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LIVING CONFIDENTLY WITH TERROR –

3 ways to conquer the “terror” of terror

Speech by Lynn Jericho, 10/6/04

Living confidently with terror has become the challenge of our times.

Most of us will live our lives without ever having known real and memorable terror. We all know though that our terror consciousness has been raised and that every one of us has wondered what we would think, feel or do if we suddenly found ourselves in a terror situation. More precisely, most of us, particularly since 9/11 and the reoccurring “terror” alerts, live constantly with some degree of anticipated or fantasized terror. This is deceptive. Our anticipation is in reality not terror but **the “terror” of terror** and there are three simple exercises to relieve our **“terror” of terror** and let us live confidently.

Both real and imagined terror get under our skin and go deep into our soul. They infect our biology, rewrite our biography and alter our lifestyle. Whether that terror comes from the acts of terrorists, stories in the media or the presence of spiders, our challenge remains the same: how do we live confidently in a terrifying world?

Terror is fear that is beyond all fear. Terror is felt in the soul when we face or imagine an immediate threat of loss to our sense of self (and all that is identified as self - family, home, job, wealth, country) from which there is no apparent escape or sanctuary. Inwardly, we feel caught or trapped by an overwhelming destructive force - without apparent capacities to sustain our self. There is no more intense experience of fear than terror.

“Terror” of terror is different. We can experience or imagine the terror of all kinds of catastrophes, illnesses, devastations or monsters (e.g. spiders, sharks, snakes, etc.). But these terrors are not the result of hatred. Since 9/11, most of us have met a new kind of terror ... the terror of a terrorist. Terrorists patiently plan and undertake acts intended to destroy our society and us. Terrorists cannot kill all of us - but they can take away our comfort and our intrinsic sense of self. Terrorists cannot be profiled - they look like anyone and everyone. They can sit next to you in a bus or a plane. Moreover, they are filled with hate – destructive hate aimed at you and your normal life.

Terrorists seek to cause random terrorizing events in order to keep their enemies in heightened states of disorganization. Acute disorganization disrupts and destroys societies, groups and individuals. Disorganized societies, groups and individuals collapse fear into hatred and begin to destroy whatever and whomever appears to be a terrorist. This chaotic reaction to terror leads to actions that lack a rational beginning, middle and end.

The terrorist's aim is destabilization and societal death. His methodology is to terrorize us with terror. When we are terrorized we are as good as dead - we lose our societal and personal organization. Sustainable life is organized and ordered. Life cannot be sustained for very long in a state of chaotic and chronic disorganization.

For most of us being organized means living life as usual - in stability. This is why so many people - about 50% of our population - seem willing to keep the Bush government in power for four more years. A vote for stability makes them feel we are sustaining the current organization of our country in the face of terrorism. This is a very naive and terrorized perspective... but psychologically very understandable.

LIVING CONFIDENTLY

Imagine, however, that we could develop our individual souls to maintain an organized sense of self in preparation for any assault of terror. What means can we use to deal with our terrorized perspective? It doesn't seem to be coming from our government.

The government wants us to be organized in terms of sustaining our physical life - lots of duct tape and plastic and batteries and water. However, physical disorganization is the easiest disorganization to overcome - just ask anyone who has lived through Hurricanes Charley, Frances and Ivan. Eventually the electricity comes back on. Even after 9/11, the first and easiest task was to organize the physical destruction and begin the physical reconstruction.

Reorganizing or sustaining the organization of our soul or mind is another matter. Terror or the chronic fear of terror throws our mind into chaos - terror frightens us out of our wits. We lose awareness of our feelings, our thoughts and our behavior.

Our mind or soul is the part of us where thoughts, feelings and intentions form. Our sense of self is rooted in a meaningful, vibrant and effective soul life. We organize our soul in order to maintain personal significance and mastery of the challenges of living. Terror obliterates that organization.

What happens to our feelings, thoughts and actions when we are terrorized by either real or fantasized events?

Terror disrupts our feeling – we are in an emotional state of shock – we feel chaotic or numb. We lose our center.

Terror disorients our thinking – we lose our focus, perspective and sense of personal truth. Our minds go blank, or become bombarded with confusing pictures.

Terror disables our will to act – we cannot act on our own. We become unable to move with clear direction or purpose.

