

F – Figuring out Feelings, Fencing-off Foes, and Facing Fears for Freedom

Dear: In case “figuring out feelings” seem to you to be a “weird” concept, let me repeat what my wonderful daughter so frequently repeats: “Father, you’re weird!” Maybe so, but even “weirder” is that, although I probably have the usual array of human feelings (though some may disagree!), I normally have a great deal of difficulty figuring out my feelings. That is, I normally have (or maybe I should say “I almost always have”) a great deal of difficulty (or more accurately, my left brain has a great deal of difficulty) first in describing and understanding my feeling and then in explaining them – even to me!

That may seem weird to you, if you can easily “get in touch with your feelings”, but many times my left brain doesn’t even recognize that my decisions are based, for example, on anger. Consequently, after I’ve made, for example, a quick comment or decision, and then have some quiet time to think, I’m frequently perplexed by: “Why did I say that?” or “Why did I do that?”

All of which, Dear, is my way of introducing the statement that this chapter has been difficult for me to write. More significantly, probably it will be difficult for you to read. It’s difficult to write about what you don’t understand, and it’s difficult to read what someone can’t explain, even to himself!

But I’ll push on – with the hope that, for this chapter, you’ll allot me even more-than-normal patience, as I stumble forward. What I want to try to show you is what I’ve learned that has helped me recognize and understand my feelings. If sometimes you, too, have difficulty figuring out your feelings, then maybe what I’ve learned will also help you, e.g., in your “decision-making process”, when you try to evaluate your emotions and figure out your feelings.

Of course, an ‘enjoyment’ is also a ‘feeling’. Consequently, an impatient “purest” might ask: “What’s the difference between ‘evaluating enjoyments’ and ‘figuring out feelings’?” I don’t have a good answer to such question. In part, it’s a “difference in intensity” – which I’ll try to explain.

To me, ‘enjoyments’ are just weak, pleasant feelings. Apparently, my dictionary can lend support for that view, for it states that a synonym for ‘enjoyable’ is ‘pleasant’. For example, I enjoy sunrises, the song of the meadowlark, and thinking that this book might help some children. In contrast, ‘feelings’ are more general, not only (on an “emotional scale”) extending in one direction far beyond ‘enjoyment’, e.g., to ‘ecstasy’, but also spanning in “the opposite direction” from ‘insignificant’ to ‘excruciating’ pain.

And if, Dear, you think that with the above paragraph I seem to be stumbling to find the right words, then you’d be starting to see what I meant that I’ve had trouble writing this chapter. In turn, this follows because I still have a lot of trouble “understanding” (and “expressing”) my feelings – in words! In fact, I’m not even sure what I mean by “understanding” or “figuring out” my feelings.

What I “think” I mean by those expressions is to have Left Brain do an analysis to try to put Right Brain’s (and Body’s?) syntheses (i.e., the feelings) into words. But already that concept bothers “me”. Right Brain (and Body?) has performed a (usually) valuable summary (or synthesis). Why should Left Brain then try to “pick it apart”, labeling everything with damnable words?!

Which reminds me of an astounding line from a certain grandchild, when she was about six. I was sitting on the back porch, trying to explain something to her, of course using a lot of words, and I can still see her standing in front of me, with hands on her hips, palms turned backwards, boldly and defiantly proclaiming her objection: “There’s too many words!”

Yes, Dear, sometimes there are too many words. For example, in an attempt to help me write this chapter, I pulled out my old copy of Roget’s Thesaurus¹ to see how the original author organized all words dealing with emotions (or, as he called them, “affections”). Maybe you’d like to look at

¹ Dear, this is an astounding book, a copy of which I expect is on your dad’s bookshelf. I think that “Roget” is pronounced as in the French [Raw-shay], and “Thesaurus” [the Greek word for “treasure”] is pronounced as if it were written “the-sore-es”, with emphasis on “sore”. The book is a family enterprise, started by the grandfather in 1805, completed after he retired at 70, then revised by his son (who added a tremendous way to find synonyms and antonyms), and my (old) copy was improved still more by the grandson.

his list in depth. In my copy of his book, the scheme is shown on pages xxxix to xlii, and then the words are listed and described on pages 304–386: 82 pages of words just identifying different feelings! Here, let me review just enough of his scheme so that you may see why I agree with a certain grandchild: “Too many words!”

Grandfather Roget first divided his “class of words” labeled as ‘affections’ (or ‘feelings’ or ‘emotions’) into five sections: *general, personal, sympathetic, moral, and religious*. Here, let me focus just on the two sections: *personal* (which seems self explanatory and includes such feelings as ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’) and *sympathetic* (which seem to be those emotions that involve interactions with others, e.g., ‘love’ and ‘hate’). Then, within each section, he has four or five subsections, and then finally, he lists the words. For example, here’s a part of the scheme he used to organize such words:

Class VI. AFFECTIONS

I. AFFECTIONS GENERALLY

| | |
|--------------|----------------|
| Affections | |
| Feelings | |
| Sensibility | Insensibility |
| Excitation | |
| Excitability | Inexcitability |

II. PERSONAL

1. PASSIVE

| | |
|------------------|-------------|
| Pleasure | Pain |
| Pleasureableness | Painfulness |
| Content | Discontent |
| | Regret |
| Relief | Aggravation |
| Cheerfulness | Dejection |
| Rejoicing | Lamentation |
| Amusement | Weariness |
| Wit | Dullness |
| Humorist | |

2. DISCRIMINATIVE

| | |
|----------|----------------|
| Beauty | Ugliness |
| Ornament | Blemish |
| | Simplicity |
| Taste | Vulgarity |
| Fashion | |
| | Ridiculousness |
| | Fop |
| | Affectation |
| | Ridicule |
| | Laughing-stock |

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| 3. PROSPECTIVE | |
| Hope | Hopelessness |
| | Fear |
| Courage | Cowardice |
| Rashness | Caution |
| Desire | Indifference |
| | Dislike |
| | Fastidiousness |
| | Satiety |
| 4. CONTEMPLATIVE | |
| Wonder | Expectance |
| Prodigy | |
| 5. EXTRINSIC | |
| Repute | Disrepute |
| Nobility | Commonality |
| Title | |
| Pride | Humility |
| Vanity | Modesty |
| Ostentation | |
| Celebration | |
| Boasting | |
| Insolence | Servility |
| Blusterer | |
| <i>III. SYMPATHETIC</i> | |
| 1. SOCIAL | |
| Friendship | Enmity |
| Friend | Enemy |
| Sociality | Seclusion |
| Courtesy | Discourteous |
| Congratulation | |
| Love | Hate |
| Favorite | |
| | Resentment |
| | Irrascibility |
| | Sullenness |
| Endearment | |
| Marriage | Celibacy |
| | Divorce |
| 2. DIFFUSIVE | |
| Benevolence | Malevolence |
| | Malediction |
| | Threat |
| Philanthropy | Misanthropy |
| Benefactor | Evil doer |
| Pity | Pitilessness |
| 3. SPECIAL | |
| Pity | Pitilessness |
| Condolence | |
| 4. RETROSPECTIVE | |
| Gratitude | Ingratitude |

