

CONQUER YOUR FEAR OF WATER

A Revolutionary Way to Learn to Swim
Without Ever Feeling Afraid



Second Edition

MELON DASH

CONQUERING FEAR OF WATER IS LEARNING TO SWIM

**Do you worry that you can't float,
remain calm, or keep yourself from drowning?**

Learning to swim means learning to be confident and peaceful in water over your head. Yet neither is taught in most adult lessons. There's a new way to become the swimmer you're born to be. Strokes are for later, *after* you learn to swim.

"This concept is so cutting-edge that it's a tragedy that more instructors aren't using this method." – Raymond Shores

- Grasp the essentials of learning to swim that are missing from traditional lessons.
- Learn the tried-and-true formula that's helped thousands overcome their fear in water.
- Become peaceful in deep water using small, simple, sensible steps of an infallible system.
- Understand the water at last.
- Learn all the precursors of successful strokes.

"I'm so impressed by what Melon does and what she knows. She has helped many. I'm also impressed by who is not listening to Melon. They have no idea what she knows. If they would just listen!"

– John Spannuth, Founder and CEO, US Water Fitness Association, former international director of the Special Olympics and founding father of U.S. Masters Swimming



Melon (M. Ellen) Dash is a nationally ranked masters swimmer, founder of Miracle Swimming School for Adults, and creator of a new paradigm of teaching and learning: The 5 Circles Teaching System. Her work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, NPR, NBC's *Today Show*, *CNN Headline News*, *Psychology Today*, and numerous other media. Since 1983, she has set new standards for teaching and learning to swim. Instructors worldwide have been licensed to teach this flawless system.

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CONQUER YOUR FEAR OF WATER

A REVOLUTIONARY WAY TO LEARN TO SWIM
WITHOUT EVER FEELING AFRAID

Melon Dash

*For my father,
Dr. William C. Dash, Physicist,
who paved the way for me*



This comprehensive guide provides a complete program of new lessons for adults to overcome fear of water and learn to swim on their own. Instructors will elevate their qualification to teach fearful adults.

This book is a revision of *Conquer Your Fear of Water, An Innovative Self Discovery Course in Swimming* (2006). Bearing a new cover and subtitle, it replaces many line drawings with photographs, provides knowledge acquired since the first printing and new illumination about how fear heals. It clarifies several lessons, answers readers' questions, and introduces a new invention for learning to float.

For more about Dash's books, classes, and instructor trainings, visit:
miracleswimming.com
5CirclesTeachingMethod.com and
melondash.com.

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I asked myself, "How does fear work?"

The answer came as a diagram on two occasions in a week of 1983.

On the second occasion, I knew I had it.

The release of lifelong fear by thousands of adult students and my entire career have resulted from The 5 Circles. It cannot fail.



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2nd Edition

PRAISE FOR CONQUER YOUR FEAR OF WATER

Your methods truly had a miraculous impact on me. My newfound confidence in water has opened doors that I thought would always remain shut.
—Rich Kennedy, Manager

As a 60 year old that had tried to learn to swim, this book was a godsend. My situation was summed up in her opening line “something made you afraid of the water.” ... I have accomplished more in 12 hours than I did with five years of conventional lessons. —Gary Hayes, Amazon.com reviewer

I learned from your book that my fear of water was a fear of losing control of myself...and now I've just passed the SCUBA open water and written exams. I owe this to you. —Maria Mendoza

This book is a master class. My sincere thanks for writing to us in a manner that gave us confidence. —Amit Gupta

I was about to say, “To hell with swimming!” when I read this book. And thank goodness I did.... Read this book slowly. Absorb each lesson. Dash says it's guaranteed to work and she's right. If you're planning to take swimming lessons, read this before you take a single one. —Piano Player, Amazon.com reviewer

You really can learn this from reading a book. I was doubtful, but it's so complete! This is something that's always been there, but everyone has overlooked it. Nobody ever said it this way. —Suzanne Marthins

I'm an American Red Cross certified instructor and aquatic facility supervisor. Your book has completely turned my focus and teaching methods around. I am now a more effective and compassionate instructor. —Jane Bosse

Dash is onto something big. Her system has affected the way I work with some of my clients. —Nancy Merz, Psychotherapist

