

fearless

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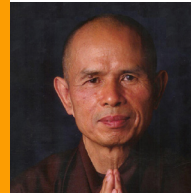
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FEAR.LESS

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Do not be too timid and squeamish about your reactions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better.

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Designed To Excel

“I firmly believe in being driven by my insecurity.”

John Fulbrook III

FEAR MEANS YOU NEED IT

Early experiences matured me quickly and gave me the survival skills necessary to deal with fear. I was hit by a truck at 16 and was humbled into learning how to walk again, and my father was killed horrifically in an accident at a young age. Both of these

experiences helped me conquer things that other people might find difficult.

This has always led me to make decisions in my life based on fear – that if I was scared of doing something or taking a next step, I knew it was exactly what I needed to do. So I went for it. If you look at my career, and this is particularly relevant right now, because I’ve moved from book design to advertising, I had to totally confront any fear I had about switching fields. It



was a huge decision, because my job as a book designer was great. I was very comfortable, had a good salary, interacted with talented authors like Stephen King and Steve Martin and felt relevant to people's lives. But I'd been doing it for a while and had reached a level of success where there wasn't a job above me to aspire to. I knew I wanted one more job in my life where I was frightened every day that I'd be fired. I wanted something that pushed me as a designer and to see if I could jump off another bridge and swim.

It's just like marriage: If you just keep doing the same old routine, eventually you won't like your marriage. But if you constantly bring new energy to it and try new scary things, even if you're uncomfortable, then you've got a better chance of survival.

REINVENT YOUR REFLECTION

One of my design mentors really taught me the importance of reinventing yourself. We went to a lecture, and people kept saying, "I need a change in my work." He said, "When I wake up and look in the mirror, I don't always like what I see, so I reinvented what I saw." That was so poignant for me, because I saw that we all have insecurities that drive us, and I firmly believe in being driven by my insecurity. I never went to school for design, so throughout my career,



“ I had to totally confront any fear I had about switching fields. ”

I've wondered, "Am I as good as the guy from design school?" My whole life, I've been driven by some insecurity. But if I'm insecure, then I'll try harder and be more aggressive to be successful.

PUSH IT

We're all crippled by fear to try something new, especially creatives. If you design magazines and have never designed an exhibition, try

designing an exhibition. If it fails, it fails, but you'll probably be so driven, because it's new, fertile ground, that you won't do the traditional exhibition work people have seen a million times. Because you didn't live and dwell in exhibitions and aren't coming from that field, it may be such a new experience for exhibition-goers that it's refreshing to see. Once you've done exhibitions for a while, and you seem to understand the space, then you ask again, "Am I pushing it or just making it safe and perfect?" When I'm embarrassed in a meeting or I fail or get scolded at work, I think, "What's the worst that can happen? You get fired because you tried to launch your career in a whole new direction?"

There has to come a point when you say, "I'm really comfortable here. I sleep really well. Now I need to go in another direction and be frightened." You need to do that if you want to push your work to another level, because the creative field is not a place where safety and innovation go together. Fear is something we should push up against in order to stay fresh.

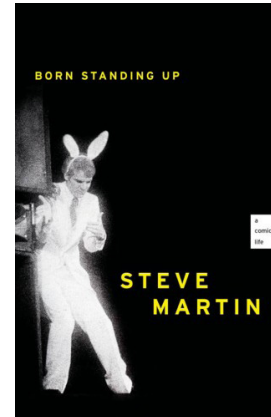
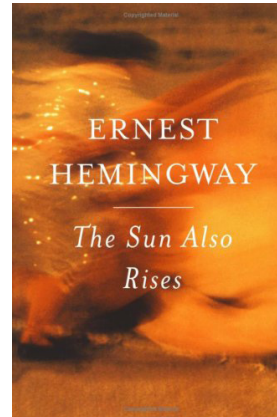
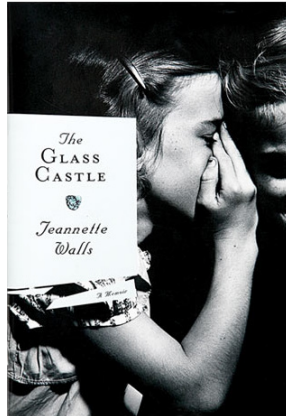
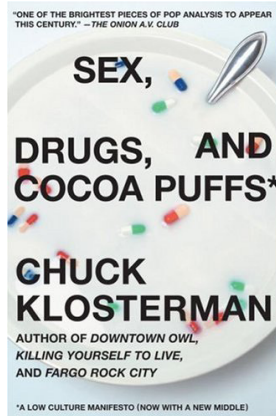
CHANGE YOUR DEFINITION

We define things so much - what our relationships should be, what our jobs should be, what happiness should be - and it's all

out of fear. We're comfortable with our own definitions but don't realize that a job doesn't necessarily have to fit into what we think a job should be. Design used to be a physical form shaping an object for the outside world. Now, design is the outside world coming in to create the object. My definition has totally changed,

and if I were obsessed with my ideas of what things were, of what safety and creativity were, then I'd be locked down and afraid to do anything. By embracing new territory and potentially scary paths, you never know what doors may open.





PROVOKE

In design, you can't solve a problem by thinking, "What's a safe way to do this?" You won't find the solution, because you're not being provocative enough. Old ideas regenerated again are just old ideas. People are interested in new ideas, what's possible and how things grow. The only way to give them that is by taking risks.

