



EXCERPT FROM CONQUER YOUR FEAR OF WATER: AN INNOVATIVE SELF DISCOVERY COURSE IN SWIMMING

by Melon Dash, AuthorHouse 2006

STEP 2: HOW TO STAY IN CONTROL

Where are you? Where is your *self*? If you were to point to yourself, where would you point? Go ahead: point to yourself now. Some people point to their heads. Some point to their hearts. What about you? If a surgeon opened you up there, would she find you? No, she wouldn't find you. She'd find bones and tissues but not *you*. You aren't physical. You *have* a physical body but you are non-physical.

We *have* bodies. We *have* feelings. We *have* thoughts. Who is it that has these things? You and I, each a spirit, have them. We are spirit, first.

Do you agree that we humans are spiritual beings living in physical bodies in a physical world? It's useful to think of ourselves as spirit, or as energy. When we think of ourselves as formless energy, or spirit, it gives us a new understanding of our freedom of "movement." I don't mean freedom of physical movement. We already understand that we're free to move our limbs, if we are able-bodied. I'm referring to your movement as *spirit* in a body. In other words, how do *you* move while your body is still?

Your body conforms to physical laws like the laws of gravity. Your spirit, however, doesn't conform to physical laws. It is not physical. This *must* be taken into account in order for teaching (and learning) to be most effective.

You are the one who controls your body. *You* are the one that instructors must communicate with, the one whose trust they must earn and whose attention they must

keep. *You* must be in control of your self and your body in water. Otherwise teaching won't work and learning won't happen.

To get to the bottom of learning, we must understand and address both the non-physical you—which I call *you*, your self, or spirit—and the body.

2+2=4

ONCE YOU'RE IN CONTROL OF YOURSELF,
YOU CAN THEN BE IN CONTROL OF YOUR BODY.

When you start a swimming class, you may wonder, "How can I stand to put my face in water? How can I remain safe in deep water?" Good questions. These must be answered before anyone can expect you to "hear" anything else about swimming.

When you using this book, please remain safe and in control in the water by *doing only what you want to do*. While learning to overcome fear, *never put yourself into a position where you have to do something you don't like, or don't want to do*.

It's important to do only that which you want to do because that's the only way we can be sure that you will be present for it. If you do something you don't really want to do, part of you resists what the other part of you is doing. That means you're divided against yourself. You're not fully "there."

If you aren't fully there, how can you expect yourself to learn? How can anyone else expect you to learn?

2+2=4

YOU MUST BE PRESENT TO LEARN.

You need to enjoy yourself. Don't you owe that to yourself? Being present and having fun are two things that swimming lessons have never required. Students who are afraid

are often thinking, “Will the instructor ask me to do something I don’t want to do? Will I drown? Am I safe? What if I panic? How will I get air? How will I stand up? Will I make a fool of myself? What if I sink?”

2+2=4

YOU CAN'T LEARN WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR ARMS AND LEGS
IF YOU'RE AFRAID YOU MIGHT NOT LIVE.

What do I mean by being present? I mean that you know where you are, you know what you're doing, and you're in control. You're satisfied with how you're handling things. Everyone can learn to swim if they practice the right things. And, it's fun...so my students have told me for over 20 years.

2+2=4

TO REMAIN IN CONTROL OF YOURSELF,
YOU MUST KEEP YOURSELF AS A SPIRIT
IN YOUR BODY.

Take a moment to absorb what this means.

If you have taken swimming lessons before and you've worried about your safety, it was impossible to be successful learning mechanics. By learning, I mean that you embodied the mechanics so that you could perform them anytime without thinking.

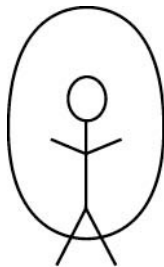
Here is a diagram of being present:



Present: you and your body are in the same place.
The stick figure represents your body. The circle and the space within it represent you, spirit. In this situation you'd say, "I feel good."

When you're present, your spirit and your body are in the same space. In the graphic above, the circle and the area within it represent your presence. They represent you as a spirit: your *self*. In the diagram, you and your body are together. You're "there." You're in control of your body. You feel safe. You're as calm and comfortable as if you were reading the Sunday paper on the couch. You could be taking a walk. You're at ease. In our everyday language, we call this being present, "at home," composed, grounded, in control, centered, together. You feel poised, quiet, solid, stable, peaceful, balanced, open, comfortable.

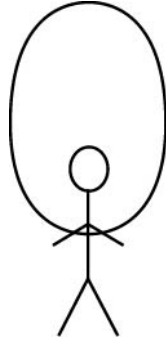
Here's a diagram of nervousness: beginning to lose presence. It can happen on land, in the water, or anywhere:



Nervous
You'd say, "I feel nervous, but I'm okay."