I really appreciate the writing style of Ms Dash, how she tells it like it is. It's ok to be afraid of the water. I highly recommend this book and wish I had had it sooner. —Chuck, Amazon.com reviewer

As a college student, Melon identified something that was wrong with the way adults were being taught to swim. She developed a system to teach afraid adults that has set the bar high for every aquatic agency and/or swim instructor—to visit their methods and make some adjustments to meet the needs of adults who have fear of water. —Sue Nelson, USA Swimming

As an American Red Cross Swimming Instructor Trainer for thirty years, I have trained hundreds of instructors. A large, essential portion of the learning process is missing for adults who are afraid in water. Water Safety would reach new heights if this book were used by swim instructors everywhere. It should start defining “learn to swim” the way this book does. —Judy Lemke

This book has more useful information about learning to swim than all the beginning swim classes I've taken in my whole life, combined. I've taken a lot of classes. —Deborah Kemper, Travel Writer

This method cannot and does not fail. —Mary Alice Yund, Chemist

This book is about healing fear. Melon Dash knows how to heal those hobbled by fear of water, deep or shallow, and bring the joy of swimming to all. —Cynthia Tuttelman, M.D.

How does Melon teach people to overcome their fear in water, you ask? The most enjoyable, inspiring, and loving way you could possibly imagine. —Anonymous

Infallible. —John Sitaras

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FOREWORD

Thirsty to learn to swim but feeling afraid? Have some Melonade!

Melon will one day be revered as the first person to clearly explain what many people are missing in everyday swimming lessons. Her longtime emphasis on swimming students' self-reliance in water by learning how to rest has been pivotal, as versions of this same message are now saving lives at sea worldwide.

This book began a monumental improvement in the world of safer swimming instruction because Melon was so doggedly unafraid to ask, honour and support how learners really feel.

Melon's work makes complete sense. This do-it-yourself book repeatedly rises to the top of my list for its clarity and for allowing learners to be themselves. She will not tell you to squash your feelings and relax!

I wish you great fun on your quest to learn to swim or to help others learn. If you give yourself time to unfurl what Melon has to say you will learn to swim in the truest sense of the word.

Andie Andrews
Aquatic Specialist
United Kingdom
Board Member, Lifesaving Foundation

PREFACE

WHAT IS KNOWING HOW TO SWIM?

Let's say you're at a hotel. As you walk to the restaurant, you pass the pool where four people in the deep end are chatting and treading. When you return from your meal, they're still in the same spot. Would you say these people can swim? You didn't see them swimming laps.

If a family rents a houseboat for a week and spends its afternoons in the middle of a lake jumping off the boat, playing tag, lounging on a raft, knocking each other off air mattresses, diving under water to get away from each other, would you say those people could swim? Even if you didn't see them doing strokes?

If you have a friend who swims a mile three times a week in a four-foot-deep pool, but she can't do it in deep water because she'd panic, can she swim?

She can "swim," but she can't swim!

There was a time not long ago—two or three decades—when knowing how to swim meant you were safe in water over your head. You might know strokes too. It was understood that if you weren't comfortable and confident in deep water, you couldn't swim.

In the 1980s and 90s, when swim team coaches became the most influential purveyor of swimming lessons, the main definition of "I can swim" changed from, "I'm safe in deep water" to "I can do freestyle. I can do strokes." Their new lessons didn't allow time to teach students that they float or how the water works with their bodies. Lessons were more concerned with teaching kids how to swim fast.

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Adults were taught the same lessons as those given to kids, as they had been for a hundred years. This was never viable for adults who were afraid. The instructional agencies thought that the failure of adults to learn was due to students' not practicing enough. Agencies didn't know their instructors were unequipped to work with fear.

Swimming coaches didn't anticipate a downside of their new curriculum for children. The downside extended to lessons for adults.

It's taken a few decades of living with the fallout of all of this to deduce that in the 1990s or so, many or most swimming lessons stopped teaching safety and stopped requiring safety to "pass the swim test." Instead, they required mechanical skills. The ability to rest and be peaceful in deep water was not tested.

I dare say that in an alarming number of people, it was also not learned.

What is the fallout?

