

SUNLIGHT ON SHADOWS: Embracing Great Compassion

Meditation 19

Transforming Fear

Start with pure motivation and then look at the presence of fear in your mind. Does fear underlie whatever other emotion you may be aware of? Whether you're feeling upset, angry, prideful, or any other strong emotion, ask yourself if fear is present as well. Is there fear in your response to an onslaught of things to deal with? Is there fear under pride or other compensating emotions?

If you're able to see fear, examine its presence in your mind. If you're not feeling fear right now, evoke a time when you were. Before exposure to bodhicitta practice, how did you respond to your fear? What were the mechanisms you used to deal with it? Did you become aggressive, withdrawn, shut down, or try to avoid it through busyness?

Then ask yourself if whatever you did in response to your fear was effective in overcoming it. Did it purify or transform it? Did it allow you to create benefit? Did it give you more confidence? Has it worked for you as an ongoing strategy?

Next, as you let yourself be aware of the presence of terror or dread in your own mind, become equally aware of its presence in the minds of others. Think of others you know who share your fears, and make the wish that their fear be evaporated by your own, so they never again have to experience it. Wish, as well, that their suffering be contained within your own, so they never again have to experience it themselves. Then let your mind rest.

Next, think of others who share similar anxieties—those you know as well as those you've only heard of or can imagine. Again, make the wish that their anxiety be contained within your own, so they never again have to experience it, and then let your mind rest.

Allow yourself to be aware of the presence of fear in your personal life, in your community, and in the world. With the intention to free all beings from fear, make the aspiration that the suffering of all beings be contained within your own, and that, by your own experience of fear, no one else ever need experience it. Then rest the mind.

Keep expanding the scope of your meditation—including more and more beings who are afraid due to different and varying circumstances—until eventually you're including all beings, because no one has ever known a life without fear. Then rest the mind for as long as it's genuinely restful.

When thoughts or emotions stir once again, think of everyone else dealing with similar habits, and then again rest the mind. At the end of your practice session, dedicate the merit.

This meditation can be repeated with whatever other emotion is present in your mind.