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CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA



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Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior

*Great Eastern Sun:
The Wisdom of Shambhala
Selected Writings*

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Conquering Fear

THE GROUND

WHEN WE BRING TOGETHER the ancient spiritual traditions of the West with those of the Orient, we find a meeting point where the warrior tradition can be experienced and realized. The concept of being a warrior is applicable to the most basic situations in our lives—to the fundamental situation that exists before the notion of good or bad ever occurs. The term *warrior* relates to the basic situation of being a human being. The heart of the warrior is this basic aliveness or basic goodness. Such fearless goodness is free from doubt and overcomes any perverted attitudes toward reality.

Doubt is the first obstacle to fearlessness that has to be overcome. We're not talking here about suppressing our doubts about a particular thing that is taking place. We're not talking about having doubts about joining an organization, or something like that. We are referring here to overcoming a much more basic doubt, which is fundamentally doubting yourself and feeling that you have some kind of shortcoming as a human being. You don't feel that your mind and body are synchronized, or working together properly. You feel that you are constantly being short-changed somewhere in your life.

When you were growing up, at a very early stage—perhaps around two years old—you must have heard your father or mother saying no to you. They would say, "No, don't get into that," or, "No, don't explore that too much," or, "No, be quiet. Be still." When you heard the word *no*, you may have responded by trying to fulfill that *no*, by being good.

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Or you may have reacted negatively, by defying your parents and their *no*, by exploring further and being "bad." That mixture of the temptation to be naughty and the desire to be disciplined occurs very early in life. When our parents say "no" to us, it makes us feel strange about ourselves, which becomes an expression of fear.

On the other hand, there is another kind of *NO*, which is very positive. We have never heard that basic *NO* properly: *NO* free from fear and free from doubt. Instead, even if we think that we're doing our best in life, we still feel that we haven't fully lived up to what we should be. We feel that we're not quite doing things right. We feel that our parents or others don't approve of us. There is that fundamental doubt, or fundamental fear, as to whether or not we can actually accomplish something.

Doubt arises in relating with authority, discipline, and scheduling throughout our life. When we don't acknowledge our doubt, it manifests as resistance and resentment. There is often some resentment or a reaction against the sitting practice of meditation as well. The moment that the gong is struck to signal the beginning of meditation practice, we feel resistance. But in that situation, we find that it's too late. We're already sitting there on the cushion, so we usually continue to practice.

However, resistance in everyday life provides us with many ways to manipulate situations. When we are presented with a challenge, we often try to turn away rather than having to face it. We come up with all kinds of excuses to avoid the demands that we feel are being put on us.

The basic *NO*, on the other hand, is accepting discipline in our life without preconceptions. Normally, when we say the word "discipline," it comes with a lot of mixed feelings. It's like saying "porridge." Some people like porridge and some people hate it. Nevertheless, porridge remains porridge. It is a very straightforward thing. We have similar feelings about discipline and the meaning of *NO*. Sometimes, it's a bad *NO*: it is providing oppressive boundaries that we don't want to accept. Or it could be a good *NO*, which encourages us to do something healthy. But when we just hear that one word, *NO*, the message is mixed.

Fearlessness is extending ourselves beyond that limited view. In the *Heart Sutra*, it talks about going beyond. Gone beyond, *gate*, is the basic *NO*. In the sutra, it says there is no eye, no ear, no sound, no smell—all of those things. When you experience egolessness, the solidity of your life and your perceptions falls apart. That could be very desolate or it

could be very inspiring, in terms of *shunyata*, the Buddhist understanding of emptiness. Very simply, it is basic *NO*. It is a real expression of fearlessness. In the Buddhist view, egolessness is preexisting, beyond our preconceptions. In the state of egolessness everything is simple and very clear. When we try to supplement the brightness of egolessness by putting a lot of other things onto it, those things obscure its brilliance, becoming blockages and veils.

In the warrior tradition, sacred outlook is the brilliant environment created by basic goodness. When we refuse to have any contact with that state of being, when we turn away from basic goodness, then wrong beliefs arise. We come up with all sorts of logics, again and again, so that we don't have to face the realities of the world.

