Founder of Đại-Ninh Congregation
Venerable Master Vô-Nhất

The Venerable was given the dharma name "THÍCH THIỀN-TÂM" and style name "LIÊN-DU".

Later on, he assumed the dharma name "VÔ-NHẤT", which literally translates to "NOT NUMBER-ONE", to humbly indicate that he does not excel in anything.

His family name was NGUYỄN and given name was NHỰT-THĂNG.

In 1945, he left home to enter Sắc-Tứ Linh-Thứu Temple *(in the town of Xoài-Hột, Mỹ-Tho city),* under the guidance of Great Venerable THÍCH THÀNH-ĐẠO.

He was born in 1925, in Bình-Xuân village, Hòa-Đồng district, Gò-Công province *(Tiền-Giang Province today).* His father was Nguyễn văn Hương, mother was Trần thị Dung *(dharma name Giác-Ân).*

He was the third among the four sons in the family. According to a story recounted by his mother Giác-Ân, while asleep one night, she was awakened by a bright light in the yard. She went outside to look and suddenly heard a voice addressing her:

"*Come here. I want to speak to you".*

The commanding voice coming from above startled her. She looked up and spotted an elderly lady gracefully descending from mid-air. Thinking that the lady must be an angel or Buddha, Ms. Giác-Ân hurriedly knelt down and prostrated. The elderly lady praised and asked her to stand up and come close. The Lady then handed over a 3 or 4 months old baby and declared:

"Take and raise this baby for me!"

Ms. Giác-Ân hesitated as she had given birth multiple times and dreaded the pain and hard work from delivery and child care. Raising her eyes, the elderly lady scolded:

"This is a precious Rahula son, not any ordinary child. I decided to hand him to you because you are a virtuous person. Do not refuse! Raise him well and he'll help you gain rebirth in Buddha Land."

Overwhelmed by the stern appearance and voice, and partly tempted by the promise of a precious son, Ms. Giác-Ân reached out to accept the baby. She was very pleased by his bright and adorable look. Soon afterward, the Elderly Lady ascended and disappeared into the sky along with the light.

Ms. Giác-Ân woke up and realized that it was just a dream. Curious, she told her vivid dream to her husband in the morning. He speculated:

"Perhaps Gods and Buddhas will give us a special son."

Soon afterward, she became pregnant. One unusual thing about the pregnancy was that she could no longer stand the smell of fish and meat, and as a result she became a vegetarian. In the countryside, vegetarian meals are much more meager than in the city and often include only boiled vegetables, soy sauce, etc. However, she remained very healthy, unlike previous pregnancies when she was plagued with one illness after another.

There was a small Buddhist temple in Bình-Xuân village, without a residing abbot. The temple was mostly deserted except during full moon days and holidays. Lady Giác-Ân started to volunteer a little bit of her daily time to sweep the floor, light the incense, sound the bell, etc. She had never done these chores before this pregnancy, but now she was volunteering with zest and devotion. Some declared that positive energy from the baby in her womb must have influenced her behaviors.

The husband was well read in ancient [chinese] books and predicted that his upcoming child must be more special than the older siblings. Therefore, not only did he not stop, but even applauded his wife's chores and prayers.

At the dawn of the day of the child's birth, the baby boy arrived easily and quickly after a light shower. The birth did not cause much pain as in the deliveries of the previous children.

Mr. Nguyễn cross checked the time, date, and signs at birth in astrology books and announced that:

"This son has the heavenly or Buddhist roots, unlike our previous children. However, he's born in the year of the buffalo, at dawn, which is the time for the buffalo to work the rice field. Therefore, he will lead a hard life away from home. On the positive note, the light rain is an indication that he won't be entangled in love and marriage, and if choosing a holy life, he'd achieve enlightenment."

Because of those events, both of the parents paid special attention to and loved the son very much.

When the late venerable began attending school, his father taught him Chinese diligently and methodically. He was extremely intelligent and studious; as a result, he learned and excelled in Chinese after a short time. At the age of 9, he was able to read Chinese books fluently and write very well. In addition to Chinese, he also learned French and the national language *(the current written Vietnamese language, which was officially adopted not too long earlier and quickly gained popularity).* Even at a young age, he was able to grasp many principles of Confucianism as well as Buddhism and Taoism.

From a young age, he already realized the impermanence of this world. He did not build a material dream like many other boys; on the contrary, he chose to leave the worldly life, severed the bonds with parents and siblings, cultivated purely, and perfected his virtues diligently. He became the bright beacon for the four faithfuls [monks, nuns, layman and laywoman] to emulate in the present as well as future.

During the 48 years of cultivation and 30 years of teaching Buddhism, his followers and temple students totaled tens of thousands, in Vietnam and overseas. Some of them held or currently hold important positions in the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Buddhist congregations, various pagodas, and other Buddhist organizations, etc. in Vietnam as well as countries all over the world.

