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Title: True Heart/Mind

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Note that an accompanying PDF file correctly displays the English and Chinese characters.

Inscription on the True Heart/Mind

Attributed to Sengcan, Third Chinese Patriarch of Zen Buddhism (ca 600 AD)

Translated by Bruce R. Linnell, PhD (2011)

A comment on the title : due to the nature of Chinese, the title could mean any of the following : "Belief in (the) Mind", "The Believing Mind", "Trust in (the) Mind", "Trusting Mind", "True Mind", "Truthful Mind", "Faith in (the) Mind", or "Faithful Mind", and indeed many of these have been used by other translators (most often "Faith in Mind"). I chose "True Mind" because the entire inscription discusses how to get back to the original Buddha nature we all have (but have forgotten), and the phrase "true mind" (in English, not the particular Chinese symbols in the title of the document) is often used synonymously with this Buddha nature, Buddha mind, True Nature, Original Nature, etc.

My goals were to include every Chinese symbol in the English sentence, using an exact translation of each symbol, and with minimal additional words and paraphrasing. This results in sentences which are sometimes stilted in English, but hopefully provides a more literal translation. Interpreted meanings are as close to the exact meaning as possible. Exceptions to these guidelines are marked with footnotes.

Definitions of Terms ----- Being : existence Emptiness : negation of the belief in Being and non-Being Awake, wise : enlightened Foolish : not awake; unenlightened Heart/mind : the Chinese symbol means both "heart" and "mind"; it seems misleading to use one or the other Suchness : that which is constant and genuine; the true nature of things; reality-as-it-is; things just as they are The Way, this wisdom : Buddha's way - the four noble truths, eightfold path, etc. Entanglements : sensory pleasures, preferences, desires, aversions, love, hate, etc. (literally "conditions") Naturally, spontaneously : done by itself, that which is so of itself, done on its own, happens without forcing it Things : the external world; objects, people, creatures, events Cease to be, rejected, forgotten, eliminated, fade away : leave your awareness, no longer influence you

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Attaining the Way is not difficult,
If only you dislike picking and choosing.
Only when you do not "hate" and "love"
Will the Way thus be clearly and plainly revealed.

If there exists the smallest distinction,
Heaven and Earth become divided and out of balance.
If you want to have the Way appear in front of you,
Do not remain "agreeable" or "opposed" to anything.

When "disagreeable" and "agreeable" compete with each other,
This makes your heart/mind sick.
When you do not understand the deep and mysterious meaning of the Way,
It is useless to merely quiet your thoughts.

The Way is perfect and complete, just like the greatest void -
Nothing lacking, nothing extra.
It is precisely because you "select" and "reject"

That you therefore do not perceive the Suchness of everything.

Do not pursue Being and entanglements;
Do not dwell in Emptiness and sufferance.
When the mind is at peace in Oneness,
Thus are these eliminated, and naturally fade away.

When you try to stop activity to return to stillness,
This stillness further increases activity.
If you are always caught in one side or the other, [A]
How can you know Oneness?

When Oneness is not understood completely,
Both of these viewpoints lose their usefulness :
To reject Being is to merely lose Being;
To embrace Emptiness is to merely be burdened by Emptiness.

Too much talking, too much worrying,
And you fall out of harmony[B] with the Way.
Be done with talking, be done with worrying,
And nothing will be closed to you. [C]

Return to the source and you gain the meaning;
Pursue enlightenment[D] and you lose this wisdom.
But the moment you return to enlightenment[D],
You go beyond and reject appearances and Emptiness.

Apparent changes in appearances and Emptiness
Are all caused by foolish opinions.
You need not seek what is true and real,
You must only stop having opinions.

Do not dwell in dualistic opinions -
Be careful not to pursue them.
Not until "right" and "wrong" exist
Does your heart/mind thus become lost in confusion.

Duality is caused by the One's existence;
But also do not dwell on the One.
When your heart/mind is one, no thoughts arise;
Then all things are without blame.

