***FEARLESSNESS***

## Introduction

Fears are the irrational and unconstructive thoughts about how an incident, venture or a thing may end up in negative or unfavorable results. They are destructive and detrimental, resulting in damaging tendencies like insecure behavior, negativity and paranoia. Further, they obstruct an individual’s problem solving, thinking and decision making abilities. They prevent the individual from leading a creative, healthy and productive life.

Fear is the reason behind a person’s negative self-image, preventing him from fully asserting himself. A fearful person may stop himself from taking part in healing and nurturing activities like making friends, going for counseling, etc. Doubt becomes the pretext behind which an individual hides to resist change or growth.

Where do these terrible fears come from? They basically spawn from negative thoughts. Negative thinking, ignorance, incorrect understanding and wrong actions may lead to fear. The mind works overtime to create its fears, turns them into a reality for itself and then suffers because of them. Many of these fears are even simply habitual and instinctual.

**Types of Fear**

According to Buddhist tradition, a person can generally be struck with one of two kinds of fears: healthy or unhealthy.

A person could decide to give up drinking out of the fear of developing serious health problems. These kinds of fears, which come up because the danger is real as well as where the person can do something about the situation, are termed as healthy fears.

On the other hand, there are unhealthy fears too. For example, the fear of objects or things that really couldn’t cause any major harm, like non-poisonous insects or lizards, or the fear of situations such as old age that a person cannot do much about. Unhealthy fears do nothing but create unnecessary and unwarranted obstacles in a person’s life..

A person during his lifetime may develop many types of fears: of death, of failure and even of success, or that of being ridiculed or losing control. Some may be afraid of commitment, whereas others may fear rejection, and so on.

What most people seem to be unaware of is that a lot of fears arise from what many spiritual teachers have recognized as illusions and distorted perceptions of the self and the world.

Fears are the result of the games that the mind plays with a person. They are the consequences of an untamed and ignorant mind. Once the individual reins over the mind, these delusions can be erased from his life.

## Effects of Fear

Fear can paralyze the power to take decisions. It stops a person from conquering his insecurities, from having faith in others. In extreme cases, it imprisons the individual in his home, as he is too terrified to venture out.

Fear prevents people from growing and changing for the better and doing away with unhealthy ways of living and self-destructive behaviors. Instead, it leaves the individual trapped in these behaviors.

When fearful, a person will fend off all offers of help and guidance from others. Fear can exercise so much control over the person as to remove the motivation or willingness to pursue a career or education. If not conquered, fear could become a habitual way of leading life.

Even for a spiritual seeker, becoming fearless is of utmost importance. True freedom is attained only when all masks of fear disappear. Fear holds the person in its bounds, whereas courage makes the person embrace inherent freedom.

Fear prevents the individual from experiencing the highest love, the love for God, and the love for self. A person filled with fear will not be able to delight in the beauty of God or revel in nature’s bounty. Fear keeps people away from giving blessings to faith and religions other than their own. It prevents individuals from loving their own communities. It even keeps persons from seeing and loving the love in their own hearts.

**The Origin of Fear**

From where does fear really arise? The eighth century Hindu saint Shankaracharya in his famous philosophical text *The Crest Jewel of Discrimination – Viveka Chudamani* says, ”Even though a man may have the power of discrimination, but if he perceives the least separation between himself and the Absolute, the God, fear will arise in him. Such distinction is seen only because of ignorance.“

It is this supposed difference that gives birth to fear. Seeing the individual soul and the Divine Soul as two different entities creates a chasm, but when the union between the two is not doubted or disturbed, absolute joy and calmness prevail. Everything is permeated with blessedness and pure love.

Whenever a person sees himself as different from the divine light and God, the limiting force of fear arises. All the great beings and every knower of Truth have shared this understanding of the root of fear. These experienced beings have time and again said that there is really never any separation between the benevolent light and the living being; this thought is nothing but an illusion. This is what the scriptures describe as ignorance. This ignorance arises from the fact that the senses do not have the ability to perceive the light of God encompassing the world. Out of their lack of knowledge, the senses believe the material world to be the only reality. This ignorance is where the fear originates.

## Fear Makes a Person Think

A person filled with fear will often think pessimistically about being able to overcome his fears. this could include thoughts like ’things will never change so what is the point in even trying’, ’everyone else in the family also had similar fears so what’s the big deal’ and so on. A fear may make the person think he is good for nothing and there is a reason why he feels this way. They might be afraid that there is way too much work involved in rising above these fears and that it is something they will never be able to do. ‘If fear is a part of life then why even bother overcoming it’, ’how can anyone not think about his fears‘, ’these fears have always existed and it is now almost impossible to let go of them’, ’the methods being advocated to deal with fear are childish and impractical; they can never help anyone’…this is only part of the resistance offered by people affected by fear.

**Rising Above Fears**

Effective methods of putting fears to rest include letting go of all irrational and unreasonable thoughts, being assertive and simply ‘letting go' of fear, identifying fears and assessing them honestly, charting out a solid, practical and systematic plan to overcome these fears.

Dealing with fears as if they were an object or thing might help an individual to remold or alter them. Physically, the individual ought to relax and loosen up. This will help reduce anxiety and apprehensions.

The person should develop a sense of confidence in others and also in his ability to conquer things or situations he fears. It is important to let go of insecurities and be open to accepting change and growth.

