
Defining the ‘Enemy’ of Fearlessness

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[Note: The original 1997 version of this Technical Paper was never properly put on a digital format and into the physical format of a covered document. This re-typing and formatting was accomplished in February 2007. Only the odd English grammar change was made, and there are a few times I added a word in square brackets for completeness of an idea. -RMF]

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to define the ‘enemy’ of fearlessness. However, this is a task that would require a full-length book to do justice to the complexity of the notion of fearlessness in historical and philosophical perspective. At best, I will barely scratch the surface of this topic here. At first glance one may say ‘fear’ is the obvious enemy of fearlessness. As it turns out this is no doubt true but exactly how ‘fear’ shows up in this article as the enemy, may hold a few surprises for the reader.

Within the last year of writing a book called the *Spectrum of ‘Fear’* and researching a diversity of author’s views through time, it became evident that there is a strong tradition and several new “movements” (both secular and religious) that are *anti-fearlessness*. These attacks come from Judeo-Christian roots to postmodernist deconstructionist philosophy and ‘new age’ or watered-down “transpersonal” spirituality. This trend of attacks, filled with misunderstandings and omissions, on the notion of fearlessness as a potential for humanity has disturbed me deeply. It is a wake-up call for anyone involved in the ISOF agenda to challenge and clarify rationally their own views (as well as others) on ‘fear’ and fearlessness. If we are fighting for liberation, it is a good idea to know thy enemy—both *within* in how we think, value, believe and decide—and *without* in how others think, value, believe and decide. Oppression is always working to undermine the fearlessness agenda on this planet. I’ve called that the ‘Fear’ Project.

The current understanding popularity of de Becker’s (1997) book *The gift of fear: Survival signals that protect us from violence*, is the latest in a long history of various “survivalist” attempts to devalue and dismiss the possibility of a world based on fearlessness (Sacred Warriorship). Only a few issues back in the *ISOF Communique* I wrote about the battle and

conflict between “survivor leaders” and “Sacred Warrior leaders” in ISOF as an organization. De Becker, like so many other anti-fearlessness writers, is wanting to revalue ‘fear’ into a natural and normal survival mechanism that actually is a “gift.” I’ve had many people in and outside of ISOF say, “Robert, you are focused too much on ‘fear’ and trying to make it ‘wrong’ (sounding ‘old school,’ dualistic and totalitarian like ‘evil’ used to be thought of by fundamentalist Christians and Muslims etc.), so let’s just forget about that and focus on ‘Love,’ kindness (less on challenging) and building community and accepting that ‘fear’ is part of being human.” My response: “I’d gladly accept ‘fear’ is part of being human, if I saw that was true—but it isn’t.” The very definition of *inherent nature* does not include ‘fear’ in the ISOF model.

Our *human nature* is fearlessness—which involves discharging and re-evaluating (healing) any ‘fear’ patterns (distress, trauma, hurts) immediately. Our socialized *human condition* makes ‘fear’ normal and modern psychology and Western philosophy make it even “natural.” I’ve spent many years distinguishing and refining more and more subtle definitions of ‘fear’ because of this movement to first “normalize” and then “naturalize” that (‘fear’) which is illhealthy and oppressive to living and human systems. To make ‘fear’ a gift, which is increasingly a popular trend as we will see, is utter twisted “spiritualization” of the most dangerous kind—simply an act of complete dissociation from Reality and Truth. But granted, it is an idea that sells well in our insane culture.

Generally, I’ve seen hundreds of people come into ISOF with enthusiasm (I suppose their own despairing “hope”) for liberation work. Their “fantasy” soon collapses when the going gets tough and their deep terror surfaces with the demand of living the path of fearlessness. I could count a truck load of distressed people in survival mode in ISOF who have attempted, more or less consciously, to undermine the very core of the ISOF philosophy of fearlessness while they are experiencing terror (denied or otherwise). The common plaintive (“victim”) cry from that truck load is “I don’t want to hear another challenge that I’m coming from ‘fear’!” I say, that’s tough and all I hear is more cowardly patterns of distress, ‘fear’ and mistrust coming from isolation—well learned in this coping survivalist culture. It is essential to fearlessness to challenge all ‘fear’ patterns for exactly what they are—they are agents of oppression. To not challenge those ‘fear’ patterns constantly in ISOF is to collude, like so many so called “liberation movements” do, with oppression itself—and that is more than a little hypocritical—and that is merely maintaining the “master coping” agenda’s of the “survivalist” camp. I’ll have none of that!

