, and to cultivate harmony and peace in our community. We understand that we can begin again with each moment, and the new year is an especially good opportunity to strengthen our habit of beginning again, making our practice and spirit fresh.

Because of this, Lunar New Year is a wonderful time to cultivate Right Resolve. We become aware of unskillful habits and patterns that lead to suffering in our selves, others, and the earth, and resolve to prevent and let go of them. We become aware of skillful habits and patterns that lead to wellbeing in our selves, others, and the earth, and resolve to practice them. In this way, we strengthen our commitment to the path of insight and Awakening.

**CHÚC MỪNG
NĂM MỚI**







New Year Traditions

Many people prepare for Tết by doing extra house cleaning and by cooking special holiday food, such as rice cakes with mung bean filling (square *bánh chưng* to represent the earth and circular *bánh tét* to represent the moon).

Being the first visitor to a person's house on the first day of the new year (*xông nhà*) is a New Year's honor. We also have traditions for venerating ancestors, exchanging New Year's greetings, giving lucky money, and visiting friends and loved ones.

At the temple, we combine these celebrations with sharing lucky dollar bills, practicing the Avolokiteshvara Oracles, making offerings to the ancestors, and celebrating with games, music, and food. We conclude with an offering to the hungry ghosts.

On the week after our Lunar New Year celebration, we pray for peace and chant the Medicine Buddha mantra, beginning with a candle offering.



New Year Blossoms

In Vietnam, springtime blossoms arrive with the Lunar New Year, and flowers are an especially meaningful offering and decoration.

The blooms remind us that they must be appreciated in this very moment, because they are impermanent. No matter how carefully we tend for them, we know that they will soon fade.

So, the New Year blossoms teach us to live deeply in each moment, and to care for and enjoy our practice. Just as we replace the blooms as they wilt, composting them and growing something new, we understand that we need to care for our practice and community, keeping our compassion and wisdom fresh.









Vesak

Vesak is the celebration of Sakyamuni Buddha, including his: birth, renunciation of worldly life, Enlightenment, teaching of the Dharma, and death and achievement of Parinirvana. In turn, it is also a celebration of Buddhist community, those who hear the Buddha's teachings and devote themselves to practice. This is why the Buddhist flag is usually prominent at our Vesak celebrations.

Even though we call to mind the Buddha's life and teachings at Vesak, the focal point is on the birth of Siddhartha Gotama and the central image is of Gotama as a child. He is standing with the right hand pointing upwards (declaring his future Buddhahood) and the left hand pointing to the earth (calling the earth as a witness that he will achieve Enlightenment). The two mudras bring together heaven and earth, above and below, in wholeness.

The image is based on a story of the Buddha's birth. He immediately stood and took seven steps, with lotus flowers blossoming under his feet. At the last step, he declared that he was the World-Honored One:

"This is the last birth.
There is now no more coming to be."

Similar to pointing above and below, the seven steps represent the seven directions (the four cardinal directions, up, down, and here or within). This is another reminder of the completeness of the practice and the wholeness of the teachings.





Bathing of the Baby Buddha


Vesak ceremonies include a ritual for Bathing the Baby Buddha, which commemorates the moment when the Buddha-to-Be declared this would be his final birth. The statue of the child is placed within a basin of perfumed water. The community takes turns mindfully filling a ladle from the basin and gently pouring it over the shoulders of the Buddha.

This ritual is based on the story that, at the Buddha's birth, the skies opened, and streams of cleansing water washed the child and his mother. When bathing the Buddha at Vesak, we remember this and apply it to our own practice. We dip the ladle three times and aspire that our practice will bring freedom from harm, an abundance of good results, and liberation from suffering for all beings.

These practices also remind us of our own capacity for Awakening, especially with the support and encouragement of a community.







Watering Seeds of Understanding

When we remember our own capacity for Awakening, we also remember this capacity exists in others, and vice versa. When each of us practices the Vesak aspirations (freedom from harm, abundance of good, and liberation from suffering), the entire community benefits. This is one reason why we cannot separate the Buddha's Enlightenment from Buddhist community. The Buddha set the wheel of the Dharma in motion, opening to us all the way of practice that leads to the end of suffering.

When we practice skillfully together, we water the seeds of understanding and compassion in ourselves and one another. And when we understand the meaning of Bathing the Buddha, we can bring the same energy and intention to our everyday activities. At Vesak, we learn to mindfully wash the Buddha image, so now we also know that we can wash our hands or dishes with mindfulness. Every moment can be transformed into the practice of understanding, compassion, and joy.



Ulambara

Ulambara has its origins in a sutra that describes Mahamaudgalyayana and his mother. After her death, Maudgalyayana perceived that his mother was reborn in the Realm of Hungry Ghosts. Moved by his gratitude for the care she had given to him as his mother, he sought to ease her great suffering. But every attempt failed.

Maudgalyayana went to the Buddha to ask how he could help his mother, and the Buddha replied that her situation required the energy and care of the entire Sangha. This coincided with the completion of the three months long retreat of intense and dedicated practice, so the monastic community had cultivated the energy and compassion to help Maudgalyayana's mother. Together, they made offerings dedicated to relieving her suffering.

