



The Intrinsic Teacher Within Us

—Reflections on the Platform Sutra

自性中本有的導師——讀《壇經》之省思

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In the *Platform Sutra*, the Sixth Patriarch exhorts us on the importance of having a good teacher in the process of cultivating the Path. He says:

“Good and Wise Friends, all people originally possess the profound knowledge of Bodhi and Prajna within them, but they cannot realize it themselves because their conditioned minds wander and become confused. That is why they must rely on a Good and Wise Advisor who can lead them to see their intrinsic nature.”

He nailed our problem—the conditioned mind is untrustworthy, it does not see the intrinsic nature. Therefore a good teacher is needed to dispel our confusion so that we can realize our intrinsic nature.

However, the Sixth Patriarch later challenges the notion that this teacher must be external. He said: “If you are someone who can awaken

六祖大師在《壇經》中開示我們，導師對修道的重要性。六祖說：「善知識，菩提般若之智，世人本自有之。只緣心迷，不能自悟，須假大善知識，示導見性。」六祖完全指出了我們的癥結所在——眾緣和合的識心是不可信賴的，是無法見到自性的。因此需要有一位導師來破除我們的迷惑，令我們覺悟自性。

然而六祖大師接下來卻提出反思，這位導師不必一定是外在的，他說：「若自悟者，不假外求。若一向執謂須他善知識方得解脫者，無有是處。何以故？自心內有知識自悟。」大師的教誨明確有力——人人都具足自性。循著內心的指南——也就是內在的導師，是可以覺悟自性的。

主要的障礙

若要依靠內導師，首先必須能夠辨識這位內導師。六祖大師提醒我們，這不是每一個人都做得到的，於是就需要一位外在導師的幫助。有些人即使有外導師的幫助，也徒然無益。六祖大師說：「若起邪迷，妄念顛倒，外善知識雖有教授，救不可得。」也就是說，心若迷惑顛倒，面對導師及其教誨，如同視若無睹，甚至於連「自性本有」的觀念，都覺得難以臆想。

耐人尋味的是，六祖大師說一般人「容許」自己迷惑顛倒。也就是說我們疏忽了自己的心

on your own, however, do not seek outside. Don't think that I am saying that you can only gain liberation through a Good and Wise Teacher, other than yourself. That is mistaken. Why? Within your own mind there is a good advisor who can awaken you yourself.” His message is strong and clear—we are all replete with the intrinsic nature, and it is possible to awaken to that nature by relying on an internal compass—the Good and Wise Teacher within.

THE KEY OBSTACLE

To rely on the intrinsic teacher, we need to first successfully identify it. However, the Sixth Patriarch reminds us that not everyone can do that, hence the need of an external teacher. And for some, even the help of an external teacher will be in vain. His said, “if you let yourself morally stray, become confused, confounded, and all mixed up with wrong thinking, then even if a Good and Wise Advisor gives you instruction, he will not be able to help you.” A confused mind makes the available teacher and teaching at hand practically invisible, sometimes to the extent that even the notion of the original nature is unimaginable.

Interestingly, the Sixth Patriarch pointed out that people let themselves become confused. This implies negligence that we have towards our own minds. Being so invested in the external world, we are often unaware of our own patterns of being; we do not even realize that we are confused. Therefore, the ability to recognize and intentionally let ourselves move away from wrong views and attachments is very important. And one way to develop this ability is through vigorous repentance on the mind-ground.

At the same time, we need to solidify our footing in the right views by practicing prajna—a mind-ground practice of detachment from external appearances and internal disturbance. The Sixth Patriarch says, “If you return to what is correct and true, use Prajna to contemplate and illuminate, then in an instant all confused thinking will vanish.” According to him, the strong habituations are never permanent. In fact, if we can employ Prajna, it is possible for those tendencies to vanish in an instant – an instant of Prajna is an instant that is free of habitual tendencies, an instant of insight to the inherent nature.

Such an instant sometimes visits us briefly at a time of profound crisis or bliss and leaves a deep impression. However, without an understanding of what it was, the impression fades. But for some people, it becomes the start of a spiritual search –the important turning point that leads to inward examination and, for a few fortunate people that cultivate, a profound change of heart that manifests as increasing moment-to-moment Prajna.

