

THE GENERAL AND THE MASTER : THE SUBTEXT OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF EMOTION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO OBTAINING ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE PLATFORM SUTRA

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De Boeck Supérieur | « [Revue internationale de philosophie](#) »

2005/2 n° 232 | pages 213 à 229

ISSN 0048-8143

ISBN 9071868915

DOI 10.3917/rip.232.0213

Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-philosophie-2005-2-page-213.htm>

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The General and the Master:
The Subtext of the Philosophical of Emotion
and its Relationship to Obtaining Enlightenment
in the *Platform Sutra*

ROBERT ELLIOTT ALLINSON

For anyone with an interest in the philosophical teachings of Ch'an or Zen Buddhism, this text is arguably the classic source of philosophical as opposed to religious Ch'an or Zen Buddhism. There are no religious doctrines, beliefs or practices endorsed in the text. The text is exclusively concerned with expounding the nature of Ch'an and its key feature, enlightenment achieved by the mind alone or by pure understanding without the assistance of textual authority, religious devotion, charitable acts, meditation practice or monastic discipline. The enlightenment which is the objective of Ch'an or Zen is not to be confused with the enlightenment of 18th century Europe. Enlightenment, apart from which Ch'an or Zen would have no meaning, is a state of an enhanced consciousness and sharp and clear thinking which results from a freeing of the mind from attachment to a notion of personal identity and other *idée fixe*. Enlightenment is a state of clear consciousness which, while retaining compassion, enables the enlightened one to achieve the same state that Buddha achieved (the word 'Buddha' literally means 'the enlightened one'). In prosaic terms, this mental state is one which is free from worry, confused thinking and the deep sadness that comes from the recognition of the suffering that life entails. The significance of an especially high version of this state is the handing over of the robe and bowl of one Master to the thus recognized successor. This successor is thereby recognized as not only enlightened but capable of enlightening others, which is a higher state than one of being simply enlightened. The school of thought of Ch'an is more widely known in the West by its Japanese nomenclature of Zen which is the Japanese transliteration of the Chinese Ch'an which in turn is derived from the Sanskrit *Dhyana* which means 'meditation'. It may be conceived as a blend of Buddhism that originates in India and the indigenous Chinese philosophical (as opposed to religious) tradition of Taoism. The *Platform Sutra* is a very clas-

sic text in Chinese philosophy and literature and occupies the first rank of importance alongside such great books as Confucius' *Analects*, Lao Tzu's *Tao de ching*, the *Mencius* and the *Chuang-Tzu*. The *Platform Sutra* is a collection of some of the sermons given by Hui Neng (638-713 C.E.), the Sixth Patriarch of Ch'an Buddhism. Much of it takes the form of a spiritual autobiography in that it describes how Hui Neng himself received his enlightenment. At the same time it is itself a spiritual teaching in that the stories that it contains (that of Hui Neng's enlightenment, that of Hui Neng's being chosen as the next master by the Fifth Patriarch, that of the enlightenment of the General), are all designed as subtle techniques to induce a state of enlightenment in the reader. The spiritual autobiography tells the story of how Hui Neng rises from a kitchen scullion to being the next Ch'an Buddhist master essentially by composing a poem which shows that he had achieved a proper understanding of enlightenment and therefore must be enlightened himself. As a whole, the text offers an excellent explanation of many of the central teachings of Ch'an or Zen Buddhism while producing a few paradoxes of its own in so doing. These paradoxes are resolvable with the proper understanding of Ch'an. In the latter part of the text there are discussions of the meaning of enlightenment, the issues of sudden versus gradual enlightenment, and the distinction between the false and the proper meaning of nothingness. The overall purpose of the text is as a guide to achieving spiritual enlightenment with an emphasis on the doctrine of sudden enlightenment via a flash of insight or understanding versus gradual enlightenment via the path of persistent and continuous effort. Understanding enlightenment as comprising the essential feature of Ch'an or Zen Buddhism (as opposed, for example, to the Four Noble Truths or the Eightfold Path) is the unique contribution of Hui Neng. For Hui Neng and the Southern school of Ch'an or Zen, the notion of enlightenment cannot be achieved by expending effort for such a notion implies the continuing reinforcement of a center of selfhood which is precisely the attachment which must be broken. The particular section of the text which this paper devotes itself to explicating is the section in which a monk, who is a General in lay life, obtains enlightenment in the context of being very emotionally attached to becoming the next Master by appropriating the robe and the bowl of the previous Master and thus possessing the external proof that he has been singled out among all of the disciples as the legitimate successor to the Master and alone officially entitled to carry on the lineage of Ch'an.

