

Fear Less

What's in it for me? Face your fears and live life more fully.

You may not even realize that you're afraid. You may not know exactly what you're afraid of. Perhaps you tell yourself that your fears are flying and sharks, when the thing that really scares you, deep down, is failure, or a suspicion that you're unlovable. Society compounds our sense of fear through harmful myths, and even our own brains are working against us, pressing the panic button at the first signs of danger. To get out of the fear trap, you'll need a little help from the experts, including an experienced psychologist and a fearless free diver. In these blinks, you'll learn

the fear-defying power of a sense of purpose; why you should hold on to that lucky charm; and why as far as your brain is concerned, you're still part caveman.

Many of our deeply-rooted fears are caused by harmful societal myths.

When was the last time you felt afraid? You might remember the panic when you lost sight of your child while out shopping, or the nerves before you gave a big presentation at work. These are classic examples of situations that can strike fear into the heart of just about anybody. But what about the other kind of fear? The moments you seethe with jealousy or berate yourself for not being good enough. These are examples of fear, too, even though you may not recognize them as such. In fact, you may be unaware of just how fearful you are. The key message here is: Many of our deeply-rooted fears are caused by harmful societal myths. On some level, all of us are afraid of failure. From an early age, we learn that life is a competition. We have to win, or at least do better than others. This message is drilled into us by our parents, peers, teachers, and coaches. We're told that competition and a little fear are good for us. It's a myth that Hollywood is particularly fond of. Think of heroes like Jason Bourne, who thrives in tense, adrenaline-fueled situations. Don't believe the myths. Fear isn't a good motivator; unless you're living in an action movie, it's more likely to limit you than liberate you. "Survival of the fittest" is another lie. If you think of the truly successful people you know, you'll realize that their success isn't down to their strength, or their ability to crush competitors. Genuine success comes from adaptability, creativity, and collaboration with others. To be happy and successful, you have to learn when to let go and move on. And you have to fail occasionally - it's an inevitable part of life, and it can actually be good for you. Failure forces you to reassess a situation and move forward, sometimes in a new direction. So instead of fearing failure, you should embrace it, and rethink the societal myths that are making you unhappy. You don't have to believe in the myth that life is a competition. You don't have to constantly compare yourself to others and strive for perfection. You don't have to live in fear. But society isn't the only problem - your brain and body are working against you, too.

Evolutionary design means that fear has a powerful effect on your mind and

body.

The phone rings. When you pick it up, you hear “I’m afraid I have some bad news.” The panic is like an electric shock pulsing through you – it’s raw, animal fear. We all feel this way when we’re scared. But why do we react so strongly? Your body is primed for fear. When you sense danger, your neural network goes into overdrive. The fear reaction begins in a part of the brain called the amygdala, which activates the fight-or-flight response. Without this reaction, the human race would have died out long ago. Here’s the key message: Evolutionary design means that fear has a powerful effect on your mind and body. The brain circuitry that protected our ancestors keeps us safe, too. But it could also be considered an evolutionary design flaw, as it creates serious tension in our brains. One part is focused on survival and avoiding risks. Another part of our brains, which develops as we mature, is focused on expansion and innovation. This is why you often feel uneasy without knowing why. One part of your brain is planning projects and focusing on your work and social life, while the other part is trying to keep you safe, constantly scanning your surroundings for threats. And, unfortunately, this outdated part of your brain isn’t very good at distinguishing between types of danger. Something as ordinary as being honked at in a traffic jam can trigger instinctive fear and panic. These fear-based reactions originate in your subconscious, often before the rational part of your brain has time to intervene. Your old brain circuitry works so quickly that you literally don’t have time to think or reason. In the meantime, you feel the fear at a physical level. Many of the effects of fear are obvious – an adrenaline rush, sometimes accompanied by trembling, sweating, shortness of breath, dizziness, or nausea. Interestingly, fear can also have a significant impact on your mind. Your IQ drops and your decision-making and critical thinking skills deteriorate. To put it bluntly, fear makes you a little more stupid. We also tend to become more xenophobic when we’re afraid, rejecting anyone or anything that’s perceived as different. We’re so focused on survival that we become hyper-defensive and risk-avoidant. Clearly, being filled with fear is no way for an individual to live, or a society to function. You need solid strategies to combat fear.

Prepare for frightening situations by practicing techniques like rationalization or by using a mantra.

