

Summary and Key Points of 9th Lesson of Sixth Patriarch Platform Sutra

Summary

This lesson focuses on the **transmission of the Dharma from the Fifth Patriarch (Hong Ren) to the Sixth Patriarch (Hui Neng)**. It covers the famous **verse contest** between the senior monk Shen Hsiu and the kitchen worker Hui Neng, which determined who would receive the robe and bowl and become the next patriarch.

Shen Hsiu's verse reflected a gradual, effort-based approach to cultivation, treating the mind like a mirror that must be constantly polished to keep it free from dust. The Fifth Patriarch recognized that Shen Hsiu had **not yet seen his original nature**—he was still "outside the gate."

Hui Neng's verse, written despite his illiteracy, demonstrated direct insight into the **empty, non-dwelling nature of the true mind**:

*Originally Bodhi has no tree,
The bright mirror has no stand.
Originally there was nothing:
Where can dust alight?*

The Fifth Patriarch secretly transmitted the Dharma to Hui Neng at midnight, explaining the *Diamond Sutra* until the line, "**Thus Mind (Mundane mind) you must know how to use it but not to be deluded by it**". Upon hearing this, Hui Neng experienced **great enlightenment** and exclaimed five "how amazing" realizations about the self-nature: it is originally pure, unborn and undying, complete, unmoving, and can produce all dharmas.

The lesson also recounts the pursuit of Hui Neng by those who wanted the robe and bowl, and his encounter with **Hui Ming**, who awakened when Hui Neng asked: "**With no thoughts of good and with no thoughts of evil, at just this moment, what is your original face?**"

The lesson concludes with a detailed discussion on **lying down meditation**, the purpose of meditation postures, methods, techniques and objects of **meditation**, and the importance of **daily mindfulness** and **heedfulness** in cultivation.

Key Important Points

1. The Verse Contest and the Two Approaches

Shen Hsiu's Verse (Gradual Approach):

*The body is like a Bodhi tree,
The mind like a bright mirror on a stand.
Time and again polish until it shine,
And let no dust alight.*

- The four foundations of mindfulness is within our fathom length body.
- The mirror bright on a stand is not your true mind.
- The Fifth Patriarch said: "**You have not yet seen your original nature. You are still outside the gate.**"

Hui Neng's Verse (Sudden/Direct Approach):

*Originally Bodhi has no tree,
The bright mirror has no stand.
Originally there is nothing:
Where can the dust alight?*

- Directly points to the **empty, non-dwelling nature of the true mind**.
- The true mind is **originally pure and complete**—there is nothing to polish and no dust to remove because it is without word, concept hence no duality.
- The Fifth Patriarch erased the verse with his shoe to protect Hui Neng, saying, "This one, too, has not yet seen his nature" (to calm the assembly).

2. The Mind That Has No Dwelling (无所住心)

- The key phrase from the *Diamond Sutra* that awakened Hui Neng: "**One should produce a thought which is nowhere supported.**"
- **Dwelling** means the mind grasps, clings, perceives through concepts, and is lost in thought.
- **Non-dwelling** is pure awareness before knowing—silent, without grasping, without attachment.
- The moment you perceive and know, you already dwell. The enlightened mind does not dwell anywhere.

3. Hui Neng's Five "How Amazing" Realizations

Upon great enlightenment, Hui Neng exclaimed:

1. **"How amazing! The self-nature is originally pure in itself."**
2. **"How amazing! The self-nature is originally neither produced nor destroyed."**
3. **"How amazing! The self-nature is originally complete in itself."**
4. **"How amazing! The self-nature is originally without movement."**
5. **"How amazing! The self-nature can produce the ten thousand dharmas."**

These five statements summarize the **nature of the true mind** (original nature, Buddha nature).

4. The Transmission of the Robe and Bowl

- The Fifth Patriarch transmitted the **Sudden Teaching**, the robe, and the bowl to Hui Neng, making him the **Sixth Patriarch**.
- He warned: **"The robe is a source of contention. It should stop with you. Do not transmit it, for if you do, your life will hang by a thread."**
- After the Sixth Patriarch, the robe and bowl were no longer transmitted.

5. The Secret Transmission

- The Fifth Patriarch tapped the pestle **three times** with his staff, signaling Hui Neng to come to his room at the **third watch** (midnight).
- He covered them with his precept sash to prevent eavesdropping.
- This is called **"speaking the Dharma without words."**

6. "Taking Across" – Teacher vs. Self

- The Fifth Patriarch rowed the boat. Hui Neng said, "Please, High Master, sit down. It is fitting that your disciple takes the oars."
- The Patriarch replied, "It is fitting that I take you across."
- Hui Neng said: **"When someone is deluded, his master takes him across; but when he is enlightened, he takes himself across."**
- The term "taking across" is the same, but the function is different.