Emotions are finally becoming respectable subjects of philosophical inquiry today as is noted by such books as the Martha Nussbaum's, *Uphear-*

als of Thought.¹ Emotions, however, have long been a legitimate subject of discourse in Chinese thought. Recently, we have such brilliant and elegantly written works as Anthony Yu's, *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber* which offers, contrary to the mainstream of present trends, a contemporary illustration of the traditional Chinese concern with the importance of emotions.² What is perhaps not so well known is that a treatment of the emotions plays a significant role in the classical Chinese text, the *Platform Sutra*. It is well known that the *Platform Sutra* written by Hui Neng is considered one of the classics if not the classic source of Ch'an or Zen Buddhism. According to John Wu, Hui-Neng (638-713) is '... assuredly one of the superlative geniuses that China has ever produced. He belongs to the company of Lao Tzu, Confucius, Mencius and Chuang-Tzu. ... His ... *Fa-Pao T'an-Ching*, or the *Altar-Sutra [Platform Sutra] of the Dharma-Treasure*, constitutes the greatest masterpiece of Buddhist literature of Chinese authorship. It is by no accident that in the whole *Tripitaka* this little volume is the only Chinese work which bears the title of a '*Sutra*'. Even among *Sutras*, it seems to have found its level with some of the greatest, such as the *Diamond*, the *Lotus* and the *Vimalakirti*.'³ As Dr. Suzuki says, 'The title '*Sutra*' has generally been given to writings ascribed to the Buddha or those somehow personally connected with him, and that a collection of the sermons of Hui-Neng has been so honoured shows what a significant position he occupies in the history of Chinese Buddhism.' Dr. Suzuki goes on to say that Hui-Neng is 'the real Chinese founder of Zen Buddhism'.⁴ However, there is one account of enlightenment in this famous text that has received very little attention. It is the story of the General.

It is commonly thought that emotions are to be repressed in order to attain enlightenment. This would especially seem to be the case in Buddhism. Even if it were to be argued that Buddhism was one matter and Ch'an Buddhism another, there would certainly seem to be much self-disci-

1. Martha NUSSBAUM, *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

2. Anthony YU, *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

3. John WU (WU Ching-hsiung), *The Golden Age of Zen*. Published by the National War College, in Cooperation with the Committee on the Compilation of the Chinese Library, Taipei, 1967, p. 56.

4. Daisetz SUZUKI *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. First Series, New York: Grove Press, Seventh Printing, 1961, p. 218-219.

pline involved in monastic Ch'an.⁵ This self-discipline would appear to have as one of its objects, the lessening of personal desires and the annihilation or at least the tranquilizing of emotions. Thus, it is of great interest to examine one of the classic Ch'an texts to obtain a view which not only accords with the view that sudden enlightenment constitutes the essence of Ch'an but that its means of attainment, at least sometimes, involve a process that requires, as an important element of the process, the presence of both strong desire and strong emotion. The argument I would like to present is that one case of attaining enlightenment that is recounted in the *Platform Sutra* shows that a very different attitude is taken to desire and emotions than annihilation, tranquilization or repression. There is a very key role that desire, emotions and the response to emotions play which is involved in the very process of the attainment of enlightenment.

Before one examines the case of the General, it is important to note that the concept of pacification or repression of desire is not Hui Neng's approach to enlightenment. In fact, the famous comparison between the poems of Shen Hsiu and Hui Neng make precisely this point. As one learns from the *Platform Sutra*, there is a contest via writing a poem, to see who has attained enlightenment. The poem which best shows an understanding of the nature of enlightenment will also show that the writer of the poem must have obtained enlightenment in order to be able to write such a poem.

5. Is Ch'an or Zen Buddhism real Buddhism? Wu points out that 'the words with which Hui Neng begins his *Platform Sutra*, "The Bodhi or Wisdom, which constitutes our self-nature, is pure from the beginning. We need only use our mind to perceive it directly to attain Buddhahood," presents in a nutshell his fundamental insight which underlies all his teachings; and for which he claims no originality but supports it with a quotation from the *Bodhisattva-Sita Sutra*: "Our self-nature is pure in and of itself. If only we are aware of our mind and see our self-nature, we should all attain Buddhahood." *op. cit.*, p. 79. Suzuki emphasizes not only the seing into one's self-nature as the essence of Buddhism, but the abruptness of this occurrence as constituting its essence: "Says the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, "An instant opening leads us into the Original Mind." O my good friends, while under my master Jen I realized the truth the moment I heard him speak and had an instant [i.e. abrupt] glimpse into the true essence of Suchness. This is the reason why I now endeavour by means of this doctrine to lead truth-seekers to an instant [i.e. abrupt] realization of Bodhi. When you by yourselves look into your minds, you perceive at once what the Original Nature is" *Ibid.*, p. 221. Suzuki is of course aware of the Hinayanistic interpretation of Buddhism: "The earlier writers conceived the Fourfold Noble Truths or the Twelvefold Chain of Causation, or the Eightfold Path of Righteousness to be the central teaching of Buddhism, which also included on the psychological side the theory of non-ego (*anatman*). But when we reflect, both philosophically and from the Zen point of view, on the life of the Buddha and on the ultimate principle of Buddhahood, we cannot help thinking of his Enlightenment as the most significant and most essential and most fruitful part of Buddhism. Therefore, what the Buddha really wished to impart to his disciples must be said to have been the Doctrine of Enlightenment in spite of the Hinayanistic interpretation or understanding of what is known as primitive Buddhism." *Ibid.*, p. 155-156.