Forgiveness

Revenge

Jealousy

Envy

Did I hear somebody say “Too many words!”? Dear, the above doesn’t even start to list the words: the above is only the scheme that grandfather Roget used to organize the thousands and thousands of words (and expressions) that he then proceeded to list in the 82 pages from p.304–386! But, Dear, although I think Roget’s scheme is amazing (and invite you to think about how he decided to organize the words, e.g., his ‘passiveness’ of ‘pleasure’ vs. his ‘discrimination’ of ‘beauty’), I’ve found that such “left-brain words” for labeling emotions don’t help much when “I” try to figure out my feelings.²

A part of my problem in figuring out my feelings might be the burden society has placed on men (although some of it may be natural). Perhaps more so when I was young than seems to be the case now, when I was a kid it was “manly” not to show emotions. Common taunts from other kids were “Nah, nah, cry baby” and “Crying like a little girl” (both of which were conveyed with the same “lilt”, as if part of a nursery song). Even elders would solemnly advise that “Big boys don’t cry” and “Girls are the emotional ones”. Maybe such “societal approval” is a partial explanation of why women seem to be “more in touch with their feelings”, but as I already wrote, maybe some of it is “natural”. On this, I have insufficient data to reach a defensible conclusion – and, in truth, I don’t find the question sufficiently interesting to seek more data, then formulate a hypothesis, and then test the hypothesis!

² If the subject of emotions interests you, Dear, you might want to read two new books on the subject. I have read only reviews of these books. One is *Friday’s Footprint: How Society Shapes the Human Mind* by Leslie Brothers (Oxford University Press, 1997); in the review that I read (by Ray Dolan, in the 1 Jan. 1998 issue of *Nature*, p. 35), what interests me about this book is the reviewer’s comment: “What is distinct about emotions is their associated action tendencies.” The other recent book is *What Emotions Really Are: The Problem of Psychological Categories* by Paul E. Griffiths, University of Chicago Press, 1997; the same review describes Griffiths’ proposal that “the general category of emotion should be replaced by, at a minimum, two distinct concepts. One... corresponding roughly to vernacular concepts of surprise, anger, fear, sadness, joy, and disgust... [all] automatic response patterns... [The] second... higher cognitive emotions, which account for emotions such as envy and shame... characterized by their ability to access beliefs and desires.” And beyond these tidbits of insight, what might interest you is this: these two books seem to provide a fairly good indication of current knowledge about feelings and emotions – and clearly, that knowledge is extremely meager! If you want to learn more, Dear, you may want to search on the internet, starting with “search words” such as “measuring emotional states” and “interpreting emotions of others”; I think that you’ll find that it’s an amazingly complicated subject area, sorely in need of more and better data! And if you want to learn still more, Dear, then maybe you want to become a psychologist or psychiatrist! In essence, their job is to try to understand emotions.

But I do have adequate data to defend the hypothesis that I have difficulty figuring out my feelings. The first major difficulty is “simply” to recognize that I have a particular feeling! That may seem “stupid” to you, Dear, but sometimes I don’t seem to “realize” that what is “driving me”, at a particular instant, is my anger, or frustration, or stress, or fear, or... And even when I do “realize” that I’m, say, angry, then many times I don’t “understand” what’s causing my anger. Without that knowledge, it’s common that I react inappropriately, as in the old adage of kicking the dog instead of confronting the boss.

Further, when trying to figure out my feelings, I frequently encounter another major problem: my emotions rarely seem “clean” – I rarely find that a single word adequately describes my “feelings”. For example, I might have a “feeling” that seems to be some complicated mixture of pain, fear, resentment, and revenge! Moreover, I find that the strength of each “feeling” can be highly variable: at times I’ve had feelings of hopelessness so powerful that I’ve considered suicide, while at other times, I’ve laughed so hard (so uncontrollably) that it really was painful! That is, I commonly find that my emotions are not only a mixture of many feelings, but the intensities of each feeling are separate variables.

And not only do my emotions seem mixed up (intertwined and tangled), many times they seem to keep moving on me: as soon as I think I understand them, they shift on me! In some cases, “I” totally can’t comprehend my emotions, especially those emotions that I’ve hinted may be from “Body” (which maybe means instinctive) and especially those dealing with sex (which, I’m sorry, I don’t feel [!] comfortable describing to you). If you think that, in total, this seems like quiet a mess, Dear, I would agree. But I’ve found that the following ideas have helped “me” (Left Brain) to understand “my” (Right Brain and Body?) feelings.

One idea was the realization that essentially all my feelings are *survival signals, warning me of dangers and rewarding me for successes*. With that “realization” (i.e., that left-brain analysis), I can then skip trying to label a feeling (or a mixture of feelings) with one or more words (e.g., from Roget’s scheme). Instead, I can proceed directly to trying to understand what the feeling is telling me about my trio of survival goals (i.e., about my own survival, the survival of my extended family, and the survival of my values).

I've found that this works for essentially all my feelings, save perhaps for what Roget calls "discriminative emotions", e.g., the feeling that something is "beautiful". But, by describing a feeling as "discriminative", maybe Roget is acknowledging that Left Brain is involved with some analysis – and, too, maybe there's a large cultural component to this "feeling". Maybe this cultural component explains, for example, why people from different cultures seem to "enjoy" such dramatically different music. In any event, I've found that trying to understand the significance of some "feeling" to my trio of survival goals has helped me "figure out my feelings".

Additional help came from the realization that my feelings are *commonly a mixture and needing an "e-motion" scale*. What I mean by an "e-motion" scale is something like this: sometimes it seems that we need a scale [something similar to the (logarithmic) Richter scale, used to measure earthquake strengths] to measure the strengths of each "feeling" in the mixture, as well as the overall strength of the emotion. That's my "e-motion" scale – which I trust that you'll pronounce as "emotion", but with a heavier-than-normal emphasis on the "e"!

For example, Dear, at this instant my overall "e-motion" scale reads 4.2 (on a scale of 1 to 10). It's composed of 1.8 from my hope that what I'm writing will help you carry our genetic code farther, 1.1 from the satisfaction that not only does this writing conform to my values but it even promotes them, 1.0 from the relief that I'm finally slugging my way through all this "junk", and 0.3 from my delight in this little "e-motion" scale – and my expectation that you realize that, at least in part, I'm just fooling around!

But actually, Dear, I'm not totally "fooling around". One way to evaluate emotions is to use numbers, such as with my "e-motion" scale. That is, according to my dictionary, one definition for 'evaluate' is "to find the numerical value of; express in numbers". You might have already done this on some occasion, only partly in jest. For example, you might have said that, "on a scale of 1 to 10", you "love" such-and-such (or so-and-so) 8.3, whereas you "love" something (or somebody) else only 5.9.

