Facing Our Fears: Living With A Courageous Heart

Guy Armstrong · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Guy Armstrong · 1:01:41

So it's nice to see everyone tonight. The dharma talk is entitled "Living with a Courageous Heart," and I was just reflecting on why I chose to speak on this topic this week. I realized that both in my own life and in the lives of many people I know right now, there's scary stuff arising. I mentioned that my dad went through surgery recently, which was really quite frightening. I have a number of friends who are facing different challenges—whether it's somebody sick in their life, a divorce, or just different life circumstances—having to find a way to face these difficulties and let that too be the path. So it's in that spirit that I'll share some reflections.

Let me begin by having us reflect on something we're very habitual about. With the stresses of the day, if we check out what's going on in our bodies and minds at any juncture where stress seems to face us—whether it's a work demand, a deadline, being stuck in traffic—our bodies, before we even know it, tighten up. Our minds start speeding up and our hearts contract, or else they really numb out.

This has been called the body of fear, and my sense is that's a very apt description. This body of fear is sometimes very subtle, where our being, our awareness, rather than being open and inclusive, has tightened and tightened, and we're just busily planning how we're going to move through—how to get through the day, which is a sad comment.

If we honestly investigate the root of any difficult experience, we'll find fear. We'll find this sense that we're approaching life like it's an adversary, on some level like we're having to meet up with something difficult that's dangerous and at best unpredictable. So we resist.

I was watching how I was moving through the heat these last couple of days. I noticed at first, every time I felt the blanket of hot air, there was this place in me that was just grumbling, sweating, and really being dramatic about it. Then I realized that was happening, and I decided, "Okay, heat meditation"—just sitting, just feeling it. Hot, sweating, nauseous, whatever, but just being with moment-to-moment experience. It was revealing to see what a habitual reflex it was to have this kind of complaint in my system. I mean, it's just weather.

One teacher described this body of fear as if we're entering this earth wearing a space suit. I think this metaphor works well because this body of fear, this space suit, is meant to help us navigate through difficulties, to get more of what we want and to avoid what we don't want. It's fight or flight—that's what this space suit does. It's basically designed to avoid direct contact. It's a kind of covering, an armor, to

avoid direct contact with the elements. The presumption is that life's too much.

Whether the stresses are huge ones—like someone we love could die—or little ones like being late for something, there's a sense that we need a buffer so we don't have to feel the enormity of what we're feeling inside. What ends up happening is that there are not so many moments that we put down this space suit, that we relax this body of fear and directly relate to the sensations, the sounds, to our breath, to each other.

The problem is not that a space suit or body of fear emerges. It's that we become identified with it. Our whole life becomes organized around those defensive patterns. So it's our habit to buffer ourselves.

I was talking about this with a friend a few days ago who called describing some things in the newspaper. Because it was all so overwhelming, it was so hard to really open and feel what it meant—the realness of the people suffering—she was describing how it's just impossible not to look at it like it was a story. So we were talking about that, and then she ended up emailing me these verified newspaper headlines of the year:

"Something went wrong in jet crash, experts say."
"Police begin campaign to run down jaywalkers."
"Prostitutes appeal to Pope."
"Plane too close to ground, crash probe told."
"Astronaut takes blame for gas in space."
"Man struck by lightning faces battery charge."
"Typhoon rips through cemetery. Hundreds dead."

Probably each one of us here knows what it's like to cognitively register huge, enormous suffering. We laugh about a jet crash headline, and yet we know that it's just really hard to get it, to really register what it means when people are suffering. So we feel we have to wear this space suit.

And then the question we're going to approach is: How much do we really have to?

And how do we learn to let go some and let this world in?

But first, let's acknowledge that all life forms, by the nature of being life forms, have this fight or flight response, have a body of fear. All life forms are wired to register where threats are and to contract and to defend.

It's really interesting that when sensory experience is registered in our body minds, it first is registered in the emotional centers of our brain, the amygdala, and then the cerebral cortex. In other words, we make meaning—cognitive meaning—after our body has already registered its fight or flight response. So it's our basic wiring to fear and to contract.

We sometimes think that there's something wrong with us when we feel fear. In fact, we almost always

do. When fear arises in our body, we think there's something wrong with me. We think it's somehow something missing or defective. I like this quote from Scott Peck: "The absence of fear is not courage, but some kind of brain damage."

