

Trust in Mind I
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Good evening, bodhisattvas.

Over the last few weeks in the koan salon, in the talks and conversations we've been having here, and in my own meandering through the tradition, I keep bumping into an early Chan, or Chinese Zen, text. Since it kept reaching up and grabbing me by the ankles, I thought it might be interesting to look at it. It's called the *Xinxinming* (信心銘), which is usually translated as "Faith in Mind," but we can do a whole night on just the title alone. Let's see what can happen if we take up a text like this together over several weeks. What can we find that speaks or doesn't speak to what it is we're doing?

Tonight I thought I would give an introduction, talk about that title, see how far we get, and also read the whole thing. I have the text for you to take home so you can do homework. [Laughs] These are the only two people in the world who would light up at that, so beautiful!

The text comes from very early in Chan, and the mythology attributes it to the Third Ancestor. Bodhidharma was the first ancestor, the one who brought Chan from India to China, and then there was Huike after him, and then the third was Sengcan. We don't know a whole lot about him — his life or his teachings — because during his time there was one of the periodic spasms of official repression of Buddhism. And so he spent his whole career up in the hills somewhere teaching in a very low-key way, and he either did or didn't leave this one jewel of a text, this first Chan poem.

Sengcan would have been alive in the 6th century, but recent scholarship seems to place the text in the 8th century, if you examine it linguistically and philosophically. This is interesting to me because it puts it in the time of Great Ancestor Ma and the beginning of the koan tradition. If that's true, then we've got a text that comes from that time and talks about the philosophical and practice milieu out of which koans came.

There is one lovely and helpful story about Sengcan, so whether it's mythology or not that he's connected to this poem, I'll tell the story. When he came to the second ancestor Huike, he

was quite ill. He said, “My body is riddled with leprosy,” — untreated leprosy is a pretty horrendous and disfiguring disease to have — “please find my sin and cleanse me of it.” So he made an immediate association between his illness and some fundamental fault of character, some sin he had committed. Huike said, “Show me the sin and I’ll purify it for you.” Sengcan did some investigation and spent some time with it and realized that he couldn’t really find the sin. He reported this to Huike, who of course said, “There, I’ve purified it for you. It’s gone.”

This comes back to something we keep coming back to again and again by different methods, which is that so much of the trouble — like 100.4% of the trouble — we get into is about misunderstandings about the self, and this is another one. Here’s another example of that: When you have a very strongly constituted sense of self, it’s easy to attach things like ‘sin’ or ‘fault’ to that self. In fact, a strongly constituted self is a magnet for that kind of idea or opinion.

When we talk about ‘no self’ we’re not talking about a complete absence of self, which would be difficult to navigate the world with. But what if we thought about it more as a strongly constituted sense of self and a weakly constituted sense of self? When we look at it that way, we can see that a strongly constituted sense of self will attract to itself ideas like sin, fault, blame, disease, wrongness, and all of that. Whereas a weakly constituted sense of self just doesn’t have the same kind of stickiness. It doesn’t have the same power to attract all kinds of ideas to itself because it’s spacious, it’s got so much air and space in it that there isn’t so much to grab onto, there isn’t so much mass that other things get caught in its orbit.

If you think of the difference between a dense iron planet — it has all this mass and stuff comes into its orbit and starts spinning around it — versus a gas planet, which doesn’t (unless it’s really big) capture things quite as well. This is an example of that, and you can see immediately how the moral of the story isn’t about his leprosy, it’s about his opinion about his leprosy. The moral of the story isn’t *You’re wrong somehow, you’re fundamentally flawed and I’m going to heal you*. It’s *Get rid of your idea that leprosy is connected to a sin, and then you just have leprosy. That’s enough!*

That distinction between reality or circumstances, even difficult circumstances, and the thoughts and opinions we attach to those circumstances, seems really important. That’s where we suffer, with the idea that there’s something wrong or sinful. And the story goes that over the next few years Sengcan’s leprosy did subside the more he practiced and spent time in

meditation. Sometimes that's true, and sometimes it's not true, that meditation can have a strong effect on physical conditions, and sometimes it has no effect whatsoever.