Yet, Dear, if ever you do evaluate a feeling with a single number, then you know that you're engaging in a gross oversimplification. A similar oversimplification is to "evaluate" a person's IQ (Intelligence Quotient) or even a person's "Emotional IQ", with a single number. A more realistic "measure" of a person's intelligence, for example, needs the evaluation of a

huge number of “components”: not only how many words a person knows but also how skillfully the person can convey ideas using words, not only how well a person can solve math problems but also how well a person can solve personal problems, and so on, covering a huge list of “components” that deal with mechanical abilities, spatial visualization, art, music, etc., etc. Therefore, Dear, when in the previous chapter I mentioned that Maslow’s IQ was 195, I hope that not only were you not overly impressed but also that you now realize I must have been just fooling around!

Similarly, Dear, I hope that you won’t take my “e-motion” scale too seriously. Later in this book [in the “excursion” **Zx**, where I hope to show you some simple but important math], I’ll dig more seriously into how one might be able to describe and measure emotions more appropriately. There, I intend to suggest that the components of our emotions can be used to define an “emotion vector” in an “m-dimensional emotion space” – but I don’t think you’d want me to go into that now. Instead, for now, let me just mention two features of my proposed e-motion scale (which I’ll suggest in the later chapter is a measure of just the “length” of the “emotion vector”).

One feature is that, using my e-motion scale, I’ve again noticed that most of my feelings are “just” survival signals – as you can check by noticing that my “current feelings” (listed a few paragraphs ago, associated with writing this book) are all “just” survival signals. Another realization is that I’ve found that my “most moving” emotions, on my e-motion scale, generally seem to be instinctive (i.e., “body talk”) – by which I mean that sometimes I’ve had enormous emotions, which I really don’t understand and wonder if they’re derived from “Body” (Instinct?). I’m sorry that I don’t feel comfortable giving you details. To give you some hint of what I mean, I’ll mention the barest sketch of an example.

Once, when your father was a teenager and caused me and your grandmother enormous difficulties, difficulties that overwhelmed me, “Instinct” (or whatever) showed “me” (my left brain) a possible way to save your father. I don’t plan to describe any more of this to you, but I do want to add that later “I” (Left Brain) saw that, although my emotion was incredibly powerful, I was grievously wrong to be guided by it. If I could live that part of my life over, then next time I would know that the better choice would be to accept the possibility that your father would die: it was a case where running the system (me) on autopilot (Body or Instinct) was a serious mistake; the pilot (Left Brain) should have overridden the autopilot and regained control. In

* Go to other chapters *via*

other words, as I tried to explain to you in **B** and **C**, sometimes – no matter the strength of Right Brain’s or Body’s emotions – Left Brain should take control and force the abandonment not only of one’s own survival but also the survival of one’s genetic code, to “preserve, protect, and defend” one’s values.

But that’s enough (more than enough?!) introduction to my “twisted tale of tangled feelings”. Now, I want to turn to what I review with “F” when I’m walking. Yet, before I get there, I probably should try to clarify something. I expect that I’ve left you with the impression that I start out on my daily walk in the desert with “A”, and then proceed calmly and enjoyably through to “Z”. In reality, that almost never happens, especially before I retired and was involved in the daily challenges of my job. (Well, I should say that better: usually I “enjoyed” the scientific “challenges” of the job; it was the damn “politics” of my job that “drove me to distraction”). Frequently it would take me half my walk (going north), just to “unwind”: addressing current problems, examining available options, evaluating the potential actions of others, etc., etc. Sometimes, clearing this “clutter” was (and sometimes still is) no simple task, and during this task, various “feelings” would enter.

For example, Dear, frequently I’ve been angry. One of the most common causes of my anger is when I am “forced” to deal with stupidity (a characteristic of essentially every bureaucracy: “designed for the general case – whereas special cases are all that ever occur”). So, in my search to find my feelings, I would ask: why am I angry at this stupidity? The answer would depend on details of its source.

If I’m angry because some person has behaved stupidly, I commonly perceive this stupidity as a threat to me (a threat to my survival) and/or a threat to the survival of my genes (this genetic code, such as yours, being me – continued!) and/or a threat to the survival of my values. Similarly, if I’m angry with some bureaucracy, I again find that my anger is derived from my perception that the stupidity is somehow threatening my trio of survival goals, by wasting my time, constraining my actions, or similar. Or sometimes I’m angry at my own stupidity – but then commonly try to console myself, trying to understand why I did what I did (examining both how I felt at the time and historical reasons for why I felt that way) and trying to see how I could use this experience to act more wisely in a similar situation in the future.

Actually, when I developed my “meditation” I was in the midst of some of the most difficult times of my life, not only associated with my trying to save your father, but also, first from fighting with the “tyrant Dean” (mentioned in the previous chapter) and then from fighting off attacks from “the traitor” (also mentioned in the previous chapter) who was making my life hell – until I encountered the idea “the best revenge is to live well”. During that period of my life, when so frequently I was angry, I reviewed the following as a part of “F”; now, I normally don’t remember it (but sometime it just pops back into my mind):

F: Faced with foes, fence them off: the fools, cowards, liars, thieves; the lazy, the crazy, the ingrates, the traitors, and the power mongers. Faced with fools, avoid anger, don’t fight the feeble, don’t flee from fanatics, fence them off, protect your family.

I’m sorry to report that I wrote another “poem” associated with this part of “F”, but I’ll skip showing it to you. The main thought in the poem (and in the above) is that to claim one’s life, sometimes it’s necessary to “fence off” some horrible people from your life.

Now, Dear, I doubt if there’s much value to you in my describing details about the people I decided to “fence off”. But maybe I can make some generalizations that might be useful to you. Yet, I want to leave some of these generalization until later chapters (for example, in **P**, dealing with Power Mongers), which in turn will be delayed until after I’ve shown you some features of desirable interactions among people (e.g., in **M**, dealing with Morality). In this chapter, therefore, what I’d like to do is comment just on some general ideas about “fencing off” certain people, as well as some characteristics of such people.

First, fencing. As I’m sure you know, a common feeling or “instinctive reaction” of humans (as well as other animals) to many “stresses” is either “fight or flight”. In many instances, such instincts serve us well: if someone attacks you with a knife, then your instincts will tell you to either fight or flee. But in other instances, Dear, when you have time to think, and time to react differently, you’ll probably find that it’s best to “fence off” certain people.

For example, consider “fools”. No doubt you’ve already encountered foolish people, and I trust that your reaction has been similar to my normal reaction: to treat them with kindness, to try to help them, but to try to make sure that their foolishness will not cause me excessive difficulty. But there are cases, Dear, which I have experienced (and which you will probably experience), when, for one’s own safety, there is no reasonable alternative but to “fence off” some fools.

Some characteristics of such fools are not only that they make absurd errors in reasoning (for example, judging people by the color of their skin), but they absolutely refuse to be guided by data (on, for example, correlation between accomplishments of people and the color of their skin). There are many other examples of such fools, who might more accurately be described as fanatics (such as the fascists and many religious fanatics), but I’ll delay describing them until later chapters. For now, let me try just to give you some general guidance for how to deal with such people.