So fear is a basic survival system. It's a painful feeling in the body, and it becomes suffering if we get identified and organized around it. If rather than just recognizing, "Oh, fear," and feeling it and being with it, we do whatever we can to run away from it, to contract against it, to try to get rid of it, to numb, to control things, what happens? It turns from fear to suffering.

This is Kafka: "You can hold back from the suffering, from the pain and fear. You have free permission to do so, and it is in accordance with your nature. But perhaps this very holding back is the one suffering you could have avoided."

Now this is really the core message that the Buddha was teaching 2,500 years ago—that we have this conditioning to hold back from life. And it's not that we're bad, it's not that we're wrong, but it's our capacity to realize that and to cultivate a sense of presence. It's our capacity to realize we're holding back and let go of resistance and let life in.

And so that's what I'd like to explore more fully tonight: how, when we realize that this body of fear is doing its thing, we realize we're tight, we realize our thoughts are racing, we realize that we've defended against each other and the life around us—how do we recognize that and relax the grip a little and let life in?

Now here is a classic story. Once there was a man who got so upset by the sight of his own shadow and was so unhappy with his own footsteps that he tried to run from both. But each time his foot hit the ground, he realized he was still taking a step. Equally disturbing, he saw that his shadow never once fell behind. Not about to give up, he ran faster, faster, faster, until finally he dropped dead. What he never grasped was that by stepping into the shade, his shadow would vanish. By simply sitting down, there would be no more footsteps.

Like the man in the story, we're afraid of what lurks in the shadow. We're afraid of change. We're afraid of the unknown. We're afraid of our imperfections. We're afraid of our mortality. And so what we do from this fear is we try to get away from it. We keep running.

And we're aware that running hurts us. We're aware that when we get caught in our addictions and our avoidant behavior, when we armor our heart, when we get intellectual, we kind of know. We know that we're in our strategy for avoiding things. But we do it anyway. It's such a deeply grooved habit.

We run daily. Each of us is trapped in reactivity. I can, at the end of any day, just look back and see huge swaths of time where I was in some trance, where I thought I was there, but I was actually trying to be busy and feel good about myself—just lost, not really present.

Real safety, the real refuge, lies in our willingness to not run away from ourselves. That is the refuge. To not run away. To stay. To just show up for this moment. And there's a wonderful question that you can ask yourself that can bring you right back here: "How can I belong to this moment?" If you see you're running, "How can I belong to this moment?"

This is the essence of meditation. We're in training to realize how this body of fear is doing its thing, sense our muscles tightening, sense that we're pushing away life, that we're lost in these ideas and concepts. And then have that willingness to come back, to stop running.

to rest in what's true.

It's also the motif in the mythology of the Buddha that he too ran. I mean, it's a given we're all running, we're all trying to protect and defend and grasp and so on. And he spent a number of years practicing austerities, a kind of striving towards spiritual accomplishment. And then, this is the centerpiece of the Buddha story, he stopped running, he stopped doing. He sat down under the tree of enlightenment, the Bodhi tree.

So that's our practice. It's really a practice of just stopping the doings and being with what is.

There's an irony that frequently people will turn to meditation as a way to reduce tension and stress, and as a way to find peace, without realizing that in the long run, while it does do that, the training itself is one of touching whatever's there. So for many people, there's kind of a surprise of sitting down and expecting to find some calmness and really getting in touch with the agitation that they've been running from. And then the learning or awakening is that by relating wisely to that, there's a deeper peace than could have been imagined. But it's not by getting rid of it.

Any true journey of awakening, of opening, is going to take us to the boundaries of what are familiar. It's kind of like getting in this small boat and setting out to sea on this kind of exploration or adventure to realize who we really are, and having all the fears that we're going to fall off the end of the earth or the fears of what weather systems might stir up the seas or how we might get becalmed and lose all our steam and everything possible that can arise that's in our psyche. All the fears and hopes and sadnesses and excitements and longings—that's what we are game to connect with, that we're willing to touch if we're sitting down and meditating.

So in a way, I look at it like it takes an enormous courage to even be willing to sit down a little and be with ourselves. Now there certainly are ways of what we call meditating where we're just trying to aim the mind elsewhere and go into a trance, but that's not the kind of meditation I'm talking about. I'm talking about a mindfulness practice whose commitment is presence with what's real. Any genuine commitment to that will lead us to the edges of what we've been accepting.

