

CHAPTER 4
FEAR, FAITH & COURAGE



Fear

"Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live in every experience, painful or joyous, to live in gratitude for every moment, to live abundantly."

Dorothy Thompson

Lying buried in the subconscious mind of our bodies, our fears contain the memory of every time we felt inadequate, hurt, threatened or unloved. What are we afraid of? We are afraid of losing and afraid of winning. We are afraid of being left alone and of losing ourselves in the crowd. We are afraid of anything that threatens the things we hold dear, our attachments, the things we think we need - our lives, our jobs, our land, our beliefs, and our family. We are so strongly attached to these special things that we feel to lose them is to lose part, or perhaps all, of our beings themselves. Our most obvious fear is death. But what we don't often acknowledge is that our greatest fear is life itself, and the possibility of actually living it completely.

*The fire fears the water.
The water fears the encroaching earth.
The forest fears the fire.
The earth fears the wayward human.
But the wind fears nothing. Since it has no form, no, identity, it cannot be
destroyed.
It cannot die.
Since it is attached to nothing, even itself, it fears nothing, even death.
Live as the wind does and you will find freedom from fear.*

Fear of Life and Death

"There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountaintop of our desires."

Nelson Mandela

Fear is part of human life. For most of us, our most obvious fear is that of dying. The thought of losing one's life, or the things that give us life, can be deeply frightening. We may not dwell on it but the fear is there. Fear of death often causes us to avoid things that make us feel uncomfortable and/or threatened. We may look the other way or avoid situations that bring us face to face with perceived threats. So much human striving, speed, and risk avoidance, is done in an attempt to cheat death (and pain) of its inevitable bounty. The ironic reality, however, is that by avoiding death (and pain), we also avoid life. *When we avoid them both, death and life become the same!* They both become too threatening to approach, let alone engage and experience. However, in order to live completely, it is necessary to die a thousand deaths of the heart and mind. We must face what we are afraid of in order to overcome it and engage life more completely. When we live like this, reincarnation is something that happens on a daily basis, moment by moment. Being "born again" is about approaching every moment with a fresh perspective that is free of the past and future.

"The wise man in the storm prays to God, not for safety from danger, but for deliverance from fear. It is the storm within which endangers him, not the storm without."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Fear is the Root of all Evil

"The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek."

Joseph Campbell

Beneath every so called "negative" feeling is fear, the "root of all evil." Beneath every form of pain, sadness, anger, or discomfort, fear lies waiting to be discovered and uprooted. Fear is the polar opposite of love. Whereas love is attention focused upon the "beloved" person or object, fear is contraction away from oneself and the world. It is a pulling away and within rather than a giving out.

Fear finds its roots in the ego's self-protection. The ego fears both life and death, because both are threatening to its survival. It is true that a healthy

ego is extremely important for us to function in the world and is a necessary basis for emotional and spiritual maturity. We must feel good about ourselves in order to finally surrender our egos to the will of spirit; a certain level of self confidence is necessary before surrender can happen. For most people, this letting go occurs in the advanced stages of the spiritual journey. But the ego's strength is a double edged sword. Our egos are limited by their very nature, and can hold us back as easily as they can buoy us upwards. Our egos revolve around a self-identity we have created through years of conditioning and reflection upon our lives in the world. Shaped by internal and external feedback, we struggle to hold onto our identities as if they were rafts supporting us in the middle of a wide and tumultuous sea called life. The ego identity seems to be the thing upon which we depend for our survival and very often it serves us well, but most of us become so identified with it that we cannot transcend it. We would rather hang on forever and be inextricably connected to and trapped by that "raft" than let go of it and risk floating unanchored for a while, allowing the ocean to carry us. We would rather live a limited, but seemingly safe, life than risk drowning in the unknown sea. So we avoid anything that threatens our ego and by avoiding "death", we rob ourselves of life.

"Fear grows in darkness; if you think there's a bogeyman around, turn on the light."

Dorothy Thompson

Leggo my Ego

The ego is like a box. It has a definite structure and fits nicely into a theoretical understanding of how life works. But boxes have walls, sometimes high and hard, and when you are in one your perceivable world is very small. Let me use my early life as an example. I was born to white upper middle class Catholic parents on Cape Cod. My parents gave me the best they could in everything. They loved me first and foremost and they shared with me their understanding of God and of life, a primarily Catholic worldview. I went to church every Sunday. I prayed hard and asked for forgiveness. I grew up a strong willed, faithful Catholic who would almost never miss a Mass and who served the church with passion. I was both a peer and a eucharistic minister at my college parish and if not for a desire to have a family and engage all aspects of the secular life, I might have become

FEAR, FAITH & COURAGE

a priest. I was also an athlete and identified very strongly with my athletic identity. I never conceived of not playing or not praying.

I was very sure of myself when I was younger. Few things were up for question, least of all my religion and my athletic skills. That was who I was. I was a good boy and a good athlete. I had built for myself, with the help of my parents and of society, a very neat, very comfortable ego box to live in. It was a nice box to be in. I was healthy. I was following the rules. I was a good boy. I was privileged in many ways. For a white, 20th century male in Massachusetts, I was in the right box at the right time. But it was still a box. And as all rigid structures do, it inevitably fell apart, battered by the realities of change and unforeseen circumstance.