In the poem of the senior monk, Shen Hsiu, there is still the reference to a daily purification of desire. In the inspired and poetic translation of Wong mou-lam, his poem reads:

Our body is the Bodhi-tree,
And our mind a mirror bright.
Carefully we wipe them hour by hour,
And let no dust alight.⁶

In the poem of Shen Hsiu, one must ceaselessly eradicate or free oneself from desire or any distracting or disturbing feelings, thoughts or emotions. In particular, desire is something to be avoided. In fact, Shen Hsiu himself is troubled by the fact that if he presents a poem, he will show that he has a desire to become Master and thus is not free from desires. We will discuss this aspect of Shen Hsiu below.

It is in the poem of Hui Neng that one sees the real emergence of Ch'an. For there is no self to which any desires, emotions, thoughts or feelings can stick. And any cleansing would simply reinforce the concept of the self and hence would be counter-productive. Such a profound point must be kept in mind when understanding the story of the General. The poem of the young, unlearned (if not illiterate), rice pounder reads in this gifted translation of Wong Mou-lam:

There is no Bodhi-tree,
Nor stand of a mirror bright,
Since all is void.
Where can the dust alight?⁷

It is helpful to bear in mind that Hui Neng himself achieved his full enlightenment upon hearing the *Diamond Sutra* being recited when the Fifth Patriarch recited the line to him, "Keep your mind alive and free without abiding in anything or anywhere".⁸ If one is intent of suppressing or ridding oneself of desire or emotion, it is the case that one's mind is expending a conscious effort to achieve something and thus is dedicated to a project and is not thereby free. It is abiding in something, i.e., the project

6. WONG Mou-lam, *Sutra Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch on the High Seat of "The Treasure of the Law"*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Buddhist Society Publications, 1959, p. 18.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 21. Once I had a devoted student who travelled to India to bring me a leaf from the Bodhi tree. If I had been a proper Master I would have crumpled it in front of his eyes but I did not have the heart for such an act.

8. *Cf. Op. cit.*, p. 62.

of ridding oneself from desire or emotion. To be free includes being free from this project. Of course, it also does not mean that freedom consists in following every desire that arises. For such a path would equally show an intent, an intent to follow every desire that arises. But if a desire does arise, in a context of seeking freedom, then that desire reflects where the mind is moving at the time. And it is in the movement of the mind that one finds freedom. For movement is unabiding. Movement in its very nature is *unattached*. One can also be attached to movement in which case it also loses its freedom. In that case, one abides in movement. But in the case of the General, the movement is part of a process, a part of the process of attaining enlightenment, a part of the process that is not to be denied. In order to achieve freedom from the concept of the mind or the self, a dynamic process is required. The process may be likened to an ever flowing-stream, which may sometimes be muddy and sometimes even blocked up. While the key insight to the whole philosophy of Hui Neng is according to John Wu, ⁹ 'that the mind must flow on and never stop', it is the movement of the General that shows this to us. If the General stopped himself from the chase, just as Shen Hsui stopped himself several times before submitting his poem, he would never be able to reach enlightenment. Even the reaching of enlightenment does not represent a stoppage.

From the account of the General in the *Platform Sutra*, it would appear that desires and emotions are not to be simply eradicated or repressed but must first be expressed in a kind of Fritz Perls' Gestalt Therapy mode and then acknowledged as possessed before one can attain enlightenment. ¹⁰ In other words, the avoidance of desires and emotions is not appropriate. The story of the General is a wonderful example of Hui Neng's emphasis on the freedom of the mind from the traditional concept of cleansing the mind of desires and emotions. *For it is the very emotiveness and powerful desire of the General that brings him to the door of enlightenment*. If he had freed himself of all desire and emotions, he would never have joined in the chase of Hui Neng and would most likely never have met him to receive enlightenment. Rather than to be avoided, as Shen Hsui thought, in his fear that presenting a poem would indicate that he was still driven by desire, desire is an essential element in the process of attaining enlightenment. Of course, the point is that it is not so much that it is the case that desire or emotions are to be followed, but rather the point is that in the complete freedom of

9. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

10. Cf. FRITZ PERLS, *The Gestalt Approach & Eye Witness to Therapy*, Palo Alto. Science and Behavior Books, 1973.

mind, if desire and emotions are there, then rather than being avoided, they are to be expressed. It is not that there is a mandate on the expression of desire or emotion. The point is that the mind cannot be stuck on avoiding them or expressing them. It must be absolutely free. And the General's case shows that if one is full of emotion and desire, then the trick is to move unattached without attempting to eradicate emotion and desire. And to move unattached when one is full of desire and emotion is to move without attempting to detach oneself from desire and emotion. To move without attempting to detach oneself from desire and emotion is to express desire and emotion. If one is driven by desire or emotion, then the expression of that desire and emotion is a necessary part of one's attaining of enlightenment.

