

Fear

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So today is Martin Luther King Day, and I was wondering what I could talk about today. I was very happy that last year when we had Martin Luther King Day, Ellen Snowy came and gave a talk, mostly reading, I think, speeches from Martin Luther King. And I thought perhaps of saying something about Martin Luther King's teachings of non-violence. The thing is quite fascinating, quite marvelous, that one of the secular saints of the United States, in that, you know, we have a holiday after him, is one of the great champions of the twentieth century, champions of non-violence. And it's nice that America has someone like that as a cultural saint, cultural hero, cultural role model for the power and value of non-violence. I've given talks about Buddhist teachings on non-violence in the past, and somehow it didn't quite sit for me to talk about that.

But what I decided to do is not quite directly related to Martin Luther King, but is a talk about fear. And that was a little more up for me as a topic, and there definitely seems a connection, because of the kind of work that Martin Luther King did, and the kind of thing that he was an advocate for, I think requires coming to terms with fear, or somehow not being limited by fear. One of my first interests in Buddhism was when I was in college, where I was a pacifist in a time when people like men my age were being drafted for Vietnam. So there were a lot of active discussions in the college dorms about war and violence, and non-violence, and civil disobedience, and non-violent action, and being a pacifist in these very tense times. It became very clear to me that if I was going to follow through with my ideals of pacifism, I would have to be willing to put my life on the line, for example, doing some act of civil disobedience.

I was very acutely aware how afraid I was of doing that, so I felt bad about my inability to live my ideals because of my fear. That was one of my first doors to Buddhism then. I was looking for some way to deal with that fear, to come to terms with it so it wouldn't limit my ability to live the life that I wanted to live. Somehow I settled on Buddhism as offering the tools, the skills, the practices that would help me come to terms with that fear. I haven't tested it in that kind of extreme way, so I don't know whether Buddhism has done that for me. Since that quest, that ideal, I would like to think that I'm less afraid than I was some thirty years

ago.

I do remember also some almost thirty years ago reading a study. I don't know how good a study it was, but the study was correlating people's different religious affiliations, different life experiences, to see people's relative fear of death. Among the people who had the least fear of death were people who meditated a lot. It didn't specify what kind of meditation, but I thought that was very interesting, that meditation somehow has an impact on our fear, and something as deep in us as the fear of death. So fear, as we know, is a very popular emotion, and it seems to be relatively pervasive. I've come across a couple of people in my life who seem to be without fear, and one of them seemed to have a lot of conceit with that.

So I don't know where the balance was. What's better, and others seem seemingly born that way. I don't know why some people are that way, and most people are not. Some people, of course, have a lot more fear than others, and there are many causes and conditions for that. About seven years ago, Dharma Seed Tape Library, which is the non-profit organization that gathers together all the Dharma tapes of all the prominent teachers in America and then distributes them—now they're all available for free if you exchange for a donation—they sent me the list of the top ten selling tapes for that year, nineteen ninety-five or something.

One of the surprises for me was to see that of those top ten best-selling tapes, four of them had to do with fear. That you know, very important people. In thinking about fear, I've certainly felt to be assured a little bit that this is a good topic, since I thought, chances are that ninety percent of you at least have had to deal with fear in some way or other. So it's something that's common to all of us, most of us. But in thinking about it, I also was thinking about how complex it is. There are so many different kinds of fear, and so many different things we're afraid of, and so many different ways of understanding fears.

I think you could write a dictionary, you know, all kinds of different kinds of fear, and words for fear. We have worry—I don't know, maybe there's even lighter words than worry—but worry and maybe concern. "I'm concerned," we say, at the light end of what we're being afraid. Then there's worry, and then there's fear, and there's anxiety, and there's terror and panic, and probably other good words too. In the fear camp, it may be a surprise to some of you that in Buddhism, fear by itself is not considered—even of itself—is not judged or categorized as an unhelpful emotion or as an unwholesome emotion for us.

