Fear

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 59:09

I'd like to talk tonight about the emotion of fear and the factor of fear in our lives. I feel that it's one of the most fundamental things that we need to come to terms with, both in our life and in our practice.

I could say that there are really two fundamental movements of mind: fear, on the one hand, and wanting, on the other. They arise in relation to the two main poles of our feeling life, which are pleasure and pain. When you look at the activities of humans all around the world, over centuries and centuries, our movements, our activities, our whole thrust in life is basically ninety-nine percent of the time a move to create more pleasure and to avoid pain in life. As you see the kind of thoughts that come up in a few days of a meditation retreat, you'll find that the thoughts also tend to revolve around these two factors of pleasure and pain.

Of course the desire, the wanting force arises in relation to pleasure. We want to bring into our lives that which is pleasurable. Fear arises in regard to that which may be painful. So between these two poles, our thoughts go. And because our thoughts go that way, our motives go that way. Because our motives go that way, our intentions go that way. Because our intentions go that way, our actions go that way. Because our actions go that way, our lives go that way—around these two factors.

Fear is one of our deepest conditionings. It's present in many forms in our life, from small to big. There are the little fears that come up in life, like, "I hope they remember to put honey out with the tea today," and "I hope the car will start on a winter's morning," or "I hope that pain in the knee won't come up again during this sitting." And then there are the big fears: fear of pain, physical pain; fear of rejection, close friendship or relationship; fear of failure—many aspects of our lives. Fear of unhappiness. Fear of never finding contentment in our lives. Fear of dying. And maybe the biggest of all, really for most of us, is the fear of life—fear of all the complexity involved in this process of living.

When fear is present in the mind, it really casts a very dark shadow. It's as though we live with fear, we live under a dark cloud of anxiety, worry, apprehension. When the fear is there, even though it may be bright and sunny out, that somehow can't come into the heart. The heart can't really open to the beauty and the joy that life can bring. The fear leads to a sense of contraction, of closeness. Our whole spirit kind of shrinks under the influence of fear.

There was a science fiction book that was very popular in the late sixties called *Dune*. It was written by Frank Herbert, and in it he describes life on another planet and a band of warriors who train by working with their minds through mind-altering drugs—very appropriate for the late sixties. You can imagine it received a cult following in the hippie era. One of the key lessons that these warriors had to learn to work

with was the factor of fear. They expressed it in this way: they said that fear is the great mind-killer. When fear is present, it keeps the mind from flowering, from opening up.

So in our lives, in our practice, it prevents each one of us from unfolding as people, from opening up the positive strengths that are within—the stability of mind and openness, affection and so forth. All of that is blocked under the influence of fear. It also leads us to a sense of isolation. We can't open to other people acting under this influence.

Some people consider that the opposite of love is hatred. But I would say rather that the true opposite of love is fear. When fear disappears in the mind, even for a brief period, when fear is absent, love is naturally there. Love comes naturally. We don't have to do anything in our practice to create love and affection. Rather, in dealing with the negative mindsets, working through them, understanding them...

coming to some freedom from them, the positive qualities are automatically present. Love is there within each of us and would naturally emerge if it weren't for the cloud of fear obscuring it.

There's a fascinating book you may have encountered called *A Course in Miracles*, which had quite an extraordinary origin. A psychologist in America, a woman in middle age, suddenly began hearing thoughts streaming through her mind. She found this peculiar—these weren't her usual mental patterns. She was simply a clinically trained psychologist with no spiritual inclinations whatsoever.

As these thoughts persisted, she decided to write them down, thinking perhaps a page or two would clear her mind. Eleven hundred pages later, she found herself with what became *A Course in Miracles*. The writing flowed automatically, as though she were serving as a conduit for another voice. Whether this was actually the case, I cannot say, but this was her experience. She didn't particularly believe in such phenomena and didn't even want to transcribe the material, but the thoughts were so persistent she felt compelled to record them.

