

There are two kinds of fear: good fear and bad fear.

Good fear is when the hairs stand up on the back of your neck. The kind of fear that tells you to cross the street for “some strange reason.” The kind of fear that gives you superhuman strength in dealing with sudden danger. The kind of fear that immediately threatens your physical survival and that prepares you for dealing in the short term.

That’s the good kind. It’s rooted in our animal instinct of pure and absolute protection of ourself and our clan. Good fear that we only want to experience a few times in life if possible.

Then there’s bad fear. The fear that creates the same kind of physical sensation you get from good fear: increased heart rate. Blood flow to the extremities. Rapid short breath. Bad fear is rooted in all the “What if blahblahblah happens?” What if? What if? What if? Bad fear keeps us on the treadmill of mediocrity. Bad fear keeps blood *out* of the brain, where we need it the most in order to make effective decisions.

Why do we get bad fear and how do we deal with it?

We get bad fear because we want it. Fear in the short term can be good. Fear in the big picture and in the long term is not good. It wears us down. It’s chemically addictive. It prevents us from using our brain. And most importantly, we create bad fear because it keeps us right where we are. Hobbling us, bad fear chains us to the world we know. Bad fear saps us of life, slowly. It must be destroyed.

Why and how does it do this? Bad fear keeps us from changing. We don’t want change because change is scary. Yep. Change is scary, and so we’d prefer to keep things stagnant, not change, and staying fearful is a great way to stay put. But here’s the funny part: Everything will change! And it’s the clinging to “the way things are” that actually causes the most pain and suffering, within us and around us.

So, what to do? Embrace change and kill bad fear.

We cling to that safe harbor of the “known” because the unknown wide ocean is just so darn unknown, so knee-wobbly scary. But consider this, what if the early explorers always kept to the same known safe harbors. Who would have finally ventured out, way out, into the wild blue ocean to seek and journey? For what? For the *unknown*. For *change*. It takes courage to venture to the unknown territories of ourselves and the world around us. To venture to the *unknown*. Here’s how to do it:

1. Harness Energy

A car with no gas goes nowhere. Without energy *we* go nowhere. Seems obvious and yet so few really focus on how to create and harness our internal energy. Our energy comes from what we put in our bodies (mostly vegetables, organic, and no processed foods), how much we recharge (sleep 8 hours a night), and how well we take care of our machinery (exercise – something, anything, just use the body). Our energy is our most important asset. No energy no change, just a lot of fear and loathing and stagnancy. Start with the energy or you’ll go nowhere.

2. Practice Awareness

With a full tank of energy we can begin. To see. To hear. To become aware of the situation at hand. Just labeling the actual fear disassociates it from us and allows the first step in moving forward, relaxing, and changing to a “towards, positive” state of being. There’s a quote I like, “If you know what you’re doing, then you can do what you want” (Moshe Feldenkrais). It’s true.

Learn to practice being aware and things get clearer and easier to deal with. Learn to practice awareness. Rituals (like tea!) certainly help by serving as awareness training grounds. Just noticing things, feelings, sensations,

surroundings, helps prevent getting overwhelmed by them. Feeling fearful? Notice the feeling, and label it “fear.” Notice what happens. Does it get more or less consuming?

3. Focus

While awareness let’s us “see” and identify what’s happening, focus let’s us harness our energy to *do something* about it. The key with focus is that it requires banishing distraction. First becoming aware of it, then banishing it. But distraction feels good. It’s addictive. It releases dopamine, a chemical in our body that is released when we see something new (it’s meant to protect us by drawing our attention to a new threat). Similar to cocaine actually in the feel good effects. And yet getting distracted hurts awareness. And if we’re not aware then we stay stuck, in that sticky safety of the known. Focus is connected to awareness because we need to be aware of that pull of distraction. But, we need the energy and strength to say “no” to it, to remain on task, to stay focused. Good ample energy, gives us willpower, to stay focused.

4. Change

And then things change. We *see* what’s going on. And then attack it with our focus. Raw clay goes from a blob of earth to a functional teacup. It changes. An idea goes from an electrical impulse in the brain to a business plan. A bad habit goes from compulsion to freedom. We venture into the wide open ocean with no land in sight. And we’re ok with it.