When there is no blame, there can be no things;
When no thoughts arise, there can be no heart/mind.
When things cease to be, mind follows; [E]
When mind settles, things are rejected. [E]

Things are caused by mind, but are things as well; [E]
Mind is caused by things, but is mind as well. [E]
If you want to know both halves,
Their origin is One Emptiness.

Within One Emptiness both halves are the same,
Each equally containing all forms.
When you do not perceive "refined" and "coarse",
How can preferences exist?

The essence of the Great Way is vast -
Nothing easy, nothing difficult.
Those with petty opinions are full of doubt and suspicion;
When they become anxious, they get behind.

Attachments lead to loss of inner freedom,
As you certainly enter the wrong path.
Letting go leads to natural spontaneity,
Where the essence of the Way is neither absent nor present.

Allowing your inner nature to unite with the Way,
Be free and done with aggravation.
Restricted thinking is opposed to what is true and real,
Sinking into darkness and confusion, which is not good.

It is not good to trouble your spirit -
So why see "distant" or "close" relationships?

If you want to attain the Way,
Do not dislike your senses and thoughts.

Not disliking your senses and thoughts
Is also the same as true Awakening.
The wise practice non-action,
While the foolish restrict themselves.
One thing is not different from another thing,
But the foolish have their desires and attachments.

To govern heart/mind by using heart/mind -
How can that not be a great mistake?
Delusion produces peace and chaos,
But the Awakened have no likes or dislikes.

All pairs of opposites
Come from your own foolish thinking.
They are like dreams, illusions, mirages -
Why struggle to catch and hold them?

"Gain" and "loss", "right" and "wrong" -
Just for a moment, let go and reject them.

If your eyes do not sleep,
All dreams are naturally eliminated.
If your heart/mind does not discriminate,
All things are of One Suchness.

Within the deep and mysterious essence of this One Suchness,
You rise above entanglements, and thus they are forgotten.

When all things are perceived as equal,
You return again to your natural spontaneity.
Eliminate them and as a result,
You cannot have any way to compare them.

Stillness set in motion is not movement,
Movement stopped is not stillness.
If both halves are actually incomplete,
How can the One exist like that?

When you examine this exhaustively to its extreme conclusion,
No path or rule remains.
Place your heart/mind in harmony with non-discrimination,
Which stops all mental activity.

Doubts and suspicions fade completely;
True faith is harmonious and straightforward.
Nothing is held on to,
Nothing can be remembered.

You are empty, clear, naturally enlightened[D],
And make no effort to use the power of your heart/mind.
Here no amount of thought can dwell;
Knowledge and feelings are unable to comprehend.

Within the true and real Suchness of this absolute source of existence,
There is no "other", no "self".
If you want to come quickly into harmony with this realm,
Only say "no duality".

In "no duality" everything is the same,
Nothing is excluded.
Wise people everywhere
Have all entered this wisdom.

Entering this wisdom can not be hurried nor held back -
It could happen in one moment or take an eternity. [F]
The Way is neither present nor absent,
Yet the Way is everywhere in front of your eyes.

Extremely small is the same as extremely large,
When boundaries are forgotten and done with.
Extremely large is the same as extremely small,

When distinct opposites are not perceived.

Being is simultaneously the same as non-Being;
Non-Being is simultaneously the same as Being.
If you are not like this,
You certainly must not remain there.

One is not separate from All;
All is not separate from One.
If only you can be like this,
Why worry about not being perfect?

The true heart/mind is non-dual;
Non-dual is the true heart/mind.
Talking about the Way ends here,
For the Way has no past or future or present.

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- A : literally, "only blocked in both sides"
- B : literally, "turn to non-agreement"
- C : literally, "nowhere will be blocked"
- D : I believe what is meant by this symbol ("illumination") is the Light of the Buddha, enlightenment, etc.; however, this is the only interpretation that is my personal opinion, and has no support from any other sources
- E : the literal translations, "subject" and "object", refer respectively to the mind and the things it perceives
- F : I believe this line (literally, "one moment eternity") refers to the "sudden vs. gradual" debate on whether enlightenment can happen quickly, or can only be achieved after many years (some say many lifetimes) of practice

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