Generally, I've witnessed a shift in the attitudes toward 'fear' in the late 1970's-80s, where 'fear' was seen as oppositional to 'Love' and liberation (influenced by Eastern spirituality in the Americas, particularly *A Course in Miracles*), to now, a reversal trend in the 90s where 'fear' is taking on a more Western context and *courage* is preferred to fearlessness—all as part of rejecting the very demanding view of Eastern spiritual understanding of 'fear' and fearlessness and a view of Reality that is 'no fear' (e.g., Alan Watts, Chris Griscom, Robert Masters and Ken Wilber's work). This 90s rejection has also included the dismissal of Sacred Warrior traditions and their understanding of 'fear' and fearlessness (e.g., Yaqui with Don Juan, or Tibetan Shambhala with Chogyam Trungpa, or Merlin-King Arthur to name a few). To this date, I know of no critical analysis that exists of these anti-fearlessness perspectives. This article is a humble effort to start a critical social dialogue on the value of *fearlessness* in light of the critics' views and claims.

The vision of fearlessness began with the co-creation of The In Search of Fearlessness (ISOF) Project in 1989. *Fearlessness* is the tradition of Sacred Warriorship that the great Buddhist teacher/Rinpoche Chogyam Trungpa (1985) wrote about in his most important book *Shambhala: The sacred path of the warrior*—which was instrumental in the foundational philosophy and approach taken by ISOF. I've recently written that one of the key purposes of post-adult education in ISOF is to nurture **fearlessness vision** in all people (see "The New School" documents). The current window display of the Fearlessness Centre says, "No 'fear' as society's goal!" The No 'Fear' Party has been cooking up its political agenda in the ISOF background for the last nine months. The definition of fearlessness, no 'fear' and fearlessness vision will follow later as a definition of 'fear' itself unfolds from this research. Another purpose of this article is to articulate some of the specific and collective 'fear' forces of oppression in this world that are currently attacking the development and Reality of fearlessness vision.

This has to be a conflict and concern for ISOF, if our purpose is to nurture fearlessness vision. This is nothing to be afraid of in any absolute way. We may experience 'fear' but we don't have to think or act from 'fear.' ISOF has 'enemies' and we have to respect their power of destruction just as we would respect the power of a grizzly bear sow with cubs. We don't have to destroy our 'enemies,' but rather merely contradict them until they discharge and heal, leaving 'fear' nothing but fragments of illusionary dramas with no Truth or True Power. We in ISOF are not creating enemies

from nothing but merely restimulating 'fear' (and enemies already there) in all their oppressive forms to surface when true fearlessness is put out as a human option and possibility for freedom/liberation and sustainable health. Only enemies can create enemies as 'fear' engenders more 'fear.' When 'fear' meets fearlessness there is going to be one 'enemy' that is always exposed—the lie that is 'fear' is exposed naked in all its twistedness, toxicity and wounds.

ISOF is not an enemy itself nor are we out to create enemies. 'Fear' always makes fearlessness an enemy. "*Fear is the first enemy*," says Don Juan, the Yaqui Brujo and Sacred Warrior (see Castaneda's books). Only 'fear'-based enemies create ISOF as an enemy. A recent book by adult education theorist, Mike Neuman (1994) called *Defining the enemy*, spurred me on to inquire into this approach of "naming" the enemy in theoretical and philosophical terms in disciplines. We have known for millenium that there are ideological enemy camps within almost every discipline of knowledge and form of politics. Neumann is merely asking us to each, in our own way and bias, to at least define our "enemies" and begin critical social dialogue with them (if that is possible).

Neumann is not recommending we go out and attempt to destroy the enemy, rather his is sick and tired of adult educators (for example) going to conferences with all their differing ideological and political agendas, while attempting to pretend to be so tolerant of diversity (as politically correct) and claiming that "we are all working toward the same goal"—when in fact, "we are not." He called the bull shit what it was, and I respect that. His work has created quite a stir of controversy. I've been teaching and collaborating with a group in our conflict and conflict resolution class for some 13 weeks and it seems really important to learn how to "fight" healthily with our differences and to acknowledge the "enemy" when they show up—especially as 'fear' patterns (distress).

There is a most disturbing and oppressive trend in conflict management these days to "resolve" conflict *before* there has been a "good fight" for the Truth. Socialist, communist, and neo-Marxist critics have challenged this trend of "neutralization" and "objectivity" in conflict resolution theory—and I agree, there is a lot of denial and "niceness" that is based on anything but true fearlessness to face our 'enemies' in conflict. I've seen great gains in many people's healing journeys in ISOF from having learned better how to "fight" again (with complete vulnerability) for what we really want and see as Truth.