I did not make the soccer team in college and shortly before my second attempt, I tore apart my knee and haven't played competitively since. Overnight I became a jock without a team to play for. I felt lost for awhile. Soon, however, I got into other sports and other avenues of physical expression. I ran. I hiked and camped. I tried yoga and martial arts. Today, these things are at the center of my physical and spiritual life. Around the same time, I also began exploring other spiritual paths, and I began meditating and studying eastern religions. Once I was exposed to these ways of seeing and being, it did not take long for me to realize that there was more to God and life than going to church on Sunday and following the Catholic model. With these experiences and my new realizations, my former identity and worldview became less solid and as it crumbled, my sense of self vanished for a while. I did not know exactly who I was and what the rules were. With time, I adjusted and my box was rebuilt again, a bit larger than before, but just as solid. I developed a new self-understanding and a new way of life that was just as strong. I received my degree and went on for more schooling to become a landscape architect. I was going to be the best designer of parks and gardens the world had seen. I was focused on becoming nationally licensed and I applied for several college teaching jobs. Almost fifteen years later, I have yet to receive my professional registration and never got a college teaching job. Somewhere along the way, that dream again fell to earth and with it my self understanding.

When I was thirty-one, I met a woman and got engaged after only three months. We were married a year later but less than four years after we met, the marriage ended in divorce, dealing yet another blow to my personal plan

for life and to my self-identity. Once again I had to face the frighteningly empty freedom of being without an external structure to build my life upon.

At age 35, I fell deeply in love with the woman that I knew was my soulmate the first time I laid eyes on her. After only a few weeks together, I found myself yearning for an endless future with her and overwhelmed by excitement. Then after two brilliant years, we were suddenly baffled and saddened by the ending of that relationship. The idea of who I was and where my life was going had melted in the heat of its own intensity. The illusion of certainty and control had been dissolved as the box of my ego shattered once again. Though the pain was great, as all deep losses are, my faith was greater. I had come to know that things are always in harmony with the Universal Plan and that in spite of the pain, all was good and right. This faith helped to ease my suffering and stay strong in heart and mind.

Just like the legendary myth of the Pheonix, each time my world has been burned to ashes, it has regrown a little less rigid, and a little more translucent. That relationship eventually arose and was born again stronger than before, a pleasurable twist to the inevitable roller coaster of changing circumstance. We are now married and our relationship continues to grow and strengthen. The harvest was made richer by the challenge of changing weather.

But whether pleasurable or painful, the shattering of my self-perception and of my illusory expectations for life, has always been an extraordinary gift and a catalyst for personal growth, a growth which has given me room to expand to a place where I could feel freer and broader about who I was and how I related to the world. I did not seek to have my perceptual world destroyed, nor did I seek the pain that was its emotional counterpart. That happened organically, and fatefully, as I became more exposed and open to the world and to myself. When we reach these pivotal points of transformation in our lives, it seems we are blessed with curiosity, courage, and strength to explore new avenues. We are given the opportunity to discover fresh ways of seeing, believing and being in the world. My unexpected forays into insecurity and fear have always been a pivotally important and wonderful point of growth and expansion in my life. I would not trade any of them. Of course at the times of transition, I was often wrought with sadness and fears about inadequacy, loss of control, and being alone without anyone or anything to depend upon. It is true, however, that

FEAR, FAITH & COURAGE

the universe always gives us what we need and rarely, if ever, more than we can handle.

My fearful attitude during these periods caused me to resist the new and cling to the old way, the raft which seemed so safe, in spite of its limits. Wherever the familiar raft went, I wanted to go. Finally, however, as we all know, comes the time when we must swim or go down with the ship. To be truly free, we must courageously let go in the midst of our fears over and over and over again until we can swim fearlessly through even the most frightening waters. When we are able to do this, we are then ready to love completely and without reservation. We give everything because we no longer grasp anything, including ourselves and our lives. It is an act of complete surrender, one that is often arrived at only through years of pain and desperation or years of spiritual work on oneself. However, pain and desperation are not necessary for us to learn our lessons. If we courageously approach life with honesty and introspection, we may learn our lessons smoothly. It seems we must reach a place of emotional nakedness before we can actually see what we have been missing, and unfortunately, we don't often choose this path willingly. We choose to remain clothed in our identities and illusions until God and nature bring us balance through the introduction of a crisis. We are made vulnerable to the cleansing powers of life through an acute healing crisis. When we are completely vulnerable, without an anchor to grasp and without even hope to keep us afloat, we are forced to let go. There is nothing left to grab onto. And in that space appears the incredible lightness of being; the rock solid center of our spirit, which is always connected to Love and to God. From this "rock bottom" valley, we must inevitably emerge to reach new heights. It is the Dark Night of the Soul, as Carl Jung referred to it. It is the Yin and Yang, the push and pull of life. Lightness must always follow the dark, or perhaps more aptly put, lightness is imbued with the memory of the darkness that gave it birth. This painful struggle is rarely what we choose or want, but very often it is just what we need, to jar our reality enough to allow us entrance into a new way of being, a way closer to the way Christ lived, the way Buddha lived, the way Gandhi lived - the way each and every one of us *can* live. Facing and then letting go of our fears is an essential first, and often repeated, step on the way.

