

Pema Chödrön

A Way Through Darkness

Now they say that, whoever they is, it is said that when we die, I've mentioned this before, when we die there is a dissolving. They say dissolving of all the elements. The experience, though, is that everything starts to drop away.

So, things like sight and hearing and taste and smell and all the senses slowly drop away, or fast, I'm sure it happens in different ways. But it gets to the point where all that has glued you together and the sense of me as separate from everything else is getting smaller and smaller. And the beautiful thing is, the smaller or the less there is to hold on to, the more access to the vastness of space.

So, the less there is to hold on to, the more access to this vastness of space. And so at death you could dissolve into it. As Zigar Kontrul poem goes, like a son or daughter returning home, his poem goes, may I with ease, and when I'm starting to die, may I with ease and great happiness let go of all attachment to this life, like a son or daughter returning home.

So, in life and in death, this is pretty wonderful. So, I have met in my life and had the immense good fortune to meet more than one person who lived out of this place of vast mind. And as I always say, what it felt like was that they never left.

They never went anywhere. They were just here. Just like, as Trungpa Rinpoche once said, just like sitting bull.

But that's what it would feel like. You'd think, well, enlightenment would feel like, I don't know what, but felt like, always felt like the eternal present. Just eternally present.

And that's a very nice space to be in with someone like that. Because then you realize, somehow, I had the experience, and many, many, many, most people have the same experience, which is that when someone is eternally present like that, it connects with that ability in you to be eternally present. It sort of brings you also into the fathomlessness of life, into the fathomlessness of just being fully present, always right here.

So, curiously enough, at death, when all the sense perceptions, because that experience is that the sense perceptions are heightened, and you begin to realize why there's an instruction that you can connect with this vastness through your sense perceptions. Like, just seeing without describing it, without conceptual overlap. Just seeing, just see without all of your opinions about it.

Or, it's like, Trungpa Rinpoche, when asked once, someone asked in the talk, what does enlightenment feel like? And I've said this many times, too, but the answer was so amazing. He said, it's like hearing a bugle, or smelling tobacco for the very first time. Like, you've never heard that sound before, or smelled that smell before.

So, you wouldn't call it bugle or tobacco. Tobacco is an interesting one because, you know, people say, oh, tobacco bad. But then, oh, smell, good.

Just direct experience. So, the senses are so helpful to us, and they actually give us access to that sky of impartial mind. We can connect with it through just, you know, just touching, or like, you know, just picking up, just sipping.

And Trungpa Rinpoche, you know, he describes in some place in the Shambhala book, maybe, where he describes what it's like to pick up a cup and drink. And it's just like, like, like fascinating. And again, I repeat myself, but he once described what it was like to get your car filled up with gas.

And it was like someone describing this cosmic experience of the car going in and stopping. And then, this is old days, because the description was that you roll down your window, and then you, you know, say, fill her up to the attendant. I remember those days.

And, but anyway, everything was so precise and beautiful. It's like a flower arranging or something. But it, all it was, was going in to get your car filled up with gas.

So, these, these cosmic events. So, when you sit in the dining room in the morning, and there's the same old breakfast. Oatmeal and eggs.

And toast. And it could be a cosmic event. It could be a cosmic event.

This, sitting here, could be a cosmic event. And the thing about it is, that it never happens twice. That's the beautiful thing.

Sometimes that's poignant, because nothing lasts. But, like, the reason it's cosmic is because it, it's a one-shot deal. It only happens once.

As they say, could you tell me something that happens more than once? And so, brushing my teeth. Well, actually, no. Like, every time you brush your teeth, it's a cosmic event.

It's like, the sky of impartial mind you never desire to measure. It's like, because it's never been exactly like this before. And it's never going to be exactly like this again.