

Summary and Key Points of 46th Lesson of Sixth Patriarch Platform Sutra

Summary

This lesson focuses on **Chapter VI: Repentance and Reform**, specifically the section on **taking refuge in the Triple Gem** (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) as the "triple refuge that has no mark." The lesson emphasizes that true refuge is not in external forms or images but in the embodiment of the Buddha's great wisdom and virtues, his Dharma teaching, and his pure and enlightened disciples.

A significant portion of the lesson critiques the literal, rigid interpretation of precepts, particularly the rule against handling money. Bro. Teoh explains that precepts are **training rules for beginners** (sekha) to prevent downfall and develop mindfulness. For those who have developed wisdom and are **beyond training (asekha)**, the same precepts are no longer binding because the user of money and technology has become wise. **Money itself is not evil; the user of money determines whether it is used wholesomely or unwholesomely.**

The lesson then delves into the **purpose of meditation**, distinguishing between **conditioned, thought-based practices** (which suppress defilements temporarily) and **awareness-based meditation** (which leads to direct seeing, wisdom, and the uprooting of defilements). Bro. Teoh strongly warns against becoming **gullible** via blindly following methods, techniques, or popular teachers without understanding the essential Dharma.

The lesson also covers the **three phases of Dharma cultivation**:

1. **Pariyatti** – learning of the teaching.
2. **Patipatti** – putting the dharma into practice.
3. **Pativedha** – living the life of a noble one after awakening.

Finally, the lesson addresses a practical workplace problem (how to handle a non-performing employee), demonstrating how the **Noble Eightfold Path**—especially right view, right thought, right speech, and right action—can be applied with compassion and wisdom in real-life situations to resolve all matters or issues amicably.

Key Important Points

1. Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem of One's Own Self-Nature

- **True refuge** is not in external forms or images.
- The Buddha is the embodiment of his wisdom and virtue—**not a statue or image**.
- The Dharma is the teaching that leads to awakening.

- The Sangha refers to **enlightened disciples** of the Buddha.
- As the sutra states: *"From this day forward, we call enlightenment our master and will never again take refuge with deviant demons or outside religions. We constantly enlighten ourselves by means of refuge in the Triple Jewels and of our own self-nature."*

2. Precepts Are Training Rules for Beginners (Sekha)

- Precepts (sīla) are **training rules** for those still under training.
- **Sekha** = those still training. **Asekha** = those beyond training.
- The precept against handling money is **not an absolute rule** for enlightened beings. It is to prevent greed leading to downfall in those who have not yet developed wisdom.
- **Money itself is not evil**—the user of money determines whether it is used wholesomely or unwholesomely.
- Similarly, technology is not evil; it depends on the user's wisdom.

3. The Traffic Light Analogy

- Traffic lights regulate traffic. If a traffic light malfunctions, you do not blindly obey it.
- Similarly, precepts are **skilful means for training**, not absolute laws to be followed rigidly without understanding.
- The Buddha said: *"I undertake the training rule to abstain..."* (veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi). This is a **training rule**, not a commandment.

4. The Purpose of Precepts (Sīla)

- Sīla is the foundation for **Samādhi** (collected, unwavering mind) and **Paññā** (wisdom).
- Keeping precepts reduces karmic negativities, fear, worry, and mental hindrances.
- Without sīla, it is very difficult to develop samādhi and wisdom.
- Precepts are **not about outward purity** (e.g., vegetarianism) but about **training the mind to avoid evil roots** of greed, hatred, delusion.

5. Contentment Is the Highest Wealth

- The Buddha said: **"Contentment is the highest wealth."**
- Contentment comes from wisdom, not from lack of possessions.
- With wisdom, you can have wealth and use it wholesomely without attachment or craving.

6. The Three Phases of Dharma Cultivation

1. **Pariyatti (Learning):** Learning of the teaching.

2. **Patipatti (Practice):** Putting the dharma into practice in daily life to awaken.
3. **Pativedha (Penetration):** To live the life of a noble one after awakening through meditation.

7. Meditation Is Not About Sitting Only

- The Sixth Patriarch emphasized: **Single Conduct Samadhi** is the constant cultivation of a straightforward, silent mind in all places (walking, standing, sitting, lying down).
- Real meditation is **in the midst of life itself**—not just sitting still like a statue.
- As Zen masters say: *"We have enough Buddha statues here; we don't need another one."*

8. The Mistake of Suppressing Thoughts

- Trying to stop thoughts is done by the **thought itself**—the controller is the controlled.
- Suppression and control are **not the path**.
- With wisdom, thoughts are seen as condition-arising, impermanent, and not-self.
- **Thought is neither good nor evil**—it is the user of thought that matters.