We all design our lives to be as comfortable as we can. I mean, it's part of our wiring. We try to make our worlds safe and predictable, and we try to avoid things from changing, because most of us don't want

change. We hold on tight to how it is. We have a million arguments on why that's good. We try to keep certain people in our life and certain people out and certain feelings there in us and avoid other feelings. We try to keep the air conditioning on when it goes over a hundred. So we all are doing that to some degree, trying to make our lives comfortable.

And yet, because there are shadow parts of the psyche that have been pushed away, it's part of the exploration to go to that edge and begin to include what we've been excluding or keeping out.

Fear signals the boundary to what's acceptable. And as one teacher, I think it was Joseph Goldstein said in one of the first retreats I was at, that to the extent that there's a boundary of what's acceptable, we're not free. Do you understand that? If there's a boundary and outside that boundary is the realm of unacceptable, we're not free. Because we're always avoiding, contracting against, resisting a part of life. One way of understanding spiritual life is to relax that boundary, kind of play the edge and keep opening to the places that we have been habitually avoiding.

Jack Kornfield describes fear when we're hitting that edge like this little light bulb that goes off and says in our minds, "about to grow, about to grow."

It takes a lot of energy to keep pushing away the unacceptable, pushing away our feelings of vulnerability, our loneliness. Loneliness is a big one. We do a lot not to feel it, to push away intimacy, to push away change. Everything is changing and yet we try so hard to nail it all down.

So staying put, facing fear, is really the only chance we have to become intimate with this life and to really touch freedom. Yet it's really hard to do it. It's all our wiring not to.

So let me ask you to reflect on something, if you will. Just take a few deep breaths and close your eyes, if you will.

Our habit is to avoid what's dangerous or risky or scary, but each of us has had times where we haven't done that, where we've been courageous. So I'd like to ask you to reflect on something in your life that you consider courageous that you've done. It might be an internal way of facing things or a behavioral way, some experience of your life where you felt that you were courageous.

Including as you reflect what you were facing, what you had to face and deal with, and the fear or the insecurity that might have brought up. What made it possible for you to be courageous in this instance? What motivated you? What allowed you to face your life? To stop running.

You can keep considering this, but please open your eyes if you will. And just to invite anyone that might have connected with that, what you noticed, what let you be courageous? What was it?

These are remarkable insights. When someone shared that seeing "the larger picture" enabled their courage, and another spoke of an "overwhelming desire to heal," we glimpse the profound motivations that draw us toward presence. Sometimes courage emerges because we recognize that "there's no other

choice"—we find ourselves at a threshold where the only path forward is to remain present with what is.

The awareness that avoiding presence creates more suffering becomes a powerful teacher. One person beautifully described recognizing their pattern of dissociation—how they would "separate and become a guru" to avoid vulnerability—yet found the courage to return to embodied presence. This recognition of our habitual escapes, without judgment, is itself a form of courage.

What's particularly moving is how many responses pointed toward connection as the source of courage: a sense of connection with the divine, the support of sangha, the feeling of being held by something larger than our individual struggles. These reflections reveal different dimensions of what allows us to meditate—what enables us to face life directly despite our deep conditioning to flee.

Notice how many pointed to a compelling quality, a genuine longing to be present fully. This isn't forcing ourselves into mindfulness, but rather responding to an authentic pull toward wholeness. There's often a readiness that emerges, a confidence that we can meet whatever arises.

It takes courage to meditate. Every moment we choose to stay present with our experience—whether it's pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—we're cultivating this courage. We're reinforcing our sense of the bigger picture, our connection with something sacred, our interconnectedness with all beings.

The word courage comes from roots meaning "greatness of heart"—*cor*, the heart. True courage isn't the absence of fear, but rather the willingness to keep our hearts open even in the presence of fear, uncertainty, or pain. This is the courage that allows us to stop running and face our lives with compassion.

That our longing, our heart's longing to be free, to know truth, to feel love more fully, will end up inspiring us to be courageous, will bring us to meditation, and will have us go beyond our habitual way.

Now, as we know, because our conditioning is strong, we need to intentionally cultivate those qualities of heart and cultivate this capacity to relax the body of fear. So let's explore how, when we're in the grip, when you're facing the big stressors, how do we begin to tap into the courage, tap into the understandings that were just brought up so beautifully here?

I find it instructive to sense, well, if I was relating to a frightened child—just consider this: if you're with a child that's very, very afraid, how would you relate to that child?

"Kindness." "Protectedness." "Patience." "Honoring." "Allowing." "Soothing." "Love."

