

FEAR

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Fear is a fundamental emotion, even as the desire for survival is a driving instinct of all living things. The prevalence of fear in human experience is not surprising in view of the fact that life on this planet has always been a precarious affair.

Species survive only by the destruction of weaker species or by developing habits and modes of life that protect them from stronger ones. Individuals within a species often survive by destroying weaker members of their own kind in response to the urge to obtain food and maintain life.

The human race is no exception. Cannibalism apart, the policy of survival by preying on the weaker members is exemplified by war and by various forms of exploitation.

Man, therefore, as well as the rest of nature has to survive in a definitely hostile world. Fear is felt in the presence of a threat to security. The awareness of danger, of a menace to well-being or to life itself, engenders fear and alerts the protective instinct of self-defence.

The Nature of Fear

The emotional sensation or feeling of fear is associated with a whole gamut of physical disturbances and phenomena. These involve the whole body from bristling scalp to freezing soles. It is maintained by one school that the physical disturbances cause the fear, by others equally eminent that the reverse is the case.

Probably the actual sequence of events is on this wise. The presence of an enemy or the threat of hostile circumstances, immediate or distant, evokes an awareness of danger. This in turn alerts the body and the mind to defence or to escape. A wide variety of altered or speeded up metabolic processes ensue; prominent among these, and possibly induced by them, is the sensation of fear, of recoil, revulsion, hate, horror.

In other words if there is no awareness of danger, no perception of any threat to security, there will be no somatic dis-

turbance and no sensation of fear. Children will often do apparently courageous things, walk up to a savage dog and fondle it, jump from a height, dash into a big wave, behaving in a quite fearless manner. This is not due to exceptional bravery but simply to a total absence of the awareness of danger. It is the burnt child that dreads the fire. Fear comes with the perception of danger to life or limb or well-being in any sphere.

Fear might, therefore, be defined as the emotional effect of physical response to awareness of danger.

Concomitants of Fear

The immediate response to awareness of danger is tension. Mind and muscle are alerted, probably by endocrine reaction, and tensed with a view to fight or flight. Whether in any particular circumstances the urge is to resist or to run the whole body must adjust itself to the paramount and pertinent matter of survival.

In response to this demand on the body's resources certain physical phenomena occur. The heart races, the hair stands on end, the face blanches, sweat pours, muscles quiver, limbs go cold. An excessive response may even paralyse, the victim becoming incapable of movement, glued to the spot with horror, petrified with fear.

In addition there are further disturbances; digestion is delayed or ceases, bowel movements are speeded up, circulation through the kidneys is increased, sphincter muscles are relaxed, liver function is disturbed. In fact the response to danger is one which affects the whole body.

Fear is primarily protective in purpose, but if fear persists and recurs, as is especially likely in man with his greater powers of perception and foreboding, it may prove damaging to health by reason of prolonged disturbance of vital function in one sphere or another.

One physical concomitant of the alarm reaction which is less well recognised is "the smell of fear." This peculiar and distinctive odour given off by the body in fear is seldom appreciable by the more or less atrophied olfactory sense of civilised man. It is, however, easily detected by animals who are infu-

riated by it with the result that their attacking and destructive instincts are aroused. An animal can perceive not only abject fear but even a sense of uneasiness in its presence, a not-quite-sure feeling, and it may snarl or bite or attack in consequence. No mere show of bravery will deceive an animal if this uneasiness is present, even subconsciously.

Form of Fear

Fear like other sensations may be felt in varying degrees. The intensity of the fear may be strangely out of proportion to the seriousness or extent of the danger involved. But little fear may be felt in the midst of battle or in a situation of extreme peril while a sensitive person may be terrified at the proximity of a spider or recoil in horror from a mouse.

Again, the forms which fear may take are many and often curious. Some people are terrified of thunder, some are scared in the dark; one individual may be driven almost frantic by feathers, another may be afraid to cross the street, or ill at ease in a crowd, or scared when alone.

Fear may be rational, in the presence of obvious danger or threat to safety, but quite often fear obtrudes its ugly head for no reason whatsoever. This intangible fear of something untoward going to happen, an indescribable sensation of insecurity or uncertainty, may swoop out of the blue like a hawk or may sweep over its victim like a tidal wave.

Some fears are difficult to explain or to relate to any remembered experience of fright or terror. They may possibly be accounted for by inherited ancestral or race memories. Whatever be the explanation such fears are very real and very unpleasant.