I think many times in the West, the kind of automatic assumption is, "Fear is wrong or bad in some way. I shouldn't be afraid." And there is a helpful fear in Buddhism and unhelpful fear. The most common helpful fear is called the fear of doing wrong, a fear of moral trans-

gression, fear of doing something that will cause us to feel somehow like we've violated our own integrity. So, like, go up against the edge of maybe doing some transgression, hurting someone through our speech, or stealing, or hitting someone or something, and you see, "Oh," and there's a kind of recoiling from that. The kind of fear, "Oh, the consequences of that are not only bad for the other people, but bad for myself." Just a kind of healthy kind of fear that's connected to a conscience, fear of conscience.

In Buddhism, this kind of conscience is called the guardian of the world, considered very important. What prevents people from doing all kinds of horrible things to each other? The unhelpful fear is what many of us are most familiar with. An unhelpful fear is often, in modern psychological terms, connected with imagination. We imagine something that's going to happen in the future, when there is actually nothing to be afraid of actually present in the present.

If some of you are sitting here in this room afraid of mountain lions coming into this hall, you have a very active imagination, and it's your imagination which is producing that fear. So a psychotherapist will point out that a lot of the anxiety that people feel—some psychotherapists will say that anxiety in itself involves our imagination, a projection into the future of what might happen. Some people have stronger imaginations about that than others. But a tremendous amount of difficulty arises for people from how they use their imagination. Imagination being a great tool that opens a lot of wonderful doors for us, but also closes others, especially with the help of fear.

There are many things to be afraid of. There is a fear of pain, of separation, of loss, of rejection, of failure, of solitude, of death, of strangers, of walking alone at night, of going to cities, going into the suburbs, going into the countryside, fear of illness, fear of food, fear of different kinds of foods, fear of others in all kinds of ways, fear of heights, fear of ourselves, fear of fear. I read once that some people defined anxiety as the fear of fear. I don't know if that works, but that was an interesting idea. At least the fear of fear for some people is quite debilitating.

Then there's also a kind of fear concerning other people. Some parents have the fear for their children, or children have fear for their parents, wanting their parents' well-being, especially as the parents get older. Perhaps when my son was younger, not even yet two and a half or something, three, he seemed to have a little bit tuned in to death earlier than most young children, and at some point, he was concerned that his parents were going to die before him or something, you know? That was a fear of his, fear for your parents, fear of loss. There's a fear for our friends or family, fear for our country, fear for the state of the world.

There's a lot of things to be afraid of in the world we live in, and people carry a lot of fear. There are people I know now who will turn on the radio to listen to the news to find out if there's been some terrorist attack. There's a kind of thing, carrying anxiety with them, and they find out to make sure nothing's happened. Any of you do that? I've talked to people who do that, open the newspaper with some trepidation in a way that maybe I didn't do two years ago.

So what are the benefits and what are the costs? What are the harms of being afraid? Are there times when it's useful to be afraid, and times when it gets in our way? It's pretty easy to think of situations where fear might be useful, and the kind of things people say is, "Oh, it's good to be afraid of a big truck coming barreling down at you when you're in the middle of a street crossing the road," or "a good thing to be afraid of mountain lions when the mountain lion's actually there," or "good thing to be afraid of heights, you know, if you're standing with your toes over the edge of Half Dome."

Though I've also heard that maybe that kind of fear is overrated, because in a situation of great danger, where there's actually real danger, some people report that they don't get—they're not afraid at that time. They seem to know what to do. Something clicks, and they somehow do the right thing, and afterwards they're afraid. So the justification that fear is useful because it keeps us kind of on our toes, or keeps things, you know—maybe that's good, but we have to look at it a little bit lightly because often when there is real danger, the system seems to click in a way, and maybe what's required is not constant fear, but constant mindfulness.

Be more mindful and vigilant. Be aware. At present, in the teachings of the Buddha, mindfulness is considered to be a protecting force. It's a function. One of the functions of mindfulness is to guard us, guard the person who is mindful. What are the costs of fear? What are the problems of fear?

