

Guided Meditation: Gazing Peacefully on Fear

Gil Fronsdal

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So I'm running a little late, uncharacteristic here, and a lot to do from last night and still catching up here at IMC with different things.

So one of the great human experiences that both protects us and harms us is fear. And fear in Buddhism is not seen kind of categorically as somehow a form of clinging or craving or grasping. It's treated very differently than things like greed and hatred. But it's something to become wise about and to see and to learn to practice with. And fear is one of the things that interferes with our capacity to love. But fear is something that needs, in order to love, we have to learn to, in a sense, love the fear, to be wise about it, if it's really something important to be afraid of, to listen to it and learn from it.

But a lot of fear is an anxiety and involves imagination of things which are not imminent. That involves a prediction, a fantasy about the future sometimes, about ourselves. But even when fear is real and we have to function, how do we live with fear and how do we work with it so there can be love instead? And one of the ways with mindfulness is to be able to gaze upon fear steadily and peacefully, to hold it in a peaceful gaze, so that the way we see is we're not seeing with fear. The way that we know, the knowing is not afraid. The way we sense and feel in the body, the sensing is not afraid.

We might be sensing fear, but the movement of sensing, the movement towards turning to sensing, turning to allow ourselves to feel it, there's something there deep inside. But how we approach, how we attend, how we accompany things, we find a place where we can be still and gaze upon it peacefully, gaze upon it steadily, gaze upon it maybe courageously, maybe gaze upon it with love.

So to assume a meditation posture and to begin by being caring and careful about your posture. Adjust, move, rock back and forth, forward and back. As a way of offering to yourself a

steady and steady presence, a way of being here that's not identified with anything that is how we feel, how we are. Of course we are different ways and all kinds of things, not to deny that, but what we offer, the care, the engagement, the accompanying here with the posture is not defined by how we are, how we feel.

And to gently close the eyes and to see if you can feel or allow for a steady presence in the body to steady yourself. To steady yourself with the pull of gravity, where you feel the weight of your body against a chair, a cushion, a mattress, steady against a surface that offers stability. And then to become aware of what it's like in your body for the body to be breathing. And as you're aware of the breathing, can you both have a steady attention, steady accompanying that's not defined by the breathing, that's not reactive to breathing, doesn't have an agenda with the breathing? Is there some within you, a way that you're aware, you know, you sense and feel?

The breathing, that you don't interfere with it, you don't react to it, a steady allowing, a steady presence. And if you can't do that, that's okay. But don't be defined by that. Don't be reactive to that. Instead, look around and find where in your body, where in your mind, there also is a calm awareness, calm, steady awareness that's going to accompany you, keep company with the breathing.

One of the tools of a hospital chaplain is that when they're sitting with someone who's quite sick or maybe even dying, they'll match the speed and manner of breathing of the sick person. And they accompany the person with their own breathing in a steady, continuous way. And is there some way that as you're with your breathing, steady attention, that you can relax the thinking mind? An agitated thinking mind can feel unsettled, almost like there's an upward movement. A calm mind settles, almost as if the thinking mind relaxes into the pull of gravity.

The mind can settle. It can settle and rest on the waves of breathing in and out, resting with that place within, where awareness is steady, soft, where awareness is calm, where awareness itself doesn't identify itself, define itself by what is known.

And then as you're breathing, as you're accompanying your breathing, allow your breathing to accompany yourself, any fear you have, any anxiety, or any other way that emotionally is difficult to be present, and gently offer a steady awareness of fear, anxiety, where the awareness is not defined with the fear. You don't identify it, identify with it, but you simply steadily gaze upon the fear, with eyes that are not afraid, with knowing that's a knowing, a mindfulness that's not afraid, not being defined by the fear or identified with it. See if you can find a way to gaze upon it, a way to feel it, to know it, that you meet your own fear with that part

inside of you that is not afraid, gently, lovingly, feeling the fear in the body, where the tension or the holding or the activation is. And let there be a non-reactive awareness of the body's sensations of fear. Breathing with it, allowing the body to relax while the gaze is steady and calm.

It's okay to be afraid. It's okay to feel the way you are. Sit in the middle of it. Be still and gaze upon it kindly. By not being identified with our emotions, defined by our emotions, limited by them, there is more room for love, for care, to be still and gaze upon everything kindly, in particular, to gaze upon fear kindly.

And as we come to the end of this sitting, to whatever degree you can, even modestly, see if you can rest on an inner stillness, settle in to a place deep within where there's a comfortable stillness. And from that stillness, to gaze out across the lands with kindness, with your mind's eye, sensing, imagining, looking across the world to people locally and far away, people in all kinds of states of well-being and challenges and suffering, all kinds of people who do not need you to be reactive, to be caught and identified and defined by your feelings. They don't need that. What they need is basic human kindness. Be still and gaze upon all beings with kindness.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be safe. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings know peace. May all beings be free, free of all suffering. And may we have a way of gazing upon the world, the way we see and know, that at least doesn't contribute to more suffering. May we gaze upon the world kindly. Thank you.