The Fear Remedies

It is not surprising that many of the remedies in the homœopathic materia medica have fear as a prominent mental symptom in their drug picture. It is interesting to note further that most of these are among the violent poisons, namely drugs which in their crude state are full of menace to health and life.

ACONITUM NAPELLUS, wolfsbane, "probably the most poisonous plant in Britain", is associated with frenzied fear, sudden

panic, fear of crossing the road, horror at the thought of an operation or other ordeal, the shocked state following a sudden fright or terrifying experience.

ARGENTUM NITRICUM, lunar caustic, a strong corrosive. This drug has some special fears, especially of being shut in a closed space such as a train or a tube in a tunnel; also fear of heights, of water, which "draws", of crowds. There is fearful apprehension before any kind of ordeal, having to appear in public, preparing for a journey, taking an examination and the like.

ARSENICUM ALBUM, white arsenic, the homicidal poisoner's favourite weapon, has a great deal of fear and anxiety. Fear of death; fear of disease with despair of recovery; fear of being left alone, especially in the dark.

CAMPHORA, which can produce collapse and deathly coldness, has fear of death, of the dark and of anything nearby in the dark; the fear is absent during the day time but may amount to a frenzied terror at night.

DIGITALIS, fox-glove, the heart poison, has great fear and anxiety concerning the future; it also has a paralytic type of fear with clutching at the heart and a feeling that the least movement may cause the heart to stop beating.

GELSEMIUM, a poisonous plant with a paralysing action on the nervous system, has fear of falling, fear of solitude, fear of "what I may do", a fearful apprehension before any ordeal, associated with tremulousness.

GLONOINUM, nitroglycerine, has sudden almost explosive bursts of terror with a horrible apprehension of impending catastrophe also fear of being poisoned.

LACHESIS, the venom of the dreaded bushmaster snake, has an intolerable anxiety with fear of death, and dread of night; there is also a peculiar fear of "someone behind her", a menace from the rear, a snake lurking in the grass. The fear of LACHESIS is often associated with a constrictive choking feeling in the throat.

PHOSPHORUS, a virulent poison in its yellow form, has a galaxy of fears, possibly due to very vivid imagination—fear of the dark, of death, of disease, of the future, of fear itself, in-

definite, intangible, of robbers, of solitude, of spiders, of being suffocated, of thunderstorms.

The foregoing are but examples of the predominance of one or other form of fear in the drug-picture of a great many of the remedies used homœopathically.

Conquest of Fear

Courage is not fearlessness but carrying on in spite of fear. An awareness of divine commission, divine companionship and divine compassion is of immeasurable assistance in this task. Fear is natural in the face of actual or imminent danger of one sort or another. If not overcome it may incapacitate and interfere with the prompt evasive or defensive action that is called for.

A terrifying experience may induce a state of shock and leave its victim shaken and, possibly, shaking. In such circumstances ACONITUM is of the utmost value, and if injury has been sustained it can profitably be followed by ARNICA.

Sometimes the fear produced by some untoward experience persists, or present distress of mind or body may by careful enquiry be traced back to some experience of a frightening nature perhaps quite remote. In such case OPIUM has been found to be a most effective remedy.

It is, however, very often the more irrational and intangible fears that prove troublesome and difficult to eradicate. Moreover they may be accompanied by physical symptoms which are components of the psycho-somatic fear complex. The "lawful" cause of such symptoms no longer exists but by a process known as the conditioned reflex the symptom may persist or recur in response to fears which lack any substance but are harboured in the subconscious.

Such fears must be hauled out into the daylight and recognised for what they are, shadows without substance, figments of the imagination, images thrown onto the screen of awareness by subconscious suggestion.

Having been realised for what they are or, rather, for what they are not, these fears cease to inspire terror and they can be discounted, disregarded and discarded. In this connection many

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—*The Homœopathic Recorder*, July, '51

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of the remedies used homœopathically can be of great assistance. Their use is far preferable to that of sedatives and narcotics which merely blunt the appreciation of fear and may produce depression and unease of mind and body on their own account.

The use of a remedy based on the study of the whole individual and on all the facts of past experience and the present situation can materially help in removing not only the sensation of fear but the many associated physical symptoms as well.

—*Homœopathy*, Dec., '57