BIO:



*John Fulbrook III is group creative director with an expertise in design thinking. For 15 years John has done influential work for global brands, most recently leading the design practice at Translation LLC., where he oversaw all design initiatives from creating NFL design systems and visualizing AT&T immersive events, to visual languages for the Brooklyn Nets and relaunching the Translation brand. Previously he was Group Creative Director for The Martin Agency, Creative Director at Collins, Creative Director at Simon & Schuster where he **brought to life** stories for Stephen King, Miranda July, Chuck Klosterman, Ernest Hemingway, and Don DeLillo. John taught communication design at the School of Visual Arts for 12+ years and lectures at a range of universities.*

“Your brain is changed by every experience you have.”

The brain is not a blank slate, but it's not fully formed either. In the young brain, each early experience counts disproportionately to the way your brain is going to be shaped. So if you accumulate a lot of very early, unpleasant experiences, your brain may be biased in that negative, inversive direction, rather than a more calm, relaxing direction. These biases are designed to perpetuate themselves. If you're in a fearful state, then your brain is monopolized by

Once that monopoly is established, can it occur even if you're not encountering a fearful experience? Your brain is changed by every experience you have. Like a tally sheet, if you've got more bad experiences than good ones, the bad ones dominate. It's well known



that depressed people are more sensitive to depressing information. People with spider phobias are extremely sensitive to anything having to do with bugs and spiders, picking up information others wouldn't notice. So your mind comes to be dominated by your fears. You move from having a one-time fearful experience to being a more fearful person.

Q: That sounds like a vicious cycle

A: It is. Fear breeds fear. We saw this after 9/11, that once something bad happens, you become very sensitive to other kinds of things and become afraid of those situations you wouldn't normally be afraid of. There's a biological value to that if you're an animal and you're in a constant state of threat, because you need to be vigilant for as long as the danger persists. Now, the nature of emotions is that the emotion

“ I had to totally confront any fear I had about switching fields. ”



persists beyond the stimulus. Fear is an emotion that occurs in the presence of a real stimulus that's there right now. Anxiety is a worry about something that hasn't happened yet, and the more anxious you are and the longer you're anxious, the more anxious you become.

ANXIETY VS. FEAR

Q: Do fear and anxiety activate different mechanisms within our brain?

A: There's a lot of overlap between the two, but there's more cognition

and anticipation in anxiety. For example, on Sunday I'm going to Spain, and Valencia is one of the hotbeds for swine flu, so I'm a little anxious about all the cases there. I'm thinking about it, anticipating it, reading about it on BBC and am trying to see what's going on. There's a lot of thought going on, as opposed to me encountering a mugger, where it's instantaneous fear.

Q: Can we change our reflex response to fear or anxiety?

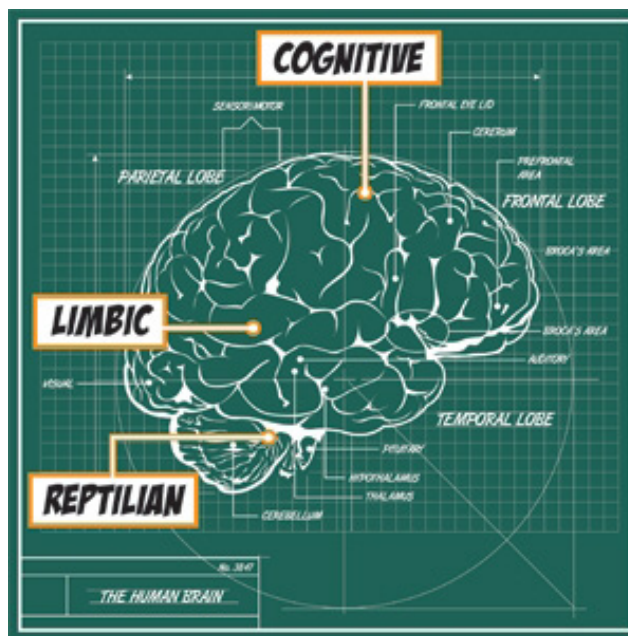
A: No. Our basic reflex responses are pretty much set. We can train

ourselves to get over them pretty quickly, to hold them back once we see them coming, but they're pretty primitive.

Q: If you've continually formed habitual anxious reactions, does that state of mind become normal after a while?

A: The defining feature of anxiety disorders is avoidance, which starts out as an emotional response. Let's say you have a social phobia, and you take yourself out of social situations so they don't make you afraid. After a while, you don't have much of a social life. Through anxiety, you're altering your life patterns in such a way that you're not leading what would be considered a normal, healthy, socially productive life. Once you've established these patterns, there's no more emotion that's elicited, but now you have a habit that's hard to break.

An interesting thing we're doing in our lab is researching how to dampen emotional memories. We're trying to find out ways to help people who are having intrusive fear-arousing memories get over them. We've done studies in rats where we give drugs to them after they remember something, and the drug prevents the re-storage of the memory. As a result, the existing memory is altered or eliminated in such a way that the rat is less fearful of that stimulus. Now we're testing behavioral ways of making rats less fearful



by giving them tests that interfere with the re-storage. The concept of interfering with the re-storage through behavioral means may have very useful benefits for people in the future.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Q: What behavioral changes can humans make, since our primal response to fear is relatively set?

