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VIETNAM PRISON CAMP SURVIVOR DONATES RARE COLLECTION OF BUDDHA'S RELICS TO TEMPLE IN ROSEMEAD

Tam Huynh's Offering Triggers a Series of Donations that has now formed
the Largest Collection of Buddha's Relics in America

Tam Huynh toiled for five long years under hard labor in a Vietnamese prison camp, his only comfort the teachings of Buddha. Nearly fifty years later, the retired army captain and father of five has traded his secure retirement for monastic vows, with a goal to teach others what helped transform his life. In addition to giving up the comforts of retirement to pursue the rigorous lifestyle of a monk, Huynh donated his prized relics of the Buddha to his new monastic home. This donation is the seed that would become *The 10,000 Buddha Relics Collection* — believed to be the largest collection of the Buddha's relics in the United States.

When Huynh joined Lu Mountain Temple's Chan meditation retreat in December 2012, he already had the aspiration to share his rare collection with others. "During the Winter meditation retreat, I made so much progress under Master YongHua's guidance, that I immediately realized this was the place where I would donate my relics," he said. In 2013 Huynh officially donated his relics to Bodhi Light International, Inc. (BLI), the organization that runs Lu Mountain Temple and Wei Mountain Temple. Founded by Dharma Master YongHua, BLI aims to make the Buddha's teachings available to the international community.

Later that same year at the age of 68, Huynh decided to devote the rest of his life to rigorous monastic training and was ordained a Buddhist monk. "I feel my life will be more meaningful if I can develop the skills to help others," he said.

Ever since Huynh was drafted into the Vietnamese military at the age of 20, he has had a life filled with hardships. With his upcoming retirement already planned, for the first time in his life, Huynh had before him the opportunity to finally relax and enjoy himself. He has property in Vietnam, and the resources to spend the rest of his life traveling and visiting his children. But he surprised his friends and family by giving it all up to become a monk.

Huynh was drafted into the South Vietnamese army in 1964 and over the next 11 years, he rose to the rank of a captain. As part of a very small company that was especially vulnerable, every night he faced the reality that his entire unit might be killed before sunrise. Once, when Huynh

spent a single night away, he returned to find that his entire platoon had been killed overnight in a surprise attack. This was one of many times he narrowly escaped death. When the war ended, Huynh was sent to a labor camp for five years, where he was forced to work long hours with very little nourishment, and where his cell was so crowded that he did not even have enough space to lie down on his back at night.

Huynh's lifelong practice of Buddhism began during these years in prison. Initially, he was given a book on Pure Land Buddhism, where he learned the practice of reciting the Buddha's name. This practice gave Huynh great comfort during his years in the labor camp. Later, he was given a copy of a very important Buddhist text, or sutra. Shortly afterward, Huynh met a monk who was also a prisoner in the labor camp, and the two of them would meet in the exercise yard, where the monk could secretly explain the sutra, one passage at a time. Later, that monk snuck a copy of a second sutra into the prison, and Huynh was one of several people who took turns reading the book at night. During the daytime, they buried the sutra underground to hide it from the guards.

In 1981, Huynh was finally released from prison. His childhood dreams of becoming a doctor or engineer had been destroyed, and he now found it very difficult to find a job. He worked as a tricycle taxi driver for 12 years, and also a delivery man, managing to earn enough money to take care of his five children. During this time he began to increase his cultivation of Buddhism, reciting the Lotus Sutra for one hour every day, and becoming vegetarian.

By 1992, Huynh was disillusioned with his life in Vietnam, and applied to enter the United States as a war refugee. In 1993, Huynh's application was accepted, and he moved to California. At 51 years old, Huynh went back to school, and he earned an Associate Degree in Ornamental Horticulture at Butte Community College, graduating with honors in 1997. He then transferred to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, where he completed a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Horticultural Science in 2002. At the age of 58, he was hired by UC Berkeley to do landscaping for their campus. In 2006, Huynh started a new job managing the landscaping for the East Bay Municipal Utility Department (EBMUD) in Oakland.

Throughout his time in the U.S., Huynh continued his practice of Pure Land Buddhism. While he was working in the gardens, he would recite the Buddha's name all day long. Huynh also attended many Buddhist meditation retreats.

Huynh became fascinated with relics of the Buddha, known by the Sanskrit word shariras, and began collecting them in 2007. "Since I began collecting shariras, I have experienced many miraculous and unexplainable things. Even the way that they came to me was very mysterious: when I visited temples in Vietnam, people I did not even know would approach me and give me shariras," he said.

When Huynh donated his entire collection to Bodhi Light International earlier this year, his action inspired a several additional donors to contribute even more relics to *The 10,000 Relics Collection*. These subsequent donations included the rare and sacred teeth and finger bone relics of the Buddha.

When asked why he gave up his collection of relics, Huynh said, “I wanted more people to enjoy these shariras, since anyone who views and worships them will receive many blessings. They were not meant to stay hidden in my small apartment in Oakland. After I experienced how well the Master was able to guide me during the meditation retreat, I feel he has the wisdom to manage this collection for the benefit of all beings.”

Huynh said he was inspired to sacrifice his retirement, and years of rest and relaxation with his family in Vietnam, after Master YongHua informed him he could make more spiritual progress as a monk and learn how to help others. “I would not have believed that I could become a monk this late in my life, and sometimes I still doubt myself. But I have great faith in the Master, and I trust his advice. Buddhist practice has always been one of the most important things in my life, and I can think of nothing more valuable than learning how to guide others in their practice.”

For more information about The 10,000 Buddha Relics Collection, please visit www.MahaStupa.org.