The prior expression of emotions is required in a carefully orchestrated step-by-step process before enlightenment can be attained. One key step in the process is the *expression* of the emotions. It is not that the Master encourages ventilating the emotions as in simply working the emotions by ranting or raving. Simple ventilation would appear to have no dynamic purpose. But in the story of the General and the Master, the General must first express his emotions in a realistic mode. The emotions must be expressed in the actual act of attempting to obtain what they desire. Otherwise, Hui Neng himself would also have never presented a poem.

The point would seem to be that unless one becomes aware of what desires and emotions are driving one, there is no possibility of obtaining enlightenment. It is not that one is attempting to become free from emotions. That would be to possess an intention. If one avoids emotions, one may remain attached to them. If one suppresses or represses emotions, one cannot become aware of whether those emotions are still motivating the person or will surface at some later point to become more obvious motivators. But if one expresses one's emotions one can become aware of whether desires or emotions are sufficient or totally satisfactory modes of obtaining what it is they want. The purpose of the expression of emotions is cognitive. One expresses the emotions in order to find out if they are satisfactory drivers. The expression of emotion is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for the attainment of enlightenment. Indeed, it is not even the emotion which is the central point of focus. It is in allowing the emotion expression that one shows that one is not attached to the emotion and it ceases to be the dominating cause of one's action. But one cannot express emotions with this kind of intention.¹¹ One's actions must be entirely natural.

11. For ease of exposition, the term 'emotion' may be used as general term to stand for desire.

The Story

In Chapter One, 'Autobiography' of the *Sutra* of Hui Neng, after Hui Neng has left the monastery in the middle of the night, gifted with the robe and the begging bowl of the Fifth Patriarch, he travels for about two months. He reaches the Ta Yu Mountain. At the Ta Yu mountain he sees that several hundred men were pursuing him in the hopes of robbing him of his robe and his begging bowl. Of these several hundred, there is an interaction with only one. It is of interest why this one is selected for interaction. While it could be the case that it was because this one 'was the most vigilant in search of me' and 'was about to overtake me', it is possible that the Sixth Patriarch could have evaded this monk. After all, he (the Sixth Patriarch) hides behind a rock and need not have come out. So, it is a conscious choice on the part of the Sixth Patriarch to select this particular monk for a spiritual interchange. The question is, why this monk?

This monk is described as 'the most vigilant in search of me' and therefore possesses *the greatest desire* for the robe and bowl. Desire is therefore necessary if one is to obtain enlightenment. In fact, when Shen Hsiu, the Senior Monk, describes himself when he is considering whether or not he should compose a poem to compete for the role of becoming the Sixth Patriarch, he says of himself, 'If my object is to get the Dharma, my motive is a pure one. If I were after the Patriarchate, then it would be bad.'¹² He is obviously trying to distinguish between his motives. He continues on, 'But if I do not submit the stanza, I shall never have a chance of getting the Dharma. A very difficult point to decide, indeed!'¹³ So, desire is necessary to succeed. However, this monk's desires are confused. Some of his desires he considers pure and others, impure. In fact 'his mind was so perturbed that he sweated all over. He could not screw up the courage to submit it, although in the course of four days he made altogether thirteen attempts to do so.'¹⁴ The problem it seems is that his mind is perturbed. It is not the emotion that is the problem. It is his attempt to conquer bad desires with good desires. In the end, his poem reflects his method. It is a poem which illustrates that his method of dealing with his desires and emotions

While one may be emotionless on the surface and yet driven by a desire it is to be understood that if one becomes aware of a desire that one has hidden from oneself, that desire will show itself to possess an emotional character.

12. WONG Mou-lam, *Sutra Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch on the High Seat of "The Treasure of the Law"*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Buddhist Society Publications, 1959, p. 17.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

is to work constantly to conscientiously suppress them. His poem, as his method, is not successful. The method of repressing one desire, an impure one, by attempting to replace it with another, a pure one, does not work. Even after writing this poem he finds that he 'kept on thinking until dawn, as he could neither sleep nor sit at ease.'¹⁵ Why does the Sixth Patriarch inform us of the agitated state of the mind of Shen Hsiu? It can only be to signify that the attempt to weed out unwanted desires is doomed to failure. The method of Shen Hsiu is the wrong method. So far is he from obtaining enlightenment, his act of writing the poem does not either signify his state of mind or clear his mind. The method of checking or suppressing desires or emotions on an hourly basis simply does not work. Indeed, after being told by the Sixth Patriarch that his poem was unsuccessful, he kept on trying. His strategy, which all of us tend to follow willy-nilly must have been, 'if you at first do not succeed, try and try again' (with the same methods). If your methodology did not work, just keep trying it over and over. If you cannot succeed in suppressing emotions, just keep trying to suppress them. If it did not work the first time, by some kind of logic, it will work at a later point in time.

