

freeing your relationships from fear

relationships, and the fear and anxiety they often evoke in us, are our greatest teachers when we learn how to flow with them.

by shems heartwell

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One of the most valuable choices we can make in life—and especially in our relationships—is to make friends with fear. Experiencing fear is not an option; it will surface and very likely at the least-desirable times. You do have the option of what you do when it arises: whether you feel it, avoid it, suppress it, or deny it. The moments that fear grips your gut or has you withdraw in any way are the most powerful opportunities for deepening connection and opening to the greater flow of love.

When we don't know or understand that it's normal to feel scared, insecure, doubtful, and off-center at times in love, our minds can get anxiously busy worrying about or doubting our relationship as a whole. When we equate the inevitable discords and challenges with something being wrong, we've missed the mark on what relationships are all about.

As much as relationship nourishes and feeds our soul, it also tends to surface our deepest vulnerabilities and tendencies to avoid pain. Once your heart deeply opens to another, you

are on a fast track of energy acceleration; and at some point, this will bring what's lurking in the depths to the surface. Whomever we share the most time and connection with will become our biggest teacher and revealer of our own shadows. There will be moments of friction that feel like sandpaper attempting to smooth out any sharp edges we have. Relationship is the mirror that reveals to us what we may not yet be aware of or have not yet accepted within ourselves.

Beyond highlighting our shadows and generating profound intimate connection, the purpose of relationship is to bring out our magnificence. In order for each of us to fully blossom into our magnificence, we must be able to befriend our fear. This happens through the process of deeply opening into our vulnerability to discover our authentic strength and capacity to love. Sometimes this requires a shedding of our negative behavioral patterns; and more often than we realize, relationship calls for us to show up in

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the beauty of our full colors. It invites us to embody our highest potential by refining our skills of acceptance, compassion, surrender, forgiveness, and selflessness.

Unfortunately, most of us have not gotten a Ph.D. in how to evolve through and utilize the fears and challenges in our relationships, so we are getting our education on the front lines of love, without much training.

We all know that relationships take work, but let's be honest: we don't like it when the going gets tough or the tough get going. Few of us like the hot flames of anger or the cold, turbulent waters of disconnection. I have experienced plenty of big waves in my intimate relationships and learned valuable skills along the way, and still I can resist saying how I really feel in a heated moment out of fear of conflict.

Fear becomes a problem when we do anything other than face it and feel it. For many people, anxiety has become the unconscious way that we avoid confronting and transforming our fears. Instead of presencing,

breathing, and being with what is here now, our minds race around like they are on a rollercoaster at Disneyland. Presencing is a blend of two words, “presence” and “sensing,” and refers to an ability to sense and bring to the present what is happening within you right now. This is one of the primary ways that we are able to process through difficult emotions such as fear. Energy goes where your attention is; when you direct your attention toward fully feeling the fear, it creates movement that digests the energy of fear. Most of us are very skilled at avoiding painful feelings. Our minds distract us and our attention gets misdirected into many forms of avoidance.

Fear is a raw emotion that arises to protect or ensure our survival. Fear happens instantly when, for example, your partner tells you he just lost his job. Anxiety happens when we are trying to avoid past painful experiences from occurring again or anticipating what may happen based on our imagination. Fear happens quickly in the moment like a loud train going by, while anxiety can be like end-

less aftershocks that have you anticipating the next big earthquake.

Anxiety has a tendency to be reactivated anytime there is a potential for hurt, loss, or threat. This is especially true in the vulnerable bond of intimate relationships—whether you've just started or ended one or have been in one for several years or several decades.

Fortunately, we are phenomenally resourceful beings and all it takes to shift out of anxiety is our willingness to stop, breathe deeply, presence, and fully feel what is going on within us now.

Sure, it is not easy for everyone to just pause and reset their anxiety reflex, but it's not easy to do a lot of valuable things until you have diligently practiced. Most musicians or yoga teachers were not masters in a few weeks. Worthy endeavors require commitment and practice, and what could be more valuable and worthwhile than transforming anxiety and fear into deeper connection and greater love?

I have a phenomenal soul-connection with

my partner. The depth of love we share is truly profound. And, the amount of fear that has surfaced for me in our relationship is pretty profound too.

I have felt insecurity rise up in me like a winter high tide. My mind can race with thoughts like: I'm not successful enough or powerful enough as a man. If I stay in this current, my mind will take me for a hell of a ride that leaves me hungover and with little room for intimacy.

When I pause and notice these thoughts and the fears underneath them, something begins to move and it's not my thoughts anymore. It's a deeper awareness, a force of presence that has a healing power.

Instead of latching onto the endless thought-stream of doubt, worry, or insecurity, I connect with what is true and real within me at a deeper level. Beneath the surface feelings and thoughts is a clarity and awareness that is ever-present when I tune into it. If anxiety takes me on a ride, I have a choice to get off if I truly want to.

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At times, it can be a challenge to go deeper and be authentic and vulnerable with my beloved—anxious thoughts may be there convincing me that I have to be different than who I really am. When this happens, I can either let the anxious thoughts color my experience or shift into what is more true within me.

Many people indulge their fearful thoughts as reality, which keeps them in the rough surface waters of reaction and protection. In these turbulent waters, it is easy to believe that something is seriously wrong... with her... with me... with the relationship.