It's a question to ask yourself. If you really imagine this vulnerability within you as deserving of these qualities of attention, how would you relate? Because when we're in the middle of fear, we usually lock into "something's wrong with me." And we get kind of hard-hearted towards ourselves.

The way that many of us were brought up was that when we got frightened, we were penalized for it. We were put down for it or punished for it. Or else, for some of us, our fears were fed. We were told what a

dangerous world this is. "Be careful—something's gonna go wrong any moment. You'll get hurt if you try to do that. People get hurt. You can't trust anyone."

And then for many, our fears were negated. We were told, "Oh, there's nothing to be afraid of. You don't really feel that." If we were sad or grieving or whatever, they were disregarded. And then we grow up with this kind of sense of not really knowing what we feel, or sensing it but denying it.

Somebody sent me this story. This is a woman struggling with a fear of loss of mental capacity. For a lot of years she felt like it was happening, but she didn't want to admit it to anybody. But now she and a lot of her peer group are passing around stories about loss of mental capacity. And this is one of their stories:

Three older ladies were discussing the travails of getting older. One said, "Sometimes I catch myself with a jar of mayonnaise in my hand in front of the refrigerator and can't remember whether I need to put it away or start making a sandwich."

The second lady chimed in, "Yes, sometimes I find myself on the landing of the stairs and can't remember whether I was on my way up or on my way down."

The third one responded, "Well, I'm glad I don't have that problem—knock on wood." As she rapped her knuckles on the table, then she told them, "That must be the door. I'll go get it."

That was her example of denial.

So there are several messages we get around fear, and then what we end up doing is that's how we treat our own fearful inner self. We put ourselves down for feeling afraid, deny that there's a good reason—say, "No, there's no good reason, I shouldn't be feeling this"—or we feed it: "Yep, things are really all going to crash around me in a moment." Rather than what you just described—soothing, comforting, protective, present—we end up either feeding or denying fear.

So what is this most kind of enlightened response to fear? How do we discover that kind and wakeful presence when we're in the grip?

We start with recognizing that it's happening. Really developing this sensor where there's a place in us that recognizes the body of fear. The body of fear is almost always there unless we're quite free, but it tightens, it contracts, it gets more consolidated. Having this place in our awareness that starts recognizing when our heart's getting harder or number, our body's getting tighter, and our mind's getting busier.

It helps to name it. "Fear" is one of the good ones to name. "Fear, fear." The little ones, the big ones.

What we'll be doing as we close tonight is a meditation on fear. So I'd like to invite you to reflect for a moment. You might not be aware of the subtle times your body of fear comes together, but reflect on a place in your life where you'd like to have more courage, where you are aware of getting caught inside fear.

For some it's situations where you might be rejected or abandoned, seen as stupid. For some it's a situation where you're afraid of failing or making mistakes. For some the fears are around our bodies—getting sick or gaining weight. For some it's around money.

For some it's around senility. For some the suffering, fear of suffering of our children. Choose, if you will, a place in your life where you know the body of fear contracts and imprisons you. Your awareness becomes very caught or identified. A place you'd like to have more freedom, more courage.

As a way of establishing a relationship with this place of tightness, we begin by just acknowledging it, in some way just bowing to it, just respect, okay, this. And as we finish tonight and go through these different steps, you can keep coming back to this place and sensing how you can relate to it.

Because we're often taught that it's bad for us to be afraid or something's wrong with us if we're afraid, we don't often acknowledge just how real it feels. Now that doesn't mean the story about the fear is real. It doesn't mean that in fact we are going to fail, that our story is accurate. But the feelings—the fear of failure, the fear of being unworthy and rejected, the fear of loneliness, the fear of what will happen if people see who we are—that fear feels very real.

I had a client some years ago who had a very great fear of any attractive woman. He went through life and when he found a woman very attractive, he got very scared and couldn't act like who he was. He felt like he just contracted. It took him months to even say that out loud because he thought it was such a stupid and ungrounded kind of fear to have in this world. What was really amazing was that the most liberating part of therapy for him was simply coming to terms with the fact that this fear was a real and painful experience in his body-mind. The fear was real.

As he said, "Okay," and he kind of bowed to it, he said, "Okay, this is real, this fear is there," he was able to start working with it. The first step to letting these fears, this body of fear, unwind itself is to acknowledge its presence. There's a quality of respect and acceptance. It's not like accepting fear means that you're accepting that you're always going to be fearful. It's just that this moment there's the ache, squeeze, tightness of fear.