If suppression is the wrong strategy, then what is the right strategy? The ultimate successor, Hui Neng, is a young boy who has been working as a kitchen scullion. He is illiterate and although scholars have disputed this point, it seems that at the very least, he is not extremely learned.¹⁶ These two qualities, youth and a lack of extensive education illustrate that some of the qualities necessary are an innocence or freshness of mind and an absence of pre-existent knowledge of how one should go about doing something.

But we must return to the story of the General.

The General is a monk named Hui Ming. He is described as having a hot temper. At the same time, he has also been described as having been the most vigilant in pursuit of Hui Neng. Since ultimately he becomes enlightened, these qualities must serve him well. First of all he has a strong emotional nature. Secondly, he is tenacious. In no way is he described as having doubts or mixed feelings. In no way is he described as attempting to suppress his emotions. Indeed, his powerful emotions may well have been the chief reason why he is able to maintain such a concerted vigilance and

15. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

16. As Wu argues, he could not have been completely illiterate since he quotes from such *Sutras* as the *Nirvana Sutra*, the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the *Amitayuh Sutra*, the *Bodhisattvasūtra Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra* and of course, the *Diamond Sutra*. Cf., *The Golden Age of Zen*., p. 77.

tenacity in attempting to achieve his goal. His goal, while it may not have been the right goal (e.g. to take the robe and bowl by force), was motivated by a powerful emotional and single-minded nature (an effective combination). The hidden message seems to be, if you have powerful emotions, even if they are “negative”, e.g., anger, jealousy, it is not correct to attempt to suppress them. Rather, make use of these emotions and channel them towards a goal even if that goal is an inappropriate goal. Do not attempt to suppress them or have doubts about them or attempt to direct them to an appropriate goal. Give your emotions free reign and let them be expressed fully without any suppression or direction. Do not stop to attempt to consider whether your goal is the right one or not or whether your methods are correct or not (Shen Hsiu, we recall, was caught in doubts as to whether he should present his poem or not for fear he might be mistaken to be too egoistic by the Sixth Patriarch). No, plunge boldly ahead, without reflection, for reflection as Sartre has told us, poisons desire and desire, unabated and unconsidered desire, at least in the case of the General, is the necessary prerequisite for the attainment of enlightenment. Such is the message of the General. The General is a great example of the qualities needed in order to achieve enlightenment. He has a single-minded purpose which would seem to represent attachment but it is this very quality of single-mindedness, this will, that will shape his state of unattached enlightenment when he receives it. It is with this same single-mindedness that his ceaseless movement of his mind will become a rock, that is, never ceasing to be able to move.¹⁷ For it is his energy that will be the energy of the Master, an energy characteristic of all Ch’an or Zen monks, an energy of willfulness and exuberance. D. T. Suzuki expresses it this way:

‘Hui-neng did not forget that the will was after all the ultimate reality and that enlightenment was to be understood as more than intellection,

17. This may be thought a contradiction but it is not to be understood in the sense that one must become attached stone-like to unattachment. If I may be forgiven an autobiographical vignette, when I ended my visit with the great Suzuki Daisetz’ personal secretary, Miss Mihoko Okamura in Kyoto in 1981, my last vision of her was when I left her in a train and she was standing on the platform as the doors of the train closed. As the doors were closing she said, ‘Dr. Suzuki always said, “Remember the Unborn.”’ The beauty of her face framed in closing doors became a moving image of Eternity. Suddenly I felt a sense of serenity. Why had she asked me to remember the unborn? What is unborn can give birth to anything and everything. It is the return to the original mind. It, properly speaking, is neither movement nor rest. But it engenders absolute spontaneity. For me, Miss Mihoko Okamura must have realized this is what I must remember. In the story of the General it is the same. It is only that the story of the General illustrates that emotions must not be stopped. The train was moving; the doors were moving. It was in movement that the unborn was born. Movement is a very great key And the unborn lifts us beyond life and death.

more than quietly contemplating the truth. The Mind or Self-Nature was to be apprehended in the midst of its working or functioning. The object of *dhyaana* was thus not to stop the working of Self-Nature but to make us plunge right into its stream and seize it in the very act.¹⁸ What better illustration of this point of human dynamic action and interaction can be found than the story of the hot-blooded General?

