

## Fear Affects Your Life

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Fear plays a huge role in our lives, both in our personal and in our community and national lives. Read about how pervasive it is and how to prevent its devastating impact. Find the home site of author Bill Allin at <http://billallin.com>

Fear is the main source of superstition, and one of the main sources of cruelty. To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.

- Bertrand Russell

Fear, superstition, cruelty: big subjects, requiring more thought than most people want to devote to subjects that won't put food on their table.

Fear is the most significant emotion we have. Many people construct their lives around fears they don't want to admit even to themselves that they have. Everything from remaining on unfulfilling or dangerous jobs to staying with a brutal or unloving mates to supporting children that refuse to work, who take drugs or alcohol or who break the law to committing to a religion about which they have doubts but are afraid to leave for fear of being denied access to heaven.

An element of fear exists in most stories on the front pages of daily newspapers. Fear is the source of war. Fear develops into hate in some people. Most democratic governments pass legislation for fear of being voted out of power if they don't respond to vocal interested parties and lobbyists. It's called a reactionary style of governance.

I can't say that I agree with Bertrand Russell that fear is the main source of superstition. Not fear on its own. People develop superstitions on their own to explain phenomena they don't understand. Such as the weather for March coming in like a lion and going out like a lamb, or vice versa, which has no valid basis in meteorological record other than the fact that March marks the transition from winter to spring in the northern hemisphere.

However, ignorance of the unknown and curiosity about it could be used by some people--such as politicians, religious and military leaders--to form superstition, which could easily slide into cruelty, either in the way the manipulative leaders treat their own people or others who are "different" in some way. Prejudice based on skin colour and cultural differences are the most obvious examples of this.

The ancients used differences in culture as reason to conquer others and to kill, rape or enslave them. More recently Europeans used difference in skin colour as a reason to capture dark skinned people from Africa and transport them to be slaves in the Americas. That slavery, as we know, was cruel in many cases, beginning with the trip across the ocean.

Can fear be conquered, as Russell recommended? Fear is a learned emotion. It may be learned through experience, such as falling down stairs as a child might develop into a fear of heights in an adult.

It also may be learned from others. US President George W. Bush's admonition after 9/11 that "either you are with us or you are with the terrorists" made enemies out of people who had little interest in the US before that. As planned, American citizens came to fear those enemies their own government had made, fearing that any one with olive coloured skin might poison, explode a bomb or otherwise kill any one or hundreds of them without notice.

Abu Graib prison, in Iraq, symbolizes as well as anything the cruelty that evolved from superstition US military personnel had of "the enemy".

Fear dissolves when the cause of the fear is put into context with facts. The more comprehensive the education a person has, the less likely he or she is to have fears, at least fears within the subject areas they know well. AIDS researchers, for example, do not fear getting HIV/AIDS. They exercise due caution.

In a few select communities and tests, Jewish and Palestinian children who played together had no fear of each other because they knew each other as playmates, not as "others" that should be feared.

If we want to banish fear, we must teach the fairly simple lesson that most fears are unfounded, most fears are intended to manipulate us and we have little or no need to adopt fears of people or events that are less likely to

happen than being struck dead by lightning.

Teach the children that fear is an emotion that is rarely based in or supported by fact. The children will grow to have the normal complement of caution that they will need as adults, without the fear that plagues many adults today.

Teach the children what they need to live, not just what they need to be employable.

Bill Allin

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