

## THE SPEAKING TREE A SHOT OF HOPE

# How To Deal With Fear, Suffering And Death

*THICH NHAT HANH*

Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today.

In Buddhism, dying is important. It's as important as living because birth and death inter-are. The Buddha said, "Anything that is born must die." If there is birth, then there must be death also. If the right is there, the left must be there also. If there is a beginning, then there must be an end.

The true nature of all things is not to be born, not to die, not to arrive and not to depart. If your dear one has just died, you may have a difficult time overcoming your loss. But look deeply. Because we are attached to one of the forms, one of the many manifestations of that person, we suffer and feel sad. The person we love is still there but, in our delusion, we cannot recognise him and say: "He no longer is." We ask, "Where are you? Why did you leave me all alone?"

Our pain is great because of our misunderstanding. Our beloved is manifesting in a different form. If we understand this, then we will suffer less.

To reduce suffering and face our fear, it helps to stabilise the mind through meditation and contemplation. Breathing is the vehicle that carries concentration. It directs your mind to the object of your meditation. Through the awareness of breathing, we begin to direct the mind towards recognising reality.

A chant which is recited daily in Buddhist monasteries goes like this: "Breathing in and out, I know I am of the nature to die; I cannot escape dying.

I am of the nature to grow old; I cannot escape old age. I am of the nature to get sick. Because I have a body, I cannot avoid sickness. Everything I cherish, treasure and cling to today, I will have to abandon one day. The only thing I can carry with me is the fruit of my own action. I cannot bring along with me anything else except the fruit of my actions in terms of thought, speech and bodily acts."

We can recognise this reality and smile. This is the practice of facing our own fear. Fear is always there within us – the fear of getting old, getting sick, dying, or being abandoned by our loved ones. It is human to be fearful and to worry about it.

The Buddha advised us not to suppress these fears but to invite them to the upper level of our consciousness, recognise them and smile at them. Every time your fear is invited up, every time you recognise it and smile at it, your fear loses some of its strength. When it returns to the depth of your consciousness, it returns as a smaller seed. This practice should be done every day, especially when you are feeling mentally and physically strong.

And while practising, if your mind gets distracted, just bring your attention back to your breath.

*Ahimsa Trust represents Thich Nhat Hanh in India. To attend their daily mindfulness meditation practice sessions, visit [www.ahimsatrust.org](http://www.ahimsatrust.org).*