Regardless of the pain and difficulty our fears cause us, however, fear itself is not the enemy. Unless extreme, we don't need to take anti-anxiety pills to

get rid of it. Instead, we need to listen closely. Fear is not something to fear, as Franklin Delano Roosevelt once reminded us. Fearing your fear will double its power. In truth, fears can be a great signal that, if heeded, can bring us self-awareness and personal growth that we otherwise might not have had. In fact, one type of fear, what I will call true instinctual fear, as opposed to reactive fear, is quite literally a lifesaver.

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself--nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, First Inaugural Address, Mar. 4, 1933

True Instinctual Fear

As with love, fear manifests itself in many ways. It can be healthy and productive or unhealthy and destructive. True fear arises when our subconscious being recognizes a threat to our survival. It is the gut speaking to us for the body, and voices itself long before our conscious mind is even aware of a threat. Our gut speaks many things and fear is only one among its words. Gut knowing is a source we can trust and it offers advice that we are normally best served to heed. Fear, when it is true, is instinctual, arising from the hard wired limbic system within our brains - sometimes referred to as our reptilian brain - a leftover from our evolutionary history as water dwelling creatures in a "lizard eat lizard" world; from a time when "catch you later alligator" was literal, not figurative. The primitive nature of this reptilian brain governs our basic instinct to survive and responds to threatening situations with a "fight or flight" response that is independent of conditioned ideas or limits learned through family upbringing and the larger culture. The "fight or flight response" is a well-known, scientifically proven mechanism active within animals that allows us to respond appropriately to life-threatening situations. In a "fight or flight" response, stress hormones such as adrenalin (epinephrine) and cortisol are produced at a more rapid pace with greater volume and pumped throughout the body. These hormones allow greater alertness of mind and body and improved speed, power and endurance. Simultaneously, blood is shunted away from our skin, immune system and digestive tract and toward our brain and extremities to assist in any fight or evasion. Our five senses are heightened. We feel a rush of blood, alertness and energy. We are ready to face the danger. We're pumped up. This gut wrenching fear is instinctive and

bypasses our intellectual analysis. It's a feeling of danger and when the danger is real, it can literally save our lives. Have you ever swerved to avoid another car or ducked to avoid something moving towards your head. That rush of adrenaline you felt and the action you took to avoid harm were instinctual. In fact, this sort of fear is more of a reflex than an emotion. We may call it fear, but it is really an appropriate physiological response to real danger.

Reactive Fear

But there are also times when the danger is not real, during which a fight or flight response is not helpful and may, in fact, be detrimental to our survival. As our rational, emotional, and spiritual selves have evolved, we have learned to temper our purely instinctual responses with additional information provided to us by these other three faculties.

Instinctual fears can provide the red flags that may save our lives, but there are times when this fear must be tempered by reason and self control. We are no longer living in a dog eat dog world, in which we must constantly be looking over our shoulders, and our primitive tendency to protect ourselves is not always necessary or helpful. For example, we may be startled by a rustle in the bushes next to our lawn chair as if a saber tooth tiger was on the hunt and we were smelling like dinner, and then quickly realize that it's simply the cat chasing its tail in the leaves. Or we may feel like strangling the kid next door after seeing him throw rocks at birds, only to have that initial animalistic reaction give way to empathy for this child's inner anger and pain.

When fear arises during non-life threatening situations, it can be detrimental rather than helpful. I call this fear reactive or conditioned fear. Reactive fear is common, and plagues our daily lives in both subtle and obvious ways. Because we tend to attach to things outside ourselves, we feel threatened when those things are attacked or taken away from us. For example, most of us are attached to our "identity box", the preservation of which we believe is essential to our survival (professional, physical emotional or otherwise). When someone criticizes our appearance, or our personality, we become insecure and our fear catapults us into a fight or flight response. We then act out the drama very much as we would in an actual life threatening situation. We may choose a "fight" response, such as verbal assault, or manipulation, or we may become physical and strike out in violence. On the other hand,

we may choose “flight” by cowering, becoming numb, verbally silencing or defending ourselves, or becoming paralyzed and impotent. We may become shy, choosing to hide ourselves in the shadows of life. Whether we choose a fight or a flight response, neither is necessary, because there is no real threat. They may help us cope with our fear for a while, but they will not overcome it. If we could realize that our appearance and our personality are not the most essential part of our lives, that in fact they are masks on the surface of our soul, then we would release them and in that freedom, be immune to attacks of this nature. We would identify only with our soul and in doing so find the liberation that the sages speak of. We would rest in the knowledge that we are always safe. Fear would not adversely affect us, and we would transcend it. Most of our daily fears arise from such illusory and limited thinking that causes us to believe we are separate and vulnerable to loss and attack, in situations where we are not. It is this reactive fear that can make our lives so often miserable.

