

Summary and Key Points of 75th Lesson of Sixth Patriarch Platform Sutra

Summary

This lesson focuses on **Chapter X: Final Instructions**, specifically the **thirty-six pairs of opposites** (duality) and how to transcend them. The Sixth Patriarch teaches that **all dharmas arise from the self-nature**, and that duality is created by the **mundane mind** through words, concepts, and ideas. The key to liberation is not to fight duality but to **understand it with wisdom** and to **live among marks yet be separated from them**.

The lesson includes the famous story of **Bodhidharma and the glaze ware analogy**, where Bodhidharma demonstrates that **sitting in Zen without understanding does not lead to enlightenment**. He emphasizes: "**Start from basic**" —meaning, understand the **mind** (both its mundane and true aspects). Without this basic understanding, all meditation is superficial and a waste of time.

The lesson also covers:

- The **transmission of the Dharma** from Bodhidharma to Hui Ke (the Second Patriarch), and the instruction that the **robe and bowl should stop at the Sixth Patriarch**.
- The **two aspects of the Middle Way**: (1) avoiding the extremes of self-mortification and sensual indulgence, and (2) **transcending duality through wisdom**.
- The **Four Noble Truths**—mundane (1st and 2nd) and supramundane (3rd and 4th)—and how the **Noble Eightfold Path** (mundane cultivation) leads to supramundane realization.
- Detailed advice on **daily mindfulness, stabilizing the silent mind**, and the **seven factors of enlightenment**.

The lesson concludes with a strong emphasis on **not trying to know, not being eager for progress**, and simply **doing the cultivation with faith, sincerity, and perseverance**.

Key Important Points

1. Duality Is Created by the Mundane Mind

- The **thirty-six pairs of opposites** (heaven/earth, sun/moon, light/darkness, yin/yang, water/fire, etc.) are examples of duality.
- Duality arises from the **mundane mind** (thinking mind) through words, concepts, and ideas.

- The self-nature (true nature) is **originally empty**—"originally there is not a single thing" (本来无一物).
- As Hui Neng said: *"If you can live among marks and yet be separated from it, then you will be confused by neither the internal nor the external."*

2. The Mistake of Shen Xiu

- Shen Xiu was trapped in **duality**—he believed in "pure" vs. "impure," "dust" vs. "non-dust."
- His verse: *"Polish it until it shines, so that no dust can alight"* reflects this dualistic approach.
- The mundane mind **cannot cease its own creations**—fighting duality only creates more duality.
- Hui Neng's counter-verse: *"Originally there is not a single thing, where can the dust alight?"* directly points to the **non-dual nature** of the true mind.

3. The Fifth Patriarch's Transmission to Hui Neng

- The Fifth Patriarch knocked the pestle **three times**, signalling Hui Neng to come at the **third watch**.
- When the Fifth Patriarch explained the *Diamond Sutra*, Hui Neng understood the **conditioned world's mundane mind** and how to use it without being deceived.
- Hui Neng was born **without a mundane mind**—he already understood the unconditioned. What he lacked was the understanding of how normal human beings become entangled through the mundane mind.

4. The Sixth Patriarch's Danger and Departure

- The disciples expected **Shen Xiu** to become the Sixth Patriarch.
- After Hui Neng received the transmission, the Fifth Patriarch immediately sent him away to protect his life.
- At the boat, Hui Neng said: *"After you have transmitted the teaching to me, now it's my turn to steer you."*

5. Bodhidharma's Glaze Ware Analogy

- Bodhidharma was seen **polishing a glaze ware** to make it into a mirror.
- When asked what he was doing, he replied: *"If polishing a glaze ware cannot make it into a mirror, then how can sitting in Zen without understanding make you a Buddha?"*
- **Enlightenment is not about sitting still**—it is about **understanding, wisdom,** and **realizing the self-nature through the silent mind**.
- **"Start from basic"** means understand the **mind**—both its mundane and true aspects. This is the foundation of all cultivation.

6. Bodhidharma's Transmission to His Disciples

- Bodhidharma asked each disciple what they had learned.
- One spoke of non-attachment to words—Bodhidharma said, *"You have received the skin."*
- Another spoke of contentment—Bodhidharma said, *"You have received the flesh."*
- Another spoke of impermanence and emptiness—Bodhidharma said, *"You have received the bone."*
- **Hui Ke** (the future Second Patriarch) **said nothing**—he simply got up and paid respect. Bodhidharma said, *"That is it! You have received everything."*
- **The one who knows does not speak; the one who speaks does not know.**

7. The Robe and Bowl Stop at the Sixth Patriarch

- Bodhidharma instructed that the robe and bowl should be transmitted only until the **Sixth Patriarch**.
- By then, the Mahayana teaching would have **taken root and flourished**, so no further transmission of the physical insignia is needed.

