

In order to avoid feeling fear we act violently, as if in doing so we are right. We are fiercely determined never to just feel fear, as if doing so would be the most devastating possible consequence of being afraid.

FEAR-GOD'S CREATOR

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CREATOR

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ISBN 978-0-9799281-9-2

1. Psychology 2. Philosophy 3. Emotion

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Printed in the United States

Booklocker.com Inc
2009

Sketches & Paintings (rendered in black & white) by Ellen Dreibelbis Fine Art

Aphorisms at chapter beginnings by
Don Fenn

*Love is the art of finding fit in difference
with all of its inevitable conflicts.*

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A large brain wants the Big Picture always to be visible, while a feeling animal wants the now to be safe and significant ... no matter what the Big Picture says or does. We must live constantly inside the competition within that contradiction.

Fear—What Is It?

Fear is a daunting, intimidating emotional experience. It grabs us, it seems, with a will of its own, utterly mesmerizing us in a negative way, filling us with its alarm and dire warnings. Fear is most often perceived as an ominous, externally-sourced presence, that suddenly takes over everything else that might be happening, making us completely lose track of our own thoughts, feelings and willfulness, propelling us with its own purpose. It's an experience of possession by forces much

greater than our selves—the ultimate emotional model of domination.

This compelling bigger-than-life intimidation is why fear has always implied divinity, and has proven the existence of gods and God, as well as the need for kings and Big People to protect us—to keep things in order, to prevent chaos. For centuries, and for some still to this day, fear is perceived as a visit from God, and responded to with prayers of supplication.

In these ways fear builds kings and other Big People like the “famous” in all of its political, economical and Hollywood forms. It does so in order to have someone to whom we can entrust our trepidations who appears big enough to handle them. We make them bigger precisely for that largely unconscious purpose.

We seem desperately to need what are actually oppressive forms of humanity—meaning those with far more power than the rest of us. In fact we still maintain,

even in this proud democracy of ours, forms of extreme power that we all deeply admire, and to which we all aspire—like wealth. When that aberration of balance oppresses us by manipulating, for profitable purposes and political ends, the very economy we all depend upon for survival.

Thus ironically we suffer fear and abuse from the very people we rely upon to protect us from fear. Though they are, like us, seduced by possessing the power we give them—into believing they really are bigger and better than anyone else. All the while we pretend that our fear is being managed by the traditions and institutions the powerful create and administer to insure, protect and increase their power.

We call those fictitious institutions, which we pretend are necessary and essential to life, the marketplace, the economy, and politics. As if life could not conceivably be done in any other way. All of which are, in addition to anything else to

which they can legitimately lay claim, partly stacked-deck poker games with much deception and slight-of-hand, designed for people who regard, and enjoy power as something with which to manipulate others, instead of something to find deep within themselves.¹

And the prime motive for all of this self-deceiving, sometimes torturous, often devious tomfoolery ... is fear. We seem to believe that as individual humans we must have tightly wound social structures that bind rebellious thought, wandering impulses, and dangerous emotion to finely tuned clinical practices called culture, the law, and the economy. Meanwhile we look the other way so as not to notice that these practices produce as much, perhaps even more damage to our emotional and psychic health, than they manage what frightens us.

¹ These descriptions have nothing whatsoever to do with specific persons, nor are they an indictment of anyone. They refer instead to the archetypes of authority and power we sponsor culturally, and for most of us personally.

Fear has thus manifested itself in our imagination in many forms. Though all of them perceive this emotion as bigger-than-life. Fear can be perceived as an ordeal to be bourn for king and country, or what to evoke in the heart of a willful child to make them desperate to be good, or a curse to be inflicted upon someone that we believe is evil and deserves to die, or as the ominous presence that lurks in every dark corner for the unwary phobic or paranoid, etc. Fear is the largest element in all fairy tales, in the will of God exerting itself, the dawn of Armageddon, as a sign of the Devil's presence, etc.

Psychology has tried to give fear a more normal, cut down to size meaning as simply one of our emotions. But these more ancient interpretations still survive largely intact in the structure of our hearts, dreams, beliefs and assumptions.

In other words, fear is the largest emotional experience we have. And, no matter how much we may pretend

otherwise, we don't handle it much better than our ancestors did.

