

## MONDAY DHARMA TALK (APRIL 2024)

I started preparing this talk a few days ago after rediscovering a book in my library called "Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change" by Pema Chodron. It was a gift from Richard W. Pema Chodron (now in her 80's) is an American Buddhist nun in the Tibetan tradition.

The book offers teachings based on traditional Buddhist material pertaining to what are called the Three Vows but she sets out to present them as three commitments that can be offered to anyone as 'a way of relating to the impermanent, ever-shifting nature of our life, as a way of using our everyday experience to wake up, perk up, lighten up, and be more loving and conscious of other beings.'

I don't intend to be more explicit about these vows but this is a quote (not her words) from the front page titled "Overview."

'Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know how, you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark.'

Are we prepared to take leap after leap in the dark? Cecilie forwarded a beautifully worded reflection from Eve Marko that was published recently on the Zen Peacemakers' website. It's titled "Where Am I Living?" The words "where am I living?" were the words Eve's sister uttered to her over the phone from her home in Jerusalem. Missile launches from outside Israel were anticipated. Sirens sounded an hour later. Assurances had been offered that the targets were expected to be military installations but as Eve writes, "when you're lying in bed waiting for all this to happen what does that assurance mean?" My daughter and family in Tel Aviv face the same experience.

I recall the phrase by Susan Murphy where she invites us all to live 'in creative uncertainty.' We are all artists; artists of life. That can include feeling the fear, recognizing "I'm scared" and allowing the question of what will happen to me? (quote from Eve's reflection)

There's no right or wrong about being scared. As Nansen said, "the way is not about knowing or not knowing. When you know something you are deluded and when you don't know, you are just empty-headed. When you reach the way beyond doubt, it is vast and infinite as space." Or as the Diamond Sutra says, "Out of nowhere mind comes forth."

Eve goes on to ask herself the question, "Where Am I Living?" She reflects on the role her country is playing in the current conflict and calls out the 'isms' of western culture such as colonialism and imperialism and their impact on the misuse of power and the desire to dominate. She also reflects on empathy and its power beyond being reduced to fitting into concepts or attachment to one lens of seeing. She concludes by saying "woe unto us if we've lost the ability to feel the other's pain." Anyone's pain. No picking and choosing.

This is not the time to despair. The coming mini-sesshin is a way of being present to what is; being Presence and taking the next step. That is the gift on offer. Just putting down and picking up. The best part is that in the silence of practice we naturally perk up, lighten up and appreciate our interconnectedness to the whole universe. Compassionate action can thus seem so natural.

I like this quote from John Tarrant which is reassuring as we leap into the dark:

“No being has ever fallen out of the samadhi of Buddha nature. Being in the life you have is your samadhi.”