

Fear and how to overcome it

Inspiration, or more precisely the lack of it, strikes fear into the hearts of people when faced with a true challenge. I remember looking at some of my opponents faces when competing in national karate championships. They looked scared; they had fear running through them. How could they perform to their best when they were driven by fear? The simple answer is they biologically could not.

Negative emotions narrows your momentary thought-action repertoire by calling to mind an urge to act in a particular way. Fear is linked with the urge to flee, anger with the urge to attack and disgust with the urge to expel. We need this in life-threatening situations as a narrow thought-action repertoire promotes quick and decisive action that carries direct and immediate benefit. But we do not spend most of our time in life-threatening situations, yet people are still predominately living in fear.

Fear certainly stands in a way of living a vibrant, good and optimal life as we cannot be truly be inspirational resulting in mediocrity performance. Also negativity does not play fair. It does not allow you to think straight or see the big picture. Studies show that when people experience negative emotions, they selectively call to mind negative thought that are linked by their negative tone. So when you ruminate, you dredge up thought that thoughts that only add fuel to the fire of your negativity. Negative emotions create negative thoughts, and the interplay of such emotions and thoughts drag you down leading you to a downward spiral.

It has to be said though that fear is needed when we do something daring. If we did not know fear we would never need to take risks, never need to go to 'the edge', never step outside our comfort zones, never dare to live! Hence the idea of courage. Traditionally courage means facing your fear, going through your fear, and thereby disempowering the fear.

No need to be daring, look for inspiration instead!

However you do not need to be daring to overcome fear. There are other much more pleasant ways such as feeling inspired. Every so often, you come across true excellence and witnessing human nature at its very best can inspire and uplift you. Inspiration is a positive emotion that is often overlooked. Inspiration doesn't simply feel good, it makes you want to express what's good and do good yourself. It creates the urge to do your best so that you can reach your own higher good.

Recent studies show that brain imaging in people in a positive state have a broadened focus rather than a narrow one. As a result, people see more possibilities, are more creative, more resistant, perform better, trust increases and there are more win-win negotiations. Research has found that medics with positive emotions made better and faster decisions. Do not underestimate the power of positive emotions! It's important to create a mindset of positivity by being open to the present moment, appreciative, kind and curious. Over time your new mindset will create better results at work and generally in your life. You will have greater satisfaction, a longer and more joyous life as well as inspiring others along the way. With this mindset you step onto an upward spiral! You cannot access this upward spiral by saying "I will be positive today". It requires a lifestyle change and it does not just happen, just like losing weight. Small and regular doses of positive emotions over time open us.

Beyond Fear

One way beyond fear is to work in an courageous way after all courage is the ability to let go of the illusion that the fear is real. In essence this means to realise all fear is not based in 'reality'. All fear is a projection of future loss. We imagine we are going to lose something in the future. That could be anything from objects to people to our reputation. This speculation can be made to appear 'unreal' when we realize that we have nothing to lose because in 'reality' we cannot possess or hold on to anything. This means we have to dare to challenge the conventional beliefs we have assimilated – that possession and ownership is both possible and necessary to a happy and successful life. We may dare to 'think' we truly have nothing to lose but we may not 'say it' so easily for fear we may be seen by others as slightly unhinged and therefore lose our reputation if not their approval! Which means we have not yet fully 'realized' we truly have nothing to lose!

Restoring Reality

Whichever way we look at it, the 'enlightened courage' that we seek in order to live a fearless life can only emerge if we let go of our belief in the possibility of loss by realizing we cannot hold on to anything in the first place. In reality, once the fear is gone then courage is not required. Within our heart (our self) we are no longer splitting our self between all our attachments and so the wholeness of our heart (our self) is restored and only then can we 'live', which really means to 'give' of our self, wholeheartedly, fully, completely, enthusiastically.

We also live in a climate of fear. As a result, we do everything in our power to stay out of harm's way. But there is a risk to playing safe. Aspirations are put on hold. But the things we fear are often unlikely to happen. Most people overestimate risk, failure and danger and underestimate the value of being curious. It is time to reclaim our neglected strengths. We can and should choose how we want to live our lives. Are we governed by fear and the need for safety or are we willing to be courageous in the pursuit of satisfaction, growth and meaning?

Curiosity serves as a gateway to what we value and cherish most. We can reclaim the lost pleasures of uncertainty, discovery and play from our youth. Outside of childhood, our innate curiosity does not come as easily or naturally, but these obstacles can be acknowledged, confronted and ultimately, overcome. We can cultivate curiosity to shape our lives closer toward the direction of where we want to be, after all realizing our potential depends on it.