Cultivation Timeline

1945: had his head shaved and officially started the leave-home life at Sắc-Tứ Linh-Thứu Temple
1948: received initial ordination to be a novice monk
1950: fully ordained as monk at the Ấn-Quang Formal Ceremony of Ordination *(Saigon, Vietnam)*
1951: completed high level Buddhist study at Liên-Hải and Ấn-Quang temples
1954: completed advanced Buddhist study at Nam-Việt Buddhism School, with highest honor
1955: entered seclusion in Cái-Bè *(Mỹ-Tho city)* and Vang-Quới *(Bến-Tre province)*
1965: complied with a Sangha's summons, he returned to Saigon to found College of Specialized Buddhism Studies and holds its director position. The College later became the current Huệ Nghiêm Pagoda, located in An-Phú ward, District 2, Ho-Chi-Minh City. In addition, the Venerable was responsible for the Buddhist Studies department at Vạn-Hạnh University and taught Buddhist Philosophy of Consciousness himself. He also taught at Dược-Sư and Từ-Nghiêm, schools for Buddhist nuns.
1967: in preparation for a long-term retreat, he started to build a cottage, which he named "HƯƠNG QUANG" in Đại-Ninh village, Lâm-Đồng Province.
1968: officially resigned from the Sangha [Institute for the Dissemination of Dharma] and moved to and entered seclusion in Phú-An village, Phú-Hội ward, Đức-Trọng district, Lâm-Đồng province.
1970-1974: responding to pleas from disciples and followers, he temporarily came out of seclusion

to found Hương-Nghiêm Pagoda for monks and Phương-Liên Pagoda for nuns, and lead Pure-Land study and practice sessions for 3 consecutive years.

1975-1992: The Venerable entered ascetic cultivation indefinitely, cutting all ties with the outside world. Although immersed in cultivation, he couldn't help but worry about numerous obstacles that practitioners would face on the cultivation path [in present and future times] that would hinder their rebirths in the Pure-Land. As a result, he spent any little time that he could spare to translate and elaborate on the Esoteric Practice, a school that he had practiced and promoted in parallel with Pure-Land. He compiled the Ceremony of Twelve-Buddha-Names Repentance and sent to his nephew and direct disciple, the late Venerable Master THÍCH HẢI-QUANG, who was the founder and abbot of Dharma Flower Temple in Tucson, Arizona 1985.

Noticed that a few Zen practitioners unfairly criticized the Pure-Land practice, the Venerable Master composed the following poem to help new, confused Pure-Land practitioners to shed doubts that otherwise would have ruined their cultivation efforts.

Many paths lead to the True home,
Different routes result in the same destination.
With Pure in Zen, Mount Lu shines,
In Pure, find Zen water of Caoxi.
As such, forward, the mind more bright,
Vow to rescue the suffering sea behind.
When we can smile like Maha Kasyapa,
Then spread lotus flowers to save the illusions.

Since 1970, the Patriarch of Đại-Ninh *(Venerable Master Vô-Nhất)* started to encourage and guide his Buddhist faithfuls to recite mantras *(in addition to Buddha name recitation)* in order to strengthen the cultivation path and avoid disturbance from evil spirits. The reason was he himself experienced challenges from devils and spirits during the 20+ years of practice and witnessed failure of many fellow cultivators from similar disruptions. This new cultivation method became known as PURE LAND – ESOTERIC BUDDHISM. The essence of the method is the combination of Buddha name and mantra recitations, with the Buddha name as the focus and mantras as protection.

Around 1983, the Venerable composed *"Cundi & Mahā-Karuṇā Dharani – Integrated Practice",* another esoteric routine for followers who practice both Pure Land and mantra recitation. After that, he reviewed and corrected earlier translations of the sutra *"Praying for Great Repentance to Become Buddha in the Future".*

Lastly, he composed the *"Daily Practice of Western Pure-Land Buddhism"* which helps practitioners combat afflictions and disruptions from evil spirits. The routine was designed to suit all levels of Buddhist followers.

From then on, the Venerable *'closed the door',* severing all worldly ties, to fully focus on recitations. He *'locked'* himself in a small cottage, less than 170 square feet, surviving on simple meals and long prayers. He turned down all visitations, left behind all worldly desires, and was determined to achieve liberation.

"Fewer visitors, fewer afflictions
Deeper the recitations, deeper the lotus scent"

The above poem is profound and extraordinary, revealing virtues of a liberated monk.

When the Venerable recited mantras and Buddha names, he felt sweet *"holy"* water flowing from his teeth, strengthening his cultivation. Even though his body was aging with time, his cultivation was deepening and thus his mind became increasingly more pure and wisdom continually more shining.