Contrary to the popular belief, I don’t embrace fearlessness. I used to. But, I don’t anymore.

I’ve heard the modified definitions of fearlessness, and while they don’t fully resonate with me, I can appreciate a different perspective. However, this article addresses the textbook definition of fearlessness, which is to be without fear.

We have a tendency to dismiss fear as weakness, but it’s not that simple. Over the years, I’ve come to understand fear as incredibly useful and here are a few of the things I’ve learned.

1. Courage and fear go hand in hand.

I used to think that people were courageous when they chose to do things I would be afraid to do. I was wrong. They could only be courageous in doing things they were afraid to do. Bravery doesn’t exist in the absence of trepidation.

I mistakenly assigned the characteristic of courage to others wishing I had the same. What I once failed to see was that I possessed the one requirement of courage — a fear to be faced head on. I came to understand that fear doesn’t negate courage. It beckons it.

2. Physiology can be misleading.

The bottom line is that fear is intended to keep us safe. Most people are familiar with the fight-or flight response. When our lives are threatened, physiology kicks in to protect us. We are hardwired for self-preservation.

Unfortunately, we may also feel a similar response to unfamiliar albeit non-threatening situations. Things that feel uncomfortable to us also put us on alert. For some, the response is just as intense whereas others experience an attenuated version.

We often get our signals crossed and respond to change with the same fervor as something that has the power to destroy us. Adrenaline doesn't always mean resist or run...which leads us to the third point.

3. Fear is instructive.

When we've established that life indeed is not in danger, fear becomes useful in a very different way.

We often become accustomed to our way of being- even if it's an existence that is less than the one we desire. We restrict ourselves for a variety of reasons, real or imagined.

Close examination of many of those reasons has fear at the foundation. Personal growth requires expansion and that can be terrifying. Whether you aim to be more vulnerable, more loving, or more financially stable, it will require a shifting of your mindset and breaking of previously established barriers.

In these scenarios, fear often points us to areas we need to investigate more closely. Though our instinct may be to flee, this type of fear is much-needed guidance.

In conclusion, fear itself isn't a problem. Our reaction to our own fears is the issue. In making fear an adversary, we miss the challenge of deciphering the message that is being sent to us. When we choose to make it an ally, we gain so much more.

We can be paralyzed by it or choose to process it. If the former is your default approach then fearlessness is desirable. On the other hand, if you consciously choose to process, who needs fearlessness?

Top 10 kinds of fear: from psychology today magazine / the Bible's response

1. **fear of failure** - Moses at the burning bush
2. **fear of success** - Jonah and Ninevah
3. **fear of dying** - Jesus said dont fear those who can kill this body, Paul said to live is Christ and to die is gain
4. **fear of commitment** (intimacy) - Luke 9:57-62 "would be" followers of Jesus
5. **fear of spiders** (arachnophobia) - Job 8:13-15 - its not as bad as you think
6. **fear of flying** - Psalm 55:6-8 - I wish I had wings, I would fly and find peace
7. **fear of public speaking** - Jer 1:6 - You are sovereign, but I can not speak. God said "I will speak"
8. **fear of heights** - Ecc 12:5 - those who dont trust God will be afraid of heights and fallin
9. **fear of the dark** - Psalm 91:5 says you will not fear the terror of night, Ps 104 says he made the moon, sun, and sends away darkness to become light
10. **fear of rejection** - 1 Sam 15 - Saul said to Samuel, I sinned because I feared the people.

Exod 32 - aaron feared the people and sinned against Moses and God.

Prov 29 says the fear of man is a dangerous trap.

John 12:41-43 Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. **But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.**

Galatians 1:10 Am I saying this now to win the approval of people or God? Am I trying to please people? **If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant.**

Matt 22:16 - Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are.

Luke 12:4-5 "My friends, I can guarantee that you don't need to be afraid of those who kill the body. After that they can't do anything more. **I'll show you the one you should be afraid of. Be afraid of the one who has the power to throw you into hell after killing you. I'm warning you to be afraid of him.**