A: The easiest, simplest thing you can do is controlled breathing exercises, often associated with meditation and yoga.

The Western understanding of what that means physiologically is that when you breathe, it allows the parasympathetic system to take control and dampen the sympathetic nervous system. Sympathetic is the fight/flight system, so that's what makes your heart rate rise and releases hormones. When you breathe in a controlled, slow way as you do with meditation, you're pulling back the sympathetic division of the autonomic nervous system, allowing your brain to go into a more open, relaxed state.

If people learned to breathe like this, they'd be much better off. What really needs to happen is that children should be taught to do this as early as kindergarten, so that it's a natural tool that everyone uses, not something you try to learn only when you have a problem; it's something you do before you have a problem.

Q: Does a biological understanding of how our brain processes fear help diminish people's fears?

A: It's funny, a lot of therapists have told me that their clients feel much better about fear after they've read my book. They see it as a natural event in the brain, not a craziness or weakness on their part. Having the knowledge that there are biological components to the fear response is helpful in accepting fear as a normal aspect of life. Realizing that it is there, but that you can let it come and go and not focus on it too much,

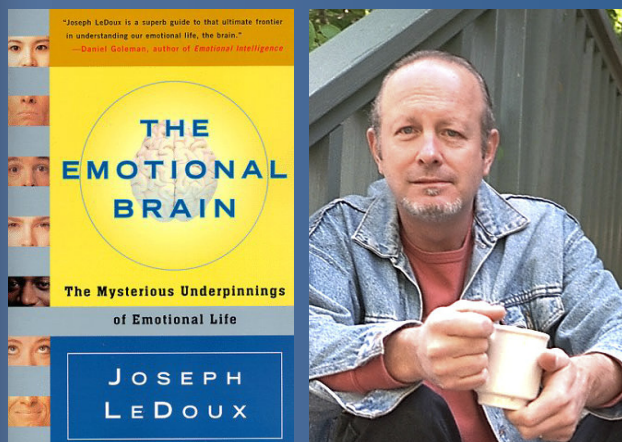
can help. We also need to understand that a lot of things happen in the world but that much of the stuff we're afraid of now is due to the media and our instantaneous exposure to anything that happens anywhere in the world in a fraction of a second. The information we can access is always setting us up to be afraid. We have the tendency to take one little thing and elevate it to the most important issue facing us right now. I haven't heard anything about the Taliban marching on Islamabad in a few days since the swine flu thing started.

YOU ARE IN CONTROL

In intensely fearful moments, evolution is doing the thinking for you. Your brain is programmed to react, and you have to perform some kind of action to deal with the danger. You can't stay frozen forever. Freezing temporarily is the right thing to do as an animal and perhaps even humans for a short period of time, as predators, respond to movement.

For example, there's a videotape of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic bombings, where as soon as the bomb goes off, you see everyone freeze for a second or two, and then all of a sudden one person takes off and everyone starts running. The transition from reaction to action is visible. This first response, when you startle and freeze, you don't have much control over. What you do have control over is the second part of the reaction, where you make a decision.

BIO:



***Dr. Joseph LeDoux** is a professor of Neuroscience and Psychology at New York University and contributing writer to the Huffington Post. He is director of the NIMH Conte Center for the Neuroscience of Fear and Anxiety, focusing on the biological underpinnings of fear, and the director of the Emotional Brain Institute. LeDoux is author of “**The Synaptic Self**” and “**The Emotional Brain.**”*



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Small Victories

“No matter how many auditions you’ve done, the chance of rejection is still there.”

Geeta Citygirl

JUST ACT LIKE A LEADER

A

After I graduated from an acting conservatory with a scholarship, I used the money I received to build SALAAM theater after I noticed a serious lack of South Asians at the

auditions and rehearsals I attended. It was troubling because I was isolated, trying to pave my way in the theater world without any real support system. There was no one, culturally speaking, to look to in the industry for guidance. I realized that perhaps I could be that support system for young Asians trying to make it.

When we first started, I was young enough that I didn’t let





my fears get too in the way of what I wanted to do, but I did have the concern of what people thought of me - a similar fear to that of a performer - that no matter how many auditions you had under your belt, the chance of rejection was still there. I had a lot of fears around

my expectations of what a theater company should be and what my role was in running it.

How I handled it was to just act like a leader even though I didn't know exactly how to run a non-profit. I thought if I at least acted like a

leader, then the other people around me who were fearful could relax. We received a lot of attention after our first event, and I remember doing a TV appearance, thinking, "There is no way that this is me, I just graduated from college. The girl out there, that people know at SALAAM, she's a very strong person, she speaks well, she can handle a lot of things - but that's not me. I'm just a girl in my pajamas at her computer." I think that's how I coped at first. I realized I needed to look professional otherwise no one would be interested in being part of this collective.

Now SALAAM has grown into a successful, established community, but in the beginning I remember thinking, "What am I doing? I'm an actor, how did I end up running a theater company?" Sometimes we're totally oblivious when life is teaching us the lessons we need to learn.

