



# THE LOTUS BUD

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## *Dear Sangha,*

This edition of *The Lotus Bud* is concerned with fear, an emotion that we all experience to varying degree; some people are crippled by it, others overcome it, but we all must face it. Placing our fear in the spotlight of mindfulness can be a wonderful and important practice on the path to peace and contentment.



Image by Romanorum animi

## *Facing our fear*

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?

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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.

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.



Image by ~.Rick.~

Fearlessness is not only possible, it is the ultimate joy. When you touch non-fear, 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. 🙏

*Extract from Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

“Let everything happen to you  
Beauty and terror  
Just keep going  
No feeling is final”

– *Rainer Maria Rilke*

“Let me not pray to be  
sheltered from dangers,  
but to be fearless in  
facing them.

Let me not beg for the  
stilling of my pain, but  
for the heart to conquer it.”

– *Rabindranath Tagore*

## The gesture of fearlessness and the armour of loving-kindness

I think this was the first Buddhist story I heard when I began practicing thirty years ago. A fierce and terrifying band of samurai was riding through the countryside, bringing fear and harm wherever they went. As they were approaching one particular town, all the monks in the town's monastery fled, except for the abbot. When the band of warriors entered the monastery, they found the abbot sitting at the front of the shrine room in perfect posture. The fierce leader took out his sword and said, "Don't you know who I am? Don't you know that I'm the sort of person who could run you through with my sword without batting an eye?" The Zen master responded, "And I, sir, am the sort of man who could be run through by a sword without batting an eye."

It took me many years to warm up to that story. I thought it inconceivable that I could undergo such a thing without batting an eye. If they were doing startle tests when I was young, I'm pretty sure I would have failed miserably. Another reason I didn't like the story was that it seemed so offhanded about life. I thought the story meant that it was all the same to the Zen master whether he lived or died.

And it's not all the same to me. I'd much rather live. 🧘

I don't actually know whether the story is meant to imply that the Zen master had so much insight into the absolute that he really didn't discriminate between living or dying, but I don't think that matters so much. The point, as I understand it now, is that he understood there was nothing at all for him to do. In the face of being killed, you have two possibilities. You can fight with the moment, either physically or mentally, and create more turmoil in your mind. Or you can say, this is simply what's happening. That's what happens when something as final as death is in sight. The mind gives up its usual hope for another reality, and when it gives up that hope, the mind relaxes. It doesn't have to look for something else to do. So even though it is the end, it's without suffering.



It was very important for me to learn the difference between suffering and pain. Suffering is the extra turmoil in the mind over and above the pain of body and mind. The absence of that tension is the absence of suffering. The Zen master could let go of that tension. Even those of us who haven't been doing decades of practice can let go of that tension when we are faced with the inevitable. This is not theoretical. I have seen this with friends of mine who are dying of cancer. The gesture of fearlessness is a simple gesture of accepting whatever there is. It's not the "whatever" of adolescence, which combines "couldn't care less" with a little bit of aggression. This "whatever" is the whatever of truth. Things happen because other things have happened. Karma is true. This is what's happening in this moment. It can't be other than this. This is what it is, and that truth is always soothing. Fearlessness also comes from benevolence and goodwill in the face of whatever oppresses you. You are afraid, but instead of fighting what faces you, you embrace it and accept it—you develop loving-kindness as a direct antidote to fear. 🧘

*Sylvia Boorstein is a co-founding teacher at Spirit Rock Meditation Center  
Source: <http://www.shambhalasun.com>*

## WHO WE ARE

The Communities of Mindful Living are inspired by the Buddhist teachings of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (pictured).



We aspire to live fully in each moment for the peace and happiness of ourselves and all beings. We meet regularly to observe the art of mindful living and to foster a supportive community of practitioners. 🧘

## Contacts

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## Coming events...

We would love to hear from you. We want the The Lotus Bud to be a place for sharing our experiences and building the Sangha; so why not write a short piece about your experiences with mindfulness ?

Email: [cbarker@uow.edu.au](mailto:cbarker@uow.edu.au)

Post: Chris Barker, Faculty of Arts,  
Uni of Wollongong, 2500

## Reading bell

As you read this magazine you have an opportunity to go back to the present moment.

You will notice a bell: 🧘 throughout the magazine.

When you come to each bell, you may like to stop reading, clear your mind and return to your breath before continuing.

## Our main activities

Wednesday Mindfulness Meditation  
Sydney, Inner West

We welcome all to come join us for meditation practice. We meet at 7:30 pm each Wednesday at the Buddhist Library, Church St, Camperdown, Sydney.

Meditation and monthly Mindfulness Days at Canley Heights

Southwest Sydney - 7.30pm  
Friday Night Meditation and Monthly Mindfulness Days.  
49 Ferngrove Rd Canley Heights.

Mindfulness Days at Nhap Luu (Entering the Stream)  
Meditation Centre  
221 Maria's Lane  
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