First, Dear, please realize that, in general, ideas are cheap: “a dime a dozen”, “a penny a pound”, “a token a ton”, or even cheaper! For those fools who present only ideas, if they provide no data to support their ideas, then I strongly recommend that you dismiss both the ideas and their advocates. When you encounter such people (whom you can’t influence by showing them either errors in their reasoning or data that conflict with their opinions), then give up on them: distance yourself from them; for your own safety, fence them off from your life.

More generally, Dear, please never “buy into” the fallacy that “all ideas deserve to be heard”. At most, what all ideas deserve is to be tested against data – but you won’t have time to perform the needed tests of all ideas promoted by other people. If people want you to listen to their ideas, then it’s their job to provide details of both the data and the tests that support their ideas. On the other hand, Dear, I do strongly recommend that you consider all relevant ideas that have supporting data: you’re far too young to reject ideas because of your prejudices; I hope that even I’m too young for that!

But enough about fools (at least for now); next, consider cowards. I’m certain, Dear, that at times, everyone is afraid, and I suspect that everyone is cowardly in the face of certain fears. In most cases when we encounter cowards, we again behave kindly and “make allowances” for their behavior, for example, “It’s understandable: she doesn’t want to come, because she

doesn't know how to swim" or "No, he won't join, because he's afraid of being fired." On the other hand, Dear, I have experienced cases (and you will probably experience cases) when, for your own safety, you should "fence off" some cowards: their failure to face their fears can endanger you. For example, if an acquaintance of yours is too afraid of losing friends to say "No!" to drugs or "No!" to excess alcohol, then distance yourself from this acquaintance: his or her cowardice could cause you great harm.

Similarly with liars. On the one hand, I'm certain that all of us lie. Sometimes we lie to make another person feel better (saying, for example, that the other person "looks great"); other times, we lie to protect ourselves (saying, for example, that we weren't bothered by something that someone said). But on the other hand, Dear, I have encountered people (and if you haven't already, then you probably soon will encounter such people) who lie so frequently that they can no longer be trusted – you won't be able to trust even that they're lying! Why they lie so frequently, I don't know; perhaps some experience in childhood taught them to avoid confrontations at any cost. Whatever the causes of their lying, Dear, if ever you identify such people, then fence them off from your life: they can't be trusted; therefore, your involvement with them could endanger you.

Then, there's a huge variety of thieves and a huge range of thievery, even when this range is restricted to exclude cases in which the thief ends up in jail. On the "mild side" of this restricted range are, for example, those people who "steal a little lime-light" from the accomplishments of others; you might have experienced such people who gladly shared some praise for work that you did essentially by yourself. And on the more severe side of this restricted range are those thieves (such as I've encountered, even in science) who literally steal your ideas, the results of your work, and (through a number of tricks) even steal your research contracts. At this severe extreme, such people belong in jail, but it's essentially impossible to prosecute them; therefore, Dear, should you ever encounter such thieves, then by yourself, you'll need to do the next best thing to putting them in jail: fence them out of your life.

And so on, for the others in my list: the lazy, crazy, ingrates, traitors, and power mongers. But enough of that for now, except maybe I should mention "power mongers", although I'll return to them later (in **P**). In particular, Dear, I'm not unmindful of the possibility that I am one of the people that you might decide that you should "fence off", for it may seem that I seek to

influence your life too much, as if to seek power over you. In case you feel that way, I'd like to mention two thoughts.

One thought is that, although there's no doubt that you are you, you are also me, going on! So, while you take these genes forward, what I'm trying to do is provide you with some advice for how you should live "our" future life! And second, Dear, is this: although I'm trying to show you some of what I've learned about life, in hopes of helping you to have a better life, I do so only to show you another way from the "religious way" in which you have been indoctrinated since you were a child. Whatever you eventually choose, I'll still always be available to help you; but also, I'll try to help you choose.

But again, enough of that for now. The above was what I reviewed for "F" when I was in "the thick of things", seemingly fighting foes whichever way I turned. After about five years, after I got out from under first the tyrant and then the traitor, and after your father seemed to get back on track, "F" changed. Although I still "feel" as strong a desire as ever to be free (a subject that I'll get to later in this chapter), I no longer "feel" that my freedoms are being attacked so forcefully that I need to fortify myself. Consequently, now when I'm walking, I usually try to "figure out my feelings" with the following.

F: Feelings:

- *There are threats to my survival, and signals telling me that I am surviving;*
- *Exhilaration when I succeed and despondency when I fail;*
- *Constraints on my freedom and relaxation of those constraints;*
- *Frustrations at ingratitude and furiousness at stupidity;*
- *There's joy in living and somberness of thoughts of dying. But: "Death, you'll find, you'll never know" – you can't be aware of a lack of awareness.*

When I'm walking, if I'm "in the mood", I then try to understand what I'm feeling at the moment and why.

As I suggested earlier, Dear, you might "feel" that the above list of my "feelings" is rather pathetic. You might think that, if you made a list of your feelings, your list would continue for pages. So, now I "feel" defensive and plan to try to explain. And what I want to explain is not why my list is so short, but why it's so long! That is, Dear, I've made long lists of "feelings",

but then I saw (as I already mentioned) that “most feelings are survival signals, warning me of dangers and rewarding me for successes; usually they’re a mixture – and most-moving may be instinctive.” That is, as I review, *There are threats to my survival, and signals telling me that I am surviving...*, and this single summary actually “eliminates the need for” (viz., “obviates”) most of the remainder of what I review!

In particular, I know that most of the feelings that I review, namely *exhilaration when I succeed and despondency when I fail; constraints on my freedom and relaxation of those constraints; frustration at ingratitude and my furiousness at stupidity; there’s joy in living and somberness of thoughts of dying...* are just “survival signals”. Therefore, if I sought brevity (or “succinctness”), then I wouldn’t review them separately. For example, I could omit recalling feelings related to “constraints on my freedom and relaxation of those constraints”, because I “know” that I “feel” more capable of promoting my trio of survival goals when I’m free. But I’ve found that separate identifications of such feelings are useful, because they seem to be so common for me.

But enough of my “feeling defensive” about what I review when I’m walking; now, I “feel obliged” to try to explain a “feeling” (another “defensive feeling”) related to what I plan to write for the remainder of this chapter! In particular, Dear, for the remainder of this chapter, I plan to skip explaining *There’s my joy in living...* not because I consider it unimportant, but because I consider it so important that it’ll be the central topic of the next chapter. For the current chapter, in addition, I plan to address only a part of what I mean by *Death, you’ll find, you’ll never know...* again not because I consider it unimportant, but because (as I’ll eventually try to show you), it’s an idea missed by all religions, and therefore, it’s a central concept of this book.

Stated differently, Dear, the above are two more examples of what I tried to explain earlier: in an attempt to present ideas to you in a more coherent fashion, on occasion I plan to break free of the “alphabetical straight-jacket” that I use only as a mnemonic device when I’m walking (where, as you may know, a ‘mnemonic’ is any mental technique for making information easier to remember). And if that still doesn’t make much sense to you, don’t worry about it: let your old grandfather do what he feels he must to try to defeat all the technical dragons and monsters he imagines are trying to drown or devour him; meanwhile, you just “go with the flow.”