Probably all of you can feel in your own body and your shoulders, your stomach, on your stress level, the cost that fear has. Fear certainly can be inhibiting. We can hold back. In that form, it can be a lost freedom. Maybe we are free to some degree to act or to speak in certain ways, but we're afraid to, and so we hold. We don't even exercise our freedom.

It can cost lost relationships. When we don't even create or build relationships because we're afraid of being in relationships, it can cost us love. I've known people who've been afraid to love because of the pain that's potentially possible. It is in the disappointment of love that can happen in various ways. People become closed. They shut down because they are afraid.

They get stuck.

Chronic fear creates a tremendous amount of stress on the whole system. But it also pre-disposes us to be more afraid, to be afraid again, to walk around being afraid. One of the interesting things that happens with people when they meditate a lot, especially like you go on retreat, is we begin tracking our mental processes, seeing much more clearly what's going on. We're not being so distracted by entertainment, by friends, all things we have to do and all kinds of things, and you just really see what's going on in your mind. Some people then become really surprised at how pervasive their fear is.

I've had people come to me and say, "I had no idea how pervasive my fear was. I'm always afraid. It's a very subtle level, but it's always there operating, always there, kind of vigilant and concerned and worried about something, and not always sure what I'm worried about. I'm just worried, you know. It's always there kind of hovering in the background—chronic fear." Oh, another benefit of fear, which almost arises together with unhelpful fear.

Almost anything which is unhelpful in Buddhism can become helpful if you know how to pay attention to it. Isn't that great? That's why sometimes we talk about using everything as compost. You can compost anything. And fear is—on retreat, for example, you tell me one of the safest places you're ever going to be sitting in, some of these Buddhist retreats, and people come there, and you talk about how safe it is.

You know, they leave their wallets on the ground, and it's there when you come back. Or someone collects it, and now people don't lock their doors. I've had people come and tell me, "This is the first time I've ever been in an environment where I felt so safe. Here I didn't have to feel like I had to lock my door when I came and left any time." It's a quiet as well as a totally safe environment, though Spirit Rock does have mountain lions, and people have seen them out there, and it's one of the environments where I've seen people terrified.

People have come to the teachers, asking for help because they are really pale and sweating and having panic attacks, are completely petrified. And you know, it's a safe environment. The fear arises in this safe environment. Why is fear there? The strength of the fear that we have, the strength of the fear we have that comes from imagination, imagining things or anxiety—the greater the strength of the fear, the greater the opportunity is to go into the fear and understand some very deep attachment or holding pattern, some very deep aspect of who we are that needs to be transformed, that can be transformed.

It's almost like fear is showing us our growing edge. One of the benefits of tuning into your

fear is to see, “Oh, this is my growing edge. This is where I can—this is where I should tune into and pay attention.” So then the question is, how do we practice with fear? How do we tune into it? How do we compost our fear? How do we bring it in? Where’s the compost bin? What do we do with it?

I think the first thing is a willingness to be present for it. That’s like ninety percent of it. Fear is often something we’re not willing to be present for, this kind of running away from fear. Fear itself is a message sometimes to run away or close down or shut down, but to be willing to be present for it, to be willing to stop for it, to see it, not to turn away from it.

It’s said in the Discourses that before the Buddha was enlightened, he made a vow that if fear arose in his practice, he would continue doing whatever he was doing until he saw through the fear. So if he was doing sitting meditation, he would just sit until the fear somehow passed. If he was doing walking meditation, he would walk until fear passed. So somehow he would just be with it, look at it, stay with it, with the fear. So willingness to see it as a subject worthy of attention and investigation.

This is counterintuitive, I think, to many of us. It can be counterintuitive to go towards the pain, to go towards the fear and actually look at it much more clearly and deeply. What happens, we learn, is that often enough, focusing and observing fear will disarm it. The greater skills you have in learning to focus and observe, to be observant of what’s going on, probably the greater the disarming effect the practice will have on your fear. One of the things that I’ve found very helpful with fear, which is a classic fear—nothing to do—is in observing it, is to name it.

