



RIVER DHAMMA

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Dealing with Fear and Worry

by Ajahn Punnadhammo

All of our mental states are insubstantial and void. And yet, as we all know, they can cause us very real suffering. One of the most painful, even debilitating, can be fear. In the last analysis, fear is intimately related to the sense of Self. Fear is a sense of a perceived threat to the Self. The path to freedom from fear is the abandoning of the idea of Self. The Self is itself just a mental construct, and as such is also insubstantial and devoid of any reality. There's nothing there, never has been and never will be. So why be afraid of imagined threats to an imaginary construct? The more a person can get free from the idea of Self, the more a person can experience relative fearlessness. An arahant, being totally liberated from even a subtle idea of Self, is also completely without fear.

Fear is also a future-based mind-state. It is a movement away from the here-and-now into an imaginary and therefore unreal future. Being here-and-now, and applying the skill of insight, we can look at fear as just an object. Like any mental state, if we can detach and look at it objectively, it loses all its power to cause suffering. The same advice applies here as with any mental state whatsoever; don't take it so seriously. It's just an impermanent, insubstantial process. It's not you and it's not yours.

The Buddha gave some specific advice for dealing with fear. He said that when "fear and trembling" come upon a meditator, he should not change posture until the fear passes. If fear and trembling come upon one while sitting, he should remain sitting until the fear passes. Likewise if standing or walking. This can be understood as practical advice for the meditator; not to try and escape the fear by running away from it with a change of postures. ▶▶

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Arrow River Forest Hermitage welcomes visitors. Prior notification is necessary if you would like overnight accommodations. Retreats must be scheduled in advance with Ajahn Punnadhammo. Retreatants are required to abide by the 8 precepts. Guests are required to abide by the 5 precepts.

It can also be taken metaphorically. A change of postures need not be physical. One can try and escape with mental fidgeting as well. This points to the important idea that the counter to fear is calm. Remaining still physically and mentally, we can watch the fear and see it as marked with the three characteristics of suffering, impermanence and emptiness.

Calm is also the counter to worry, fear's annoying little brother. Worry is a kind of fear which uses the energy of the thinking process, (vitaka-vicara) to seize control of the mind and make it run around in pointless loops. The first rule for getting out of the worry loop is to understand that you can never think your way out of it. Remember worry feeds on thought. The desire-mind contributes by imagining that the problem can be solved by coming up with a rational solution. This does not work.



Breath meditation (anapanasati) is given as the specific antidote to worry. Relax the mind into the purely bodily sensation of the breath. Don't try and fight the thought process, this also gives it strength. Just peacefully let it fade into the background and don't pay attention to it. Remember, don't take your mental states seriously. Like all the others, worry is void, impermanent and unreal.

Know that both fear and worry are right here, generated in the mind and passing away into the void. You cannot escape fear and worry by trying to change the outer world. There is no security in samsara. You can't escape by running away either. The way out is down and through. Finally, remember to keep calm, because everything is out of your control.■

❁ New Computer ❁

Ajahn Punnadhammo's computer is showing signs of age. We are raising funds for a new computer. Our goal is to raise \$2000 for a new Apple PowerBook G4. The computer is an essential part of Arrow River's operation, allowing contact with members, friends, potential stewards and visitors, other Buddhist organizations etc. all over the world.

If you wish to contribute send a cheque to the treasurer specifying that it is for the new computer, see page 4 for information on donations.

Time

by Chad Trottier

Time. We waste so much time trying to make more time for ourselves. The back-breaking, frantic pace of the modern world is kept up mercilessly in the name of acquiring supposedly great time-savers. All the extra work is done for the sake of a more convenient world. Yet, as I have all too often seen, people are spent from the increasingly demanding hours of the workday to acquire and maintain these "convenient time-savers." Whether it is their choice or not to keep the western machine running their store of energy is too depleted to enjoy what little spare time they have. As usual the easy solution eludes us.

The best way to save time is to simplify - and Arrow River is about as simple as it gets. I feel inexpressibly grateful to have reaped the untold benefits from a rare and extended visit here.

Arrow River not only provides the precious external time of an open schedule, but encourages one through spiritual teaching, solitude and natural surroundings. You can seemingly transcend time altogether on an internal plane. Of course, in time saving, as with everything, mind states play a critical role. When we are worried the minutes can seem like agonizing hours. When we are having fun all we can say is, "Well, where did the time go?"

And unless it is experienced, one can't imagine the seamless beauty of steady present moment awareness where the flow of life becomes truly timeless. The still peace, the silencing of the constant barrage of mental noise and the fearless letting go. The predetermined conditioning to stand naked in the present, with an unburdened consciousness allowing what comes to speak for itself. This kind of time has immeasurable worth and again is due to simplification, now at the level of the mind.