- A shortage of lifeguards: there haven't been enough people who could pass the pre-test to take the training to become a lifeguard. Therefore, the pool of guards is now insufficient.
- Virtually no change in the drowning rate in the past twenty-plus years. One might guess that the drowning rate would have increased noticeably in that time except for the valiant efforts of the new industry of Drowning Prevention which has prevented many deaths.
- Twenty and thirty-somethings who cling to the sides in deep water even though they took swimming lessons and their parents think they can swim.
- Adults and kids who think they can swim, but can't. What could be more unsafe? They try out for swim teams. They say they can swim. They

swim from the shallow end toward the deep end and suddenly head for the side at the dropoff. The coach says, “I thought you said you could swim.” The ‘swimmer’ says, “I can, until I get to deep water.” The coach says, “I’m sorry, but you don’t know how to swim.”

- Many adults who quit swimming lessons because the lessons don’t meet their needs. Many become discouraged and resign themselves to not swimming: “I guess swimming isn’t meant for me.”
- People who pass the common swim test without proving that they can rest in deep water; therefore, they haven’t shown that they’re safe.
- Many people who are afraid in water who believe they simply need to learn to tread water to be safe. This is not possible until they can swim.

This book teaches adults how to be comfortable and safe in water, shallow and deep: to swim. It provides all the ideas, explanations, skills, and steps that are essential to learning comfort and safety. When you’ve embodied them—when you can swim—you can go on to learn strokes without struggle.

Strokes provide swimming *efficiency*. But safety must come first. It turns out that it’s not movement in deep water that makes you safe: it’s the ability to remain still inside. One day, this will be the goal of all beginning swimming courses.

Melon Dash, Founder
Miracle Swimming School for Adults, LLC
Sarasota, Florida

INTRODUCTION

I love the water. It's the depth that gets me.

—Giselle

If you know that $2+2$ equals 4, and you see the world adding $2+3$ or $2+6$ or $2+135$ and trying to get 4, always coming up with an incorrect answer and basing further calculations on these answers, you might feel as I do, like shouting from the rooftops, “Two plus two is four! I can show you. The rest of your calculations will be correct. Life will be easier!”

For a century, many adults have taken swimming classes that didn't meet them at their level. Their level was “afraid.” This stage precedes “Beginning Swimming” lessons but hadn't been identified as a stage until the 1980s. “Afraid” has been treated as insignificant. Instructor trainings have been devoid of tools to address it. But instructors are beginning to learn that “afraid” has its own set of needs and skills. These steps may not be skipped.

Overcoming fear is an intimate process that takes place at your core. It requires slowing down and coming to a full stop. The journey is simple and clear. The process is reliable, predictable, and fun. It just may involve something you never considered before. I hope you'll treat yourself with the utmost respect, compassion, and patience.

By my definition, if you're uncomfortable in water, you're afraid of something. There are no silly reasons for being afraid. An understanding is missing. It makes complete sense to be afraid in water until you know how the water works and how to be in control in it. However, knowing how it works and how to be in control in it have never been systematically taught in beginning swimming classes, to my knowledge. Would anyone expect a five-year-old

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to learn to read without learning the alphabet first? You must be met at your level, taught the basics, and all your questions must be answered correctly.

Topics in this book are presented as they arise in class. You will come to a new understanding. It will turn your swimming around.

TWO—AN ADULT AFRAID IN WATER—AND TWO—
THE INFORMATION IN THIS BOOK—EQUALS FOUR: AN ADULT
WHO IS CONFIDENT, SAFE, AND FREE IN WATER AND KNOWS
HOW TO REMAIN SAFE. IT WORKS EVERY SINGLE TIME.

It's my wish that in my lifetime, all swim instructors will learn how to teach "2+2=4."

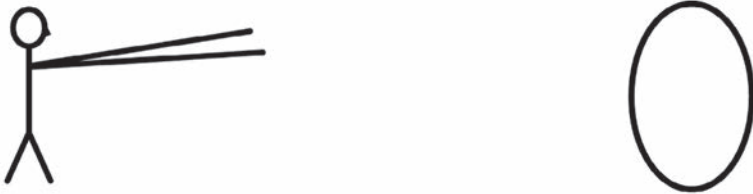
- Q.** Why haven't you learned to swim?
- A.** Because you weren't comfortable. I hope you'll follow the steps in this book "to a T." *It's about fun!*

PART 1

THE URGENCY TO GET STARTED

Urgency is understandable, but it impedes learning.
Feel the buzz.