A MOTHER OF MANY CHILDREN

As I've gotten older my own personal fears have changed, and in 2005, I realized I had neglected myself for the last five years as I ran SALAAM with no personal life. At some point my fears started to bubble up and I thought, "Am I ever going to get married? Will I have a family?" That was a very different fear for me because I had never been so directly



focused on what I wanted, it was always what the community or the performer wanted.

When I turned 30, I saw a spiritual advisor and told him I was confused about my life. I wanted to get married, have children, and live a stable life but I ran a theater company and wasn't sure my lifestyle was right. He told me not to worry about getting married, but to be open to it happening. He felt I was closed off and obsessed with theater, but that there was a big world outside of New York that I hadn't even thought about. He said that I had a limited view of what having children really meant.



"You're already a mother," he said. "You take care of so many kids in New York under your theater wing. Perhaps you're a mother for many children of the world, not just the mother of a child you give birth to." That made me think about where my fear actually came from and how my notion of "mother" limited me to thinking I couldn't be a traditional mother. Being open and expanding my definition diminished my anxiety to an extent, and I saw that I was already mothering to some degree through SALAAM.

" If you feel connected to the world and you don't single yourself out, then you'll have less fear. "

WE NEED AN ENSEMBLE

If you feel connected to the world and you don't single yourself out, then you'll have less fear. It's the "I" versus "we," idea. We keep saying it's a global village, yet we've become so disconnected from each other. In theater I feel that the "we" is more present in the ensemble, there's more spotlight on the group

effort because everyone knows you're only as good as your director and your playwright and the props people. We all need the support of a community. It helps people stay strong and recognize that they're not alone. As I've gotten older, connecting myself to people who support me and wish me well is what sustains me, and that's what I hold close. Figuring out our own journey and what works for it has to be balanced by the like-minded people around you.

MAKING IT THROUGH

At times I've felt that I needed to find God because no other coping mechanism was getting me through. I had no idea why something was happening and needed some understanding of a higher reason. It sounds so basic but sometimes breathing, listening to your heart and quieting your mind is the best way to speak to God.

BIO :



***Geeta Citygirl** is a writer, entrepreneur, professional actor, and founder of **SALAAM theater**, a non-profit organization that empowers South Asian-American artists seeking to develop their craft. A recognized and respected theater aficionado, Geeta's work has been seen in numerous theaters throughout NYC and Hollywood, CA. She teaches masters classes and workshops in acting.*

The Art Of Mindfulness

Thich Nhat Hahn

Each of us experiences pleasant feelings and painful feelings. One of the core practices of mindfulness is to take care of our painful emotions. Many of us run away from ourselves, from our pain. Usually when we have pain, we don't want to face it because we don't know how to take care of it.

We also think that if we are powerful, we shouldn't feel pain. So we try to cover it up with other things. Rather than changing the path and helping positive seeds arise from our store of consciousness, we try to escape our feelings through unmindful consumption.



“We think that if we are powerful, we shouldn’t feel pain.”

We turn on the television, pick up a book, or talk on the phone. We try to do something to ignore the pain, fear, sorrow, or despair we feel. But while consuming things that help us temporarily forget our pain, we bring more elements of distress into our bodies and minds. We bring elements of craving, fear, and worries. This makes the situation worse every day.

Instead, we can go home to ourselves. We can use the energy of mindfulness to recognize the pain inside and hold it tenderly, like a mother holding her baby. Mindfulness is the mother. Your pain, your sorrow, your despair, is your baby. There is no fighting. The energy of mindfulness does the work of recognizing, embracing, and bringing relief. When a mother hears her baby crying, she puts aside what she’s doing, goes immediately to pick up her baby, and hold the baby tenderly. She may not know what is wrong with the baby at first, but the fact that she’s holding him tenderly like this already brings relief to the baby. You may not know what is causing your pain, your despair, your

depression, your fear, but if you know how to hold that pain with the energy of mindfulness, you immediately get relief, because the energy of mindfulness begins to penetrate the energy of pain, of sorrow.

Imagine a flower in the morning. The flower is not yet open. The sunshine embraces the flower, and the energy of the sunshine begins to penetrate the flower. The sun doesn’t just go around the flower. The light naturally penetrates the flower, and an hour later the flower has to open itself to the sun. The sun is our mindfulness, embracing the flower of our feelings.



“Usually we try to do something to ignore the pain, fear, sorrow, or despair we feel” If

we allow anger, fear, and despair to be alone and unsupervised in us, they will be destructive. If we generate mindfulness, it will recognize and embrace these painful feelings. The practices of mindful breathing and mindful walking not only nourish and refresh us, but they also help us recognize and embrace the pain in us. Instead of using our energy, our power, to suppress our pain, we help our body become more integrated. By embracing our suffering, we are much stronger.

If our loved ones sit or walk with us, we become even stronger because the other person lends us their energy of mindfulness. We can say, “Darling, please come and do mindful walking with me. I need your presence.” Then she will come and walk with you. Together, we combine our mindful energies, and there is plenty to embrace our suffering.

