

# Declare Independence from Fear

## Thom Rutledge

Author of *Embracing Fear*

*You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face ... You must do the thing you think you cannot do. – Eleanor Roosevelt*

The belief that we can think and act in such a way that fear will be banished from our lives is a dangerous fairy tale, a fiction that contaminates personal responsibility and leads to reckless reactivity or paralysis. As long as we cling to the need to send our fears into exile, as long as we insist that the goal is to be fear-free, as long as we believe that there is such a thing as complete reassurance, we are in trouble.

Life cannot be lived --- at least not lived fully --- without experiencing fear. Fear is not an obstacle standing between you and the life you want to live; it is an integral part of that life. Fear is to be faced, not avoided. Attempting to side step fear is like skipping class: you can do it if that's what you choose, but you will not be making it to the next grade level. (unless, of course, you are a star athlete)

Stop ducking your fears. Make a list of them instead. Start the list today and keep it handy. Add to the list as you become aware of more fears. There is no shame in having fear. It is as much a human characteristic as having skin or breathing air. Don't waste your time debating whether or not your fear "should" exist, or whether or not "it makes sense." These are just stall tactics and will only contribute to the paralysis.

Fear is a teacher, not the enemy. Go back to your list of fears from time to time, select a fear on the list and ask yourself, "What can I learn from this fear?" And let yourself --- encourage yourself --- to become curious about how you might be different after you have learned that lesson.

Expect the next fear --- aka: challenge --- to follow with another lesson. Don't fool yourself into thinking you can bar the door. Fear is already on this side of the door with you. Put an end to your internal bigotry against fear. Accept your fears as a natural part of the community of thoughts you call "I."

Let fear bring you into closer alignment with what you value most. Don't let fear strip you of, or make you violate what you believe in.

Greet your fears rather than hide from them. Interview them rather than ignoring them. Converse with your fears, listen to your fears, and challenge your fears. Don't automatically accept what they say. Disagree with your fears, and don't always let them have the last word.

Declare your independence from fear. Understand that independence does not mean the absence of fear. It means that you become capable of living in peace with your fears. When you no longer have the need to hide from, get rid of, or ignore your fears, you will be living a life that is instructed, but not controlled, by fear.

Have fear, acknowledge fear, listen to fear, learn from fear, and never let fear do your thinking for you.

Always remember that it is *how* we live, not *that* we live that matters most.

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Read Thom's story, "The Dying Battery & The Recovering Codependent," in the new *Chicken Soup for the Recovering Soul* (Health Communications).