

Trust in Mind II
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Good evening, bodhisattvas!

We've been talking about the *Xinxinming*, "Trust in Mind," which is an early Chinese poem that lays out some of the philosophical and practice foundations for Chan, which is the Chinese Buddhist school that became Zen in Japan.

"Trust in Mind" is a Chan response to the fundamental dilemma that Buddhism raises, which is that life is *dukkha*. Usually we translate that as 'life is suffering' — not such a good translation, really; it's more like 'life is unsatisfactoriness.' And, in particular, in Chan, the idea is that a big element of that unsatisfactoriness is a sense of incompleteness, that things are unsatisfactory because when we encounter them — when we have a meeting with someone or something, or in a certain situation — there is something incomplete. There's something not yet whole. Which is also hopeful, because it means that there could be, perhaps, a creation of that wholeness in any encounter.

The sense of *dukkha*, incompleteness, is a kind of existential condition. We feel there's something missing. We feel that things are not whole or complete in ourselves or in our relationships to the world, and often that's what causes us to go looking for things, be they meditation, athletics, great diets, communism, or whatever it is that we look for to give us that sense of the completeness, the wholeness of things. "Trust in Mind" is, in part at least, a response to the question of that incompleteness. Here's a prescription for what to do about it in the first section, which says:

The Great Way is not difficult
for those who have no preferences.
When love and hate (like and dislike) 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.

“Trust in Mind” begins by saying that what we bring to this existential condition of incompleteness is what’s being described fundamentally as duality. We bring, first of all, the idea that there’s a subject — a self — and there are objects — everything else basically. And there’s a relationship between the self and everything else that’s a dualistic kind of relationship. In that fundamentally dualistic relationship we create all these other dualisms by constantly setting up what you like against what you dislike. *This is good, this is bad. I like this, I don’t like this. This is good for the world, this is bad for the world. I hate this, I love this* — all of that kind of stuff. What it’s talking about is not that you should become preference-less, because that’s a kind of robotic, boring state, but that you shouldn’t have preferences about your preferences, that you shouldn’t feel that just because you like chocolate more than vanilla that means that chocolate is better than vanilla. You don’t go to that next level of making a preference about your preference. You might accept that you’d rather be eating chocolate ice cream on a road with no traffic than eating vanilla on a congested, crowded road, but that doesn’t say anything about the nature of the world. It just says something very local about your own preferences.

But to set up what you like against what you dislike, to constantly engage in what the Korean teacher Seung Sahn called checking mind, that’s what we bring to the feeling of the incompleteness and unsatisfactoriness of life. That checking mind is the mind that’s always comparing, always taking notes, always sorting and categorizing, and especially for some of us, comparing ourselves, comparing and contrasting ourselves to other people and everything else.

So there’s the diagnosis of what we bring to the party that causes difficulty, and then in this next section, “Trust in Mind” brings in what the alternative is. If we weren’t doing *that*, what would it be like? It says:

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.

It holds out this great promise: 'when the deep meaning of things is not understood...'
Great! Now we're going to find out what the deep meaning of things is. And then it goes off in another direction entirely, and leaves us without a clear sense of what the deep meaning of things is. It talks about the true nature of things but doesn't exactly say what the true nature of things is. That's a very Chan thing to do, because for people in Chan it's useless to talk about it. There's no point in describing it. You have to experience it for yourself. That's the invitation : for you to say, *Yeah, but what IS the deep nature of things? What is the true meaning? And how do I get me some of that? How do I experience that for myself?*

But not being a great Chan Master of the past, I'm going to say a little bit about the true nature of things. What I want to do is fill in the philosophical understanding that they would have taken for granted, which we can no longer take for granted because we're not steeped in that tradition anymore. At least give what they would have taken for granted and continue to extend the invitation to you to discover and experience it for yourself.

