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Pain and Suffering, Fear and Opportunity

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Where does fear come from?

All forms of fear arise out of an expectation of pain and suffering; which is a concise way of saying that fear comes from our feeling overwhelmingly intimidated by the prospect of being hurt or distressingly unsettled by the possible disruption that a change in our experience might bring. When we lack confidence in our ability to endure discomfort or adapt to changing circumstances, that pessimism saturates our thoughts and colors every aspect of our life outlook. We find ourselves playing out scenarios in our mind of what could go wrong in our lives in any given situation; it's an obsessiveness which triggers a biological state of alarm. Because the body ALWAYS follows the mind, if your mind is constantly declaring *I need to get ready for this, this and this horrible thing that just might happen because I don't want to be caught flatfooted if it does indeed show up*, your body responds to this concern by going into alert mode (what psychologists call the fight or flight response). And this is the fear we feel in our bodies through the tensing of our muscles, rapid heartbeats, dry mouths, jittery nerves and fluttering belly sensations.

Why not just avoid pain and suffering?

To be fair, it really is absolutely right and appropriate to expect that you will feel pain and endure suffering in your life experience. There's nothing irrational or delusional about coming to terms with this understanding. However, contrary to popular attitude, pain and suffering are not things to be feared and thus avoided at all costs. Pain and suffering are actually two of life's most valuable tools. Think about it. Without pain and without suffering, what motivation would you have to grow from your experiences? Pain and suffering are what keep you moving, like heat beneath your keister, to more right and favorable conditions in life. They are really excellent teachers. It is only when you start to believe that that's how your story is going to end, in an endless saga of pain and suffering, that you become bound by your fears instead of moving through them. Those uncertainties you face in life, which are the foundation of your fears, live on in you when you allow yourself to become so overawed by them that you shy away from ever really getting to know the truth about them; from ever really discovering how their storyline actually plays out, instead of how you imagine it to play out. Make a commitment starting now to honor and own the truth that you will never get passed anything that you remain intent on exhausting all efforts to avoid. That is to say, if you are not choosing to confront your insecurities you are choosing to be limited by them. Robert Frost was onto something great when he said, "The best way out is through." I would actually go so far as to declare that the *only* way out is through.

Is there any way to cure or prevent fear?

Fear is a state of mind which can only be generated outside of the present moment. When your attention is wholly engrossed by what is taking place right Now, it is not possible to be afraid. It is only when your attention centers on rerunning narratives of past traumas or predicting disastrous outcomes in the course of future possibilities that the conditions become right for fear to proliferate. Stop and think about that for a moment before you read on. Let this understanding thoroughly sink in. It is only when you are going over things gone wrong or imagining how things may go wrong that fear even has an opportunity to express itself. Being fully attentive to the experience of the moment however, being neither reflective nor projective in your deliberation, effectively abolishes all grounds for fear and apprehension.

What does the past, present or future have to do with reality and being fearless?

Hindsight is the foundation of foresight because the only means we have of predicting future events comes from the experiences of past events. Without hindsight, there can be no foresight. And in the absence of both of these perspectives there is only the perfectly pure clearness of Now.

Being in the present moment allows you to enjoy the experience of limitless optimism and impregnable self-assurance. Not that you'll walk around proclaiming *oh how wonderfully hopeful and confident I am*. No. This experience is more like a general state of being in that it is felt, but not in a self satisfied kind of way; it's appreciated, but not emphasized. In this state, you take the fact for granted that there is no need to be afraid of what lies ahead nor pine over what has been. All those anxieties are set aside for the moment and you then enter a space where it is simply trusted that whatever will be and has been, is in the best interest of your greatest good. This unspoken trust is what allows you to be in the moment. Without this trust you'd be too preoccupied with rehashing old storylines or obsessing over hypothetical disasters to be more than dreamingly aware of the present moment.

The past is but a fleeting experience, the future a vision of possibilities. The only thing that's truly real is Now. So know this: a choice not to be present is a choice to be absent from Reality. If you're not in the moment, you're in a world of your fantasy.

