

Inviting Fear (or anything else) excerpts

Ajahn Amaro guides us through a meditation on fear and teaches us to tame it with attention.
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...Invite it in—when we send out invitations we can be a little better prepared for who shows up at the party....Fear is not the enemy—it is nature’s protector; it only becomes troublesome when it oversteps its bounds.

...so it’s not held as “My big fear problem” but rather “Here is fear that has come to visit.”...

Begin by sitting quietly and focusing the attention as clearly as possible on the present moment, using a simple tranquil object to establish equilibrium—the natural rhythm of the breath is good for this purpose for most people, moving in the empty space of the heart.

Where do I feel the fear? What is its texture?

Is it hot or cold?

Is it painful? Rigid? Elastic?

We are not necessarily looking for verbal answers to all these questions; rather, we are just trying to find the feeling, accept it completely, and not add anything to it.

“Fear feels like *this*.”

Many find that fear locates itself primarily in the solar plexus, sitting like a tightened knot in the belly. Just feel it, know it, open the heart to it as much as possible. We’re not trying to pretend or force ourselves to like it, but it is here—right now it’s the way things are.

Let this process run for at least ten minutes, then consciously let it wind down—not suppressing it, but, as when it’s time for guests to leave, make the hints, and let the event wind down naturally. It might take a while, but that’s fine; just let it run out at its own pace. During this time, reestablish the breath as a focal point, and use the exhalation to support the fading of the fear-wave.

Once it has come to an end, focus the attention on the feeling of the breath, moving as before in the empty space of the heart. Let the heart be clearly conscious that the fear cycle has come to cessation: it arose out of emptiness, it returned to emptiness. It was florid and impactful in its appearance, but the overarching quality, now having been seen directly, is its transiency.

Now we know ...

The effect of this practice is to train the heart, so that when the next wave of fear arises, from whatever quarter, something in us knows. The intuitive wisdom faculty is awakened and recognizes: “I know this scenario—don’t panic—it looks impressive, but it’s just the fear reaction.” It becomes vastly easier to avoid being sucked into the vortex of anxiety.

The feeling is not pleasant, but the heart knows, with absolute certainty: “It’s only a feeling.” And if action needs to be taken, then that action will be motivated by wisdom, kindness, and sensitivity to time and place rather than by neurotic reactivity and habit.