The Sixth Patriarch hides behind a rock. At this point he could choose not to dialogue with the General. But he must realize that the General has exhibited the correct qualities for a candidate for enlightenment. The General does not attempt to stop his emotions and he has a passionate nature. In a word, his desire is strong and unimhibited.

Now, the General has other qualities in addition to his hot temper. But he cannot gain access to his other qualities through the suppression of his hot temper. In fact, it is only in his having given in to his hot temper, to pursue the Sixth Patriarch, that he has been able to catch up with him. The first lesson with respect to how to relate to one's emotions is to give in to them and to give them free reign.¹⁹ It is only after this giving in to his emotions, to a full and untrammelled following of his emotions, that the General is able to gain access to another part of his nature. For, when the Sixth Patriarch has thrown his bowl and robe on the rock, it is only then, when confronted with the apparent object of his pursuit, that the General can reconsider. His reconsideration can only take place after he has expressed (not vented) his temper fully. Then he can reconsider. Do I really want the bowl and the robe? He realizes that these are but empty symbols and although his aggressive emotions have carried him to the bowl and the robe, they can take him no further. They have done their work. But they are not enough. Now, another emotion must take over. In the text, all that is said is that 'When he got to the rock, he tried to pick them up, but found he could not'.²⁰ What is meant by that enigmatic phrase, 'could not'? It is not

18. Cf. Daseiz SUIZUKI, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, First Series, New York: Grove Press, Seventh Printing, 1961, p. 222.

19. Needless to say, this is advice which is offered only to those who are known not to be potential murderers! One is not allowed to become to enter a monastery until one has been carefully screened. It is also to be understood that the audience is made up of those who possess a deep rooted and sincere desire for enlightenment.

20. WONG Mou-lam, *Stira Spoken by the Sixth Patriarch on the High Seat of "The Treasure of the Law"*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Buddhist Society Publications, 1959, p. 25. In my own personal twist to this story, a story of not trying rather than trying, Yen Why, the great master of the Po Lin Monastery, and the only surviving student of the celebrated master 'Empty Clouds', the last Ch'an Master of China, who passed away at the Biblical age of one hundred and twenty years (Yen Why lived into his nineties and up to that time could still keep well ahead of me in climbing mountains), ceremoniously handed me with his own two hands

parallel to the Arthurian legend of Lancelot attempting to pull Excalibur out from the ground and finding that he was physically incapable. The 'could not' can only mean in this context that the General realizes that he did not come for the robe and the bowl. The General realizes that he wants something beyond this empty symbol. But his realization can only come to him after he has done nothing to stop his emotion from driving him to the very point of picking up the robe and the bowl. It is only by allowing our emotions full power to drive us to our goals that we can gain access to a higher goal.

This, too, is not enough. At this point the General swallows his massive ego and asks for teaching. He must be willing to learn. There is a sequence of steps that must be followed in the right order if one wishes to achieve enlightenment. One is reminded of Diotema's insistence in the *Symposium* of climbing upwards on the Ladder of Love and not missing any of the steps, one of which, as we recall, is the acting out of uninhibited sexual passion.²¹ Here, in the case of the General, one must first give full reign to one's emotions, and then and only then is there a chance that a higher goal will emerge. After the emergence of that higher goal, we must exhibit a true humility. But for the purposes of this paper, it is important to take note that the emotions are a key ingredient in this process. And it is only if one is willing to give them full expression that the process can continue. For in the end, enlightenment requires a complete commitment and partial commitments and hobbled commitments along the way cannot lead to full success later on.

To complete our story, it is only after the showing of complete humility on the part of the General, that the Sixth Patriarch shows himself and offers his teaching. But still he is not ready to teach. Prior to his teaching he asks the General to 'refrain from thinking of anything and to keep your mind a blank.'²² It is only after the General does this for a 'considerable time' that his lesson commences. While this is an anecdote and one might well imagine that this 'considerable time' might be a few hours, in order to fit the pattern of one's own life, such a 'considerable time' in real time might translate into a number of years or even decades. Meditation does have a

unsolicited, shortly before his own passing, his bowl and chopsticks (the normally did not wear a robe). When, in great humility, I said that this was far too great an honour, he said that it was nothing. It reminded me of the many times I had asked him in the privileged years I had with him if he were a master and he would always say, 'If I said I were a master, how could I be a master?'

21. PLATO, *Symposium*, 210d-211d.

22. *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

place. But such practice can only take place after one has given one's emotions full reign! It is a later stage in the sequence of obtaining enlightenment. One cannot and should not practice meditation or mind-clearing while one's mind is perturbed by emotions. It is not that meditation is wrong. It is only that it has a proper sequence. It can and should be done only after one has fully followed the path that one's own emotions are taking one. If one does this and only if one does this, then one's own higher nature will tell one that another goal can be substituted for the one that one has been pursuing. How close is Plato of the *Symposium* and Hui Neng!