Specific Fears

Stage Fright

Stage fright, or performance anxiety, is one of the most common types of reactive fear. Many of us are afraid to stand alone in front of others to speak or perform. When suffering from performance anxiety, we are afraid that what we do won't be good enough and that people will laugh at us, dislike us, reject us, or worse. To protect against this potential pain, we prefer to remain off-stage, out of the limelight, choosing to live quiet, seemingly safe lives. Some people, those with enough personal courage, make the choice to “perform” regardless of their fear. There are numerous celebrities who admit to habitual stage fright, yet continue to perform and be well received in spite of it. We are all subject to self-doubt; to the insecure feeling that we are simply not good enough in some way or another. Whether or not this is actually true, we fear it might be, and this feeling creates that familiar fear of rejection; of being unloved.

Fear of Abandonment

The fear of being left alone is one of humanity's most pervasive existential fears. Most of us have felt abandoned in our lives by those whom we expected, and perhaps needed, to be available to us. The younger or more vulnerable we were when it happened, the deeper the wound. Somewhere inside us, our cells hold the memory of that abandonment and the fear of

annihilation that arose with it. We may have been abandoned physically, orphaned by the absence of one or more caregivers. We may have been abandoned emotionally, as a child of an alcoholic or the victim of a cheating spouse. We may have been abandoned mentally by inattentive teachers or the denial of family members. We may have been abandoned spiritually by disingenuous spiritual leaders. But whatever the source of our abandonment, being left alone when we are so vulnerable and dependent upon another, is a heart wrenching wound. A wound like this can lie dormant for years, its memory hidden beneath layers of protection and denial. The scab of denial can itself cause further emotional scars that cover untold stories of inner pain. Later in life, as we mature, we may come face to face with something that triggers the original abandonment experience and feel the old wound anew manifesting as post-traumatic stress. In our reactive state, we often fail to see that the current situation is only a trigger and that in fact, our strong negative emotional responses are usually composed of leftover emotional energy from past wounds.

The fear of abandonment is pervasive in our world. It causes us to do and say things that are contrary to our truth in order to avoid being outcast and rejected. It causes us to hold back from expressing ourselves for fear of rejection. It causes us to abandon others before they can abandon us, remaining prisoners of the past, always running away from life. These deeply held emotional contractions due to past events continue to influence our present lives through subconscious habits or behaviors. For instance, we may be shy but not realize that it stems from an embarrassing experience of ridicule in first grade show and tell. Or we may be afraid of telling someone we love them because of a past memory of rejection the last time we exposed our vulnerable feelings to someone we loved. Examples like this are endless.

Fear of Unworthiness

So many of us fear we are unworthy of love and life. We may have been told this as children. We may have learned it over time. Most of us have felt the awkwardness of thinking we aren't good enough in some way or another. You may be a star athlete and yet fear you are intellectually inferior. You may be a great mom and fear you are a lousy daughter. One of the greatest dis-eases of the human species is the fear-based belief that we are not good enough and that we somehow need to defend against this or prove otherwise. For many, religion represents a doorway to salvation from our inherent

human “sinfulness” that will finally be realized in life after death - in heaven. This belief is a double-edged sword that betray a certain shame for being alive. This is an unparalleled tragedy that leads us to abuse ourselves and others through unjust attacks upon character. It is often this fear that leads us to judge and ridicule others or to deny what is true for ourselves in order to appear “better” to someone else.

These are but a few of the more commonly held reactive fears shared by so many of us. These fears gnaw at the structure of our identities like rust consumes metal. To quell these fears we often turn to our addictions and other forms of denial and resistance or to the reassuring words of trusted love ones. But these coping mechanisms can only soften the sharp cut of fear temporarily. We need a longer lasting remedy.

Have No Fear, Faith is Here

Fortunately, all conditioned fears can be overcome. The remedy to fear is faith and the development of faith leads to courage. Courage built on faith enables us to take the practical steps necessary to deal directly with our fear. To overcome fear, we must first acknowledge it, and then learn to embrace it, face it, feel it, and allow it to move and be released, as all feelings eventually must. Nothing stays the same, especially our feelings and if we don't hang onto them, they will be transformed. The challenge is to remain present in the midst of fear, without reacting in habitual conditioned ways, and to watch it transform as we remain detached witnesses. To do so is to regain power over them, seeing them as merely weather on the changing landscape of our emotional selves.

Courage and Faith

Courage

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."

Nelson Mandela

Courage is absolutely necessary in order to carve through the fear that hinders our growth on the journey to be our best selves. A courageous being faces fear and speaks the truth with clear eyes and a willing soul, accepting its pain for the inevitable spiritual pleasure that always results. But how does one become courageous? How can we, in times when we are literally trembling with anxiety and self-doubt, and wrought with pain, hope to find our courage? Is it necessary to tread a yellow brick road towards some magical man in some magical place to find our heart? For many of us, we have tried that road, seeking Oz in a bottle, a snort, sex, self-abuse, excess work, and other addictions that help us mimic courage by blunting the sharp, invasive attack of its adversary, fear. But these yellow brick roads are endless paths to nowhere. Rather, we need to enter a yellow *wood* and take the road less traveled by. The poetic imagery of Robert Frost in his poem entitled "The Road Not Taken", points the way past addictions into ourselves, past our fears and into our faith.

