

## Fears Are True, But Fortunately Not Very True

Written by Nirmala  
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*Q: Recent world events have brought up a lot of fear and frustration for me. It is difficult to deal with the emotions that come up around all of the disaster on the world stage. Accepting these events placidly seems impossible. Can I ask how you are coping and how you would advise handling the fear and sadness that the world situation brings up?*

A: The problem with our fears is that they are all potentially true. Anything we can imagine could happen, so our fears have some truth to them. However, none of our fears have much truth, and most of our fears have a ridiculously small amount of truth to them.

First of all, none of our fears have come true yet. If they had, we wouldn't be fearing them anymore! So in that sense, all fear only exists as thoughts in our minds. Fear only exists as the movement of thought and feeling, and that is a very small existence. Yet, we have been taught to focus on our thoughts and feelings. We have been asked repeatedly, "What do you think?" and "What do you feel?" As a result, we pay close attention to the movement of thoughts and emotions in our mind and body: "What do I think about this?" "How do I feel about that?" So even though their actual existence is very slight, thoughts and feelings can seem much more important and true than they really are. We even use the argument, "Well, that's what I think!" to make a point, as if the mere fact that we think something makes it true!

Secondly, even when something we were afraid of happens, it never happens exactly as we imagined. Regarding many of the stories in the news right now, if a worst case scenario were to happen, it is still unlikely that all of the disastrous consequences predicted would actually come true. And who knows, any particularly dramatic episode might actually shift our world into a new and more productive direction. So the specific content of our fears is never a very complete picture of what will or can happen.

Even though our fears are not very accurate or important, they still can contract our awareness. It is this contraction of awareness that allows us to become hypnotized by the media and its fear-producing stories. The contraction of awareness is a kind of hypnosis or trance that fear triggers in us.

With any form of hypnosis, the antidote is awareness. The more aware you become of the experiential quality of your thoughts and fears—how they contract you—the less hypnotized you will be by the content of your thoughts and fears. Thought mostly functions to contract our

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awareness and put us into various trance states. This is not a mistake, but the contraction this causes gets old after a while. Then we naturally feel drawn to experiencing the flow of awareness without any trance-like illusions getting in the way.

Years ago, I studied a form of therapeutic hypnosis. The instructor explained that by understanding more about how hypnotic trances are triggered, we would become less susceptible to them. We would recognize that someone or something was hypnotizing us and then we could choose to follow the hypnotic suggestion or not.

One method for inducing trance is to get someone to focus their awareness. The classic example is getting someone to focus on a swinging object, like a pocket watch. Similarly, the dramatic and extreme images of dire possible future outcomes get us to focus intently on the images on the television. We become hypnotized by these images. Television uses many of the hypnotic techniques I learned. Even more amazing is how our own mind uses those same techniques to shape our own awareness. We have learned what images and thoughts trigger a trance in us, and so we become hypnotized by our own thoughts! This is not a mistake, as consciousness wants to experience every possible state, including the trance state we call fear.

However, at any moment, you can wake up from your fear-induced trances. Notice the contraction of awareness that comes with every fear. This contraction is a sign that your awareness is leaving something out. The more contracted your awareness is, the more expanded your unawareness is! You can wake up from a fear-induced trance by simply noticing what else is true besides the content of your fearful thoughts or by becoming very curious about the feelings and sensations in your body: How true is the content of that thought? What else is true? What else is possible? How do you even know what you are thinking right now? How do you know you are afraid? What sensations are present that let you know you are afraid? Are they actually bad sensations or just different sensations?

Directing your awareness in this way to the mental structures and visceral sensations of the fear can dissolve the fear. Like the highway mirages that disappear as soon as we get closer to them, as you get closer to and more curious about your fears, they tend to disappear. All that has disappeared is a thought or feeling that was shaping your awareness. Without that thought or feeling, your awareness expands again to include more of the truth. It turns out that the biggest truths are the truths of love, divine intelligence, and the mystery and beauty of life. These bigger truths are not very scary at all! At any moment, you can turn away from the television screen or from the “television screen” of your own mind and see what else is here besides your thoughts and fears.

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Personally, I am fascinated by all of this. I occasionally enjoy watching or reading the news and observing the reactions the news can trigger in me and in others. I also enjoy the moments when awareness penetrates into all of this in a new way. For example, as you become more curious about your own fear, you may notice how much of our society is driven by fear. Most political battles are between one set of fears and another set of fears. Neither side can see how their fears limit their view, and a narrow view naturally leads to extreme or imbalanced approaches. The antidote is always more awareness and truth. The truth really does set you free.