Urgency is a desperate sense of wanting to be ahead of where you are. In a few pages, you'll find what happens inside us when we're ahead of ourselves. Be aware of this debilitating state.



**Wanting to be somewhere you're not:
your body is on the left. Your attention—you—are on the right.**

You may feel like skipping these early pages and going directly to the skills. But understanding the material in the following pages is a critical first step for learning.

How long have you yearned to be free in water? Number of years: _____

For now, please feel the sensation of urgency if you have it—the hurry, internal speed, tension, excitement, wanting-to-get-this-part-over-with—and allow it to be there.

There are times when urgency is a useful thing. Learning to overcome fear and swim is *not* one of those times. When you want to learn, the feeling of urgency helps you get started but it also can tempt you to skip steps. If you

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are urgent to learn, feel where urgency is in your body and stop reading to experience it *fully now*.

Why stop reading to experience it? Because when you become present to it, it has its first chance to let go. When it lets go, then instead of your attention being focused on the goal, all your attention will be in the present, available for learning. With all your attention available for learning, you cannot fail.

Here are three of the most common statements of adult swimming students.

“I’M AFRAID IN THE DEEP, NOT THE SHALLOW”

Someone who is afraid in deep water but not in the shallow is confident in the shallow because he (or she) can stand up. In other words, he depends on the bottom or the side for his safety. However, he doesn’t truly know shallow water. He doesn’t *know* how it works with his body. If he did, he’d be free in the deep.

I’ve taught my class in a pool that was no deeper than five feet and people overcame their fear of deep water. No, those people weren’t short!

Do you want to rely on yourself for your safety in the shallow and deep rather than on the bottom or the side? If so, then get to know shallow water. Start at the beginning and skip no steps. It may seem that there are a lot of steps in this book, but they’re not what you may think. Besides, many steps are short. I dare say, being in a rush to learn is part of what has kept you from getting to know the water. To learn to swim, you’ll need to slow down, feel the water, and get to know it. Doing so is not drudgery, tedious, or something to get past. It’s rich and fun. The water is an amazing place. It gives you things you do not yet have.

“I JUST NEED TO LEARN TO BREATHE”

Most people who can do a stroke like freestyle who cannot get air during the stroke are tense and rushed. You won't learn to breathe while you're tense and rushed. People may say they're tense because they can't get air. Guess what? That's probably not the reason. More likely, they don't know the water holds them up. Knowing it holds them up makes all the difference. And if the water truly doesn't hold them up—which is the case for a small percentage of people—then they don't know how to be calm if they sink. A *swimmer* is calm even if he or she is not a floater. When you “know the water,” you will be at home and comfortable as a floater or a sinker and be able to get air on your own without effort.

You may be thinking, “She's going to tell me to relax.” But no, I would never tell you that.

“I JUST NEED TO LEARN TO TREAD”

Contrary to popular opinion, someone who is fearful in deep water is nowhere near ready to learn to tread water. Even if they could muster the movements to support their heads above the surface for a few seconds, it would be unsustainable due to fear and exhaustion.

Learning to swim is a different process for adults than you may have thought. I hope you'll take your time and grasp the remarkable teaching of this book.

PART 2

HOW TO KNOW IF YOU'RE AFRAID IN WATER

Some people who are afraid in water know they're afraid, and some don't. Students have said to me, "I'm not sure I'm afraid in water. But I do cling to the sides when I'm in the deep." To me, clinging to the sides in the deep means they're afraid.

Have you been unsuccessful learning how to rest or breathe while swimming? Perhaps you believe it's because you haven't practiced enough or that the instructor didn't have enough teaching experience. Those could be true. Or, it may be that you weren't in control.

If you're not calm in the middle of the deep end of the pool, or swimming out to a raft in a lake and stopping to rest on the way, or at any point between the lawn chair and deep water, this book is written for you. Discomfort and uncertainty are two faces of fear. If you weren't afraid, you wouldn't hesitate to go to the raft—even if you didn't know strokes. If you have wished you could swim, or felt badly that you couldn't, rest assured: it's okay to be afraid in water. And there is a pleasant path out of fear to freedom.

