

## Death is Only a Breath Away

If somebody had told me 20 years ago, that my mother would become my most important Dharma-teacher one day, I would have declared them insane. And yet that is exactly what happened, and I am beyond grateful for it. My mother died the 19th of March 2020 from her long Parkinson's disease. Five days before, she had stopped speaking and refused to eat. My father called me desperately and I immediately got on the next train. For hours I sat by her bedside in the nursing home, held her thin, frigid hand, stroked her feverish forehead, simply sat there in silence, recited the *Hannya Shingyo* in my head, thanked her, sang songs she used to sing together with my father, recited prayers I knew were important to her once. In between I spoke to her doctor on the phone, spoke to the care team, ate an apple. Everyone else around me – especially my father – thought she would come back, recover one more time. But I knew, she was beginning to set off on her way, and she knew it too. I saw it in her last glance, before she closed her eyes. Time and again her eyes searched mine. She looked at me in a way I had always craved in vain when I was a child. In her eyes lay pure, boundless love. That was her farewell gift and I could reciprocate it, though it did not need reciprocation. Everything happened at once. We both fell out of time and space, dissolving into a field of pure awareness. Nobody there anymore. At some point, she could not open her eyes anymore. When she got anxious, I told her that she could go now, that she was released, that she could let go and trust. I had no idea where these words came from. My mind chimed in at times and complained: Isn't that a little presumptuous? But the words were there, they rose from the depths of my being and became effective. Her body relaxed slowly. In her last hours, she turned peaceful. Then she stopped breathing, barely noticeable. It was as if she had fallen asleep, utterly peaceful, without a fight, with a smile. I had not known before, that death has an unimaginable beauty and can transform a whole room and drench it in utter peace, deep silence and boundless love. Her face was relaxed, unravelled, and so was the atmosphere in the entire room. We sat there for a long time. My husband and my daughter were there in the last hour, I felt secure and supported. Inside me a deep peace spread out, I had to smile repeatedly, while tears were streaming down my face. And so my mother, who had always wanted to control everything and observed my meditation path with skeptical indifference, became my spiritual leader in her last days. She, who had always prided herself on not having any spiritual tendencies, completed her life in utter devotion and fulfilled the Dharma in her own way. On my meditation path, there have been moments in which I have asked myself, what good may actually come out of these endless hours I spend cowering on my cushion? Suddenly I realized, they have prepared me to be at the right place at the right time when it matters most, and to do what needs to be done, without doing anything. In between life and death lies only one exhalation. That

experience hit me with all its force. I, or whoever was sitting there at that moment, realized life and death are one and the same. She had stopped breathing, and in a blink of an eye she had transcended from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead. And yet nothing had happened. No one was ever born, no one has ever gone, and yet she is dead now. And both are true at the same time. And she lives on inside me. Love is stronger than everything. This experience, which countless people have had before me is deeply intimate and personal, yet universal at the same time. In it lies the whole Dharma hidden, yet visible. I feel sad, gifted, blessed and comforted. Let us wake up and live complete. Death is only one breath away.

Birgit, Berlin, 04.04.2020