

Fear not

At one time or another, we must have been troubled by any of these 5 fears: (1) of livelihood, (2) of disrepute, (3) of nervousness before an assembly, (4) of death, or (5) of a bad destiny.¹

Fear of loss of livelihood. Our livelihood is not just a job that keeps us alive and healthy, but it significantly shapes and influences our whole being. If we are neither monastics nor living on an inheritance, we need to work to earn a living. Our work, as such, is a means of supporting ourselves in an ethical manner. The Buddha reminds those of us who are laymen to enjoy our well-earned wealth and benefits in *a balanced life*, that is, living within our means.²

If what we do attract wealth, that's good. For then, we and our loved ones can live at ease, and we also have the means to do charity, giving others an opportunity to rise above their suffering, ignorance and deprivation. Wealth, in other words, should be wisely and widely shared, so that our home, clan, community, society, country and the world are, in some way, a better place to live in.³

Work is best when we love doing it, and it is something not against any of the 5 precepts.⁴ Next, our work should make us financially independent. This means that we need to be patient with ourselves and our work until the time is right for us to progress to seek a better job, or even retire.⁵

The more dependent we are on our work for a living, the greater is our fear of losing it. However, according to the (Saṅgha) Bala Sutta (A 9.5), we have nothing to fear if we have the 4 "powers," that is, those of wisdom, energy, blamelessness, and conciliation, that is to say,

- (1) we are well qualified in our work and skillful at it;
- (2) we are industrious in our work;
- (3) we are blameless in our actions; and
- (4) we are on good terms with others.

Fear of loss of reputation. If we have a superior sense of ourselves, often measuring ourselves against others, we are likely to fear a loss of our reputation, especially when we have done something wrong. This can be a good thing if such a thought prevents us from lapses in our duties or being unethical.⁶ A worse situation is where we think that we are above everyone else, even above the law, so that we are not accountable for what we have done or not done.⁷ According to the (Saṅgha) Bala Sutta, we have nothing to fear of disrepute when

- (1) we apply wisdom, that is, a practical knowledge to bring the best out of everyone;
- (2) we are industrious in accepting responsibility and rectifying any of our mistakes;
- (3) we have done what is right and proper within our power; and
- (4) we are kind to others, willing to accept and forgive them.

¹ This reflection is based on **(Saṅgha) Bala Sutta** (A 9.5), SD 2.21: [link](#).

² See **Dīgha, jānu S** (A 8.54, 7/4:282 f), SD 5.10: [link](#).

³ On worldly happiness, see **Anaṇa S** (A 4.62/2:69 f), SD 2.2: [link](#). On the best benefits of wealth, see **Ādiya S** (A 5.41/3:45 f), SD 2.1: [link](#).

⁴ On the 5 precepts, see SD 15.11 (2.2): [link](#).

⁵ See **Right livelihood**, SD 37.8: [link](#). On financial management, see SD 4.1 (4): [link](#).

⁶ On conceit, see **"Me," The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a: [link](#).

⁷ On narcissism, see **"Me," The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a (4): [link](#). The sense of being above society and the law: see "Inside the criminal mind," Straits Times (Singapore) 4 Oct 2010 (B5).

Our “reputation” is often how others perceive us. Often enough, what we see as our “reputation” is simply how we perceive ourselves. To be a true individual, we must be able to rise above both, see ourselves as we truly are, and be emotionally independent.⁸

Stage fright

It is said that if we habitually do bad, we would be nervous before a crowd. Harping on our weaknesses, too, may prevent us from being confident before others. In short, if we let our memories of past failures weigh us down, we will easily lose self-confidence. Or, it could simply be a lack of experience: then, we should begin with speaking before a small group of people we are comfortable with.

The word for “nervousness” (or fearfulness) here is *sārajjā*, and its opposite is ***vesārajjā***, “moral courage, intrepidity.”⁹ We need moral courage to speak out against an injustice or harmful situation or impending social problem or any issue we need to address. Then, we should reflect on what the (Saṅgaha) Bala Sutta has to say here. We can overcome our nervousness before a crowd by cultivating wisdom, energy, blamelessness, and conciliation, that is,

- (1) Learn effective public speaking and how to gain inner calm before others.
- (2) Practise speaking, say, before a life-size mirror or helpful friends.
- (3) Have good intentions and be moved by the Dharma.
- (4) Speak with lovingkindness, and touch the good in others.