Do you think that just because you can't swim, or you panic in deep water, or you get water in your nose, or you can't open your eyes under water, or you sink, or you can't get a breath, or you didn't pass your swimming test...you weren't born a swimmer? Impossible. You were born with the blueprint to learn to swim, every bit as much as the fastest swimmers in the world were. Soon, you'll know this, as I do.

PART 3

WHAT HAPPENED?

You are not alone.

The same thing happened to everyone who is afraid in water. It happened millions of ways, but there is a common thread among all of them.

Something made you afraid in water. For most people, it was a frightening experience in water. Also, for most people, a parent was afraid in water or “didn’t swim.” For a few people, the cause of fear is unknown. Virtually always, there was a loss of control. This fear can be healed.

Here is one sample of an early experience of a student who was afraid.

“My fear of water began years ago, when as a child, a well-intentioned but uninformed swim teacher pushed me into the deep end of the pool, thinking this would get me to swim. Needless to say, he was mistaken. I went on to become an adult who loved water but never fully enjoyed being in water because I was always nervous and afraid. I’ve tried other classes since then. But it seemed as though I could never “get” the breathing, my arms and legs refused to work together, and the panic in my belly just wouldn’t go away. Plus, the teacher usually wanted me to do things that I didn’t feel ready to do. It was awful.

The most important lesson Miracle Swimming taught me is that when I take my time, going as slowly as I need to in order to feel safe and comfortable, I learn. I learn without fail, and with great joy.”

—Anonymous

PART 4

WHAT DIDN'T HAPPEN?

Relieve yourself of a burden.

Why learning to swim hasn't worked.

It's not your fault.

After you became afraid, you may or may not have tried to overcome it. What you needed was not what you found, however. Your questions may have gone unanswered. Perhaps you were given misinformation or learning steps that were out of order. The instructors didn't know.

$$2+100 \neq 4$$

Everyone can learn to swim. Yes, you. It's not that you can learn to swim if you grin and bear it. It's not that you can learn to swim if you feel the fear and do it anyway, though that approach has its place elsewhere. It's not that you can learn to swim if you force yourself. It's that you can learn to swim happily, gently, and predictably. There's no mystery about it anymore.

If you've taken swimming lessons before and you haven't learned to swim or to breathe or to be comfortable in water shallow and deep, it's probably because you and the instructor were trying to add 2 and "not 2" to get 4. You were probably trying to add "you" plus "swimming mechanics" to get confidence. They don't add up.

Yes, you can make some progress in conventional "swimming" lessons. But the lessons fall short of what an afraid learner needs. However, if we add your "self" to the full list of sequential steps of learning, it will add up to safety, freedom in water both shallow and deep, comfortable swimming,

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and skill in preventing panic. If you haven't yet reached your goals, you are like thousands of people worldwide who have asked me, "Will your lessons work for me?" In a word, yes!

Most likely, your instructors and their trainers were unaware that traditional lessons didn't teach people to swim; they taught strokes instead. The distinction had not been made. The safety standards of afraid students were not met. But instructors thought they were doing the right thing.

In order to make all swimming students as safe as they can be, instruction must dive to the depths of what safety really is. It's not simply, "Learn strokes and treading." Safety resides at a level never before, to my knowledge, examined by the swimming and aquatics industries. This book teaches it. The details were discovered in 1983. This new system of keeping yourself safe is the very definition of mindfulness.

It's okay to be afraid in water. In fact, about half of adults in America are. Many say, "I love the water." But put them in deep open water (lakes, oceans) and 64% (158 million adults) are afraid. Put them in water over their heads in a pool, and 46% (114 million) are afraid. Thirty-nine percent are afraid to put their heads under water (Gallup, 1998.) Yet all of them, and you, were born to be swimmers. If someone can swim, he or she is not afraid in deep water.

What is swimming, anyway? Is it perfect strokes, even if done fearfully? Is it going from here to there in water without being able to stop and rest in the middle?

