

Fear-Filled or Forward-Facing? The Choice Is Ours!

Let me start by saying I have things to fear all the time. I don't like to fly on planes, and usually the week before I take a plane trip anywhere, I have anxiety-filled dreams at night. But I like to visit other places, so I push myself to make my plans to fly and go ahead anyway. When I go for a bicycle ride, there is the possibility that I'll fall off the bike and hurt myself. In fact that's happened once or twice, and the road isn't very forgiving, let me tell you! But road rash heals, fortunately, and the falls I took have taught me to use more caution when riding with a group. In my work life there are fears also. I work for myself, and I'm in a service business, so while I'm serving my current clients, I need to also be thinking about ways to cultivate new business. And sometimes even when client relationships seem to be working positively, they may decide they don't want to work with me and take their business elsewhere, so there is always the risk that clients will leave. And these are just a few of the many fears in my daily life that could become emotionally overwhelming if I allow myself to go there.

From the moment we're born, life can be a dangerous place, and there are things to fear around every corner. We can plan for our preferred life outcomes, but that doesn't stop bad things from happening to us, and many times there are no warnings about those bad things - they happen anyway, don't they? As I see it we have two choices when it comes to fear. One is to listen to phrases such as "what if" and "suppose something should" and "that's too scary" and take them to heart as a way of living life. Or we can admit that life brings scary things to us, and that they are unavoidable. With this information known, we can own our fears around whatever those scary things might be for each of us, and we can manage the anxiety brought on by the fears without becoming emotionally paralyzed. Myself, I'm all for striving for choice number two whenever possible.

I am reminded of a recent conversation with an acquaintance, during which we talked of several different topics, all having to do with leisure activities. No matter which leisure activity we discussed, this person started almost every sentence with "I should really look into doing that." However, no matter what the activity discussed, by the end of the discussion, the person had decided not to pursue it, because in each scenario there was a downside possibility/risk that might come from participation in the activity. In another recent conversation with another acquaintance, this person shared with me about an upcoming move to Hawaii, and that it came about very suddenly. The opportunity presented itself and this person went with it. During our brief talk, this acquaintance said to me that life comes at us fast, and we can choose to meet it and go with it.

Quite a contrast between the two conversations, isn't there? In my life, I find I'm stimulated by others who find life as exciting an adventure as I do. When I talk to someone like that, I'm feeling nourished somehow - to have my views mirrored by someone else is nurturing, reassuring, empowering, inspiring, validating, all at the same time. When I spend a few moments in conversation with a person for whom fear is the underlying message, I feel drained, depleted and dejected. Maybe that's why I try very hard to limit my contact with people from the second group.

Fear is something hard wired within us, and it's also learned as we take cues from the people who raise us and the people towards whom we gravitate as we grow and go out into the wider world. However, far outstripping our learned attitudes about fear, and aside from factoring in our personality styles, we need to remember what was stated above. Bad things come to us, scary things are all around us all the time, life can be a dangerous place at any given moment. But we're here, we're alive on the planet. So what choice do we have but to meet the scary things as they come, deal with them in order to keep going on, knowing we can learn something from every experience we encounter, even the ones that cause us fear?

Years ago, a client said a phrase to me that I use often: "The only way out is through." I add to that: "The only direction is forward." Another of my favorites is the following: "Dance as though nobody is watching, work as though you don't need the money, love as though you've never been hurt, leap and the net will appear." One last one: "Our fears are the price we pay for the things we win." For me, these are powerful words I try to live by, because they are all about hope and positive energy and belief in ourselves.

Here's a very simple first step toward facing forward as opposed to fear-filled. Change the "Yes, but....." and "I can't" and "It won't work because..." phrases to "I can," or "I choose," or "I will." Think about the things you fear. Are they getting in the way for you in terms of pursuing a goal, a passion, a lifestyle choice, a dream, a plan? If the answer is yes, then I send hopeful thoughts to you for finding ways around those fears so that your journey forward can continue with better ease, more joy, greater rewards.