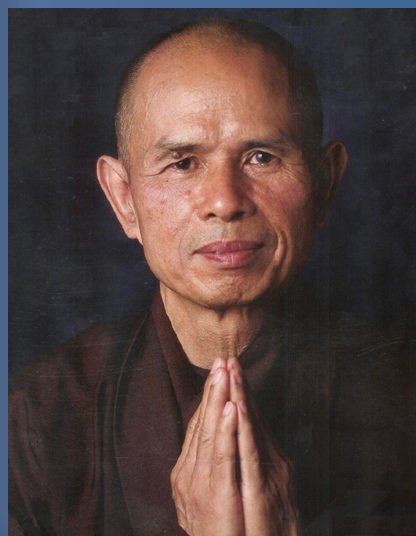
If we have several friends sitting with us, the positive, collective energy of mindfulness will be even stronger. It will be much easier for us to allow our pain sorrow, and despair to be embraced by the collective energy. That is why it is so pleasant and helpful to practice in a community where everyone knows how to do the same thing. The energy is powerful. If you allow yourself to be embraced by the collective energy, you feel much better and healing happens quickly.

The energy of mindfulness helps us be aware of what is going on. When you breathe in and you know that you are breathing in, this is mindfulness of breathing. When you drink your coffee or tea and you know that you are drinking coffee or tea, this is mindfulness or drinking. When you walk and you know you are walking, and you enjoy every step you take, this is mindfulness of walking. So these kinds of practices generate the energy of mindfulness, helping you be fully alive, fully present to touch the wonders of life for your nourishment and

healing.

EXCERPT FROM THE ART OF POWER, BY THICH NHAT HANH,
PUBLISHED IN 2007 HARPERCOLLINS.

BIO :



*Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master, poet, scholar, and peace activist. During the war in Vietnam, he worked tirelessly for reconciliation between North and South Vietnam. His courageous efforts to generate peace moved Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. During the war, he founded the Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon and the School of Youth for Social Service. Forced into exile because of his efforts to negotiate peace in Vietnam, he continued his activism, helping to resettle Vietnamese refugees abroad. He is the author of many books including *Peace Is Every Step* and *Anger* and lives in **Plum Village**, his meditation center in France.*

Life Is Good

“Young people put too much focus on others’ opinions.”

Marshall Goldsmith

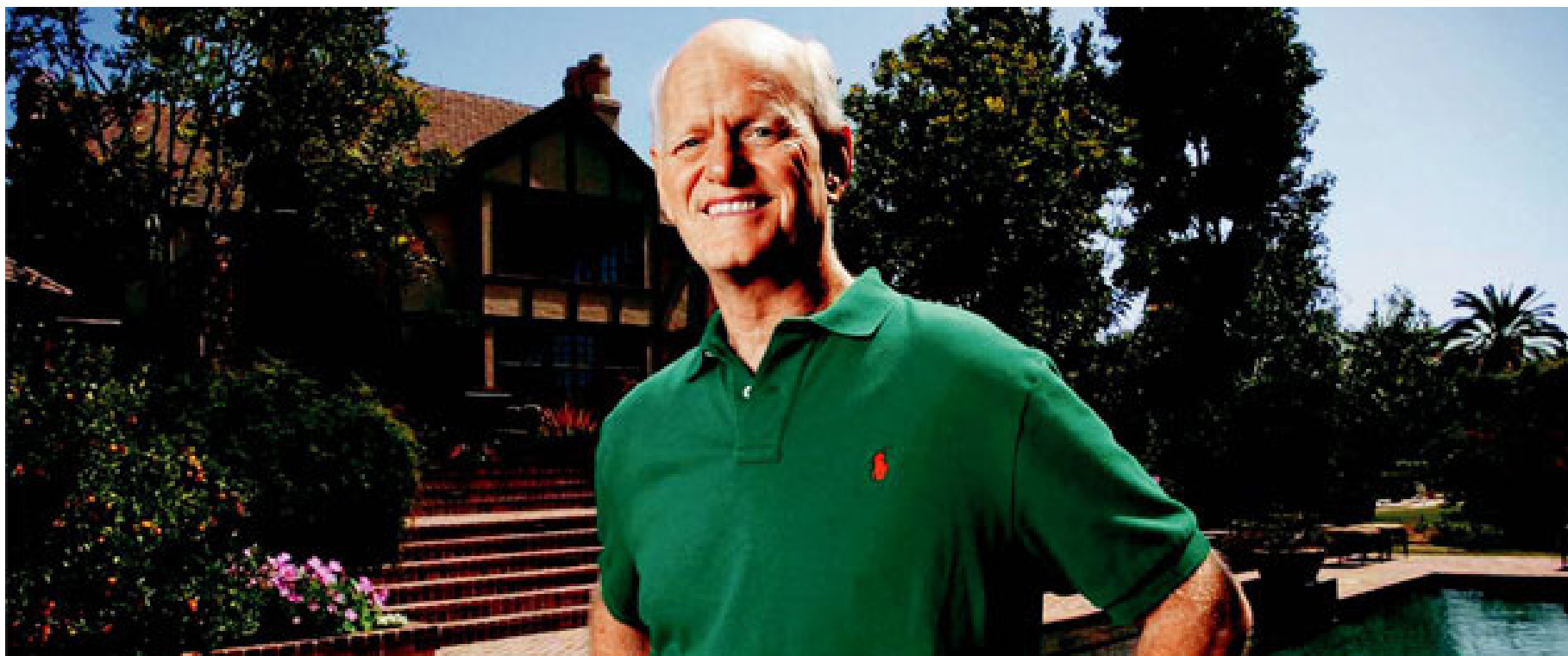
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TOSSED INTO THE WATER

