Connecting

Connecting to deepened wisdom and deepened relationship

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Fear

Chalice Lighting

Words of Alfred, Lord Tennyson: "Though much is taken, much abides; and though we are not now that strength which in old days moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are: one equal temper of heroic hearts, mad weak by time and fate, but strong in will to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

Check In Questions

Tell about a time when you were afraid.

Defining Moment

From Dictionary.com

fear (n.) (1) a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined; the feeling or condition of being afraid. Synonyms: qualm, trepidation, horror, panic, fright, terror, dread, dismay, consternation, apprehension, foreboding. (2) a specific instance of or propensity for such a feeling. Synonyms: bête noire, aversion, phobia, bugbear, bogey. (3) concern or anxiety; solicitude. (4) reverential awe, especially toward God. Synonyms: veneration, reverence, respect, awe. (5) something that causes feelings of dread or apprehension; something a person is afraid of. (6) anticipation of the possibility that something unpleasant will occur.

Psychology of Fear: The Basics[1]

If people didn't feel fear, they wouldn't be able to protect themselves from legitimate threats. Fear is a vital response to physical and emotional danger that has been pivotal throughout human evolution.

In our early evolutionary history, humans regularly faced life-or-death situations. Today, the stakes are lower, but while public speaking, elevators, and spiders don't present the same type of immediately dire consequences that faced early humans, we respond with brains shaped by that early evolution. Many people experience occasional bouts of fear or "nerves" before a flight, first date, or big game. But when someone's fear is persistent and specific to certain threat, and impairs her or his everyday life, that person might have a specific phobia.

I. Why People Feel Fear

At least 60 percent of adults admit to having at least one unreasonable fear, although research to date is not clear on why these fears manifest. One theory is that humans have a genetic predisposition to fear things that were a threat to our ancestors, such as snakes, spiders, heights, or water, but this is difficult to verify, although people who have a first-degree relative with a specific phobia appear more likely to have the same one. Others point to evidence that individuals fear certain things because of a previous traumatic experience with them, but that fails to explain the many fears without such origins.

Personality traits such as neuroticism appear to increase one's likelihood of developing a phobia, and a tendency toward frequent worries and negative thoughts may also increase the risk, as may being raised by overprotective parents, losing a parent, or sexual or physical abuse. Most likely is that people follow multiple pathways to fears, not least among them the emotional response of disgust.

Did humans evolve to feel specific fears? Throughout human history, certain animals, such as snakes and spiders, have caused high numbers of deaths. Thus, some researchers believe, humans may have evolved to an innate tendency to avoid such creatures, as it would deliver a survival advantage. Some studies have shown that it's easier to condition people without apparent fears of any animals to fear snakes and spiders than to fear dogs or other "friendly" creatures. Studies of other primates show that they share humans' fear of snakes, leading some to speculate that such fears themselves may have spurred the growth of primate intelligence overall, as humans and others evolved to avoid the dangers posed by such threats.

How do children learn fear? Research shows that babies do not appear to show signs of fear until around 8 to 12 months of age, usually in response to new people or events, but they are less likely to show a fear of strangers when sitting on a parent's lap. And while some fears may be innate in humans, many fears are learned, perhaps most commonly by seeing a parent react fearfully to an animal or situation, or to frequently warn a child about its dangers.

[1] Adapted from: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/fear

Why do people sometimes seek out scary experiences? There are times when people actively pursue experiences that could scare them, like a roller coaster or a haunted house attraction. Some research suggests that even though these experiences can be truly frightening in the moment, they may also boost people's moods: The scare response is sincere, but the quick reassurance of safety delivers an equally strong jolt of relief and enjoyment that may linger well after the experience.

What everyday fears can hold us back? Some feelings commonly described as "fears" are not strictly phobias, but mental obstacles that limit people's actions and decisions, often preventing them from making progress, such as the fear of failure, the fear of success, the fear of rejection, the fear of missing out, or the fear of commitment. These feelings of insecurity, unworthiness, or indecision can often be addressed in therapy.

II. Specific Phobias

A phobia is a distinct fear or anxiety about a certain object or situation, exposure to which consistently provokes fear or causes distress in the sufferer. The fear experienced is almost always disproportionate to the true danger the object or event poses, and people with specific phobias generally know there is no real reason to be afraid and that their behavior is not logical. However, they cannot avoid their reaction.