But enough of my “feeling defensive” about so much! Now, I want to get back to ways that I’ve been fighting for my own freedoms, in part by “fencing off” undesirables. And of course I realize that fences both keep some people out and others in (recall the “connectedness of opposites”); yet, Dear, I’m sorry to say that there are some people in this world that you just must keep your distance from: in one way or another they can enfeeble you. But enough of that, also.

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to convey some general ideas about two feelings that I’ve found are especially powerful for me, namely, fear and freedom. I’ll try to relate these ideas to at least a part of what I review when I’m walking, that is, *there are constraints on my freedom and relaxation of those constraints* and “*Death, you’ll find, you’ll never know*” – *you can’t be aware of a lack of awareness*. In fact, Dear, the last line of what I review (including *Death, you’ll find, you’ll never know*) really isn’t a feeling but an analysis, the quoted part of which comes from another one of my “versifications” – which I’ll show you in a later chapter (even though it’s “bad” – but it would seem even worse if I showed it to you before explaining some of the ideas it contains). After trying to convey some of these general ideas to you, I want to focus on the key idea of the need to face our fears to gain our freedom.

To begin this thrust, let me make a few introductory comments about the much-overused word ‘freedom’. I say that ‘freedom’ is a “much-overused word”, because it’s a word that people “bandy about”, seemingly not understanding what it means. As I’ll show you in a later chapter (L), ‘love’ is another such word. The ambiguity of such words – derived from the complexities of the associated feelings – provides wonderful (or better, “horrible”) ammunition for hucksters of the world, who can then “con” people to join them (of course, with the hucksters in control!) as “freedom fighters” or “true believers” or “the Christian Right”, and so on.

As with the word ‘love’, the word ‘freedom’, alone, is so general that it’s essentially meaningless. For example, a lonely beggar on the street might claim that he’s found “freedom” if the billionaire Bill Gates gave him a million dollars. Bill Gates would probably claim he had found “freedom” if he could have the beggar’s solitude! Shucks, if he gave away all his money, Gates might then even start singing Bobby McGee’s lyrics: “Freedom’s just another word for ‘nothing left to lose’.”

* Go to other chapters *via*

In any event, Dear, maybe you see that ‘freedom’ is one of those “dangling words” that’s essentially meaningless without more explanation. In particular, both the noun ‘freedom’ and the equally ambiguous verb ‘free’ (from which the noun ‘freedom’ is derived) should be used only as adverbs to modify such verbs as: think, speak, fear, want, and so on, as in freedom to think, freedom of speech, freedom from fear, freedom from want (which, in turn, means freedom from economic misery), and so on. To see how the word “freedom” can be “turned on its head”, consider the powerful idea by Robert Ingersoll (1833–1899): “I am not so much for the freedom of religion as I am for the religion of freedom.”

To see more, consider the following analysis by the psychologist Erich Fromm (from his 1959 book *Freedom in the Work Situation*):

Freedom means many things to many people. Do we mean by freedom, a freedom from – freedom from drudgery, from monotony, from the stupidity of manual work, freedom from the irrational authority of a boss or foreman, freedom from exploitation? Or, on the other hand, do we mean a freedom to – freedom to participate actively in the work process or freedom to enjoy work? Actually our concept of freedom today is essentially a negative one. It is freedom from and not freedom to, because we are mostly concerned with what we are against and not what we are for – against whom we should defend ourselves rather than what we are living for.

Alternatively, rather than use the phrases “freedom from” and “freedom to”, use can be made of the words ‘security’ and ‘liberty’, respectively.

But that understood, Dear, for what follows, please permit me to use the words “free” and “freedom” – as abbreviations for what I really mean! For example, when I remind myself of the “category of my feelings”, *there are constraints on my freedom and relaxation of those constraints...* I might then review particular constraints on particular freedoms. For example, for a period of time, “the traitor” demanded (as a condition of employment) that he review all my letters before I could send them – a constraint on my freedom to communicate that damn near drove me crazy. I felt like a trapped animal. Eventually I broke free from this constraint, but at considerable cost.

You probably have felt similar (but, I hope, not so intense) constraints on your freedoms: it’s called “the parent-child relationship”! Parents,

however, aren't normally vindictive (viz., "characterized by vengeance"), as "the traitor" eventually admitted he was (because, when I had been his supervisor, I had encouraged him to be kinder to a co-worker – an encouragement that he strongly resented). Instead, as you probably realize when you have time to reflect, parents (with their typical incompetence!) try to promote your survival by constraining your freedoms. And though at times you may understandably question their "ridiculous assessments" of your abilities to make appropriate decisions, yet I hope that, when you reflect on the situation, you take pleasure in seeing some of the benefits to you in "the parent-child system": having someone (besides yourself) adopt as a prime goal the promotion of your survival! Kid: it doesn't get any better than that!

In other cases (i.e., in most cases!) most people probably resent constraints on their freedoms. Thus, convinced that no one (with the exception of one's parents and, one hopes, one's loving spouse) is so committed to our own trio of survival goals as we individually are, and convinced that, in general, we need to be free to promote these goals, then in pursuit of those goals, we all desire freedom. Yet, sometimes we willingly accept some constraints on our freedoms, provided that the constraints also promote our trio of survival goals. Stated differently, all data of which I'm aware suggest that all people want their freedoms. As far as I can discern, people want their freedoms, because (except for situations to be mentioned) each person knows that 1) no one else (save possibly one's parents and one's loving spouse) is so committed to achieving one's trio of survival goals as oneself, and 2) these goals will most likely be achieved if one has the freedom necessary to pursue them. Stated differently, Dear, just as I'm certain that all humans pursue their trio of survival goals, I'm certain that all humans want their freedoms – and I'm equally certain that all humans will eventually be free from all dictators, including all clerics.

The most important general exception to the above "principle" (that achieving our trio of survival goals is enhanced if we are free), at least as far as I've been able to discern, is the following. Some times we conclude that our survival goals will be enhanced if we join some group and accept associated constraints on our freedoms. That is, with our trio of survival goals being our prime goals, we willingly except constraints on our freedoms in exchange for enhancing the possibility of achieving our trio of survival goals.

For example, most of us willingly pay our taxes (although not without complaining about their complexities and not without complaining about some of the uses to which our tax money is put!), provided that, in the main, our tax dollars are used to promote our trio of survival goals (e.g., to fund the military and the police, the schools and our justice system, public works, scientific research, and so on). Similarly, we willingly obey most laws (or work to change them); that is, we accept constraints on our behavior (e.g., we agree to drive only on the right-hand side of the road), because our own trio of survival goals is promoted if we all accept the constraints on our freedoms that are prescribed by our laws.

I apologize if the above “civics lesson” was totally obvious, Dear. I “belabored the obvious”, because I wanted to contrast it to other constraints that some people accept on their freedoms, in order to avoid fear. It’s true that a part of why we accept constraints on our freedoms (by agreeing to abide by our laws) is because of our fear of lawlessness (viz., anarchy). In fact, during times of great insecurity (such as during riots or wars) people in many societies have accepted severe constraints on freedoms (of movement, of assembly, of the press, and so on). But, Dear, some people willingly accept much more stringent restrictions on their freedoms to avoid much more intense and much more personal fears.