I had a life-changing experience when I first started working in business with a famous entrepreneur named Dr. Paul Hersey. We did a huge presentation for IBM in 1978, when IBM was the most respected and admired company in the world. Because I’d never been in a business situation like that

before (my business experience had been pumping gasoline in Kentucky) with such high-level executives, I was so nervous I literally kept my hands under the table the entire time so people wouldn’t see them shaking. I thought to myself, “What are you doing in such a big, famous place?” My whole goal for the meeting was to try not to urinate on myself. The first 15 minutes of the meeting was rich people’s talk - what they did and whom they knew. I didn’t do any of those things or know any of those people, so





I didn't say too much. Dr. Hersey knew that I was a professor, so he talked about some topics on the agenda and then said to one of the executives, "Marshall knows a lot about that." He threw me his marker, and I stood up and started writing on the board. All of a sudden, these big IBM executives raised their hands and asked for permission to speak, and I felt like a professor again and they were my students. After a few minutes of answering their questions, I wasn't afraid anymore, and all I could think about was, "If I lived through this, I can live through anything." I overcame my fear just by being tossed into

"I overcame my fear just by being tossed into the water."

the water, by being given an opportunity by someone who had enough faith in me to throw me into an environment that forced me to succeed. I remember before the meeting he asked me, "Do you think you can do this?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "I'll pay \$1,000 for one day." Back then, \$1,000 to a 28-year-old was a lot of money. I said, "Sign me up!" I've been very fortunate to have people believe in me and who've been generous enough to help me overcome my fears. When someone influential believes in you, you're much more likely to believe in yourself.

LOVE WHAT YOU DO

Looking at the new world, it's very important to love what you do, because people in the new world are going to have to work very hard. If you don't love what you do, you're not going to have a happy life, even if you're successful materially. When I quit working with Dr. Hersey, I went into business on my own, and my wife was nine months pregnant with our second child. Interest rates were 18 percent. I had a mortgage on the house, and I was particularly afraid then. The good thing about it was that it motivated me to work harder and pushed me to challenge myself.

YOU'RE JUST AS SMART

I find a lot of younger people lack confidence and that they see fear of failure as a huge thing. They have a tendency to overrate the rest of the world as if the rest of the world is somehow better or more distinct or more brilliant than they are. Young MBAs are just as smart as everyone around them; they just have trouble expressing an opinion. I tell them to quit worrying so much and to just get out there and start selling. With all fear, you have to confront it. Name it. Breathe. Then stop worrying, and it will eventually go away.



“ Young MBAs are just as smart as everyone around them; they just have trouble expressing an opinion. ”

I used to be afraid of not being “correct” in everything I said. My mentor, Peter Drucker, taught me to do what I think is correct, say what I truly believe and realize that all humans, including myself, are going to be wrong on occasion. Young people are afraid of looking stupid and put too much focus on others’ opinions. The rest of the world doesn’t care that much. They’re too busy worrying about themselves to worry about you, so don’t have so much anxiety. Just get out there and have fun. The people who never fail are the people who never try, and the only people who don’t get criticized are people who don’t do anything. Anybody can be a critic, and the real achiever in life isn’t the critic, but the person who actually does something of value.

LIVE BY THE RULES

In my life, I live by three rules:

Number one: Be happy now.

I broke my neck surfing when I was younger and was unable to walk. I was so afraid I'd never be able to walk again, and it was humiliating to have to lie in bed and be waited on for my every need. I've never entirely come to terms with that fear, but over time I improved and learned how to get back on my feet and regain my ability to walk. I was so happy that I swore I would never complain again. I told myself, "Don't worry about anything else. If you can walk, life is good." That put things into perspective for me, and I spent much less time worrying about how little I had and became

"The great Western disease is 'when.'"

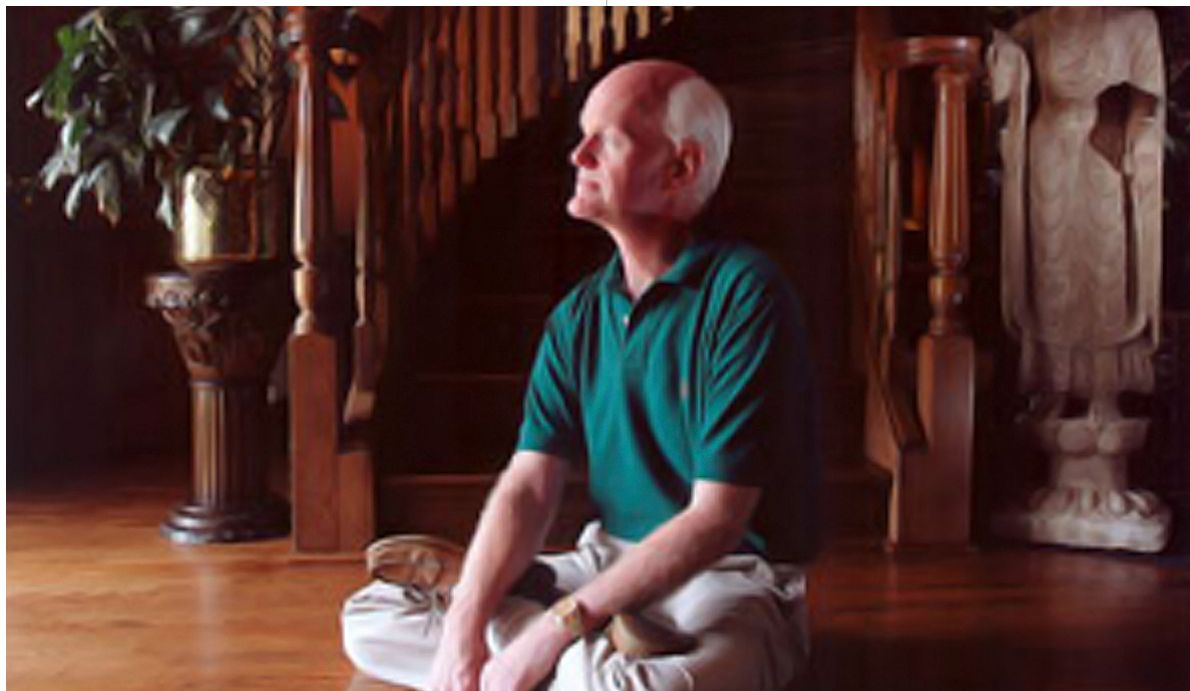
grateful for the things that I'd been given. Now, when I find myself complaining, I remember this, snap back and feel much better about life.

