

Trust in Mind III
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Good evening, bodhisattvas!

For some weeks we've been talking about an old Chinese Chan poem called the *Xinxinming* or "Faith in Mind," "Trust in Mind," and we're going to continue tonight, and probably for the rest of our lives, to go through this.

I wanted to touch on a couple of things that we talked about in the last session, because it floats into what we're going to turn to tonight. To recap briefly: The first thing is about the essential nature of things, the deep meaning or true nature of things, as the poem says. Although the poem doesn't make clear what that is, we have a sense of this philosophically from what they would have taken for granted, what they meant when they sat and talked about the essential or true nature of things. To begin with, there's the fundamental Mahayana idea that everything has an aspect of form and an aspect of emptiness — a manifest aspect and an aspect that is empty of self-nature, empty of independent existence, which is the way everything is connected to everything else. We have the apparent vividness and particularity of everything, and simultaneously we have the way everything is one with everything else.

The Chinese added a third term to form and emptiness, which is function. By function they meant the dynamic quality in the relationship between form and emptiness. What does it do? What does it look like? How does it act? That was very important to the Chinese. Peter Hershock, who wrote a wonderful book on Chan Buddhism called *Chan Buddhism*, says at one point that it's not enough to know what buddha nature is; you have to know what buddha nature does. That was essential in Chan, that it wasn't enough to describe something or see its suchness, you also had to understand how it functions, what it does, what it means in the world. Form, emptiness, and function.

It's important because without function you have an apparent duality between form and emptiness that gets resolved by saying they're identical, as it says in the *Heart Sutra*: form is emptiness and emptiness is form. You've got an apparent duality between two things which are actually identical, but you've still got a static thing; you've still got something that isn't moving yet.

Function is a way of being in the world of form, which we are; we sit here as forms in the world of form, phenomena in the phenomenal world — and bringing in the empty aspect of everything. Interestingly, bringing in what everything does, how it functions, is a way of bringing emptiness right into the world of form. I'll give you an example of what I mean. From the perspective of the phenomenal world, the world of form, the ordinary way of things, where our perspective is relatively small, narrow, and focused on how things feel, what we think about them, and how things seem to be going — from that perspective it might be easy to think about someone with whom we have a close relationship in terms of what they mean to us. Their function is to love us, or to stand still and let us love them, or not to love us when we want them to love us, or to help us or to make things incredibly difficult all the time, or to irritate us, whatever the case might be. We tend to think of them in terms of our own sense of what they mean, how they function in relationship to us. If you bring in the empty aspect, then suddenly you have to also see this person as a complete, particular, perfect, radiant manifestation of the vastness that is everything. When you do that, when you look at that person in that way, it becomes a little more difficult to think their function is to irritate you. Suddenly things get bigger and more spacious and, in a way, more interesting.

When we bring in that sense of function, that deep sense of everything being a manifestation of the vastness, then suddenly there's a dynamic quality between form and emptiness. They are that person and they are this complete manifestation of the vastness simultaneously, and what do we do with that?

That's the first bit from last week. The second, which goes along with that, is that when we see the largeness of things, the largeness of any relationship or circumstance as well as its particularity, it becomes crazy to think we can know the meaning of things before they happen, that we can go into the situation knowing what the meaning is going to be.

Another important idea in "Trust in Mind" is that meaning arises *out of* the situation, the relationship, the interaction. We can't know what something means until we've lived through it, and then probably spent some time reflecting on it. When we go in with a big agenda, a big idea of what this is supposed to mean and what the outcome ought to be, we're limiting what's possible. And we're cutting ourselves off from discovering the meaning that isn't just happening inside our own heart-minds, but is actually happening in the relationship or circumstance; it isn't just about us but is about the whole. That doesn't mean we don't go into some circumstances with a list of things that need to be accomplished. I was thinking about today, Mary Jane, how we had our list of things to be

accomplished. We were like dogs circling the territory getting closer and closer to sitting down on it. It didn't happen exactly in a linear way, but I think we did pretty well on the list. There's that combination of holding what we bring and what we imagine needs doing with what actually happens, and letting those things speak to each other and inform each other.

The first part of "Faith in Mind" is addressing the way we make dualities in our own heart-minds when we have preferences or opinions, setting up what we like against what we don't like. In the third part, which we're going to look at today, we begin to move into the realm of activity. We've been focusing on the interior world of thoughts and feelings; now we're going to begin to look at how duality and nonduality work once we start acting: not just thinking and feeling but engaging.

It begins — *Bang!* — right in the middle of things:

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.

We'll begin next time with "Stop talking and thinking. There is nothing you will not be able to know."

"When you try to stop activity to achieve passivity, your very efforts fill you with activity." Anybody who's had any experience with meditation knows that condition of trying to stop activity to achieve passivity: *Okay, I've got to stop thinking, I've got to stop the chatter, I've got to stop the uprising of emotion, I've gotta gotta gotta gotta ... so that things can get still and quiet, and then I'll really be meditating.* Here's the big news for meditation: From the point of view of meditation, whether you're engaging in the activity of ruminating, planning, being enraged, or whatever else, it is not an improvement to be occupied with the effort of *not* doing that. You're just trading one activity for another, and you're as far away as you ever were from any kind of sinking into meditation. If that's the case — if it's not really about, in another formulation, using the self to suppress the self — the only thing that does is to reinforce the idea of self. Now you just have the good cop self rather than the messy thinking and feeling self — again, not an improvement.