So why not simply ignore the past and give no thought to the future?

Now here's where I am going to seemingly contradict myself because while it is true that if you're not living in the present you are living in a delusion, it is also true that it would be reckless to abandon all reflection and unwise to give up all dreaming. Why? Because it's not really about the *act* of looking back or the *act* of imagining ahead that sets the standard for the making of a delusion. What sets this precedent is the intent behind your action.

It's absolutely okay for you to dream because dreams are the blueprint of your future. And given this you need to ask yourself, why would I imagine anything less than the best of possibilities to occur? It is also absolutely okay for you to look back because history is meant to be learned from. But if you're going to reminisce, make it for the purpose of gaining understanding. Don't make a habit of looking back in the spirit of lamentation because it is pointless to wish that somehow things could be different from what they are. Your life's state of circumstances are what they are. You need to surrender to this

reality because accepting where you are is the only way to move from where you are. The alternative is to go in circles. In order to move forward, you have to surrender to the idea that the situation you are in (whatever it may be) is what it is; but realize and own the fact that you have the power to change how you *feel* about the circumstances at hand simply by choosing to look at your present situation in a different way. Be open to the truth that your understanding about the events of the moment is not perfect. There are facts unknown to you at this point that are still coming in. Life's situations are ever evolving. Don't believe for one second that you are seeing the full picture because I promise you that you're not. What you are in fact seeing is your extrapolation of what that full picture might look like based on the information you have available. But always remember, not all the information is available to you. And you can fill in the holes anyway you like. So why not extrapolate a bright and prosperous complete picture rather than one filled with doom and gloom? Why worry, when you can imagine a different possibility? At the very least, this course of action will alleviate the fear and stress you feel in this present moment, which is really all you have anyway. Because remember, your right Now is all that really matters because your right Now is the only thing that truly exists. You cannot touch the past, even though its effects may ripple through you like a tidal wave. Nor can you seize the future, even though its prospects are what stir you to action. All you can do is seize the moment of your Now. So why not choose, right now, to look at the uncertainties in your life as adventures instead of threats. Every adventure worth its salt is peppered with its share of challenges. Most of what you think you know doesn't come from reality as it is, but reality as you suppose it to be. You glimpse a piece of the picture here and a piece of the picture there, and rather than accept the truth that there are gaps in your understanding of what the full picture really looks like, you simply fill in the blanks yourself. Your inner voice concocts an anecdote that fills in all the spaces that you don't see. What you need to realize however, is you have the power to concoct any tale you want. So I ask you again, why not make your story a joyful one?

Given all this, what's a practical way to get passed fear and insecurity?

Try this mental exercise. It's one that I've made a part of my routine and perhaps it can be of some use to you too. I've developed the habit of setting aside time each day to give thought to a situation in my life that is troubling me. I let my inner narrator tell the story of this situation as I would like it to play out as I immerse myself in the experience of this imagined scenario until I'm able to strongly evoke the feeling of what it would be like when it actually comes to pass. I also allow my critical voice to sit on the sidelines and boo, hiss, ridicule and make fun of my optimistic outlook all it wants. I let it berate me for being silly, naïve, foolish, stupid, ridiculous and whatever else it can come up with until it (my critical voice) eventually becomes the thing that sounds stupid and ridiculous. I allow my inner critic to throw everything it has at me, while I neither ignore nor engage its cynicism. I'm simply aware of it as I stand firm in my resolve to be present with this assault in order to endure passed it. It's kind of like a mental "rope a dope." I have found this exercise to be great for dealing with my anxieties. It allows me to play out my insecurities without actually having to live them out in any extreme sense.

What is the opportunity of fear?

Fear presents us with a great touchstone which serves to draw our attention to the limitations we have accepted in life. The opportunity of fear lies in our conquering it because the truth about life is there are no limitations (only challenges). Our beliefs in

the ideas of boundaries and division are meant to be shattered; and an understanding of the grand oneness of All is meant to be realized. Fear is the gateway to this Truth.

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