

The Gift of Fear

..... source unknown (adapted and retold by Amy Fox)

There was once a woman who lived with fear. She hadn't planned to live with him, but it just happened that Fear moved into her house when she was a little girl and fear had lived there ever since.

Fear was big and strong and he had long fangs with poison. When he bit her, her heart would momentarily stop, and her muscles would grow weak. But, as long as she didn't do anything fear didn't want her to do, fear didn't bite her very often.

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One day, the woman decided that she wanted to do something new, all by herself...even though she didn't know she could do it. Fear was adamantly against the idea and warned her that if she tried, he would bite her harder than he ever had before. But her mind was made up and she said that she was going to try anyway. So, Fear bit her even as she struggled to do the new thing and her muscles grew weak. Eventually Fear was just too big, too strong, and the woman exhausted, gave up trying.

The next day the same thing ensued with the woman wanting to do a new thing and Fear preventing her from doing so. But the woman persisted in trying the next day and the next and the next. Each day she lost the fight, but with each fight her muscles grew stronger and her body learned how to fight Fear's poison. Eventually, when Fear bit her, she did not fall down and she could keep fighting.

One day, after a long fight, the woman finally pinned Fear to the ground and she said to him, "I have beaten you. Now go away." and to her surprise Fear did. As she went to sleep, she thought of all the things she would do in the days to follow without Fear by her side.

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The woman thought she had beaten Fear, but when she woke the next morning, he was there sitting in the corner of her bedroom.

The girl didn't understand why Fear was there because clearly she had beaten him the day before.

Fear explained that that was yesterday and if the girl wanted him gone today, she'd have to beat him today.

And so Fear and the girl fought. As they fought the woman noticed that Fear was a bit smaller than he was yesterday, she was sure of it. After only half a day of fighting, the woman again pinned Fear to the ground and ordered him to go. And he did. And she spent the rest of the day doing new things.

The next day, Fear was sitting in the corner chair and when he stood up to fight her, she noticed he only came to her chin. She beat him by late morning and continued her day doing as she wished.

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The next day Fear only came up to her waist and on that particular day, with Fear being so small, the woman didn't tell Fear to go. She simply went about her day and walked off to the woods to pick berries.

As she gathered berries, a large bear appeared and began to chase her. The woman ran but the bear was closing in. Fear, who had followed her into the woods and who was running beside her, came up behind her and bit her. Her heart beat faster and her muscles grew stronger and hand in hand with Fear she ran faster and faster away from the bear.

And it was in that moment the woman saw Fear with different eyes. She decided she would fight Fear long enough until Fear was small enough to fit into a small pouch she carried around her waist – this way he wouldn't prevent her from doing new things, but he would always be with her when she needed him most.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & PROMPTS

OPENING CLASS

How often does fear hold you back? Where in your life does fear live?

Notice your points of contact with the mat. See if you can breathe into this moment, your body... feeling your excited places, your tired places, your stuck places, maybe even the places it's easy to move...

Let yourself breathe and move here, no forcing, just noticing and if you find pockets of stickiness or resistance or fear, no need to tackle it or dismiss it; simply notice what comes up and arrive again with your breath.

DURING CLASS

When fear arises, it's an opportunity to leverage our fear for our strength.

Only when your muscles start to break down, do you get stronger.

Only when your mind starts to fight against you, do you have the opportunity to rise to unprecedented levels.

Notice where fear or doubt comes up. Where can you lean into and leverage it?

CLOSING CLASS

When fear arises, it shakes us to our core – it dismantles our sense of safety and security – it diminishes our sense of trust and enough-ness – but in life, there are two different levels of fear: there's the legitimate fear, the kind that saves our lives and then there's the kind of fear we get when we are trying something new.

Fear itself isn't a problem. It's our reaction to our fears that creates tension in our lives.

When we make fear an adversary, we miss the message that fear holds for us. But, when we choose to make fear an ally, we can leverage it for our growth.

EXTRAS

This story, while poignant, is on the longer side and you'll see in the transcript that it can be broken up into four parts by the ellipsis "..."

Certainly you can choose to tell the story all at once in the beginning, but sometimes what is most powerful for your students is telling little bits at a time so that they are working towards the rest of the story during class.

If you're going to chunk the story into four parts, tell the first part in whatever landing shape your students arrive in. Next, have your students hold plank or a popped-up table top to engage the breath, bandhas and tell the second part of the story. Then, go through your sun A movements. When you're ready to tell part three, have your students hold chair and tell the third chunk. From there, go through your Sun B and Sun C movements. Finally, tell part four as your students hold closing, static postures of effort (i.e. plank pose or Buddha squat) and then finish class with your yin poses and Savasana.