I believe that knowing how to swim is not about doing a perfect stroke... or even knowing strokes at all. My definition of, "I can swim" is confidence that you can rely on yourself for your safety in water over your head and the ability to do so. Confidence in water automatically brings ease in water, the ability to move from here to there without tiring, being free to play, and having a choice about what to do. It brings a curiosity about deep water: "Is deep water the same as shallow?" And in the answering of that question, a

beginning student learns that yes, it is. Only his mind is different in the deep; he “loses” it. And that raises the question, “What shall I do about my mind in deep water?”

In my opinion, and in that of most of my students, if someone can do the crawl stroke in shallow water but not in deep water with confidence, he or she cannot really swim yet. She would say, “I can swim—sort of.” To her, the term swimming includes not just mechanics but also the component of confidence. Both are your birthright.

Everyone is born a swimmer. Everyone is born a talker and a walker, a reader and a driver. You weren’t born knowing how to do these things. You have the blueprint within you to learn them. You just needed the steps. You learned how to walk and talk beautifully because you didn’t skip any steps. You learned to read and drive step by step. You didn’t learn to swim because many steps were skipped. But if you skip no steps, it’s inevitable that you’ll learn.

If you’re afraid in water and you’re like the six thousand adults that I and my licensees have taught since 1983, you’ve felt frustrated and confined not to be able to learn to swim. You may have felt embarrassment and shame as well. You have missed opportunities. You want to be free.

If someone is afraid in water, there’s an essential ingredient he needs before he can learn swimming mechanics. (When I use “she” or “he,” I mean both genders.) If it’s not learned, the student won’t learn to swim, period. Those people who already have it are the people who learn to swim.

That essential ingredient is control. Despite the fact that swimming has been taught to millions of people without teaching control, the system that was used was not based on universal principles that worked for all students. It has never worked for adults who are afraid, nor does it teach true safety. The millions of students who did learn to swim—i.e., became confident in deep water—were in control. Since instructors believed that everyone was in control, control—and by extension, the ability to learn with their system—was

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assumed. It was an incorrect assumption. Therefore, control was never identified as Step 1.

$$2+2=4$$

IF YOU DON'T HAVE STEP 1, YOU CAN'T REACH STEP 2

And what is safety? Yes, it can be “no boats driving through the swim area.” But this is not the primary safety you’re concerned with. You’re concerned with the safety you’ll feel if you’re in control of yourself—you know you won’t panic.

Learning safety did not happen. Instructors thought your safety came from them: “I’m here. You’re safe.” But it comes from within.

$$2+2=4$$

YOU HAVE TO BE IN CONTROL TO LEARN TO SWIM

PART 5

HOW TO FIX IT

Nuts and bolts of overcoming fear.

The steps of learning to swim.

Overcoming fear IS learning to swim.

Fix the problem.

THE TEN FRONTS OF FREEDOM IN WATER

A “front” is a leading edge. In overcoming fear in water, there are ten fronts on which you can make progress toward the goal of freedom in deep water (ten angles from which to approach it). Each is part of the whole picture. When you’ve reached your limit of what’s fun on one front, you can turn to another front and continue to make progress. Progress on one front builds confidence, which enhances your progress on all fronts. Resting often brings up the rear on each front as well. The fronts are (in no particular order):

- Fun, Presence, Control and Internal Speed
- Beliefs
- Face
- Front
- Back
- Vertical
- Propulsion
- Breath
- Water Entries
- Deep Water

For each of these components of learning to swim, there is a sequence of steps that, when followed, takes you to the goal: freedom in that area. The most important front is fun, presence, control, and internal speed. From fun, all the rest are made possible.

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This book intersperses all ten fronts throughout the book, the same way Miracle Swimming classes are taught. You'll make a little progress here, then switch to another front and make a little progress there, then switch again and make progress over there. Little by little, predictably and systematically, you grow. Growth happens quickly if you go slowly and skip no steps.

STEP 1: $2+2=4$

If we know that $2+2=4$, and we base our adding of $2+2$ on this truth, we will get the correct answer every time. If we add $2+3$ or $2+6$ trying to get 4, we will never get the correct answer. Everything else based on the incorrect answer will be further afield of the truth.

That is why you should not expect to learn to do freestyle or tread water or breathe if your front float is tense and uncomfortable. A tense front float plus stroke mechanics do not equal a comfortable, viable freestyle.

