



## The Year-To-Live Experiment, by Stephen Levine

I was fifty-eight years old when I began the year long experiment. When the Dalai Lama was fifty-eight years old, a reporter asked him what he was going to do next with his life. He answered that he was going to prepare for death. The interviewer inquired about his health, and the Dalai Lama replied that he wasn't sick, but that his body was impermanent. When I heard about that conversation, I thought that preparing for death was the natural thing to do. [...] The year-to-live offered extraordinary insights into the places where I had been numb, and into the still small voice within, which became more pronounced. But the most profound influence was an increase in courage. When you have one year left, fear makes you too small. You better live that life that you're going to be so unhappy to think you are leaving. [...] Fears arise everyday that are like five or ten pound fears. We've become accustomed to these little ones and are able to submerge them with no problem. We think submerging is a sign of our strength, a sign of how far we've gone. It is not. Those fears are opportunities for liberation. They are five and ten-pound hindrances that we can learn to handle by thorough investigation. You can't investigate pain during bone cancer if you've never done pain meditation before. You can't even investigate pain during a stubbed toe usually. Most people stub their toe and send hatred into it. They are merciless and wish it would be gone. What pain in us most needs is to be embraced. We have learned to be absent. We feel abandoned by the part of us that could make us feel whole. We scared it off. When you prepare to work with the fear of death, start working with little fears. You step off the curb, a moment of fear. You meet a stranger, a moment of fear. Start with the five and ten-pound fears because they're workable. We're familiar with them and they don't close our heart. They might tighten our belly a little bit, but we're working with soft belly. Eventually we increase our capacity to work with larger fear. If we went to the gymnasium to pick up the five-hundred-pound weight, the fear of death, we couldn't do it. But we can work out with five and ten-pound weights. We open to the little angers, fears, and doubts, not circumventing them just because we are able to, which decreases aversion to pain and displeasure, and increases our ability to do the work that we were born to do.

--Stephen Levine, from "A Year To Live"