Each of us has an organized sense of self that finds its reflection in the vitality, coherence and integrity of our feelings, our thoughts and our actions. Inner organization of our souls is far more empowering than an organized desk or bathroom cabinet and far more life ordering than

the latest Palm Pilot or Blackberry. It is blessed organization. We know we are blessedly organized when we find harmony in our feeling, truth in our thinking and goodness (the absence of harm) in our deeds.

This blessed organization can be temporarily disrupted by terror or the threat of terror - with dramatically negative consequences.

Fear and hatred play havoc with our moral impulses. In today's global challenge of terrorism, it is imperative that all of us as individuals strengthen our ability to maintain the organization of our individual souls.

Personal strength of soul leads to confidence in sustaining not only our lives but also the rich meaning of our existence. The degree to which we can manage our relationship to terror is the degree to which we live confidently. By strengthening our soul and our personal organization, we can combat our "terror" of terrorism - and collectively counter our impulses.

THREE WAYS TO STRENGTHEN CONFIDENCE AND MITIGATE "TERROR" OF TERROR.

There are three **very simple, but not easy**, exercises you can practice to strengthen your ability to feel, think and will under any circumstances - and mitigate your "terror" of terror. These exercises work! They are a path to overcoming reactive, instinctual and chaotic response to both daily distraction and sudden loss of the ordinary.

It is best to do one exercise every day for a month. Each exercise takes only five minutes. Choose a time of day and a place that offers little distraction or interference. When you have completed all three exercises you can continue to practice them in either alternation or all three everyday.

#1. Control of Thoughts - Find a simple man-made object - a paperclip, a key, a spoon, a pencil, a toothbrush, etc. Begin to think about this object - its components, its history, its manufacture, its purpose, etc. Be very direct with your thoughts. You will be surprised by all the thoughts you can experience regarding a simple everyday object. Break down each distinction until you have considered all aspects in great detail. Work with the same object for at least one week - or you can work with the same object for an entire month if you wish.

Avoid memory. On each new day do not go into memory for the thoughts you had the day before. Think each thought anew. (This may sound impossible but it is important and not so difficult. This is not a memory exercise. It is a thinking exercise.) Pencils are not very exciting objects for thought, just as a treadmill is not a very engaging walk. When you have practiced this exercise successfully you will have tremendous strength in your thinking. Strong thinking provides a counter to **"terror" of terror**.

#2. Control of Will - Pick an absolutely meaningless activity - e.g. remove your glasses and place them across the room, walk back to where you originally were, again cross the room, put your glasses back on and return to your original activity; or line up all your pens vertically, now make a star with all your pens, put them back in a line; or open the refrigerator, take out all the foodstuffs that are in jars, unscrew the tops, screw them back on, put them back in the refrigerator; or take your watch off one arm and put it on the other, then put it back on the first arm.

The activity you select must have no significance and seem like a ridiculous waste of effort. Moreover, it must be done at the same time every day - an odd time like 7:28AM. Try to accomplish your activity without using a watch or clock. After a week or ten days, you can change your activity. Performing this activity daily gives you the strength of will to carry out any deed in spite of all difficulties and challenges. A strong will provides a counter to **“terror” of terror**.

#3. Control of Feeling - Pick a time and for five minutes observe your emotions. Consider the four basic emotions – anger, fear, sadness and happiness. Note that you have emotions about your emotions. You may be angry that you are afraid, or afraid of being sad or even sad that you are happy. Ideally, pick a significant event that occurred during the day and reflect on your fear, anger, sadness and happiness associated with the event.

We all feel all four emotions at all times - it is just that one or two will dominate your feeling life and suppress the others. Feel each emotion with clarity. When we can observe the flow of all our emotions in every moment, we will no longer find our feelings imbalanced and disorganized. Our thoughts and our deeds will no longer be colored by our emotions in unconscious ways. We will feel a more active centering in our feelings. Control of feeling provides a counter to **“terror” of terror**.

With this workout of your inner soul functions of thinking, feeling and willing, your capacity for maintaining your inner organization will be very strong. Though circumstances may occur that alter the world around you, **the world within you will remain familiar and effective**. Like a kaleidoscope being twisted and turned, your sense of self will always maintain blessed organization. You will live far more confidently and terror will not overwhelm you.