In learning to swim, the “correct answer” is comfort and control in water, not just the ability to go from here to there with pretty strokes. Once you have comfort and control, learning to go from here to there is automatic and guaranteed.

Historically, the formula of swimming instruction with students who are afraid has been:

- A student who is afraid
- + *being taught stroke mechanics*
- + *being asked to keep up with the rest of the class*
- + *no discussion of how students feel*
- + *lack of instruction in how to remain in control*

= a student who is uncomfortable, unsafe in some shallow-water and most deep-water situations, stroking if she's lucky, but not swimming. She is afraid in the deep and does not call herself a swimmer.

The common formula for students who are *not* afraid is the same as above, but the result is a person who is safe in most situations but has no idea what to do if he becomes afraid. He wings it.

To get the correct answer, this sums it up:
a student who is afraid or not afraid
+ *permission to learn at his own pace*
+ *an opportunity to share feelings and thoughts*
+ *learning what's required to stay in control*
+ *satisfactory, correct answers to all his questions*
+ *all the steps of learning to swim in sequence*

= a person who is confident and safe, allowing him to access his natural ability and, without effort or thought, to make up the mechanics on the spot to go from here to there with ease, the same way a child learns to walk.

It has been thought that by learning swimming mechanics an adult would overcome fear. However, stroke mechanics don't help adults overcome their fear. They can make it worse.

SWIMMING MECHANICS HAVE NO MEANING
UNTIL YOU CAN FEEL WHAT'S HAPPENING.

If you're terrified, you can't feel how much the water is doing for you.

2+2=4

MOST ADULTS LEARN TO SWIM TO ADD PEACE OF MIND AND PLEASURE TO THEIR LIVES. SINCE THAT IS THEIR GOAL, PEACE OF MIND AND PLEASURE IN WATER ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO PRACTICE.

It's true that strokes give you control of something: propulsion and speed. Strokes provide efficiency. You can swim faster with them than without them.

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However, no stroke and no swimmer—regardless of talent and speed—can out-swim a shark or even a small fish (not that you’ll need to, but it seems to be in the back of people’s minds). Strokes don’t make a person safe.

Millions of adults know how to do a stroke, but they’re still afraid in deep water and open water. They’re not in control in deep water, so what good will strokes do? You must be in control in deep water in order to learn skills, perform them and rest there. The minimum level of control needed is control over yourself, not over propulsion or speed. All afraid-in-water students I’ve met agree that they don’t feel in control of themselves in deep water.

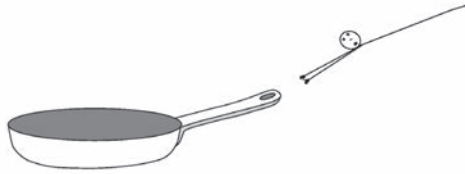
True or false?

YOU WANT YOUR SAFETY TO COME FROM YOURSELF,
NOT FROM THE BOTTOM OR THE SIDE OF THE POOL
...OR STROKES.

By control, I don’t mean that you’re saying over and over to yourself, “I’m safe. Just do it. You can get there.” I mean you can just be yourself in water, perfectly quiet within, and enjoy yourself without doing anything in particular. The water is so different from land that the experience of simply being in water is enough to be interesting, to arouse curiosity, to satisfy. Even if it weren’t interesting, it would still be essential to be in control if you wanted to swim and keep yourself safe.

Being in water is bringing your full presence to it. It’s being completely “here.” Nothing is completely available to you and me unless we’re experiencing it while we’re completely here. In school when we were children, it was called “applying yourself.” Only when we are completely “here” can we receive all that’s being given and all that’s inherently present. The gifts of being completely here can be mind-blowing. In the case of learning how to be comfortable in the water—pool and ocean—my students have used that very term.

Have you ever “flown off the handle” and later regretted it? Surely, we all have. Flying off the handle is loss of control in an irretrievable way. This is panic, the same as panic in deep water. The solution is the same for both, and it’s simple. Naturally, this book is about the panic in water. The solution works for all panic.



