

Facing fear

*How to step out of fear
and use it for good.*

Words Tennille Ziegler.
Collage Lisa Lodge

Living in the 'know' – planning our future, holidays, weddings and more – if 2020 was anything to go by it is learning to live with the uncertainty of life. Was it all a fallacy anyway? The idea that we can know and plan for the future?

Alongside this uncertainty resides fear. Fear on a personal level, and on a collective level. Fear is an emotion that can show up in the body in many ways, if not addressed, it can lead to long-term health issues. Self-imposed fear can be one of the biggest barriers to achieving our goals. It can stop us before we begin, because we're too afraid to even try.

Yet, fear is not all bad. Fear shows up in our lives when we are about to do something that challenges us (potentially something new or risky) that creates uncertainty. This doesn't mean that we should always listen to the fear and not do the said challenge. Instead you can feel the fear and use it to drive yourself further.

Understanding fear and how it resides in the body is important. The autonomic nervous system (ANS) is our primary connection to this world and beyond. It's what connects our mind, body, and spirit. The ANS consists of our sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and parasympathetic nervous system (PNS).

The amygdala in our brain has a central function within the SNS. The amygdala's danger signals trigger the release of powerful stress hormones, including cortisol and adrenaline, which increase heart rate, blood pressure, and rate of breathing, preparing us to fight back or run away – also known as the 'fight or flight' response, says Bessel van der Kolk author of *The Body Keeps The Score*. Once the danger has passed, the body returns to its normal state fairly quickly. When recovery is blocked, the body is triggered to defend itself, which keeps people in this SNS state.

A system that was once intelligently created to help us survive, is now a state that a lot of us are constantly living in, triggered by small stressors and fears.

The second branch of the ANS is the PNS, which slows the heart rate down, relaxes muscles and aids in returning your breath to normal – a state that we ideally want to be in more often than not.

TOOL KIT

Some tools from Wiebke Queisser and Jin Ong to move through fear

• **Learn the principles of energy medicine**

Learn how to ground, how to release and how to clear yourself at the end of each day. Visualise how any dull or draining, fearful energy just moves through you, out through your feet. Feel the connection to the earth.

• **Don't buy into panic**

Instead, genuinely reach out to others and ask if they're ok, how can you help? Create solidarity.

• **Be mindful**

When you enter a space be mindful of your energy levels and also the environment. Go into and leave the space without carrying anything.

• **Remember that no feeling or situation will last forever**

Connect to deeper wisdom knowing that these things pass. We are never stuck and whatever will happen, you will be able to handle it.

• **Connect more to plants, nature and animals**

It will give you an immediate perspective shift.

• **Get really clear on your foundations**

Work out what your values are to set up your base stability and security.

• **Ask yourself**

What is the legacy you want to leave?

We have to learn and teach our system to take the stress levels down and not be alert all the time. Energy healing, meditation and mindfulness are ways to help soften and to unscramble the force fields so our bodies can tolerate the influences in this world much better.

Psychologist and energy healer Wiebke Queisser, who is also owner of Yogatime Bondi in Sydney, explains how the collective energy is currently very unstable and how this uncertain state can trigger our fear response. Queisser says it is important to become aware of the collective and also our own journey so we don't get drawn into the 'freak out' aspect.

Becoming aware of what is ours and what is the collective fear is important so we can remain stable and grounded in the midst of the uncertainty. Queisser speaks of the nature of fear, which makes people retract, pulling their energy back inwards. Now more than ever it is important not to lose touch with each other and the community. Our strength is in the heart, our adaptability and the community.

It seems this community support is more important than we realise. Human beings are astoundingly attuned to subtle emotional shifts in people (and animals) around them says van der Kolk. Numerous studies of disaster response around the globe have shown that social support is the most powerful protection against becoming overwhelmed by stress and trauma. "No doctor can write a prescription for friendship and love: these are complex and hard-earned capacities," says van der Kolk.

Another way of managing fear is by identifying where the emotions reside in the body. Wanaka-based psychosomatic therapist and osteopath Jin Ong says that your physical body is a manifestation of your emotional state.

Emotions want to be expressed in the moment, but sometimes, particularly in western society, emotions can feel inconvenient, and we often don't give them the chance to be expressed. The emotions then get stored in the body as a source of stress.

Fear shows up in many ways in the body. In Chinese medicine, fear is governed by the kidneys – which can show up in our lower back or under our eyes (which are connected through meridian lines).

If we look at the chakra system (an energy system from India), fear is connected to our root chakra – which governs our emotions and sensations around having safety, security and stability in our life. This fear can begin from a young age, especially between birth and seven years old if we didn't have a very stable family life. This blockage in the base chakra can stop us from moving forward in life.

Ong says that moving through fear is about getting comfortable with discomfort, going back to process emotions that were unable to be expressed in that moment, allowing us to move forward in life. **g**

"I think death is an amazing trigger to get people realising sometimes how short life is and how they're living life. It can be the messages that are given to them by people whose lives have either been cut short or the old and the wise who have many years to reflect."

Jin Ong