Normand Bergeron (for example), is back in the ISOF Community (and student in “The New School”), because he has never seen another place that is so dedicated to Truth at all “costs.” Fearlessness has many “costs,” materially, emotionally, spiritually in ‘fear’-based oppressive society. Fearlessness has cost the loss of many wonderful relationships because of the ‘enemy’ that pulled them apart. ISOF will never disappear in spirit but it may take a beating and lose much of its gains in the past eight years. I for one am not going to go down without a hell of a good fight. And if I go down, or ISOF gets slaughtered, then I know it will arise from the ashes— Spirit always does that. How about you?

What is Fearlessness? Fearlessness Vision? No ‘Fear’?

To learn more of the enemies of fearlessness, or anti-fearlessness campaign, it is important to briefly outline what fearlessness is. This is a large topic, far beyond what the scope of this technical paper can deal with. The booklet I’ve written (Fisher, 1996) called *Dare to contradict, dare to distinguish: Into the flaming heart of the In Search of Fearlessness Project* is a good resource to supplement this overview. One of the first problems in identifying fearlessness is how do we define it? and from what perspective? From a “victim” or “survivor” perspective, “fearlessness” may be seen very differently than from a “thrifer (Sacred Warrior)” or Royal Leader view. That is a long story beyond the scope of this essay. True fearlessness is “complete vulnerability at all times,” according to Trungpa. Suffice it to say, there are many different perspectives on what *fearlessness* is and as yet no systematic study has been done to unify these concepts and definitions (a good book yet to be written would be called *Spectrum of Fearlessness*).

Basically I see fearlessness as a “view”—a spiritual perspective—a life and liberational path. The book I wrote (Fisher, 1997) called *Spectrum of ‘fear’* too all the views of ‘fear’ throughout time and places around the world—and that is a fearlessness view—a view where nothing is excluded, everything included (even when it isn’t pleasant, even when it is challenging of one’s biases). Spirit itself in an ideal world is ‘Love.’ Spirit in a world of oppression (due to ‘fear’-hurt/violence) is manifest as fearlessness. Fearlessness is the “name” for Spirit in the context of a less than ideal world in the 1990s. Fearlessness is the action/path from ‘fearland’ to ‘Loveland.’

Trungpa says, “Fearlessness is not the reduction of fear, but going beyond it” and he says one must first know all about ‘fear’ to know fearlessness.

Learning about 'fear' in this context, is actually learning all about fearlessness simultaneously — my experience writing *Spectrum of 'fear'* confirmed this. Trungpa has provided guiding phrases for the ISOF Project and my own thinking and living for several years since co-founding ISOF eight years ago. **To know all about 'fear' is fearlessness itself in action—to contradict the illusion, denial, hiding, masks, disguises of the 'Fear' Project.** Trungpa's (Shambhala) vision of fearlessness is a good start but it is not complete and requires revision in light of the research and experience at ISOF. Trungpa offered the West secular-based meditation practice and wisdom from the Tibetan tradition of Shambhala (3500+ years ago). ISOF has not focused on meditation practice per se as the path of fearlessness and liberation but has invented and incorporated the 6 'fear' vaccine processes (see the "Medicine Wall" handouts at the Fearlessness Centre). The result being, that 'fear' is now seen as "toxicity" in living systems (a 'fear' pattern virus metaphorically), just like distress—and *no distress* or *no 'fear'* is seen as the only way to be healthy and sustainable.

So fearlessness, is now viewed as the reduction and elimination of 'fear' from the planet — thus the No 'Fear' agenda (therapeutically and politically) in much of my recent work. There are unfortunately associations of this No 'Fear' agenda in ISOF with the popularized cultural slogan *NO FEAR!* associated with clothing and bumper stickers created from a California manufacturer. The *NO FEAR!* popularized slogan is very interesting in reflecting the current feeling of a generation-X of young people brought up in a world of terror and AIDS. For the most part, *NO FEAR!* means a "puffed-up egoic courage" — typically male macho stuff (actually anti-terrorizing counterphobic activity to not feel oppressed by 'fear' — basically master coping techniques). But the initiative to have a world of No 'Fear' is admirable and a truthing cry from the younger generation to the old. I listen and continue to listen to young people. ISOF and the fearlessness model we represent have much to offer to this movement of No Fear. As well, there is a small ground stream of feminist resurgence (at least in Canada) to have a world of no more 'fear' of violence (see Canadian Council on Women's report). As yet, this has not taken hold of the public interest in a broader framework than "victim" and "survivor" strategies to eliminate 'fear' of violence (in the most overt forms perpetrated by men, usually against women and children). Unfortunately, in the feminist and No Fear versions of "fearlessness" there is not theory of oppression typically, and that is my biggest critique and challenge to those movements — similar to my critique of 'new age' and human potential and eco-environmentalist movements. *Fearlessness vision*, is a large topic, but simply it is a vision beyond 'fear'-based conditioning (socialization) and

