

Live from Boksum - Death and Dying

[Lama Lena]: Are we all the same people or are we others? This is the one that goes further away... range so that it does not cover up the microphone. And it sounds like I'm talking through mashed potatoes. Quietly. Sit and remember. But you're still in the first Bardo. You never left. And all of this... all of it. The Curly Q's and the straight lines. Just sparkle. So it's really not necessary to bother chasing the light from the laser pointer, whatever you happen to think it is.

(Chanting: Dorje Sempa, Garab Dorje, Dzogchen lineage, Guru Rinpoche, Marpa, Milarepa, etc.)

Since you have in this life gone to a great deal of trouble to amass accumulations—such as things, understandings, realizations, mantras, wongs (initiations)—since you have put a lot of effort into this, you'll probably try to prolong this life and prolong your access to those accumulations for as long as you can before you allow them to dissipate. But the time will come when there are no methods that are effective in prolonging your life, no matter how good you are with your diet or how well you take your medications. It's still going to end. You might get an extra year out of it doing all that stuff, and of course you will probably bother with that unless it looks like it would be a very unpleasant year. But nonetheless, it will come to an end.

Now, those of us who are human, among the six classes of beings, will generally go at a certain speed in their death process, which allows a bit of noticing. Gods go slower; they probably notice it more. Animals go faster. Very rarely will an animal linger past the point where they can walk around unless they have been highly humanized. When they can't, they'll go off under a bush and simply complete their process. It's a lot faster. Bugs, mayflies—it often goes by in the blink of an eye and you won't remember anything. Too fast.

So we're going to mostly talk about humans, because we're talking to Homo sapiens. When you die, as you are dying, there are inner and outer signs that you may expect that will tell you that you are dying. The earth element dissolves into the water element; the body becomes heavy and can no longer get up. Animals rarely last more than a day past that. Humans tend to arrange to linger. I think we have a grip on our accumulations tighter than many other things. Once you're

dying, you might as well get on with it.

I recommend that in most countries you complete the paperwork stating what will be done in the case of you approaching your death. In America, we call them "advance directives." What do you call them in Holland? Come on, there are Dutch people here. What do you call them? Where you write out papers and say, "Well, I want to be a no-code" or "none of this and some of that." End-of-life decisions, yeah. Have you all got your papers done? Do your papers, guys. Otherwise, they're going to do terrible things to you. In America, they'll do terrible things to you for money, because the more they can keep you alive, the more they can bilk out of your insurance, if you have insurance. So the safest way, once you realize you're dying, is to simply cancel your insurance immediately. That only works in America. I believe Holland is a bit reasonable about letting you have choices, but your family may not be. And when you can't yell at them anymore, they may decide something quite different than what you want.

My recommendation is: if the matter is terminal, no IV rehydration. That's how you make somebody linger when they can't get out of bed, because you're not that thirsty. Do fill out your papers and talk to your kinfolk.

When the body gets heavy, you see something that looks like rippling solidity. I guess the closest thing I've ever seen is a lava flow, but lava flows are red and this is black. And it's like ripples that are slowly moving. When the water element dissolves, your mucous membranes dry out (that can be seen from the outside). Inside (it was skipped in this text), there's a sort of shimmering sheet of water. Have you ever seen those water walls? Imagine a water wall with no solid wall behind it—only light, but not from any source. Light shining through it. That is what you see. You hear... this is from the inside, how you know what's happening. Other people see your lips get dry.

When the fire element absorbs, you begin to cool from the edges inward. It's best if the feet cool before the hands, so that you cool from the bottom up. When the air element stops, from the outside they see the breathing stop. From the inside, you have a sensation of tumbling over and over. Flying, falling, tumbling—which makes you so dizzy you feel like you pass out after a bit. What's actually going on with that sensation of tumbling is that the energy is withdrawing into the central channel. The white is coming down and the red is coming up, and they're joining at the heart in that encapsulation.

All of these are symbolic occurrences. Really, nothing is happening. These are visions; these are dreams. These are experiences just like these experiences now. The only point of learning them, memorizing them, and going over them again and

again is so that when it starts to happen to you, you are not alarmed. "Oh my God, what's happening?".

If you get a diagnosis that's terminal and you're still functional enough, there are things you can do to strongly make it easier. Give away all your accumulations. The books you've collected forever, your egg cups or teapots, fancy clothes, infinite numbers of scarves—those were my mom's; I still have a couple of them that she gave me and they got passed out. Whatever it is. Give away your accumulations, release them. Recognize your death is occurring when the time comes. And don't freak out. This is why we practice it again and again. Practice dying, practice moving through the Bardos, practice what to do about each Bardo according to our level of practice.