If we are not able to stand back and question the truth beneath these fears, they can become the reality of our experience and keep us spiraling in concern and overwhelm. Not at all fun or functional!

Anytime you’re experiencing fear or anxiety, there’s something deeper that can be discovered. It may be your true strength, higher love, or profound acceptance. Whatever it is, fear is your gateway to it. Anxiety can be your warning signal that lets you know when its

time to look deeper into your inner recourses of being.

We have to reach deep within ourselves to find the connection to truth that will heal our greatest fears. It’s inside us if we look for it. But we’re only going to look for it if we realize the purpose of relationships is to bring our fears to the surface.

If you’re going to find fulfillment in your relationship, you must realize that its purpose is not to make everything easy. It’s actually the opposite; the purpose is to bring out your magnificence by rousing you into a more profound sense of love.

Here are six key steps to consciously using fear in your relationship:

1. Know the difference between fear and anxiety.

Most of the time when someone says they are experiencing fear, they are actually experiencing anxiety. Something happened or may happen and their mind is racing in circles trying to figure out what to do or not do. When anxiety gets strong, it keeps us in a



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fight, flight, or freeze state, which limits our perception or ability to be rational.

To shift out of this cycle, it is important to slow the mind down and anchor it to the body. Breathing deeply while feeling into the belly is a well-known way to come back to home base. What also works is to consciously move all the joints in your body in a pleasurable and stimulating way. This can be done very subtly or as a full-out dance of movement. Either way, it turns on the parasympathetic nervous system—the part of our body that controls rest, relaxation and regeneration—and shifts you out of the fight-or-flight response. This is necessary to fully metabolize our emotions and learn from the experiences we are having.

2. Acknowledge when fear is arising inside of you and share those fears with your partner.

Speaking your fears can be vulnerable. It can also bring you closer to your partner and help you to move through them. A loving partner

can be your greatest ally in accepting and loving yourself more deeply and fully, regardless of what you are feeling. This is a profound practice. To be seen, heard, and loved in the moments when we feel scared and vulnerable nourishes a basic need that most people hunger for.

3. Focus on your experience of fear and not on the solution to resolving it.

Before aiming for what will remedy your fear, breathe it through you like a big wave you are surfing. Allow the experience of fear to be a whole body, informative journey and not something that you want to get rid of and move on from. Like a bitter medicine, sitting with or moving/breathing through a wave of fear can bring you to deeper understanding or the healing of a past painful experience.

All too often, people move away from the discomfort of fear, which thwarts the process of healing and growth that come from cooking through our emotions.

4. Listen to your partner's fears.

Do your best to empathize, support, and accept your partner's experience. Fear has deep roots and many things can trigger it. Very often what is triggering our current feeling of fear is rooted in a past experience. When you validate your partner's experience and encourage him or her to feel their feelings all the way through, healing happens.

We all thrive in the sunlight of loving acceptance and permission to have the experience we are having. Avoid the impulse to remedy, relieve, or fix your partner's feelings of fear. The best thing you can do is to hear, accept, and love them while they feel what they feel.

5. Find the source of any recurring fears you have and dig it up.

Beneath the fears that come up over and over again are unconscious beliefs that tend to run our lives and especially our relationships. Many of our core beliefs are born from cultural and religious programming that is not necessarily bettering our world or your life.

Some of our core beliefs must be questioned and composted to get out of the fear-anxiety cycle.

The two big core beliefs that many of us carry are as follows:

- » **I am not enough**—*good enough, successful enough, worthy of love, etc.*
- » **There is not enough**—*time, energy, money, love, etc.*

These two beliefs are the stems for many branches of misbeliefs that skew our view of reality. When you mindfully question these core beliefs, you may notice that they have a great deal of emotional charge in your body. Notice where you feel the sensations in your body and bring your breath to that area.

Breathe into that area of your body and ask yourself: Is this belief really true? How do I feel when I believe it? Is there another belief that counters the fearful one that is truer for



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you?

For instance, if I have a belief that I am not good enough at anything that I do, I feel it in my solar plexus and stomach. As I breathe into this area and question this belief, I get a clear knowing within me that it is not entirely true. I know that I am very good at caring, listening, and loving. What is true is that I am good at being who I am and loving in the ways that I do.

You get the idea. (Of course, clearing beliefs is a subject that needs a much more thorough explanation than I can offer here. For an in-depth guide on how to clear harmful beliefs, check out the [Summer 2016 issue of Conscious Lifestyle](#).)

6. Flip the fear into what you desire.

Once you are able to defuse your anxiety, you have then freed up vital energy that can be used for something far more useful.

What is it you are truly desiring and wanting in your life and relationship? Focus on your creative vision of what is most valuable and important to you. What action steps can

you take that will propel you toward your desires? Taking action generates movement and attracts more energy. It gets you on the creative path and out of resistance and avoidance, which is where fear thrives.

Earlier I mentioned that the purpose of relationship is to bring out our magnificence. The true gifts of your essence emerge through connection and collaboration. Even if it's not through relationship with a beloved, through any relationship (with nature, community, or work) is where you discover and embody your full potential. May you welcome fear as your friend on your path to loving and magnificence.

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