



Welcoming Fear As A Friend, by Gerald G. May

The basic lesson is this: Fear is not an enemy but a friend. Fear is something good, something alive, alert, and wild in us. Fear may be a response to danger, but fear itself is not dangerous. On the contrary, it is nothing other than life-spirit standing on its toes right here, right now with clear attention, sharp senses, ready body, flared nostrils, bristled hair, poised muscles, pumping heart, clean breath.

The immense gratitude I experienced when I was most afraid was for feeling so incredibly alive. In untamed fear there is a profound sense of something that is *me* going through the experience. It is personhood without definition, identity without identification, selfhood without attributes. And it has an immense steadiness to it, an almost eternal quality. Here is this life, this being that is deeply myself, having this experience, being in it as I have been through every moment of the past, as I will be in every moment, to come, no matter what. In this strange way, fear brought me an ultimate reassurance.

I understand how people can become addicted to fear. I have known some who were hooked on their own adrenaline, compelled toward danger, driven to dancing with death at the edges of life. I doubt that will ever happen to me, for I have no desire to seek fear. But neither am I interested in protecting myself from it. When fear does come, I no longer want to cope with it. Let me neither tighten myself against what I'm feeling, nor become paralyzed by it, but let me live into the bright, sane responsiveness that fear makes possible. Let me welcome fear for the friend it is, for what it teaches and how it serves. When I feel the hairs on the back of my neck bristling for no reason, when I sense an unexplainable tremulousness, I never again want to deny it or call it neurotic. Instead, I want to welcome it, go into it, see what it is trying to show me.

People who have been assaulted sometimes say they had a premonition of danger but dismissed it. They judged their fear as unrealistic, denied or coped with it, and forged ahead. They were afraid of being afraid, and they got hurt. I have to disagree with Franklin Roosevelt and so many others who have said that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. I would turn the phrase on its head and maintain that the only thing we have to fear is our fear of fear.

