

SUTRA SPOKEN BY THE SIXTH PATRIARCH

六祖坛经

(唐) 惠能 著

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缘起

《六祖坛经》记载了一位觉悟者的开示，愿能觉悟了本来具足的佛性，释迦牟尼在觉悟之后，感叹原来众生都有这个佛性。对不再满足于富华人生、发愿了生死的修行者来说，这是直指人心、言下顿悟的教法。

众生皆有佛性，只是无知而已。认知到自己的无知，才能放下无知。如同点灯照明，原有黑暗并非躲别处，黑暗只是没有灯光的状态。

六祖寺方丈释大愿发愿弘扬六祖禅宗，刊印11种外文版的《六祖坛经》，愿海内外众生，闻到甘露，滋润生命。



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释大光（中文名）禅师，1944年出生于美国，1987年在韩国崇山大禅师下出家，在美国与欧洲担任禅师，同时翻译编辑禅宗书籍。共译者释大观现居中国香港，1981年在泰国阿姜查处出家，1992年成为崇山大禅师弟子，翻译崇山大禅师的《世界一花》等。

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Sutra Spoken By The Sixth Patriarch

Recorded by Ven. Fa Hai (Tang Dynasty)

(美) Ven. Dae Kwang

(香港) Ven. Dae Kwan



**Bodhi has no tree.
Clear mirror has no stand.
Originally nothing,
Where is dust?**

<FOREWORD>



Ven. Dae Kwang

On November 30, 2004, Zen Master Seung Sahn (崇山) died. This English edition of the Sixth Patriarch's Sutra is dedicated to his memory. Buddhism teaches us that there is nothing special, that it's only our like and dislikes mind which create special. Death is also not special, however, it is our great teacher. Just before he died, Zen Master Seung Sahn was doing just what he had always been doing, teaching us. The prospect of death can lead some people to a life of self-concern, but he would use his illnesses as teaching for us. During the more than thirty-two years that he taught outside of Korea and Japan, his body was always quite ill, but this never hindered him. His job was to give and he gave himself completely to us. No monument or sentiment can memorialize that.

Whenever a teacher dies, many feelings arise in people. Some feel grief at the loss; some feel remorse because of what



they did not do; some feel a sense of indebtedness or gratitude for what they have received. The most basic of these from a Buddhist point of view would be gratitude and indebtedness. The gratitude we feel at this time is for our teacher's clear teaching and for the giving of his whole life to us. This is the greatest gift that anyone can give. Any time we receive the gift of good teaching, it comes with a responsibility — a kind of debt. That means we have a duty to do something with it.

A few hours before his death, the Sixth Patriarch taught his students this way: "After my passing away, do not follow the worldly tradition and cry or lament. What you should do is know your own mind and realize your own Buddha-nature, which has neither motion nor stillness, neither birth nor death, neither comes nor goes, neither affirms nor denies, neither stays nor departs. After my death, if you practice according to my instructions it will be as if I were alive. However, if you go against my teaching, no benefit will be obtained, even if I were to remain with you."

So, what are the "instructions"? Our school's teaching has always been very simple and clear. Zen Master Seung Sahn only taught one thing — don't know. Sometimes this "don't know" meant "just do it", sometimes it meant primary point, sometimes correct situation, relationship and function, sometimes "put it ALL down," and sometimes great love, great compassion, the Bodhisattva way. It came in many boxes, with a wide variety of wrappings, but the question was always the same, "What are you?" As he said many times, "I hope you only go straight don't know, which is clear like space; try, try, try for 10,000 years non-stop; soon get enlightenment and save all beings from suffering."



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**All things in the universe are never separated
from our True Nature.**

**Who would have thought that our True
Nature is intrinsically pure!**

**Who would have thought that our True Nature
is intrinsically free
from appearing and disappearing!**

**Who would have thought that our True Nature is
intrinsically self-sufficient!**

**Who would have thought that our True Nature is
intrinsically never moving!**

**Who would have thought that our True Nature
gives rise to all things!**

**The Dharma is transmitted from mind to mind
and the recipient must realize it by his own efforts.**

**From the time of the ancient Buddha it has been
the practice for one Buddha to pass the essence of the
Dharma to a successor,
and for one Patriarch to transmit to another
the secret teaching from mind to mind.**

1.1 When the Patriarch had arrived at Treasure Forest Monastery (Bao Lin Si), Governor Wei of Shaozhou and other officials went there to ask him to deliver public lectures on Buddhism in the great hall of the Great Brahma (Da Fan Si) Temple in the City of Guangzhou.

One thousand people gathered to hear the Patriarch speak, including Governor Wei, government officials and Confucian scholars, Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis, Taoists and laymen. After the Patriarch had taken the high seat, the assembly bowed in homage and asked him to speak on the fundamental laws of Buddhism. The Patriarch said:

1.2 Learned Audience, our True Nature (Bodhi Nature) is originally pure, and by making use of this alone, we can reach Buddhahood directly. Let me now tell you something about my own life and how I came to realize the teaching of the Zen (Dhyana) School.

My father, a native of Fan Yang, was dismissed from his official post and banished to be a commoner in Xinzhou in Guangdong. I was unlucky in that my father died when I was very young, leaving my mother poor and miserable. We moved to Guangzhou, living in very difficult circumstances.

