



How I Conquered My Fear

A good friend recently attended a Leadership Development seminar and shared a profound quote about fear:

“F.E.A.R. has two meanings –

Forget Everything And Run

OR

Face Everything And Rise.

The Choice is yours.”

I was faced with just such a stark choice during my training as a Life Coach. My years’ long struggle with fear had to come to a head there didn’t it? In fact, all my toxic baggage was dealt a deservedly severely harsh blow during that life-altering period.

One of our trainers gave us a wooden plank on the first day and instructed us to write our visions, goals and objectives. We had to lug it around with us everywhere but that was the easy part. The part about this wooden plank deal which tempted me to flee and never return was when he informed us that at the end of the training we would have to break our planks in half using our bare hands. The fear travelled from the tips of my toes to the top of my split ends in a matter of nanoseconds. What? I did not sign up for this! It does not say “break-wooden-plank-or-you-won’t-be-certified-as-a-life-coach” in the brochure! I was not even upset, no, I was AFRAID. Make that very afraid. My internal dialogue went something like this:

“I am not going to break that plank, I just know I won’t. Maybe I must just ask for my refund now? How embarrassing!”

The mental and emotional torture was relentless but I was so determined to experience the promised internal shift and transformation that I decided to hang in there and face my irrational fears down. I was truly ready to experience breakthroughs in my life and not depart this Earth a prisoner of emotions such as a fear. Fear is a big one for most, if not all, people. But we tend to look at people in certain positions who outwardly appear to “have it all together” and imagine that they do not ever get scared. Wrong. But those who are successful in life see fear for what it is and have embarked on journeys of personal development so that they can wake up every day and win at this marvellous game of life. Quite paradoxically, public speaking was a huge fear of mine. Imagine that, a former lecturer who has stood in front of literally hundreds and hundreds of students over a period of a decade actually struggled with public speaking!



Oh I loved lecturing and was on Cloud Nine in any lecture theatre but in other environments external to academia, I wasn't so comfortable. It had a lot to do with other internal deficits that I was secretly struggling with which in turn just made me a fearful mess of a person. I am sure that this will take many by surprise but that's fear for you, it's just so irrational.

So, the wooden plank brought it all back. I experienced palpitations and frequently entertained notions of walking out of class. I had visions of failing to break the plank and having to go home to tell my husband that I had failed. That plank became my nemesis and best friend because on it I had penned the most beautiful vision for my life and despite the internal fear wrangling, I knew that this was my opportunity, a once in a lifetime opportunity at that, to finally, finally break free. So I did not run. We would be in the middle of a lecture and addressing something else and I would interrupt, "About the plank..." My trainer would say, "Don't worry, you will break that plank when the time comes, you will conquer your fears once and for all. Forget about it and focus on the training. We will get you there." And I would nod trustingly but still wracked with fear of failure. My fellow coaches-in-training would say during breaks, "You've got to visualize the broken plank Mothepa, don't worry about the how, just see the outcome." And every time I tried to do that, the weirdest thing would happen: in my mind's eye I would see them break it but it was super difficult to see myself doing the same. When I came into focus, all I saw was a solid block of wood. But over a period of time, as I absorbed all the teachings about the inner workings of the mind, I gradually saw the broken plank and myself doing a victory jig. Indeed that day arrived and I broke that wooden plank with a Rocky Balboa-esque soundtrack playing loudly. I showed it no mercy and allowed it no quarter. I was done with fear. I was done with self-doubt. I was done with shrinking. I was ready to step into my purpose and the fullness of me and to live my life to the fullest.

So post the plank what has it been like? It has never been quite the same because I now even understand the biology of fear (in fact, when I next address this topic, I will deal with the science of fear so that people may understand that it is actually a natural, instinctive response to the phenomena of life which can be managed and overcome). And now if I experience even just a mild fluttering of fear, I tell it to stop and leave me be. I've got things to do here on Mother Earth. Something shifted for good internally and it is a deliciously liberating thing to have happen.

The oft-used phrase "feel the fear and do it anyway" can be a tad simplistic but in essence, it is true. But I would like to suggest that it would be worthwhile to invest in having a professional do some "fear work" with you so that you can get a firm handle on it once and for all. That phrase will mean so much more if you do the work. You will literally feel that slight fluttering but go ahead with confidence and do your absolute best. And also bear in mind that it also serves to remind you that you are still alive, so learn to live with it perhaps but let it know who's Boss. I wish you all nothing but a life of fearlessness and fullness. You deserve it.