We try desperately, for instance, to make love bigger than fear, and often believe that we've achieved that, at least for a while—until love is compromised by disappointment. Mixed with large doses of fear, for many this moderate emotion is the same thing as an extreme relative, betrayal—a fear-induced escalation of hurt. To what extent disappointment becomes this much larger, even deadly emotional relative, betrayal, is a direct measurement of how much fear dominates that particular life, no matter what we may otherwise believe about it, or about what might have caused it.

Fear is the most defining element to who, what and how we are as individual people, especially with regard to how we fulfill or betray our needs and our aspirations ... and in turn betray or assist others as well.

Love doesn't conquer fear, though we keep dreaming and hoping for it. In that hope I write science fiction, fables and romantic thrillers precisely to explore and express that aspiration, revealing the things that try and prevent it, and those that sometimes overcome such oppression. But for the most part love is pitifully helpless when it comes to fear.

Look what love has become in this modern, techno-society—hedonism. This ancient, oft-repeated ritual of excessive pleasure-making is compelled primarily by fear demanding that love wipe panic and terror from our hearts by being more frequent, aggressive and mesmerizingly compelling.

In this desperate context, gentle sweet understanding love is obviously a joke, and the first victim in the presence of terrorism.

We're still living in 9/11. We can't leave it. Fear holds us there. So, among other attempts to recover, we desperately regress into our bodies, reducing love to

frantic humping. Dance has become almost exclusively sexual foreplay.

But there's a much bigger problem with fear that far outweighs what we do with it sexually. It's that we cannot tolerate *awareness* of fear's presence for very long—usually only for a second. It may freeze us for another second. For some it freezes them permanently. But for those it doesn't totally immobilize, we instantly jump into action in order to escape fear by moving to another realm of consciousness. As a result its presence, real meaning and importance to us is almost never known, or even acknowledged, let alone carefully and dispassionately examined. Instead it's denied, avoided, run from and shunned as quickly as possible.

Curiously it's the phobic's, those who can't escape the awareness of fear, who, in spite of their panic, are far more in touch with it than those of us—the counter-phobic's—who can get away.

Though we know in our minds that fear is an emotion, it's not generally perceived to be part of us. The moment we feel it, we externalize it. We most often view it as an intruder trying to break into our heart or home. We see them! But only for a second before running away, going to another room or mental place, pretending they're not there—what we do with fear all the time.

Fear most likely exists, among other reasons, to reveal what's troubling or endangering us. But we pay no careful attention to it in dread that to see it—to look into its evil eye—will undo us, as if *knowing* that it's present is what makes fear most dangerous.

It seems that knowing too much is the worst sin. Remember the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, where knowing too much is the crime for which we were banished from Paradise? Religion claims the crime is disobedience of God. But that's what all parental entities say to

distract us from the real sin ... danger ... to know!

In not knowing we perfectly execute the principle borderline psychic defense of *dissociation*—in which we all engage liberally in the presence of fear.

Dissociation means literally to dissemble thoughts, feelings and impressions, scattering consciousness of them to the four winds. Now you see it ... now you scramble the information so it can never again be recognized or remembered.

Freud called its most successful parts the work of “repression”, meaning specifically the burying of traumatic memory and awareness—as if it was a good thing. It may be necessary for children to do so when they’re traumatized and totally unable to cope with it. But then for the rest of their lives that trauma, and the dysfunctional habits that it unconsciously structures into their ... our system, are never brought into the light and healed. Fear continues to exercise its

habitual-ized, automatic and unnoticed damage upon our lives. We have no normal, ordinary strategy by which childhood traumas, and the disablement they encode in our behavior, are revealed, reworked and discarded.

Though many of us spend an enormous amount of effort pretending that our lives have been perfect, and that we know everything we need to know about them, none of us entirely escape the experience of trauma. The simple truth is that we're still gross amateurs at loving each other, and that includes parents. Let's face it. Who knows what a kid really needs to be, or to do, for instance in the face of fear, in order to most fully become themselves? Far too often family life produces yet another cultural clone, instead of someone who intends, and is capable of changing the basic structure of the culture, and family from which they derive.