When she finished and read the complete work, she discovered it contained profound wisdom and genuine dharma teachings. Though expressed in Christian terminology, it offers what I consider a universal expression of the dharma. An American psychologist has since distilled these thirteen hundred pages into a more accessible format, creating a bestseller that captures part of the central message: *Love is Letting Go of Fear*. This approach to human development centers on working with our fears and learning to release them, allowing love to flower naturally. Love is always present within us.

Fear, I believe, also lies at the root of aggression. If you observe people who carry much anger or hostility, who express violence either physically or psychologically, you'll discover that beneath this behavior lies fear. The contracting quality of fear creates a sense that our very existence is threatened, as though we might be squeezed out of being entirely. Under such imploding energy, when it becomes extreme, the only apparent relief sometimes comes through explosion—through some form of violence. This explosive energy typically represents a reaction to fear's contraction, making aggression another fundamental

movement of mind closely aligned with fear.

So this evening I'd like to explore how to work with fear in our practice. How can we become free from it? True freedom from fear requires understanding. Only insight, only wisdom, can effectively remove fear from our lives.

In seeking to understand fear, I find that Krishnamurti, the Indian philosopher who died last year, offered some of the most penetrating observations. He summarized his understanding of this problem in one concise phrase: "Thought breeds fear." If we want to discover fear's origins, we must examine our thoughts.

You can observe this in your own practice—the emotion of fear is typically preceded by imagining some unpleasant future circumstance. This recognition holds tremendous liberating potential. We create our own fears, generating them through our thoughts. Life itself is not inherently frightening. While life may be uncertain and insecure—while we cannot find any fixed outer security because everything changes—this doesn't mean we must approach existence with fear. Even amid uncertainty, we need not bring a fearful mind to our experience.

There's no reason to be afraid of something we don't know. How can we be afraid of the unknown? We have to begin to see the influence of our own mind in creating fear for ourselves. We need to begin to take responsibility for it.

What happens in this breeding of fear is that we are looking for security in our lives. We want our lives to be safe and secure. So in order to make that happen, we think about the worst things that could happen to us. We want to make the future really safe, so we dwell on all the things that could go wrong. And then, of course, we try to figure out strategies for working with each of them. These strategies sometimes work, but sometimes don't.

There's a little story that illustrates the effect of strategies. In the jungle, a camel was going for her morning walk, approaching the edge of this jungle. Inside the jungle was a tiger. The tiger saw the camel coming and heard her chomping. The tiger thought, "Ah, this she-camel is going to walk into this jungle. When she gets close to me, I will spring out at her and catch her, and she will be my breakfast." So the tiger's waiting there, strategy figured out for the morning, waiting to pounce on the camel.

But up above in a tree is a monkey, and the monkey sees the camel walking and sees the tiger moving into position. He thinks, "Ah, the camel is going to walk into the jungle, and then the tiger is going to jump out and eat her. But I have this coconut, which I will drop on the head of the tiger when it starts to jump, and it won't be able to get the camel." So the monkey's waiting there with his coconut, ready to drop it on the tiger's head.

But there's a little squirrel on a branch a few feet away from the monkey, who sees the camel coming into the forest. The tiger is getting ready to jump on her, but that monkey is holding the coconut to drop on the

tiger so that it won't be able to get the camel. The squirrel thinks, "Just before the monkey is going to drop the coconut, I'm going to bite the monkey so that he can't drop the coconut."

The camel, meanwhile, is still walking slowly towards the jungle. There's a bird, a very large bird, flying over the jungle at this point. He sees the camel coming, sees the tiger's ploy, sees the monkey with the coconut, and sees the squirrel about to bite. And he thinks, "Ah, the camel's going to walk in. Just before the squirrel goes to bite the monkey, I will swoop down and pick up the squirrel and fly off with it so it can't bite the monkey. The monkey will drop the coconut on the tiger's head, the tiger can't get the camel, and the camel will have her walk through the forest."

Meanwhile, the camel's still walking slowly toward the start of the jungle path. She gets just to the opening of the jungle, and she thinks, "I think I've had enough of a walk today." And she turns around and walks back the other way. So much for strategy.

