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2009

Opposing Fear

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Roche, Fr. Randy, "Opposing Fear" (2009). *Spiritual Essays*. 70.

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Opposing Fear

Fear is not a word that elicits delight. Even the opposite of fear - courage, bravery, or some other expression - does not necessarily cause joy. There is little about fear to like, and we will not have much of a life if we do not oppose the many forms of fear that confront us.

Sometimes, we can put an end to feelings of fear by using reason, as when an unfamiliar sound can cause fright until we learn that the source is not really a threat to us. For anything other than an immediate physical threat to which we must respond, we can pause for a moment to consider the sources of the fear, and think through the realities of our situation before deciding whether we really need to protect ourselves or can reasonably move through and past the occasion of fear.

We can often displace fear when we choose to act out of a value that is greater than the threat, as when we love someone enough to help him or her even at some risk to ourselves. We are quite capable of distinguishing between facing an extreme emergency where we might put our lives at great peril of injury or an occasion when we would merely be risking a minor verbal rejection. But in fearful situations great or small, our decisions will be influenced by the values we hold more than by our reasons.

Fear has many varieties, some powerful enough to completely engage all our faculties, others so subtle that they are almost below the level of consciousness. Anxiety is one kind of fear that afflicts most of us at times, and can, unaddressed, cause harm even if the threat is never fulfilled, or the intensity is quite mild. When we are anxious, we usually have an abiding feeling of unease that also occupies a part of our minds, diminishing our resources for living. If an open window is letting in too much air, we close it rather than remain uncomfortable. For anxieties, we can identify the source, and make a commitment to deal with the problem either right now or at some later time. We thereby replace a generalized feeling of distress with a definite and firm plan to take whatever action or avoidance of action we judge to be appropriate.

Some feelings of fear are immediate and physical, and wholly unavoidable, as when we face the sudden menace of a traffic accident. We respond as best we can, and take care of the consequences afterwards. Whether or not we or someone else suffers injury, our bodies and minds carry the after-effects. The sooner we seek healing

for the thoughts and feelings that follow an episode of fear, the less time and energy we will lose, somewhat like those who come home with a heavy briefcase or shopping bag and immediately set it down rather than carry it around while trying to set the table or open the mail.

Fear of God, fear of what others might think about us, fear of loss, of death, of suffering – any of us might be subjected to a type of fear at one time or another. We owe fear no allegiance, no freedom to roam the private rooms of our awareness where peace and self-respect belong as rightful residents. We cannot wish fear away, nor succeed by issuing a general decree: “No fear.” But we can appraise each experience of fear from the life-enhancing perspective of determining to get through it rather than to be dominated by it. For one example, fear of God can be turned completely around to an experience of friendship by turning directly to God and giving expression to our present thoughts and feelings. Though this does not always work with every other person in our lives, more often than not we can move beyond our fears when we face them directly and honestly.

The fears that will dissipate and disappear are the fears that are opposed.