"Retreat to recite Buddha ceaselessly,
Sweet water from teeth tasting so pure.
Thirst is quenched by water of virtues,
No longer need outside water."
(Spontaneous Verse in Seclusion)

From this poem, we can speculate that all of his teeth had turned into precious gems *(i.e., five-color tooth Sarira).* Once, a dentist tried to split one of his teeth with various specialty saws; sparks came flying like fireworks when the blade touched its surface, but the tooth remained undamaged. It appeared to be harder than diamond. This event, plus other miracles surrounding the tooth, proved that the tooth had turned into a precious Sarira gem.

When Ms. BẢO-ĐĂNG went to Vietnam in 1993, she met Mr. Hòa *(a son of one of the Venerable's followers, Mr. Chánh-Kiến)* who was a dentist and had possession of the tooth Sarira. Mr. Hòa showed her the tooth and recounted many miracles that the tooth Sarira of the Late Master brought. Accompanied Ms. Bảo-Đăng was her younger brother in Vietnam who was skinny and had long suffered from a lung illness. He was able to touch the tooth during the visit. Since then, his lung problem disappeared and he became healthy. Moreover, his poor livelihood started to improve and he has been fortunate and happy until now.

On the 13th of December, 1992 *(lunar calendar: 20th of November of the year of Water Monkey),* the Venerable Master called for his head-disciple Thanh-Nguyệt and handed over his will and final instructions. Within his last writings was the following poem.

Many frightening events in the last sixty eight years,
Ups and downs, and much disparaging, slandering.
It was nothing but one long dream,
of life's stage that one must perform.
Twenty four years of diligent recitation,
Amitabha's name shone brightly.
Notified by the West yesterday,
At cat hour, I will repay all worldly ties.

The Venerable knew the time and day of his passing more than 6 months in advance. At 4 o'clock on the morning of the 14th of December, 1992 *(lunar calendar: 21st of November of the year of Water Monkey),* the Venerable Master told his attendant, also the head disciple, Bhikkhuni Thích Nữ Thanh-Nguyệt, to gather close disciples and faithfuls into his cottage to recite the Buddha Name along his side. At 6:15 o'clock, he passed away peacefully, in the sitting posture.

The Venerable was 68 years old, with 48 years in the Sangha.

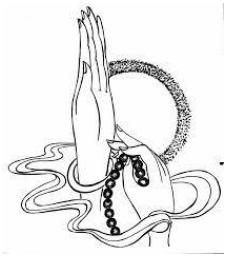
Writings/Published Works

Translation	- Unisha Vijaja Dharani Sutra - Mahākaruṇā Dhāraṇī Sutra *(Great Compassion Sutra)* - Sutra on Contemplation of Amitabha Buddha - Vairocana Sutra *(3 volumes)* - Scent of the Pure Land - Treatise on Ten Doubts about Pure Land *(Zhiyi's Illumination on Pure Land)* - Collection of Cause-Effect and Reincarnation Stories - Collection of Selected Miracles

	- Pure Land Letters *(Selected Yin-Guang's Correspondence)* - Buddha Recitation Pāramitās Sutra - Expounding 108 Buddha Recitation Poems of Master Ji-Xing - 13 Patriarchs of Pure Land Buddhism
Author	- Essentials of the Teachings of Consciousness - Best and Concise Buddhism *(3 volumes)* - Pure Land Study – New Food for Thought *(3 volumes)* - Ten Essences of Buddha Recitation *(English translation: Horizontal Escape)* - Echos of the Lotus *(Collection of Pure Land Rebirth Stories) (7 volumes)* - Daily Pure Land & Esoteric Practice - Pure Land for Practitioners
Poem	- Collection of Thiền-Tâm Poetry *(over a thousand religious poems in various types)* - Spontaneous Verses in Retreat - 108

The Venerable Master was an enlightened Bhikkhu and the only one achieving the highest level of rebirth in the modern time. He was well versed in Buddhist philosophy, a virtuous beacon in Vietnamese Buddhism, and recognized as the teacher who most successfully promoted both Pure Land and Esoteric Buddhism in the history of the Vietnamese Sangha. His return [to the Pure Land] was an enormous loss for and he was dearly missed by the Sangha and Vietnamese faithfuls all over the world.

During the tomb opening ceremony, three days after the funeral, everyone present saw a pair of golden snakes, about 6' long. They crawled to the headstone and silently laid there for a few moments. Then they raised their heads, looked directly at head disciple Thanh-Nguyệt, bowed 3 times, and retreated and disappeared in a nearby bush.

Homage to the transcending compassion and virtues
Tireless cultivation amid this chaotic world
Golden lotus blossoming in Buddha Land
Palms pressed, chanting: Namo Buddha
Wishing:
Perpetually liberated from the Saha World…

Respectfully dedicated by Grand disciple *Bảo-Đăng*