We run up against our hesitation to get fully into things all the time, even in seemingly insignificant situations. If we don't want to wash the dishes right after we've eaten, we may tell ourselves that we need to let them soak. In fact, we're often hoping that one of our housemates will clean up after us. On another level, philosophically speaking, we may feel completely tuned in to the warrior's world. From that point of view, we think that we can quite safely say, "Once a warrior, always a warrior." That sounds good, but in terms of the actual practice of warriorship, it's questionable. "Once a warrior" may not always be a warrior if we disregard the beauty of the phenomenal world. We prefer to wear sunglasses, rather than facing the brilliance of the sunshine. We put on a hat and gloves to shield ourselves, fearing that we might be burned. The colorful-ness of relationships, household chores, business enterprises, and our general livelihood is too irritating. We are constantly looking for padding so that we don't run into the sharp edges of the world. That is the essence of wrong belief. It is an obstacle to seeing the wisdom of the Great Eastern Sun, which is seeing greater vision beyond our own small world.

The ground of fearlessness and the basis of overcoming doubt and wrong belief is to develop renunciation. Renunciation here means overcoming that very hard, tough, aggressive mentality which wards off any gentleness that might come into our hearts. Fear does not allow fundamental tenderness to enter into us. When tenderness tinged by sadness touches our heart, we know that we are in contact with reality. We feel it. That contact is genuine, fresh, and quite raw. That sensitivity is the basic experience of warriorship, and it is the key to developing fearless renunciation.

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Sometimes people find that being tender and raw is threatening and seemingly exhausting. Openness seems demanding and energy consuming, so they prefer to cover up their tender heart. Vulnerability can sometimes make you nervous. It is uncomfortable to feel so real, so you want to numb yourself. You look for some kind of anesthetic, anything that will provide you with entertainment. Then you can forget the discomfort of reality. People don't want to live with their basic rawness for even fifteen minutes. When people say they are bored, often they mean that they don't want to experience the sense of emptiness, which is also an expression of openness and vulnerability. So they pick up the newspaper or read anything else that's lying around the room—even reading what it says on a cereal box to keep themselves entertained. The search for entertainment to babysit your boredom soon becomes legitimized as laziness. Such laziness actually involves a lot of exertion. You have to constantly crank things up to occupy yourself, overcoming your boredom by indulging in laziness.

For the warrior, fearlessness is the opposite of that approach. Fearlessness is a question of learning how to be. Be there all along: That is the message. That is quite challenging in what we call the setting-sun world, the world of neurotic comfort where we use everything to fill up the space. We even use our emotions to entertain ourselves. You might be genuinely angry about something for a fraction of a second, but then you draw out your anger so that it lasts for twenty-five minutes. Then you crank up something else to be angry at for the next twenty minutes. Sometimes, if you arouse a really good attack of anger, it can last for days and days. That is another way we entertain ourselves in the setting-sun world.

The remedy to that approach is renunciation. In the Buddhist teachings, renunciation is associated with being nauseated by the confused world and the pain of samsara. For the warrior, renunciation is slightly different. It is giving away, or not indulging in, pleasure for entertainment's sake. We are going to kick out any preoccupations provided by the miscellaneous babysitters in the phenomenal world.

Finally, renunciation is the willingness to work with real situations of aggression in the world. If someone interrupts your world with an attack of aggression, you have to respond to it. There is no other way. Renunciation is being willing to face that kind of situation, rather than covering it up. Everyone is afraid to talk about this. It may be shocking to mention

it. Nonetheless, we have to learn to relate to those aspects of the world. We have never developed any response to attack—whether it is a verbal attack or actual physical aggression. People are very shy of this topic, although we have the answers to these challenges in our warrior disciplines, our exertion, and our manifestation.

In the warrior tradition, fearlessness is connected with attaching your basic existence to greater vision, or what we call the Great Eastern Sun. In order to experience such vast and demanding vision, you need a real connection to basic goodness. The key to that is overcoming doubt and wrong belief. Doubt is your own internal problem, which you have to work with. But then beyond that there may be an enemy, a challenge, that is outside of you. We can't just pretend that those threats never exist. You might say that your laziness is some kind of enemy, but laziness is not actually an enemy. It would be better to call it an obstacle.

