

Heaven & Hell

Pema Chodron, *Comfortable With Uncertainty*, pages 61-2

A big, burly samurai comes to a Zen Master and says, “Tell me the nature of heaven and hell.”

The Zen master looks him in the face and says, “Why should I tell a scruffy, disgusting, miserable slob like you? A worm like you, do you think I should tell you anything?”

Consumed by rage, the samurai draws his sword and raises it to cut off the master’s head.

The Zen master says, “That’s hell.”

Instantly, the samurai understands that he has just created his own hell—black and hot, filled with hatred, self-protection, anger, and resentment. He sees that he was so deep in hell that he was ready to kill someone. Tears fill his eyes as he puts his palms together to bow in gratitude for this insight.

The Zen master says, “That’s heaven.”

The view of the warrior bodhisattva is not “Hell is bad and heaven is good” or “Get rid of hell and just seek heaven.” Instead, we encourage ourselves to develop an open heart and an open mind to heaven, to hell, to everything. Only with this kind of equanimity, can we realize that no matter what comes along, we’re always standing in the middle of a sacred space. Only with equanimity can we see that everything that comes into our circle has come to teach us what we need to know.