Fear of death

If we habitually indulge in sense-pleasures without regard for mental or personal cultivation, we are very likely to have a fear of death. We would not feel comfortable discussing the subject. The best antidote to the fear of death is to truly *love* ourselves, and show that same love to others, and to love life as a whole. Living well is the best preparation for dying well. In short, this is *a life of lovingkindness*.¹⁰

Following the Buddha’s teachings, we can overcome our fear of death by cultivating wisdom, energy, blamelessness, and conciliation, thus:

- (1) learn all we can about the nature of the mind and body, such as the 5 aggregates;¹¹
- (2) make regular effort in cultivating the mind, especially the breath meditation;¹²
- (3) lead a blameless life based on moral virtue (keeping the precepts);¹³ and
- (4) fall asleep with lovingkindness, wake with lovingkindness.¹⁴

Fear of a bad destiny. Insufficient knowledge, false information or ignorance about the after-life often cause unnecessary worries and concern about what will happen to us after death. We should immediately avoid unhealthy “eternalist” religious teachings about eternal hell and eternal heaven. The first point we should know is that there is nothing *permanent* in

⁸ See **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8: [link](#).

⁹ On *sārajjā* and *vesārajjā*, see **Piṇḍolya S** (S 22.80) @ SD 28.9a(3): [link](#).

¹⁰ See **(Aṭṭha) Mettānisamsa S** (A 8.14/4:150 f), SD 30.6: [link](#). On guiding the dying mind for high rebirth, see **(Mahā,nāma) Gilayāna S** (S 55.54/5:408-410), SD 4.10: [link](#).

¹¹ For a detailed study of the 5 aggregates (*pañca-k,khandha*), see SD 17.1-8 (incl the nature of consciousness): [link](#).

¹² On meditation (theory), see **Meditation & consciousness**, SD 17.8c: [link](#); practical aspects, see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1: [link](#). For reflection, see “The truth is in how we breathe,” R129 100324 *Revisioning Buddhism* 2011 ch 15: [link](#). On how breath meditation helps the dying, see the closing of **Mahā Rāhu-ḷovāda S** (M 62,30/1:426), SD 3.11: [link](#).

¹³ On using moral virtue as practice and meditation, see **Sīlānussati**, SD 15.11: [link](#).

¹⁴ See ↓**(Ekā,dasa) Mettānisamsā S** (A 11.16), [SD 2.15](#); cf **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16,1.11/2:81 f), SD 9: [link](#).

the universe or anywhere else: whatever exists must exist in impermanence. Although some existential states, such as heavenly realms, may last for a very long time, even many world cycles, they are still impermanent. They all exist in time.

In Buddhist terms, *we create our own heaven, our own hell*, by our own habitual actions and wrong views. We can overcome our fear of a bad destiny by cultivating wisdom, energy, blamelessness, and conciliation, so that their powers will benefit us, thus:

- (1) our body-mind is impermanent, and as such, it has no essence or soul;¹⁵
- (2) lovingkindness and joy are wholesome karmic momentum in our last moments;¹⁶
- (3) lead a blameless life based on moral virtue (keeping the precepts);¹⁷ and
- (4) readily forgive others so that we free our minds from the dark and dead past.¹⁸

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¹⁵ On the self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), see “I”: **The nature of identity**, [SD 19.1](#); **Anusaya**, SD 31.3 (5): [link](#).

¹⁶ On lovingkindness for the dying, see **(Karaja, kāya) Brahmavihāra S** (A 10.28/5:299-301)= SD 2.10: [link](#).

¹⁷ On using moral virtue as practice and meditation, see **Sīlānussati**, SD 15.11: [link](#).

¹⁸ See **Sama, jīvi S 1** (A 4.55/2:61 f), [SD 5.1](#); **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16.1.11/2:81 f), SD 9: [link](#).