Take a deep breath. Now hold it for four minutes as you dive into the depths of the ocean without any equipment. This is the amazing feat achieved by William Trubridge, a free-diving world champion. On a dive in the Bahamas, he reached a depth equivalent to twice the height of the Statue of Liberty. Free diving isn’t a sport for the fainthearted. You’re alone in the ocean, more than 80 meters below the surface, relying on the power of your body and breath. It requires incredible psychological resilience. But when Trubridge dives into the water, he’s ready for the challenge. This is the key message: Prepare for frightening situations by practicing techniques like rationalization or by using a mantra. This kind of fear is in-the-moment fear. A moment of critical pressure experienced at a conscious level, reacting to a perceived threat. Maybe you get anxious during heavy turbulence on a flight or feel your heart pound before giving a work presentation. But there are various techniques you can practice beforehand, so you’re ready for these moments. One is to use a deliberate routine, like a breathing exercise, a

visualization exercise, or a positive affirmation like a mantra. The author recommends the mantra, gratitude for this opportunity. Repeating these words allows you to move away from fear, toward possibility and ambition. Alternatively, try distracting yourself from the fear. Listen to music or chat with someone about an unrelated topic. It's a temporary solution, but it works. One of the most effective techniques is rationalization. Use logic and statistics to take yourself out of your fear. This is Trubridge's strategy - he's rational about the risks he faces, and acknowledges that his real fear is of failure, not of pain or death. He's then able to manage his fear using mantras like, nerves aren't real or now is all, which keep him focused on the present moment. The key is preparation. Trubridge keeps calm because he's practiced these techniques. Professional athletes treat anxiety management as part of their training program, and you can do the same. Think of it as training for life! So, if you're a nervous flier, for instance, rehearse before your next flight. Choose a mantra or relaxation exercise, or do some research on flight safety. With a little practice, you can keep control of your fear in scary situations.

Some fears are hidden and need to be acknowledged before they can be dealt with.

Fear is a natural part of human experience and can't be avoided completely. But some fears are unnecessary and irrational. They may also be subtle, working below the surface to steal your sense of joy and satisfaction. Jake, a successful athlete, lived in fear for many years without consciously realizing that he was afraid. All he knew was that he was ashamed of his sexuality and determined to keep it private. Nobody knew that he was gay, and nobody was allowed to get too close. He kept his distance from his teammates, his friends, and his family. Jake's girlfriend complained that he was moody and closed-off. Eventually, she left him. Jake later started dating a man in secret, but his anxiety and insecurity led to the end of this relationship, too. He felt increasingly lost and lonely. The key message here? Some fears are hidden and need to be acknowledged before they can be dealt with. Sexuality is just one aspect of your identity that you might keep hidden. Fear causes you to keep all kinds of things private, affecting your happiness and damaging your relationships. Or perhaps you have a different kind of fear. It could be the sense that nothing you do is ever good enough - a fear of failure. Or maybe you're jealous, which is essentially a fear of not being lovable. Whatever it is, you have to recognize your fear in order to address it. For Jake, the breakthrough moment came in a therapy session with the author. She asked Jake to describe his fear, and he gave it an identity - a ferocious grizzly bear, standing guard. Through conversation, Jake realized that the bear - his fear - was trying to protect his heart from pain. Once he was able to see and confront his fear, Jake was able to understand it better and begin the process of letting go. He came out to his parents and was astonished when they responded with love and support. As a result of his honesty with himself and others, Jake is now happier and more hopeful for the future. The first step is to acknowledge your fear - whether it's a fear of pain, rejection, or failure - and bring it out of the dark, so it can no longer haunt you. But this is just the beginning. For the next stage, you'll need to do a bit more soul-searching.

Change the stories you tell yourself to

break free from fear.

Are you different from your friends? Or are you the black sheep of the family? We give ourselves labels and tell ourselves stories all the time until they seem true. For instance, if you repeatedly tell yourself “It’s not worth trying,” you’ll believe it. These negative stories are often the cause of our fears and anxieties. Luckily, there’s a solution. With a new story, you can create a new reality. Here’s the key message: Change the stories you tell yourself to break free from fear. The residents of Nima, Ghana, might be forgiven for being a little pessimistic. Nima has high levels of crime, unemployment, and poverty, with poor quality housing and sanitation. But even in the toughest conditions, changing the story – and people’s perspectives – can make a real difference. A new social enterprise called AMIN NIMA is a hopeful reimagining of the town. The name itself is symbolic of a new future for Nima; by reversing the letters of the town’s name, it challenges residents to change their negative perceptions. Rather than viewing Nima as a slum, residents should see it as a vibrant place – home to a diverse community of artists and entrepreneurs. You can apply the same concept to your own life – flip the script. Of course, change isn’t easy, especially when it applies to stories you’ve been telling yourself for years. They’re often closely tied up with your sense of identity, as your ego tends to get attached to these stories. Try asking yourself questions like: Who am I when I’m fearful? How do I act? And, What changes can I make to break my restrictive routines? Answer honestly, without cynicism. You’ll start to realize how you can make real changes in your life. The author had her own realization at work. She noticed that when she was working in a male-dominated environment, she tended to dress more conservatively. She later acknowledged that this behavior was subconscious – she didn’t want to draw attention to herself as a woman because she was afraid she wouldn’t be taken seriously. Once she was aware of this fear-based pattern, she changed her response. She now makes a conscious decision to dress and behave as she wants. After asking yourself Who am I?, the next question is: What do I want? It’s time to look at the power of purpose.