Faith is the balance point between fear and courage. Courage is our greatest ally when facing our fears and when forging the truth. Courage is built on a foundation made of many keystones. It is partly built upon determination and commitment. For example, courage comes much more readily when we are committed to something - the life of a loved one in danger for example, something which would bring most of us to risk death if need be. Courage is also aided by self-love. When we love ourselves, we can stand alone, and the prospect of others leaving us or standing against us, becomes less fearful. When we love ourselves, we take full responsibility for ourselves and give others responsibility for themselves. We become lovingly detached from the decisions and opinions of others, trusting them to be for their highest good and knowing they need not affect who we are or how we feel about ourselves.

However, the development of courage is not a linear cause and effect relationship; it is a feedback loop. These keystones often support the development of courage, but at the same time, our courage supports the development of these keystones. It is a cyclic relationship, spiraling upward and constantly evolving. For many of us, courage needs to be there first in order for us to learn to love ourselves. For it is only by courageously choosing to accept what we fear is wrong with ourselves, and by looking honestly at those things, that we can bestow upon ourselves the forgiveness that allows self-love. This additional self love then energizes the strengthening of our courage. Through this process, the virtues of life feed each other. Like all of nature, they are interdependent and directly related. However most importantly, our courage is forged on and reinforced by faith.

"To have courage for whatever comes in life - everything lies in that."

Saint Teresa of Avila

The Sword of Courage is Forged by Faith

"So long as we believe in our heart of hearts that our capacity is limited and we grow anxious and unhappy, we are lacking in faith. One who truly trusts in God has no right to be anxious about anything."

Paramahansa Yogananda

Faith can be put into many things. We may place our faith in a higher power – God- the greatest support of all. We may trust in our family and friends to be there for us when we need them. Sometimes it is nature that supports us. Whatever the source of our faith, it provides us with an ever-present secure and loving embrace, a womb that gives birth to our courage.

Personal Faith Leads to Personal Courage

There are many kinds of courage and many kinds of faith. Personal courage is directed towards the personality's experience in the external world. It is strengthened by a belief in oneself – a personal faith. Faith in our individual selves will lead to personal courage; a courage which gets us through daily fears like exams, public appearances, and interpersonal intimacies. We must always have faith in ourselves and reach to develop it where it is missing.

This is part of the ego's healthy development. This ego-based faith in *ourselves* will get us through many of our daily challenges but it will never completely release us of our fear; it will only combat it. However, faith in Love - in the Universe, in Nature, in God, in something beyond ourselves - will.

Spiritual Faith Leads to a Deeper, Truer Courage

"We must be willing to get rid of the life we've planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us."

Joseph Campbell

Spiritual courage is a broader kind of courage built on a broader kind of faith. It is strengthened by the internal knowing that life is Divinely guided and always in alignment with the "highest good". It is the belief that some higher, all encompassing law, power, Spirit, or God, is taking care of everything. This is a deeper, truer faith. This spiritual faith is what forges, cultivates and nourishes the courage that is necessary to face our deepest fears and life challenges.

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr (aka The Serenity Prayer)

Developing faith in something bigger than ourselves - bigger than everything - is the way to find true spiritual courage, the courage that faces and transcends all fears. Since our fear is rooted in the ego, our separate self-identity, spiritual courage cannot be found there. It is found beyond our separate selves in the shared womb of spiritual truth that defines, includes and cradles us all. If we look for safety and security within ourselves, how can we find it? We do not control the universe. We cannot order the changes of nature (although we certainly influence them). We can only act with clear intentions, and acknowledge that the consequences are beyond our control. When we know that our true safety and security lies with some greater universal order that is taking care of everything, working perfectly no matter what happens, then we can release our hold on the outcome of our

actions and release our fear and resistance along with it. We may then be capable of acting with firm intention while simultaneously allowing the result to be what it will be with complete detachment.

Courage is Action in the Face of Fear

What does it mean to be courageous? Many people falsely assume that the courageous man – the mythical “hero” – is fearless. But this is an unrealistic image of courage. In fact, true courage is birthed in the presence of fear. True courage could in fact be defined as “conscious action in the face of fear”. As such, it requires a willingness to take risks, making the presence of fear an instant opportunity to become courageous. The true hero is someone who acts with conscious fortitude even though he is afraid.

RISKS

*To laugh – is to risk appearing the fool
To weep – is to risk appearing sentimental
To reach out for another – is to risk involvement
To expose feelings - is to risk exposing your true self
To place ideas, your dreams before a crowd – is to risk their loss
To love – is to risk not being loved in return
To live – is to risk dying
To hope – is to risk despair
To try – is to risk failure*

*But risks must be taken,
Because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.
The person who risks nothing
Does nothing – has nothing – and is nothing*

*They may avoid suffering and sorrow, but they cannot learn – feel – change
– grow – love – live*

*Chained by their certitudes, they are a slave;
They have forfeited their freedom*

Only a person who risks is free.

