

A Life Confirmed

by Angie

Bodichitta (noble, awakened) is the genuine heart ... a jewel that is never marred and completely whole ... in everyone.

-Pema Chodron

Vincent was sorting through a box of books sent down by Helpers, carefully lifting them out and sorting them into piles on Father's table. It was a job he loved and did whenever he had time. It was also the main source of his new reading material, since he had read so much of what was in Father's library.

He stopped when his hand fell on a small, yellow bound, paperback, published by an imprint he recognized, one which favoured philosophy and belief. He read the back, and realized that he had never heard of the person whose quotations filled the book. He became fascinated and sat down on a chair to read the introductory pages. Soon he was delving into the book itself.

How wonderful, he thought. The book was a treasury of the teachings of Pema Chodron, an ordained Buddhist nun, who he learned had been born in New York, but spent decades in Tibet learning that philosophy.

As he read her words, he felt as if his entire life had been verified and fallen into place. His internal struggles, it seemed, were no different to anyone else's and his meditations and soul-searchings, whether in his chamber or by the nameless river, were what everyone experienced and accepted - when they understood the importance of doing so.

Pema advocated knowing yourself above all, accepting what one was, and using that knowledge as a foundation for understanding the inner world – and then projecting the serenity that came from that place onto others.

Vincent had never found any solace in the major religions, for they had no explanation for himself, and likely would not have accepted him in any case. Instead, out of necessity, he had focused inwards, developing his own philosophy and relying on his own strength, character and sense of justice to deal with his life in the tunnels, the people in it.

His forays above at night were not just a form of escape from life underground, but a chance to observe life – and sometimes he could help others in small ways. He needed that perspective, and his bond with Catherine also gave him a different view of the world above, which would never accept him.

Father, of course, was a good role model, and had taught him to be a scholar, but even he had no explanation for Vincent – or what exactly he was or had come to be. His survival, of course, he owed to the tunnel world, and he never forgot that.

Reading the little book calmed him, and Vincent carefully put it in a pocket to take back to his chamber. It was a delightful book by a person he wished he could meet, although he was sure

he never would. Nevertheless, the common sense approach to all of life's ups and downs gave him yet another insight – this time into every day philosophy.

Later that day, after he had finished his chores, he sat in his chair in his chamber and continued reading.

Pema advocated finding out what is true by studying yourself, '*in every nook and cranny.*' She made it clear everyone had to do it for themselves. Vincent had been doing this from an early age, of necessity, since there was no one else like him. She also said we all have everything we need, that there is no need for self-improvement. Acceptance is key to bodhisattva – the noble or awakened heart.

She also made it plain that we can never know what is going to happen – but that every challenge, rather than being the end of something, might be the beginning. Using compassion and overcoming our own fear of what might happen is the key that will open the door.

That made Vincent think. Catherine, he knew, wanted more from him, but he was afraid – of himself mostly – his appearance, his strength if was unleashed, his ability to control his passion. Pema said fears are normal, but also something that had to be faced in order to be not fearless, but aware of it's nature.

He had never thought of his fears in that way, and he sat for a long time in silence, considering it. He had always believed that he must overcome his fears for Catherine's sake, for their love to move to the next level. However, Pema implied that he must only understand it, and then move on, and not let it defeat him.

Vincent felt as if a great weight had been lifted from his heart. He HAD been letting his fears defeat him in this matter. Catherine had been patient, and she understood, but he had not had the courage to realize that he could control himself. That accepting what he was, is the first step to overcoming the fear.

"Vincent?"

Catherine. Vincent stood up, and without further ado, captured her in his arms and held her tight.

"I've been a fool," he remarked into her hair softly.

She moved apart from him and looked in his eyes. *What on earth? He looks ... serene.*

"I have come to the realization that I am like other people, Catherine."

Catherine didn't know what to say to that, so remained silent, hoping he would explain.

"I have dwelt on my fears, rather than accepting them and thereby rendering them powerless to keep me from my destiny."

"And now"? she asked, afraid to comment on this, in case she had misheard.

"Now Catherine, we must move forward, because there truly is no other direction. Tonight, if you wish."

Catherine drew in a breath she had not realized she had been holding, and hugged him tightly.

"Whatever you wish, Vincent. You know I have been waiting for this."

I must connect to that part of me that I fear and accept it, he thought. Yes, it felt right. He felt as if the two sides of himself had formed a truce and would move together towards love.

Vincent picked up Catherine and carried her to his bed. The next hours would prove that he had been correct. There really was no way to overcome fear but to face it

He didn't tell her about the little book which had spoken to him so perfectly, but he would ... some day.

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