

SURVIVAL PAPER

#SP06-9

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Analysis and Control of Fear

"We have nothing to fear but fear itself" Franklin D. Roosevelt

"I have had a lot of trouble in my life. Most of it never happened" Mark Twain

Fear and anxiety are unavoidable elements in any survival situation. Scientists have found that a "fear gene" may control how we respond to fear. Fear is a psychological and biological reaction to real or perceived threats to life and to those things we consider important. Of course we will fear bodily injury and death but we may also fear for others or fear for the loss of property or freedoms. Fear can manifest itself in many ways. The knot in the stomach, the inability to concentrate, the urge to run, headaches, loss of sleep, nausea, loss of fine motor skills are some manifestations of fear. Fear is normal and must be expected and accepted. Fear can save you or doom you depending on how you manage it. Sometimes fear is an indicator of what you should avoid. At other times the thing you fear is the very thing you must do to survive. If the object of fear didn't matter it would not be feared, therefore it requires action and management by you. Fear should stop you from taking unnecessary and foolish risks. Fear should not misdirect you into harms way such as backing off a cliff to avoid snakebite. Fear should not be allowed to get between you and an objective of worthy value.

Fear starts with our physical and psychological environment. Each person has his or her own list of potential threats. The nature of these threats depends on many factors including the immediate situation (lost in woods, being shot at, chest pain), age, knowledge, health, financial situation, vocation, life style, location, etc. You may be afraid of the smoke coming in under your bedroom door or of losing your job. It's still "fear". So we start with the treat/no threat analysis. Now there are three states of threat response. They are ignorance, awareness, and preparedness.

Ignorance may be deliberate or accidental. There are folks who simply avoid any sources of enlightenment. They may be lazy or illiterate or just can't handle any kind of challenging information. They don't even know they don't know. Accidental ignorance can happen to even the most educated and responsible person. Let's face it; no one

can anticipate everything that could happen. That “bolt out of the blue” can catch anyone. Ignorance may be bliss but it can also be fatal. You do not really want to be ignorant! There is no fear here because there is no awareness.

Preparedness is the state where a fear has been recognized and managed or neutralized in advance. Preparedness requires that the psychological, physical and material requirements of threat response have been addressed. The psychological aspects are addressed through training and mental conditioning. Building self-confidence in the required abilities, having faith, developing a personal mission and having a plan are effective ways to psychologically prepare for fear generating situations. How one addresses the physical aspects of a hazard will depend on age, sex, physical condition and health but regardless of these factors there are steps that can be taken to improve physical preparedness. A healthy lifestyle including weight control, exercise and medical checkups is always a good idea. Stocking medications and having devices that compensate for any physical limitations is important. You must ask yourself “if this happens do I have the strength and endurance to survive. If the answer is no then improve your condition, plan ways to compensate for your problems or do what you can to avoid that situation. Material preparedness is simply having the necessary items to avoid, neutralize or survive a hazard. Survival kits and home preparedness is addressed in many, many publications and need not be covered here. It can be said that the possession of survival stuff can compensate for some physical limitations and impart some level of psychological comfort but stuff alone can give false confidence. At this stage fear is managed if not eliminated.

So now we come to the state of awareness where fear is recognized as a threat for which we are inadequately prepared. This is true fear and it comes in two varieties. There is “chronic fear” of bad things that are anticipated in the coming weeks, months or years. Examples would be fear of economic collapse, fear of declining health, fear of being a street crime victim, fear of an epidemic or a terrorist attack. Symptoms of chronic fear include loss of sleep, inability to concentrate, anger, and depression, use of drugs or alcohol, poor decision-making, headaches and loss of appetite. Chronic fear must be recognized and corrected before it leads to even more real and immediate threats to your life and freedom. Truly, the fear is a bigger danger than what is feared. Then there is “acute fear” that is an immediate threat to your existence or freedom such as some coming under your door, a gun aimed at your head, freezing in the wilderness or on a sinking boat. Symptoms of acute fear include: nausea, shaking, loses bowels, psychological paralysis (freezing), and loss of fine motor skills, tunnel vision, and fight-or-flight reactions. The boosted adrenalin and other fear generated physiological reactions can help save you if controlled. Here you have to act fast but also act right. Even the best trained have been known to panic but training and mental conditioning are your best defense.

Both acute and chronic fear can be divided into three categories. These are fear of the unknown, fear of pain (physical and mental) and fear of ones own inadequacies. While these can never be completely removed from our minds, they can be anticipated, prepared for, managed and reduced.

