



## Learning Not to Be Afraid of Things That Are Real, by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Recently I've been looking through a field guide on nature observation. The author, when he was a child, was trained by an old Native American. One day the child asked the old man, "Why is it that you're not afraid of heat and cold?"

The old man looked at him for a while and finally said, "Because they're real."

And this is our job as meditators: to try to learn not to be afraid of things that are real.

Ultimately, we discover that things that are real pose no danger to the mind. The real dangers in the mind are our delusions, the things we make up, the things we use to cover up reality, the stories, the preconceived notions we impose on things. When we're trying to live in those stories and notions, reality is threatening. It's always exposing the cracks in our ideas, the cracks in our ignorance, the cracks in our desires. As long as we identify with those make-believe desires, we find that threatening. But if we learn to become real people ourselves, then reality poses no dangers.

This is what the meditation is for, teaching yourself how to be real, to get in touch with what's really going on, to look at your sense of who you are and take it apart in terms of what it really is, to look at the things that you find threatening in your life and see what they really are. When you really look, you see the truth. If you're true in your looking, the truth appears.

This is an important principle in the practice. [...] Only people who are true can see the truth. Truth is a quality of the mind that doesn't depend on figuring things out or being clever. It depends on having integrity in your actions and in your powers of observation, accepting the truth as it is. It means accepting the fact that you play a role in shaping that truth, so you have to be responsible. You have to be sensitive both to what you're doing and to the results you get, so that you can learn to be more and more skillful.