We think of all these complications that can arise in our life, and often they get that complicated, don't they? We think of all the things that could happen and go wrong, and we make plans for each of them, and we think we've got the future worked out. But what we ignore is what we're doing in the present. The future may be a little more secure, but what about right now? The present is becoming filled with fear. We're filling it up with anxiety.

When can we ever stop doing that? When can we get to the secure future? When can we stop worrying about the future? Can we ever? Or is there always something else that can go wrong? Don't we always need to keep planning ahead if we're going to live in this way? This particular strategy becomes self-defeating. We need to see how we create this fear for ourselves. In seeing this generation, then we can start to do something about it. When these thoughts come along, we can see where they lead and say, "No, no thanks, I won't go into that right now."

The second understanding that needs to come in working with fear is that truly the root of fear in the mind is attachment, holding, clinging. We hold, we depend on many different objects in our lives. We hold on to people. We hold on to possessions. We hold on to money. We cling to views and opinions. We hold on to a self-image.

Wherever there's holding for security, there's going to be fear. There's inevitably fear because we always know that we can lose that thing. We pick something up in the beginning because we're frightened, and holding onto that thing makes us feel safe—whether it's a relationship or an object, a view or whatever. But as long as we're holding it in order to feel safe, there's always a fear of loss. There has to be.

So holding for security doesn't eliminate fear. It makes sure that the fear goes on and on and on. It perpetuates fear. Clinging is no way out of fear. Finding security in anything outside ourselves only makes the fear go on.

When there's attachment in the mind, it creates the possibility of shakiness, mental shakiness. The Buddha

often referred to this in discussions during his lifetime. Northern India at the time of the Buddha was rich with a diverse range of spiritual views. It was rich with spiritual characters, some real eccentrics. Christina mentioned last night that Jain who was standing on his leg, hoping to work through all his karma in that way.

Another approach to working with karma was carried on by other sects in northern India. People were afraid that even though they had a human life this time, the next time—they believed in reincarnation—they were worried that they might be born as an animal. This is one of the teachings of reincarnation. The idea being that if their karma, if their actions in this life weren't so pure, they would have to be born in a lower level and then suffer the consequences of that unwholesome karma.

So some people thought they would get around this by living out their dog karma in this life. There were actually people who went around behaving like dogs for the course of their lifetime, hoping they could get it out of their system and then be free of that particular karma.

The Buddha often had discussions with these people who came to question him about his views. He would often say afterwards, "I saw in that person's mind, as he discussed his view, there was wavering. Because of that wavering in his mind, I could tell there was attachment." But he said, "You, oh monk, I watched you in that discussion. I could see there was no wavering in your mind. There was no attachment to the view that you were talking about."

So wherever we find in our life this quality of wavering, of hesitancy, of uncertainty, doubt, fear, anxiety, we know that someplace there's holding, there's attachment. We really can't become free of fear until we become free of these various forms of holding. In the long run, that's the key to getting free of fear.

This whole issue of attachment and the creation of thought through fear is brought out in a discussion that Krishnamurti had with someone who was dying. This fellow was dying, he knew he was dying, and he was very concerned about what was going to happen to him after his death. He was convinced that Krishnamurti had the answer—absolutely certain that Krishnamurti knew, but just wasn't telling him.

The man's question was: "Do I continue after death, or is there nothing left when the body dies?"

Krishnamurti said, "What is this 'me' that your mind clings to and that you want to be continued? The 'me' exists only through identification with property, with a name, with a family, with failures and successes, with all the things you have been and want to be. You are that with which you have identified yourself. You are made up of all that. And without it, you are not. It is this identification with people, property, and ideas that you want to be continued even beyond death. And is it a living thing? Or is it just a mass of contradictory desires, pursuits, fulfillments, and frustrations with sorrow outweighing joy?"

Clinging is the root of the fear.

But in the meantime, while we find we have these attachments, while we find there is holding in the mind

and the fear is arising, how to work with it in a more practical day-to-day way in our meditation practice? What to do with fear when it comes up?