I trust you agree, Dear, that fear is one of our most powerful feeling – if not the most powerful (i.e., fear may be “most moving” on most people’s “emotion scale”). When Body senses fear, adrenaline starts pumping; when Right Brain feels fear (for example, associated with noises in the night), all sorts of horrifying pictures (of everything from burglars to monsters) can appear. In such cases, Left Brain usually takes a back row seat: Body takes over with its “Just do it: fight or flee!”

The number of different fears that people can have is enormous! These are all the “phobias” that people can have – where as you probably know, ‘phobia’ is from the Greek word *phobos* meaning ‘fear’. To see some of these phobias, Dear, type “list of phobias” in a good internet search engine (such as Google). Some of these lists have well over 200 entries, ranging from *acrophobia* (fear of heights) and *arachnophobia* (fear of spiders) to *xenophobia* (fear of what’s strange, where *xenos* is the Greek word meaning “strange, foreign, a stranger”) and *zoophobia* (fear of animals).

I know that you have few such “fears”, Dear, and you may even “feel” that most of such fears would be “silly” – for you! But, Dear, I trust that you’ll never casually dismiss other people’s fears as silly: their fears may be “totally incomprehensible and unrealistic” to you, but their fears can be as realistic to them as being attacked by a blood-thirsty screaming demon.

If our own fears are not too intense – or even if they are intense, then after some of the initial intensity has subsided – then our Left Brain can become involved, to try to analyze the cause of the fear, and to examine alternative, rational responses. In many cases, we chose to constrain some freedom to avoid some fear; for example, people with fear of crowds (cenophobia or ochlophobia) will constrain their activities to avoid crowds, people with fear of travel (hodophobia) will constrain their freedom of movement, and so on. An example of my willingness to constrain a freedom to avoid fear is that, at least temporarily, I yielded on my freedom to communicate with my colleagues, for fear of being fired (that is, losing the ability to feed my family). For similar reasons, many workers put up with similar (or even worse) “abuses” at their jobs.

But here is not the place to go into details about any of what could be an enormous number of examples. Instead, because a certain grandchild asked me why I didn’t believe in God, I want to show you how some people willingly accept constraints on their most important freedom (the freedom to think) to alleviate their most intense fear (fear of death). Stated differently, such people rate freedom from fear of death (necrophobia) as more important than freedom to think.

First, Dear, maybe I should defend my statement that the most important “freedom” is freedom to think (or freedom of thought). If we can’t think for ourselves, it’s hard to claim that we’re still alive: even animals (even trees!) think for themselves! Meanwhile, fortunately for us, it’s very difficult to constrain people from thinking for themselves. No matter what your parents say, you still think that...! As the poet Richard Lovelace (1618–1658) wrote (when perhaps “hermitage” was pronounced differently!):

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage...

That is, Dear, even when one's body is imprisoned, one's mind can still be free.

Yet, in every society, various groups go to substantial efforts to try to constrain our thoughts. In many cases, such efforts promote each person's trio of survival goals: your parents (even certain grandparents!) try to influence your thoughts in ways that they think will help you, your teachers' prime job is to influence your thoughts, and so on, including a huge number of other people (from police to politicians and from counselors to clerics). In many cases, though, people try to constrain your thoughts not for your benefit but for their own. Of course, an example is most advertisers (who seek your money), but other examples include most politicians (who seek money and power) and (as I'll show you in later chapters) essentially all clerics (who seek money, power, and prestige and/or relief from their own fears, e.g., of death).

Because so many people have gone (and still go) to such enormous efforts to try to constrain your thoughts, Dear, it's commonly extremely difficult for your thoughts to be free. Each of us has been inundated with "indoctrination" or "propaganda" almost every waking hour essentially since we were born! Even when we walk alone, say in a desert or along a lonely beach, it's extremely difficult not only to break our thoughts free from such influences but even to know which thoughts are our own.

One of the best ways – if not the single best way – to free our thoughts is to gain exposure to opposing ideas. Thereby, there is Thomas Jefferson's wonderful summary:

The basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.

And of course Jefferson's point should be generalized: not only to more modern forms of communication (such as the internet) but also for all ideas. That is, Dear, except for those few brilliant humans who are truly able to think for themselves, the rest of us (as a practical matter) require freedom of communication if we are to experience freedom of thought. Stated more succinctly, Dear, please expose yourself to other thoughts.

Meanwhile, those intent on constraining your thoughts will attempt to constrain your exposure to other ideas. The most notorious examples are all the political dictators who have polluted the world: by constraining what the people were able to learn, the dictators constrained (and still constrain) what most of the people of their countries were able to think. Similarly for the clergy of all organized religions, as I'll show you in later chapters.

And similarly, even for those who want to help you. Thus, your parents have constrained your exposure to certain ideas (and certain emotions and other experiences) because they thought that you were too “impressionable”. That is, Dear, your parents sought to increase your exposures in a balanced manner, so that your personality would remain balanced after each new exposure – which is a part of the difficult “balancing act” of being a parent. Meanwhile, believe it or not, even a certain old grandfather has been working on his own balancing act, trying to convey certain ideas to certain grandchildren. In fact, Dear, sometimes even you will want to constrain your thoughts (e.g., constraining “day dreaming”), but while you're reading this book, I hope that you'll give yourself the opportunity of freedom of thought.

That assumed, I'll now return to the main point that I was trying to make. In pursuit of our trio of survival goals, sometimes we willingly abandon our most important freedoms – if we are convinced that, thereby, we eliminate some terrorizing fears (i.e., unquestionable threats to our survival). In particular, some people constrain their most important freedom (their freedom of thought) to avoid their most terrorizing fear (the fear of death). In fact, abandoning thought in the face of terror is quite common – even “automatic”. Thus, when you're “terrorized”, your adrenaline flows, your (Left Brain) thoughts are discontinued, and your instincts automatically take over: without thinking, you automatically “duck”, “slam on the brakes”, or do whatever your Body demands be done (with its: “Just Do It!”).

But the cases that I want you to consider are those when there's time to think about some terror – and the conscious choice is made to constrain further thinking. I don't know how common this is – in fact, I've never spent much time thinking about how many terrors humans are subjected to, but there is the old adage: “If you can't do anything about it, why worry about it?”

In particular, I remember when I was a youngster, say between the ages of 8 to 12, walking home at nights through the woods, really scared of cougars

* Go to other chapters *via*

that I knew were there. Therefore, as I walked (rapidly!), I'd whistle and sing as loud as I could, in part because I thought that the noise would scare the cougars away, but mostly because, while I was "entertaining the trees", I couldn't think of what was terrorizing me! More significantly, there's substantial evidence to support the statement that most people have always chosen to abandon their freedom to think about their most basic and most common terror, their own death.