oppression, whereby “oppression” is seen exactly for what it is and how it works as the weave in most contemporary cultures on the planet. Fearlessness vision, also sees the alternatives to the human condition and maintains the “flame” of clarity and purpose on a new world no longer based on ‘fear’—you could say fearlessness vision is faith+-- but it is not merely a belief or dogma to “try” to get or be “hopeful” for—it is an actual vision and way of visioning. Most people in ISOF don’t reach that development in time before their ‘fear’ patterns take over and they leave the ISOF Project (if that is even possible). That “reality” brings me great grief. ‘Fear’ will gladly choose anything but fearlessness. Oh, of course, there are always the “twisted” versions I’ve heard several times over the years from folks in ISOF. The twistedness says, “It takes more courage to leave ISOF than to stay in it for me.” I don’t buy that for a second. Why this focus on “in” or “out”—Spirit is not at all interested in that—for “in” and “out” doesn’t exist in non-dual, non-‘fear’-based Reality. The terror of “in” or “out” comes not from Spirit—not from true fearlessness.

So, is there a false “fearlessness”? Yes. Ken Wilber, has been an important transpersonal theorist, who has challenged the world (Wilber, 1995) on its modernist (post-Enlightenment) “fearless shallowness.” I recommend people read that work, for it is too complex to enter into here. In Search of Fearlessness is anything but shallow modernity and its attempt to control the world and make it “perfect” and “clean.” The ISOF agenda is clear that healing and liberation is going to be very very messy and chaotic when the resistance to the ‘Fear’ Project flares up- and attempts to dismantle true fearlessness.

The Anti-fearlessness Campaign

Though this topic requires further detailed research, I’ll attempt to summarize a few of the examples of “movements” as enemies to fearlessness.

a) ‘New age’ and “transpersonal spirituality – I’ve corresponded on three lists via the Internet in the past two years. These list groups have gathered around three topics that most interest me: transpersonal psychology, spirituality in the workplace, and Ken Wilber’s work. The e-mails have been collected for later analysis. The jist of many many conflicts I’ve had occur over the perception of these folks that I am attempting to “search” for fearlessness and therefore any search (from a Zen or Buddhist-like perspective) is a “desire” or “need” and that is itself at the core of ‘fear.’ They’ve argued that fearlessness is not very positive,

but a negative term, and that cannot be Spirit or healthy or liberational. What I've seen over and over again with these critics is that they highly mistrust any kind of "movement" ("guru" or "leader" looking like a "cult") that claims universal truths about liberation for all humanity through time and place. They see 'fear' as natural and merely an illusion to overcome once the "ego" is transcended and they don't see that I have transcended "ego." They believe that I'm trying to destroy 'fear' by using 'fear' (ego) and it won't work—many of them argue we have to surrender the ego and any "search" or action—non-action is the only way to peace and harmony and Light. Part of the resistance to fearlessness has been tied into postmodern thinking, of which many of these people have been well educated in (see below on postmodernist deconstructionist philosophy).

b) Postmodernist deconstructionist philosophy- for many of you, postmodernism may sound odd or new. Simply, it is the current secular philosophy that is attempting to rebel against and debunk any kind of spiritual truths or universal values for humanity. It is a rugged individualist philosophy that is against any authority of anykind that claims to offer what is "best" for humanity. This attitude is very prevalent with the young people of our day and those with university education. It is anti-religion, anti-philosophy and some critics say it is anti-itself (I see a lot of twisted rebel). It surely is anti-fearlessness, for the postmodernist attitude is rather nihilistic and pessimistic [narcissistic] and castrating of any "grand narratives" that are supposed to be helpful or hopeful to rescuing humankind from suffering and the misery of "real" life. They don't want to see anymore "grand schemes," for Hitler's was enough of a disaster. These folks tend to be anti-healing, believing that any "clean-up" campaign is imposed by some authority with a bias to their own culture and norms— and thus is no different than ethnic cleansing operations at the core of racism and genocide.

c) Existential philosophy- this is the dominant philosophy that took over the Western world since Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead." This philosophy, much like postmodernism, is not wanting a world that is "good" without "evil"—you can't have one without the other. 'Fear' is part of being human and defines the human being. *Courage to be* is all that is possible but there is no divine or transcendence escape from 'fear,' say the existentialists. Fearlessness is pure fantasy wish and actually destructive to humanity these folks [and psychoanalytical folks] would say. Much of W. philosophy and the rationalist traditions have followed this existential view of 'fear.'