How are we going to respond to real opposition that arises in the world? As a warrior, how are you going to relate with that? You don't need a party-line logic or a package-deal response. They don't really help. In my experience of how students usually relate with conflict, I find that they tend to freeze up when someone is very critical of them. They become noncommunicative, which doesn't help the situation. As warriors, we shouldn't be uptight and uncommunicative. We find it easy to manifest basic goodness when somebody agrees with us. Even if they're half agreeing with you, you can talk to them and have a great time. But if someone is edgy and negative, then you freeze, become defensive, and begin to attack them back. That's the wrong end of the stick. You don't kill an enemy before they become the enemy. You only slash the enemy when they become a 100 percent good enemy and present a real 100 percent challenge. If someone is interested in making love with you, you make love to them. But you don't rape them. You wait until the other person commits themselves to the situation. Working with your enemy is the same idea.

When a warrior has to kill his enemy, he has a very soft heart. He looks his enemy right in the face. The grip on your sword is quite strong and tough, and then with a tender heart, you cut your enemy into two pieces. At that point, slashing your enemy is equivalent to making love to them. That very strong, powerful stroke is also sympathetic. That fearless stroke is frightening, don't you think? We don't want to face that possibility.

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On the other hand, if we are in touch with basic goodness, we are always relating to the world directly, choicelessly, whether the energy of the situation demands a destructive or a constructive response. The idea of renunciation is to relate with whatever arises with a sense of sadness and tenderness. We reject the aggressive, hardcore street-fighter mentality. The neurotic upheavals created by conflicting emotions, or the kleshas, arise from ignorance, or avidya. Ignorance is very harsh and willing to stick with its own version of things. Therefore, it feels very righteous. Overcoming that is the essence of renunciation: we have no hard edges.

Warriorship is so tender, without skin, without tissue, naked and raw. It is soft and gentle. You have renounced putting on a new suit of armor. You have renounced growing a thick, hard skin. You are willing to expose naked flesh, bone, and marrow to the world.

This whole discussion is not just metaphoric. We are talking about what you do if you actually have to slash the enemy, if you are in combat or having a sword fight with someone, as you see in Japanese samurai movies. We shouldn't be too cowardly. A sword fight is real, as real as making love to another human being. We are talking about direct experience and we're not psychologizing anything here. Before you slash the enemy, look into his or her eyes and feel that tenderness. Then you slash. When you slash your enemy, your compassionate heart becomes twice as big. It puffs up; it becomes a big heart; therefore you can slash the enemy. If you are small-hearted, you cannot do this properly.

Of course, many times conquering the enemy might not involve cutting them in two. You might just turn them upside down! But you have to be willing to face the possibilities.

When the warrior has thoroughly experienced his or her own basic rawness, there is no room to manipulate the situation. You just go forward and present the truth quite fearlessly. You can be what you are, in a very straightforward and basic way. So tenderness brings simplicity and naturalness, almost at the level of simplemindedness.

We don't want to become tricky warriors, with all kinds of tricks up our sleeves and ways to cut people's logic down when we don't agree with them. Then there is no cultivation of either ourselves or others. When that occurs, we destroy any possibilities of enlightened society. In fact, there will be no society, just a few people hanging out. Instead, the

fearless warriors of Shambhala are very ordinary, simpleminded warriors. That is the starting point for developing true bravery.

THE PATH

The starting point on the path of fearlessness is the discovery of fear. We find ourselves fearful, frightened, even petrified by circumstances. This ubiquitous nervousness provides us with a stepping-stone, so that we can step over our fear. We have to make a definite move to cross over the boundary from cowardice to bravery. If we do so properly, the other side of our cowardice contains bravery.

We may not discover bravery right away. Instead, beyond our nervousness, we find a shaky tenderness. We are still quivering, but we are shaking with tenderness rather than bewilderment. That shaky vulnerability contains an element of sadness, but not in the sense of feeling badly about ourselves or feeling deprived. Rather, we feel a natural sense of fullness which is tender and sad.