When they were talking about the deep meaning of things and the true nature of things, here's something about what they assumed everybody would take for granted. In the Mahayana tradition, which is the second great turning of the teachings of Buddhism, there's a lot of emphasis on what usually gets called form and emptiness. Emptiness, *shunyata* in Sanskrit, is the condition of everything being empty of individual self-nature. The positive way of saying that is that emptiness is everything being connected. That's what it means: Nothing is separate, nothing has its own individual inherent existence separate from everything else. The first quality of emptiness is this connectedness of everything to everything else.

Form is the way that gets manifested [knocks on floor] in hard matter and thoughts and energy, and the things that are part of the phenomenal or manifest world. When Chan people spoke about form and emptiness they were also expanding the sense of those things so that emptiness becomes what we call the vastness, which is to say it is that aspect of everything which is not only connected to everything else, but is also luminous and complete and eternal. And form is not only that which is manifest but it is the suchness of things, which in Sanskrit is *tathagata*. It is everything that is vivid, particular, and alive about things; that's the

form aspect. Everything has both of those aspects: the interconnected, luminous, eternal, complete aspect, and the vivid, particular, alive, manifest aspect, simultaneously.

Then the Chan folks said (those of you who are familiar with koans will recognize the formulation), *Well, that's pretty good but that's only two thirds of it.* They added a third thing to form and emptiness, which was function. Function is kind of a clunky word but it actually works pretty well. There are two aspects to function. One is that when you think about something's function, you think about what it's for. Here, very lightly in Chan, resides any sense of the meaning of things, or the purpose of things, in its function. The other thing that comes to mind about function after *What is it for?* is *What does it do?* Here we have action, and in Chan it's tremendously important that we don't just have the luminous, eternal aspect of things and the manifest, vivid aspect of things. We also have the activity of everything, the active nature of things. You can't leave that out.

What happens when you bring in function — when you bring in *What is it for?* and *What does it do?* — is that you make a bridge from emptiness through form into the world. By that I mean that what we hope for, what we practice for, what we intend, is that our action, our activity, our function, our relationship to the world come out of a union of the empty world and the form world, come out of a union of our own luminous aspect with our own vivid aspect. If we can act out of a union of those two things, we can find true and helpful function in the world, and that finding of our helpful and true function in the world is the bodhisattva way. That's what it means to be a bodhisattva: for each of us to discover what that is for us.

In a lot of Western cultures we have an assumption that we will find our purpose and our meaning by standing firmly in our form aspect, by discovering what we care about, what we're good at, what our skills are, what our opportunities are, and out of that we will find our action in the world. This is saying something different. This is saying that isn't quite enough, that you have to also somehow consider — here's the slightly mysterious part — your luminous, eternal aspect, and you have to allow that to flow through your vivid, alive, manifest aspect into the world. That's the true work. Purpose and meaning isn't as personal as it is in most Western cultures. It isn't so much a personal quest as it is a kind of opening and allowing of eternity to flow through us, be shaped by us, be shaped by our tathagata, our particularness, and flow into the world.

We have emptiness or the vastness, and form or manifestation, and function or activity, as the three parts of the true nature of things in Chan. This is the deep meaning of things. The deep meaning resides not so much in who you are as what you do, and so instead of looking to try to discover the meaning of our life or purpose in life first and then acting from that, Chan says *Act!* and then find out what your meaning and purpose is, based on what you do, based on what happens.

In the first line of this section it says, “When the deep meaning of things is not understood, the mind’s essential peace is disturbed to no avail.” Now that’s interesting because it’s not saying *Don’t disturb your mind’s essential peace*. It’s saying, *Just don’t disturb it to no avail*. Again, we have this emphasis on action, on what we do, on being bodhisattvas as best we can. So go ahead and disturb your mind’s essential peace, which really can’t be disturbed at all, which you’ll figure out as soon as you try to disturb it in this way, so it’s all okay! It’s not a matter of getting as still as you can and staying that way. It’s a matter of stirring it up! Try, act, find out; just don’t do it to no avail. And we can avoid doing it to no avail if we remain connected to this deep meaning of things that we’re talking about.