Now, Dear, maybe you've never been terrorized by your own death. Therefore, let me suggest why, and let me try to describe this terror based on my own experiences. The first idea that I want to convey to you is that, if the religious propaganda (to which you've been exposed since you were a baby) has been effective, then your ideas about your own death have been modified to conform to "the party line" or to "the group think" (i.e., to conform to your indoctrination). And the second idea that I want to convey is that our ideas about our own death change with age.

Let me start with how our ideas about our own death change with age. Although certainly I'm no expert on the subject, I expect that young children rarely think about their death in abstract ways; instead, as with my experience with the cougars (and with various other things that went "bump in the night"), young children are afraid not of death but of whatever it is that might harm them. For older children and young adults, especially males, it seems to be common not only to be unafraid of death but even to defy dangers – and thus the "stunts" that even they will later agree were foolish, such as the way I would roar down the road in my motorcycle, exceeding the speed limit, lying down with my stomach on the gas tank and my feet hooked over the tail light. What an idiot!

Then, sometimes as a part of their "middle-age crisis", people commonly come to the stark awareness that they will die. As far as I can recall, my first experience with this "death terror" wasn't until my late twenties or early thirties. This experience, which occurred maybe a total of ten times in my life, is of an overwhelming fear of death. I especially remember the several times that I would wake up in the middle of the night suddenly "realizing" I would die. It was an overwhelming emotion, followed by thoughts such as: "What am I doing wasting my life on... when soon I'll be totally gone?"

In truth, I don't know the origin of such feelings. Because I would wake up with this feeling, I assume it was coming from my subconscious mind (i.e.,

from Instinct or Body). And unfortunately, when I've had such feelings, I've never had "the presence of mind" to examine "the picture" that my mind displayed of "death". That is, I don't know how Right Brain is involved, although I have the faint impression that "the picture" is one of infinite depth without any details... if that makes any sense!

During the past decade or more, the frequency of occurrence of my "death terror" (or whatever it should be called) has greatly subsided – so much so that, now, I don't remember when it last happened. Maybe with age, "programmed into our genes", we "instinctively know" how to "come to terms" with our death; that is, maybe the evolution of these experiences has been "natural". But maybe this "death terror" has subsided (or disappeared) because, as I'll now try to show you, my left brain has had time to "figure out this fear". And since I don't know which of these two alternative dominated, let me add some comments about both.

As for the possibility that the dominant factor has just been my aging, let me mention that I have some experience with the thoughts of people when they were near death. On his deathbed, my father-in-law, who was quite religious, said to me: "I'm not afraid to meet my maker." And on her death bed, my mother (who was very religious) said to me: "I've lived long enough – probably too long." Thus, when near death, at least two of your great grandparents had no fear of death.

In general, Dear, I'm sure your ideas about death will change as you age. In particular, when you become very old (similar to certain people whose names it's best not to mention!), I guarantee that your ideas about death will be different from the ideas of a youngster. Even while you're young, when you're tired, do you shun lying down to sleep? When you're in pain, do you shun the time when the pain would stop? When you're bored, do you shun an end to the boredom? And when you know you're a burden to others, do you wish that you weren't? That is, Dear, regardless of your feelings about death, now or when you are an adult, I guarantee that you will feel differently about death when you're old.

On the other hand, maybe my own fear of death didn't subside just with age, but subsided because many years ago, "I" (Left Brain) did "confront" my "death terror". After not too much thought, "I" realized that fear of death was totally ridiculous! Starting from the premiss that my death would mean my total lack of awareness, I concluded the obvious (which I still remind

myself when I'm walking with F's): *death you'll find you'll never know: you can't be aware of a lack of awareness.* That is, Dear, no one can know about one's own death (i.e., a total lack of awareness), for it's logically inconsistent to be aware of being totally unaware.

Subsequently I found that others had reached a similar conclusion. In particular, approximately 2300 years ago the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE), whom I mentioned in the previous chapter and about whom I'll be writing more in later chapters, wrote the following.

[It follows that] death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consist in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living... [Death should not] concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more.

That is, in my own words: *Death, you'll find, you'll never know.*

In summary, Dear, please don't be afraid of death. Definitely try to avoid it by being careful, definitely try to postpone it so that you can enjoy as much as life as possible, but don't be afraid of death. Dear, as near as I can guarantee you anything, I guarantee you that you'll never experience death, because you can't be aware of a lack of awareness – you can only be aware of the fear of the lack of awareness. And while I'm at it, Dear, let me try to give you a summary, here, of all the above, because I want to end this chapter with something far more important than showing you what I review when I'm walking.

F – Figuring out Feelings

Most feelings are survival signals, warning me of dangers and rewarding me for successes; usually they're a mixture; most moving may be instinctive; to analyze them, use an "e-motion" scale (!), but some are clear: there are threats to my survival, and signals telling me that I am surviving; there are constraints on my freedom and relaxation of those constraints; there's my anger at stupidity and my irritation at ingratitude; there's exhilaration when I succeed, and despondency when I fail; there's joy in living and somberness of dying. But: "Death, you'll find, you'll never know" – you can't be aware of a lack of awareness.

Now, Dear, some apologies to you. I expect that all of the above hasn't been of much value to you, in part because the topics were so much derived from my own experiences and in part because I know that I can't express my thoughts well, especially thoughts about my feelings. Of course I hope that you'll find something of value, but I'm skeptical. Instead, should you follow a path similar to mine (digging into your feelings and trying to gain your own freedom), I wouldn't be surprised if you find that you'll need to spend substantial effort coping with the indoctrination to which you have been subjected, i.e., your parents' religion.

For example, Dear, if you think you are immune from all thoughts about death, then I'm sorry to feel the need to object: not only are you not immune from such thoughts, you have been immersed in them ever since you were a baby. Since you were a baby, you have been subjected to propaganda that has taught you to come to terms with death in a specified way (eternal life). You never even had a chance to decide if you wanted your thoughts constrained; because of your indoctrination, your thoughts were never free.

That is, Dear, if all of what I review seems "weird" to you, if death seems to be something that "old people worry about", if it seems to be "totally irrelevant" to you, if you've never given the fear of death much thought, then I suggest that you skip church next Sunday and, instead, give some thought to one of the "cornerstones" of your religion? Similar cornerstones support the foundation of essentially all organized religions, certainly including all varieties of Christianity (including Mormonism) and Islam, namely, the "promise" of "life after death".

In later chapters, I'll try to help you "dig" into this idea of "life after death". There, I hope you'll be willing to see how primitive this idea is, almost certainly starting before writing was invented (~5,000 years ago), well illustrated with the purpose of the Egyptian pyramids (built ~4500 years ago), and perhaps first conceived more than 50,000 years ago! That is, it's an idea that originated when humanity was "in its infancy", when the most advanced thoughts were comparable to those of a little child of today.

Further, Dear, I hope you'll be willing to see the complete absence of even the tiniest shred of data to support the idea of "life after death", well illustrated by one of the earliest samples of writing, *The Song of the Harper*, written in Egypt ~2650 – 2600 BCE:

* Go to other chapters via

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There is no one who can return from there [i.e., “the afterlife”] to describe their nature, to describe their dissolution, that he may still our desires... No one goes away and then comes back.

