



Don't Be Afraid of the Dark

By Evette Gardner

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I had a dream once. I had just finished up some business in the town square and was beginning to feel restless and ready to leave so I started walking to my car so I could go home. There was a hill at the edge of the square, if I walked up its street and around the corner it should have been an easy five minute walk to get to my car. I say, "should have been," because as soon as I step outside of the square and began to make my trek up the incline something odd began to happen. Every step I took away from the square was met with more and more darkness. It was freaky. I went from full daylight, back at the square, to pitch black, couldn't see a thing around me darkness in a matter of a few strides. Yet despite my new blindness I still *felt* like I knew exactly where I was and how to find my way to where I wanted to be, but not having the ability to verify my inner feeling with external visible evidence I began to doubt myself. And the more dismissive I chose to be of my initial affirming *inner* sense the more intense my doubts grew until finally I reached the point of a full blown panic. I couldn't bring myself to take another step. I was so afraid of getting lost in the darkness, of taking a wrong turn or wandering so far into the void that I wouldn't be able to find my way back even if I wanted to, that it didn't matter that even amid my fear I nonetheless still dreaded the thought of having to pass one more second in the square I'd just left. It didn't matter because at that moment, the square was where the light was. It was a place where everything was so familiar to me it had become stale. There was no way I could get lost there, I became convince, and at the time that sounded like a rather comforting situation to be in. Being in the throws of a panic-attack as I was, mind numbing boredom didn't seem like such a horrible trade-off in place of wet my pants fear. I turned around and started back down the hill, back into the square, back into the daylight, back into the tedium of yet another Groundhog Day (see *Bill Murray*) in the town square and as soon as the darkness was lifted and I found myself being able to not only feel but clearly see my surroundings, I immediately went from feeling scared to feeling defeated. I realized then that all I'd managed to do, by coming back to this place, was to surround myself with everything I desperately wanted to leave behind. I blasted myself for being such a coward. Why had I let the darkness intimidate me so when I *knew* (because something in me was telling me, indeed screaming at me) that I still had the ability to find my way even in the dark? And what good was having the ability to see everything if all I was seeing just reminded me of those things I wished I could be rid of?

The metaphor of this dream wasn't at all hard for me to figure out. Though the situation of it was somewhat on the other-worldly side, as many dream scenarios tend to be, the *feelings* I experienced in this dream were very much in sympathy with the emotional experience I was used to having regarding my career direction in my "waking life" experience at that time. I could see now that I had been allowing my fear of uncertainty

in this area of my life to discourage me from taking chances outside of the perimeter of my comfort zone and I was paying dearly for this decision with a severe case of restlessness. My dream was just trying to get me to see this choice I was making about my career direction in a different context. And in this, this dream taught me something very much to the point of fear in general, not just as it pertained to my career choices.

Fear is the wayward child of uncertainty. And being in the dark can be an intimidating thing because it forces us to rely on something which most of us are not used to relying on – our intuition, our sixth (inner) sense. We're more comfortable placing our trust in things discernable to our five worldly senses. We want to see things with our own eyes *before* we extend our trust to them. We're not used to placing much confidence in the guidance of our gut; so when our gut becomes the only sense that is of any use to us we grow uneasy. Suddenly we're not so sure of even those things, which in the light of broad day, we would never doubt. We want that tangible verification we associate with our experience of things through our five physical senses and when we don't have this "proof" everything becomes a question. Everything arouses doubts. And in this mental environment fear has fertile ground to grow, prosper and impact our life experience in a way that hampers our spiritual development. But here's what I've learned from my experience in the darkness:

- There have been moments in my life, which I now can acknowledge, where I have fought to stay in the constricting space of my comfort zone even after it had become painfully obvious to me that this was a position that was not serving me well. I know this can be a stumbling block for me, so I now try to stay mindful of fresh instances in my life where I may be repeating this same mistake.
- I'm learning that stepping outside of my comfort zone *in spite of* my fears is what ultimately frees me from my (perceived) limitations. There's an expression that I like which I once heard Sally Field say when she was giving an interview, "Fear is where the information is." So if you can bring yourself to walk through your fears whole new worlds will open up to you.
- I'm learning not to deny my fears (because I understand now that I can't conquer what I refuse to even acknowledge exists), I choose instead to simply weather my fears. By this I mean I simply choose to be aware of my fears, to be honest with myself about them, even as I refuse to dwell on them or allow my fears the power to influence my choices. Through this action though I acknowledge my fears I do not substantiate them and in this I do not allow them to have power over me. I'm learning that my fears may be challenged, and are ultimately overcome, by my pressing on despite them.
- And one of my most difficult lessons yet... I'm learning how not to be so concerned over the fact that when I step out on faith's path I never know how things are going to unfold and I'm learning to be okay with that uncertainty. Instead of dwelling on what all *might* go wrong because I can't see around every corner (if I'm wandering in the "darkness"), I look to focus on the wonder and amazement that *only* comes about from not knowing what's around every corner. And that's an important thing to remember - if you can't take the uncertainty, you'll never gain the wonder! So I'm learning not to panic whenever pain or difficulty strikes. I'm learning, instead, to take the long view of my life experiences. I'm learning to accept that sometimes difficulty

is an essential precursor, a necessary preparation, for something extraordinarily wonderful. And that you have to allow space for your life's story to evolve, you have to be willing to weather pain and see the storms of your life experience through in order to realize the beauty of the after-storm sunshine. And there's nothing else in the world like an after-storm sunshine.

I keep saying "I'm *learning*" because the applications of all these understandings are works-in-progress. There's always a new fear to be challenged; there's always that next (perceived) boundary to be dissolved. Faith must grow to know no boundaries. But though I am still learning, perhaps these lessons I'm learning in my darkness will be of some use to you in your life experience. Though these types of experiences, where it seems as if you're moving through your life with nothing tangible to guide you, may seem ominous and daunting, these moments must arise periodically in every person's experience. They arise to teach us something very valuable. They are our opportunity to be led by faith (instead of by sight). They are our opportunity to trust the true light within one, the Light that is The Source, instead of relying on the artificial light we see in the world at large.

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