

Facing Fear and Finding Courage

1 Life shrinks or expands according to one's courage. **Anais Nin**

2 A great deal of talent is lost in this world for the want of a little courage. **Sydney Smith**

3 Courage does not always roar, sometimes it's the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, I will try again tomorrow. **Mary Anne Radmacher**

4 Don't give into your fears, if you do, you won't be able to talk to your heart. **Paulo Coelho**

5 The person who risks nothing does nothing, has nothing, is nothing. He may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, live, and love. **Leo Buscaglia**

6 Choose the great adventure of being brave and afraid at the exact same time. **Brené Brown**

7 I am learning every day to allow the space between where I am and where I want to be to inspire me and not terrify me. **Tracee Ellis Ross**

8 . . . perfectionism is just fear in fancy shoes and a mink coat, **Elizabeth Gilbert**

9 Basically, your fear is like a mall cop who thinks he's a Navy SEAL: He hasn't slept in days, he's all hopped up on Red Bull, and he's liable to shoot at his own shadow in an absurd effort to keep everyone "safe." **Elizabeth Gilbert, Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear**

10 Addressing the anger and fear that fuel our unkindness allows us to connect with the basic kindness that is the essence of our being. **Ezra Bayda, Saying Yes to Life**

11 **Fear is energy that can be mobilized**

Fear is a very powerful emotion. When you feel fear in your body, it's helpful to relate to it as an energy that can be mobilized for life. It may feel like a constriction in your chest, throat, or abdomen. Breathe through it without judgment and allow yourself to feel it as a very strong force. If you pray for help, you can begin to expand this energy we call 'fear' and use it for healing and transformation. . . .

Our only protection is in our interconnectedness. This has always been the message of the dark emotions when they are experienced most deeply and widely. Grief is not just 'my' grief; it is the grief of every motherless child, every witness to horror in the world. Despair is not just 'my' despair; it is everyone's despair about life in the twenty-first century. Fear is not just 'my' fear; it is everyone's fear

If fear is only telling you to save your own skin, there's not much hope for us. But the fact is that in conscious fear, there is a potentially revolutionary power of compassion and connection that can be mobilized en masse. This is the power of fear.

-Miriam Greenspan, Healing through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear, and Despair

12 The Healing Time

Finally on my way to yes
I bump into
all the places
where I said no
to my life
all the untended wounds
the red and purple scars
those hieroglyphs of pain
carved into my skin, my bones,
those coded messages
that send me down
the wrong street
again and again
where I find them
the old wounds
the old misdirections
and I lift them
one by one
close to my heart
and I say holy
holy.

--**Pesha Gertler**. . .Composer **Elizabeth Alexander** has used this text as a basis for her choral composition, Finally on my Way to Yes (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJbB1R16wYw>)

13 The problem with fear is that we don't experience it fully. . .

The problem with fear is not that we feel it but that we don't feel it, as what is not felt cannot be healed. When we don't know our fear, cannot experience it fully and speak it openly, we are more likely to be troubled by anxieties, phobias, psychosomatic symptoms, controlling, destructive and aggressive behaviors.

Miriam Greenspan in her book, *Healing Through the Dark Emotions*, assures that whatever the nature of fear, it is always more helpful to befriend it, than become frozen or anxious trying to

avoid it. Even our neurotic and irrational fears have something to teach us about our limitations, our vulnerabilities and our need for healing.

The author is encouraging us to consider fear not as a weakness but as information, a signal of unsafety, a usable energy, a way of knowing. What fear tells us is that we are human. We are vulnerable. We are interconnected with others in the fabric of life. We can allow fear, breathe through it and use its energy. We don't have to let it become panic by avoiding it.

Agata Canning, posted on her blog

14 If we ignore fear, we can't go beyond it. . .

Courage as a warrior depends on getting to know fear. If we ignore fear, we can't go beyond it. Trungpa Rinpoche called it a giant kindling log that we can use to develop a giant fire of fearlessness. The way to develop courage is not to cast out fear, but to find out more about it by looking directly at fear. Until you see what the problem is, trying to get away from the fear just gives the fear more energy. Finding out more about your own fear is fearlessness. It is the leap you need to take. . . .

One day while in solitary retreat [the great Tibetan poet-yogi] Milarepa went to gather firewood, and when he came back there were demons in his cave. He shouted at them to go away. He tried everything he knew to scare them, and some of them left. But one of the demons wouldn't leave. He threw sticks at it and tried magic spells. Nothing worked. Finally Milarepa said, 'Okay, make yourself at home! Let's sit down. We'll talk about the teachings. Make yourself comfortable, and have some nettle soup!' And the demon disappeared. Milarepa sang the demon a parting song, which you can write on a piece of paper and use as a slogan for yourself. 'With compassion, I overcome the demons. All blame I scatter to the winds!' This is what we learn to do with our fear. 'Tell me about yourself. I'm genuinely interested. You've come a long way to find me. Have some soup!'

--Cynthia Kneen, Awake Mind, Open Heart: The Power of Courage and Dignity in Everyday Life

15 Define Your Biggest Fears, a spiritual practice

What is it that you are afraid of? Who is it that you are afraid of? Be honest. What are you guarding, hiding, avoiding, or denying? Are you most afraid of death? Pain? Illness and disease? Public speaking? Wrinkles? Are you afraid of losing your job? Your house? Your spouse? An autocratic parent? Does one person have so much power in your life that you are totally afraid of what he or she thinks of you? Start out with only one fear. You can't cut through all of them at once, so don't try. Where you find your greatest fears, you'll find buried treasure deep below within your psyche.

This large fear is a demon in your life, so you might as well face it and get to know it better. Analyze what it exactly is that causes you terror. Be very specific. If you are afraid of losing your job, for example, see if you can break your fears down. Are you afraid of losing money? Are you afraid of feelings of rejection?

Are you afraid of admitting defeat? Are you afraid of what your spouse, your parents, your children, your friends, your neighbors will say or think? . . . Are you afraid that you won't get another job and you'll end up living on the street? Are you afraid of the loss of status? Are you afraid of losing your community at work? Are you afraid of losing your job-related identity? Are you afraid that you won't know what to do with your time? Are you afraid of the process of hunting for another job? Are you afraid that you will have to give up a way of life? Afraid of disconnection, loneliness, boredom, meaninglessness?

Allow yourself some time to experience your worst fear. For just a few minutes, imagine a worst-case scenario and go there in your mind. Put yourself in that situation. Imagine it. Visualize it. Tell yourself that this is what has happened. Don't run away from it. Don't panic. Don't avoid it. Face your fear; see what is unconsciously driving your habitual compensatory behaviors in an attempt to avoid the worst. Do this and you'll eventually have a new perspective, more freed-up energy, and a new lease on life. . . .

If you are anxious about the possibility that you will end up alone, without a partner, for example, see if you can access this fear. Think about how you can construct a good and satisfying life on your own. The more we can train in learning to "hang in there" with our fears, even for the briefest of moments, the more we grow in breadth and depth. Training in this way helps us loosen our attachment to more excess baggage. In this way we open our hearts and allow the world to enter rather than walling it out, which is what we usually do with inappropriate defense mechanisms and irrational fears.

--Lama Surya Das, Letting Go of the Person You Used to Be

For Reflection and Discussion

A What is your greatest fear? How are you challenged to face fear and find courage?

B Can you point to a time when you were able to face fear and find fearlessness?

C Has fear motivated you to service?

D How does your experience of All Souls help you face fear and find courage? Be as specific as you can.

--Mary Beth Hatem, for covenant groups at All Souls Church, Unitarian