That's Sengcan, and that's about as much as we know from him.

I want to talk a little bit about the title. It's three words or characters in Chinese: *xin* (信), *xin* (心) — and those are two different words, two different xins — and *ming* (銘). The *ming* is the easiest part; it means an inscription. We could just take it to mean 'essay on' or 'writing about' the *xinxin* part. When you read Chinese, it's so different from English in that each character has this penumbra of meanings and associations around it. It's hard to translate because you have to pick one English meaning, and you're always losing a lot because if you're reading the Chinese you get that cloud of associations. My cloud of associations with this word that means inscription includes what is to me a beautiful Chan phrase praising a particular bit of writing, saying they are words worthy of inscribing on the bones: something so valuable and important that it's worth carving into our bones, taking that deep into us, letting them mark us that deeply. Words worth inscribing on the bones. Maybe there's something here, in that these words have survived and spoken to us for such a long time; I would commend them to you as words worthy of inscribing on the bones.

Then for the xins at the beginning. The first one is a word that can mean 'faith,' which is the way it's often translated: Faith in Mind. It can mean 'belief.' It can also mean 'trust' or 'confidence,' and I tend toward the trust or confidence kind of interpretation, which I'll talk about in a bit. So you've got faith, belief, trust, confidence — all that kind of constellation of meaning. And then the second character is 'mind,' 'heart-mind'. Chinese is extremely unhelpful in telling you how words connect to each other; there are no prepositions, you don't know if it's an adjective or a noun or a verb, or all of those things at the same time. So they just sort of plop things next to each other, and you have to figure out how they relate to each other. In some ways, the way we developed working in koan seminars and in the koan salon, where people just plop something down and someone puts something next to it, and we do this kind of juxtaposition, really came out my experience of the Chinese language. We're just doing koans like the language: We put things down next to each other, we push them around a little bit, rearrange them, and find out what the connections are, which are never one way but always a multiplicity of ways.

What's the connection between faith, belief, trust, confidence, and heart-mind? There's a lot there. At one level, there's a simple thing that gets back to a question we've been asking for years: Do you trust your life? Do you have faith in your life? Do you trust your heart-mind? And, if you've been working with *Do you trust your life?* try switching it to *Do you trust your heart-mind?* That's an obviously closely aligned but obviously different and unsettling question. How do you feel about your heart-mind? Do you have confidence in it, do you believe in it? At one level of meaning it's about our relationship with our own heart-minds, our most intimate relationship. At another level it's also talking about the big heart-mind, the heart-mind of the world or the universe. Do you trust that? Do you have faith in that? In that place we talk about where our individual heart-minds meet the great heart-mind of the universe, where they're continuous, do you have trust there? Do you have faith?

Another way of looking at the title, a classical interpretation of it: In the time *Xinxinming* was written, most philosophies, most practices, even most buddhist practices, had a strong devotional element. For instance, in Pure Land you had a devotional relationship to Amitabha, a sort of bodhisattva-buddha, and if you did it right you would end up being reborn in the Pure Land. This is something familiar to us in the West, where if you have a devotional relationship with a god figure, you will go to heaven when you die. There were a lot of similar ideas, and so maybe one of the radical questions *Xinxinming* was suggesting was: What would it be like to have that kind of devotion not to a figure outside ourselves, not to a god or some other kind of being, but to the heart-mind itself? To the great heart-mind. What if we don't need to create any other kind of mediating being, or any other belief, but just have that devotion and faith to the great *What is?* So that every moment we come into relationship with the great *What is*. Every moment that's our field of practice, that's what our heart-minds are doing, and there's nothing beyond that, no guaranteed reward for that except for what it feels like to do that.

My sense of this poem is that it really is talking about having trust in the heart-mind, both our own and the large one, and so that's how I translate it, but we can call it *Faith in Mind* if people are used to hearing it that way, because that's fine as well.