Phobias fall into five broad categories:

- Fears of animals, such as fear of dogs (cynophobia), spiders (arachnophobia), or bugs (insectophobia or entomophobia). These fears, known as zoophobias, also include the fear of bats (chiroptophobia) and of snakes or lizards (herpetophobia).
- Fears of the natural environment, such as a fear of heights (acrophobia) or of storms. These phobias also include fear of fire (pyrophobia) and fear of the dark (nyctophobia).
- Fears related to blood (hemophobia), injury, and injection, such as a fear of needles (trypanophobia) or medical procedures including dentistry (dentophobia).
- Situational fears, such as a fear of flying (aerophobia), a fear of public speaking (glossophobia), or a fear of riding in elevators, which is itself a type of fear of closed spaces (claustrophobia).
- Others, such as a fear of vomiting or choking.

Phobias can manifest at any time, but tend to emerge in childhood or adolescence, and the symptoms are often lifelong. In some cases, exposure to the feared object or situation (the phobic stimulus) can cause full or limited panic attacks. As many as 9 percent of Americans annually experience a specific phobia, according to the DSM-5, and women are twice as likely as men to have a phobia. It's not uncommon to have multiple phobias: three-quarters of individuals diagnosed with a specific phobia have more than one and the average sufferer has three. The onset of a phobia can sometimes be traced to a specific event, like surviving a plane crash or being attacked by a dog. But for many more people, the origin of the phobia remains unknown. Some people with a specific phobia change their lifestyles to avoid their triggers, moving to a region where certain animals are rare, for example, or where there is no subway.

III. Social Anxiety

Social anxiety disorder, which is also known as social phobia, entails a deep fear of other people's judgment, evaluation, and rejection that limits sufferers' enjoyment of life. Individuals with social anxiety may avoid situations in which they will be exposed to the scrutiny of others, such as giving a speech, eating in front of others, meeting new people, or engaging in group conversations.

People who experience social anxiety may endure extreme unhappiness, self-doubt, and even hopelessness, symptoms which overlap with those of depression. But research on the two conditions reveals a core feeling of worthlessness, or feeling that one is undeserving, whether of happiness or of other people's friendship. Addressing that symptom in therapy could help to address social anxiety before it triggers depression.

Cognitive behavioral therapy may help sufferers begin to overcome social anxiety by practicing approaches to social situations through limited exposure, and beginning to question the internal stories that lead them to avoid others. Testing predictions that things will go wrong, to prove that they are incorrect, can further help people challenge anxious thoughts, as can learning to credit or reward themselves for steps toward socializing.

IV. Overcoming Fear

A core treatment for fears is exposure therapy, in which a therapist guides the client to gradually and repeatedly engage with the source of their phobia in a safe environment to help strip away the threat associated with it. For example, someone with a fear of flying may be prompted to think about planes, view pictures of planes, visit the airport, step onto a plane, and eventually complete a flight. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can also help sufferers challenge and reframe their harmful beliefs. Medication such as beta-blockers, which block adrenaline and lower heart rate and blood pressure, may be prescribed in the short-term.

Minding one's thoughts, acknowledging their fears, and being present can go a long way toward managing everyday fears. The first step is to question the story behind a fear. When one's mental predictions insist that something will go wrong or that an individual faces imminent danger, the ability to step back, recognize those thoughts as stories, and calmly evaluate whether they are true or rational can be a powerful step toward overcoming them.

Using the technology of virtual reality to simulate exposure to fears has emerged as a useful therapeutic tool. Virtual Reality Graded Exposure Therapy (VRGET) may be helpful in addressing concerns like specific phobias and anxiety disorders. Patient outcomes appear to be no different in virtual and real settings, but VR may enable therapists to reach more people with accessible and affordable care.

Developing Courage means learning to respond to and manage fears. Courage entails not being afraid to be afraid, knowing that fear is sometimes unavoidable, and that it's a feeling that can be useful when it's recognized as an alert and not a barrier. With this knowledge, courageous people can prepare without panicking, take action instead of shying away from it, and ask for help when their fears clue them in that it may be needed.