An experienced teacher can also create opportunities for such an instant by skillfully counteracting our specific attachments to wrong views, so much so that the discriminating mind is stunned into a temporary loss of grounding,



念。由於對外境的投入，也就察覺不到自己當下的心是怎樣的，那就更不會察覺到自己是 在迷惑顛倒之中。所以能夠認識，以及刻意地「使」自己遠離邪見和執著是非常重要的，而培養這個能力的方式之一，便是精勤不懈地從心地上來懺悔。

同時，我們必須修行般若來堅固自己的正見——在心地上修習遠離外相和內擾。六祖大師開示說：「若起正真般若觀照，一剎那間，妄念俱滅。」照六祖所說，我們的習氣不會永久存在。實際上，如果我們能運用般若的話，我們的習氣可以在剎那間消失——也就是說，運用般若觀照的那一剎那，就是沒有習氣的一剎那，也就是洞察自性的一剎那。

這種剎那有時會在千鈞一髮或極度欣悅的時刻突然一閃而來，讓我們深深感觸。可是如果我們不能領會這一瞬間的意義，那麼這內心的觸動也會漸漸淡去。但對於某些人，這觸動會成為一個尋找靈性的開始，一個通往向內檢視的重要轉折點。而對於一些有幸能夠修行的人來說，這內心的轉變會給他們帶來更多的念念般若。

一位明眼善知識會製造機會，在某一瞬間善巧地來對治我們特定的執著與偏見，以至於我們的分別心頓時被震懾，剎那無立足之處；在這一刻，般若就會啟動。這一瞬間的慧見，成為我們修行的引導，進

giving space for Prajna to be active. The insight from this brief moment will then act as a guide for our practice that eventually leads to a moment-to-moment Prajna. Although it takes practice, if we can engage in Prajna in every instant of the present moment, that would be the end of our habitual tendencies.

But what are we confused about? The Fifth Patriarch told the assembly in his monastery: “All day long you just seek good fortune and happiness rather than trying to escape from the bitter sea of birth and death. If you are confused about your essential nature, how can blessings save you?” Just like them, distracted by cultivating good behavior, we sometimes do focus on transforming our minds. But good deeds can merely provide better fortune and worldly happiness which are temporary since the fundamental confusion about what is behind all the activities is not resolved. Ultimately we are confused about our essential nature.

Although there are different schools and styles of teaching, all of them aim to address the same confusion for people with different propensities and with various degrees of obstacles. As the Sixth Patriarch says, all the various teaching and vehicles are just provisional expedients which ultimately lead to correcting this very same confusion regarding one’s original nature.

THE ROLE OF A TEACHER

With the key obstacle identified, the goal of being a teacher himself becomes self-evident – to enable us to break through the confusion and see our original nature. It is worth emphasizing here that rather than acting as a vehicle and “taking” his students directly to awakening or realization, the teacher only points the way. Often, the teacher, just like Venerable Master Hua, points out a mistaken direction in the disciples’ cultivation so that we can reorient ourselves accordingly and eventually be self-reliant. When the Sixth Patriarch departed from the Fifth Patriarch he said: “when someone is confused, his master takes him across. But when one has awakened, he takes himself across... And now that I have awakened it is only right that I ‘take across’ my own essential nature.” The unrealistic expectation for the teacher to “take one across” can only lead to inaction or lack of personal effort in us because we will be waiting for the teacher to somehow “bestow” or even “transmit” the awakening to us.

What’s more, the hope of being “taken across” to awakening or even being able to relax in cultivation because we can depend on an enlightened master can be another obstacle because it shifts the focus from investigating our own mind to looking for the perfectly enlightened master out there. The result can be despair if we fail to find the master; or complacency and dependency if we succeed in doing so. Actually what really matters is whether the master has created space for insightful reflection for our own self-understanding, as well as clear understanding about the ground of cultivation.

而趣向念念般若。雖然這需要鍛煉，但若能在時時刻刻的當下，都能契合般若，我們的習氣就會消亡。

那麼，我們到底在迷惑顛倒些什麼呢？五祖告誡寺中的大眾：「汝等終日只求福田，不求出離生死苦海。自性若迷，福何可救？」如同他們一樣，我們有時會注意去轉化自己的心，但卻又分散心力去積善。善行只能帶來短暫的福報和世俗的快樂，它無法解決對所有事物緣由的根本惑。我們終究還是不明白自性。

雖然有許多不同的宗派和教學方式，它們的目的都是在闡明不同傾向、不同障礙程度的人所共同的困惑。如同六祖所說，所有不同的教誨和宗乘，都只是權宜之法；其最終都是歸向於導正對自性的迷惑。

導師的職責

確定了主要的障礙，導師自身的目標就很明顯了——就是能讓我們破除迷惑、見自本性。在這裡要特別強調，導師的作用主要是指出道路，而不是作為車乘「載著」弟子直達覺悟或證果。這些導師們，比如宣公上人，時常指出弟子錯誤的修行方向，來讓我們自我調整，然後漸漸能夠獨立。當六祖大師辭別五祖時，他說：「迷時師度，悟了自度。……今已得悟，只合自性自度。」指望導師來「度」我們到彼岸，是一個不切實際的期待，這樣只會因為等待導師「賜予」或「傳授」覺悟給我們，而怠惰了修行。

