

# Awake Mind, Open Heart

The Power of Courage and Dignity in Everyday Life

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## A Book Excerpt on Transformation

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"Courage as a warrior depends on getting to know fear. If we ignore fear, we can't go beyond it. Trungpa Rinpoche called it a giant kindling log that we can use to develop a giant fire of fearlessness. The way to develop courage is not to cast out fear, but to find out more about it by looking directly at fear. Until you see what the problem is, trying to get away from the fear just gives the fear more energy. Finding out more about your own fear *is* fearlessness. It *is* the leap you need to take. . . .

"One day while in solitary retreat [the great Tibetan poet-yogi] Milarepa went to gather firewood, and when he came back there were demons in his cave. He shouted at them to go away. He tried everything he knew to scare them, and some of them left. But one of the demons wouldn't leave. He threw sticks at it and tried magic spells. Nothing worked. Finally Milarepa said, 'Okay, make yourself at home! Let's sit down. We'll talk about the teachings. Make yourself comfortable, and have some nettle soup!' And the demon disappeared. Milarepa sang the demon a parting song, which you can write on a piece of paper and use as a slogan for yourself. 'With compassion, I overcome the demons. All blame I scatter to the winds!' This is what we learn to do with our fear. 'Tell me about yourself. I'm genuinely interested. You've come a long way to find me. Have some soup!'

"When our heart is challenged, it's difficult to stay genuine and true and to befriend our problems as they are. We long to go beyond them, instead of examining them to see what the issue really is. Based on our longing, the impulse to move away from our difficulties gets triggered very fast. But Milarepa's advice is not to try to get away from experience. The warrior's discipline is to lean into what frightens you. You can open to the fear or not, and you're choosing to open up. Don't look away. Even if you are afraid, don't run away. Open to what you are feeling. Soften. Then go into the fear. When you do, you experience a shift. You may become aware of feeling cool and alone, and that sense of slightly cold aloneness makes you feel together and realistic. Now you are a 100 percent real person. You are calm from being real. Now you can use your intelligence and your heart, and improvise.

"You've just practiced the warrior's discipline. You went into the fear, and in the process you transcended the obstacle. You came out the other side. The process is like opening a door and going in. The threshold where you were is completely transcended and you find yourself on the other side of fear. You are strengthened and confident. Rinpoche called it a practice of *going in and coming out*. When you go into your fear instead of ignoring it, you find you are already coming out on the other side. Put your awareness in the actual feeling of being afraid. This accomplishes more than 50 percent of the shift. Then the fear dissolves, and you are left with yourself. This is the tenderness. It is a *pragmatic* tenderness. Now you can pick up clues about what to do. Just seeing the obstacle very clearly, just using awareness once you really see the obstacle, your genuine intelligence arises by itself."