The really important thing in working with fear in meditation is to come to know it, first of all, and secondly, to accept it. When fear comes up, we really have to investigate: what is fear? I wonder if you've ever really looked into this question. Have you ever hung out with fear long enough to find out what it really is? Or every time fear comes, do you seek to find something else to take its place, to distract yourself from the experience?

Through meditation we have this wonderful opportunity of getting directly in touch with fear. You may think that you've come to a meditation retreat to be calm and clear and peaceful, and the last thing you want is to be sitting on your cushion and be full of fear.

But actually you're very lucky if that arises for you. You're very lucky. Because it's only when an emotion comes up in the present moment that we have any chance to work with it, to understand it. We can't really understand emotions at a distance. We can't sit here with our books and papers and figure out how we're going to be free of fear. We have to work with the living reality.

And the zafu is a very good place to do it. Because basically, when fear comes up in a sitting, nothing's really going to happen to you. You're going to get up at the end of that sitting and walk out of the room. You're not going to be any poorer or worse off or in any danger. It's a pretty safe place, right? So it's a very good place to start coming to terms with fear, to start to experience it.

So fear arises and we look in and we want to find out: what is it? What is fear? It really has two components. It's an expression in the body, a certain manifestation in the body, and it has another expression in the mind. So we need to come to terms with, to come to understand both those expressions.

In the body, often we first feel fear in the pit of the stomach. There's a sort of very shaky, fluttery feeling in the stomach. The whole body may begin to feel light and kind of trembly throughout. There may be an increase in the heartbeat. Heart starts going faster. The breath may become jerky. There may be perspiration under the arms. All these are the various physical sensations that tell us fear is coming up, that we're experiencing fear.

Now, are any of these sensations intolerable? Are there any of them that we can't handle? Can you handle a fluttery stomach? Yeah, no big deal. Can you handle your heart going a little faster? That's okay. It's happening. Can you handle some sweat under your arms? Yeah. No one's too close to you. So on the physical level, there's really nothing that difficult about fear. We just have to get comfortable with these physical sensations.

On the mental level, again, there's an emotional tone in the mind. There's this sort of fleeing quality. It comes up and we kind of want to run the other way. It's a kind of restlessness, a kind of moving away. But we can get to know that too, just as you probably found in the early days—you can sit through

restlessness. You can take it. You can experience it. And it's okay.

We can bring the same kind of willingness to fear if we're just willing to be there for it and experience it. And eventually, we find that we can accept it. We find that it's really okay for that fear to be there. And then we have a whole new relationship to it. We can accommodate the fear. We can have it be present and we don't have to react to it.

Because normally, what's the first thing that we do when we experience fear? What's the first emotion that we feel at the arising of fear? Isn't it generally more fear? We're afraid of fear itself. So when fear arises, we don't want to experience it, we're more afraid. And this leads to a chain reaction.

Then we're in a greater state of fear and it starts escalating into panic. Then we're really overwhelmed.

R.D. Laing, who was a Scottish psychoanalyst, had a book called "Knots"—a little short book that he wrote in the early seventies, which illustrated the various kinds of binds that we get into through the complication of our thinking, the way we tie ourselves into knots. About fear he had this to say: that we are afraid of the fear that is afraid of the fear that is afraid of the fear that is afraid. One may perhaps speak of infinite regression.

Once we're not afraid of fear, then when it arises, we don't generate any more fear in relation to it. We can have the fear be there, and yet there's an underlying sense that it's okay. So there's an underlying trust and faith with the fear. And when that gets strong, when that accommodating power gets strong, then the fear can be present and it doesn't really disturb our actions.

You know, if you're feeling afraid and you have to act, you have to relate, you have to do something in the world, often the actions that come out of fear are not very skillful. The fear generates a kind of panic quality and often the confusion comes through in the action. But as our ability grows to accommodate fear, we can have fear in the mind and still act with some clarity, still act with some wisdom.

Now, in working with fear in this way, it has to be a real acceptance. It means you really have to open your heart to the fear. You really have to be willing for it to be there. And it can't be a sort of halfway acceptance, which is really a kind of subtle resistance where you sort of catch a glimpse of fear out of the corner of your eye and go, "Right, fear, that's okay. Fear. Yeah, fear." You can't handle it that way. You really have to be open. Openness to it.

