

Our Fears, Our Ethics, Ourselves

"Fear is not the natural state of civilized people."

- Aung Ang Suu Kyi

"Collective fear stimulates herd instinct, and tends to produce ferocity toward those who are not regarded as members of the herd."

- Bertrand Russell

"Perhaps the most important thing we can undertake toward the reduction of fear is to make it easier for people to accept themselves, to like themselves."

- Benaro Overstreet

"Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live."

- Dorothy Thompson

The past month has given me pause to consider the issues that seem so much to affect me and affect you – events of our everyday lives. The things we take for granted: working, breathing, sleeping, home, friends, and family. Perhaps this is more of a subject for Thanksgiving; however, this month's newsletter is not about being thankful. This month's newsletter is about our actions and behavior in "everyday" life.

What is it that governs the decisions we make and the actions we take? I dare say that many of our behaviors and actions are based upon our internalized fears, whether known in a conscious way or buried into the unconscious mind.

When I walk down a dark alley and see what appears to be a group of young men silhouetted by the glow of the streetlight, what is it I feel? And what is it that I do? Do the facts support my fears? Or am I acting out of "common sense"? What comes first? And where, in all of this, are my ethics about humanity?

When I see a homeless person begging what is it I feel? What is it I do? And what is it I think? And where are my ethics in all of this? By what basis did I take my action to walk on by, or

give wide berth, or give a few coins, or stop and chat? How do I decide what to do? Or do I even take the time to make decisions?

When we view a marginalized person, a bi-racial couple, a same-sex couple, a person of different ethnicity, colour or other socio-economic-cultural strata, or even a transsexual, how do we act? How do we behave? What drives us? Our fears or our ethics?

It seems to me that perhaps it is more difficult to be honest with our feelings. Perhaps our feelings and fears are very powerful; yet none of us would feel proud to acknowledge some of our culturally biased and irrational fears. Yet they do exist in all of us. They are real. They have been inherited over the generations and thousands of years. They are so ingrained that it is hard to even know that it is not "common sense" or "religious beliefs." It is just plain old FEAR of what we do not know. Fear of what we have no experience of in our own lives.

In World War II it was the Japanese-Americans who were interned in concentration camps. Not so long ago blacks and whites were not allowed to date or marry one another. In some parts of the United States it is still frowned upon and dangerous. An openly gay man cannot serve in the military. Supposedly straight men and women serve in the armed forces, and yet it seems the call of nature for heterosexuals does not seem to have diminished the capacity for making war. Separate drinking fountains for blacks and whites existed at one time in our history. Separate school existed for the races. Separate colleges. Asylums for committing women who were too independently-minded existed in the 19th century. All of this was not based upon rational, ethical thought. It was based upon individual and society's irrational fears.

Where did our ethics go? Those guidelines for the humane behavior of one human being to another? The rules by which we interact, play, work, and connect with one another can be based upon fear or ethics. It appears the worst of

~POINTS OF VIEWS~

Helen Hill, MA, MFT Intern (IMF #48896)
Supervised by Cheryl Grant, MA, MFT (Lic #35887)

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such behaviors are fear-based. And it would appear that the best of our behaviors are ethics-based.

As a population of individuals it seems of late that we have been encouraged to be fearful, and to base our actions and behaviors on fear and suspicion. The awful secret is that fear makes for lousy decision-making. Because, behind fear is the demon of ignorance.

In our history we have found that our ethics said it was wrong to keep some people slaves and others not. It was fear that said, "We can't have that! Why all sorts of terrible things will happen if we give slaves their freedom!"

In our history our Supreme Court used ethics to hold that separate but equal is yet another demonstration of inhumanity and fear and ignorance.

The ground-breaking civil rights laws came about because of civil disobedience. A marginalized people rebelled and rioted because they were tired of rules and laws being applied to them which were based upon fear and ignorance. These laws and behaviors were only overturned when people of good conscience and ethics, of all colours and stripes, decided that the fear was unfounded, evil, irrational, and destructive to all of us as human beings.

A human being has certain rights to live NOT in fear. And this implies that we must live in our ethics. Can we live in our ethics? Are we truly willing to look at our own fears? Do we have the power and strength of our high-minded words to carry us into our ethics and away from our fears?

The challenge is to face ourselves and our fears; both conscious and unconscious. It is the only way to grow into the best and noblest we aspire to be. It is the only true way to embrace our ethics, by understanding our fears. It is in this way that we can embrace ourselves, our potential of being humane, and the real meaning of redemption.

As always, I believe deeply in psychotherapy as one path to explore our conscious and unconscious fears; to find our way in this world to our best and noblest and ethical self.

- Helen Hill

"Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blind-folded fear."

- Thomas Jefferson

"Ethics, too, are nothing but reverence for life. This is what gives me the fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, promoting, and enhancing life, and that destroying, injuring, and limiting life are evil."

- Albert Schweitzer

Helen Hill, MA
2211 Corinth Avenue, Suite 203
Los Angeles, CA 90064
310-779-7795
<http://www.helen-hill.com>