

Fear and compassion. Fear and compassion. I bet you haven't heard those two words together often, maybe never. Perhaps you thought I was a bit confused and really meant compassion for the fearful. While I admit to confusion now and again, either Fear and Compassion or compassion for the fearful, would lead me in the same direction...a focus on You, Me and Us.

Yes, we should have compassion for the fearful. In fact, it's my compassion for people, all of us, that drives me to focus on fear today. The truth is, we are all fearful, we all live with fear. Some of us more than others, with some fears stronger than others, some more problematic than others.

I believe fear drives our behavior infinitely more than we know. In large measure, that's because our fears can be so much a part of us, so normal, that we don't even recognize them as fear. Fear often masquerades as rational thought, as reasonable caution, maturity.

The choice to take "that" job rather than a lower paying job, even though I'd enjoy the work more----could appear as the mature choice, the rational choice...on the surface. At a deeper level that choice may well be driven by a *belief* that I don't deserve to be happy or I'm unworthy; which might well be based on a fear of being too vital, too inspired, too happy.

Making the distinction between a mature decision and fear requires a level of consciousness. It requires that we let go of some level of fear of fear. Our culture teaches us to see fear as a negative, something to be avoided, out-grown. When in fact, fear can teach us a great deal about ourselves if we are willing to be open to it.

Certainly, some fears are valuable. Some fear is required to increase the odds of survival, our own, our progeny, even the nation. We should have a certain amount of fear of the ramifications of global warming. We should have fear of lions and tigers. But are we really served by a fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of success, a fear of connection, a fear of losing control?

My energy teacher would say no. He's taught me that fear is largely generated by the ego's need to be in control; the ego's drive to maintain a separate self...the "I", the "Me". The ego uses beliefs, distortions and misinterpretations to maintain tension and control.

Remember back to our reading, Joel Morwood, said "The reason we are afraid of Enlightenment is because we know in our heart of hearts that before we can Awaken to our True Self, our ego-self must die... for this is confirmed by the mystics of all traditions." The ego is more than willing to distort in order to stay front and center.

Moving beyond fear requires consciousness, we might even call it spiritual growth. It requires awareness of our deeper selves, the part of us that is not ego, the part of us that does not die with the body, the part that is connected to that interconnected web we talk about. Consciousness provides an opportunity to heal, to become more whole, to be who we truly are, an opportunity for genuine connection.

So what's beyond fear? I've said, moving beyond fear requires consciousness, but what's beyond fear? Love. Love is beyond fear. Beyond fear is love. We often fear love because we fear losing control. And the ego-self always wants to be in control and will be, unless we are intentional in intervening, unless we are willing to open to our deeper selves.

So how do we open to a deeper self? We do it through intentionality; we do it by being in a spiritual community, we do it by meditating or some other form of study that connects us to the Spirit of Life, also known as CHI, life Force, God or nature. There are many paths up the mountain.

Dr. Karl Albrecht, author, futurist and one of the top 100 Thought Leaders in the area of leadership, says the daily fear you experience is a feeling of anxiety created by imagining terrible future events. They include what he calls "the dream killing type of fear that exists in your mind and keeps you playing small in your life and the world"; "the crafty type of fear that convinces you that existing is the same as living".

He identifies five basic human fears. 1) Extinction: the fear of annihilation, ceasing to exist, it's more than fear of dying. 2) Mutilation: fear of losing any part of your body; having our body's boundaries invaded. 3) Loss of autonomy: being paralyzed/immobilized; overwhelmed, controlled by circumstances. 4) Separation: fear of abandonment, rejection, becoming a non-person; not wanted; not valued. 5) Ego death: fear of humiliation, shame, profound self-disappointment, shattering one's sense of worthiness.

Albrecht, says, these are the fears that get in the way of asking for a raise, speaking your truth, or saying "no. The fears that inspire you to say what you think people want to hear, stay in a horrible marriage, and walk away from the risky proposition of boldly pursuing your dreams. He says, when we know where they really come from, we can start to control them.