“The Way is perfect like vast space, where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess.” This is the next piece of the promise. If we put down preferences, if we put down all of that sorting and checking-mind stuff, if we begin to experience these three aspects of our essential nature and the essential nature of everything else, things get really big. Vast space. We get really big. The space inside us, the space we inhabit with everything else, gets really big, and in that big space full of equanimity, there’s nothing lacking and nothing in excess.

Now we’ve just been talking about how it’s important to act, so this is not a brief for passivity. (We’ll get more into this in the next section, about the relationship between activity and passivity.) It’s not saying to just stay still and don’t do anything because everything is vast and perfect. It’s saying that when you connect with this way of experiencing things, this way of experiencing things is as vast as space. It’s big, it’s calm, it’s spacious, and into that you can bring anything. You can bring the greatest turmoil, the deepest sorrow, the most difficult things, and they can be held in that space, and not denied or turned away because the space is strong enough to hold it.

It says in the next line, “Indeed, it is due to our choosing to accept or reject that we do not see the true nature of things.” If we try to keep things out of the vast space that we’re creating inside ourselves, which we find is continuous with the vast space of everything else, if we try to reject things or keep things out, that’s where the trouble comes from. The absence of trouble is the inviting of everything into that space within ourselves, as vast and calm as space itself.

Then there’s another middle-way suggestion: Don’t live in the entanglements of outer things. Don’t think that everything that happens has to do with how you engage with the world. At the same time, don’t turn away from the world to a stillness that has a frozen quality about it. “Be serene in the oneness of things and such erroneous views will disappear by themselves.” Be serene in the oneness of things. Be okay with that. Come to hold that space that is connected to everything else without fear, at peace with that connection with everything else — which is the way things are anyway, so you might as well. And if you can find that big space, that spacious place, that serenity, then all the picking and choosing and preference stuff, the good and the bad, and the pitting things against each other, does disappear by itself. It’s not interesting anymore. It’s like having felt something very big and large and peaceful and then choosing to crawl back into a little tiny dark box and closing the door behind you; it’s just not such an attractive option anymore. There is a way that things begin to fall away by themselves.

Any comments or questions about this section?

Excerpts from the Q and A:

JIS : When you walk into the room and it’s full of clutter and you get irritated, that’s the vastness, too! There’s nothing that sits outside the vastness. But the difference is that you don’t know it in that moment, because the form world is so in the foreground and the vastness is so receded into the background that it’s difficult to connect with the fact that it is. If you knew that that was the vastness, it wouldn’t bother you, right?

Q1 : Okay, right. So is that an awareness that you can bring with whatever I'm doing? Just to break through it?

JIS : Yeah. You could laugh and say, *Oh, the vastness is irritated at the vastness*, and it just shifts in an instant! [Laughter] Right? Where we get into trouble is when we've lost the connection and we've forgotten the vast dimension of the irritation.

Q2 : What's the faculty that we're drawing on, not checking mind, that enables us to actually discern how we're doing when we act? What is that that we're drawing on to make that assessment that enables us to know whether this is a good choice or not?

JIS : I think what "Trust in Mind" would say is that it's this connection to the deep meaning of things, which is being able to look at something, to evaluate something, as an action and the results of that action, with one eye looking from the perspective of the vastness and one looking from the perspective of the world of form. Bringing those two together and evaluating based on how it's doing in both those aspects, from both those perspectives. Is this true to the radiant world? Is this true to the vivid, alive world of form?

Q3 : Is that a cognitive process or is it just a felt orientation?

JIS : It's a combination. We've talked about how the heart-mind is a kind of single system in Chan, and so you're bringing all of their faculties to bear, but they're more balanced. We tend to be either cognitively predisposed or emotionally predisposed, whereas this is an invitation to combine those two things and bring those faculties together, as well as intuition, somatic, and all the rest of it.

Q4 : So when you're talking about using that discernment you're talking about acting and planning?

JIS : Yeah. The thing is, making a shift so that we allow the meanings to arise out of the actualities of things rather than our plans for things. The meaning comes out of what happens, not what we think ought to happen or what we intend or plan to happen. And then we discern that. We discern that meaning, the actual meaning, not the meaning inside our own heads.

Anything else before we close?

Thank you all.