The Patriarch's lesson can be taught only after much no-mind practice. It is only then that he presents the General with a spiritual question. It is not a logical puzzle, but a spiritual one: 'When you are thinking of neither good nor evil, what is at that particular moment, Venerable Sir, your real nature (literally, original face)?'²³

As soon as the General hears this question, he at once becomes enlightened. Enlightenment is sudden no doubt. But it has been elaborately prepared. His spiritual question is itself divided into two parts. The first part requires him to have no value judgements. It is only if he is beyond valuation that he can "hear" the message of the second part. But being beyond all values is only possible, one must remember, if one has first given free reign to one's most powerful desires and emotions. It is only if one has given in to one's emotions, validating them as key players in one's life, that one can gain access to one's higher nature which in its penultimate stage, is beyond value judgements. One can transcend values only if one has first followed one's passions. How close are Nietzsche and Hui Neng!²⁴

The General understands the meaning of his real nature (or his original face). The meaning of this is understood at a particular moment. It is not a conceptual puzzle that is to be understood after having been painstakingly taken apart by abstract and dialectical logic. It is understood all at once, in an instant. But this sudden understanding can only take place when one has discarded all values. And this ability to discard all values can only be gifted after one has given full reign to all of one's emotions.

The idea of the sudden understanding is akin to the idea of following one's emotions. Sudden understanding all in an instant is not the same as reaching a conclusion after a carefully considered reflection. A sudden understanding comes to one. It is not something that is rationally deliber-

23. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

24. Cf. Robert E. ALLINSON, 'Evaluation and Trans-Evaluation in Chuang-Tzu and Nietzsche', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 4, December 1986, p. 429-443.

ated about. Just as one follows one's impulse, as a young poet writing a poem on the wall without thinking whether one should write a poem or not, whether it is seemly or unseemly, but writes the first poem that comes into one's head, without revising it thirteen times first, so does understanding come to one in the end.²⁵

The suddenness, the power, the lack of control of the emotions bears a significant analogy to the final understanding that comes to one in the end. One does not control the emotions; one simply receives them. Such is the word, passion. So it is with understanding. It cannot be forced. It simply comes to one in the end. It is, as with the emotions, a result of letting go, of not trying to control, of not trying to find the right answer, of not trying to use the right method: it is, surrender to the power of the moment.

The emotions are not only crucial as co-players in the quest for enlightenment; they also contain, as analogical sources, key information as to how our higher mind must operate in the end, to finally achieve enlightenment. It is not something that we, as reasoners, must piece together and actively deduce. The ultimate understanding simply comes to one, just as emotions come to a child, and we must give in to it, just as a child must give in to her or his emotions.

When the Sixth Patriarch puts the question to the General, he asks him, '... what is at that particular moment – the moment when he has cancelled all value judgments – his real nature'. The focus here is 'at that particular moment'. The answer must reveal what is understood at a particular moment. What is being called for is an instantaneous insight. What is being called for is one's understanding *at a moment*. Of course, such a moment is adumbrated by a cancellation of values. But this, too, is an act of momentariness. For values will return willy nilly. We are not so easily rid of them. But in a moment, for a brief, rare moment, they can be cancelled out. And it is in that sacred space of the empty mind, the mind without judgments, that the real self can be seen. But the emotions have acted first, as a clearing house, before that real self can be perceived.

What is that glorious moment? It is a moment that consists in letting go. A letting go of all values. A surrender, if you like, to our own nature. Just as giving in to our emotions is a surrender to our nature, so is the giving up of all of our values. First we must learn to *surrender*. First we must learn to surrender to our emotions. Then and only then are we ready to learn another lesson: how to surrender to our original nature, our nature without

25. Cf., Robert E. ALLINSON, 'The Buddhist Theory of Instantaneous Being: The Ur-Concept of Buddhism, *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, Kyoto, May 1975.

values. We cannot first learn how to suppress emotions and then discover our real nature. How can we know our real nature if we do not know how to surrender? If we do not learn the art of surrender, we will always possess mental control. We will always possess a mind, that is, a center and a source of control. We must learn the art of surrender. *We must be passionate before we can be wise.*

Of course it can be objected that such a state of being beyond all values is the same as that of an amoral being. But this is to assume that one's original nature has no moral direction and such an assumption has no place in Buddhism. It can also be objected that this account is not fully applicable to all emotions. What if one's emotions in the first place were to murder and rape? Should one follow those emotions as well? This is to misunderstand the nature of emotions.²⁶ In any case, such an account of the emotions as given in the *Platform Sutra* is designed for a pre-selected audience of spiritual aspirants. It is not intended as a manual for murderers and rapists.