I was interested in finding this particular listing of basic human fears. It was similar to a list I had learned a long time ago; which also laid out a list of five fears.

Some time ago, Jeff, my energy teacher of many, many years, laid out a typology of fear. I use the term typology to both give it substance and to impress. I don't know if he's "right" but I do know he was on to something significant, some elemental understanding and insight.

His work is grounded in the belief that the body is a complete navigational tool. One that contains the knowledge gleaned through eons of evolution. Our work, to access that knowledge, is to move beyond beliefs, beyond the ego self and tap into the wisdom contained in our bodies. He teaches how to recognize and use energy, CHI, the life force.

He says fear stops energy from moving in the body. It creates density, tension and negativity. It affects our perceptions of the world.

We have a fear of feeling. All this is instigated by thoughts and beliefs, which we physically experience as separation and limitation.

Jeff's five layers of fear are as follows. They go from surface level fears to our deep seated fears.

5 surface level of fear: fears about money; relationships; health; image; status; losing control.

4 fear of change; failure; rejection; success; responsibility; of being seen; being alone; fear of the unknown; of losing what we already have; being out of control; fear of losing control:

3 survival fears: fear of it all being taken away; not having what we want; fear of who we are (often I've heard gay people say when they were young they feared being gay/being who they were—wanting desperately to be “like everyone else”)...fear of being who we are. Fear of dying; getting lost; moving beyond others; being alone; being controlled, stopped; crushed; overwhelmed; losing control

2 Fear of being too vital; too creative; too inspired; too happy; fear of knowing who you are; fear of the power of love; fear of giving up fear; being blown away; blown apart; disintegrating; fear of freedom; fear of there being no God; fear of the unknown; channeling too much life energy; darkness; evil; losing control.

1 the deepest level of fear: Fear of the light; unity with God; of the external; fear of seeing through the illusion of separation; losing control.

Note that each level of fear includes a fear of losing control. That's the power of the ego's presence at work!

Albrecht's list and Jeff's clearly overlap. They certainly are talking about the same territory. They both lay much of the power of fear at the feet of thoughts and beliefs. They both recognize that these thoughts and beliefs have the power to drive behavior. They have the power to keep us small, the power to keep us separate; the power to keep us from Enlightenment, as Morwood says.

These limiting beliefs help to keep us separate. They get in the way of connection. They interfere with spiritual growth. And they are wholly human. Wholly human because we have egos whose job is to maintain a sense of separate self.

We can not do away with our egos. It seems fundamental to being human. We certainly do not want to do away with our minds, because they serve an important function. Our rational minds are incredible tools. They do what they do very well. But they do not do all that we are capable of, nor all that we are in need of.

So we must have compassion. We must learn to be compassionate with ourselves. Be willing to forgive ourselves our humanness. And as we are able to be compassionate with ourselves, we will find a deeper well of compassion for others.

Yes, I know I've heard it's easier to have compassion for others than it is to have compassion for ourselves. And that may be true. But I wonder if what we call compassion for others isn't really more akin to tolerance or acceptance.

The Latin root of compassion is to "suffer with". My question is can we truly "suffer with" if we have an unacknowledged fear of being overwhelmed, being crushed, fear of it all being taken away? Can we "suffer with" if we have a deep seated fear of losing control?

I raise the issue of fear this morning, not to frighten you, but to offer the possibility that spiritual growth requires grappling with our fears. Requires a willingness to experience and recognize our fears. Requires a willingness to walk with others while they experience their fears.

That is what our faith community can do for each other. That is what our faith community should do for and with each other. That's what the healthiest congregation feels like. It's what love requires of us.

Yet, we will remain fearful. We'll remain fearful because we are human beings, and that's the way we are made. Maybe there is no fear in Nirvana, but for those of us who remain on this earth...there will be fear.

The question is...will you choose to live with fear in a conscious way OR will you choose to use fear to insulate you from fear?

It's a choice we get to make many times in any given day.

May we choose well.

Amen