7. Hui Ming's Awakening

- Hui Ming pursued Hui Neng to steal the robe and bowl but could not move them.
- He cried out, "Cultivator, I have come for the Dharma, not for the robe!"
- Hui Neng said: **"With no thoughts of good and with no thoughts of evil, at just this moment, what is your original face?"**

- Hui Ming was **greatly enlightened** at these words.
- He later asked, "Apart from this, is there yet another secret meaning?"
- Hui Neng replied: "**What has been spoken to you is not secret. If you turn the illumination inward, the secret is with you.**"

8. Studying the Dharma Without Recognizing the Original Mind Is of No Benefit

- The Fifth Patriarch said: "**Studying the Dharma without recognizing the original mind is of no benefit.**"
- "**If one recognizes one's own original mind and sees one's original nature, then one is called a great hero, a teacher of gods and humans, a Buddha.**"

9. The Buddha Dharma Arises from Difficulty

- The Fifth Patriarch instructed Hui Neng: "**Do not speak too soon, for the Buddha Dharma arises from difficulty.**"
- The Dharma is rare and precious. It requires sincerity, perseverance, and the willingness to endure hardship.

10. Methods and Techniques Are Only Initial Skilful Means

- Methods and techniques (such as Ānāpānasati, noting, etc.) are only **initial skilful means** to train the heedless mind.
- **They are not meditation itself.** They are used to anchor the mind so that mindfulness (sati) can arise.
- Once mindfulness is stabilized, you no longer need a method or technique. The mind is already heedful and aware.
- As Bhante Kumara said: "**I don't teach a method. I teach people. Every student is different. One method does not fit all.**"

11. The Four Postures for Meditation

- The *Satipatthāna Sutta* teaches that meditation can be done in all **four postures**: standing, walking, sitting, and lying down.
- **Sitting posture** is often the most conducive for initial training because it helps maintain alertness.
- **Lying down posture** is the most relaxed and conducive for advanced stages, especially for entering **cessation (Nibbāna)**.

- However, lying down meditation is rarely taught because most beginners fall asleep instead of meditating.

12. Lying Down Meditation and Cessation

- For **Sotāpanna (first stage)** and **Sakadāgāmi (second stage)** , cessation can occur momentarily in daily life.
- For **Anāgāmi (third stage)** and **Arahant (fourth stage)** , longer periods of cessation are required, often in a formal posture—and the lying down posture is most conducive.
- The Buddha himself entered **Parinibbāna** in the lying down posture.
- In deep cessation: heartbeat stops, brain activity ceases, and the body is indistinguishable from a dead person except that it does not rot or emit foul smells. The pure energy of Nibbāna remains within.

13. 24-Hour Meditation

- 24-hour meditation is possible when you become **skilful in lying down meditation**.
- When mindfulness is stabilized throughout the day, there is no difference between standing, walking, sitting, or lying down. Meditation becomes a part of your nature.

14. The Most Dangerous Person

- J. Krishnamurti said: "**The most dangerous person in the world is the one who says, 'I know.'**"
- When you think you already know, you cannot learn. Your cup is full.
- The Buddha said the same in the *Sallekha Sutta*: "**He who holds on to his views tenaciously, even the Samma Sambuddha cannot save him.**"

15. The Work (Byron Katie) – Four Questions

Byron Katie's inquiry process helps break the power of wrong thoughts:

1. **Is it true (a right thought)?** (What the thought tells you)
2. **Can you absolutely know that it's true (a right thought)?**
3. **How do you react, or what happens, when you believe that thought?**
(You suffer)
4. **Who would you be without the thought? (You are peaceful)**

Then, turn the wrong thought around through understanding.

16. Key Meditation Pointers

- **Spiritual faculties** (faith, viriya, mindfulness, samadhi, wisdom) allow the mind to enter meditative states easily.
- **Mental hindrances** block the mind from entering the meditative states of inner peace, calmness, and awareness.
- The Buddha's last words: "**Strive on with heedfulness.**"
- **Heedfulness** is being ever mindful and constantly meditative. Use it to cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

17. The Nature of True Meditation

- **Wherever there is a meditator, there is no meditation.** (J. Krishnamurti)
- **Wherever there is effort, there is no meditation.** (J. Krishnamurti)
- True meditation is **silent, effortless awareness**—without a sense of "someone doing it."
- The moment you "try" to meditate, you are already lost in thought.

18. The Secret Is Within You

- Hui Neng told Hui Ming: "**If you turn the illumination inward, the secret is with you.**"
- There is no external refuge. The truth is within your own nature. You must look within, not seek outside.

19. The Dharma Is Simple Yet Profound

- The true teaching is **very simple, very direct.**
- Yet before you have the condition to understand, you cannot understand.
- **The Dharma can only be realized by the wise, each for themselves (paccattam).**