There is No "Fight or Flight" Reaction[2]

When a person views a photograph of a hairy, looming spider or a slithering snake in a laboratory experiment, scientists usually see markers of increased electrical activity deep in that person's brain, in a region called the periaqueductal gray (PAG). When a caged mouse smells a cat and freezes, scientists observe similar changes in the mouse's PAG. What's the obvious conclusion? The PAG controls fight-or-flight responses of mammals in threatening situations.

Actually, however, as recent improvements in the power and resolution of magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) have discovered, changes in PAG activity occur in nonthreatening, mundane tasks, such as comparing a letter of the alphabet to another letter on a screen. So if the PAG is not dedicated to fighting or fleeing, what is it doing? Anatomical connections suggest that the PAG regulates and coordinates your heart, lungs and other systems of your body with your so-called limbic system and cerebral cortex. And it does so not just when you experience a threat but all the time—whether you're highly emotional, deep in thought, sound asleep or reading a fascinating article about the brain. In moments of threat, such as in the mouse and human experiments, the PAG is simply working harder. (Incidentally, this explanation suggests one reason why so-called antianxiety drugs manage anxiety disorders without curing them. They target brain circuits that aren't dedicated to anxiety or fight-or-flight but that simply regulate the body.)

Moreover, when studies of mice look at situations in which the mouse is free to roam around, when these mice encounter a potential threat, such as the odor of a predator or something novel, they typically don't freeze, fight, or hightail it out of there in one simple movement. More often, they flit away and then dart forward, repeatedly yo-yoing back and forth between avoiding and approaching. The mice appear to be foraging for more information, dipping their toes into an ambiguous situation, trying to reduce the uncertainty of their immediate environment.

Research over the past 20 years has shown the brain to operate much more on predicting, and much less on reacting, than previously thought. In daily life, you might feel like you react to all sorts of things that are threatening or safe. You see a car swerve toward you, and you flinch. You read a text from a loved one, and you smile. You hear a sneeze and turn away to avoid germs. You smell the aroma of a chocolate cake, and you salivate. You encounter stimuli, and react accordingly. The best available evidence suggests, however, that that this stimulus-response model doesn't fit what your brain is actually doing. Your brain doesn't react to the world – it predicts in advance how to act and what to experience in the next moment.

[2] Adapted from Lisa Feldman Barrett, *Scientific American*, 2024 Aug 8.

This guessing happens so quickly and efficiently that you don't experience yourself doing it. You don't *react* to someone's sneeze by turning away. As they slightly move their head, preparing to sneeze, your brain uses its abundant past experiences to *predict* the probability that a sneeze is coming and creates an action plan for you to turn away. These preparations for movement also prepare you to hear and see the sneeze, all before the sneeze happens. The signals coming from the retina in each eye and the cochlea in each ear either confirm those predictions or adjust them so your brain can predict better next time. The fancy name for this is "learning."

We do NOT go through life constantly detecting threats and reacting with flight-or-fight circuits. Rather brains operate mainly by prediction, not reaction. All brains constantly anticipate the needs of the body and attempt to meet those needs before they arise. They seek to reduce uncertainty to survive and thrive in circumstances that are only partially predictable.

Reducing uncertainty requires energy. It's a costly metabolic outlay for a brain, and if intense or persistent enough—as in times of political chaos, economic or personal hardship, pandemic or climate change—the metabolic burden can feel distressing or utterly exhausting. The suffering signifies that you're doing something really hard: foreseeing the future in an ever changing, uncertain world. In an uncertain situation, your brain must assemble multiple predictions with multiple action plans and maintain them for an extended time through neuronal activity and other brain functions. All this takes energy, more than you'd need to hold fewer action plans for a shorter time.

Metabolic expense, if it drags on for long enough, can feel unpleasant. When your brain attempts to learn in uncertainty, it releases chemicals that increase your arousal level, and you may feel worked up and agitated. Your brain often makes sense of this arousal as anxiety, but that's not mandatory. You can also make sense of arousal as regular uncertainty and forage for information like a free-roaming mouse. Uncertainty can be a good thing. People even seek it out—and its positive cousin, novelty—when they try new foods, watch new movies, meet new people and learn new skills. Uncertainty, like all things that are metabolically costly, needs to be managed in a metabolically efficient way.