From a Printed Flyer at Dr. Kevin Lowey's Office (Author unknown)

Action in the face of fear is powerful. It is conscious. It reflects a strong sense of security based on spiritual faith. It recognizes that fear is an illusion that can only be cut through by courageous action. This action may take many forms. It may come as silence or speech. For instance, people may threaten you with ridicule if you don't join in their criticism of another person. In that case, *silence* is courageous. At other times, when your free speech is being threatened, *speaking up* can be very courageous, as in the case of Martin Luther King, who spoke with great courage for himself and for those who could not find a voice. Courage may manifest as *stepping onto a stage* in front of an audience. Or courage may manifest as *humility*, allowing another to be in the limelight as you *remain in the shadows of obscurity* with the possibility of being overlooked. In such a moment you exhibit your courage (to yourself) by standing strong against inner insecurities that seek approval from others. Courage may take the form of *fighting for your life* in a battle to the death. Like a Samurai warrior. Or it may take the form of consciously *allowing yourself to die* in order to save a life. Courage may take the form of *stepping up to the plate* again after striking out during every at-bat before it, or *taking the same exam* again after failing it twice already. Courage may take the form of allowing yourself to be pinned on a cross and *killed for your beliefs*, like Jesus. Or it may take the form of *telling someone you love them* with deep sincerity. But whether Christ-like martyrdom or small acts of kindness, each of these choices is courageous because it is a powerful and consciously chosen action made squarely in the face of fear. Courage is forged by faith but both are catalyzed and honed by the presence of fear. Courage and fear are two sides of the same polarity, with faith as the neutral balance point. Heroes are born on the most modest and sometimes invisible acts of courage.

Dealing With Fear Skillfully

Once we have been graced with faith and obtained a measure of courage, how do we skillfully address and deal with our fears? How do we learn to move through and beyond our limiting fears and yet recognize when our fear is true and worth reflecting upon? How do we know when an actual threat exists and when we are being falsely triggered into assuming a threat is there? How do we navigate through our fears when everything in us is screaming for us to protect ourselves and "fight or flight"?

Step One - Listen to Your Fears

First, we need to realize that fear is always worth *listening* to. No matter what sort it is, it always has a very important message for us. At the simplest level, our fears ask us to pay attention. When we do, they can express themselves and dissolve, or at least lead us to a place of awareness from which we can address what is causing it. This listening is useful. In fact, it is desirable and necessary for spiritual growth. How we act upon that awareness, however, is of utmost importance. Our fear is an energy that often urges us to contract, and then to resist and fight or pull away from the perceived threat to our physical and emotional safety. If we *do* contract, then we are slaves to the fear, destined to live a life determined by the past, very possibly built out of outdated and inaccurate perceptions. However, until we learn that we are afraid, and until we believe we have a choice about how to react to our fears, we will be trapped by them. With awareness that we are afraid, and knowledge regarding where our fears are coming from - whether it be from unpleasant childhood memories, deeply held trauma, or truly impending danger - we can make conscious choices about how to respond. In order to develop this awareness that leads to freedom, listening to our fears is the first step.

Step Two - Face, Feel and Deal With Your Fears

In order to heal we must face, feel and deal with our fears. Facing our demons is essential to transcending them. We all have them. We need to address them and to root out their causes. We need to discover their origin. More often than not, they are like bad dreams, rooted in old patterns of thinking that we inherited from poor role models and cultural conditioning that instilled us with a sense of insufficiency – “not enoughness”. Perhaps you harbor memories of bullies abusing you on the playground, or teachers that gave you negative reinforcement as a kid. Our fears are usually ghosts, echoes of the past that continue to haunt us, limiting our lives in profound ways. Nonetheless, we must make a concerted effort to address and clear each of the human fears that block our road to self-realization. It can be a difficult road, one that brings us face to face with our darkest nightmares. But facing these dark dreams is the only way in which we will wake up; the only way we can truly find rest.

As with all fear, our normal response is to fight them or to run from them – the “fight or flight” response. But to face them is to do neither. It is simply to stand your ground, neither running and hiding nor resisting and fighting.

FEAR, FAITH & COURAGE

By standing our ground, and setting clear boundaries between ourselves and these fears, we begin to take back our power. We no longer allow our fears to chase us through life. Nor do we allow them to remain buried beneath the surface of our relationships, robbing us of personal power and turning powerful actions into powerless re-actions - an endless tennis volley, with life as our opponent. We address our fears, clean them up as we would wounds, and come back to ourselves. We cease to *react* and begin to act. We become empowered again in the face of fear. This courageous action in the face of fear, is the essential step which, when made, carries us through the threshold of fear into a new realm of freedom; a place where love and life can flow again.

So pay attention and listen to your fears. But don't let them run your life. You are not your fears and your fears are not you. When you feel stuck, stop resisting, step back, take a breath, stand your ground, and remember you have choices. Conscious choice leads to powerful action that is based on awareness. Fears will come and if you allow them, they will go. Instead of contracting, expand and enter into your fear. Instead of choosing to follow fear, choose to allow its expression. Love your fear as you would a scared child, because that's exactly what it is, an expression of the most vulnerable part of yourself. The late renowned Tibetan Buddhist spiritual teacher Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, in his book *Crazy Wisdom*, used a wonderful image to illustrate his views on acting in the face of pain and fear. Picture a child who is holding a razor blade with the most wonderfully sweet honey dripping across its shiny surface. The child is afraid of being cut by the razor-sharp edge and yet the sweetness of the honey has a greater allure, a magnetic pull strong enough to warrant licking the blade, a walk on the edge of fear which may bring some pain and the taste of blood, but will definitely be worth the taste of honey. Let your faith propel you along the razor's edge between fear and courage as you earnestly search for the sweetness of life.