It's like the feeling you have when you are about to shed a tear. You feel somewhat wealthy because your eyes are full of tears. When you blink, tears begin to roll down your cheeks. There is also an element of loneliness, but again it is not based on deprivation, inadequacy, or rejection. Instead you feel that you alone can understand the truth of your own loneliness, which is quite dignified and self-contained. You have a full heart, you feel lonely, but you don't feel particularly bad about it. It is like an island in the middle of a lake. The island is self-contained; therefore it looks lonely in the middle of the water. Occasionally, ferryboats carry commuters back and forth from the shore to the island, but that doesn't particularly help. In fact, it expresses the loneliness or the aloneness of the island further.

Discovering these facets of fearlessness is preparation for the further journey on the warrior's path. If the warrior does not feel alone and sad, then he or she can be corrupted very easily. In fact, such a person may not be a warrior *at all*. To be a good warrior, one has to feel sad and lonely, but rich and resourceful at the same time. This makes the warrior sensitive to every aspect of phenomena: to sights, smells, sounds, and feelings. In that sense, the warrior is also an artist, appreciating whatever

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goes on in the world. Everything is extremely vivid. The rustling of your armor or the sound of raindrops falling on your coat is very loud. Because you are so sensitive, the fluttering of occasional butterflies around you is almost an insult.

Such a sensitive warrior can then go further on the path of fearlessness. There are three tools or practical guides that the warrior uses on this journey. The first is the development of discipline, or *shila* in Sanskrit, which is represented by the analogy of the sun. Sunshine is all-pervasive. When the sun shines on the land, it doesn't neglect any area. It does a thorough job. Similarly, as a warrior, you never neglect your discipline.

We're not talking about military rigidity here. Rather, in all your mannerisms, every aspect of behavior, you maintain your openness to the environment. You constantly extend yourself to things around you. There is a complete absence of laziness. Even if what you are seeing, hearing, or perceiving becomes very difficult and demanding, the warrior never gives up. You go along with the situation. You don't withdraw. This allows you to develop your loyalty and connection to others, free from fear. You can relate with other sentient beings who are trapped in the confused world, perpetuating their pain. In fact, you realize that it is your duty. You feel warmth, compassion, and even passion toward others. First you develop your own good conduct, and then you can extend yourself fearlessly to others. That is the concept of the sun.

The second guide on the warrior's path is represented by the analogy of an echo, which is connected with meditative awareness, or *samadhi*. When you try to take time off from being a warrior, when you want to let go of your discipline or indulge mindlessly in some activity, your action produces an echo. It's like a sound echoing in a canyon, bouncing back on itself, producing more echoes that bounce off of one another. Those echoes or reflections happen all the time, and if we pay attention to them, they provide constant reminders to be awake. At first, the reminder might be fairly timid, but then the second, third, and fourth times you hear it, it's a much louder echo. These echoes remind you to be on the spot, on the dot. However, you can't just wait for an echo to wake you up. You have to put your awareness out into the situation. You have to put effort into being aware.

Becoming a warrior means that you are building a world that does not give you the setting-sun, or degraded, concept of rest, which is

purely indulging in your confusion. Sometimes you are tempted to return to that cowardly world. You just want to flop and forget the echo of your awareness. It seems like a tremendous relief not to have to work so hard. But then you discover that this world without even an echo is too deadly. You find it refreshing to get back to the warrior's world because it is so much more alive.

The warrior's third tool is actually a weapon. It is represented by the analogy of a bow and arrow, which is connected with developing wisdom, or prajna, and skillful means, or upaya. In this case we are talking about the wisdom of discriminating awareness, which is experiencing the sharpness of sense perceptions and developing psychological accuracy. You can't develop this kind of sharpness unless some experience of egolessness has manifested in your mind. Otherwise, your mind will be preoccupied, full of its own ego. But when you have made a connection with basic goodness, you can relate with both the actual sharpness of the arrow and with the skillful means provided by the bow. The bow allows you to harness or execute the sharpness of your perceptions.

The development of this discriminating awareness wisdom also allows you to accurately detect the enemy. A real enemy is someone who propagates and promotes ultimate selfishness, or ego. Such enemies promote basic badness rather than basic goodness. They try to bring others into their realm, tempting them with anything from a cookie up to a million dollars.

