

## **Make Fear Your Friend, Not Your Jailer**

By Christine Schlattner and Michael Linehan

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There are two kinds of fear. There is the natural, sensible reaction to imminent danger, i.e. actual danger that is in front of us right now. This type of fear can be a great asset. When tapped into and guided, this kind of fear can help ready the body for flight or fight, amping up our senses and giving us the power to do whatever is necessary to escape.

The other type of fear is the gnawing, pervasive anxiety - the fear of the imagined possibility, of parking lots, of taking the dog out in the evening, of an unfamiliar sound. This kind of fear can limit everything you do. By facing into this kind of fear effectively, you can replace it with calm awareness.

We may not even realize that fear is controlling us. We become masters at hiding the little anxieties, nervousness, and uncertainty from ourselves. We learn to brush off uncomfortable emotions with reasons such as "I'm imagining things," "I'm mistaken," or "He didn't mean it in a bad way." Think about it. Aren't there times when you are home alone or in a parking lot when you rush, hoping nothing will happen? And aren't there times when you feel uncomfortable with someone and don't quite know how to take or handle a comment, look or gesture? Wouldn't your life be more enjoyable if such moments didn't bother you so much?

As one woman we know said: "Facing reality gives me a huge sense of relief. I used to be fearful of what could happen to me, of certain environments, situations or people, but I did my best to ignore those fears because I didn't want to be consumed by them. In actuality, I was consumed by fear without really knowing it. I didn't realize what a damper it put on me until I got rid of it, how big a part it played in my life until it left! Imagine. Like always, I am aware, and I am careful, but now I have a plan if I need it. I was only able to make a plan after I faced reality full on. Facing reality gave me knowledge, and knowledge is my weapon. Facing reality is essential to my safety."

Understanding what is really happening and facing it can bring you a new sense of security and peace of mind. It can also help you identify the type of fear that is helping you stay safe and the type that is preventing you from taking advantage of the full range of opportunities your life offers. Once you recognize the difference, you will be prepared to make the wisest choices for yourself.