Uncertainty is a normal condition of life, but these days, with social media and round-the-clock news coverage, it sometimes bombards us. At every moment, there's a crisis somewhere in the world: war, political chaos, climate-induced fires and floods and school shootings, not to mention the occasional pandemic. Too much uncertainty is metabolically draining and can leave you feeling distraught and worn out. But these feelings don't emerge from mythical, overtaxed fight-or-flight circuits. They may just mean, in an ever changing and only partly predictable world, that you're doing something really hard.

We Fear the Wrong Things[3]

But why are we so afraid? That's the really tough question. Of course terrorism is a real risk. So are climate change, avian flu, breast cancer, child snatchers, and all the other things that have us wringing our collective hands. But humanity has always faced one risk or another. Why should we worry more than previous generations? To think the potential disasters facing us today are somehow more awful than those of the past is both ignorant and arrogant. A little more attention to history would also reveal that there have always been people crying "Doom!" – almost none of who turned out to have any more ability to see into the future than the three blind mice of nursery-rhyme fame. In a sentence: We are the healthiest, wealthiest, and longest-lived people in history. And we are increasingly afraid. This is one of the great paradoxes of our time.

At home, children are forbidden from playing alone outdoors, as all generations did before, because their parents are convinced every bush hides a pervert – and no mere statistic will convince them otherwise. Childhood is starting to resemble a prison sentence, with children spending almost every moment behind locked doors and alarms, their every movement scheduled, supervised, and controlled. Are they at lease safer as a result? Probably not. Obesity, diabetes, and the other health problems caused in part by too much time sitting inside are a lot more dangerous than the specters haunting parental imaginations.

On average, 36,000 Americans are killed each year by the flu and related complications. Obesity may kill around 100,000 each year. Hundreds of thousands die annually simply because they don't have access to preventive health services. These risks are not new or darkly glamorous. They're not even terribly complicated or little-known. We have made enormous advances in human health, but so much more could be done if we tackled them with proven strategies that would cost little compared to the benefit to be reaped. And yet we're not doing it. We are, however, spending gargantuan sums of money to deal with the risk of terrorism – a risk that, by any measure, is no more than a scuttling beetle next to the elephant of disease. As a direct result of this misallocation of resources, countless lives will be lost for no good reason. That's what happens when our judgments about risk go out of what. There are deadly consequences.

Why do we fear a proliferating number of relatively minor risks? Why do we so often shrug off greater threats? Why have we become a "culture of fear"?

Part of the answer lies in self-interest. Fear sells. Fear makes money. The more fear, the better the sales. So we have home-alarm companies frightening old ladies and young mothers by running ads featuring frightened old ladies and young mothers. Software companies scaring parents with hype about online pedophiles. Security consultants spinning scenarios of terror and death that can be avoided by spending more tax dollars on security

[3] Adapted from Daniel Gardner, *The Science of Fear.* 2008.

consultants. Fear is a fantastic marketing tool. Politicians looking for votes, bureaucrats plumping for bigger budgets, scientists seeking government funding, activists and nongovernment organizations all advance their agendas by hyping the fearful. The media are out to get eyeballs on what they produce, and it's hard to get eyeballs without something (seemingly) scary to report.

But this is not a complete explanation. Sometimes corporations, activists, politicians, and the media find it in their interest to play down genuine concerns. What psychologists call confirmation bias is powerful. We all do it. Once a belief is in place, we screen what we see and hear in a biased way that ensures our beliefs are "proven" correct. Psychologists have also discovered that people are vulnerable to something called group polarization – which means that when people who share beliefs get together in groups, they become more convinced that their beliefs are right and they become more extreme in their views. Put confirmation bias, group polarization, and our culture of fear together, and we start to understand why people can come to completely different views about which risks are frightening and which aren't worth a second thought.

Our Stone Age brains can't change, we won't abandon information technology, and the incentives for marketing fear are growing. But while we may not be able to cut the circuitry of fear, we can at least turn down the volume. The first step is simply recognizing that there are countless individuals and organization that have their own reasons for inflating risks. We need to be skeptical, to gather information, to think carefully about it and draw conclusions for ourselves. We also have to recognize that the brain that is doing this careful thinking is subject to the foibles of psychology. This is more difficult that it sounds. People can easily accept the idea that *other* people's thinking may be biased – in fact, they tend to overestimate the extent of that bias. But almost everyone resists the notion that their own thinking may also be biased. One survey of medical residents, for example, found that 61 percent said they were not influenced by gifts from drug company salespeople, but only 16 percent said the same of other physicians.