In the Shambhala warrior tradition, we say that you should only have to kill an enemy once every thousand years. We mean here the real enemy, the basic rudra principle, which is the personification of ego-hood, of ego run wild. You can work with other enemies by subjugating them, talking to them, buying them out, or seducing them. However, according to this tradition, once in a thousand years a real assassination of the enemy is necessary. We're talking about someone who can't be reached by any other means. You might use a sword or an arrow, whatever means you need to overpower them, so their ego is completely popped. Such an assassination has to be very direct and personal. It's not like dropping bombs on people. If we pop the enemy, and only then, they might be able to connect with some basic goodness within themselves and realize that they made a gigantic mistake. It's like having rotten teeth in your mouth. Eventually you have to have all your teeth

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removed, replacing them with false teeth. After that, you might be able to appreciate the teeth that you lost.

Overall, these three principles—the sun, the echo, and the bow and arrow—are all connected with the natural process, or path, of working with our basic intelligence. Beyond that, they describe the fundamental decorum and decency of the warrior's existence. A warrior should be capable of artfully conducting his or her life in every action, from drinking tea to running a country. Learning how to handle fear, both how to utilize one's own fear and that of others, is what allows us to brew the beer of fearlessness. You can put all of those situations of fear and doubt into a gigantic vat and ferment them.

The path of fearlessness is connected with what we do right now, today, rather than with anything theoretical or waiting for a cue from somewhere else. The basic vision of warriorship is that there is goodness in everyone. We are all good in ourselves. So we have our own warrior society within our own body. We have everything we need to make the journey already.

FRUITION

Fearlessness has a starting point, it includes discipline, it makes a journey, and it reaches a conclusion. It is like the Great Eastern Sun: the sun rises, it radiates light, and this benefits people by dispelling the darkness and allowing the fruit to ripen and the flowers to blossom.

The fruition of fearlessness is also connected with three analogies. The first is that fearlessness is like a reservoir of trust. This trust arises from the experience of basic goodness, which we have already discussed. When we feel basically good, rather than degraded or condemned, then we become very inquisitive, looking into every situation and examining it. We don't want to fool ourselves by relying on belief alone. Rather, we want to make a personal connection with reality.

This is a very simple, straightforward idea. If we accept a challenge and take certain steps to accomplish something, the process will yield results—either success or failure. When you sow a seed or plant a tree, either the seed will germinate and the tree will grow, or they will die. Similarly, for the inquisitive warrior, trust means that we know that our actions will bring a definite response from reality. We know that we will

get a message. Failure generally is telling us that our action has been undisciplined and inaccurate in some way. Therefore, it fails. When our action is fully disciplined, it usually is fulfilled; we have success. But those responses are not regarded as either punishment or congratulations.

Trust, then, is being willing to take a chance, knowing that what goes up must come down, as they say. When a warrior has that kind of trust in the reflections of the phenomenal world, then he or she can trust his or her individual discovery of goodness. Communication produces results, either success or failure. That is how the fearless warrior relates with the universe: not by remaining alone and insecure, hiding away, but by constantly being exposed to the phenomenal world and constantly being willing to take that chance.

The reservoir of trust is a bank of richness from which the warrior can always draw conclusions. We begin to feel that we are dealing with a rich world, one that never runs out of messages. The only problem arises if we try to manipulate the situation in our favor. You are not supposed to fish in the reservoir or swim in it. The reservoir has to remain unconditional, unpolluted. So you don't put your one-sidedness, your bias or conditionality, into it. Then the reservoir might dry up.

Normally, trust means that we think that our world is trustworthy. We think that it's going to produce a good result, success. But in this case, we're talking about having a continual relationship with the phenomenal world that is not based on either a good or bad result. We have unconditional trust in the phenomenal world to always give us a message, either success or failure. The fruition of our action will always provide us with information. Such trust in the reservoir keeps us from being too arrogant or too timid. If you're too arrogant, you'll find yourself bumping into the ceiling. If you're too timid, you'll be pushed up by the floor. Roughly speaking, that's the concept of the reservoir.

The ancient Chinese *Book of Changes*, or *I Ching*, often talks about success being failure and failure being success. Success sows the seeds of future failure, and failure may bring a later success. So it's always a dynamic process. As warriors, fearlessness doesn't mean that we cheer up by saying, "Look! I'm on the side of the right. I'm a success." Nor do we feel that we're being punished when we fail. In any case, success and failure are saying the same thing.