If your practice is Kye-rim (Generation Stage), as it is for many, you would head into the second Bardo and go for a Pure Land, Dewachen. If something happened to your practice just before you died, do that also. If you are tantric, the Bardo of visions—the one of the Dhyani Buddhas, who are the initiatory deities that bunk you on the head and turn you into the archetype, or the fierce and peaceful deities—tantrikas would be most at home there. If you are Dzogchen, go for the first Bardo, the Bardo of the Dharmata, which is actually the only real one. The rest are just visions.

If possible when you are dying, get a hold of your teacher or a Dharma friend to refresh your practice, to remind you what your practice is. And gather accumulations by giving away all your possessions. Otherwise, they're going to distract you. Arrange an image of your Yidam, set out various offerings, set up an altar. Do you know why we do altars? They hold the energy. You can't be expected to hold the energy yourself as you're constantly flapping around. So you make an altar and it holds it for you. It refreshes your path every time you notice it. How many of you have an altar at home? For those who have not done so yet, and who are actually living in a home and not on the road, it's highly recommended that you make one. Even if it's as simple as a bowl of water, a form of light in front of a book, or a crystal. A book, a stupa, and a statue or painting. You can get them really simple. Look at some of the ones that Trungpa used to make; they still do at some of the Shambhala centers. He took them down to the very simplest: for the book, often just a piece of calligraphy with an "AH", a photo for the image, and a simple pointy crystal for the stupa. And in front of it would be a bowl of water and a candle. That works. Oh, and some flowers. He was into Japanese floral arrangements.

What I'm suggesting you do is, when you find you're dying, set yourself up to die nicely. Go home from the hospital. Get them to send you home with the pain meds. They're usually going to be nice about this if you're in hospice care; we don't worry

so much about a dying person getting addicted. I mean, so what if you get strung out on morphine while you die? The body is what's addicted. The body is dead. It's not going to bother you in the Bardo. Addiction wears off in the Bardo, as does the pain.

As you find the elements absorbing, you've set up everything around you to nicely remind you. If you're choosing a Pure Land, the key to your Pure Land—the mantra—is playing in the background. There is a feeling of peace around you. Your family is on board. They understand how to support you and wish to support you through the process. They're not in denial trying to save your life at the last moment when you've got stage four cancer. Also, they are not flinging themselves upon the sick person and wailing. Certain cultures have that custom. I think it's a way of reassuring them they're loved, but in the end, for a dying practitioner, it is not useful. Since this is public on the internet, I know there are people from such cultures where that is the custom: wait until they're all the way dead to fling yourself upon the corpse and wail. Wait until they're in the coffin and you're walking towards the graveyard; then you can fling yourself on it and wail all you want. In many cultures, that's a showing of love.

The main practice, however, of preparing for death—the next thing I'm working with is taking death as a friend—is habituating yourself in Trekchö. These are completion stage practices. If you are working with a Yidam, allow your Yidam—which is you—to dissolve into the seed syllable in the heart chakra. Allow the seed syllable into Svabhavakaya: no thing, Dharmata. Become accustomed to resting in the Bardo of the Dharmata. Enter into it like a baby or like a toddler crawls into its mother's lap. This Clear Light: empty, infinite, always present, never in abeyance. It is the light by which you see all this stuff. You see all the stuff? Things, trees, bushes, decorations... this light between my hands here. This clear, transparent light, nothing special. It's the same light.

As the nature of mind is to move, to create, to think, feel, and sense, to perceive, and to experience... mind itself creates experiences out of its own clear light. Notice the light, not what it's shining on. When your own experience of luminosity—of clear light, of Dharmata—and the characteristic of the luminosity of the Bardo unify as one, this is Mother and Child Luminosity coming together. They have never been other than that. The "child luminosity" of the path is what is pointed out by your teacher, what you have struggled and attempted to personify throughout your practice, what you have glimpsed, what you are sometimes able to identify with when you're not distracted. What you are sometimes distracted from by your grasping nature, but that you prefer to the distraction and keep trying to get back—yeah, that. It is by its nature unstable and moving. When it joins with that which has always been stable and unmoving, this is the essence of Trekchö. It's

where moving and stillness come together as the dance of stillness. Mother and Child Luminosity unite, and it is as it always has been.

