

You Do Not Get Smaller Fear. You Get a Bigger You.

Growth is not the shrinking of what frightens you. It is the widening of what can hold it.

There is a picture of the spiritual life that almost everyone starts with, and it goes like this: I am working on myself so that the things that frighten me will stop frightening me. The fear is a stain. Practice is the solvent. Enough practice, and the stain comes out.

I understand the appeal. I lived on that model for years. The trouble is that it makes every recurrence of fear into a report card, and the report card always says the same thing: still failing. So people do the work, feel the fear again anyway, and quietly conclude that they must be doing it wrong, or that they are somehow constitutionally broken in a way other people are not.

They are not doing it wrong. The model is wrong. Here is how I put it at the end of a call this week:

“Fear doesn’t go away, but this part grows around it.”

TIM O. DAVIS — GROUP TEACHING CALL, AUGUST 2026

This part grows around it. That is the whole thing.

Think of a tree that grew up against a fence post. The post does not dissolve. The tree does not spend forty years trying to make the post not be there. The tree gets bigger, and after enough seasons the post is simply a small hard thing inside a very large living body, and it no longer determines the shape of anything.

That is much closer to what happens in a person. The fear stays roughly the size it was. What changes is you. The part of you that can be aware of the fear without becoming it gets stronger and roomier, until one day something arrives that would have flattened you at thirty and you notice it, feel it fully, and remain yourself while it passes through.

I want to be careful here, because this can sound like a consolation prize. It is not. It is a much better deal than the one you were hoping for. If the goal were to eliminate fear, you would need life to cooperate — no illness, no loss, no uncertainty, no one you love ever in trouble. Life does not cooperate. But if the goal is to become large enough to hold fear without being run by it, then nothing outside you has to change for you to be free. That is a freedom nobody can take.

And it explains something people find confusing about their own experience. You can be freaking out and completely stable at the same time. Those are not contradictions; they are two different parts of you, operating at once. The nervous system does what the nervous system does — heart going, hands cold, mind sprinting. And underneath, something is watching, unhurried, not in danger. Most people have felt this. Very few trust it, because they assume that if the fear is loud they must not be centered.

Loudness is not the measure. **Identification is the measure.** The question is never *how much am I feeling* but *am I lost in it*.

So how do you actually grow that part? Not by force. It grows the way muscle grows, through repeated honest contact with load. Every time you stay present with something uncomfortable instead of leaving — through distraction, through a drink, through a story about whose fault it is, through getting very busy — you add a little. Every time you feel the whole wave and do not act from it, you add a little more.

The practical instruction I give is almost embarrassingly small: **stay present, and find one thing that is true.** Not the true interpretation of the situation, which the mind will happily manufacture. One true thing. The chair is holding you. The breath is moving. You are here. When fear has flooded the room with projections about a future that has not happened, a single verifiable present-tense fact is a handhold, and holding it is how you keep your feet.

From that footing you can do the thing that matters to the people around you: you can be shaking and still be useful. You can grieve and still comfort someone. You can be genuinely uncertain about the outcome and still be a steady presence in the room. That is not suppression — you are feeling all of it. It is that you have gotten big enough for all of it to fit.

Stop measuring your progress by how little you feel. Measure it by how much you can feel while remaining yourself.

THE PRACTICE

When fear floods in, do not look for the reassuring interpretation. Find one thing that is verifiably true right now — the breath, the chair, the floor — and hold that. Truth is the handhold; the rest is projection.