8. How to Transcend Duality (Sister Adeline's Question)

- **Duality pertains to the conditioned world**, created by the mundane mind.
- To transcend duality, you need **wisdom**, not to fight it.
- The Buddha's teaching: *"People are just the way they are. The world is the world. Things are just the way they are. Whatever arises has causes and conditions behind it."*
- With wisdom, you **accept** reality without reacting, creating, or proliferating duality.
- **The Middle Way has two aspects:**
 1. Avoid the extremes of self-mortification and sensual indulgence.
 2. **Transcend duality through wisdom.**

9. The Four Noble Truths: Mundane and Supramundane

- **1st Noble Truth (Dukkha):** The realities of life and existence. If confronted without wisdom, suffering arises. (Mundane)
- **2nd Noble Truth (Samudaya):** The cause of suffering is craving born of self-delusion. (Mundane)
- **3rd Noble Truth (Nirodha):** Suffering need not be. Nibbana can be realized here and now. (Supramundane)
- **4th Noble Truth (Magga):** The Noble Eightfold Path leads to the end of suffering. (Mundane cultivation leading to supramundane realization)

10. The Noble Eightfold Path Still Has Duality (Sister Eng Bee's Question)

- The Noble Eightfold Path includes dualities: right view/wrong view, right thought/wrong thought, etc.
- This duality is **part of the conditioned world** and is necessary for mundane cultivation.
- When you awaken, you **transcend duality** because you are no longer deluded by it.
- From mundane cultivation comes supramundane realization. The path itself is mundane, but it leads beyond the mundane.

11. The Three Phases of Seeing (Mountains)

- **First phase:** "Mountain is mountain" (ordinary perception, duality).
- **Second phase:** "Mountain is not mountain" (direct seeing, transcending form).
- **Third phase:** "Mountain is mountain again" (suchness seeing, returning to life with wisdom).

12. The Silent Mind and Daily Mindfulness (Sister Lee's Question)

- **Not until your daily mindfulness is stable can you have the silent mind.**
- You must first train the mind to be mindful, then stabilize it until it is **ever mindful**.
- If your spiritual faculties (especially sati) are not developed, you will be heedless and think a lot.
- Use skilful means (Anapanasati, chanting, bowing, mind-sweeping method) to anchor the mind and stabilize sati.
- When the mind is silent and still (passaddhi), bring it out into daily life to cultivate **daily mindfulness**.
- **Real meditation only begins when you are ever mindful in the midst of life.**

13. Do Not Try to Know

- Trying to know is the **thought** trying to know. This prevents mindfulness.
- **"Do not try to know, just silent."**
- When you understand, you just do what needs to be done: train the mind, stabilize sati, cultivate daily mindfulness.
- **Too eager to progress is itself a form of craving**—it blocks awakening.

14. The Heart Area and Awareness

- Every time you fold your palms to pay respect with faith, energy goes to the **heart area**.
- When the heart area opens, you become **sensitive** and can be aware from there.
- Awareness from the heart area can **speed up cultivation**.
- Train to be **aware** from inside (heart area) of outside (activities, senses).

15. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

1. **Sati (mindfulness)** – the foundation (basis for heedfulness).
2. **Dhammavicaya (investigation of Dhamma)** – when sati is stable, you can use it to investigate dharma.
3. **Viriya (spiritual zeal or tenacity)** – when investigation reveals truth, viriya arises.
4. **Piti (spiritual joy)** – wholesome joy arises from a calm mind.
5. **Passaddhi (tranquillity)** – the silent, still mind.
6. **Samadhi (collectedness)** – a free mind that is unwavering, collected mind.
7. **Upekkha (equanimity)** – perfect balance or equanimity of mind.

16. Avijja Paccaya Sankhara (Ignorance Conditions Mental Activities)

- **Avijja** (ignorance) is not understanding the truth.
- Dependent on ignorance, **sankhara** (mental activities, thinking) arise.
- To weaken this link, you must **straighten your views** through understanding and mindfulness.
- When mindfulness is stable, you have less ignorance, hence **less thinking** and **more clarity**.

17. The Four Right Efforts

1. **Abandon** unwholesome thoughts that have arisen.
2. **Prevent** unwholesome thoughts from arising.
3. **Cultivate** wholesome thoughts not yet arisen.
4. **Refine and perfect** wholesome thoughts already arisen.

18. Space Between Thought

- When the brain/mind is cluttered with memories, fears, phobias, beliefs, and conditioning, there is **no space**.
- No space means no mindfulness, no freedom, no peace.
- **Space between thought** = no thought = no fear, no anxiety, no sorrow.
- **Write things down** so you don't have to rely on memory. This creates space.

19. The Handful of Leaves vs. The Leaves in the Forest

- The Buddha picked up a **handful of leaves** and said, "*What I have taught is like this handful of leaves; what I have realized is like the leaves in the forest.*"
- The handful of leaves is the **essential Dharma** for sainthood awakening (up to Arahant).
- The leaves in the forest represent the **Bodhisattva way** leading to Samma Sambuddhahood—very extensive, but not difficult when understood.

20. Practical Advice for Daily Cultivation

- **Have a good daily religious routine:** morning chanting, meditation, paying respect, evening chanting.
- **Be mindful of all actions:** waking up, walking to the toilet, brushing teeth, showering, eating, driving.
- **Do one thing at a time with full awareness.**
- **Do not accumulate psychological memories** (fears, worries, scars of memories). Write them down if necessary.
- **Do not be eager to know** your progress. Just do the cultivation sincerely.
- **When the conditions are right, awakening will happen naturally.**

21. Final Reminder

- **This teaching is very rare.** The opening verse says: *"Difficult to encounter in hundreds of millions of eons is the unsurpassed, deep, profound, subtle and wonderful Dharma."*
- Do not let this window of opportunity slip by.
- **Plant the seed of Bodhi** strongly now, so that in future lives—whether there is a sasana or not—your nature will recall the vows and important dharma understanding.
- **With faith, sincerity, and perseverance, everything flows and you will progress along the path of Dharma.**