9. Thought-Based vs. Awareness-Based Meditation

Thought-Based Meditation	Awareness-Based Meditation
Noting, labeling, verbalizing, focusing, concentrating	Silent, choiceless awareness
Develops energy fields, jhanas, nimittas	Develops direct seeing and wisdom
Suppresses defilements temporarily	Uproots defilements through wisdom
Conditioned state	Free mind
Cannot cope with life after retreat	Can cope with life in the midst of activity
Leads to attachment to calmness and peace	Leads to heedfulness and liberation

10. The Real Purpose of Meditation

- **Only truth and wisdom liberate the mind.** Nothing else.
- Meditation is not about seeking calmness, peacefulness, or fantastic experiences.

- It is about **insight into the three characteristics** (impermanence, suffering, non-self) and **uprooting delusion via the direct seeing**.
- It is about **straightening views** and developing **right thought, right speech, right action, and right livelihood, etc.** (the Noble Eightfold Path).

11. Daily Mindfulness Is the Real Meditation

- **Life itself** is our greatest teacher. Mindfulness in daily life is the **real meditation**.
- **Daily mindfulness leading to heedfulness (appamāda)** is the key to awakening.
- As the Buddha said in Dhammapada verse 21: *"The heedless are as if dead."*
- Without daily mindfulness, formal meditation is of little use.

12. The Five Spiritual Faculties and Five Mental Hindrances

- The **five spiritual faculties** are: faith (saddhā), effort (vīriya), mindfulness (sati), concentration (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā).
- When these are stable, the **five mental hindrances** (sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, doubt) cease naturally.
- The mind then becomes **meditative on its own**—peaceful, still, and aware without effort.

13. Consciousness vs. Awareness

- **Consciousness** is not the same as **awareness**.
- You can be conscious of life but not aware within the moment.
- To be aware is to be **silent, without thought**, fully present.
- Most people are conscious but **not aware**—they are lost in heedless thinking.

14. Contemplation (Second Turning) Is Done Outside Formal Meditation

- During formal meditation, **do not contemplate**—just relax, be silent, and maintain awareness.
- Contemplation (the second turning of the Four Noble Truths) is done **after** meditation, when the mind is clear and free.
- Contemplation involves **inquiry**: Why did the Buddha say birth is suffering? What is attachment? etc.

15. The Three Turnings of the Four Noble Truths

- **First Turning**: Proclamation of the truth (e.g., "Birth is suffering").
- **Second Turning**: Contemplation and inquiry to understand *why* it is true.
- **Third Turning**: Wisdom borne of Direct seeing and through the meditative cultivation (bhavana-maya paññā)—awakening to the universal characteristics.

16. The Noble Eightfold Path in Daily Life (Workplace Example)

- A student asked how to handle a non-performing employee that management wanted to dismiss.
- Bro. Teoh advised applying the **Noble Eightfold Path**:
 - **Right view**: to accept the realities of what happen via the law of karma etc.
 - **Right thought**: Arise kind and virtuous thought of love, compassion, and understanding—not anger or selfishness to resolve issues amicably.
 - **Right speech**: Speak kind, gentle and pleasant speeches, to explain the situation clearly, inform him of his rights and how to resolve issues amicably.
 - **Right action**: Act fairly, without bias or emotional negativity.
 - **Right livelihood**: Do your duty as a manager without violating moral and ethical principles.
- The goal is to **act without creating karmic negativity** for yourself and others.

17. The Lotus Flower Analogy

- The lotus grows from muddy water but rises above the filth to bloom.
- Similarly, the enlightened being lives in the conditioned world but is **not entangled by it**.
- This symbolizes the Mahayana ideal: **transcending duality while remaining in the world**.

18. The Three Worlds (Triple World)

- **Kāma loka** (world of desire / sensual realm)
- **Rūpa loka** (world of form)
- **Arūpa loka** (formless world)
- To transcend these, one must cut off **all craving and attachment** to the world to realise the cessation of form and mind.

19. The Danger of Becoming Gullible

- Many meditators blindly follow methods, techniques, and popular teachers **without understanding**.
- They think that by sitting, noting, focusing, or concentrating, they are meditating.
- Without understanding the essential Dharma (mental hindrances, spiritual faculties, Four Noble Truths, etc), they **waste their time** and will not progress.
- **Do not be gullible**. Investigate for yourself. The truth will stand up to investigation.

20. The Path to Awakening

- Develop **faith** and **understanding** (pariyatti).

- **Put the DHAMMA into practice** (patipatti) with right view, right thought, right speech, right action, etc.
- **Stabilize mindfulness (sati)** through daily mindfulness and formal meditation.
- When the mind enters sati, you no longer need an object of meditation. The mind is already trained.
- Realisation of Sotapanna leads to the severing of the first three fetters:
 1. Self-delusion (sakkāyadiṭṭhi)
 2. Clinging to rites and rituals
 3. Doubt in the Triple Gem
- Then the path to liberation is established.