During my stay I've been blessed with about four months of meditation retreat time, and was continually startled to discover how much time I'd previously spent squandering away the precious gift of consciousness.

And I've realized that I want something, something in the end that everyone wants. Peace. And what I want is not easy to come by, it's something true and unshakable. If I had it, there would be nothing in the universe that could break me. I ask myself now if it still sounds so easy, to be invincible in a way that I never imagined invincibility to be, and to understand the task before me to be grand if I am still interested.

I know "I" will never be peaceful. That is only a delusion. Nor will peace own me. Peace just is. To be at peace I can only die, not the death that inevitably takes us all, but the death of the concept of me. The thing for which I fight day and night to keep satisfied, the thing which demands constantly to be the center of the universe, the thing in me that craves. I have already sacrificed my life for that. It has taken all my attention away from what is just behind the peace that is. And now I should let it die.

Now I've run off about me but my point is not to boast about a few small realizations I've had, ones you've heard about before. I recognize that they are nothing when compared to the real truth. My point is

not to decry the worth of the modern world or other lifestyles. My point is simply to encourage anyone interested in Arrow River to come experience it. It is a place wholly devoted to giving the priceless time necessary to develop a practice that leads to personal liberation. So come, stare deep into the pristine blue sky, become as endless as the sound of the rushing river, feel the beat from the heart of this wild land - and breathe. Still your mind and give yourself time.

Thanks to everyone and especially to one inspirational monk, Ven. Ajahn Punnadhammo, who has made my stay possible. I can only do my best to repay the outstanding debt to you all. ■



☸ ARFH Updates ☸

Donations

Donations can be sent to the treasurer at the following address:

Ian Moores
Box 79
4700 Keele St.
Toronto, ON, M3J 1P3

IMPORTANT ► All cheques should be payable to: **Arrow River Forest Hermitage.**

Retreat Reminder

*To provide an introduction to Tranquillity Meditation, the Hermitage invites interested participants to register for a three day retreat, from:
Friday, June 3, 2005, 6:00 pm to Sunday, June 5, 3:00 pm*

There is room for 12 meditators during the Tranquillity Meditation weekend. If you are interested in attending, please complete the **Visitors Form**, which you will find in the *Visiting Arrow River* section of the website. Reviewing the additional information from "what is expected from guests" will help prepare you for your stay.

🔔 **NEW** 🔔

Ajahn Punnadhammo has started a weblog.

Check it out at: <http://my.tbaytel.net/arfh/bhBlog/bhblog.html>

🔔 **Receive River Dhamma By EMAIL** 🔔

Please help us defray printing and mailing costs.

If you wish to receive *River Dhamma* in full colour PDF format by email forward your request to: riverdhamma@sympatico.ca

A special thanks to all those that have already subscribed to the email version.



Mississippi Pilgrimage

Walking on Faith and Kindness. Living with Uncertainty
by Jotipalo Bhikkhu

Do the words "Comfort" and "Luxury" come into your mind when you consider what life in a Buddhist monastery might be like? Probably not. After spending six years at the Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery (which is certainly not a luxurious place) but where there is the near certainty of a daily meal, hot shower and a roof over one's head; the word "comfort" does come into my mind. Especially now, as Austin Stewert and I prepare for a five month pilgrimage, where we hope to walk from New Orleans, Louisiana to Thunder Bay, Ontario.



On March 1, 2005 Austin and I are planning to start the walk in New Orleans. We hope to use small country roads that parallel the Mississippi River and/or Hwy 61, and eventually end up at the Arrow River Forest Hermitage before August 20th. Our intention is to live simply, devote much of our time developing the formal meditation practice, and to live in dependence on the kindness and generosity of those who wish to see us succeed. We plan to dedicate any goodness that arises from this practice to peace, both individual peace for all beings, and World Peace.

The idea to do a long walk has been percolating in my mind for well over a decade, and was firmly established about ten years ago when I read the biography of Peace Pilgrim; who wandered without money or possessions for twenty-eight years teaching and talking about peace. Her life has deeply touched and influenced the direction of my own life. The idea for this particular walk though, started in February of 2003, as the U.S.A. was preparing to invade Iraq.