Fear of the Unknown

In the movies, it's always the monster you don't see that is the scariest. Fear of the dark, fear of the future, fear of what a stranger may do are forms of this fear. Fearing to go to the doctor because we don't know what he will find. Fear of going someplace or doing something for the first time is common. In its chronic manifestation it is a source of constant worry that wears us down and holds us back from going places and doing things. It is that big "what if?" that keeps us awake at night. In its acute form it is better known as "the unexpected". The unexpected situation that jumps up and presents forces us to make fast choices without knowing much about the situation. For example we wake up to the sound of the smoke alarm (you do have one?) you don't know if it's an alarm malfunction, you left food on the stove or the whole house is on fire. Fear initially seizes you. You may suddenly realize that you do not know where you are and panic can make you do things that make your situation much worse. While it is easy to say, "expect the unexpected" it is by definition impossible to do. There are things you can do to reduce the potential dangers of fear and panic generated by the unknown and unexpected. While some events are truly unpredictable others are unexpected because we just don't want to think about them. These can be substantially reduced by a processes known as "what-if-analysis". As the name implies, "what-if-analysis" is the process of mentally considering what if an undesirable and hazardous situation occurs and mentally dealing with it in advance. What if I am bitten by a snake out here? What if that guy approaching me intends to assault me? What if I can't get home in this blizzard? What if that smoke is from a big fire? You can use this process as soon as you recognize a potential hazard. You do not have to wait until you smell the smoke or hear the snakes rattle. A fear of something unknown can also be reduced by deliberately going at that fear through education and experience. Learn more about the things you fear and if possible gain experience with them in a safe manner. Planning is an especially effective way to reduce chronic fear. Convert the fear of an undesirable event into a plan to cope with it. Instead of "Oh god what if I lose my job?" its then I will cut spending and go back to school for a while. Instead of "Those people are going to kill me" it can be "I can avoid or counter them if they attack". By applying "what-if-analysis" to potential acute fears and planning for things you chronically fear they can be greatly reduced. Doing these things does not make you paranoid. On the contrary, these techniques reduce anxiety and contribute to a calmer and more confident psyche.

Fear of Pain

While masochists actually like pain most folks find it unpleasant. By pain I am including the physical pain we experience from injuries and illnesses, the more subtle pain of heat, cold, hunger and thirst and the psychological pain we may experience from shock and grief at losses. We may put off going to the dentist when we know we should or delay putting a pet down because it will be psychologically painful to us. It is normal to avoid pain and in most cases it is wise but fear of pain can work against our best interests. Those who live a less sheltered life have experienced more pain and are better at managing it. How you react to pain is also effected by your experiences and culture. I have seen children in America screaming from a minor bump and I have seen films of African children sitting calmly in the clinic with horrible wounds and

amputations. In the acute situation where the wound has just occurred the fear reaction actually releases powerful analgesics that temporarily reduce or completely eliminate pain. This is nature's way of providing the opportunity to finish the fight or flight before the pain overwhelms you. The absence of pain should not mislead you into thinking "its just a scratch" and doing something to make things worse. Trust me, the pain will come. Knowing this, you can plan for the pain by treating the injury, seeking shelter, taking pain relievers etc. before it hits you. Here again, planning and preparation can reduce fear. Knowing first aid, carrying pain releasers having experience cold, hunger, etc in training can greatly reduce the fear of pain. You must not let pain break you will. Say, "Okay pain, I can handle you". A long as it hurts you are alive and as long as you are alive you have a chance to beat it.

Fear of Personal Inadequacy

Unless you are a complete idiot you know you have some inadequacies. The "great ones" are great because they deal with there shortcomings not because they are perfect. We all have mental and physical limitations that make us fear situations. We fear the social implications of admitting that we don't know or that we can't do it. We fear the real hazards of being unable to shoot straight, clime a cliff stop bleeding or know the way out. We are afraid of not knowing what to do or not doing the right thing or not being able to do the right thing. WE fear our own shame and the disapproval of others. This fear most often manifests itself in a failure to act. We see a danger but we don't want to say or do anything that would make us look silly. We go along with the group while we have a feeling this is not good. Maybe the whole group is going one way while each person in it is afraid to say that they think it's a mistake. You may not take a class or try a skill because you fear failure. Those things you fear are often the exact things that will provide the greatest rewards and best chances for future survival. There are two things you can do that will help to deal with this fear. First you must accept that inadequacies are normal and that everyone has them. Success and survival just depends on not letting them stop you. Failure is better than failure to try. The second is obvious. Adopt a life mission of continues mental and physical self-improvement to reduce those things you are inadequate at and prove to yourself how good you can be.

Fear is a very powerful force that can doom those who should survive and save those who should perish. It allows the weak to subdue the mighty and the few to intimidate the many. It is why small forces can send whole armies into retreat and why whole populations can be enslaved by a brutal few. Being able to manage and overcome fear in yourself and your friends is a vital element in staying alive and staying free

Courage is not being unafraid. Courage is being afraid and doing the right thing anyway.