d) Christianity – at least in the more fundamental streams (as opposed to mystical) claims that fearlessness is a sin, pride/hubris, and thus ought to be punished or eliminated as a human goal. Only God (Jesus) is fearless and humans by necessity have to suffer with ‘fear’ and pain. “Fear of God” is essential to the spiritual life.

e) Modern Sociology and Anthropology – these theorists have concluded that there may be some groups that live near “fearlessness” but they are not free of fear and there is actually no evidence of true fearlessness groups or societies (though, they have not studied Sacred Warrior or mystical spiritual traditions). Even the important work of Corradi et al. (1992) on social justice and the politics of moving toward societies without fear, concludes that it is probably not possible.

f) Modern Psychology [and Psychiatry]- current literature from a men’s radical movement in England shows that “fearlessness” is thought to be a lie for men, and at best, men may have to face their fears courageously while staying in a world filled with ‘fear.’ ‘Fear’ cannot be destroyed they say, only overcome circumstantially with effort to cope better. Recent feminist psychologists (Quigley & Shroyer, 1996) produced a whole book which repeatedly challenged and criticized any notions that humans should try to be fearless because that kind of perfection is just not possible in this world (and only makes us feel worst when we fail)—and it is just not human either. They believed that we would gain more learning and lessons from ‘fear’ than by being fearless. Scott Peck, the popular psychiatrist, has been known to declare that anyone who doesn’t experience ‘fear’ is “brain damaged.” Quigley & Shroyer give a rude example of “fearless” in a schizophrenic man who jumped into a cage with a lion because he wanted to pet it—and got torn apart. They remark, “*Obviously, this man was fearless, but that wasn’t such a good thing. Indeed, fearlessness such as his usually stems from an impairment in judgment.... Being free from fear can be just plain stupid, foolish, or even fatal*” (p. 12). There is a very strong physiologist- behavioralist movement in psychology [and medicine] to make ‘fear’ scientific, biochemical and genetic—and thus inevitable. However, these reductionists don’t criticize their own limitations in knowing and measuring ‘fear,’ especially relative to other disciplines that also explore ‘fear’ without scientific methodologies but more intuitive and experiential [e.g., phenomenological, philosophical, or arts-based] methods. The field of ‘fear’ and fearlessness research is a mess—filled with confusion and outright contradictions of how best to deal with ‘fear.’ It is not surprising that fearlessness is also misunderstood and confused.

Concluding Remarks

From this small selection of anti-fearlessness “movements” and writers, there is an obvious omission in their research and claims. They most always have no theory of ‘fear’ or ‘fearlessness’ that encompasses the spectrum of traditions and disciplines that have articulated experiences about ‘fear’ and ‘fearlessness’ for thousands of years. The views are rather truncated and biased, mostly unsystematic, and lack a hurting and healing theory that includes a good theory of oppression. These movements and their proponents (books and ideas) are sadly biased but don’t warn the reader of their bias. That is nasty education and borders on outright propaganda. [These are such, the enemies of fearlessness]

I’ve reviewed thousands of works on ‘fear’ and fearlessness for my book. I’m convinced that ‘fear’ (oppression) itself is working heavily in controlling and distorting the information about ‘fear’ and fearlessness [= fearism]. And that is not surprising I suppose. ‘Fear’ is always a lie. It is deeply disturbing to see how many theorists of each of these anti-fearlessness camps have become “sold” on the idea that ‘fear’ is a “gift,” a source of a “lesson” essential for humans to learn by. This is like saying that humans have to be oppressed and hurt to learn lessons. That is absurd and dangerous thinking. It certainly doesn’t fit the model of human nature in ISOF. These ‘fear’-based rationalizations that continue to justify ‘fear’ and its value in human experience and societies is exactly the reason why the cycle of ‘fear’ (violence/hurting/toxicity/oppression) has not been stopped on this planet—and will not be stopped as long as we rationalize its usefulness and essentialness to humanity. Often, if not systematically and unconsciously, the many authors totally confuse the difference between “twisted” or pathological fearlessness and true healthy fearlessness. They also don’t explore that difference, nor examine the ancient Sacred Warrior traditions or E. and W. mystical traditions that view fearlessness (no ‘fear’) as the Ground of the Kosmos and Spirit. We have a lot of homework to do yet. And we [in ISOF] are not alone in promoting true fearlessness and that literature is as important to document as the “enemy.” I’m merely saying, we have to know both our enemies and our allies.

“Fear keeps us away from developing the ‘fearless’ self...”

- Griscom (1988)

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