

GRIEF AND LOSS: WAYS TO SHARE YOUR FEARS

By Louis E. LaGrand

Fear is arguably the most common hidden emotion that mourners delay confronting. The reason is obvious: no one wants to appear weak. Of course, that is inbred societal nonsense that we have all been subjected to since fear is an expected response whenever we feel threatened by circumstances that have to be faced.

You may be thinking: How can I ever get by financially? I am afraid to live alone. What if others find out how scared I am? I am afraid to go to certain places without him/her. I fear always feeling sad. Who can I find to listen to my problems? No one really cares. These and many other fears are a normal consequence of grieving, especially if we have been over dependent on the person who is no longer with us. They also have a grave emotional and physical impact on the intensity of grief.

Most fear is learned and we have to commit to unlearn it. Here is an approach, as part of your grief work, which can set you free from your self-imposed prison.

1. With paper and pencil, find a quiet place, sit down and make a list of your fears. This may take more than one sitting as you may remember something later. If that happens, make a note of it and add it to your list. The next step is to prioritize your fears. Ask yourself what bothers you the most. Be specific and spell it out in detail. Tackle the one that immobilizes you and causes much anxiety.

2. Now the critical part—share. Fears hidden keep us isolated and become a destructive burden. Who do you trust to tell in detail what you fear? Remember the people we connect with are crucial parts of life, for among other things they give us hope and motivation to persist. Start with someone in your family. If you would rather not involve a family member, then try a best friend that you implicitly trust. Trust is huge in dealing with fear.

Next consider someone at a local church or synagogue; you don't have to be a member. And make every effort to strengthen your spirituality. Another great source for sharing is through deepening your personal relationship with God or your Higher Power. This may sound hackneyed and trite, but prayer is powerful and the closer you can get to your spiritual beliefs, I guarantee, the sooner your fears will become less daunting. Your prayers can be a conversation asking for wisdom to break the habit of fear, which is usually a habit you learned long ago. It has consistently been proven that trading spirituality for fear generates hope and reduces anxiety.

Gather all the insights possible from your sharing. Ask for opinions on strategies, and keep open to receiving new ideas. Finally, make a detailed plan to deal with those deadly images of fear when they show up. What will you say to yourself? What resource will you tap? What action will be immediately taken?

3. Now go to work. Become better informed about the nature of your fear. Start with your limiting beliefs about the specific fear. Where do they come from? How and at what age did

you get them? Challenge and examine the false information behind them that contributes to feelings of inadequacy. Then substitute challenging beliefs for the distorted or limited ones. Try varied approaches to this task gleaned from professionals as well as people you know who have dealt with similar fears. What beliefs supported their efforts?

For example, choosing optimism is a belief you are in charge of initiating or rejecting. In this vein, understand that good things happen to everyone; yes everyone, except some of us fail to recognize them. So keep a gratitude log and write one or two good things that happen to you each day. This will aid the change in attitude needed for fear-conquering. Go down a different thought path.

If you are insecure, bounce ideas off the person(s) you confide in. Learn relaxation skills (deep abdominal breathing is a must, music therapy, visualization where you practice seeing yourself overcoming the fearful situation, progressive relaxation, etc.) in order to combat high stress. Practice laser-focusing on new routines, especially those designed to deal with fear, and accepting the changes accompanying your great loss. Acceptance is a key. Along the way, the question is not will there be some failures. The question is: will you rebound, gather your courage to try again, and even take another road if necessary?

Know that you have the ability to conquer fear as you mourn. And like all of us, you may need a little help with the task. Seeking that help is a wise move, not a sign of weakness in dealing with fear that commonly surfaces with big changes. Consider Emerson's observation: "Do the thing you fear, and the death of fear is certain." When in doubt, go back and connect again with those you trust, both in this life and the world of spirit. We all need emotional refueling at times. We create our fears and we can let them go by strengthening our inner lives.