

FEAR AS YOUR ALLY

A recent study conducted by a well-respected organization in the United States determined that in 80% of attacks on women (I would even extrapolate this to men as well), the predator frightened his victim into submission simply by using verbal intimidation. The mind guides the body. The street predator knows that if he is able to paralyze your mind through fear, your body will freeze also, no matter how much physical training you have.

What is fear? Most people view fear as an extremely negative feeling which causes one to totally freeze and panic, and as a result get hurt. Although this is a common belief, it is not quite accurate.

Fear is both a physical and an emotional response to a perceived threat or danger. The physical reactions prepare us to confront and survive a dangerous situation, by readying autonomic functions for self-preservation and trauma. Heart rate increases; adrenaline and blood clotting enzymes are released to make the body stronger, faster and less likely to feel pain. Although the biological response to fear does not differ from person to person, the emotional response will, based upon one's perception of threat. It is this perception of threat that can, and will, differ from person to person based upon training and learned past experiences in how to deal with the specific threat encountered. What may seem to be a threatening situation to one person may not be to another.

This emotional response to fear is both learned and voluntary. A learned experience is generally taught to you. For instance, if you are a parent who has arachnophobia, and you see a spider crawling across the floor, your first reaction may be to scream and jump on a chair. Your small child will soon begin to model his behavior in the same way. Seeing the spider will trigger the learned fear response.

The voluntary reaction is what we choose to do when faced with a dangerous situation. Unfortunately, many people use fear in a self-defeating, negative way rather than with a challenging positive attitude.

Perceived threats trigger our learned and voluntary responses and any three will occur: fight, flight, or hypervigilance. A lot of us know about the fight or flight response, but not many of us know about hypervigilance. Hypervigilance (freezing in place or taking irrational actions) is something that we are all inbred and programmed with from the cave man days, at the reptilian brain or frog brain level. For those of you that have seen Jurassic Park the movie, what do the experts in the movie yell to those people who were running from the Tyrannosaurus Rex? Why? because it was hypothesized that dinosaurs hunted via movement. Now, let's bring this to the year 2002. Let's say you are

traveling mach factor ten down a deserted highway in the middle of the night with your high beams on, when all of a sudden a deer jumps out in front of your car. What does the deer do ? It freezes. Why? Does it see the car as a car? No, it sees the car as a threat. What does Bambi do when it sees or senses a threat in the bush? It freezes, in an attempt to not be seen by that which is potentially hunting it. Like Bambi, we have this same response programmed into us as well. Once caught in a state of hypervigilance, it is a downward spiral that once caught into, is very difficult, if not impossible, to get out of. Why is this important? Because the mind guides the body. If the brain freezes, so will the body !!!!! Allowing yourself to become stuck in a state of hypervigilance, both mentally and physically, will most certainly allow the attacker to succeed, or will prevent you from becoming proactive in dealing with the situation at hand.

The emotional response to fear, need not be mental immobility; it can be trained and utilized as a voluntary, positive force. An analogy can be drawn by comparing the fear emotion, with electricity. When used positively and appropriately, electricity runs our lives; when used negatively and carelessly, electricity can kill. The emotion of fear is the same way; used in a positive way, the emotion of fear is a ðpowerizerö and an ðenergizerö. Used in a negative way, the emotion of fear can cause one to panic, freeze, get seriously injured, and in the worse cases, even killed. What you choose to do with the emotion of fear ó allow it to control you, or harness the energy ó is left up to you to decide, it is a conscious choice, but the decision you make could mean the difference between winning or loosing.

So now we know that fear is simply an ðemotionö, just like any other emotion that the good Lord gives us. We also now know that although the emotion of fear is triggered based upon one's perception of threat, which could differ from person to person, biologically it reacts the same in each and everyone of us. We also now know that when the emotion of fear hits, one of three responses; fight, flight, or hypervigilance, will take place. Based upon what I just shared with you about the hypervigilant state, I think you will agree that we want to pick the ðfightö or ðflightö response. How do you choose fight or flight and not the hypervigilance response? The answer is simple in concept; ask yourself: ð Am I threatened or am I challenged?ö

To understand this concept, place yourself on the following scenario: You are in an office building that has thirty floors, and wanting to go to the top floor, you decide to use the elevator. When the elevator arrives, with no one inside, you enter and start your ascent. Arriving at the tenth floor, the door opens and standing in front of you is an unknown male, 6'6", 250 pounds, built like a Mac truck, brandishing a knife and saying, ð shut up and I won't hurt you, if you scream, you're dead.ö Now ask yourself , ðAm I threatened or am I challenged?ö Most people , when faced with this situation, will say they are threatened.