And that openness is really what starts cutting through the power that fear has over us. When we're no longer afraid of fear, when it really doesn't matter to us if it's present or if it's absent, its whole strength, its hold over us starts to go. It's exercised its magic over us. We've been enchanted by it for years and years and years because we couldn't handle it. When we find that we can accept it, it starts to lose its power.

And as it loses its power, the whole force of its conditioning starts to fall away. And we go into situations

where we generally have felt fear, and we suddenly ask ourselves, "Why do I need to feel fear in this situation? There's no reason for it. It doesn't do any good. Why is it here?" And it starts to fall away, in situation after situation.

When this happens, it opens up real new possibilities in our lives. As it is, most of us are willing to live to some degree within the barriers that fear creates for us. We may think about doing something. We may hear about something that interests us. It might be meeting some new person, taking a class, or coming to a meditation retreat. And we think, "That would really be good for me to do. That would be very worthwhile. I can see the growth in it. I can see the value for myself. But it's scary." You know, I think about it. It's scary. I better not go too close to that one.

And often we make a decision, not even consciously, but we just sort of move our minds away from that area. We stop really considering it. Because it's scary. And then we block ourselves from that growth, from the potential in that experience—meeting the person or going through the experience, whatever it might be.

When we become willing to experience the fear, then we're willing to go beyond that barrier. We don't let the fear put us off. We say, "Right, I can see the value in that. I can see that if I do it, I'm going to be afraid, but I've been afraid lots of times before. I've experienced it many, many times, and I know that's okay. So I'm willing to go through that barrier of fear and work with that experience and find that value."

And then we find, as we work in this way, that our life starts to open up.

Our life feels more expansive, and we're able to take on more challenge. We grow in this way, taking in more of life. As we expand our field of living, our frontiers naturally expand as well. We come up against another barrier—something we've never even considered doing before becomes a possibility for us. Once again, the fear arises. But we have developed more and more faith to just go through that fear, not to let fear deter us from the experience.

If we continue to live in this way, continuing to work with these seeming barriers, life becomes a series of increasing challenges and increasing growth—with no end to the growth in that way. Whereas if we simply give in to the fear and let it put us off, we reinforce our belief in it. We give it more strength in that way. So it's very important, both in meditation and in living, to confront these fears and come to terms with them.

The finest tradition of this is found in Buddhist meditation practice. There was a teacher in northeast Thailand in the early part of the century named Ajahn Mun. He came from the Thai forest monastic tradition—the community of monks and nuns living in the forest, practicing in the forest. In the early part of this century, life for forest monks and nuns was quite tough. It wasn't in any way easy. The villagers were not rich, there wasn't a lot of food to go around, and medical treatment was scarce. So it was a tough life.

But Ajahn Mun was completely devoted to it. He loved the forest style of practice. Here's what he would do: Monks are pretty portable beings. All they really need to get by is their begging bowl so they can collect food in the morning, and in Thailand, this instrument called a glot. A glot is like a big umbrella—a big round umbrella with a hook on the end. If you're living in the forest, you stick this big umbrella over the limb of a tree and hang your mosquito net from it. It becomes your portable hotel room. At night when it's time to sleep, you crawl under your mosquito net draped over your glot, and you have a place to sleep.

In the morning, you take your begging bowl and walk to the nearby village. You go through the village and people put rice and curry in your bowl. You return to your forest, eat your single meal, and then the rest of the day is free for meditation. You sit and walk and sit and walk in the forest.

This is what Ajahn Mun did for many years—it was his preferred way of life. As he became well known in northeast Thailand, he gathered a number of followers and disciples, one of whom was Ajahn Chah. Ajahn Chah was the teacher of Ajahn Sumedho, who is the abbot of the Amaravati and Chithurst monasteries in this country. There's another teacher called Ajahn Maha Bua who is still teaching in northeast Thailand in this tradition.