We call this situation "nervous." You don't feel terrible, but you don't feel good anymore, as you did in the first circle. You're mostly in control, but not completely. In everyday language, we call this, "having cold feet." "A question in the air." "Buzzing." As a spirit, you aren't completely in the body anymore. You've begun to rise upward and outward through the top of your head.

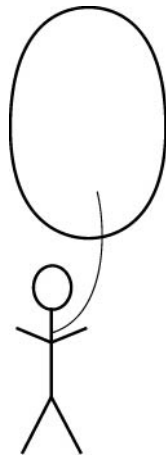
Here's a diagram of you when you've become still more afraid:



Afraid
"I am not having fun. Get me out of here."

Afraid: you are further out of your body. There's little or no presence of you as a spirit in your body below the chest. This causes the common knot in the stomach, butterflies in the stomach, and clammy hands and feet. In the diagram the hands are drawn below the circle so that you can see this. There's less presence of the spirit in the body to keep things stable. We're no longer having fun when we reach this stage.

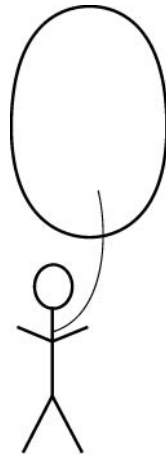
Here's a diagram of us when we're terrified:



Paralyzed by fear
"Help!"

Your spirit has left your body all the way to your neck. There's no presence of you below the neck. You can't move a muscle. We call this "scared stiff" or "paralyzed by fear." If we're out of the body a little bit further, above the mouth, we're unable to call for help; we can't make a sound or even mouthe a word.

Finally, here's a diagram of panic:



Panic
Out of it. "How do I get back? I can't get back."

We call this "losing it;" gone; panic; not home; out of it; freaked out. "Out" is quite correct. The spirit is out of the body, not permanently, and not completely, but enough for the body to be in danger. There's still a thin thread of energy that connects us to our bodies when we are in panic. If we return to the body, it's not because we're in control of doing so: it just happens.

If, once you return from panic, someone asked you what happened, you would say you don't know. This is because you weren't there to experience it. You left your body first. Someone watching you could tell you what you did (what your body did), but you wouldn't remember since you weren't "there."

WHAT IS CONTROL?

It's purposely or automatically keeping yourself, as a spirit, completely in your body.

PANIC PREVENTION

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TO OVERCOME YOUR FEAR IN WATER,
YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW TO REMAIN IN CONTROL
AND PREVENT PANIC.

Remaining in control is the key to the door of confidence. It begins with the awareness that you have a choice to stay “here” or leave. The next step is *choosing* to stay here or leave (to give up). Once you decide to stay here, the next step is to *feel*. Feeling keeps you here, in your body. The next step is to follow the instructions that come to you. All of this takes place in a couple of seconds.

If we have no choice when certain situations arise, that is if panic is a habit, then there’s no chance to remain in control on purpose. We’re in the throes of our habit. Only when we slow down can we have a choice. Without slowing down, there is no learning of panic prevention.

Question: Slow down what?

Answer: Slow down our internal speed: our vibration. You and I have various internal “speeds.” When we’re calm, our speed is very slow, or still. When we’re not calm, our energy moves faster. Our incremental speeds can be called calm, contentedness, interest, fascination, concern, watchfulness, protectiveness, nervousness, fear, struggling and panic. No doubt, we’ve all felt these increments of internal speed. When we’re struggling, our energy is moving—vibrating—very fast.

Q: How do I slow down my internal speed, my vibration?

A: By *feeling it and allowing it to be there*.

Q: How can this be fun?

A: By taking it slowly, only doing what’s comfortable and taking plenty of rests. The process really is rewarding. It heals fear.

Once we slow things down enough, we have a choice. From the choice not to panic we can then exercise the steps to *keep* ourselves in control. From exercising these steps, we maintain the highest degree of safety that's possible in the moment.

YOUR VIBRATION OR INTERNAL SPEED

We may think of ourselves as having no input over how fast our internal "speed" is. We may suddenly find ourselves "speeding" and feel stuck there. We are "rattled."

When you feel tension, you are speeding to some degree. You can learn what to do with this speed.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The five circle diagrams are the main stages we go through when we're in a situation and we become more afraid. However, just because they're typical stages, it doesn't mean they're desirable or required. In fact, they're not helpful. It would be preferable if we could stay in the first circle even when something very frightening is happening.

