

Fear is a question. What are you afraid of and why? Our fears are a treasure house of self-knowledge if we explore them.

- Marilyn French

Fear is a mysterious question for many people. People are often not certain what they are afraid of. They may not even be aware that they are afraid of anything. They just "naturally" dislike or avoid some things, never considering that they might be afraid of them.

Being able to identify a fear goes a long way toward overcoming it, if that is desired. Just knowing that you are afraid of something does not eliminate it as a fear. But it does allow you to take steps (usually involving monitoring and assistance from at least one other person) to conquer the fear.

Our most deep-seated fears begin in childhood. They may begin with a bad personal experience, such as hearing of a severe problem that someone else has had which may have cost that person his life or a limb, or with watching a movie for which fear is an integral part.

Adventure movies, for example, depend on the main character(s) being involved with close-to-death events. In my case, I developed a fear of confined spaces (claustrophobia) after watching a movie (with my parents, in my preschool years) about an escape from a concentration camp or prison in which the characters dug an extensive tunnel that was just large enough for them to crawl through. The movie spent considerable time focussing on the fact that the tunnel could collapse at any moment, killing anyone inside.

Horror movies, which many teens enjoy immensely, can be the sources for future fears if watched by younger children. Tarantula spiders, for example, are often used to create scary situations where the characters fear they will die of a spider bite (even though this is extremely unlikely from a tarantula bite). This movie experience by a young child may result in a fear of spiders or even of insects as well as the child gets older.

Acknowledging our fear of something is a beginning. It helps us to consider where we might have developed that fear. If our fear is of spiders, then knowing that a horror movie we saw as a child falsely portrayed a tarantula as an eight-legged arachnid worthy of fear could help us to rationalize our way out of a fear of spiders. In fact, most spiders are more helpful to us than they are harmful, a fact never conveyed in a horror movie.

Examining our fears can tell us a great deal about ourselves and our past, as fears and phobias are all learned, not instinctive. The study of some of the dark sides of ourselves can also help us to grow into more confident people as we learn how to overcome our fears and become masters of our own emotions.

Fear is a weakness of character. Learning about our fears and working to overcome them helps us to build our character in ways we never thought possible, by empowering ourselves.

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