Isn't that what democracy is all about, producing the opportunity to do just that? It

may be theoretically possible. But who's prepared actually to challenge basic tenants of culture without fear of being strung up, accused of unpatriotic disloyalty, or even imprisoned for treason. Who's willing or able to allow their children to become strangers if they wish? I'll admit it. It would be too painful to bear, at least within the context of present childcare practices.

It's been just a blink of an eyelash in time, the last one hundred years, that we've even begun thinking clearly and scientifically about how profoundly afflicted children are, especially because of their extreme vulnerability. Though we haven't yet discovered to what extent adults remain permanently vulnerable. History, no matter how much we dress it up with kings and heroes, is an account of terrible and horrific abuse inflicted upon almost everyone by all of us. Only some of us have begun to stop doing it ... most of the time. Though it still continues to happen, mostly in emotional and economic

terms, much of it perpetrated by the demon called wealth, which produces, and represents the current version of aristocracy.

By what misguided insanity do we continue to concentrate so much power in the hands of so few? It's a compelling, standing invitation to corruption, no matter how moral the person may otherwise be.

So we're all screwed up just a little, mostly more, many a lot. It doesn't mean people are bad. It just means we haven't evolved very far. Indeed it isn't our fault. The terrorizing practices of past events are still alive in the dysfunctional aspects of our public institutions. For instance, why, in such a wealthy country, should most of us, until we die, be perpetually afraid we don't have enough resources to be safe? Our habits still contain the oppressive attitudes of more repressive times.

Most people would find it depressing to think of life in these startling ways. It makes us afraid, and we don't know what

to do with that emotion, except to be confused and overwhelmed. On the other hand it's also liberating to see things as they are. It gives one a fundamental purpose to their life—to understand it better—no matter what kind of other work they do. We are not accustomed to thinking of ourselves as evolving, with daily things to learn. We most often perceive the need for that to be a sign of mental illness. Which reveals just how prejudiced we still are about psychic distress, the natural consequence of conflict-resolution and change. We've got to become psychically in crisis—be falling apart—before someone willingly, generously and without judgment provides us with quality help. We call that crisis mental illness.

When there is no such thing, as future history will eventually, vividly reveal! This is not to say that there's no severe psychic disablement, which motivates terrible acts. Instead it means that all psychological symptoms are normal stages of human

psychic evolution—5000 years of which coexist simultaneously on the planet.

For instance, the human brain is genetically structured easily to produce delusion and hallucination. Just send a small electrical current through the only connective tissue between the left and right lobes. This natural ability to become what, out of prejudice, we call mentally ill ... is a failsafe device, an offloading strategy, of projecting part of the self into other agencies—in essence the beginning of religion. Hallucination and other psychic defenses are adaptations, until we can hold in the mind's eye enough information, with its many contradictions, to begin to be whole in ourselves. It's taken us tens of thousands of years of evolution to be capable of having a mind of our own, which sometimes holds the universe in the palm of our hand.

In the process of this perpetual changing, which human traits should we keep, and which to discard? We don't

know, because we haven't learned that much about ourselves. Though of course we pretend otherwise since actively not-knowing is very frightening—but of course only if we're aware of it.

Fear, and our incompetence with it is probably what created gods, and then God—as our desperately attempt to avoid having constantly to face learning new things within uncertainty, trepidation and terror. Instead God will take care of it.

Yet ultimately fear will probably become known as the *learning emotion*, which informs us of error—not the next guy's, but our own. Fear is always a part of change. And the errors we discover in ourselves as a result of learning have nothing to do with immorality. To make a mistake, perhaps for one's whole lifetime, simply means we've left the realm of possibility in our wish-fulness. Our expectations and desires often contradict reality, the possible. Nature contains change ... chaos ... with structure ... limits

what's possible, or the whole bloody living process of reality would fall apart.

All other living things accept and deal with the fundamental limits and contradictions of being alive ... except humans, who want to eradicate them, rather than collaborate with them. Sound scientific evidence reveals that coastal cities will eventually be overwhelmed by nature. And yet we will most likely fight to the death to deny and prevent having to think about putting them somewhere else. Other life forms make the adjustment as best they can, but we insist we shouldn't have to.

Though so much more advanced, with our greater talent, and in its growing pains, in the process we've also become more primitive than the rest of life. It's time we learned a lot more than we ever thought necessary or possible. And that learning isn't about technology, or traveling to other planets. It's about us.



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