Seeing the good result of their efforts, Maudgalyayana found peace for himself, and the sangha found delight in supporting him and relieving his and his mother's suffering. The Buddha then taught that our skillful actions can bring about wellbeing and healing to seven generations. This is a powerful reminder of the importance of spiritual community, especially the monastic Sangha, in embodying the Buddha's teachings and supporting transformation. We continue this practice by making offerings and performing the Hungry Ghost ceremony. We also celebrate Ulambana as a day to honor our parents (both living and dead) and our ancestors.





Rose Ceremony

During our celebration, we are offered a rose in honor of our mothers, a red rose for those who are living or a white rose for those who have passed away. Monastics receive a yellow rose, recognizing that they belong to the Buddha's family.

These roses help us remember that we are the continuation of our parents and ancestors; we are made of our parents, and they are always within and with us. We have all inherited and learned from our parents and ancestors, some qualities and habits leading to wellbeing, and others leading to suffering. Understanding this, we aspire to practice out of gratitude for this life in which we have heard the Buddha's teachings, and for the healing of ourselves and all our ancestors.





Healing Hungry Ghosts

At Ulambana, we focus on our parents and ancestors, and we gather to chant and make offerings at the shrine of Tieu Dien Dai Sy. But the practice does not end when we finish the ceremony. The Most Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh also taught us another important aspect of healing the hungry ghosts.

The way we treat each other in a society, and the way a society is organized, can produce a hungry ghost in us psychologically. We can see this inside of ourselves and in our communities. Driven by disconnection with life, our ancestors, and with each other, we become desperate to find meaning and community. If we do not have a safe, compassionate, and wise community to support us, it is easy to become more alienated. We habitually think, do, and say things that are harmful and that increase the isolation. Cut off from life, we neither feel nor are safe. We easily become distrustful, even as we hunger for connection and understanding. We have become like a hungry ghost, always craving this connection but not able to satisfy ourselves.

The Hungry Ghost ceremony is an opportunity for us to reflect. How can we relieve the sufferings of ourselves and others? How can we create community where we can connect with one another in healthy ways? We return to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, and we contemplate the insight from the Hungry Ghost ceremony that it is possible for us to learn to live in such a way that brings about release from suffering in ourselves and in the world.





6. Gratitude & Sharing Merit



With gratitude for all who helped with this project:

Photo credits:

Cover: Temple from north entrance. Photo by David Ketchum (DK).

5: Lotus blossoms with honeybee. (DK)

6-7: Venerable Thay. Temple construction. Photos by Marc Spess (MS). Overhead view of the temple grounds. Photo courtesy of Venerable Thay (VT).

8: The community of practice. Photo by Rheanna Pulley (RP).

9: A nun with palms together. (RP)

11: Buddha in the garden. (DK)

12: The temple gates. (DK)

13: Marble furnishings. (DK)

14: Quan Am Bodhisattva. (DK)

16-17: Fixtures and lotus ponds. (DK)

18-19: Offerings of flowers, fruit, and incense. (MS)

20: Temple rooftop. (MS)

21: Guardian lion. (DK)

22: The four pillars at the south entrance. (MS)

23: The Dharma Protectors. (DK)

24-25: Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva (DK)

27: The master's tea set. (MS)

28: Preparing to serve a meal. (MS)

29: Celebrating together with a meal. (VT)

29: Bell of mindfulness. (DK)

30: The shoe rack; the tea and coffee station. (MS)

31: Donation box. (MS)

32: The coat closet. (DK)

33: The community practicing while wearing temple robes. (RP)

34-35: Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara. (DK)

36: The ancestor's shrine. (DK)

37: The teacher's shrine.(DK)

38: Amitabha Buddha. (MS)

41: The Buddha Hall. (DK)

42: Buddha Sakyamuni on the main altar. (DK)

44: A bodhi tree leaf. (DK)

45: Reclining Buddha. (VT)

47: The three sages of the Pure Land. (DK)

48: Medicine Buddha. (DK)

51: Manjushri Bodhisattva. (DK)

52: Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. (DK)

54-55: Tieu Dien Dai Si (Burning Face Avalokiteshvara). (page: VT; inset: DK)

56: Ho Phap Vi Da (Skanda). (VT)

58: Dhammapada posters. (MS)

59: Amitabha Buddha. (MS)

60: Venerable Thay with ink. (DK) Small bell. (MS)

61: Temple bell. (MS)

62: Bells. (DK)

63: Wooden fish and temple drum. (MS)

65: New Year in the Buddha Hall. (VT)

66: The Buddhist Flag (MS)

69: Tet decorations in the Dharma Hall. (VT)

70: A New Year's vigil in the Buddha Hall. (DK)

72-73: Cherry blossoms.

74: The basin and altar is prepared for bathing the Buddha. (DK)

77: Temple members bathe the Buddha. Photo by Kyle Clymore (KC).

78: A Vesak ceremony in the Buddha Hall. (KC)

81: Offerings for the Hungry Ghosts. (DK)

82: Venerable Thay receives a yellow rose. (RP)

83: A tray of roses. (MS)

85: The Hungry Ghost ceremony. (DK)

87: A child practices placing palms together. (KC)

89: The temple community. (VT)

Book layout by Max Prater.

Descriptions by David Ketchum under the guidance of Venerable Thay.



We bow with gratitude to the Triple Gem.
On this anniversary of our temple's construction,
we especially dedicate the merit of this offering
to all who have supported our temple community
and all who benefit from receiving the Dharma here.

May what is useful support us in deepening our practice.

May what is incomplete or inaccurate
be corrected and not become an obstacle.
And may all beings be free from suffering.

Namo A Di Da Phat