況且這種指望被「度」而覺悟，或者為了能夠依賴開悟的明師而甚至懈怠了修行，都會變成一種障礙，因為我們把應該探究自己心性的注意力，轉移成向外尋找一位理想的開悟明師。如果尋找不到，有可能因此而喪失信心；如果找到了，我們又會變得很滿足、很依賴。其實真正重要的是：這位明師是否能施設空間，讓我們明徹地反思來進行自我認知，以及清楚地明白修行的基礎在哪裡。

THE QUALITIES OF A TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

There are multiple incidents where the Sixth Patriarch, just by briefly meeting someone and hearing their questions, is able to discern exactly where the person is at in terms of cultivation, and what the specific obstacle is that he or she is facing. In the exchanges, the questioner often experiences a profound awakening or realization. These lively encounters describe the embodiment of a successful teacher-student interaction that results in internal transformation. When describing the criteria of finding a good teacher, the Sixth Patriarch says, “A Good and Wise Teacher who has the background and an affinity (有大因緣) [with you] can transform and guide you, leading you to see your original nature. This is because the good and wise teacher is able to stimulate all good dharmas.” Which means we should pay close attention to these three criteria: 1) Background (yin 因); 2) Affinity (yuan 緣); and 3) The ability to “stimulate all good dharmas.” It may help here to examine the meaning of the Chinese terms.

Since the goal is ultimately to enable us to see our own nature, the Chinese word yin 因, translated as “background” may shed light on the Sixth Patriarch’s meaning. Yin literally means “cause” or “reason” in Chinese. It refers to the teacher and student’s intention. In other words, the teacher should have a clear intention for enabling the student’s self-awakening. The word yuan 緣, translated as “affinity” literally means circumstantial conditions or connections in Chinese. It refers to the ability to establish a deep connection to understand the current conditions of the individual. Finally, a good teacher needs to have the ability to “stimulate good dharmas” means not only working on pointing out the obstacles and confusion but also actively drawing out the timely good qualities, dispositions, and virtues in order to sustain cultivation and accomplishment of the Way.

Although the description given by the Sixth Patriarch is stated from the perspective of looking for a teacher, the fact is that a successful teacher-student relationship always depends on both the teacher and the student playing their parts equally. Therefore these three criteria should be examined from both the teacher’s and the student’s perspectives. A direct teaching is successful only when the teacher and student have the common intention, the matching affinity, and the activated good dharmas that facilitate the internal transformation.

Having the Background (yin 因). When the Sixth Patriarch, Huineng, showed up in front of the Fifth Patriarch for the first time, he immediately expressed his background (因) aspiration—to “seek only to be a Buddha, nothing else.” After entrusting the direct teaching to Huineng and making him the Sixth Patriarch, the Fifth Patriarch also expressed his intention – the great cause, the fundamental background (因)—of his teaching. He said, “Out of caring, I am planting this seed; Because of the ground, the fruits will ripen again. Without this feeling, there’d be no seed planted; Without the nature, there’d be no new life to thrive.”

師徒關係的本質

許多機緣中，六祖大師只是從簡短的面談和聽取提問，就可以確知參訪者的修行程度以及所面對的障礙。互動交流中，提問者經常能豁然貫通而覺悟或證悟。這些例子，都是成功的師徒互動所導致的內心轉變。關於找到一位好導師要具備的條件，六祖大師說：「是善知識有大因緣，所謂化導令得見性。一切善法，因善知識能發起故。」也就是有三個攸關的準則：（一）因；（二）緣；（三）發起善法。瞭解這些名詞的中文涵義，或許能增加對六祖大師這段開示的理解。

既然見自本性是最究竟的目的，那麼把「因」翻譯成「background（背景）」似乎較能傳達六祖大師的原意。按照字面解釋，「因」是「原因」或「理由」，意思是師父以及弟子的動機。也就是說，為人師者應該有明確的動機來啟發弟子的自我覺醒。「緣」翻譯成「affinity（相近）」，字面解釋是外在的條件或關係，意思是有能力與對方建立深厚的關係，進而瞭解對方所處的條件狀態。最後，一個導師需要具備「發起善法」的能力，不僅能指出對方的障礙及迷惑，更能積極地引生良善的特質、稟性與品德，使其堅持修行，成就道業。

六祖大師雖然是從尋訪導師的觀點來說明，事實上，成功的師徒關係仰賴師徒各盡其職。因此這三個準則，應該從師父及徒弟兩方面來審視；也就是說，頓教成就與否，取決於師徒是否具有共同的動機（因）、契合的緣，以及發起引導內在轉化的善法。

從「因」來看，當六祖惠能大師初見五祖的時候，立即就表達了他的因地志向——「惟求作佛，不求餘物」。而五祖大師傳授頓教給惠能，並立其為六祖後，也表達了他傳法的心意和期望——所謂大事因緣——他說：「有情來下種，因地果還生；無情既無種，無性亦無生。」

☯待續

☯To be continued