Researchers have tried to "debias" thinking by explaining to people what biases are and how they influence us, but that doesn't work. To protect ourselves against unreasoning fear, we must wake up Head and tell it to do its job. We must learn to *think hard*. A quick and final judgment isn't necessary to deal with most of the risks we face today, so when Head and Gut[4] can't agree, we should hold off. Gather more information. Think some more. And if Head and Gut still don't match up, swallow hard and go with Head.

[4] "Gut" does not refer to your literal intestines, but to the largely unconscious processes in the brain that produce quick intuitive guesses.

Acknowledge Fear and Look Deeply at Its Source[5]

Most of us experience a life full of wonderful moments and difficult moments. But for many of us, even when we are most joyful, there is fear behind our joy. We fear that this moment will end, that we won't get what we need, that we will lose what we love, or that we will not be safe. Often, our biggest fear is the knowledge that one day our bodies will cease functioning. So even when we are surrounded by all the conditions for happiness, our joy is not complete.

We think that, to be happier, we should push away or ignore our fear. We don't feel at ease when we think of the things that scare us, so we deny our fear away. "Oh, no, I don't want to think about that." We try to ignore our fear, but it is still there.

The only way to ease our fear and be truly happy is to acknowledge our fear and look deeply at its source. Instead of trying to escape from our fear, we can invite it up to our awareness and look at it clearly and deeply.

If we bury worries and anxieties in our consciousness, they continue to affect us and bring us more sorrow. But we have the power to look deeply at our fears, and then fear cannot control us. We can transform our fear. The practice of living fully in the present moment – what we call *mindfulness* – can give us the courage to face our fears and no longer be pushed and pulled around by them. To be mindful means to look deeply, to touch our true nature of interbeing and recognize that nothing is ever lost.

If we can acknowledge our fear, we can realize that right now we are okay. Right now, today, we are still alive, and our bodies are working marvelously. Our eyes can still see the beautiful sky. Our ears can still hear the voices of our loved ones.

The first part of looking at our fear is just inviting it into our awareness without judgment. We just acknowledge gently that it is there. Then we can embrace it tenderly and look deeply into its roots, its sources. Is our fear coming from something that is happening right now, or is it an old fear, a fear from when we were small, that we've kept inside? When we practice inviting all our fears up, we become aware that we are still alive, that we still have many things to treasure and enjoy. If we are not busy pushing down and managing our fear, we can enjoy the sunshine, the fog, the air, and the water. If you can look deeply into your fear and have a clear vision of it, then you really can live a life that is worthwhile.

Fearlessness is not only possible, it is the ultimate joy. When you touch nonfear, you are free. If I am ever in an airplane and the pilot announces that the plane is about to crash, I will practice mindful breathing. But don't wait for the critical moment to arrive before you start practicing to transform your fear and live mindfully. Nobody can give you fearlessness. You have to practice and realize it yourself. If you make a habit of mindfulness practice, when difficulties arise, you will already know what to do.

[5] From Thich Nhat Hanh, *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm.* 2012.

Fear Quotations

“I think fearless is having fears but jumping anyway.” — Taylor Swift

“If you know the enemy and know yourself you need not fear the results of a hundred battles.” — Sun Tzu

“Thinking will not overcome fear but action will.” — W. Clement Stone

“Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold.” — Helen Keller

“To him who is in fear everything rustles.” — Sophocles

“What is needed, rather than running away or controlling or suppressing or any other resistance, is understanding fear; that means, watch it, learn about it, come directly into contact with it. We are to learn about fear, not how to escape from it.” — Jiddu Krishnamurti

“We fear the thing we want the most.” — Robert Anthony

“There is no hope unmingled with fear, and no fear unmingled with hope.” — Baruch Spinoza

“We fear things in proportion to our ignorance of them.” — Christian Nestell Bovee

“There is no passion so contagious as that of fear.” — Michel de Montaigne

“Find out what you're afraid of and go live there.” — Chuck Palahniuk

“You are only afraid if you are not in harmony with yourself. People are afraid because they have never owned up to themselves.” — Hermann Hesse

