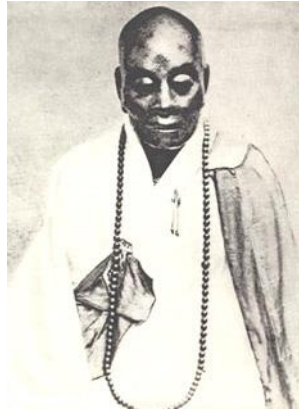




## Lessons from The Sixth Patriarch by Jim Beichler

Buddhism began in the seventh century BCE with the enlightenment and teaching of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha. The first notable surge of Buddhism came in the third century BCE when the emperor Ashoka conquered a large part of the Indian sub-continent. Ashoka is credited with spreading Buddhism throughout southern India and Sri Lanka. In the following centuries, Buddhism found its way west to Afghanistan, north to Nepal, Tibet and into China as well as south-east into the lower portions of Asia (Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Malaysia) and into Indonesia (Bali). At one-time Buddhism cut a large swath throughout eastern and southeastern Asia. Buddhism is different from other religions, if it can even be called a religion rather than either a form of transcendental philosophy or transpersonal psychology, because it not based upon worship of a God or gods. So, there are intimate subtleties to Buddhist concepts that are not satisfied by describing its principles in such simple terms as are usually the case in western religions, i.e., dharma and karma. Yet there does remain a single underlying principle in all of Buddhism that unites everyone and that is the singular fact that within every person, without fail, there exists a unique 'buddha-nature' and every person has the innate ability to break free of the cycle of birth and rebirth, attain nirvana or enlightenment, just by realizing and developing their own inherent 'buddha-nature'. A person's 'buddha-nature' can be equated to the western spiritual/mystical concept of a person's true 'self' or higher-consciousness. These ideas in the East date back nearly three-thousand years in one form or another, but one of its greatest proponents and best-known teachers came much later.



During the sixth century CE, Bodhidharma (called Daruma by the Japanese) officially

introduced Buddhism into China and founded the Shao Lin temple where the practice of Kung Fu (a form of meditation through movement) purportedly originated. The Chinese already knew a great deal about Buddhism from earlier pilgrims, travelers and teachers by this time, but Bodhidharma came to China specifically to teach Buddhism and under his teachings, Buddhism took on some of the major characteristics of Taoism, forming Ch'an Buddhism.

Ch'an is interpreted as recovering the 'original mind' through meditation. The word itself is a Chinese form of the Indian Sanskrit word 'dhyana'. Ch'an Buddhism thrived over the next century and was studied in many monasteries, including the Shao Lin monasteries famous for their Kung Fu boxing style and meditation based on breathing techniques. However, the Ch'an tradition split in the seventh century when Hui Neng (638-713, from Ghangzhou, China), the sixth Patriarch, was forced to flee from the Shao Lin temple with his followers.

Hui Neng was a poor illiterate beggar boy who was naturally and spontaneously enlightened upon hearing the Diamond Sutra being recited in a marketplace, before he came to the temple to study Buddhism. Only the Fifth Patriarch of the temple recognized and understood Hui Neng's enlightenment, but after being allowed to enter the temple Hui Neng held no special position within the Temple political structure. He was only allowed to be a lowly servant. When it came time for the Fifth Patriarch to pick his successor, he knew that Hui Neng was the only person qualified to truly follow him, but the politics of the temple would not allow a simple illiterate servant of the temple to be appointed the new Patriarch. So, the Fifth Patriarch initiated a poetry contest to choose his successor. A poem written by the chief monk was very popular among the other monks, who highly praised it, and won the contest because Hui Neng could neither read nor write.

The body is the Bodhi-tree,  
The heart is like a bright mirror stand,  
Strive to clear it at all times,  
And allow no dust to cling.

The poem was philosophically correct, but obviously did not reflect the intuitive understanding of enlightenment that comes from firsthand

experience.

When the winning poem was read to Hui Neng by a friend and fellow servant, he disagreed with the sentiments of the poem and had his friend secretly write a rebuttal in the form of another poem on the wall of the temple.

Fundamentally no Bodhi-tree exists,  
Nor the stand of a mirror bright.  
Since all is empty from the beginning,  
Where can the dust light?

Hui Neng's poem clearly reflected his firsthand experience of enlightenment. The Patriarch knew immediately who the author of the new poem was because only Hui Neng had reached the level of enlightenment that was expressed in the new poem. So, the Patriarch gave Hui Neng the official insignia of the office, the Patriarch's robe and bowl, and told him to run for his life. Thus, the Ch'an Buddhist movement split into different feuding factions and Hui Neng became the sixth and final Patriarch of Ch'an Buddhism.

