

# **Rooted in Groundlessness: Embracing Fear in Changing Times**

by Sinéad McAteer RPP

The Earth element resonates with the polarities of safety and fear. Safety in the material sense is felt as the need for food and shelter, job security, and so on. The focus today is on inner safety. How we cultivate a sense of inner safety and feeling at home in our own beingness. As this grows, we find that attachment to objects in the outer world is reduced. We realise that we don't need anything much out there to stay fixed in order for us to feel safe. This realisation helps us to accept the ever-changing nature of life as we find out that the only constant is change. Right now, many people have a sense of the ground shifting beneath their feet. We are challenged to come to a deeper awareness of who we are beyond the old structures and securities. Greater inner peace and inner security are possible when we learn to fully embrace fear. As the emotional barriers created by fear are dissolved, we can open and create the sincere and loving connections we truly need.

## **Faces of Fear**

*'One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light,  
but by making the darkness conscious' – Carl Jung*

There are some profound fears that seem to be universal to the human experience – fear of rejection, fear of not being good enough, fear that we are not loveable, fear that there is something inherently wrong with us that we must keep secret. Fear of the dark - our shadow side, equally we may fear the light - our own power and potential. In addition, a certain type of fear has become apparent to me over the years, which I call an abject fear of the feminine. The feminine being the interior world, deep knowing, instinct, intuition, feeling, spirit, sensuality, and mystery. This kind of fear has many layers. It is reflected firstly in the neglect and dismissal of the feminine aspect of oneself, secondly in the oppression and abuse of women worldwide through the ages, and thirdly in the mistreatment of the generous body of mother earth herself. These are all inextricably linked. As we face this kind of fear in ourselves so I believe it is possible to heal it at all levels of manifestation.

Fear has a more pervasive influence over daily life than we may realise. Fear is the underlying cause of many supposedly ordinary behaviours and attitudes. If we are going to bring the light of awareness to fear, we need to look it squarely in the face. Some of the everyday masks that fear wears are: Coldness, jealousy, lying, defensiveness, cruelty, shutting down, competitiveness, feeling "less than", feeling "better than", grasping, sneering, criticism, giving too much, giving nothing at all, violence, envy, deceit, suspicion of everything and everyone, manipulation, disrespect, hatred, harassment, suppression, boasting, bullying, judgement, self-doubt, worry, giving one's power away to others, controlling, one-upmanship, possessiveness, prejudice, feeling separate from others, not listening (unable to hear one's own inner voice, unwilling to hear anyone else), denial, anxiety, contempt, harshness, cynicism, gossip, begrudgery. The list could go on. These are a fairly ugly bunch and all too familiar. In fact, some of these are so commonplace we may wonder what a person empty of all this would look like? A free and peaceful person is the answer - which is what we all want for ourselves.

There are many reasons why we may forget ourselves and succumb to fear-based behaviour. Culture and conditioning which encourages living from the ego only plays a part. Also, personal history, old hurts and traumas reaching way back to earliest experiences. On top of these may be thick armour taken on to protect the vulnerable self against further attack. It is not my wish to speculate about causes here, each person being so complex and unique. Life will urge us to explore and heal. As old patterns tend to repeat, our life

experience will constantly present opportunities to look within at what is really going on. The good news is all these habits are abundant fertiliser for the flowering consciousness. Underneath and beyond all fearful tendencies is a person with the potential to be caring and kind; a person with infinite capacity for love. If we are not our fear and all its faces, then who are we?

### **Bridging Ether and Earth - Self-Inquiry: Who Am I?**

The search for self, spiritual journey, whatever we call it, comes down to one question – Who am I? The ego, or sense of separate self, needs to identify and attach to something in order to feel real. The greater the hold fear has over us, the tighter our grip on labels and trophies of all kinds: roles, worldly success, status, academic achievement, physical attributes, beauty, money and so on. These of course are fine and wonderful things in themselves. It is the seeking of a sense of self in them – in other words, attachment to them – that we know is the root of so much suffering.

The ego is lonely and hungry for love. Sometimes when we feel famished we eat up all the wrong foods which poison rather than nourish. We do and say all the wrong things, which create the opposite of what we really wanted. This is why all genuine spiritual teachings point to the same thing – that the love we need is within, and forgetting this causes us to suffer and to harm others. The ego will identify with anything it can get its hands on. Identification through the lens of the elements looks like this: Through Earth we believe 'I am what I have', Water 'I am what I feel', Fire 'I am what I do', and Air 'I am what I think'. The energy becomes more and more refined as we move upward through the chakra system. Our spiritual quest pushes us to reach up into Ether, wherein lies the pure sense of 'I am'. This is who we are looking for – ourselves. Awareness of our self beyond labels.

In the body, the polarities of:

- ≈ spirit and matter,
- ≈ formless and form,
- ≈ surrender and control,

are played out in the throat and neck centre where Ether and Earth meet.

The neck is a major control centre since we consciously decide whether to hold back, or express freely, through the throat. At the neck and throat we are given a choice: clear communication of the truth of who we really are, or holding back - surrender to life or trying to control it. Clear harmonious ether aligns us with truth, listening, connection to deep self and the infinite ethereal realm. This is why meditation on sound and hearing consciousness is so powerful, it resonates directly with ether. The condition of the throat centre, what we give voice to and our ability to listen, will tell us something of the state of ether and earth. We may inquire inwardly then. Are these in balance? Is one dominating at the expense of the other? Has fear taken over, closing up the throat centre, shutting down the ability to listen, to hear and express the truth? Harmonious ether brings us ever back to the sense of 'I am', beyond all form. The other elements will always play out in our lives: fiery *doing*, watery *feeling*, airy *thought* and *form* of earth. With balanced ether, all our thinking, feeling, doing, and having become infused with the energy of the deep self and less and less ego-driven.