If you're chopping vegetables in the kitchen and you cut your finger while thinking about your children driving home in a blizzard, *where are you?* Are you completely in the kitchen? No. Part of you is in the kitchen and part of you is in the car. You wouldn't say to yourself, "Here's my knife, here's my finger, I'll slice right here." You were not in complete control of your hands or the knife. You could not control your body (hands) since you weren't in it.

WHERE YOU ARE RELATIVE TO YOUR BODY

You and I enter, leave, and remain in our bodies at different times of the day. When we're "at home," we're in our bodies, calm and relaxed. We're in our bodies when we feel in control.

If you're sitting at your desk at work daydreaming about being in Hawaii, your body is at your desk but you are in Hawaii. If someone knocks on your door, the sound brings you

back to your desk. If you're reading a book and you have to read the same paragraph three times, your body is in the chair but *you* are somewhere else.

We can be "at home," solidly in our bodies. We can be partly in and partly out, and cut our finger with a knife. And, we can be completely out—when we panic and can't stop ourselves.

Likewise, when we're focused on something that's not happening now, in a fantasy of the future (what will happen if...?) or a memory of the past (I can't let X happen again), *we are in* the future or in the past. We are not here. If you're in the water and you're not completely here, you're not in control. Don't even think about *learning to swim* in this situation. This is when you can easily fly out to the third, fourth or fifth circles, even if there's no physical danger.

The farther out you go past the first circle, the easier it is to go out even farther. We humans have formed a habit of letting ourselves jump out of the present into the future to "protect ourselves from danger." Sometimes, it's necessary to protect ourselves. At other times, it's not appropriate because there's no danger or because we'd be better off staying here and attending to what our bodies are telling us. They tell us how to be safe...as safe as we can be.



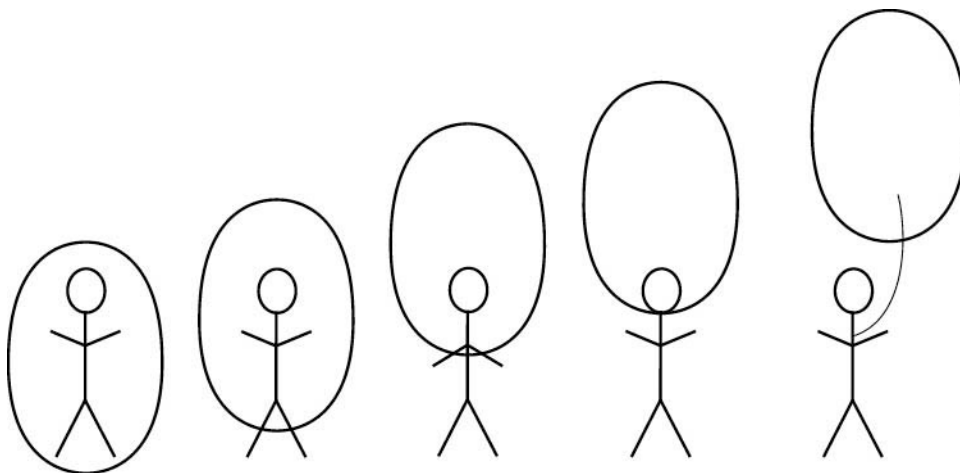
In the not-dangerous times it's *useful* to keep ourselves in the present: in control. In the dangerous times it's *essential* to keep ourselves in our bodies. Otherwise we are of no use to our bodies. This may be why you are afraid in water.

Because the fundamental act of remaining in control is about *where you are* relative to your body, we can say that being in control is a matter of your location. In your body, you're in control. When you're partly, or completely out of your body, you're partly, or completely out of control.

Since the fundamental act of remaining safe is about your location as a spirit relative to your body, learning is a spirit-ual event. Obviously this has nothing to do with religion. It's about the location and movement of you as spirit.

For learning to be optimal, we must take into account our characteristics as spirit. The fact that we are spiritual beings is so ordinary and invisible that it has been overlooked in most teaching. Overcoming fear and learning to swim are spiritual and physical events. First and foremost, especially for people who are afraid, overcoming fear is spiritual.

Q: HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GO FROM THE FIRST CIRCLE TO THE FIFTH?



Going from calm to panic: leaving your body. © M. Dash 1983

A: No time flat. You can be feeling fine one moment and in the next moment, panic. You've probably experienced this.

Q: WHO'S IN CHARGE OF WHICH CIRCLE YOU'RE IN?