If it's not about that, what's an alternative? The simple answer is to stop thinking that it's all about you, stop thinking it's all about what happens in your heart-mind. I used to talk about it — in fact I just did about forty seconds ago — as something like sinking into meditation, but that's not quite accurate, because it still gives us the impression that there's something we have to do. We have to get quiet, we have to sink, we have to go deep, we have to somehow do all this in order to make meditation happen. It actually seems more accurate to say that the only thing we have to do is be receptive to the stillness that's rising up to meet us. That's a different kind of activity.

What does that mean, to be receptive to the stillness that's rising up to meet us? When that happens, then we're not doing anything, we're not making the meditation happen. The meditation is rising up out of the floor, or up out of the ground, depending on where we are. The meditation is rising to embrace and include us along with everything else. And we can feel how that stillness, that vastness, arises as us sitting there in meditation, and the birdsong and the cars rumbling by and whatever else is going on — all of it rising out of the stillness, all of it rising in the stillness. To be receptive to that is a much easier task than thinking we have to get ourselves whipped into shape and perfectly still in order to make that experience happen, which we can't.

Sometimes when we're sitting, making ourselves receptive to meet that, it does mean a kind of slowing down, quieting, and focusing, bringing our concentration to our breath, say, so that the scattered, diffuse sense of self for awhile is concentrating on something that's ready to be met. Sometimes these spring mornings I've been so enjoying sitting out in my garden with a cup of coffee, and mostly what I have is this giant silly grin on my face, because it's just so unbelievably beautiful these days, so unbelievably beautiful. That's being receptive to the stillness arising in the form of the irises that are almost past, the roses that have just bloomed, the cottonwoods, and the aspen quaking in the breeze. Sometimes it's having a silly grin on your face. Sometimes it's jumping up and down and saying yes and grabbing your camera. Sometimes in a difficult situation it's allowing yourself to be flooded by the difficulty of someone else's sorrow, anger, or confusion. Just standing there, staying for it, not resisting it, letting it fill you and seeing what happens when you do.

All of these are neither activity nor passivity. They contain elements of both and are a kind of mixture of both, a third thing that isn't worried about whether anything is moving or not, but more interested in *how* it is moving. Can you feel that difference? It's not enough to know what buddha nature is, you have to know what buddha nature does.

“As long as you remain in one extreme or the other, you will never know oneness.” Well, that’s pretty self-evident in the terms we’re talking about. From this perspective of not falling on the side of activity or of passivity, in a way not even recognizing that developing, but looking for that third thing which is both a still and a dynamic engagement with things — that’s oneness. The still and dynamic engagement with things. If you fall on one side or the other, if you fall on the side of activity, *Gotta do, do, do, go, go, go, finish the list, get everything done, you know, stop myself from thinking those thoughts, stop feeling all those feelings*, or if you fall on the other side of *I’ve got to get quiet, I’ve got to get still, I’ve got to have nothing going on, I’ve got to be just completely passive* — you’re partial. You’re missing the other, and from that perspective you can never know oneness. The paradox is that if you don’t find that oneness, that dynamic / still relationship between form and emptiness and activity and passivity, you’ll fail at all of it. You’ll fail at both activity and passivity, because it’s a delusion to think that those are pure things that exist by themselves without the other. They’re a mixture. Maybe sometimes activity is in the foreground and what’s called here passivity is in the background, sometimes quiet is in the foreground and activity is in the background, but it’s always a mixture of those two things.

And then “Trust in Mind” goes on to say that you’ll also fail in assertion and denial. That’s interesting, because now we go back to the beginning of the verse where it’s talking about setting up preferences and likes and dislikes, and it’s saying that if you think those are pure dualities, you’re going to fail at that, too! You’re not even going to do the assertions and denials right; you’re not going to do the ‘I like this’ and ‘I hate that’ right, because you’ve got a delusion about the nature of them, thinking that they are pure when they never can be. They’re as mixed as anything else.

We’ve begun to talk here about activity in the larger sense, and the relationship between activity and stillness, and how we can carry both of those things. Maybe the most important thing to take away from tonight is this: Look to where you think you have to *make* something happen, including your meditation, and see if there’s a way, in fact, that you can just *let* something happen. That you can shift your focus from making it happen to being receptive to its happening. Again, receptivity is not a pure state. Sometimes being receptive to what’s happening means charging into the middle of it and doing something. That’s genuine receptivity to a particular situation. The question is to look and ask and wonder what is being truly receptive to a moment. Is it waiting, listening, and being interested? Is it charging in and saying *Stop! This cannot continue!?* That’s being receptive, too. The point is that

you're discovering the meaning in the situation itself and acting from there, rather than bringing in a preconceived idea with you.

I'll stop there to leave time for comments and questions, which I welcome.

Q1 : Can you say more about liking and not liking not being pure?

JIS : It's very difficult for anything to be pure. Almost everything is made up other things, because everything's connected to everything else, and the connections are not so much hard jewels, each one separate, but a more vaporous thing, more permeable. One example is if someone says something to you that really bugs you about yourself, it's interesting to look at where you're actually agreeing with it, which might be one of the reasons it bugs you so much. We might think *I have pure dislike for this comment*. But there's actually a kind of liking or agreement as well, where it gets to you because you're afraid it might be true. The great love affair is a great irritation and the reverse as well. That's what I mean. When we try to purify it, when we try to convince ourselves that something is only good or only bad, it's like we're doing violence to things. We're refining them past where they're alive. In Zen there's a saying about water so pure that no fish can live in it.

Anything else?

Thank you.