So we begin with that and again just notice where your body of fear gets tightened around a particular situation. Just let yourself acknowledge the realness in a respectful way. One Zen master, when asked how he related with fear, said, "I agree, I agree." It's like saying, "Okay, this is here."

Once we have acknowledged the realness of this moment's feeling of fear, we then, as the Buddha did, pause, stop running, and face the fullness of it. This is the meditation of sitting down in the shade, being receptive to the unknown, the discomfort.

This isn't easy. This is where we actually have to train ourselves because there are so many parts of our life where we've got such a studied way of acting quickly, reacting, judging, that for us to stop and really feel in that pause, really connect with our experience, is difficult.

This is Pema Chödrön: "When we protect ourselves so we won't feel pain, that protection becomes like armor, like armor that imprisons the softness of the heart. We do everything we can think of not to feel anything threatening. We try to prolong feeling good about ourselves. When we breathe in pain, when we breathe in fear, somehow it penetrates that armor. The way we guard ourselves is getting softened up. This heavy, rusty, creaking armor begins to seem not so monolithic after all. With the in-breath, the armor begins to fall apart, and we find we can breathe deeply and relax. A kindness and tenderness begin to emerge. We don't have to tense up as if our whole life were being spent in the dentist's chair. When we breathe out relief and spaciousness, we are also encouraging the armor to dissolve. The out-breath is a metaphor for opening our whole being."

So this natural breathing in life—feeling what's there, breathing out, making space—is our way of pausing and relating directly to what's here.

What this means for most of us is that we have to let go of the busyness of our mind. And that in itself is a training. It's our biggest form of armor. The more we stay lost in planning thoughts and worry thoughts, the less we are asked to actually feel what's happening. We use our thinking as a defense against the intensity, the vibrancy of the elements.

So usually to do this breathing in and feeling fully, breathing out, making room, we first have to realize all the stories that are going on and just relax the grip of them some. "Okay, thinking, thinking, stories, stories," and then just feel into our body.

You can do it again and again, even this moment. Just sense whatever ideas are in the mind. Just note, "thinking, ideas, stories," and then again sit down into the body, breathing in, receiving this life fully, whether it's pain or fear, our interest, our sleepiness, our numbness, just feeling exactly what's real.

This is sitting in the shade. This is how we stop running. And then we breathe out and sense the space it's all happening in, letting it float, letting it be there.

Let me share a story with you. This was a teacher from India who described his experiences with fear, and I thought it was a wonderful description.

He said he was determined to get rid of his negative emotions—this was in the 1960s that he started practicing. He struggled against anger and lust, he struggled against laziness and pride, but mostly he wanted to get rid of his fear. His meditation teacher kept telling him, "Stop struggling, stop struggling, just let it be." But he just took that as another way of explaining how to overcome his obstacles and kept on trying to get rid of fear.

Finally, his teacher sent him off to meditate in a tiny hut in the foothills of the mountains. He shut the door and settled down to practice. When it got dark, he lit three candles. Around midnight he heard a noise in the corner of the room, and in the darkness he saw a very large snake. It looked to him like a king cobra, and it was right in front of him, swaying.

All night he stayed totally alert, keeping his eyes on the snake. He was so afraid he couldn't move. There was just the snake and himself and the fear. And then there was just fear and fear and fear.

Just before dawn, the last candle went out, and then he began to cry. He cried not in despair but from tenderness. He felt the longing of all the animals and people in the world. He knew their alienation and their struggle and their fear. All his meditation thus far had been nothing but further separation and struggle, trying to get rid of parts of life.

Now he accepted—really accepted wholeheartedly—that he was angry and jealous, that he resisted and struggled, and that he was afraid. He accepted fear. He also accepted that he was precious beyond measure, wise and foolish, rich and poor, and totally unfathomable. He felt so much gratitude that in the total darkness he stood up, walked toward the snake, and bowed. Then he fell sound asleep on the floor.

When he awoke, the snake was gone. He never knew if it was his imagination or if it had really been there, and it didn't seem to matter. As he put it at the end of this talk describing his experience with fear, that much intimacy with the real experience of fear caused his dramas to collapse, his sense of separation from the world to collapse. Finally he was able to connect directly with life, to belong fully to his life.

I love that story because, as is so true in the Buddha's teachings, the very arising of what's difficult is also the ground of our freedom—that by facing fully the intensity of fear, by really allowing ourselves to belong to fear, we end up belonging fully to life. By facing death, we awaken to live our moments completely.

