

FEAR...friend or foe?

Have you ever sat through a presentation or workshop and been delivered the old chestnut, "F.E.A.R. is False Evidence Appearing Real?" I have heard this many times and have always thought it a load of nonsense. Whenever this little saying is trotted out, there are always those in the audience who nod their head in wise agreement. What a joke. If you asked 90% of those nodding heads to stand in front of that same audience and speak, they would likely turn pale with fear. I don't know who first coined the phrase but they must have read it on a cereal box or found it in a fortune cookie. I just have to say it...what claptrap. Fear is the most debilitating emotion a person can experience. My very first client had a fear of heights, and the thought of simply standing on an upper floor balcony would cause them to break out in a sweat. Flying for them was definitely out of the question. Not long after that client, I was approached by someone suffering from exam anxiety. Sweating, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea were experienced before any sort of test. Try telling these people that all they are experiencing is simply "false evidence appearing real."

These are examples of extreme cases of fear we would label as phobias. A phobia can be defined as an aberrant and intense fear of an object or situation that poses little or no actual danger. Usually, a phobia is considered similar to a normal fear, but it is the extent to which a person is affected that determines whether that fear has become a phobia. There are hundreds of recognised phobias, everything from Ablutophobia: a persistent and irrational fear of bathing, washing or cleaning. The phobia is more common in women and children, especially with people who are extremely emotional...to...Zoophobia: an irrational and exaggerated fear or aversion towards animals. My favourite is Linonophobia: an exaggerated and unwarranted fear of string. (A colleague once dealt with a case of Ablutophobia...the cause was a past life drowning.)

Most recently I worked with a young woman who had an aversion to babies and pregnant women. Experiences and decisions made when a baby herself, both in this life and a past life, triggered an adverse response to any images of birthing. Can you imagine going through life like that? There are many reasons why a person may develop a phobia and just as many techniques for releasing it, but for the sufferer it is very real. And is it any wonder? Our whole society is based on fear. Most marketing is based on fear, fear, fear. Just look at most television advertising where your senses of sight and sound are used against you. All designed to create fear for your safety or that of your family; fear of ill health; fear of not fitting in; fear of debt; fear of missing out...and on it goes. Many schools, governments and religions rule by fear. Whole countries and nations are controlled by fear. So it's no wonder that fear is so prevalent in our lives and when it gets a firm grip it is very debilitating.

The fears we share with the other members of our culture can also affect us greatly. In the 19th century, tuberculosis killed tens of thousands of people, but starting in the 1880's, death rates began to plummet. Why? Previous to that decade no one knew what caused TB, which gave it an aura of terrifying mystery. But in 1882 Dr Robert Koch made the momentous discovery that TB was caused by bacterium. Once this knowledge reached the general public, death rates fell from 600 per 100,000 to 200 per 100,000, despite the fact that it would be nearly half a century before an effective drug treatment could be found. (Lyall Watson, "Beyond Supernature", pp. 58-60.)

In the early days of organ transplants fear was an important factor in the success rates. In the 1950's kidney transplants were only a tantalising possibility. Then a doctor in Chicago made what seemed to be a successful transplant. He published his findings, and soon after other successful transplants took place around the world. Then the first transplant failed. In fact, the doctor discovered that the kidney had actually been rejected from the start. But it did not matter. Once transplant recipients overcame their fears and believed they could survive, they did, and success rates soared beyond all expectations. (Joseph Chilton Pearce, "The Crack in the Cosmic Egg.") Of course you could argue that the simple change in belief was responsible for the increased rates, but what was blocking that belief? It was fear.

It is so entrenched in our psyche that we even motivate ourselves with fear. In NLP parlance we describe “away from” motivation, where a person motivates themselves by moving away from what they don't want rather than toward what they do want. Using fear of what you don't want to motivate yourself is less effective than moving toward a powerful, positive goal. Just as an example, I once asked a client to list what they thought was important to them about regular exercise. The list contained statements like; I don't want to be fat; I don't want to be like my Mother; it makes me feel good; I want to stay healthy; I need to keep my job...and so on. Can you see the fear factor in that list? From what we have discussed so far I'm sure we would agree that fear is most often our foe, but it does not have to be that way.

Now I don't have any miracle cure for overcoming fear. Sometimes it can be as basic (note: I said basic not easy) as recognising and facing your fear. I know how tough that can be. I was once terrified of public speaking, but an intensive seven day course dissolved that issue. Now you can't shut me up. My intent is to bring into your awareness just how fear may be playing a role in your life. If you've made a New Years resolution, take a good look at what's motivating you. And here is one way to do that. Whatever you have decided, more exercise; better relationship; loose weight; more money; more time for yourself, it doesn't matter what. Take ten minutes to list what is most important to you or what you most value about that resolution in just a few words. Why have you made that decision or resolution? Just list them as they come to you...get a friend to help you. Once you've got around ten short descriptive reasons, have a good honest look at the list and note which ones contain an element of fear. Which ones are motivating you “away from what you don't want”. If it's all “away from” motivation, you need to reassess what is truly important to you in regards to that resolution. Find a more compelling, positive reason to draw you to that goal or achieve that resolution. This simple exercise may surprise you, and in so doing you may well recognise other aspects of your life that are somewhat flavoured by fear.

When you fear something you give it focus and attention and keep it more alive as a possibility. The more you fear something, the more you are telling yourself it is likely to happen. If you repress that fear, it may still surface in your life in some way to be dealt with. See this as a healing opportunity, and a way to change the limiting beliefs or stories that may be behind those fears. Your fears can offer clues and point you in directions that enable you to reach greater understanding and self-awareness. This is an important point and I want you to consider this. Fear is actually your friend...it is not false evidence at all, it does not have to be your foe. Yes fear is a vibration, it is energy...it's energy being filtered through belief systems that are out of alignment. Fear is a messenger telling you that your belief systems are out of alignment with your true Self. Fear can point to limiting beliefs and assumptions that do not serve us, all of which can be altered.

“Dance in the shadows of your fears and they will turn to light.” Aine Belton