One important aspect of this exercise is being consistent in efforts. There is nothing positive in being obsessed with feared things or events. Being reasonable and pragmatic about the whole approach is essential. Fears are not worth occupying the central point of attention, efforts and energy.

As a person starts to work upon his fear, its intensity may increase and cause some pain, hurt and discomfort. The person should be ready to face some disquieting feelings at this stage.

The most important thing is to not lose the inspiration and the zest to change and grow. It must be remembered though, that as humans, it is natural to have some fears and that is a fact which must be faced.

## The Mind

The great Epic Mahabharat says, ‘Throw off your weaknesses as a serpent does its old skin, and emerge with a new brilliance.’

Human beings in general are prone to falling prey to mental and physical pain arising from an unrestrained mind. Delusions like attachment, envy and anger are the allies of an uncontrolled mind that bring pain.

Every individual has the power to choose. He can either ignore the danger he is in, losing all control, or he can choose to recognize this vulnerability and look for ways to ward off the danger by eliminating the real causes of fear. This way the person is in control, leaving no scope for fear.

A reasonable amount of fear for suffering and delusions could actually draw out some constructive action to prevent falling prey to some serious dangers. Fear is required only as a motivation until the person takes refuge in inner spiritual realms, and is ready to train the mind and eliminate all vulnerability. Once the individual reaches here, he attains fearlessness, as now nothing can bring suffering or pain to the person.

## Dealing with Fear

The following exercise is just one of many simple ways to let go of fear and anxiety:

* Sit in an easy and comfortable position for meditation. Keep the back relaxed and straight.
* With eyes closed, inhale naturally.
* Contemplate what the current fear is.
* Identify unhealthy fear(s). It could be a fear of death, of failure, etc.
* Understand that these fears and the negativities are a result of a deluded, uncontrolled mind and negative actions.
* Imagine these fears together with their causes in the form of dense smoke. Breathe the smoke out.
* The smoke vanishes into the vast expanse of the universe and never comes back.
* Now inhale and believe that the incoming breath is the pure, nourishing fearlessness of all the great beings. Imagine it permeating the mind, body and soul.
* After meditating in this manner for some time, feel the body and mind as being completely cleansed. Feel the blessings and protection that have been received from the great beings. The body now feels light and the mind is radiant, calm and fearless.

## Seeing the Entire World as One

One of the ancient hymns of the Atharva Veda (19.15.6), one of the four Vedas, says:

*May we be without fear of friend and foe.*

*May we be without fear of the known and the unknown.*

*May we be without fear by day and by night.*

*Let the entire world be my friend.*

This prayer asks the Lord to expel fear and kindle the benevolent light within. The message in this poem is: in order to overcome fear, one must rise above all kinds of fears and discriminations, give up all impurities and invoke and embrace inborn courage. Perceiving the world as friend is no small task to achieve. It requires great understanding, courage and love. The person will have to let go of all his doubts, fears, reservations and prejudices. Only then will he be able to see the splendid, shimmering and the radiant fearlessness and the divine courage within.

**The Joy of Fearlessness**

Gurumayi Chidvilasananda is one of the great Siddha Masters of the modern times. She says, “Facing the consequences of past karmas is not something to dread. With right understanding, with right knowledge, you actually look forward to wiping the slate clean.”

Fearlessness is when the individual readily accepts and bears all consequences of his actions. Once a person is willing to endure these consequences, there remains nothing to be afraid of.

A person might have no control over whether or not events will go in his favor, but what the individual can control is his mind, reactions and behavior. When the individual ultimately bids adieu to insecurities, negativities and doubts, he gets to taste freedom. What it requires is just taking a firm decision – a determined decision to not lead a miserable, sad life and to not to be controlled by fear and its allies like wrong habits, malice and distrust.

Upon following this, so much more space opens up inside, with more room for goodness, positive thoughts, and faith. At such times the positive energy, on its own accord, dances out of the person’s being, it does not have to be forced out. The thought that negativities will no longer be leading the life-path fills the entire being of the individual with freedom. The feeling of being bound vanishes and the inner blocks are removed as the divine light of fearlessness flows out of the person.

## Self-Inquiry and Fearlessness

What is it about self-inquiry that scares so many people? What is it that keeps individuals away from meditation? Why is it that so many people choose to ignore the positive results of these two great practices? Are they afraid, doubtful or unsure? Ultimately it is nothing but fear.

What is it that people are afraid of? Is it really just meditation or contemplation that people fear or is it just about everything else too? There are many other things that people may be afraid of, but may tend to create drama in their lives, assuming that the drama will somehow hide their insecurities from others and people will never be able to know what is going on in their lives.

Fear takes birth when an individual does not want anyone to find out about him, including himself. They are really masking their fears most of all, from themselves, probably out of fear of their inherent goodness too.

Gurumayi Chidvilasananda says, ‘Whenever you are afraid to examine yourself that is a sign you should engage in self-inquiry. When you notice this kind of fear, it actually means you are ready to look within; you are ready to meditate.’

It is when the person realizes this fear and practices contemplation and meditation that he is able to move beyond the emotion. This willingness is actually present in every moment – all the person needs to do is to learn to flow with the current and ride this wave of willingness to reach that splendid abode of fearlessness.