Ajahn Mun was apparently a very inspiring guide, but he was also a tough monk—one tough-willed fellow. For instance, if his monks had malaria, they were still required to sit in meditation. If you know malaria, it's a very unpleasant disease—you're wracked with fever and chills, extremely gruesome. The monks would just have to keep sitting in meditation through that. He felt this built character.

Another of his teaching methods was to encourage all of his monks to go and live in the forest, to take their bowl and their glot and just settle into practicing in the forest. At this time in northeast Thailand, there were still quite a lot of tigers in the forest there.

So these young monks, they might be 20 years old, 25 years old, would go out into the forest to practice, and not far away they'd hear the gigantic roar of a tiger in the middle of the night. That brings fear. Real fear. So they'd be shaking, knowing that at any time this tiger could simply take a few steps over and eat them. Literally. Now that's real fear. You think you have troubles? That's real fear.

But Ajahn Chah basically forced them to stick it out and confront their fear directly. He said, if you can go through your fear in that situation—your fear of death, of really being eaten alive—then you have truly dealt with fear in your practice. So the teaching was not to avoid it.

But sometimes, to tell the truth, there are things we do need to avoid. Sometimes there are aspects of life that are too intense or too dangerous. For instance, there are parts of New York City I would not want to walk through at midnight. So you have to use some common sense. I might be right to feel uneasy in certain parts of the city at that hour.

Also, on an emotional level, I think you have to know your limits. In the mid-70s, I was living in California, and the concept of the open marriage was very much in vogue—the open relationship. There's no

possession, there's no attachment, there's no such thing as jealousy. It's just a figment of your imagination. So basically, the way it operated in the group of people I was around at that time was that there was no idea of being committed to any particular sexual partner. One basically slept with whoever one felt like sleeping with on any particular day or night.

As I look back, I see this was not very skillful. We had good intentions. We wanted to become free of our jealousy, free of possessiveness, but we didn't have much wisdom. And instead of freeing us from jealousy and attachment, what I see is that it made those patterns more intense, because we weren't actually able to work with them effectively. It resulted in quite a lot of suffering for most of us in that group.

So instead of getting free of the conditioning by confronting the fear, it reinforced it because it simply wasn't a workable situation. You have to know your own limits. You need to bring wisdom into this area too.

There are a few practical ways to work with fear when it comes up in meditation. I'll suggest a couple of practical approaches right now.

One way is to decondition the energy. In this approach, it's best to pick a quiet place like your room at home, someplace you feel quite safe. When fear comes up, work with relaxation. This works best if there are certain experiences or events that can trigger the fear easily for you.

What you do is lie down and begin to work with deep breathing to bring a sense of relaxation throughout the body. Deep in-breath, deep out-breath. Just relaxing. Then when you feel quite relaxed and comfortable, bring to mind the images of things that bring fear for you. It might be flying on an airplane. It might be meeting someone new. It might be performing as an artist or something like that.

When that situation comes up in your mind, it will bring fear along with it. That's the conditioning. Even when you think of it, even though it's not actually real, the fear will arise. The thing to do then is to keep working with the breathing and the relaxation to decondition that response. So even while holding the image, keep relaxing, breathing, relaxing, breathing.

Soon you can have the image in your mind without a reaction to it. The image can be there and there's still the sense of relaxation. The next time you think about actually doing that thing, there won't be as strong a reaction of fear. In this way, you're taking some of the charge off the pattern itself.

Another approach that I found useful came out of my experience with a kind of therapy called co-counseling, which I know is starting to be popular in England now as well.

I don't know if it's spread to other parts of Europe.

In co-counseling you take a series of classes with a group of other people where you learn the techniques of this type of counseling. Then you get together once a week with someone from the class and you take turns. First one of you is the client and they work on their areas of difficulty while you're the counselor,

providing support and suggestions. Then you switch roles - they become the counselor, you become the client.

Co-counseling emphasizes, in working with difficult emotions, this idea of discharge. We become free from emotion by discharging physically the feeling - sort of letting it out, expressing it. They say, for instance, if you're embarrassed, the way to discharge it is through laughing. If you're sad, the way to discharge it is through crying. And if you're afraid, they say, the way to discharge it is to shake it.