Also, sparkles will occur, because it's the nature of light to sparkle when it strikes rainbows, when it strikes the crystal of creativity (that's the analogy given). When the clear light of Dharmakaya strikes the prism of Sambhogakaya aliveness, it fragments into rainbow colors. At which point many people see many things. You've heard the life story of Guru Rinpoche. Western scholars keep trying to put it in linear order and find out if he was born in the Swat Valley or Bamiyan... and try to make a line through time to describe a birth, a youth, an adulthood, and a death. They won't be able to. There are too many stories in too many places. There's only one accurate autobiography: "High above North Urgyen" (which is the crown chakra, it's a euphemism). High above North Urgyen in the sky (sky is the euphemism for Dharmata)... there arose a luminous double-dorje. Double-dorje is the euphemism for indestructibility, adamantine. So empty that it contains not even space, so you can't stick anything in it. It shone forth with rainbow-colored light, causing many sentient beings to have many experiences and perceptions. End of story.

Do you realize that's what you are doing? You are shining forth with rainbow-colored light from the adamantine double-dorje of your heart, causing others to have many experiences that they think are "you"—which of course they are making up. And then they're getting all upset by some of them and all happy about others. Really, guys? It's just the sparkle as the moving dances.

The visions coalesce: the Bardo of the five families, the Bardo of the archetypes—all of these incredibly intense visions. Because, yes, the light is bright. It's loud. It's hot and cold. Tactile, rough and smooth. Everything all at once, all the sensations. Be aware that you have never left the Bardo of Dharmata. This is just the multi-colored shimmering light, sparkling in the many colors of the rainbow. Just watch it go down. Recognize it's your own light; it's not outside of you. Nothing ever is. Nothing ever was or will be.

The mind is always active in the Bardo, as the channel pattern of your current stream. We say "mindstream," but a stream has banks; this doesn't. It's more like a current in a lake or an ocean, merging in and out with all the other currents and swirling around. Kinda hard to pick up one current and say, "Well, it's just this current and not that current." So this current of your mindstream, its shape, its patterns... I wish we had a river here to go sit by. And you could watch the eddies in the currents and the little whirlpools that form in some places and then desist and then form in another. It's a good analogy. These currents have patterns, and those patterns are called karma. They're called karma from within the time-space

continuum: cause and effect. Of course, like when somebody is doing a big Wong (initiation) and you get all the stuff from it before it happens, like the different dreams and stuff; and it hasn't even happened yet, but it's causing reverbs through the time-space continuum. You've all felt this when somebody's giving a really good initiation, who knows how to do it and is doing it well.

Cause and effect will do; it's a way of explaining it to the children. From the "fourth time" (which is the first Bardo—same difference), which you've never left. It's called Indra's Net, and it looks like a spider web. In every place that the webs cross each other, there's a little dewdrop. And each dewdrop is a mindstream, or thinks it's a person in a moment. This is an analogy, but for those of you who think in pictures, you can use it.

Since the mind is always active, it never stays the same for two instances. Each spark or radiant moment of manifesting existence is not separate from the original state of the true nature. Each spark is the union of emptiness and clarity. This radiance, manifesting as a point instance of space-time, is the Nirmanakaya. It's always moving within time. Time and the space continuum are the same thing; they support each other. You can't really have time without space or space without time—it doesn't work mathematically. Not that math is any more real than any other language.

Guru Padmasambhava taught that the three Kayas are inherent in the nature of mind, not outside of you. Don't go worshipping them as if they were an almighty God up there. They are totally ordinary, right here and right now. They never go anywhere else, and you never leave them. The Dzogchen vow, "never to separate from natural mind," is a joke. How could you? Anyway, I've had people come crying to me because they think they broke the Dzogchen vow by becoming distracted. Keep meditating.

People don't always know this and are always wandering, looking for something outside of themselves—"the next realization," guys. "The day it's stabilized, I think I'm going to attain rainbow body." You all look like rainbows anyway! The channel pattern is a rainbow body. What did you think the channels were full of? Multi-colored lights! That's what's meant by "rainbow." That's what the channels are made of—they're made of light. You're made of light. It's all made of light. It looks solid due to your channel pattern interacting with itself, like in a dream, a magic show, a hologram, or a video game. Old analogies and new ones.

However, the search opens you to a lot of experiences, good and bad, high and low, deep and shallow. Sequences of gain and loss. You get a siddhi; it wears off. I always end up stubbing my toes when that happens. You gain a realization. Cool!

"Got it now." It wears off. It's moving. You got a realization—well, what the hell did you think it was going to do? If it came, it's going to go. Really, everybody should go back to the four thoughts that turn the mind and make sure they truly understand impermanence. Otherwise, you're going to try to keep something that came. And you can't. The only enlightenment is the one that's always been there. The present flows and changes. Time moves. There is nothing real in the obedience.