True or False?

Fear is a friend. As long as we are human, fear will touch us and teach us. But it needn't control us. With a consciously chosen vision that is focused beyond fear day after day, moment after moment, we may eventually find ourselves in a place that no longer recognizes fear as fear - as the dreaded obstacle we so commonly see it as, but rather as a rougher texture within a world made of the fabric of love. We may actually come to love our fear as a great teacher and valued friend. At that moment, it is transformed and fades away. Listen to your fears and face them, but the only fear worth following is the one from your gut, not your head. And the only way to discern the difference is to study yourself and to listen; to become honest enough and self-aware enough to face your fear. Listen closely enough to make a wise choice. And make enough choices and enough mistakes over time to get a real good idea about which fear is speaking you - true or false.

Road Map to Dealing with Reactive Fear and Developing Courage

1. **Find Your Fear** - When you have any kind of negative emotion (sadness, anxiety, hatred, anger, fear, etc.), assume that fear preceded and underlies it and try to identify what you are afraid of. If you cannot find your fear, take your time. Slow down and breathe so that you can really feel deeply into your body. You may recognize your fear as anxiety, tension, restriction, hyper-vigilance, or nervousness in your mind and body.
2. **Act Consciously But Don't React** - Once you are aware of the location and source of your fear, breathe into your abdomen as you meditate to calm yourself. Do not react to your fear in anyway. Act consciously in the face of fear to acknowledge and learn from it, but neither resist nor follow it. This is courageous.
3. **Sit Still and Embrace the Fear** - If you feel compelled to fight (argue, yell, blame, hit, control, change) or flight (avoid, deny, ignore, withdraw, drink and drug, space out) from your fear, sit on your hands, sit still and breathe. Literally. Embrace the fear and overcome your desire to react to it by allowing yourself to feel it without trying to change it. Enter into it and realize that the fear does not have power over your health and happiness. Take your power back by sitting confidently with it in spite of its presence. See your fear as a friend that is attempting to help you learn something valuable.
4. **Sit Still and Watch Your Fear Dissipate** - Continue to observe and be still and your fear will eventually dissipate. In its wake will be a stronger, more fearless self. This is a highly courageous act and there is many a "tough guy" out there who would be hard pressed to accomplish it. If you're one of those tough guys, or gals, challenge yourself and try it. You'll be surprised how hard it is to sit still in the midst of fear and if you can do it, your courage will increase exponentially. This is a sort of modern day "vision quest" and doesn't involve any dragons except for your own inner demons.
5. **Reflect and Reach for Conscious Growth and Awareness** - From this place of personal power, reflect on what caused your fear and its consequences. Did fear cause you to lose you sense of self? Did it cause you to do something you don't believe in? Did it cause you to react unconsciously? If so, consider what you can do to prevent these things from happening in the future. Perhaps you will choose to remove yourself from a difficult situation before you become fearful. Perhaps you will go to therapy

to deal more directly with your unproductive emotional triggers. Perhaps you will change nothing. Whatever you chose to do, let it be a conscious act aimed at growth and awareness.

6. Take More Risks - *To challenge yourself to develop more courage in fearful situations, try taking more risks – start with one per day. Make it a constructive and healthy risk such as telling someone you love them or being more expressive in social situations. Avoid destructive risks. Do what you are afraid of until you are not afraid. Slay your dragons by turning to face them.*

7. Ask For Help - *If you feel you need help, pray for Spirit to assist you, go to therapy, talk with friends, get massage/bodywork and take natural remedies such as flower essences, herbs and homeopathic medicines. These can be powerful aids on the journey to greater courage. Reach out and ask for help whenever you need to until you can stand on your own.*

8. Be Gentle With Yourself - *Finally, be gentle with yourself and remember it's okay and natural to be afraid sometimes. You can befriend and embrace your fears and eventually you will transcend them.*

Road Map to Developing Personal Faith

1. Build Your Ego Where it is Lacking - We must always strive to have faith in ourselves and work to develop it where it is missing. This is part of the ego's healthy development. This ego-based faith in ourselves will get us through many of our daily challenges. It will enable us to become fully powerful and creative beings in the world.

2. Affirm Your Faith - To develop personal faith, it is necessary to reflect upon yourself. Reflect upon where, when and why you do and do not trust yourself. Start by making a list of the qualities about yourself that you have faith in. Write down everything that you believe is good about yourself. Read it every day. This will reinforce your inner confidence and help you to use it as a springboard for developing even more.

