

FEAR: Instructive or Destructive?
By Dr. Darlene Treese

"Fear defeats more people than any other one thing in the world."-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Depression, gloom, pessimism, despair, discouragement...sign of the times or a murderous epidemic? Fear simply does not exist somewhere out there in the world. If you went searching for it, you would find it only in the mind. It is something that you do to yourself by thinking fearful thoughts and having fearful expectations. Fears that restrict you may take on different forms. The first level is your personal story and that consists of two types of fears: things that can happen and things that require action. Fears of things that can happen include the fear of aging, of losing financial security, of illness or change. Fear of things that require action include changing careers, beginning or ending a relationship, or making a speech. One of the insidious qualities of fear is that it can affect every aspect of our lives.

The second level of fear has to do with the inner state of mind rather than external situations. These fears reflect your self-worth and your ability to handle life. It may include the fear of failure or success, rejection or helplessness. Level three is the bottom line that sustains all fears– the fear of not being able to handle whatever may happen. The truth is that if you felt you could handle anything that came your way, you would fear nothing!

A fear may seem ridiculous but the reactions it creates in your mind and body are real. This is because fear is not a logical thing. It is an emotional response to a past experience that you have had that you may not even recall. That past experience of when you got hurt is being projected into the future, and your fear is protecting you from having that experience occur again. You will never fear something that has already happened. You may be angry or upset, but you will not fear it.

Babies are born without fear – only high sensitivity to falling and loud noises. All fears are developed. You learn them from experiences when you get hurt, or when you are told by an authority that you will get hurt, or when you saw someone else get hurt. Fear is not good or bad – it's your reaction to the fear that determines your limitations. You can change the fears that no longer serve you – those that you have outgrown or are outdated and restrict you in some way, when you no longer have the need to be protected. For instance, if it's ok for you to look foolish, you will have no fear of being embarrassed. If you laugh and learn from your mistakes, you will never need to repeat them.

The moment of fear can lead you directly to a feeling of confidence, trust, relaxation, forgiveness, and acceptance – whatever positive reaction you need to have in relation to the fear. View fear as an alarm or wake up call that you need some strength, acceptance, confidence or trust to move forward and achieve your goal. To change your reaction to fear: (1) Be gentle, kind and supportive to yourself when experiencing fear – not angry, frustrated or upset. (2) Understand that fear is an indication that you are lacking knowledge – create options and positive mental imagery. (3) Recognize that you have everything within you by asking yourself, "What do I really need to give myself right now?" (4) Take 1 step at a time and give yourself credit, validation and acknowledgement for taking that step. (5) Recognize that fear does not cause the problem – only your perception of the problem. Focus on what you want and know that you will benefit from whatever happens. Fear gives us guidance about what we need to take the next step and reach beyond our present limits. If you are not feeling fear, you are probably not living!

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