I was living in Thailand at Wat Pah Nanachat, and discovered they had many books about Peace Walks. Now, as is often the case with junior monks as they approach their fifth years in the robes (and some freedom to move about) I was no exception. Ironically I had all this time to read these books because one of my knees had swelled to the size of a grapefruit and I was unable to walk on the daily alms-round through the local village. Myself and another injured monk, who had a cut on his foot, started working on a plan to do a peace walk all the way around the world! We could barely get around in the monastery and here we were at evening tea, planning our route through the Middle East! We both saw the comedy of our error, and I think the other monk outgrew the fantasy. Unfortunately I didn't.

Besides being a peace walk, the pilgrimage is very much a continuation of the monastic training. I see learning to be at ease with uncertainty will be a major part of our practice. I'm already getting a lot of question like, "How will you be received in the South?" I hear myself respond, "Don't know." "Will people know what you are doing on alms round?" "Don't know." "Where will you sleep?" "Don't know, it's all uncertain." It sounds scary, but in reality there is little one can know for sure. Will you be having dinner at home tonight? You might be planning to, but in fact it's all uncertain.

If your are interested in following the progress (I hope) of the walk, Abhayagiri has set-up a web-page at <http://www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/article/382/>. We plan to update the site at least once a week to keep friends informed of where we are, and how we are doing, maybe posting photos and news articles. ■

A very uncertain itinerary

March 1	New Orleans, LA
April 15	Memphis, TN
May 21	St. Louis, MO
June 30	Dubuque, IA
July 30	Minneapolis, MN
Aug 20	Thunder Bay, ON

Contact: jotipalo@abhayagiri.org

A Reflection

by Forest Sister



I come from near San Francisco, California, a land of ocean, bay, dry hills with scattered oak and low brush, summers that turn the land golden, winters of wet fog and sometimes driving rain. I have seen snow in pictures, on the tops of far-off mountain peaks, and occasionally nearby. One winter, while camping in Death Valley, it snowed an inch or two. It was near -10°C ($+15^{\circ}\text{F}$) and I thought it was very cold. Once I took a lift to the top of a 5000 m. peak in China where the wind was blowing and I nearly froze. But I chose to serve as lay steward at ARFH in the winter, when all my tropical friends said I was crazy. "Canada? In January?" they asked me incredulously. I just nodded.

Now I am in a real winter for the first time. I had read Jack London and considered the Arctic. I read stories of immigrant pioneers on the American prairies in the winter, lost in blinding storms, frozen to death. I brought every warm bit of clothing I owned and bought extra long underwear. Luckily, I am a camper and I've awakened with my tent buried in snow. "It can't be any worse than that," I thought to myself. "There's a cabin and a stove and wood." Indeed, there is a very cozy cabin - much nicer than I had expected. And yes, the snow is falling, a soft silent powder that will fill my boots when I dig my way to the outhouse. There's a foot so far and maybe eventually we will dig deep paths everywhere with white walls on either side.

But, I'm not cold and it's beautiful so far as I stare out of the picture window at a scene I have only imagined from

Christmas cards. Flakes drift down, the bare tree trunks measuring the depth, covering the path to the bird feeder. Clumps of snow collect on the upper surfaces of spruce branches. Later, when a wind rises, they will blow off in miniature storms. My truck is also getting covered, but so what? Soon it will look like all the others here; it won't be a California truck anymore. The intricately woven bare branches of birch and poplar form a fringe against the sky, today lead, tomorrow blue. Deep green spruce mingle, adding color and texture to the forest.

Life is good here if you are ready for it. There are miles and shafts of silence punctuated by daily contact with a small group of friendly people. If you want time to contemplate, relax, read, write, study without interruption - this is a good place. If you are Buddhist, it's even better - a conducive, supportive atmosphere of genuine followers and practitioners, a library of books, images of the Buddha and a sala or altar room. In addition, the lay steward has the responsibility to deal with the outside world represented by Thunder Bay, Ontario and to cook one large meal a day for the community. You can't just sit and meditate all day. But the forest always surrounds you here, in winter buried deep in a soft covering, cut through by icy roads and paths.

I haven't seen this forest in summer, it is probably lush green underfoot with a running stream, flies and mosquitoes humming at your ears. Now it's quiet with a few loyal chickadees and blue jays at the feeder, with footprints of unseen rabbits, squirrels and even moose crossing the meadow area. Now there are no insects, there is no mud. It's soft and clean, untouched snow mottled with tiny hummocks from the uneven snow fall. The paths are getting buried again and tomorrow I'll try out my snowshoes, old wooden ones like I pictured, pressing down and re-defining the way to the outhouse and the community hall. But now I have water and a pile of fire wood, food enough for our group, a lamp to see by and peace to think about the impermanence of snow, winter and life itself. Everything passes away.

You may call these five skandhas Forest Sister. ■