You can overcome fear with a strong sense of purpose – or surrender.

Khalida Popal grew up in a climate of fear. When she was nine years old and living in Kabul, the Taliban announced that girls should no longer go to school. Women effectively had no rights. They couldn’t work or study, and they couldn’t even leave the house without a man. One of Popal’s greatest frustrations was being prevented from pursuing her passion – soccer. When she played she was told that she was bringing shame on her family, just because she was a girl. But as she got older, her fear and anger fueled her mission. This is the key message: You can overcome fear with a strong sense of purpose – or surrender. Despite countless challenges, including death threats, Khalida successfully campaigned for women’s right to play soccer in Afghanistan. Today, Khalida says that she feels privileged to have found her sense of purpose in life at an early age. This purpose came from her fear that the world wouldn’t change – that women would continue to face harassment and discrimination. Having a purpose can give you a sense of stability even when life is difficult and unpredictable. A purpose is your contribution to the world beyond yourself – something that provides strength and motivation in the face of fear. To find your sense of purpose, ask yourself: How did I decide what I care about most? Another useful question is: What lessons from my

upbringing anchor me? Introspection can reveal a potential path. If you're not sure about your purpose, try a different strategy - surrender to the fear. Simply let go and trust in something bigger than yourself. It might be a belief in God, fate, the power of collective energy, or even a lucky charm. During the Second World War, this strategy worked well for the Lancaster bomber aircrew, who put their faith in charms and mascots. One man wore his wife's silk stocking around his neck, while others carried knitted dolls they'd been given by a young girl. The men's belief in the mysterious powers of their lucky charms helped them to cope with the immense fear they experienced during missions. It's worth noting that the Lancaster crew accepted a reality that many of us deny. You're never in total control of any situation. By accepting this, surrendering and letting go of control, your fear will no longer control you.

Struggle is an inevitable part of life, but remember - you're not alone.

The Romantic poet John Keats - who certainly knew a thing or two about suffering - was able to accept the reality of life. He once wrote, "Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and trouble is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?" Struggle and suffering are part of life. It's not realistic to expect to be happy and comfortable all the time. Our struggles also allow us to learn and grow. The key message here is this: Struggle is an inevitable part of life, but remember - you're not alone. Living a fearless life doesn't mean avoiding difficulty at all costs. Similarly, we shouldn't make the mistake of repressing negative emotions. Repression takes a psychological toll, leading to the gradual build-up of emotional waste. Like an expanding island of plastic dirtying the ocean, emotional waste can grow over time, and lead to toxic effects if it's not dealt with. So, what does that mean in practical terms? The author recommends acknowledging your fears and how they've limited you. Then acknowledge how your fears may have affected your relationships. Perhaps fear is behind the fights you start with your partner, or the pressure you put on your children. Your fears may have had an unintentional negative impact on other people. But, crucially, these people may also be the key to overcoming fear. We're all deeply social creatures. We thrive on connection, and the sense of belonging we experience with others is a powerful fear-fighter. As you work on yourself, remember that you don't have to do it alone. Nurturing and deepening your relationships can reveal phenomenal sources of strength and resilience. It's true that opening up to others can be difficult or even frightening at first, but it's well worth the effort. You may think you need to feel safe to be intimate with others. Paradoxically, once you find the courage to open up, speaking honestly and authentically, you'll discover an incredible sense of security. Remember Jake, the athlete ashamed of his sexuality? When he finally found the courage to come out, he experienced the freedom and safety that intimacy and honesty can bring. By connecting with others, you too can overcome your fears.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: Fear can prevent you from living life to the fullest, but once you recognize your hidden fears, you can begin to overcome them. The key is to find a strategy that works for you, whether it's identifying a strong sense of purpose or surrendering to a higher power. And don't underestimate the importance of forming close connections with others. Love truly is stronger than fear. actionable

advice: Don't repress your emotions. Allow yourself to feel everything, and cry if you need to. Or scream, or sing - whatever works for you! Once you've let the emotions flow through you, you'll feel so much better.