

The Liễu Quán School of Buddhist Meditation

Master Liễu Quán was born in the village of Bạc Mã in the Phú Yên province in 1670. He lost his mother at the age of 6. His father used to bring him to the Hội Tôn temple where he met the abbot Tế Viên. At the age of ten he was admitted to the temple as a novice. He studied with Tế Viên for nine years. When Master Tế Viên passed away in 1690, he went to the far away province of Thuận Hóa (now Huế) to study with the master Giác Phong at the Thiên Thọ temple, now called Báo Quốc. One year later when he received news that his father was sick he asked for the permission to go back to his village. He worked as a logger to keep his father. Four years later, after the death of his father he went back to study and practice at Thiên Thọ temple. He was ordained as a bhikṣu in 1697 at the age of 27.

In 1702 he met and began to study with Master Tử Dung at the Ân Tông temple in Thừa Thiên. He was given the Công Ấn: "all dharmas return to one, where will the one return to?" to work with

for five years. In 1708 he went back to his teacher; Master Tử Dung told him:

*Alone let yourself go down to the abyss.
The only way to be reborn is to die,
Who could blame you after that?*

Liễu Quán clapped his hands and laughed. Tử Dung said: "Not ripe yet." Liễu Quán tried once more: "The hammer is iron itself." Tử Dung shook his head. Next day, Tử Dung was passing by his cell and called out to him: "Our conversation of yesterday is not finished yet. Tell me again!" "If I had known that the lamp is fire itself, then the meal could have been ready a long time ago." Tử Dung was delighted by this reply.

Liều Quán was 38 by this time. After receiving the transmission, he set up the Thiên Tông meditation center. Liễu Quán allowed the Viên Thông center to be built by his students at the foot of the Ngũ Bình mountain. Lord Nguyễn Phúc Khoát used to come to this center to practise. In the years 1733-1735 four national ceremonies of ordination were organised in the Thừa Thiên province over which Master Liễu

Quán presided. The number of his disciples were as many as 4000. In 1740 he presided over an ordination at the Long Hoa Center and in 1742 at another one at the Viên Thông center. Practice centers of the Liễu Quán School were set up everywhere in the country. The Phú Yên province is one of the stronghold of the school, with the Hội Tông, Cổ Lâm and Bảo Tịnh temples.

On the morning of the 21st day of the 11th month (lunar calendar) 1742, he asked his attendant to bring him a pen and a piece of paper. He wrote this gatha:

During the seventy or more years I have been in this world,

Form and Emptiness have always been the same.

Today all vows fulfilled, I am going back to my home.

Do not tire yourselves out asking questions concerning schools and patriarchs.

After finishing the gatha, the Mastw sat quietly taking tea. Monks living at the center came to see him. Some of the monks cried. Liễu Quán said: "Please do not cry! Even Buddhas have to enter Nirvāṇa. My coming and going is clear. There is nothing to be sorrowful about." The monks stopped crying. He asked: "Has the mui hour (1-3pm) come?" People said: "yes." Liễu Quán said: "After I

am gone please remind yourself of the fact of impermanence and practice diligently to attain wisdom. Do not forget my words!" And he passed away in the lotus position.

The following is the gatha he wrote for the sake of the future generations of the Liễu Quán school:

The great way of Reality

Is the pure ocean of the true nature.

The source of Mind has penetrated everywhere .

From the roots of Virtue springs the tradition of compassion,

Vinaya, samadhi and prajna,

The nature and function of all three is one.

The fruit of transcendent wisdom

can be realised by being wonderfully together.

Maintain and transmit the wonderful principle,

In order to make known the true teaching!

For the realisation of True Emptiness to be possible,

Wisdom and Action will have to go together.

Thật tế đại đạo

Tánh hải thanh trùg

Tâm nguyên quảng nhuận

Đức bốn từ phong

Giới định phước huệ

Thể dụng viên thông

Vĩnh siêu trí quả

Mật kế thành công

Truyền trì diệu lý

Diễn xướng chánh tông

Hành giải tương ứng

Đạt ngộ chân không.

Thật (reality) *tế* (domain) *đại* (great) *đạo* (way)
Tánh (Nature) *hải* (ocean) *thanh* (clear) *trừng* (calm)
Tâm (mind) *nguyên* (source) *quảng* (broad) *nhuận* (penetration)
Đức (virtue) *bốn* (roots) *từ* (loving-kindness) *phong* (tradition)
Giới (precepts) *định* (concentration) *phước* (merits) *huệ* (wisdom)
Thể (body, self-nature) *dụng* (function) *viên* (complete) *thông* (commu-
 nication)
Vĩnh (eternity) *siêu* (transcending) *trí* (wisdom) *quả* (fruit)
Mật (mystically) *khế* (corresponding) *thành* (realisation) *công* (works)
Truyền (transmission) *trì* (maintaining, practising) *diệu* (wonderful) *lý*
 (truth)
Diễn (expounding) *xướng* (speaking) *chánh* (true, legitimate) *tông* (school)
Hành (action) *giải* (understanding) *tương* (together) *ứng* (corresponding)
Đạt (attaining) *ngộ* (awakening) *chân* (true) *không* (emptiness)

The lineage name of Master Liễu Quán is *Thật Diệu*. This name begins with the word *Thật*, the first word of the above gatha. All of his disciples, belonging to the second generation of the Liễu Quán school of meditation, have *Tế* as their lineage name. The lineage name of Thầy Nhất Hạnh is *Trừng Quang*, thus Thầy belongs to the eighth generation of the Liễu Quán School. If you are a student of Thầy Nhất Hạnh, your lineage name will begin with the word *Tâm* (Mind or Heart) and you belong to the 9th generation of the Liễu Quán School and the 43th generation of the Lin Chi. If you are an ordained member of the Tiếp Hiện order, you belong to the 2nd generation of the Tiếp Hiện order. When you have disciples, their lineage name will begin with the word *Nguyên* (Source). If you are a westerner and do not use Hán characters, you could translate the words into your own language, and give dharma names to your students in that language.