1.3 I was selling firewood in the market one day, when one of my customers ordered some to be brought to his shop. After making the delivery and receiving my money I ran into a man reciting a Sutra just outside the shop. As soon as I heard the



text of this Sutra my mind opened. I asked the man what Sutra he was reciting and was told that it was the Diamond Sutra (Vajracchedika or Diamond Cutter). I enquired as to where he came from and why he recited this particular Sutra. He said he came from Eastern Chan Monastery in the Huangmei District of Qizhou. The abbot in charge of this temple was Hong Ren, the Fifth Patriarch, who had about one thousand disciples studying with him. He had traveled there to pay homage to the Patriarch and attend lectures on this Sutra. He also told me that the Patriarch encouraged the laity as well as the monks to recite this scripture, because by doing so they might realize their own True Nature and thereby reach Buddhahood directly.

1.4 It must be due to my good karma in past lives that I heard about this and was given ten taels for the maintenance of my mother by a man who advised me to go to Huangmei to interview the Fifth Patriarch. After arrangements had been made for my mother, I left for Huangmei, which took me less than thirty days to reach.

I then went to pay homage to the Patriarch. He asked, “Where are you from and what do you want?”

I replied, “I am a commoner from Xinzhou in Guangdong. I have traveled far to pay my respects and ask for nothing but Buddhahood.”

“You are a native of Guangdong, a barbarian? How can you expect to be a Buddha?” asked the Patriarch.

I replied, “Although people may be from the north or south,



Buddha-nature originally has no north or south. A barbarian may be different from the Patriarch physically, but there is no difference in our Buddha-nature.”

1.5 He was going to speak further to me, but the presence of other disciples made him stop. He then ordered me to join the others to work.

Then I said, “May I tell you, Venerable, that Prajna (transcendental Wisdom) often rises in my mind. When one does not stray from True Nature that is called a ‘field of merit.’ Venerable, what work would you ask me to do?”

“This barbarian is too bright,” he remarked. “Go to the stable and speak no more.” I then went to the rear of the monastery and was told by a lay brother to split firewood and pound rice.

1.6 More than eight months later the Patriarch saw me one day and said, “I know your knowledge of Buddhism is very sound; but I have to refrain from speaking to you, because bad people may harm you. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Sir, I do. To avoid people taking notice of me, I dare not go near you.”

One day the Patriarch assembled all his disciples and said to them, “The question of incessant rebirth is a momentous one. Day after day, instead of trying to free yourselves from this bitter sea of life and death, you seem to go after nothing but tainted merits (i.e., merits which will cause rebirth). Yet merits will be of no help, if your True Nature is obscured. Go and seek for the Prajna



(wisdom) in your mind and then write me a stanza (gatha) about it. The person who understands his True Nature will be given the robe, and I shall make him the Sixth Patriarch. Go quickly! Don't delay in writing your stanza, as deliberation is quite unnecessary and of no use. The person who has realized his True Nature can speak of it at once, as soon as he is spoken to about it. He cannot lose sight of it, even when engaged in battle."

1.7 Having received this instruction, the disciples withdrew and said to one another, "It is of no use for us to concentrate our mind to write the stanza and submit it to the Patriarch, since the Patriarchate is bound to be won by Shen Xiu, our instructor. If we presume to write a stanza, it will only be a waste of energy." Upon hearing this, all of them made up their minds not to write anything and said, "Why should we bother making a stanza? Hereafter, we will simply follow our instructor, Shen Xiu, wherever he goes, and look to him for guidance."

Meanwhile, Shen Xiu was thinking to himself, "Considering that I am their teacher, none of them will take part in the competition. I wonder whether I should write a stanza and submit it to the Patriarch. If I do not, how can the Patriarch know how deep or superficial my knowledge is? If my objective is to seek the Dharma, my motive is good. If I were after the Patriarchate, then it would be bad. In that case, my mind would be that of a worldly person and my action would amount to stealing the Patriarch's holy seat. But, if I do not submit a stanza, I shall never have a chance of receiving the Dharma. A



very difficult decision, indeed!”

In front of the Patriarch’s hall there were three corridors. The walls were to be painted by the court artist, named Lu Zhen, with pictures from the Lankavatara Sutra depicting the conversion of the assembly, and with scenes showing the genealogy of the five Patriarchs for the education and veneration of the public.

1.8 After Shen Xiu had composed his stanza he made several attempts to submit it to the Patriarch but as soon as he went near the hall his mind was so perturbed that he sweated all over. He could not screw up enough courage to submit it, although in the course of four days he made altogether thirteen attempts to do so.

Then he thought to himself, “It would be better for me to write it on the wall of the corridor and let the Patriarch see it for himself. If he approves, I shall come out and bow to him, and tell him that it was done by me. If he disapproves, then I shall have wasted several years on this mountain receiving respect from others, which I by no means deserved! In that case, what progress have I made in learning Buddhism?”

At 12 o’clock that night he went secretly with a lamp to write the stanza on the wall of the south corridor, so that the Patriarch might know what spiritual insight he had attained.

1.9 The stanza read:

Body is the Bodhi-tree

Mind is a clear mirror’s stand