3. Take Steps to Overcome Your Lack of Faith - Next make a list of the areas in your life where you lack faith in yourself. Perhaps you feel you are overweight. Perhaps you do not trust your ability to be socially adept. Perhaps you do not feel you are a good listener. Perhaps you believe you are a bad test taker. Perhaps you are ashamed of yourself in some other way. Write these things down and then next to each one, write 5 ways that you can work towards overcoming this lack of personal faith. Write down things you can do to develop greater ability in these areas. For example, if you are a baseball player and having trouble hitting the ball, striking out a lot, write down ways that you can regain power over this area of your life and rebuild your faith in yourself. The list might read: batting cage practice every day, watch video clips of great hitters, ask coach for special tutoring, visualize successful hitting, relax mind and body prior to games. As you actively seek ways to develop your ability, your personal power, confidence and faith will grow. And along with this, your skills will flourish.

4. Deal Proactively With Your Demons - By proactively working on developing greater personal faith, you avoid the temptation to allow yourself to be victimized by your own negative self image. You will avoid the temptation to seek outside reassurance as you build your sense of security about yourself. As discussed earlier, it takes faith to build courage but it also takes courage to build faith. You must take courageous risks as you grow into your true power. As you address the areas where you lack faith, you will be dealing directly with some of your most potent inner demons. As you do, your personal faith will grow exponentially.

5. Face Your Fears and Work on What You Are Not Good At -

Developing personal faith requires work. It is not easy to address your fears and insecurities. It can be difficult to tackle them when you are starting from a place of insecurity. Nonetheless, you must. It is the only way to overcome the ego's obstacles. Work on what you "are not good at". Face your fears. It is the only way for you to overcome them and to some day, finally let go.

6. Create Who You Desire Yourself To Be - *Paradoxically, in order to be truly free of the ego's insecurities, we must first develop the ego. Build your faith by challenging your lack of faith and actively choosing to create who you desire yourself to be. You can do it! Be your best!*

FEAR, FAITH & COURAGE

IDENTIFY YOUR DEMONS AND DEVELOP STRATEGIES FOR PROACTIVELY OVERCOMING THEM	
<i>How I Lack Faith Myself</i>	<i>How to Deal Proactively to Develop Personal Faith</i>
<i>Example:</i> A. I Am Afraid of Speaking in Public and Usually Avoid it or Have Very Strong Anxiety While Doing It	1. Try being the first one to speak up at a party; go out of your way to break the silence.
	2. Practice conversations or speeches in a mirror to prepare for the actual moment.
	3. Visualize yourself speaking in front of an audience followed by praise and positive reactions; imagine that over and over in your mind's eye feeling the rush of positive feeling that comes from speaking in public
	4. Write down what you want to say beforehand such as "Hi my name is Jeff and it's a pleasure to meet you" or "I've been looking forward to meeting you" or an entire speech and read it over and over until it becomes second nature. Then when the time comes, you'll be ready.
	5. Talk to a therapist about why you are afraid and work on additional strategies for healing and dealing.
B.	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.
C.	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.

Road Map to Developing Spiritual Faith

1. Develop Your Spiritual Faith - Spiritual faith is the internal knowing that life is Divinely guided and always in alignment with the “highest good”. It is the belief that some higher, all encompassing law, power, Spirit, or God, is taking care of everything. This spiritual faith is what forges, cultivates and nourishes the courage that is necessary to face our deepest fears and life challenges.

2. Cultivate a Big-Picture View of Life - Developing spiritual faith requires belief in something beyond oneself. It is developed by practices and circumstances that cultivate this bigger picture view of life. Some of the best are:

- meditation
- sacred ceremony/ritual/services
- prayer
- reflective reading and study/contemplation
- spending time in nature
- song and dance

3. Make Your Spiritual Growth a High Priority - If you desire greater spiritual faith, you must make it a priority. Read about it. Talk about it. Ask trusted teachers and guides for assistance in gaining this new perspective. Practice looking beyond the material world of form. Join groups that are focused on spiritual development and awareness. Ask the spirit-world for help, guidance and protection. Dwell in your spiritual self.

4. Take Risks, Act Decisively As If You Have Faith, and Trust What Happens - To do this you must take risks. A faithful person lives life with commitment, even without knowing outcomes. If you lack faith, start living completely even when you have no idea if things will turn out “right”. Go on that trip you’ve been dreaming of even though you lost your itinerary. Ask that person on a date even if you don’t think he/she will say yes. Follow that intuition even if it seems silly. Practice living “as if” you had all the faith in the world; as if everything had some magical, mystical meaning – even the difficult things you don’t like. If you get even an inkling of a spiritual message, listen to it and follow it. Let that inkling take you where it will. For example, if you think your soul is saying something to you about where to go to college or whether or not to take a new job, slow down and listen to it. Give it serious attention. After you get as much information as

FEAR, FAITH & COURAGE

you can, take it to heart and be willing to act decisively and to trust what happens. As you live faithfully, your faith will develop further. And as your faith develops, you will find it easier to live faithfully.

5. Affirm Your Faith Every Day - Write down a list of what you believe, or want to believe, in. It could read: *I believe in love, I believe in the goodness of all humans, I believe that there is a good reason for everything that happens in life, I believe that my mom's illness is meant to be and has a greater reason, etc. Read this list every day to affirm your faith in spirit beyond the material realm.*