



FEARLESSNESS

By Thich Nhat Hanh

The spiritual teacher and author of [Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm](#) explains—in an excerpt from this new book—how to release ourselves from the trap of our anxiety.

Most of us experience a life full of wonderful moments and difficult moments. But for many of us, even when we are most joyful, there is fear behind our joy. We fear that this moment will end, that we won't get what we need, that we will lose what we love, or that we will not be safe. Often, our biggest fear is the knowledge that one day our bodies will cease functioning. So even when we are surrounded by all the conditions for happiness, our joy is not complete.

We may think that if we ignore our fears, they'll go away. But if we bury worries and anxieties in our consciousness, they continue to affect us and bring us more sorrow. We are very afraid of being powerless. But we have the power to look deeply at our fears, and then fear cannot control us. We can transform our fear. Fear keeps us focused on the past or worried about the future. If we can acknowledge our fear, we can realize that right now we are okay. Right now, today, we are still alive, and our bodies are working marvelously. Our eyes can still see the beautiful sky. Our ears can still hear the voices of our loved ones.

The first part of looking at our fear is just inviting it into our awareness without judgment. We just acknowledge gently that it is there. This brings a lot of relief already. Then, once our fear has calmed down, we can embrace it tenderly and look deeply into its roots, its sources. Understanding the origins of our anxieties and fears will help us let go of them. Is our fear coming from something that is happening right now or is it an old fear, a fear from when we were small that we've kept inside? When we practice inviting all our fears up, we become aware that we are still alive, that we still have many things to treasure and enjoy. If we are not pushing down and managing our fear, we can



enjoy the sunshine, the fog, the air, and the water. If you can look deep into your fear and have a clear vision of it, then you really can live a life that is worthwhile.

The Buddha was a human being, and he also knew fear. But because he spent each day practicing mindfulness and looking closely at his fear, when confronted with the unknown, he was able to face it calmly and peacefully. There is a story about a time the Buddha was out walking and Angulimala, a notorious serial killer, came upon him. Angulimala shouted for the Buddha to stop, but the Buddha kept walking slowly and calmly. Angulimala caught up with him and demanded to know why he hadn't stopped. The Buddha replied, "Angulimala, I stopped a long time ago. It is you who have not stopped." He went on to explain, "I stopped committing acts that cause suffering to other living beings. All living beings want to live. All fear death. We must nurture a heart of compassion and protect the lives of all beings." Startled, Angulimala asked to know more. By the end of the conversation, Angulimala vowed never again to commit violent acts and decided to become a monk.

How could the Buddha remain so calm and relaxed when faced with a murderer? This is an extreme example, but each of us faces our fears in one way or another every day. A daily practice of mindfulness can be of enormous help. Beginning with our breath, beginning with awareness, we are able to meet whatever comes our way.

Fearlessness is not only possible, it is the ultimate joy. When you touch nonfear, you are free. If I am ever in an airplane and the pilot announces that the plane is about to crash, I will practice mindful breathing. If you receive bad news, I hope you will do the same. But don't wait for the critical moment to arrive before you start practicing to transform your fear and live mindfully. Nobody can give you fearlessness. Even if the Buddha were sitting right here next to you, he couldn't give it to you. You have to practice it and realize it yourself. If you make a habit of mindfulness practice, when difficulties arise, you will already know what to do.