“Do what you fear and fear disappears.” — David Joseph Schwartz

“I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.” — Rosa Parks

“There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure.” — Paulo Coelho

“Scared is what you're feeling. Brave is what you're doing.” — Emma Donoghue

“Fear is not real. The only place that fear can exist is in our thoughts of the future. It is a product of our imagination, causing us to fear things that do not at present and may not ever exist. That is near insanity. Do not misunderstand me - danger is very real but fear is a choice.” — Will Smith

“A man that flies from his fear may find that he has only taken a short cut to meet it.” — J. R. R. Tolkien

“It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live.” — Marcus Aurelius (in "Meditations")

“Each of us must confront our own fears, must come face to face with them. How we handle our fears will determine where we go with the rest of our lives. To experience adventure or to be limited by the fear of it.” — Judy Blume

“Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood.’ — Marie Curie

“He who is not everyday conquering some fear has not learned the secret of life.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson

Our Spiritual Exercise

Every day for 7 days write in your journal describing one fear you experienced in the previous 24 hours, and answer these questions about it.
What were you afraid of?
How strong was it (on a scale from mild-to-terrifying)? How long did it last (or is it ongoing)?
Would you say there was a rational basis for the fear?
What did you do in response?
At the end of the week, look back over your entries. What lessons do you draw?

Suggested Reading for Further Exploration

Dennis Merritt Jones, *When Fear Speaks, Listen: The 7 Messengers of Fear*. 2024.
Jose Francisco Trevino Chavez, *Fear* (8 Short Stories). 2024.
Lawrence Doochin, *A Book on Fear: Feeling Safe in a Challenging World*. 2020.
Patricia Zeggelaar, *Speaking Truth to Fear: Practicing Hope in Difficult and Challenging Times*. 2020.
R. James Case, *Fear is a Choice: Unravelling the Illusion of Our Separation from Love*. 2020.
Thich Nhat Hanh, *Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm*. 2012.
Daniel Gardner, *The Science of Fear*. 2008.
Gavin de Becker, *The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals that Protect Us from Violence.* 1997.
Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway: Dynamic Techniques for Turning Fear, Indecision, and Anger into Power, Action, and Love.* 1987.

Questions

Journaling prompts, group discussion, or both

1. "Psychology of Fear: The Basics" (pp. 2-4). What did you learn from this overview?
2. "There is No 'Fight or Flight' Reaction" (pp. 5-6). What difference does it make to you if you think of your fear as coming from dedicated "fight or flight" circuitry or from your brain working hard to make predictions under conditions of uncertainty?
3. "We Fear the Wrong Things" (pp. 7-8). How rationally would you say you assess risks?
4. "Acknowledge Fear and Look Deeply at Its Source" (p. 9). Do you tend to suppress fear? What do you make of Hanh's approach?

Faithyna's Family Page

Faithyna Leonard

There are moments in life when we all encounter feelings of uncertainty and fear, sometimes in ways we might not expect. These emotions are a natural part of our journey, and how we respond to them can shape our experiences in meaningful ways.

What are you afraid of? One of my biggest fears has always been the dark. But over time, I came to realize that it wasn't the darkness itself that frightened me—it was the feeling of losing control, the inability to see what was there. By facing this fear, I learned that what scared me most was not being able to know or control my surroundings.

As I spent time reflecting on this fear, I discovered that the darkness of the room wasn't the root of what troubled me. It was my need for control. Once I understood this, I felt more at peace. While I still don't enjoy the dark, I've learned an important lesson: not everything in life is within my control, and that's okay. Accepting this has given me a sense of peace in the face of fear.

Fear is a natural part of life. Whether it's fear of change, fear of the unknown, or fear of failure, it can easily overwhelm us. In challenging times, fear can cloud our minds, making it difficult to see the path forward. But while fear is real, so too is the strength within each of us to overcome it.

Even when fear feels insurmountable, it doesn't define who we are. In fact, fear often signals that we are stepping into new, unfamiliar territory, which is where growth often happens. It's okay to feel afraid, but we don't have to let it control our actions. We can choose to face our fears with courage and confidence.

As a community, we can help each other move through fear by offering support, kindness,

* * *

Check Out. What overall message stands out for you?

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Chalice Extinguishing. Words of Martha Kirby Capo: "Our time together is finished but our work is not done. May our spirits be renewed and our resolve strengthened as we meet the challenges ahead."

Connecting is produced by the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines for use in small groups. Each month (ten months a year) explores a different theological or spiritual theme. Next issue: 2024 Oct: Fear.