More significantly, Dear, I hope you’ll be willing to consider other thoughts. For example, there’s the thought of Bertrand Russell:³

Fear is the main source of superstition, and one of the main sources of cruelty. To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.

Further, not only is conquering fear the beginning of wisdom, it’s a foundation for freedom of thought.

To conquer fear, Dear, you must confront it. For example, in the case of my overcoming my fear of death, maybe what happened is that my Left Brain examined my fear of death, and with this examination (like examining if there truly is a “boogie man under the bed”), my fear has dissipated. If that’s what happened, then probably there’s a lesson here of wider significance and of value to you: if you wish to “conquer fear”, then first try to understand it. Yet I know that, instead of trying to understand their fears, many people try to live with their fears, try to ignore them, or “wish them away” with some belief – where *be-lief* means, “wish to be.”

Now, of course it’s understandable why people want to constrain their thoughts when their thoughts turn “unpleasant”. To avoid facing problems, many people seek escape by engaging their minds in other activities, such as watching TV, going to movies, or going “out” in other ways (i.e., “going out” of one’s thoughts). We prefer not to think about sickness, illness, and death. Certainly most people wish to avoid thoughts about the terror of their own death; many curtail such thoughts by entering into a state of denial; they deny the existence of death; they “believe” that they will have “eternal life”. But this denial of death can come at an enormous cost: the acceptance of constraints on freedom of still other thoughts and the acceptance of our being manipulated by power mongers. Thus, Dear, as I’ll show you in later chapters, replacement of the real (instinctive) fear of death with a fictitious fear of the Lord (or fear of “eternal damnation”, or whatever) leads to loss of freedom.

³ Quoted from *The Conquest of Happiness*, p. 135, a Signet Key Book, for which I can’t give the publication date because the binding of my copy is broken and the copyright page is lost, but I see that Russell wrote this little book when he was 58, so the copyright date must be in the 1930’s. Russell lived from 1872–1970 and was still very active in his 90s!

In later chapters, I'll sketch some of the history of our ancestors' astounding struggles to achieve various freedoms. Here, let me begin to address just an apparent contradiction in the behavior of so many humans: 1) the obvious desire of so many humans to achieve their freedoms, and 2) the obvious ease with which so many humans abandon these same freedoms! The contrast between these contradictory behaviors seems especially stark when the immensity of the dangers that people have overcome to achieve their freedoms is contrasted with the ease that so many people abandon their freedoms – typically to alleviate some fear.

At first thought, this difference may seem to be derived from the difference between brave leaders and cowardly followers, but closer inspection shows that many of the “bravest freedom fighters” derived their “bravery” by abandoning their freedom to think – so that they could avoid the frightening prospect of death. Thus, it takes no bravery to put your head in a lion's mouth or strap explosives around your waist – if you've been convinced that, thereby, you'll be rewarded with “eternal life”. The difference, then, is not so much in “bravery” as it is in the ability to think and in the commitment to rely on data.

And it's not just a constraint on freedom to think about death (which most people don't want to think about anyway!), but associated is a huge collection of constraints on other freedoms: you can belong to a specific group only if you “believe” the following... Such constraints are the common fare of all organized religions, with the clerics defining the constraints on your freedom to think – and to add insult to horrible injury, they charge you for the “privilege” of having your thoughts and actions constrained! Why people choose such constraints on their freedoms is a topic I'll address in a later chapter, e.g., see **X2**, dealing with “EXcavating Reasons (Why People are Religious)”. Here, I'll mention just that many people will go to surprising extremes to satisfy the need that they “feel” to belong to a group. As the “longshoreman philosopher” Eric Hoffer wrote in his 1951 book *The True Believer*:

People whose lives are barren and insecure seem to show a greater willingness to obey than people who are self-sufficient and self-confident. To the frustrated, freedom from responsibility is more attractive than freedom from restraint. They are eager to barter their independence for relief of the burdens of willing, deciding, and being responsible for inevitable failure. They willingly abdicate the directing of their lives to those who want to plan, command, and shoulder all responsibility.

* Go to other chapters via

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In addition, many people seem to have a tendency to want to be followers. This seems to be part of the “herd instinct”, whereby (similar to animals) people instinctively know that they’re safer if they become members of a herd (because a herd is normally attacked by predators only at its edges). Further, there’s little doubt that many people desire to be followers. Followers at least satisfy their desire to belong to a group. Maybe there’s even evolutionary support for there being so many followers: in any group of animals, all can’t be leaders! Did evolution then favor having many followers? Otherwise, would there be chaos in the tribe?

But even if most of us are genetically “designed” to be followers, Dear, it’s still our choice of whom to follow. In your case, I hope you’ll choose to follow the free thinkers. But I strongly expect, Dear, that your genetic inclination is to lead. If so, then I hope that you’ll become a leading free-thinker. In either case, I expect that you’d profit from studying the ideas of Robert Ingersoll (1833–1899).

As an example of Ingersoll’s writings, and in contrast to my clumsy use of words, what follows is his description of how he felt when he broke free from his own religious indoctrination. I will end this chapter with this quotation, because I don’t want to pollute what he has written by my writing anything more. Besides, every time I re-read what he wrote, tears well up in my eyes, and then I want my mind just to be still, relishing the feelings stimulated by what he wrote and how he wrote it. After you’ve read it multiple times, maybe you’ll understand why he’s frequently referred to as “Ingersoll the magnificent.”

When I became convinced that the Universe is natural – that all the ghosts and gods are myths – there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood, the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison crumbled and fell, the dungeon was flooded with light, and all the bolts, and bars, and manacles became dust. I was no longer a servant, a serf, or a slave. There was for me no master in all the wide world – not even in infinite space.

I was free: free to think, to express my thoughts – free to live to my own ideal – free to live for myself and those I loved – free to use all my faculties, all my senses – free to spread imagination’s wings – free to investigate, to guess and dream and hope – free to judge and determine for myself – free to reject all ignorant and cruel creeds, all the “inspired” books that savages have produced, and all the barbarous legends of the past – free from popes and priests – free from all the “called” and “set apart” –

free from sanctified mistakes and holy lies – free from the fear of eternal pain – free from the winged monsters of night – free from devils, ghosts, and gods.

For the first time I was free. There were no prohibited places in all the realms of my thought – no air, no space, where fancy could not spread her painted wings – no chains for my limbs – no lashes for my back – no fires for my flesh – no master's frown or threat – no following another's steps – no need to bow, or cringe, or crawl, or utter lying words.

I was free. I stood erect and fearlessly, joyously, faced all worlds. And then my heart was filled with gratitude, with thankfulness, and went out in love to all the heroes, the thinkers who gave their lives for the liberty of hand and brain, for the freedom of labor and thought – to those who fell on the fierce fields of war – to those who died in dungeons bound with chains – to those who proudly mounted scaffold's stairs – to those whose bones were crushed, whose flesh was scarred and torn – to those by fire consumed – to all the wise, the good, the brave of every land, whose thoughts and deeds have given freedom to the sons of men. And I vowed to grasp the torch that they had held, and hold it high, that light might conquer darkness still.