Sometimes when I’m afraid, I’m sitting in a conversation with someone, and for some reason I’m starting to feel a bit anxious or afraid in the conversation. For some reason or other, I can be aware of it. I know it’s there. But if I, in my mind, name it, “Oh, this is fear. Here it is—fear.” There’s that naming of it actually becomes a more fully embodied or more full acknowledgment of it.

It’s like truth stating—to state what it is makes it much more disarms it, or going it clearly, kind of, I see it more clearly then, or hold it, or I feel it more, you know? It’s like, “Oh, there it is.” So naming it—just “fear” or “anxiety.” Name it. Naming it when it’s there. Naming it a few times, “Oh, here it is. Fear, anxiety.” Once a fear has been acknowledged, once we stop and look at it and are willing to look at it, then there’s a number of different approaches a person can do around the fear, different strategies a person might have.

One of them might be to realize that maybe it's not helpful to pay attention to your fear any more. Sometimes fear gets under a loop that creates panic attacks. If you feel yourself kind of going into one of these loops, then perhaps the wise thing is not to pay attention to the fear any more, but to do something that breaks the trance, that breaks the cycle. But, you know, if you really have learned to stop and pay attention to the fear enough so you can see that, then perhaps you can have a wise relationship to it.

Otherwise, things you can do around fear is simply continue being aware of it. There doesn't have to be any further strategies of trying to fix it or manipulate it or go through it. Just simply, "Oh, here it is, and I'm going to hold it in my awareness however long it's going to be here." Remember that awareness and love are very closely connected. So you bring awareness to something like fear. It's like bringing awareness, maybe even with a little mantra which says, "It's OK. It's OK."

I remember Joseph Goldstein once saying that if a fearful five-year-old shows up, you don't try to say, "No, stop being afraid or go away until you are not afraid," or "I don't like you because you are afraid." You know, that just wounds upon the wound. What you do is you tell the five-year-old, "Oh, it's OK. It's OK." Sometimes we need to do that for ourselves, to our own fear, just to hold it very gently in awareness.

Maybe I have this mantra: "It's OK. It's OK." But it doesn't have to be even with mantra, simply holding things with awareness and learning how to hold it without being for or against it, without trying to do something with it, without hating it, without fighting it. Because one of the things that happens is that if we fight our fear, if we hate our fear, we are actually fighting and hating part of ourselves. Generally, that's not a very useful strategy for most of us.

So can we find a way not to be at war with ourselves, to have a non-violent approach to what we see within ourselves, to see our fear? We simply hold it in awareness—just doing that can be phenomenally healing, though it's not healing necessarily that quickly. That requires patience. Another strategy around fear is to learn to relax around it, to find some way to relax the body, relax something. Sometimes, for example, if the stomach is tense, you're afraid, relax the stomach or relax the shoulders, or relax different parts of your body.

If relaxation of the body is available, it can have a big impact on taking the sting away from the fear. Somehow, when the body is tense, there's a way in which we become less conscious when the body is tense and holding, and we become more conscious as we learn to relax the body. So finding ways of relaxing the body in relationship to the fear. One of the classic ways of doing that is to breathe deeply, have long exhalations. In panic attacks, they teach people

to breathe, don't they?

But there are other ways of relaxing besides physical relaxation. For Buddhists, or someone who has a deep kind of heartfelt connection to the Buddhist tradition, taking refuge is a form of relaxing, of taking refuge in that which you can deeply trust. So finding that which you can really deeply trust and can rest there, let that make it easier to be with the fear. If you are taking refuge in something deeply you trust—taking refuge in the Buddha, the *Dhamma*, *Saṅgha*, taking refuge in the practice. For me, there are times when situations are very challenging, and I don't know how to respond.

