

## Growth versus Protection

“Our true identity is to love without fear and insecurity.

Our higher potential finds us when we set our course in that direction.”

– Doc Childre, originator of the HeartMath System

An old Cherokee chief was teaching his grandson about life.

“A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy. “It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One wolf is evil. He is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, self-doubt and ego. The other is good. He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. This same fight is going on inside you and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about this for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The old chief simply replied, “The one you feed.”

I read this Cherokee parable recently. Written by an unknown author, it beautifully captures the concept of growth versus protection. The concept is based on the idea that there are two states of mind in which we can dwell: love and growth, or fear and protection. In reality, most people spend a little time in each but will have a principal frame of mind which determines how they move through the life experience.

The mother of all negative emotions is fear. It is the source of all of those feelings the chief attributes to the evil wolf. The mother of all positive emotions is love – love being the epitome of emotional freedom and stability – in the parable, love is the good wolf.

When you’re living in a state of fear, your world is small and getting smaller – you are “locked down” and looking to circle the wagons, as it were. Fear prompts you to view every person and situation with suspicion. As with any persistent state of mind, you begin to filter your experiences to support your perceptions and assertions. That is, you may have 10 experiences and only one could be construed as truly frightening, but when you’re coming from a place of fear, you will focus on the frightening experience

and disregard the other nine. This distortion will support your viewpoint. It makes little sense from a logical standpoint, but a fearful mindset is seldom rational.

In working with individuals in a therapeutic setting, I have observed that debilitating fear is often the result of underdeveloped self-esteem and an inadequate set of coping mechanisms. In and of itself, fear is neither good nor evil. The emotion of fear is present to keep you safe and alert you to potential danger. Left unchecked, however, fear can create a downward spiral of emotional energy (our lack of self-worth and resourcefulness created the spiral) and as we careen downward, our self-worth and ability to cope is further eroded until we arrive at a place of helplessness and apathy.

There's a great scene from the original *Jaws* movie where Roy Scheider's character comes face-to-face with the great white menace for the first time. He stumbles, unbelieving, back into the cabin and says to fellow shark hunter, Robert Shaw, "You're gonna need a bigger boat." In all likelihood, to move from a place of fear and protection to one of love and growth, you're gonna need a bigger and better coping strategy.

Psychologist and best-selling author Judith Orloff claims there are four questions we must ask ourselves in order to initiate an upward emotional spiral and transform fear.

Question Number 1: what are my top five fears? It's crucial to know what pushes your buttons so that you can name what scares you. Says Orloff, "When you name them, they can't get you." When you begin to recognize the fearful forces at play in your life, you'll be in a much better position to deal effectively with them.

Question Number 2: where do my fears come from? It's important to backtrack through your past to determine where fears originated. Did they come from your parents? Did you have an abusive, neglectful or narcissistic parent who couldn't see you for who you were? Don't misinterpret; this question is designed to bring awareness, not to allow you to lay blame and avoid self-responsibility for your life and choices. When reflecting back over your life and experiences, remember to ask, "What can I draw from this experience that will help me to become a stronger and more heart-centred person?" To catastrophize or get into the "what if's" is the worst thing you can do.

Question Number 3: what people or situations set off the fear? Answer this question so that you can begin to recognize your fear triggers and those times that you knee-jerk into an old defence pattern or self-defeating way of thinking or being.

Question number 4: what change can I make to be freer? What courageous steps can you take to offset fear so that it doesn't dominate your life? These questions are a great starting point. Remember, no step is too small. Instead of being mired in a place of fear and languishing there, start doing something positive today. Focus on the doable and if you need help, reach out for it. Explains Orloff, if we beat ourselves up a little less today than we did yesterday, than we're making progress.

A Swedish proverb translates into, "Fear less, hope more, eat less, chew more, whine less, breathe more, talk less, say more, love more, and all good things will be yours."

You have a choice about how you see anything. Maybe you cannot control the events of your outer life but you can control your attitude and that is the source of your power. You can choose to starve the fear and nurture the love – to feed the good wolf.