Ch'an Buddhism was introduced into Japan in the thirteenth century where it is known as Zen Buddhism, so named because the practitioners practice 'zazen' or sitting in meditation without purpose or goal. In Japan, Buddhism took on whole strange new twist when it became entangled with the fighting philosophies of the warrior caste.

The samurai warriors of Japan so respected the discipline of mind exhibited by the Zen Buddhists that they based their Bushido warrior's code on Buddhist thought. This happenstance is not so hard to believe given that Ch'an Buddhism in China led to the develop of Kung Fu. In this manner, some of the basic Buddhist principles were incorporated into various forms of Japanese martial arts. In a sense, this completed the adaptation of Taoism and Buddhism that began in China. The syllable 'do' in the word Bushido is just Japanese for the word 'Tao', which can be translated as the 'way' or the 'path'.

It is from the story of Hui Neng that we have a perfect example of the simple truth that rote knowledge, in the form of philosophical and logical knowledge of consciousness, does not necessarily offer a direct path to higher levels of consciousness, *i.e.* spiritual/mystical enlightenment. Enlightenment of this type can only come from other physical factors (whole-body experiences through quiet stationary meditation or moving meditation, *i.e.*, the careful study of martial arts and development of internal 'chi' or 'ki') or perhaps a mentally significant spontaneous mental shock, which are necessary for a new complexity of knowledge to

emerge (intense enough to rewire some neural nets in the brain) as a higher state or level of consciousness. NDEs are similar in their results but do not rise to the level of enlightenment, and it may be possible for some people to be born with more sophisticated neural net wiring that is more easily adaptable to higher states of consciousness and full-blown enlightenment.

Since rote knowledge and learning of that knowledge alone (gathering and memorizing facts) are not enough to initiate the high-level changes in consciousness, that does not mean that natural knowledge of our true physical being and reality (as is ideally expressed in science, *i.e.*, natural philosophy which seeks the truth or true nature of our physical reality) cannot help a person reach a higher state or level of consciousness. Knowledge and acceptance of natural truth can help under special conditions. In other words, neither science nor humankind in general needs the accumulation of more data and facts alone, either about consciousness or the physical context of consciousness and physical reality, to reach higher levels of consciousness, either individually or collectively, but rather the emergence of a new physical context (scientific theory) of both consciousness and the universe in its wholeness that better relates them together and explains their intimate connection. But pure logical philosophical knowledge and practice does not help and could possibly hinder the pursuit of higher levels of consciousness under some extreme circumstances. Human made logic and philosophy alone normally emphasize only the material worldliness of our existence and being rather than the otherworldliness and oneness of our being within and as a part of nature.

Natural philosophy, or what we call science, is different from other forms of philosophy in that it is only restricted by nature and our experienced or observed external reality and thus subject only to external natural limitations, rather than and self-imposed limitations of the human mind as is the case in normal philosophy. So only natural philosophy can lead to a truer and more accurate picture and understanding of the true internal nature of our own being within the external context of a greater and better understood universe. Science grows and evolves in tandem with the natural evolution of our own minds and consciousness, as well as evolves our consciousness and neural net structure and bodies over time to better conform to the natural world, even against the worldly logic of the mind. So correct science is more conducive to developing higher levels of consciousness.

Since human consciousness is a product of

evolution, whether internally (genetic) or externally (natural selection) inspired and influenced, true knowledge of the external world is not necessarily an illusion as is our internally motivated and constructed philosophies, and thus true science need not inhibit and should predictably enhance consciousness, higher levels of consciousness and even offer help along the path to spiritual enlightenment. It certainly wouldn't complicate the path as do normal and other forms of human derived philosophy, even in the form of some religions and religious philosophies.

Hui Neng's story also demonstrates that the highest level of enlightenment can also come spontaneously, although spontaneous enlightenment is rare. This implies that the human brain and mind are highly capable and already primed for spiritual enlightenment (Satori and attaining a state of Nirvana) through no more than evolution, while practice of special methods and some types of learning are more advantageous than just rote philosophical knowledge. The brain and mind are also primed for developing science or some similar form of interpreting and explaining nature and the natural world around us in concert with developing consciousness but fail when the internal reality of our consciousness is kept separate from the external physical reality of our being. In reality, they are one and thus continuous with each other. We are one with each other and the wholeness of the universe.