I don't know what to do. Sometimes, even as a teacher, that's the way—sometimes people come on retreat, mostly on retreat, but sometimes outside, with a very difficult personal circumstance, and I don't know. It's not always so clear to me what to do. It's not always so clear for me what I could offer, or what to do, or how to help the situation. But I trust the practice, and so I'll try to practice the best I can in that situation.

Which means being present to the situation, being present to what's going on within me and with the other person, being honest about what's going on, being mindful, hopefully, being compassionate, hopefully not being in opposition to anybody or what's going on. Over and over again, I find that the practice somehow finds its way in these situations. So for me, that practice—by taking refuge in the practice, in the Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Saṅgha*—is helpful in situations sometimes where I might be afraid. Compassion is another form of relaxing or holding fear: to feel compassion for oneself, compassion for the situation, to meet the situation, meet ourselves, meet our suffering in a compassionate way. Remember the resource of compassion in the midst of fearful times.

One of the ways to feel compassion is to realize the universality of fear. Many of us will take our fear so personally. It's just about me, myself, and mine. It's my fear. It's my situation. It's not even personal sometimes, the fear. It's a universal aspect of being a human being.

If we realize the universal aspect of it, sometimes it can be easier to be more compassionate, more open to it, not be oppressed by it, not feel like it's a personal failure. Another strategy around fear, which is one that is often taught in Southeast Asia in the Buddhist circles there, is to strengthen the mind. The primary way of strengthening the mind is through developing a concentrated mind. Here in the West, in the teachings in the West, there's much more of a psychoanalytic or analytical kind of approach. "Let's go into it and understand it really well." That's almost like there's therapy ongoing in understanding it.

But in Asia, where they don't have very strong therapeutic, psychotherapeutic, or psychological approaches to the practice, there's a very strong emphasis on kind of avoiding it—in a sense, knowing it's there, of course, but then trying to develop a strong enough concentration so that you override the fear. There are always wonderful stories then of monks and perhaps nuns who would go out into the forest and sit there intentionally waiting for the mountain lions to come—actually, it's the tigers. And there are great stories, at least the ones who survived them, you know, they will write about it, and how great it was, and how they sat there, and they closed their eyes, and could feel the breath of the tiger, and that's—well, they say, “No, this is how I'm going to die.”

“Then let me die, and I'm going on. So let me go. The best thing is, I'm going to die anyway. I might as well die in the *Dhamma*.” So they would just kind of zero in on the breath, and just release, be focused, and try to develop that concentration, and then feel very happy with themselves when their concentration on the breath became strong enough, it overrode their fear.

This is a little maybe aside, but there's a wonderful English Tibetan monk by the name of Ajahn Sucitto. He's kind of like the second most senior monk in England after Ajahn Sumedho. Some years ago, he did a pilgrimage in India. He was going to walk around India, and he was going to walk in Bihar. Bihar, which is where Bodhgayā is, where a lot of important Buddhist sites are, where the Buddha is enlightened. Now, that particular countryside around there is known for its banditry, and so it's not the kind of place you usually want to go out at night, and it's not the kind of place you want to go out at night by yourself.

But he was a Buddhist monk, and he felt that he was protected. So he had an attendant with him, a layman, and they were walking around in Bihar after night or walking by themselves. Sure enough, the local bandits showed up and confronted them, I think, with long swords or something, and certainly with weapons of some sort or other. Ajahn Sucitto just stood there very calmly, and apparently said or thought to himself, “This is, again, at least a good way of dying, I suppose.” His attendant ran away, and then from the bushes far away kind of felt bad about it—he was supposed to be the attendant who was helping and protecting his monk. So he ran back and got in a scuffle with the bandits for a while, and then ran away again, bruised, and Ajahn Sucitto—I don't know exactly how the story, what he did literally, but in some way or other, got on his knees or did something, and kind of put his head out, and stayed there, “I'm ready.” These guys were so impressed by this kind of fearlessness of this monk, and so they spared his life.