Ether is fed primarily through stillness and spiritual practice. Our self-inquiry must be sincere and authentic. It has been said that if we use spiritual practice as avoidance, we will never be free. And we are all yearning for freedom. Freedom from old entrenched habits of mind and self-imposed limits. It takes a special mixture of vigilance and gentleness to face ourselves, really face what is going on for us in the moment. Being physically grounded in the body is essential as earth must balance out ether. Assimilation is a quality of earth. To truly assimilate experiences and spiritual awareness, earth must be in balance. We

cannot be fully present or embody our spiritual essence while in a state of ungrounded distraction and agitation. Any full body prayer will help, such as yoga or chi kung (particularly focusing on the earthy bones, spine, and clearing cold fear out of the kidneys).

### **Embracing Opposites**

*'what disturbs and then nourishes has everything we need...' – David Whyte*

Our gentle presence then stays with the experience in the moment. Feeling it in the body, watching the mind, not turning away, just staying. When we do this, we realise that all of life is a spiritual teaching and the real practice occurs when we are off the cushion or out of the church and facing life full on. It means free-falling at times, being with groundlessness, not knowing what is next. It means making friends with death, dying to old parts of us, opening to the unexpected. To embrace death is to create new life, these are the natural cycles.

When we go deeply into something, the opposite inevitably reveals itself. This is pure Polarity. I sometimes think the most manic and extreme acts of ego are an attempt by the deep self to break ground. By deliberately watching the play of fear, recognising that we are not it, it begins to churn over into a compost to feed the deep self. To stay with yourself in your fear is an act of self-love. What you are actually doing is staying with a frightened part of yourself, one that is crying out for your attention. This in turn reduces the habit of fear and creates more space for the real self to shine through. Like a lotus growing in the mud, it is only by embracing the non-beautiful that we come to the beautiful. We realise the beautiful and non-beautiful live very close to each other. The choice to act from fear or love is made moment by moment. We may never be completely free of fear, but we can minimise the havoc it causes by simply recognising it and remembering who we really are.

I read somewhere that love is the opposite of fear. But I believe that love has no opposite; it simply is all that is. It is beyond duality. Fear may be the perceived absence of love, but love is always there. We just don't always feel love. Maybe we weren't treated with love by people who themselves couldn't feel it. One of the truest things I ever read is this simple statement: 'Hurt people, hurt people.' People who are hurt, hurt other people. It's easy to see how this can escalate so that soon everyone around has forgotten who they are. It takes courage to stop, embrace the pain and say – enough! Perhaps the *opposite* of fear is trust. When we are engulfed in fear maybe we have lost trust in the existence of love at all. This is one of the most terrible aspects of fear; it is excruciating to human beings to lose a sense of trust and hope. Trust in what? Trust in our own innate goodness. Trust that we are not our fear. Trust in our worthiness and deserving. Trust in the benevolence of the Universe. Trust in the friendliness of life. Trust in our own power. Trust in love. Trust that love will always guide us in the correct use of power.

### **Receiving the Blessing**

*'I learned that it is the weak who are cruel, and that gentleness is to be expected only from the strong...Those who do not know fear are not really brave, for courage is the capacity to confront what can be imagined.'*

*– Leo Rosten*

In Native American traditions, blessings are seen in a broader context than we sometimes see them. A blessing could be something that brings you joy and comfort for example. Equally, anything that has helped you to grow, realise your strength or deepen your compassion is considered a blessing. If we could frame our experiences this way, we might be less afraid. It would ease much of the suffering created by struggle and resistance to what is. Often, we recognise in hindsight how much we grew through facing the crisis times. In truth, we don't always need to wait for a long time to pass to receive the blessing.

This is easier said than done, especially when we are feeling intense pain. It takes practice, and a commitment to being totally honest with ourselves. The more we watch what arises in the moment, the more likely we are to feel deeply, feel right through the pain into the stillness. This means we must stay in touch inwardly. It does not mean, however, that we have to understand why things happen as they do. Our "why's" may never be answered. There is great liberation in acceptance without the rational mind figuring everything out. As long as we run from our experience, suppress, deny, or otherwise avoid it, we rob ourselves of the hidden treasure within it. We must have the courage to dive right in and through, not half way, but all the way. We have to be brave and go deep. Only then can we touch the indestructible in us, and reclaim our strength and beauty. This has worked for me and it can work for you too. We may even find ourselves giving thanks right in the middle of the storm.

The journey from head to heart is the biggest adventure of our lives. It is not the easiest path and the distractions are many. It challenges us to be tenacious and strong in holding to our truth, our choices, our right work, creative life, or whatever has meaning for us. To see through the illusion and fickleness of the ego, to see who we truly are and who others truly are, sometimes takes all the courage we can summon. We must be willing to move from fear through the "tender, shaky" place inside as Pema Chodron puts it, to come home to the sacred ground of our own heart.

#### Lakota Prayer

Wakan Tanka, Great Mystery,  
teach me how to trust  
my heart,  
my mind,  
my intuition,  
my inner knowing,  
the senses of my body,  
the blessings of my spirit.  
Teach me to trust these things  
so that I may enter my Sacred Space  
and love beyond my fear,  
and thus Walk in Balance  
with the passing of each glorious Sun.

---

*Sinéad McAteer is a Registered Polarity Therapy Practitioner. Visit [www.siomha.com](http://www.siomha.com). First published in the Ontario Polarity Therapy Associations newsletter, Energy Currents, Spring 2010.*