



## WE'RE SO CLOSE, IT'S LONELY By Susan Piver

**R**elationships are lonely. Even good ones. My relationship with my husband is lonely. My relationship with my guru is lonely. They're the same kind of lonely. And these are the *good* relationships.

The other day, we had a fight (my husband and me, not Rinpoche and me). It was a bad one. Super bad. Bad like leaving-the-house-at-1 a.m.-to-go-sleep-on-the-couch-in-my-office bad. It's so cliché to say I can't even remember what it was about, but I sort of can't. Well maybe I can, but I just don't want to believe that something so unbelievably stupid (someone not telling someone else that they bought a new camera, for example; I mean it only cost \$200 and I needed it for work) could cause two normally sane people to absolutely lose their minds and jump all up and down yelling at each other. I mean *for goodness sake*.

I dragged myself home at 6 a.m., dreading seeing him, but also hoping I would so he could see that I was still ignoring him. As I let myself in and walked up the stairs to our bedroom, he was exiting the shower, towel around his waist. Although I was still angry, I could see that he no longer was. He came toward me and held his palms up to me like two "hold it right there" signs or, possibly, two "OK, OK, I give up" signs. My palms spontaneously rose to mirror his, whether to stop him from coming closer or to hold him to me, I also couldn't tell. In that moment, I realized I was trapped. I couldn't push him away, nor could I hold him close enough. I couldn't keep him at bay because our lives are no longer two separate-but-parallel tracks as they were when we began living together. No. We're living one life together now. I don't know how or when this happened.

From this realization, and from the tender sight of his bare chest and the scent of his pineapple-shampoo hair, I felt myself

soften a tiny bit. I couldn't pinpoint the sequence of thoughts and feelings that led to this opening, nor could I ever hold my husband close enough for him to know what that experience felt like for me. I saw the depth of our connection and the simultaneous inability for us to truly know each other. He must feel the same exact way, I thought as I pulled him close. Very lonely. And, I realized, the closer we got, the more shocking and painful it would be to still not really know each other.

I feel pretty much the same way about my spiritual practice. Are the buddhas and bodhisattvas really there? Do they know me? How can I ever know them? Am I inviting them or rejecting them? I have no idea. Sometimes I think yes, and sometimes I think no. Just as often I think neither answer could possibly be relevant, but I don't know how else to ask the question. All I know is that my efforts to connect more deeply with my teacher have become sort of dreamlike, difficult to discern, at least with my everyday mind. I can feel that the more I practice, the more something happens, but I'm not really sure what that something is, or what it responds to.

I used to just go to dharma talks and then try to practice what I'd been taught. I still try to do this. But just as often these days, I get my practice instructions from Aerosmith songs or an overheard conversation on the train. There's nothing mysterious about it—I'm just listening to my iTunes or going to work and suddenly something clicks, like, "It's really true—I don't exist." I don't know where it comes from. It's very personal. Intimate. Lonely.

A few weeks ago, I was talking to friend of mine, also a practitioner, but from a different lineage. He was telling me that nowadays, his practice consists of getting up in the morning, going to his meditation cushion, and just sitting there, without trying to do anything at all. There are no longer any rules to follow such as "place the attention on the breath" or "visualize an open sky." Just like me, he doesn't really know what to do anymore. He can't go back to following a set of practice instructions, nor is there a new set to jump forward into. There is only space and the feeling of groundlessness. In his tradition, he says, this stage of spiritual development is called "stupefaction." I love that. Stupefaction. This is where no one can tell you what to do anymore, no one but your guru. But I no longer know what listening looks like. Just like with my husband, some kind of dialogue is taking place within me but below my radar. No one will ever know what this is like for me. Not even me. **BD**

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