But the only other thing they spared was his under-robe, which is kind of like a slip, and so everything was taken away from him. Besides the slip, he had to walk into town in the slip. So the Asian way of kind of just developing a strong mind shouldn't be undervalued, because I think sometimes I feel here in the West, some of us at least, some of the messages we get, there's a lot of emphasis on relaxation, letting go, letting go of what you're holding on to, and not a lot of emphasis on developing the qualities of the mind to become stronger and stronger.

That brings me back to Martin Luther King, where he talked about soul force, borrowing a term from Mahatma Gandhi, and where he championed the idea that you don't develop the soul force—you want to rely on it and develop this tremendous inner strength. That your soul force, your truth, and your ability to confront the situations will be greater than the force of the other person's violence. The whole civil rights movement was training a lot of people in how to become strong, developing inner strengths. That changed America. So part of Buddhist practice is not just letting go, but also developing strength—a strength of character, we should say, but strength of concentration, strength of honesty, strength of personal integrity, of virtue, strength of compassion and equanimity, strength of patience.

A lot of different strengths can be developed with practice. The next kind of important strategy, which is very much in line with the mindfulness teachings, is to investigate the fear—so more than just simply hold it in awareness, but really get in there and explore it. What is this fear of mine? How does it manifest? Where? How do I experience it? What goes on when I'm afraid? There are many different things to investigate.

When you investigate fear, I find it very helpful to investigate my fear in my body, and to drop into my body with my fear, and feel what's going on in my body, to feel the sense of tightness or tension or weakness or vulnerability that I might feel in my body when I'm afraid. It's interesting to watch different places in my body that react to fear. Maybe it depends on the kind of fear, and it makes it more interesting—mixed kind of, you know, where is it today? In the chest, or the stomach, or the hands, or the shoulders, or the face, or the jaws, or the lips, or the eyes, or the legs. You know, it can be anywhere, right? One of the values of experiencing fear in the body is it can actually be a lot easier for many people to be present for fear.

When you feel it in your body, it's like the body becomes kind of the place to ground the attention. The body is not another story. The body is not another imaginary idea of what might happen to you. The body, if you know, is much more concrete, and so to drop into the body and feel it, feel the fear in the body, can make it all easier to process it than to hold it,

to bring presence to it. We can also investigate the thoughts around the fear.

We can explore: Is my imagination operating here? Is there really a mountain lion here? Or am I thinking there might be a mountain lion here next Monday because Gil keeps talking about it? I'm sure this means it's not safe to come here next Monday or whatever. You know, you can look at what's going on here. Really stop and really look as honestly as you can. This also is a skill that we develop that becomes stronger over time—the skill to be able to turn the attention to look at our cognitive patterns or beliefs or thoughts.

It builds over time. Can I look and begin investigating, exploring what's going on here? What are my thoughts? What am I thinking? What am I believing here? What are the assumptions underlying this particular fear? Who told me, on what authority do I believe what I believe around this?

Why believe these things? To do a kind of cognitive exploration of this, both silently in terms of mindfulness, but also actively, and with reflections and thoughts and massaging it. What's going on here? One of the great skills that insight develops with mindfulness practice is that you don't have to believe your thoughts. I think people who are uninitiated to the world of self-reflection often—every thought is to be believed. When you realize you don't need to believe your thoughts, you can take them or leave them as you wish. It's very empowering, very freeing.

One of the ideas is that you realize your thoughts are not you. If you don't identify with your thoughts, don't take the “these thoughts are me, define who I am,” then you can have thoughts, various kinds of bizarre thoughts, and then you can't be hooked by them as much. They can just pass through and not cause much problems. One of the realizations is to realize that fear itself doesn't define who you are. Do not equate fear with you. It is not my fear, but the fear can be very freeing sometimes. To realize that, you know, because it's a kind of contraction, a kind of holding around—when it's my fear, also when we have me involved in it, then we take as well to this way.

