

How We Disguise our Fears by Kathie Brodie

Fear is insidious. It doesn't come knocking at the door hat in hand, it slithers under the window sash when you least expect it. If it came calling, we would be able to identify it. Then we could deal with it face to face. I am beginning to understand that our nature isn't such that we immediately think of fear when certain mundane things happen, or maybe I should say that I don't immediately think in those terms. It always surprises me when I figure it out. It is sort of a slap on the forehead I could have had a V-8 kind of dawning.

The other day I had a revelation about a relationship that I've never understood. It wasn't so bad (remember we are blind to our own foibles) that I thought I needed to "fix" it, but it was irksome, and fast working its way from irksome to annoying to frustrating to overwhelming. Those words describe my reaction but they don't really identify the emotion that was surfacing. It took some time to look inside and identify the actual problem and what to do about it. Believe it or not, getting in touch with emotions around this issue was a challenge for someone not used to labeling emotions. Feeling is one thing, but identifying is quite another.

I knew this was a bigger issue than it seemed on the surface because it kept coming back. So where does one start trying to untangle a ball of yarn? You just keep picking at it until something begins to unravel. I kept avoiding it, overlooking it, working around it, not quite ready to face it yet, but all the time knowing something had to be done. After all, when I was in my 20s, 30s and 40s this didn't seem to be a problem. (Of course one answer may be that my memory is finally failing too!)

When I read the Abraham Hicks Emotional Guidance Scale I realized I was going backwards. Not good! I realized on that scale (found on page 90 of *The Amazing power of Deliberate Intent*) I was going down from worry to blame to discouragement to anger rather than heading up the scale to joy in my life. It had been a repeated pattern, which I know means a life lesson, but I just couldn't seem to get on top of it. I would conquer it for a day or a few days or a week, but it never lasted long before I slipped back into my old habits. Okay, I confess. It was clutter. Yes, clutter. Clutter used to be confined to one area, my office, but then it managed to show up on the kitchen counters, then around the bathroom sink, then in the garage shelves. Are you getting the picture? Sometimes I would attack it with a vengeance, other times I would turn my back on it, and still other times I would just get so discouraged I felt like packing my bandana, hanging it on a stick over my shoulder and running away from home. I had the usual bucketful of excuses (if you ever need one, let me know because I have lots!) "I'm too busy", or "I'll do it this weekend", or "The weather is too nice to do it today", and so on.

Believe it or not, I have finally figured it out. The problem is not clutter, it is fear. Yes, plain old fear. I was listening to a conversation between two friends and the light bulb went on. Isn't it funny when some simple phrase floats across your consciousness and viola, clarity descends on you like a beautiful shawl? That's the way it happened for me.

As long as I had clutter, I could focus on the clutter and not look beneath it to the cause. It was a great excuse and it was all-consuming, the total problem was just the clutter, the

organization, the over-committed lifestyle, right? What I overheard my friend saying was that there is a certain pre-determined temperament that makes it very difficult for some people to deal with the unknown. Chaos is the unknown, so the higher the level of chaos in the lives of these people, the higher the level of fear. That's why at times I could clean my office and my counters and they would be fine, but other times the chaos a/k/a clutter was overwhelming. And as I look back, the times when I had the most clutter around was the times when I was changing careers or getting a divorce or I was worried about something "big" that was happening in my life. These were the times that I had the most fear of the unknown. All these years I was looking at it backwards; it wasn't the clutter causing the fear, it was the fear causing the clutter. Isn't that brilliant? Fear was the underlying culprit all the time just disguising itself as a superficial problem of clutter. I find it so interesting that it never occurred to me that there was anything underneath the clutter which was the actual cause and event, chicken and egg scenario. And then if I throw in Ego, I understand that Ego wants you to stay where you are because that is a comfortable and predictable place to be. Well, maybe not comfortable but at least it is predictable. Every time you get close to accomplishing something new, Ego is threatened because that would mean a change, and change involved the unknown so fear slithers back in so Ego does whatever it can to keep you back in your old patterns.

This realization made me actually face Fear with a capital F and analyze what I was fearing. It turned out to be getting out of my repeated pattern of failure (which I subconsciously believed would happen) in a new situation and changing that to believing I could succeed. I had succeeded many times in my life, but way down deep in my subconscious I was playing old tapes, hearing old parental voices of "Don't take a job away from a man", or "Men don't like women that are too successful". I also had a pocketful of false starts and failed ventures to give myself evidence to support my failure consciousness. When I took the time to face Fear and delve below the surface to the cause, I was able to actually pull out the old tapes and destroy them once and for all. What a revelation. I felt like shouting from the rooftops! It's Fear. Plain old Fear! Face it down, analyze it, understand it, and it will recede to a manageable level. It reminded me of pouring water on the wicked witch of the West in the Wizard of Oz. I came upon the realization almost by accident (just as Dorothy innocently splashed water on the Witch without knowing the outcome) but now the hidden basis of so many of my behaviors is recognizable!

It doesn't mean I don't have fear now but it does mean that I can recognize the warning signs when fear is getting a toe-hold. No longer is fear a concealed but constant companion. Now I think in terms of what is causing a pesky behavior. Is it fear-based? When those seemingly innocent things happen, like seeing the clutter creeping across the countertops again, I can quickly check in to my inner self and see where fear is hiding. It is actually an interesting exercise to take a step back and see if I can find the face of Fear hidden somewhere under the pile of recycled papers on the counter. Once I recognize it, I can face it down and smile smugly as I go about cleaning the counters. And all this came to me after overhearing a conversation between friends!