Let me pass these out and tonight just read it. If it seems like a lot of words, just let the words wash over you. You can read along if you want, or you can just let the words wash over you and see what happens when you do. Notice if there's anything that lights for you as I read

it. I've included two different translated versions here. The one on the left is D.T. Suzuki's, and he's included because he's a genius and he knows this stuff better than anybody else. He had a profound personal understanding of it. The one on the right, which is the one I'm going to read, is a more modern translation, and I think really good at getting the meaning across in a clear and simple way. So, if there's stuff you're interested in in the Richard Clark translation you can read back into the Suzuki translation and have that as a commentary. And he, of course, makes another choice about the title: Verse on the Faith Mind. He's saying that the faith part is an adjective to 'mind,' and so he's talking about that mind that has faith — what's that like? The mind that trusts — what are the qualities of that?

The poem opens with one of the most famous couplets in all of Zen that gets quoted over and over again: "The Great Way is not difficult for those who have no preferences." You've probably heard it as "The Great Way is not difficult if you just avoid picking and choosing," which is the same thing. "When love and hate are both absent, everything becomes clear and undisguised." Later on this is also the source of "When my mind doesn't arise all things are blameless." And notice how in both cases it's not saying that we have a shift in our attitude. It's saying that things change; the nature of things is that they become clear and undisguised. That's interesting. It's not that we see them clearly, but they themselves appear in a different way.

[Joan reads "Verses On the Faith Mind," *Xinxinming*, translated by Richard Clark]

The Great Way is not difficult
for those who have no preferences.
When love and hate are both absent
everything becomes clear and undisguised.
Make the smallest distinction, however
and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.
If you wish to see the truth
then hold no opinions for, or against, anything.
To set up what you like against what you dislike
is the disease of the mind.
When the deep meaning of things is not understood
the mind's essential peace is disturbed to no avail.
The Way is perfect, like vast space
where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess.

Indeed, it is due to our choosing to accept or reject
that we do not see the true nature of things.
Live neither in the entanglements of outer things,
nor in inner feelings of emptiness.
Be serene in the oneness of things
and such erroneous views will disappear by themselves.
When you try to stop activity to achieve passivity
your very effort fills you with activity.
As long as you remain in one extreme or the other
you will never know Oneness.
Those who do not live in the single Way
fail in both activity and passivity,
assertion and denial. To deny the reality of things
to assert the emptiness of things is to miss their reality.
The more you talk and think about it,
the further astray you wander from the truth.
Stop talking and thinking,
and there is nothing you will not be able to know.
To return to the root is to find the meaning,
but to pursue appearances is to miss the source.

At the moment of inner enlightenment
there is going beyond appearance and emptiness.
The changes that appear to occur in the empty world
we call real only because of our ignorance.
Do not search for the truth;
only cease to cherish opinions.
Do not remain in the dualistic state
avoid such pursuits carefully.
If there is even a trace of this and that, of right and wrong,
the Mind-essence will be lost in confusion.
Although all dualities come from the One,
do not be attached even to this One.
When the mind exists undisturbed in the Way,
nothing in the world can offend,
and when a thing can no longer offend, it ceases to
exist in the old way.
When no discriminating thoughts arise, the old mind
ceases to exist.
When thought objects vanish, the thinking-subject
vanishes,
as when the mind vanishes, objects vanish.

Things are objects because of the subject (mind);
the mind (subject) is such because of things (object).
Understand the relativity of these two
and the basic reality: the unity of emptiness.

