

# Words of a Young Novice Monk

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Sitting at my desk, I recall memories with my family: The moments when I was still in my mother's womb (as my mother has told me), when suddenly, dark clouds came and shattered my family. My father left my mother to find a new love when I was not yet born. For sure, at that time, my mom suffered a lot, so I came to hate my father. Why was it that he did not return to take care of us, that when I was born, I was already fatherless? My mom had to assume the role of a mother with the added responsibilities of a father. Every morning, she got up early to prepare sweet soup to sell. At that time, not yet really understanding her misery, I horsed around with friends in the village without noticing her presence. Oh, Mom, I was so heartless! I am so sorry, Mom!

Fortunately, during that time, my mom's younger brother (Br. Trời Hướng Thượng) was there, acting as a father to help raise me. He was very strict with me. Many times, I got carried away playing with my friends, and when I came home too late, my uncle punished me by making me kneel holding incense. At that time, I was so sad and angry with him for not understanding that I was lacking the love of a father. Out of loneliness, I hung out with bad friends because they understood me. My tears flowed, and when my uncle saw them, he told me to go to sleep, but in my heart, I still could not relieve my sadness. In the evening, he came to me, rubbed my head, and whispered, "I'm sorry for the loss in your heart, but I promise to protect and take care of you." After years of taking care of me (until grade four), he left me to become a monk. He saw a beautiful new horizon, an ideal he dreamt of every night. And so I lost another family member, the one I loved and trusted most, in whom I had so much faith and hope. He was gone, returning no more.

Two years went by as I lived in grief, loneliness, and sadness. Then I went out with my bad friends again; they pushed me to go to play video games, card games, to fight, and so on. Over time, my studies declined a lot. From a child who studied well and was obedient and polite with teachers, I had become a bad student, frequently criticized by the teachers as depraved.

In grade six, I had the conditions to go to Từ Đức temple. When I was there, I felt so happy to play with the aspirants. In the temple, I still goofed off a lot. In the mornings, everyone went to meditate, but I continued to sleep, and I was not present for any of the Dharma Talks. I was sad when I left Từ Đức temple, but I still had to go to school. At home, I continued to practice walking meditation. The feeling of walking alone was enjoyable. I told myself, next time, I would ask to become an aspirant at Từ Đức temple, the place I love. By eighth grade, I still wanted to be an aspirant at Từ Đức temple, but as I was not old enough, the elder Brothers did not allow it. Therefore, I asked my family if I could go to Huế to become a young novice monk until I was old enough to be an aspirant in Từ Đức temple. The day I prepared to go, my mom cried a lot because she feared I would not be able to endure being alone, without her by my side, having to do hard work such as I had never done before. Thinking like that, she cried all night, yet, at that time, I still only thought of going to Hue to try out being a novice monk. If possible, I would stay; if not, I would return home.

In the beginning, when I first started as a novice, I saw everything as new, lovely, and beautiful, but after a while, I wanted to go home because, in the temple, I could not play games or hang out with friends; I could only rake leaves, study sutras, and chant. Every time I felt sad, I always sought a quiet place with lots of stars to lie down and look up at the twinkling stars, saying, "Dear Mom, what are you doing now? Do you miss me? Here, I miss you and everyone very much!" The tears kept flowing down my cheeks. There was no one who could understand; I looked tough on the outside, but on the inside, I was very soft. Over time, I adapted to life in that environment.

Time passed quickly, and then I was fifteen, old enough to be an aspirant at Từ Đức temple. What happiness! After two years away from Từ Đức temple, I could see again the familiar, lovely scenes: the meditation hall, the row of hibiscus, the volleyball court where I played the most. From then, I began a new life; the aspirants who were there before me showed me about the work, practices, and such. I remember the days when the Brothers sat down to play together and share their joys and suffering so that we could better understand each other and help each other overcome those difficulties. Those are moments I will never forget. The same is true of my memories with the big bell. The first time I went to invite the big bell, I was so scared passing by the ancestral altar to offer incense, feeling as though someone was standing behind me, but it was just my imagination. As I went to the big bell, sweat poured from my forehead, from when, I do not know. Many times, do to my lack of mindfulness, I startled the Brothers a lot by inviting the big bell early, an hour before sitting meditation. Therefore, I had to do beginning anew for disturbing the Sangha. There are still so many things to share, but I just want to tell a few stories. After a while of anticipation, the good news came that I would be ordained as a disciple of Thay, of the Buddha, and the Patriarchs. When our elder, Brother Pháp Niệm, put his hand on my head and the Sangha chanted the name of the Bodhisattva, I felt the energy of the Sangha, so powerful, penetrating me, and I recited after him:

“Shedding my hair completely

I make the great vow today

To transform all my affliction

And to help all living beings”

After the ordination ceremony, people moved downstairs for the tonsuring ceremony. The sound of the name of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara resounding, the first shavings of hair falling, touched my heart deeply. So, mom and dad, I have become a son of the Buddha. The peaceful energy radiated out, moving everyone to tears. I did not cry like my Brothers and Sisters, who soaked the porch with their tears, making me laugh. After the tonsuring ceremony, I went back to my room, and, touching my head, silently said, "Now that I have a shaved head and a monastic robe, I vow from now on to endeavor to walk steadily on this path."

Thank you for reading.

I would like to offer two poems:

### **Hướng Thượng [Wholesome Way] of Monastic Life**

May all that is good and beautiful

Come to those who aspire to ordain

May they be strong and resilient

Faith steady and strong, undiscouraged

### **Peacefully Free**

The head shaved, the robe brown

Opening my heart, expanding with love

The moon tonight, illuminates the way

Igniting the torch of awakening, living peacefully free