When you’re in control, you have choices. You can ask yourself, “Would I rather do this, or that?” When we’re not in control, we act from a place of survival, habit, or “instincts” that we can’t change in the moment. It’s almost as though we have no mind. Indeed, when we are in these moments, we have—for all intents and purposes—lost our minds.

2 + 2 = 4

WHEN YOU’RE NOT IN CONTROL, YOU DON’T HAVE A CHOICE.

This book illustrates learning: the learning of you, a person, not just a physical body but a non-physical being who fills and controls the body. We use this essential truth of you and me to heal fear and learn to swim. Healing fear and learning to swim are about what you do with your self, not your body. First, learn what to do with your self—be peaceful—and then it’s easy to learn what to do with your body—mechanics. Without this fundamental point, you have virtually no chance of becoming free in deep water.

Learning to swim is becoming peaceful and competent in water over one's head. Strokes are merely choreography. Choreography makes swimming more efficient. You must learn to swim before you learn to swim swim efficiently.

2+2=4

IF YOU DON'T HAVE THE CORRECT INFORMATION,
YOU HAVE LITTLE CHANCE OF SUCCESS.

Many people learn to swim without ever hearing about or learning the essential non-physical skill of remaining in control. This is fine, until an emergency in water comes up. And when emergencies come up, many swimmers don't know what to do; sometimes good swimmers drown. This is partly because they were never taught the true fundamentals of safety. Most instructors believe fervently that they teach safety. But they were never trained in the true fundamentals of safety themselves. No one was, as far as I know. Most adults in the United States—and the world?— even those who have taken swimming lessons, are not comfortable in deep open water, and therefore they aren't safe. If control in water is taught, the results are more positive than students imagined possible. Students call their experience a miracle.

Please consider letting yourself off the hook for not having learned to swim. When you receive all the pertinent information and learn it, you cannot possibly fail. Not that everyone has to overcome his or her fear with this method, but we have not seen any other teaching that goes straight to the heart of panic-prevention, confidence, and safety. Without those, you can't learn to swim. The amount of confidence you gain, the level of skill you attain, and the degree of challenges you can meet are likely not optimal without this information.

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? 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: the self.

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 energy, or spirit. 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 understand that we're free to move our limbs if we're able-bodied. I'm referring to our movement as spirit in a body. In other words, how do we move while our bodies are still? Daydreaming is an example.

Your body conforms to physical laws like the law of gravity. Your spirit, however, doesn't conform to physical laws. 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 with whom instructors must communicate, 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. If you're afraid you might die, you cannot follow the instructions, "Do this with your arms."

2+2=4

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

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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.

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?” These must be answered before anyone can expect you to “hear” anything else about swimming.

When using this book, please remain safe and in control in the water by *doing only what you want to do. 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 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 “here.” You’re in control, you know where you are, and you know what you’re doing. You’re satisfied with how you’re handling things. Everyone can learn to swim if they practice the right things. It’s fun...so my students have told me for over thirty-five 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 worried about your safety, it was impossible to be successful learning mechanics. By learning, I mean embodying the mechanics so that you could use them anytime without thinking.

Here is a diagram of being present. As you come to understand it, you will find that it’s the very definition of mindfulness.



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, a 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, you as a spirit, your self. In this 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. In our everyday language, we call this being present, “at home,” composed, grounded, centered, together, mindful. You feel poised, quiet, solid, in control, stable, self-contained, peaceful, balanced, open, and comfortable.

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



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

In nervousness, you don't feel terrible, but you don't feel good anymore, as you did in the 1st Circle. You're mostly in control, but not completely. In everyday language, we call this, "having cold feet, weak in the knees, a question in the air, buzzing." As a spirit, you aren't completely in your body anymore. You've begun to rise upward through the top of your head.

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



Afraid:
"This is not fun. Get me out of here!"

Afraid: we are further out of our bodies. There's little or no presence of us as a spirit in our bodies below the chest. This causes the common knot in the stomach, butterflies in the stomach, and clammy hands and feet. There's less presence of the spirit in the body to keep things stable. We're no longer having fun.

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 form a word.

Finally, here's a diagram of panic.



Panic:
Out of it. "Help me get back!"

We call this "losing it," gone, panicked, 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 asks you what happened, you would say you don't know. This is because you weren't there to experience it. You