The brain makes decisions for the future based upon past experience and training; it guides the body. No matter how much physical training you have to deal with an attacker who is about to assault you, if you stay in the "threatened" mindset, you will go into hypervigilance mode, come to a paralytic standstill, and be at the mercy of the attacker. Because of this fact, you need to get "CHALLENGED."

How do you get from a "threatened" mindset to a "challenged" mindset? By consciously saying the word "BUT." In the elevator, when the door opens and you are faced with the attacker armed with the knife, what should be going through your mind is, "I'm in a bad situation, BUT if he takes another step, I will fight back."

The powerful word "BUT" challenges the brain and allows it to work and think. When I give lectures on this topic, I always lead my audience up to the point where I ask them this question: "There is one little three letter word that will change your mindset from threatened to challenged, do you want to know what that word is?" At this point I pause for about three seconds, and then I say the word "BUT." It is amazing to see the expressions on people's faces. I then share with them that as soon as I said the word "BUT" most of the audience's brains asked themselves, "BUT what?" As soon as the brain goes "But What?", the brain now begins to work. It can now find answers to the questions it is being faced with, such as, "How am I going to get out of this situation as quickly and safely as possible." Once the brain is allowed to work, the physical training and experiences you may have can now be applied. In other words, instead of freezing into a complete standstill, you begin to take some action to protect yourself.

A good self-protection program with "realistic" scenario based training is beneficial not only in teaching you physical strategies, but in helping you realize that you CAN use fear to your advantage. However, even if you do not have the self-protection training or life experiences to deal with a specific threat, the "CHALLENGED" brain will begin to adapt, overcome, and improvise to find a way for you to stay safe. There are hundreds of instances in which men and women with no prior self-protection training, have physically resisted their attackers and "won." Why? They CHALLENGED themselves.

As previously stated, in 80% of attacks on women, the predator used only verbal intimidation to scare his victim into a submissive state of hypervigilance. To overcome this, you must allow the brain to work, challenge it to mentally figure a way out of the dangerous situation, and to physically release the "internal warrior" that the emotion of fear can stimulate. Decide to focus and direct the mental and physical forces into a powerful attack of your own, and allow the full impact of the fear response to propel your mind, body, and soul against your attacker. Fear can be your greatest ally in a dangerous situation, but it can also be your worst enemy. **THE CHOICE IS ULTIMATELY YOURS TO MAKE !!!!!**

What I have just shared with you, you can practice in your everyday life. I share with you, this personal experience to demonstrate this fact:

I was one of the youngest sergeants ever to be promoted in my police department. While in the promotional process, the last stage was an interview in front of a panel consisting of the Chief of police, the Deputy Chief, a Police Board member, and a City Counselor. My interview was set for 2pm, so I was there at 1:45pm. The panel knowing of my early arrival, waited until 2:30pm to call me in. Why? They wanted to sweat me !!!! As I was waiting for my interview, I noted that my heart rate and breathing had increased, I was sweating, my mind was racing a mile a minute, at which time I asked my self; "Am I threatened or am I challenged." I immediately identified the fact that I was "THREATENED" Upon comprehending this fact, I knew that if I went into this interview in this mindset, I would choke (go into a state of hypervigilance) !!!! How many of you have heard of this happening to someone, or experienced this yourself. Immediately upon recognizing my state of mind, I said that magical, but very powerful word, "BUT". As soon as I said "but", I stopped sweating, my mind slowed, and my heart rate and respirations decreased. I went into my interview in a now "CHALLENGED" mindset and as a result, did very well, and got myself promoted.

Why did I share the above noted experience with you the reader?, because in my 15 year career as a police officer, I have been attacked with an edged weapon on four separate occasions. In each one of these edged weapon encounters, the biological effects of fear that I felt were no different than those I experienced during my sergeant interview. Remember, fear is strictly an emotion, IT DOES NOT DIFFERENTIATE. What you choose to do with the emotion of fear, is left up to you to decide and to practice !!!!!!!

Strength and Honor

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