And this belonging is the antidote, in a sense. The deepest fear is one of severed belonging. The deepest fear is of disconnection. So whatever allows us to begin to establish a connection with life gives us room in our hearts for fear.

One way is, as I've been describing, to connect directly with the experience itself. There are other ways, though, of also cultivating the heart so we feel a sense of belonging and we have room for fear. In fact, the Buddha's first teaching in response to fear was a loving-kindness meditation. He told the monks that surrounded him at that time—this was his quote: "Our fear is great, but greater yet is the truth of our connectedness."

It's so beautiful. Our fear is great, but greater yet is the truth of our connectedness. This is one of the lines from the scriptures that many people know and that becomes more and more real as we live our moments—that we see these weather systems of fear, this body of fear contracting, but discover more and more that what's most true and real is a sense of belonging to the world that allows us to have room for fear.

So this is the refuge that the Buddha talked about. If we're lost in fear, to find what we belong to. We find it through mindfulness by relating directly to the experience of fear. We find it as we cultivate the heart with practices like loving-kindness.

Any moment that we extend care to another being or to a part of ourselves reestablishes a sense of connectedness—even if we're doing it mechanically. Even if it's mechanical, just the fact that we had an intention to try comes from a part of our heart that cares. Any extension of care reestablishes connectedness.

In a moment of fear, if we just bring to mind what we most deeply cherish, just bring that to mind and just feel even a little bit of the warmth of caring, we're on that pathway back into belonging, back into a sense of wholeness where we can include fear but not be driven by it. That is the meaning of courage, that greatness of heart.

Let's take a moment—what we'll do is work a little bit with the fears you've identified.

Bringing this meditation practice to hold that fear, we'll begin by simply establishing the presence that comes from feeling our bodies and feeling our breath.

Sense what area of fear is asking for attention in your life—what circumstances bring up fear. Pick one area. Some will be able to evoke the realness of the feeling of fear more than others. Not to worry, but just include awareness as well as possible of where you'd like to have more courage.

Let the situation be as real as you can. Visualize the circumstances if possible. If there are others involved, see who's there. Sense what's most difficult and feel what that's like in your heart. When you feel like you've connected with what brings up the body of fear, just let go of the story and simply feel what's there. Very present.

Feel where the fear lives so that as you breathe in, there's a willingness to feel what has been avoided. Agree to feel what's there. Regardless of what you're feeling right now—fear, numbness, tiredness, happiness, whatever it is—let the in-breath be one of touching what's real. We breathe in and touch what's real. We breathe out and offer it space—that bigger picture, that open awareness.

Breathe in and connect with what's there. Breathe out and offer space, kindness, care. If it feels like too much to breathe in and feel, sense that all of nature and all of the loving energies of the universe are there to help receive it. Breathing in, there's room for this. Breathing out, offering care.

The Dalai Lama told one very frightened man that if he couldn't hold his own fear, just sense he was held in the heart of the Buddha, the lap of the Buddha. Let this fear be held by the beloved—breathing in, feeling fully, knowing there's room. Breathing out, offering care, space, establishing an intimacy, a realness with what's true inside you. Rather than running, we sit in the shade of this tree of enlightenment, this wakeful, caring presence.

Now bring to mind someone in your life that you know struggles with something that scares them, that contracts them. Everyone that we know struggles with fear, but bring to mind one person who's dear to you, so that you can breathe in on their behalf. Breathe in and sense the fear, the struggle, the pain.

Breathe out and offer them your prayer, your compassion.

Let others come to mind, continuing to breathe and feel that as you breathe in, you breathe in the fear, you breathe in what has been resisted, and you breathe out offering kindness for the benefit of others.

Include in your awareness now the sense of all those that have gathered here—that each one carries their share of fear, each one wants to be happy and free—so that you breathe in and sense that you're breathing in for each of us. As you do, bring to mind faces and a sense of some of the people here that can make it more genuine for you. Breathing in, feel that you're breathing in for all of us, including the parts of the shadow, the difficulties. Breathe out and offer that space and that care that is the freedom of our courageous heart.

The only thing great enough to awaken through fear is the power of the heart. Our fear is great, but greater yet is our connectedness.

So we close chanting Om again as we did when we opened. Feel free to let your voices mingle and harmonize as we chant six rounds.

[Chanting: Om, Om, Om, Om, Om, Om]

May our attention and our prayers be of benefit to all beings. May all beings awaken. May all beings be free.

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