That brings us to the next analogy, which is music. Music is connected with the idea of continuously being joyful. The feedback, or the

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result, that comes from the warrior's practice is never a dead end. It presents another path. We always can go on, go beyond. So while the result of action is fruition, beyond that, the result is the seed for the next journey. Our journey continues, cycling between success and failure, path and fruition, just as the four seasons alternate. There is always a sense of creativity, so there is always joy on the journey, joy in the result.

Why are you so joyful? You are guided on the path by the disciplines of the sun, the echo, and the bow and arrow. You have witnessed your basic goodness, taking joy in having nothing to hang on to. You have realized the fundamental NO. You are free from doubt and you have experienced a sense of renunciation. So whether the situation brings success or failure, it brings an unconditional good understanding. Therefore, your mind and body are constantly synchronized; there is no deficit of any kind in the body or the mind. Your experience becomes like music, which has rhythm and a melody that is constantly expanding and being recreated. So the sense of celebration is constant, inbuilt, in spite of the ups and downs of one's personal life. That is continuously being joyful.

Having developed trust and appreciation, you can finally conquer fear, which is connected with the analogy of a saddle. In the Buddhist teachings we talk about developing such a good sense of mental balance that, if you become mindless, your awareness automatically brings you back, just as in the process of skidding on the ice and losing your balance, your body automatically rebalances itself to keep you from falling. As long as you have good posture and a good seat in the saddle, you can overcome any startling or unexpected moves your horse makes. So the idea of the saddle is taking a good seat in your life.

An overreaction or an exaggerated reaction to situations shouldn't happen at this level. You have trust, you are constantly being joyful, and therefore you can't be startled, either. This doesn't mean that your life is monotone, but rather you feel established in this world. You belong here. You are one of the warriors in this world, so even if little unexpected things happen, good or bad, right or wrong, you don't exaggerate them. You come back to your seat in the saddle and maintain your posture in the situation.

The warrior is never amazed by anything. If someone comes up to you and says, "I'm going to kill you right now," you are not amazed. If someone says that they are going to give you a million dollars, you

think, "So what?" Assuming your seat in the saddle at this level is achieving inscrutability, in the positive sense.

It is also taking your seat on the earth. Once you have a good seat on the earth, you don't need witnesses to validate you. Someone once asked the Buddha, "How do we know that you are enlightened?" And he touched the earth in what is called the earth-touching mudra, or gesture, and said, "Earth is my witness." That is the same concept as holding your seat in the saddle. Someone might ask, "How do we know you won't overreact to this situation?" You can say, "Just watch my posture in the saddle."

Fearlessness in the warrior tradition is not a training in ultimate paranoia. It is based on training in ultimate solidity—which is basic goodness. You have to learn how to be regal. Trust is like becoming a good citizen, celebrating the journey is like becoming a good minister in the government, but holding your seat in the saddle is finally assuming command. It is how to be a king or queen.

At the same time, conquering fear is not based on blocking your sensitivity. Otherwise, you become a deaf and dumb monarch, a jellyfish king. Sitting on the horse requires balance, and as you acquire that balance in the saddle, you have more awareness of the horse. So when you sit in the saddle on your fickle horse, you feel completely exposed and gentle. If you feel aggressive, you don't have a good seat. In fact, you are probably not even riding the horse. You don't put your saddle on a fence railing. You have to saddle a real horse.

In this case, riding the horse is riding somebody else's mind. It requires a complete connection. In the Buddhist tradition, this is called compassion, or working with somebody else. You are completely exposed in this situation. Otherwise, it's like a medieval knight encased in his armor. It's so heavy that he has to be cranked up onto the horse. Then he rides off to battle and usually falls off. There's something wrong with that technology.

Often, when someone tells us we should be fearless, we think they're saying not to worry, that everything is going to be all right. But unconditional fearlessness is simply based on being awake. Once you have command of the situation, fearlessness is unconditional because you are neither on the side of success or failure. Success and failure are your journey.

Nevertheless, sometimes you become so petrified on your journey

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that your teeth, your eyes, your hands, and your legs are all vibrating. You are hardly sitting in your seat; you are practically levitating with fear. But even that is regarded as an expression of fearlessness if you have a fundamental connection with the earth of basic goodness—which is unconditional goodness at this point.