This makes sense, really. When fear comes up, we feel this kind of shaky energy throughout the body. What they suggest is to go with that - really let yourself get into that shakiness and just let it take you over. Just shake with it.

At this time I was working in California for Hewlett Packard, an electronics company. We had just brought out this really interesting new product - sort of the first handheld computer, quite a revolutionary product. What twenty years ago filled a whole room with vacuum tubes, we had brought down to something that could be held in the palm of your hand.

There was a lot of interest in the technology and I was asked to give a talk at a local college about it with some students. At that time I was not at all comfortable with public speaking. The idea of standing up in front of thirty-five people and giving a talk for forty-five minutes filled me with fear, with nervousness. I said I would do it because I felt I should, but I really was not looking forward to it.

I had about a forty-five-minute drive up the freeway to reach the college from where I worked. As I was driving along, I started to feel nervous. "Oh, God, I've got to stand up in front of all those people and talk." I started to feel that shakiness, that lightness coming into my body.

Well, what does co-counseling say about this? They say to just get right into it. Okay. So I just really did. I was driving up the freeway and I just started to shake. I was driving along at seventy miles an hour and just shaking like mad for the whole forty-five minutes. I don't know what people thought who passed me.

I started to appreciate the humor of the situation while I was in it. So I'd shake for a while and I'd laugh for a while. The talk actually went very well. But also in going over the experience enough times and just going through the emotion, it just released. It released that mental dread about it.

So I do recommend shaking, actually. If you're really feeling fearful, just shake. Whether it's here or outside on the grounds or whatever. If you want to do it in town, I'd be a bit more cautious. We might get known as some strange religious cult known as the Shakers or something. But it does help. It does help.

The last way of working I'm always a little bit reluctant to talk about because it's so different from the rest of Vipassana practice. It's an approach that I call getting tough with fear. I think actually that there is a spiritual precedent for it. Somewhere in the Chinese tradition of Buddhism, I've heard of this philosophy called the guest and the host. Basically it comes down to the question of, as you're living your life with this

body and this mind, whose home is it really? Who's the host here? Who really lives here?

If there are some guests that aren't particularly welcome, who come in when they haven't been invited, and they hang around longer than they're welcome for, and they're a great inconvenience to the host, there's only one thing, finally, to do with such guests - and that is very firmly show them the door.

And you have to, before you can do that, you have to really realize whose house this is? Whose living room? And not being willing to be victimized any longer by these mindsets. Just not being willing to take it.

I came upon this quite spontaneously, actually, in my own practice during one of the month-long retreats I mentioned. I was sitting here in England about seven years ago. I'd been practicing for a couple of years at that time. In the course of this month-long retreat, some deep place of fear in me just got triggered. Something triggered off a lot of fear, and for several days during that retreat, I was just full of fear. No matter what I did or where I went, the fear just kept arising. It was quite unpleasant.

I thought about all the things that people had told me to do with it—you know, just watch it, just accept it, just experience it—and it just kept going on and on. After this had gone on for about two and a half days, I was doing standing meditation, and I realized I was really getting sick of it. I was getting absolutely fed up with it. I remember saying to myself, right at that time, I said, "Fuck it. I'd rather die than live like this." And I meant it. I was really angry at that time. I meant it.

That resolve broke the back of the fear. It just broke its back. I could literally feel it draining out of my body into the ground. The fear just sort of drained out of me. I didn't know at all that that was possible. I didn't know I had that kind of strength. But it was sort of like the fear had pushed me to a limit—to a limit of what I was willing to take. And at that limit, some deeper strength came up that could just deal with that fear totally.

So I hope you never reach that limit with fear in your own practice. But if you do, realize that we all have within us depths of strength and resolve and firmness that we don't usually touch, we don't usually tap into. Since that time, fear has come up a number of other times in my practice and in my life, but it's never had the hold on me again that that did. In that real strong resolve, in that firm resolve, something changed in my relationship with fear. Something changed between me and it. And it has never returned with that kind of strength again.