Find happiness and contentment where you are. I'm a Buddhist, and the basic Buddhist attitude in life is to be happy now. The great Western disease is "when." "I'll be happy when I get the money, when I get the status, when I get the promotion." We all have the same "when." When I work with CEOs, I'm not proud of myself because millionaires get more money because they've met me. I tell them that I just want them to have a better life and for the people around them to have a

better life, and you know what I find? For pretty much everybody, that's enough.

Number two: Do whatever you can to help people.

As you get older, you want to do things that make some difference in the world. People have been very nice to me, so I try to help others to the degree that I can. If generous people hadn't offered me opportunities at a young age, I certainly wouldn't have been able to



accomplish what I have today. I try to do the same for young people today by talking to them and giving them most of my resources for free.

Number three:
Follow your dreams.

Just go for it. If you have a vision, even if you're not sure how to get there, just go for it. You may not win, but at least you tried.

“ If you have a vision,
even if you're not
sure how to get
there, just go for it. ”



BIO :



*Dr. Marshall Goldsmith is a world authority on corporate leadership, coaching more than 100 Fortune 500 CEOs on becoming better leaders. Forbes has named him one of the world's five most respected executive coaches in the world. He has written more than 24 books, including his bestseller “**What Got You Here Won't Get You There.**” The New York Times has named him one of the 50 greatest living business thinkers.*

Compassion Rules The World

“Since I’ve tried to be kind to myself, I’ve been much happier.”

Karen Armstrong

Q: What fears were associated with your early career in academia?

A: Because I lost one job after another, I spent most of my youth terrified that I wasn’t going to find employment. In most of my occupations, I felt as though as soon as I managed to create an opportunity for myself and gathered my wits, the job fell

through and things started to collapse. Most things were largely outside my control, such as a television company I had been working with embezzling money, and losing my job as a schoolteacher due to my epilepsy-related breaks, but it was still incredibly hard for me to get perspective.

For example, I knew I had failed my Ph. D thesis even





“ The understanding that ultimately things would work out for the best was not available to me then. ”

would work out for the best was not available to me then – not immediately. I realize now that there’s no shortcut and I just had to live through some of the misery when my worst fears were fulfilled. I think perhaps we all need the courage to do that at times in our lives. But now I can look back and see that it was actually a great moment and turning point in my life.

Q: What have your experiences taught you about embracing, instead of resisting your fears?

A: You don’t overcome these fears in one episode or an epiphany, but very slowly you come to rediscover joy in

before the letter arrived. I intuitively felt that the both the written and oral exams had gone poorly, and that the examiner was someone who was inclined to fail people. So even though I feared that it was going to happen, the moment I saw the letter that I had actually failed, it was dreadful because it was basically the end of my academic career - all sorts of feelings were going through my mind along with fear – disappointment, sorrow and

rage. There were years when I couldn’t even bear to hear the word thesis or doctorate in conversation – it just brought up a dreadful ring of rage and disappointment in me. Only now am I relieved that I failed, because if I hadn’t, I’d be teaching English literature in a university and have a much less personally fulfilling and interesting life that I do currently. But I couldn’t have known that at the time. The understanding that ultimately things

the things you fear or that you normally push away. We all want things fast in our society. We want to have a realization now, enlightenment now. We're used to everything being so fast: fast communication, fast food, instant news. We've forgotten that a lot of these things take time and happen moment-by-moment, year-by-year. It's no good if you're a flower and continuously pull yourself up to examine how your roots are growing every second. You've got to let things grow. You hold yourself together as far as you can, and take joy and comfort from the little things that happen along the route. Change happens in an incremental and slow fashion and at subterranean levels, not immediately or when we want it to.

Q: How can we come to understand the significant fear of being alone?