Look at how you experience through your channels. You interpret those sensations as symbols having meaning. The sounds you are hearing right now—you're making them up. You're all hearing specifically the sounds you're hearing. When you have these sensations that you interpret into words or sounds that you think somebody is saying, then you think about them. You repeat them to yourselves. You think what they might mean. You make a story out of them, about yourself, because everything is self-reflexive. That's how we hold on.

You see, resistance to enlightenment is absolutely futile. It is the natural state. But convincing somebody to let go enough to notice that is rather difficult. All teachers do is walk around stamping on your little fingers hanging onto the edge of the cliff. Let go. Cease maintaining your personality as what you want it to be, or on other days, what you fear it might be. Cease telling yourself that you're not enlightened. Cease telling yourself that you got enlightened today. Just... relax all your perceptions.

Remember, a definition of a perception is: sensations about which you are telling yourself a story, and there's feelings about the story you told. This clump is called a perception. All perceptions, all experience, is nothing other than the expression of your mind. You don't "have" a mind. It's the clinging to the idea that you personally have a personal mind that sticks you to Samsara. Don't shove. When you shove something away, it "does push hands" with you and comes toward you. Tai Chi is an excellent exercise. Just relax. Don't try to get anything. Don't try not to get anything. Just relax.

Mind itself is open, empty, and pure from the beginning—the embodiment of the three Kayas. Our practice is to relax into it, to release everything that isn't it, because everything is the natural expression of the nature of the mind. So there's nothing you have to get rid of. There's no ignorance. There is no confusion. There is no wisdom.

The Bardo of birth and life—this Bardo here—is a very special circumstance for practice since everything here is pervaded by and made of the three Kayas. This is where you could recognize that your present vision and perception are not separate. The teaching of the inner tantras says that all of our dualistic

conceptions—such as the root of self and other, but also good and bad, loving friends and avoiding enemies—are made of thoughts. Mind creates all these made-up thoughts. There's nothing among all of those names with any solid existence. And yet the mind creates notions and projects visions, which we are inclined to believe and act on.

Therefore, the key is working with thoughts. If you can unravel your belief in the thoughts by looking at the Dharmata **while** thinking. Not **instead** of thinking (this is not Shamatha), not even Vipassana. First, because it feels as if it's done in an order, develop a habit of being able to see the Dharmata while thinking. You can think anything you want; nobody cares. You need not to care—not to like one thought better than another. Then, check out the "thinker" that is looking at the Dharmata. If you do this right, it becomes obvious beyond a shadow of a doubt that there was never anything other than this, and that all your attempts to maintain yourself as a singularity or a mindstream—rather than simply an eddy swirling in the great ocean for a brief moment—are futile.

Questions? Is it really that clear? (Laughter).

[Student]: Can you speak a bit more about Child and Mother Luminosity?

[Lama Lena]: The "child luminosity" of the path is your practice as taught to you by the teacher, what you do every day. The "mother luminosity" of the ground is the innate and natural enlightened state—your birthright, what has always been yours. You have to mix them, or allow them to join to become one and the same—your practice (which includes all those little realizations that you get and maintain, that you're hanging on to, which are generally symbolic of the reality, if done right). Do you see how what you see in your practice is a symbol of what is actually the case? What you see in your practice is simply a symbol, whether it's tantric or Trekchö—it's a symbol of the innate enlightenment. So when the symbol and the thing it's a symbol of are seen as the same thing... there it is.

The problem we all run into is that we are attached to what we think. We are attached to the words of the text, the words of the teacher. We have that grasping to believe that things are actually existing the way we think they are. And no matter how many times I tell you guys I'm a "dog's tooth," you're still like... you don't quite get it.

We have decided that some things are good (like pleasure and relaxation—how we define "Gewa," good) and some things are bad (like stress and suffering). These are belief systems. You can't see the innate perfection around you because it's not what you think would be perfect. Your thoughts are in the way.

[Student]: So as it becomes clearer... is there no difference between relax and not relax?

[Lama Lena]: Correct. In the end, you will always manifest, only not as "you." Something will always manifest—things dancing with each other. That which is the root of all manifestations, but is not itself a manifestation, will always be that. Choose where you want to identify, knowing that whatever you do...

[Student]: I was wondering if I have to understand your words. They say the Dharma is merely transmitted by speech, by word. But also I feel sometimes you can say "uby-doop" and I understand. Or even a movement, a gesture. Sometimes it's good even not to understand words, as if there's something beyond words...

[Lama Lena]: Sometimes I do. (Laughter). Yes, exactly.