

“Thus have I heard” of an ascetic wanderer who walked this earth mindful, aware, and content. Those who knew him called him “Sawyamuni”. His peaceful walks and meditation in the forest occupied his time. One day in the midst of a long journey to the hills, he came across a Buddhist temple. The name, which was set atop the entrance, read “Kim Quang Temple”. Sawyamuni had never seen anything like this before. It was extravagant. From the entrance he noticed the beautiful yellow-tan paint that covered the temple. The red terra cotta shingles played harmoniously with the exterior paint and the red mahogany carvings that jutted out off of each corner in the shape of dragons. Over the doorway to the temple was a wood sculpture of the Wheel of the Monarch. This was incredibly ornate and out of the ordinary for Sawyamuni. He realized what the building was and on arrival he asked a local monk, “what goes on here?” The monk replied, “ We reside here to pray to and practice the Buddha, Dharma, and the Sangha. Sawyamuni understood this but was confused as to why they were practicing in this way. He felt like the minority of the group being an ascetic wanderer because of the way that he practiced his rituals and the religion.

Sawyamuni arrived at the temple in the morning sometime around eleven o’clock. At this time there were already hundreds people gathering inside the confines of the temple lawn. Mostly everyone was of Asian descent but there were a few people that were white and that was something Sawyamuni wasn't sure of, but he tried his best to be helpful and kind toward them. They, after all, were laypeople practicing the same religion. One of the monks said, the giant Jade Buddha will be presented at this temple for the next few weeks. They called the event the “Exhibition of the Jade Buddha for Universal Peace.” You could easily tell the difference between the laypeople and the monks because of the clothing they were wearing. The laypeople mostly wore their work or casual attire, while the monks wore brown and grey robes. Everyone who was there was very aware and mindful of everyone else. The whole area was beautifully decorated with flowers and statues of the Buddha and other vases and

decorations. The smell of strong incense brought a sense of tranquility and peacefulness to the people who were there. The giant Jade Buddha was placed to the left of the temple, but was almost just as tall. It was exceptionally decorative with gorgeous marble pillars, flamboyant dragon pieces, and sweet smelling flowers. Sawyamuni stood before the huge altar of the Jade Buddha, knelt and did his ritual of prayer three times. He then got up and turned around to see the garden behind him. It had a wandering path that lead him around the other statues and ponds. On his return he noticed the vendors on the right side of the lawn. This disappointed him. He in his own mind knew that all of that stuff was just material goods that he did not need, but for the temple they collected donations and money from the vending. He did not understand that these offerings were for enhancements to the temple and not for personal indulgence.

Before any of the celebrations started Sawyamuni took time to enter the temple and offer prayer to the Buddha. Sawyamuni was impressed with the interior of the building. He noticed those who wore shoes removed them before entering, but he didn't own shoes so he wandered in with his bare feet. The floor was finished wood that held a distinguished center area that seemed to separate the two sides of the room. Sawyamuni was first drawn to the front of the room where there was another giant golden Buddha placed upon a pedestal against the back wall. He put his palms together and raised them to his head three times in honor. He was approached by one of the monks who tried to show him the three tables in front of the statue that held relics from some of Buddha's disciples like, Sariputra and Subhuti. The monk was very friendly in trying to show Sawyamuni these relics. These intrigued Sawyamuni very much; he tried to ask the monk more about them, but could not understand what he was saying because of the difference in dialect. He nodded contently and continued to look around. Sawyamuni watched some of the other people perform their rituals and was grateful for being able to view it. On either side of the Buddha statue were two tables that held smaller jade Buddhas. In front of those were some vases

that were used to make a gong noise that the monks would spontaneously sound off on. Sawyamuni was very impressed with the celebratory aspect of the event. Upon hearing an introduction for a music group that was performing later, he made his way out of the temple and moved in with the crowd to watch the band.

Sawyamuni was sitting on the grass ready to enjoy the entertainment, but encountered a beautiful young woman named Vivian. She was the lead singer of the band. Sawyamuni was excited to meet this musician since they were about to be playing. She introduced him to the rest of the band, but the conversation could not last long because they were called onto the stage to perform their music. All of the visitors sat cross-legged on the grass in front of the band that was in front of the Jade Buddha. They all sat quietly with gentle postures showing their enjoyment and their awareness.

The music began to play and ten Vietnamese girls wearing vibrant white dresses decorated in colorful lays and flowers came prancing up the isle and spread out in front of the band. They danced together, spinning and twirling their bodies and parasols. Sawyamuni was absorbed in the dancing, but was unable to understand the songs that were sung. In spite of not understanding the words to the song he enjoyed the simplicity of the sound that emanated from the vocals and instruments.

Sawyamuni listened for a while but then got up and decided to go look at the vendors. He knew the things being sold were for the laypeople, because there was no need for him to have any of that. It was not his way of life. However, Sawyamuni saw a miniature figure of the Buddha laughing. He had never seen such a figure. Intrigued, he asked the lady if she spoke his language first, and she said, "yes". Sawyamuni asked the lady what the significance of the "laughing Buddha" was, and she tried to respond, but in fact her dialect was not as good as she thought it was. He could barely understand her, but what he discerned from listening to her speak was that it symbolized the good nature and happiness that came to the Buddha's followers. It enlightened him to see that all the people who attended the event were

very generous and willing to answer any questions Sawyamuni had.

Sawyamuni left the temple before the music ended. He indulged for a few hours the blessed event that he witnessed. He walked off into the woods to continue his wandering amongst the forests. Mindfully, calmly took each step lightly as he entered back into his domain to again beg for his food and to be mindful of all his dukha. He thought to himself after how beautiful it was to watch everyone interact with each other and the entertainment. Viewing the actions of the people showed Sawyamuni the different perspectives they had. It especially impressed him when these laypeople practiced in the temple, how respectful and aware of everything they were. The wanderer's upbringing definitely influenced his attention and thoughts. He was brought up a boy out in the hills, lived a simple lifestyle but decided to give up it all to become an ascetic wanderer. He had only his robe and his bowl. This was strange for him because he was use to being content with nothing but his body and the dharma. He saw many lavish things he had never seen, although it amazed him to see the beauty of the flowers and decorations for the admiration of the Jade Buddha. Sawyamuni wondered to himself while he watched some of the people in the temple and tried to understand what some of the types of prayers they did were. He was unaccustomed to their style of worship. Nonetheless, he took it all in with open eyes and did not judge, but absorbed their way of life. The entire day of this event was a blessing in disguise for Sawyamuni.