A: After I left my environment of academia, I lived in solitude for a while and started to research my book, "A History of God," which seemed to be where I turned my life around. It started a new phase in my life, and I found that being alone was an enormous help to me during this time. A lot of people are terrified of being alone, because in our society, it's seen as a negative thing – to be alone is some kind of appalling failure or dreadful prospect – so for many people, it is. Our society encourages one to think that all virtue is social. But what I found is that the rhythm of solitude had a dynamic and a depth of its own. In solitude, you really face up to yourself without distractions, and being alone somehow seemed less scary because I was already doing it and surviving. Going to the depth of your fears and acting in their direction

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can be a valuable blessing if we choose to see it - they can be objective mirrors if we're just willing to put ourselves in front of them. Once I was living alone, I also found my attitude towards religion became much more positive and found a great joy in being alone. As a writer, you also have to get used to being in solitude and working alone – there's no substitute for that, and sometimes writers can't even bear the task without a bit of solitude. You have to have an environment to foster the discipline to sit, day after day, for a requisite number of hours, even if it's not going well or your words are boring you, until you finish.

I love solitude now and need some quiet everyday. I become nervous if I don't get it - like a flower out of water. But now I can





relish being alone because I have so many people in my life that I know and communicate with - my readers, family, friends, and acquaintances. The solitude is balanced.

Q: How did you manage not understanding your epilepsy and then finally receiving a diagnosis?

A: It might sound strange, but when I was diagnosed with epilepsy, personally, it was a relief. For years, I'd been having frightening symptoms and experiences of deadly terror and I thought I was losing my mind - the result of my brain being in motion, in a storm, so to speak. So when I finally had the diagnosis that it was epilepsy and all I needed was medication, it was an absolute relief, and in fact, the diagnosis was a turning point in my life that allayed a lot of my fears. I learned to live with many things. That's the wonderful thing about human beings: We get used to anything. You can get used to illness, and you can learn

to go with it, embrace it and not push it away so that it festers in a corner of your consciousness.

In our society, we often try to console people who are afraid by telling them everything will be all right. It's not always helpful because it pushes people into a state where they're left to deal with things alone, and sometimes people even do it to protect themselves from their own similar fear. A woman with cancer once told me that she was astonished by the number of people who told her to think positively. She said, "You don't always want support to be positive. Sometimes you want to mourn and deal with your fears and work through those feelings," but that's discouraged in our society. If you're ill with a potentially lethal disease, you're going to be frightened. The same goes with a sudden loss of employment, which is a very frightening prospect. Pushing away your fears

“That's the wonderful thing about human beings: We get used to anything.”



and denying their existence is not a good thing.

Q: Do you think fear manifests through religion and religious behavior?

A: Fear, if it becomes ungovernable, often results in negative behavior. The great deal of religious fundamentalism that we're seeing in the world is rooted in a profound fear of annihilation. Every single fundamentalist movement in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is convinced that modern society wants to wipe out religion. When you attack some of these religious movements, they invariably become more extreme because it convinces the fundamentalists that you're really going to destroy something - this isn't just paranoia.

Religion doesn't work if it operates out of fear. It actually instills more fear in people, because it demands a lot from them, and the punishments are very strong. Many people are terrified of the idea of the afterlife, because they

feel like they'll go to hell because they haven't measured up to the demands of religion. If it's to be a successful religion, religion has to be far more about positive, affirmative action.

a book or a play, is brilliant but dismissive or contemptuous of others, I think it's flawed deeply. I used to think my life was uneven and disaster-prone, but choosing to have compassion

“ Compassion is the only thing that's going to get us through these various crises, and it doesn't mean just feeling sorry for people. ”



Compassion is the only thing that's going to get us through these various crises, and it doesn't mean just feeling sorry for people, it means feeling with them. In this economic crisis, we've got to think together creatively instead of just scrambling to save ourselves. We've got to see that the economy going down in other parts of the world is our business too, because we're now globally intertwined and this resounds on us. Politically, the only way we can come out of our conflicts is to understand each other. And that means really understanding each other, not just making a halfhearted effort, but working hard, studying, finding out about other nations, understanding where Al-Qaeda is coming from and the grief and pain of the

Q: What is the most important quality to be developed within us?

A: My conviction is that the most important thing in the world is kindness and compassion. Very little else matters. If a person is utterly charming and brilliant but fundamentally unkind to others, I'm not impressed. Similarly, if a work, like

toward myself was a source of relief for my fears. Since I've tried to be kind to myself, I've been much happier, because now I understand what it is when other people fear a disaster or are frustrated when they can't do things or when they're unsuccessful. When we've had moments of disappointment or grief, we should use those to understand others all over the world.

people of Palestine. Atrocity is always wrong, but it hasn't come out of the blue - it's come out of real fear and real pain of people all over the world. And we have to understand that and rectify those underlying pains.

It's really tempting to isolate ourselves in our fear, move ourselves in a defensive way against the threats from outside. But that isn't going to work, because we've got to deal with this intelligently. We have to do it as a species and as the human race together.

That involves compassion and doing one's best for the whole, not just for oneself.

BIO :



JOHN WITH HIS WIFE LAVERNE

***Karen Armstrong** is a former Roman Catholic nun and the author of more than 20 books on comparative religion, including “**Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today’s World**,” “**A History of God**,” “**The Bible: A Biography**,” and “**The Case for God**.” In 2008, Armstrong won the TED \$100,000 prize to create the **Charter of Compassion**, a collaborative effort to build a peaceful global community by bringing together people from all religions.*

**There is more to life than
increasing its speed.**

Mahatma Gandhi