A: Right. *You are*. You may think that *circumstances* caused you to leave your body and go to the next circle. But circumstances were not the cause. A belief you had at the time

was the cause (for example, “I will sink. I’m not safe. I will drown.”) This belief caused you to leave the first circle. If you knew *why you must stay* in your body, you’d think twice about leaving. But you didn’t know the importance of your location.

2+2=4

IF YOU DON'T KNOW YOU'RE IN CONTROL
OF YOUR LOCATION, YOU *AREN'T*

Once we know that moving out of the first circle is what causes us to lose control, we can learn how to remain in the first circle and in control on purpose. This is simple.

WHY WOULD ANYONE LEAVE THE FIRST CIRCLE IF DOING SO WOULD PUT HIM IN DANGER?

Please don’t blame yourself: it’s a learned response. We learn when we’re children to leave the first circle. We leave our bodies when we would rather not feel what’s happening. Fear, emotional and physical pain or any situation you can think of that would be too much to bear is reason enough to leave. A 5 year old being held under water by his playful older brother past the point of fun or safety can either stay in his body and feel extreme discomfort (no air, desperation, possibly rage) or he can leave his body. Who would stay? No one.

Leaving the first circle becomes an adaptation to great pain. Over time, it can become a habit. When it appears that something is going to feel bad, or we’re reminded of something that felt bad, we leave our bodies. No one can be blamed for it. We began doing it long before we knew the consequences: losing control. But this habit can be replaced with a more useful one: the habit of staying here. This is the path to freedom in water.

In this book we will learn first how to be safe and be in control: how to stay in the first circle and return to it if you notice you’re in the second. We don’t go to a higher circle than that. We prevent it. You can be in control enough to prevent it.

When you *know* you're safe, you exert no effort or thought to remain in the first circle. When you're *not sure* you're safe, you need to know how to remain in the first circle, or how to get back to it, on purpose.

BEING IN CONTROL

"If I know that I can't put my feet on the bottom, I panic." "I can fake it for a while, but then the truth comes and gets me." —Sylvia

If you ever learned to drive or ride a bike, ski or in-line skate, you know you didn't feel safe until you learned how to stop. It's the same in swimming. You need to know how to stop in order to feel safe. Stop your arms and legs? No, stop yourself from panicking. Once you can remain stopped, you can learn the simple building blocks and mechanics of swimming.

CONTROL GIVES CONFIDENCE
CONFIDENCE FEEDS LEARNING

Overcoming fear *must* precede learning to swim. Otherwise, the feelings of ease and freedom you desire to play, rest, and swim in water and deep water are not possible.

It's more important to stay in the first circle than to float or to put your face in the water, to stand up, or to tread water. If you stay in the first circle, you'll be in control of whether you inhale water or not, stand up or stay floating, stay speedy or slow down. Once you can remain in control, you can do whatever you want to do. Do you see the importance of being in the first circle?

2+2=4

YOU MUST BE ABLE TO REMAIN IN THE FIRST CIRCLE IN ORDER TO LEARN TO SWIM, BREATHE WHILE SWIMMING, AND REST IN DEEP WATER

HOW TO STAY IN CONTROL

You can stay in control (in the first circle) *by feeling. Everything.* That's right. Slow down and *feel* everything that's happening in the moment. Feel whatever is there. Feel your internal "speed," feel buoyancy, feel tension, feel your chair, feel the air temperature, feel how much air you have or don't have, feel your left knee. Just feel. If feeling all of that is too much, just feel one of them. You'll probably have to slow down to feel.

DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT SKIPPING THE STEP OF FEELING

To be in control, we have to feel. And because feeling happens in only one place—our bodies—when we focus on what we're feeling, we stay in our bodies. Where our focus is, we are. Feeling keeps us in our bodies and keeps us in control.

Often, we use thinking to negotiate an unfamiliar situation. But in some situations, such as overcoming your fear in water, thinking does not work best. It works better to feel. When we think too much, we lose touch with feelings.

If you let yourself feel, you'll get a sense of what to do next. Proceed slowly enough to keep feeling. Follow your internal "instructions." Give yourself permission (and get permission from anyone you're with) to slow down and feel. You need to stay slow. If you do this, you cannot help but succeed.

Please let yourself off the hook for not learning to swim if you tried before. You were probably not asked to go slowly and listen to your internal signals, feel them, and follow their instructions. These were absolutely essential!

Have you watched a baby learn to walk? She didn't hurry herself. She didn't try to run before she could walk. She didn't criticize herself while she learned. She didn't compete with the neighbor baby or compare herself with other toddlers at daycare. She was

completely self-absorbed, that is, 100% in her body. She was in the first circle. That's why a skill as intricate as walking only takes a few weeks for a baby to learn completely.

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