



The Silence In Between

念念之間的寂靜

From a lecture on the *Sixth Patriarch Sūtra* by Reverend Heng Sure, August 7, 2015
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“To cultivate in every moment of thought—that is the true nature.”—The *Sixth Patriarch Sūtra*

「念念若行，是名真性。」——《六祖法寶壇經》

How do we interpret that? To me, to cultivate in thought after thought means that you have to be alert, you have to be on your own case, reviewing your thoughts, constantly aware of what you are thinking. Then, when thoughts arise, you are aware of them and you turn back. You go deeper, past those thoughts, into your true nature. That is what I take away from this line: in cultivation, we are constantly returning.

We don't take what comes up in our minds as the whole story or the immediate truth. Rather, we doubt our mind. Just like the bumper sticker in Berkeley used to say “Question Reality.” That is exactly what the Sixth Patriarch is talking about. As thoughts arise, you don't assume that they are reliable. This does not mean that you should try not to have thoughts. You don't beat yourself up over

我們如何理解這句經文呢？對我而言，念念修行意味著你必須要警覺，你必須根據自己的情況，審查你的念頭，常常覺察你在想什麼。當念起的時候，只要能覺察到它們，你就回頭了；覺察之後，再穿透這些念頭，更深入地去觀照你的真性。這就是我從這句經文得到的啟示：修行當中，就是不斷地返本還源。

我們不會認假為真，不會把內心湧現的種種當作事物的真相；相反地，我們會質疑自己的念頭，就像柏克萊寺那台車車尾貼的標語「質疑現實」。這正是六祖大師開示的，當念頭升起時，不要臆斷它們，以為它們是可靠的。當然，這也並不表示你應

having thoughts. Rather, you look past them, you challenge them and let them pass. This is the Dharma of prajñā.

This probably only makes sense if you have a meditation or recitation practice. It is talking about the space between the words you recite, or in between the thoughts that arise as you meditate. What is that space? Reflecting on the space between the thoughts can be a very useful and interesting technique.

What might happen, for example, is that you are sitting there meditating and something arises. You may smell some delicious food and you go, “Ah! Yes, it is time for lunch soon... but let’s meditate now.” That is the practice of prajñā. Why? Because you let go of the thought about lunch. When you then go back to your meditation there is something equally alive, equally real, but silent and thought-free. Could that be consciousness itself? I don’t know, I am proposing to people to look into it, but not to give you more work to do.

If you have just started meditating, the experience is mostly like listening to the radio: there is constant noise, it is hard to find silence. But over time, as your meditation deepens, you will find times when there is silence in between your thoughts. Now here is a sound [plucks a string on his guitar] and an echo...And after the sound?...Let’s hear it again [plucks again]...

And the silence follows that sound. How long does your ear cling to that sound before you get impatient or bored? Before you realize you are trying to hear yourself hearing? Really, in all of the stuff we do, we listen to our self listening. The Sixth Patriarch says, “cultivate in every moment of thought—that is the true nature.” Sometimes that can be nothing. Might the silence in between thoughts be the nature?

Where I am living now in Australia there is a beautiful bush, a baubinia, that grows right outside the door. Sometimes I consciously look at the stems, at the leaves, at the light coming through the leaves, at the space between the leaves, in between the leaves and blossoms. What emerges from paying attention to that empty space is a beautiful perspective. You realize that we are surrounded on all sides by fullness, although there is no object. Our nature, the prajñā-nature, is holding us all, inside and out, thought after thought and in the absence of thought. ❀

該設法不要有任何的念頭，你不必因為有種種念頭而自責。取而代之的，對於種種的念頭，看清它、質疑它、放下它。這就是般若法。

也許只有當參禪或者誦經、持咒、念佛的時候，你才能體會這個道理。就在讀誦時的字字之間，或者參禪時的念念之間，存在的那個間隙是什麼？觀照念與念之間的這個間隙，是一個很有用也很有趣的方法。

舉例來說，當你打坐參禪的時候，有個動靜出現了。你可能聞到食物的香味，然後就想：「啊，很快就會吃午飯了……但還是再坐一會兒吧！」這就是般若行。為什麼？因為你放下了這個吃午餐的念頭。當你繼續回到參禪時，內心依然活潑真實，但是寂然無念。那就是意識嗎？我不知道，我只是建議大家參究參究，而不是給你更多工作做。

如果你開始參禪，那種體驗很像在聽收音機：經常出現雜音，很難有寂靜的時候。但是隨著時間拉長，你的功夫會加深，就會發現念頭與念頭之間存在的寂靜。現在你聽到聲音（手指撥動吉他上的一根弦），而且還有回音……那麼聲音消失之後呢？我們再聽一次（又撥動了一次弦）……

聲響之後，接著的就是寂靜。這個音聲，能讓你維持聽多久不覺得不耐煩、不覺得無聊？能維持多久，你才會意識到自己的聞性？事實上，做任何事情時，我們都在聽自己的聞性。六祖大師言：「念念若行，是名真性。」有時，根本空無一物。念念之間的寂靜，或許就是自性？

當我住在澳洲的時候，門外有一叢美麗的灌木，一株洋紫荊。有時我會刻意去看看它們的莖和葉，還有從樹葉間透進的光線、樹葉間的空隙，以及樹葉和花朵之間的空隙。就在注意這些空間時，一個美麗的視野躍然浮現。你會發現，我們全然被含攝在無有一物的圓滿之中。從內到外，前念後念，都被我們的本性——般若真性含容著。❀