One can free oneself from all values only in a moment. And one can experience the full tide of emotions only in a moment. If one stops to consider one's emotions, the moment is lost. If one stops to consider whether one should drop all values or not, the moment is lost. If one ponders if one's emotions are right or not, one loses the purity of the moment and the power of the emotional drive. If one stops to question the sanity of transcending all values, one loses the purity of the emotion and the power of the gift of sudden understanding. Acting out and following one's passions is a great teacher. He or she who does not have this teacher has little chance to reach enlightenment.

The power of the moment is very great indeed. And it is a *particular* moment. It is the moment when one has no guidance of criteria of what is right and what is wrong. It is the giving in to unreason or an *understanding that is beyond all rational criteria*. An understanding that is beyond all rational criteria is closely akin to a passion. It is akin to a passion in the sense that one is not guided by reason! Such is the power and the importance of the lesson of following one's passions. Such is the power of the gift of surrender.

26. A fuller account of how negative emotions arise can be found in Robert E. Allinson, *Spare. Time and the Ethical Foundations* (Ashgate, 2002), Part II, 'The Nature of Ethics and the Bio-Psychological Deduction of the Emotions', Chapter One, 'Toward a New Ethical Foundation: Bio-Evolutionary Social Theory'. Suffice it to say here that one's inclination to murder and rape would only emerge if one's initial emotions had been in some way blocked or repressed. If one's natural passions were allowed a proper outlet, there would be no place for the murderer or the rapist.

And finally, of course, what is the content of the lesson? What is one's real nature, or one's original face? In the text, there is no given answer to this question. The General understands and reaches enlightenment from the question. But there is no indication of how he understands the answer to the question. This too is significant. It is not the answer or the understanding of the *answer* that is important; it is the understanding and the power of the *question*. Reason is always seeking for answers. But the only final answer, the only satisfying answer, is produced by the question itself. *The answer is in the question*. It is only when one gives up attempting to find an answer that the "answer" can come to one. It is in understanding the ultimacy of the question that one finally understands that it is the question that frees one's mind; it is the *question* that brings full liberation, not any answer. For any answer that can be put into words will be a concept that will become a mental possession. And a mental possession will be something to guard, to hold onto, and to attempt to remember when it is forgotten. It will require mental effort. The mind will carry the definition away. But it will remain separated from it as well. And in this separation it will never obtain freedom.

It is in the question, in the dispelling of all answers, that one finds liberation. It is in the state of mind of the *stopping of the process of finding answers* that one finds freedom. But one cannot simply decide not to search for further answers. Such a decision is a mental intention. Such a decision will not possess much effect. One will begin searching again in a short time. And anyway, it is arbitrary; one might still *want* to find answers even if one has decided not to seek them. So long as one desires to find answers, one stays in a state of dissatisfaction. The mind can only be freed in a moment when the mind knows that the right question, put at the right time, has opened and freed the mind from its inherent restlessness. It is the question that does the work, that clears all questions from the mind and allows the mind to experience itself in its pure state of consciousness free from both question and answer. Just as the emotions provide the first and fundamental lesson in letting go, *it is in the letting go of searching for answers* that one finds what one is looking for, not the "right answer" which "explains" enlightenment, but enlightenment itself which is the freedom from the demands of reason. But such freedom must be genuine. The mind must really be free. And such real freedom can only be experienced in the moment of its practical achievement.

One's "real nature" (original face)? One's real nature is of course a state of freedom from reason, freedom from values, freedom from direction, freedom from control, freedom from self. Self is a social construct. But

before birth there is no socialization. There is no personality. There is no empirical ego. One learns this initially in the giving in to one's passions. And now one learns it again. In giving in to the moment, in this case the moment of understanding, a moment which has been prepared by full humility, full attentiveness and full freedom from judgment, one can return to one's original innocence, one's original freshness, one's original spontaneity. It is in this moment that one reaches back to one's nature. A nature beyond social construction. A nature which is flexible, ready to learn and ready to be. One's nature is not to control, not to direct, and not to follow. But just to be. This is the true state of the unborn. The unborn is always ready to be born.

The answer to the question to the earlier question, why this monk – the General with the hot temper – has been chosen, has been answered. The Sixth Patriarch has chosen this monk for enlightenment because he knows that he is a good candidate. It is not because the General has caught up with him that he teaches him. The Sixth Patriarch could have decided to remain hidden. Or, he could have decided to continue running away. Or, he could have decided to hide his robe and bowl where the General could not have found them. But he left them in plain view and decided to use the situation as an opportunity to enlighten the General. He knew that it was a good opportunity. Hui Neng knew that it was this man - a man of great passion – who was the best candidate for enlightenment. There is more detail – more sub-text – relating to the enlightenment of the General than of anyone else in the *Platform Sutra*, including Hui Neng's own case of enlightenment. Can this be a clue that most of us are more like the General than Hui Neng?

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