In this Emptiness the two are indistinguishable
and each contains in itself the whole world.
If you do not discriminate between coarse and fine
you will not be tempted to prejudice and opinion.
To live in the Great Way
is neither easy nor difficult,
but those with limited views
are fearful and irresolute: the faster they hurry, the
slower they go
and clinging (attachment) cannot be limited;
even to be attached to the idea of enlightenment is to go astray.
Just let things be in their own way
and there will be neither coming nor going.
Obey the nature of things (your own nature)
and you will walk freely and undisturbed.
When thought is in bondage the truth is hidden,
for everything is murky and unclear,
and the burdensome practice of judging brings
annoyance and weariness.
What benefit can be derived from distinctions and separation?
If you wish to move in the One Way
do not dislike even the world of senses and ideas.
Indeed, to accept them fully
is identical with true Enlightenment.
The wise man strives to no goals
but the foolish man fetters himself.
There is one Dharma, not many; distinctions arise
from the clinging needs of the ignorant.
To seek Mind with the (discriminating) mind
is the greatest of all mistakes.
Rest and unrest derive from illusion;
with enlightenment there is no liking and disliking.
All dualities come from
ignorant inference.
They are like dreams or flowers in air;
foolish to try to grasp them.
Gain and loss, right and wrong;
such thoughts must finally be abolished at once.
If the eye never sleeps,
all dreams will naturally cease.
If the mind makes no discriminations,
the ten thousand things are as they are, of single essence.
To understand the mystery of this One-essence
is to be released from all entanglements.
When all things are seen equally
the timeless Self-essence is reached.
No comparisons or analogies are possible

in this causeless, relationless state.
Consider movement stationary, and the stationary in motion,
both movement and rest disappear.
When such dualities cease to exist
Oneness itself cannot exist.
To this ultimate finality
no law or description applies.
For the unified mind in accord with the Way
all self-centered striving ceases.
Doubts and irresolutions vanish
and life in true faith is possible.
With a single stroke we are freed from bondage;
nothing clings to us and we hold to nothing.
All is empty, clear, self-illuminating,
with no exertion of the mind's power.
Here thought, feeling, knowledge and imagination
are of no value.
In this world of Suchness
there is neither self nor other-than-self.
To come directly into harmony with this reality
just simply say when doubts arise, 'Not two'.
In this 'not two,' nothing is separate,
nothing is excluded.
No matter when or where,
enlightenment means entering this truth.
And this truth is beyond extension or diminution in time or space;
in it, a single thought is ten thousand years.
Emptiness here, Emptiness there,
but the infinite universe stands always before your eyes.
Infinitely large and infinitely small;
no difference, for definitions have vanished
and no boundaries are seen.
So, too, with Being
and non-Being.
Don't waste time in doubts and arguments
that have nothing to do with this.
One thing, all things:
move among and intermingle without distinction.
To live in this realization
is to be without anxiety about non-perfection.
To live in this faith is the road to non-duality,
because the non-dual is one with the trusting mind.
Words! The Way is beyond language,
for in it, there is
no yesterday
no tomorrow
no today.

Okay, so any absolutely essential questions before we close?

Q1 : It's very similar to the *Heart Sutra*. What is the relationship timewise, and did they meet up and what did they say?

JIS : That's a great question. The *Heart Sutra* would have come first, would have been translated and known for a while. One of the things that's interesting about this poem is that it's the first bit of Chinese writing — if it's as early as the mythology says — that has no Sanskrit in it, no reference to the Indian tradition at all like the *Heart Sutra* does, but it's in a completely Chinese idiom. So one way you might think of it is that they'd finally gotten to where they can have a native expression of this important idea. But that sense of how negation and deconstruction clear a space in which something good can happen, I think is true for both of them. Just clear the space and it will appear.

Q2 : I happened to pick up a copy of *The I Never Sleeps* by Dennis Genpo Merzel. I was just curious if you would recommend that as a companion to this.

JIS : I haven't read it so I can't say for sure, but he's in another koan tradition. He's in Maezumi Taizan's line, but he's renounced koans, and he's done the Big Mind thing. Have you heard about the Big Mind? Well, he's taken Zen and completely stripped it of any kind of philosophy and turned it into this sort of gestalt experience where he says you can experience an opening like in an afternoon in this Big Mind process. It's interesting [Laughs], you know, and creative. Let me know what you think when you read it.

Okay, anything absolutely essential? Thank you.