

Fear

Talking with a friend of mine who has recently gone through a tough trial after spending 18 days in a hospital caring for her husband, a comment arose regarding the fact that after a specific age we should not have to be providing for anybody else. She is of course right and ideally, this is the way it should be; but in reality it works in a different way.

Each of us knows how challenging life is these days. Partly due to the self imposed obligations and responsibilities, we continue pulling our own wagon during decades, and we never really reach a limit to our collection of mountains to climb and challenges to achieve. Truth be said, it is not easy for some to pull away from being workaholics.

Family members are also another reason. How can we stop helping our loved ones when they have a real challenge, and I am not talking about contributing with money for anything superficial? We can always turn our eyes away from them but this does not really work, especially if in the past we have shared a deep emotional connection. The conclusion was that whatever we choose to do for others, we should do it with joy, even if it is sometimes seems as too challenging. We choose to become unconditional friends to our loved ones, which is easy.

After several decades of roaming around planet earth, something that I have been forced to learn is that my fears are mostly imaginary. I have been afraid of being alone, afraid of living in poverty and not being able to provide for my basic needs or those of others. I have been afraid of challenges, such as the time when I became sick with vertigo and had to stop working for many months while having small children and a wife to care for. I also experienced fear when I decided to deposit all of the remaining money I had after a divorce in the stock market, and then lost it. Yet, I am still here, healthy, a bit fat, strong and happy.

What a toll fear has on our lives! No villain or criminal, no ecological or natural disaster wrecks havoc in our lives as much as fear does. What is even more interesting is that fear is nurtured within us, same as everything else in life; although in the case of fear this is an emotional virus we are helping grow. We open our gates to fear, similar to the old tales of vampires that required that the soon-to-be victim to invite it to go into his or her home before hell broke loose. Looking back into history, by far and large, fear has been the trigger of most horrors and miseries among human beings.

When I look ahead and contemplate an unknown number of pending years in my life, I prefer to see a series of opportunities to live in better ways than I have so far. I try to imagine the best path to choose for me, not based on my previous emotional needs and realities, but in who I am now. Fear pops up like a Jack in the Box, screaming at me: what are you going to do if you do not have a steady income of cash? Will you leave your profession behind? What will this decision bring to your mental processes?

How will I function internally if there are no more timeframes to live by, no more obligations to be in my office all day long, to complete bureaucratic matrix, review financial documents, prepare budgets, find solutions to people's requests and demands of all kinds, deal with not so hidden vendettas; or to catch my briefcase and go and fly at weird hours of the day or night? How will I be able to function without the whip cracking at my ears (especially when it is me who holds it)? Blah!

Money is always needed, this is true. But the question is, when do we decide to push fear away? When will our love affair with fear move away? I believe the answer lies on treating ourselves with respect and with love. We cannot give the best of us to others if we do not believe in it. If compassion is not practiced first on our behalf, how can we share it? We have to be friends to our own self before we can be friends to others.

Life is not only designed by love itself, but is filled with examples of generosity and joy, friendship and greatness. I read an article about two disabled men, one blind, the other one a double amputee, who have spent the last thirteen years replanting trees in an eight hectare plot of land in rural China in order to prevent floods from damaging their small village as well as to improve the environment. They receive a small income from the local government for their efforts.

The two men, Jia Haixia and Jia Wenqui went to school together in the village of Yeli in North East China. Wenqui says they have always been like brothers. Wenqui, a double hand amputee, leads the way through the forest, guiding Haixa, his blind friend, who holds his empty jacket sleeve. When they reach the river, he gets on Wenqui's back in order to cross the fast moving water without falling.

‘I am in his hands, he is my eyes?’ says Haixa. ‘We are good partners?’. Haixa was born blind in one eye, and had an accident in the year 2000 that made him lose the vision in the remaining eye. Wenqui lost his two arms since age 3, when he touched a high voltage cable lying on the ground.

So far they have planted an estimated 10,000 trees. The people from the village are helping them fix their tools, sometimes carrying saplings to be planted. Haixa received recent news from his doctors that bring the possibility of recovering his sight on one eye in the near future. Still Haixa insists he will continue planting trees until the day he dies.

If either of these two men had looked at life with fear, they would have denied themselves the privilege of knowing how much they have contributed back to life. No matter how limited they both are physically, they are real examples to follow by so many millions who indulge in self pity, at times, me included. We have such little trust in love; our lives become difficult because of this grip we hold on fear.

In the end, the way to define a friendship is by understanding the meaning of the word love. Perhaps St. Paul's 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 describes it best:

‘If I speak the tongue of men or Angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind; it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrong.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails...?’

Dorothy Thompson, an American journalist and radio broadcaster once said that only when we are no longer afraid, do we begin to live. We have so many virtues within, so much potential to do anything we want and to achieve everything we desire. There are no limitations. Destiny is only a mistaken concept. We are the engineers of our own lives. Perhaps the most important issue at stake is to remain of the nature of fear, which is mostly like an overacting soap opera diva. The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.

We have so much to be grateful for, so many opportunities to improve our lives and those of others. It is time to live away from the limitations imposed by fear. The decision belongs to each of us.