Now, the reason I say I hesitate to recommend it is because it's in sort of the entire opposite direction from Vipassana. You know what this is about. This is about gentleness, receptivity, acceptance, passivity, just observing, not interfering. This is a completely different approach where you just realize, you take the situation in hand and you exert your will. You exert your will.

But I think if we look into it, there actually are spiritual traditions that talk about this kind of approach. If you've read the books by Carlos Castaneda, where he describes his teachings from Don Juan, the Mexican

Indian shaman and man of knowledge, they're often speaking about the way of the warrior. Over and over again, Don Juan will put Carlos in the situations that just call up the most incredible fears for him. You know, he'll tell him how much the ally, this strange sort of demonic being, wants to get to grips with him and wrestle him, and then he'll send him out into the desert at night alone, saying, "The ally's waiting for you out there." That brought up Carlos' fears. At the end of one book, he made him jump off a cliff. So finding, through being pushed to these limits, that warrior-like quality.

Another spiritual tradition that has it is the tradition of Rinzai Zen. Now Soto Zen, which is the school of Suzuki Roshi, which I read from today, is very much like Vipassana. Soto Zen and Vipassana are very close. But Rinzai Zen, on the other hand, is more the warrior Zen in Japan. And it has this fierceness. I did a retreat with a Rinzai Zen master a number of years ago named Kusaki Roshi.

And I must say he's one of the most impressive individuals I've ever met in my life. He still teaches, mostly in California, and he's a very impressive man. He embodies everything a Zen master is supposed to be—he's funny, he's wise, he's unflappable, and he can be extremely ruthless.

When you come in for an interview with one of us Vipassana teachers, we're just all sort of gooey sentimentality—warmth and compassion and all that easygoing stuff. But you go in for an interview with Sasaki, and he doesn't hesitate to put you in your place. Some of his comments are things like, "Hmm, stupid answers," or "Too much thinking, go away." He often says about coming for interviews in his tradition: "When you come for sanzen"—which is what they call the interview situation—"come prepared to kill or be killed."

So when you feel your practice is at that stage, go see Sasaki Roshi. He's an excellent teacher.

I want to close with one story that illustrates the other end of the spectrum entirely. We've talked quite a lot about fear, but in spiritual tradition there's always the awareness of the possibility of the other extreme altogether—this state of real fearlessness, of total fearlessness, having overcome all forms of fear and trembling. And again, a story from the Zen tradition.

In medieval Japan, there was in many ways a state of real lawlessness. Individual warlords with their bands of samurai would control neighboring territories, and often one would invade another, try to conquer it, then that warlord would regroup and try to take that territory back. So there was a lot of invading and fighting all over medieval Japan.

This one warlord had come into a certain area with his samurai, and nearby villagers heard they were coming. They knew that if these samurai came, they would all be put to death, because they were loyal to another warlord and his samurai. So they knew they would be put to death, and they all fled.

Just outside the village there was a Zen monastery. The monks also heard that the warlord was coming, and they too fled so that they wouldn't be put to death. Everyone left except the Zen master. He just stayed in the monastery and went about his daily routine. He took his morning meal, had a sitting, cleaned up his

bowls—just living his life.

The warlord came into the village and heard that everyone had left except this one Zen monk. He was furious. He said, "Who is this person who would not run away from me? Who does he think he is anyway? I'm going to go out and see him."

So he went straight away to the monastery with several of his samurai and found the Zen master sitting on his zafu, just calmly practicing his meditation. The samurai warlord draws his sword, charges into the zendo and says, "You! Don't you know who I am? Don't you know that I am one who could run you through with this sword without blinking an eye?"

And the Zen master says, "Is that so? And do you know that I am one who can be run through with a sword without blinking an eye?"

At that, the samurai warlord placed his sword in front of the Zen master, bowed to him, and asked to become his student.

The power of fearlessness.

May all beings see into clinging. May all beings understand fear. May all beings live with fear.

Thank you for listening.

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