

## Daily Meditation 01-22-24

### On Death and Dying and Grief

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we're talking about death and grieving. And I want to share with you the poem I allude to there by my friend and co-worker, M.C. Richards, potter, painter, philosopher, author of the classic work "Centering."

She composed this poem the day after she learned she was dying, titled "I am dying." Now, M.C. had a doctorate in English Literature. So this comes out in this poem.

*I am dying.  
Four children are singing Ring Around the Rosie here,  
where I'm drinking my morning coffee with hot milk.*

(She lived in a Steiner community for handicapped adults, and in Pennsylvania.)

*I was an English major in school.  
So many famous lines about death.  
Death, Be Not Proud.  
Such a masculine presence,  
part of our paternalistic culture and religion.*

*I relax into someone's arms.  
I feel a softness, as of sleep;  
a gentleness that is friendly.*

*The children are riding their bicycle through my room.  
They do not see me, or the walls.*

*I think of Eliot's Hollow Man:  
Is death like this? they ask.  
In deaths of their kingdom,  
walking alone when we are trembling with tenderness,  
lips that would kiss form prayers to broken stone.*

These lines brim with self-pity and accusation. Like Thomas Hardy's "intolerable antilogy of making figments feel." Oh no, now is not then. So she's moving on, from patriarchal versions of death, to her own repose.

*I do not feel betrayed, or bereft.  
It is more like the Chattanooga Choo Choo:  
the great traffic of evolution.*

*And I am carrying my bit of being,  
free of agenda,  
open to a future,  
ready to experiment,  
be creative,  
serve,  
be beautiful,  
be real,  
be nowhere,  
be no one I already know.*

*Be birthing myself,  
waves and particles,  
backpacking in the hereafter.*

So that is another version of death, quite different from the patriarchal fear-riddled and self-pity-riddled version of death.

And let me share with you the poem from Mary Oliver, about death. This is from her collection of her works called "Devotions: The Selected Poems Mary Oliver." "When Death Comes."

*When death comes like a hungry bear in autumn,  
When death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse  
to buy me, and snaps the purse shut,  
When death comes like the measles pox,  
When death comes like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,*

*I want to step through the door, full of curiosity, wondering.  
What is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?*

*And therefore, therefore I look upon everything  
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood.*

*I look upon time is no more than an idea,  
that I consider eternity as another possibility.*

*And I think each life as a flower,  
as common as a field daisy, and as singular,  
and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,  
tending, as all music does, toward silence,  
and each body, a lion of courage  
and something precious to the earth.*

*When it's over, I want to say:  
all my life, I was a bride, married to amazement,  
I was a bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.*

*When it's over, I don't want to wonder  
if I've made of my life, something particular, and real.*

*I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,  
or full of argument.*

*I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.*

Amen. See you next week.