One of the investigations into fear, to thoughts, the ideas, the assumptions or beliefs around it, is that often we'll discover that part of our fear can be related to our sense of self or self-image: how we want to represent ourselves in the world, how we think we need to be in the world in order to be safe, how we need to show ourselves in the world. Who we need to be—we need to be kind, we need to be smart, we need to be non-revealing, you know? “If I really show people who I am, people are not going to accept me.” This is where the great panic I've seen on retreats arises among some people: to realize that our attachment to self, attaching

to self-image, the attachment to the way in which we're trying to present ourselves to other people and to ourselves is a fiction, and that it needs to be let go of if we want to be free.

It needs to be let go of, and to come up against that edge when you see the possibility of letting go of that particular clinging and not be familiar, not feel safe in that realm beyond self-definition, self-image. We orient ourselves, we organize ourselves in relationship to others and our world through various kinds of ideas that we hold on to and cling to, and we start letting go of those clings, then we don't have the same or any reference points any more, for like, "Who am I?" and "How must I be with people around me?" It can be very frightening until a person gets used to, gets kind of street smarts, and learns to relax, and learns the benefits of taking that great leap beyond self-image and self-representation, self-definition, as a way that we cling to and hold on to.

I remember very well for me the point where I came, where in my practice, I could really clearly see what I needed to do, what my practice was asking me to do, in terms of letting go of certain ways in which I was holding myself in the world, and carrying myself, and being in the world, and talking to people in the world, and not quite being able to do it because I was afraid, "Oh, I can't do that." And, you know, right enough, for now, it took quite a while to go riding that edge and taking little baby steps beyond, and testing the waters, and rushing back, and kind of exploring that.

For me, it was very helpful to be on retreats, because what happens on retreats—these *vipassanā* retreats and silent retreats—there's so little social interaction. Since so much of the sense of self is often related to how we relate to other people, and comparative thinking and all that, it was a very safe place for me to just let go, let go, let go, let go, let go of all these holdings that I had, and find out how to be in a very open, unclinging way, without definition, without needing to be anything for anybody. So I think any spiritual practice that involves personal transformation will sooner or later bring a person up against the edge of fear.

So you should know that. Maybe we should advertise that. You know, we'd have the big sign outside that says, "Insight Meditation Center—Apprentices Come and Be Afraid." I guess no one would come then, but hopefully you have a sense of the great value of "Come and be afraid." The value of doing that, because "come and be afraid" means the possibility of potential interference is to go beyond it, to learn how to go through it, to resolve it, to not have it stand in the way, either because it goes away, which it can, or because it no longer has a sting.

Learn how to act in the world and act freely in spite of it, without its bothering us because

we're not grabbed by it. So I would challenge you in various ways here today as we end. One way is to challenge you all to stop and pay more attention to your fear, give it more serious attention, and even the subtle fears that arise, because what happens on retreat is that people say, "Oh, it was always so subtle. I didn't really notice it in daily life. But it's so pervasive and so central to how my whole personality, or how I see myself in the world, how I act, is treating it." Tune in to the subtlety of your fear.

The other thing I challenge you to do is to question the assumption that fear, your fear, is helping to keep you safe. If it's not helping to keep you safe, then you should be afraid of it. Then, you know, maybe it doesn't have much real important function. Remember, the Buddha said that mindfulness is the great protector. And then please remember compassion. Have compassion for other people who are afraid, and have compassion for yourself as you realize how much unhealthy behavior in the world arises from people who are afraid, how much of the violence we see in the world arises because people are afraid.

Hopefully, as we begin to honestly face our fear, we'll understand other people at the level of their fear, maybe in ways they don't even understand. So we can be more compassionate to the suffering of even the people who produce, who perpetuate violence in this world of ours. Oh, and certainly compassion for ourselves. The world needs people who are fearless, and the world needs people who are compassionate. What better role model for compassion and fearlessness than Martin Luther King.

So may we all take the best of his example and let that inspire us as we go forth in our practice, in our lives. I hope that this has been a helpful talk. If any of it has not been helpful, leave it here. And also try to have fun with your fear. See if you can enjoy it, enjoy practicing with it, investigating it enough. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.