**Understanding the Fear of Life**

Today, I’d like to say a little about the fear of life, which is the first cause of all our psychological troubles.

But first, I want to say something about the value and importance of seeing and *understanding* that the fear of life is the first cause of all our psychological troubles*.* The fear of life is a silent and false assumption that life is untrustworthy and dangerous that runs in the background of all experience.

Now, strictly speaking, there is no requirement that you understand the cause of your psychological misery before you can be rid of it and, conversely, mere understanding of the cause will not free you of it. The [*act of looking at yourself*](http://www.justonelook.org/just-one-look-instructions.html) will eradicate the fear, and requires no understanding, belief or preconditions of any kind. Seeing clearly the actual cause of your psychological suffering reveals that nothing you do based on the assumption that psychology is the problem has ever given you any permanent relief from its miserable nature.

In the recent upsurge of interest in our work, as new voices from different points of view join and enrich the conversation, we are seeing more clearly than ever how an understanding of the actual cause of our mental misery, although not required, vastly simplifies and mitigates the tumultuous experience of regeneration that often follows that first look.

Although our understanding of how the psychology works in service to the fear of life has become much clearer in recent times, that insight is not new. Many others over the ages have come to understand the nature of the mind and the psychological mechanisms that comprise the mind with great clarity and in detail. But to our knowledge, none have found any fundamental and permanent fix for its madness.

Because of the dominance that the context of fear and distrust holds over the mind and its structures — and despite the dismal history of consistent failure to provide decisive and permanent relief — it has been all but impossible for even those with the greatest clarity and maturity of understanding to suspect that there might be some *event* or *condition* appearing prior to the development of the psychology that sets the context within which the mind takes form in such a way as to require the mind to distrust life itself as a matter of existential significance and import.

Religion sees more clearly the *hiddenness* of the actual cause of our pain, and has proposed a variety of supernatural explanations such as original sin, satanic forces, and the like, to explain the mind’s insane determination to suffer. Unfortunately, the religious approaches have had no greater success than the psychological ones in ridding us of this curse.

And still, we continue to pursue solutions based on false insights and broken understandings, which create the illusion that the mind — that is to say, the psychology — is to blame for all the trouble that stifles and ruins the experience of being alive as a human being. And once that false assumption is firmly seated, even the clearest and truest among us are blocked from seeing any way out other than religion, philosophy, immersion in the ancient wisdom teachings, or psychotherapeutic practices aimed at taming psychological mechanisms that are actually untamable.

We are told, with all the best intentions, that we must either reform the mind by gaining understanding of what we *should* think and feel, and clear it with practices designed to clarify and give power to our understandings, or seek supernatural forces that will free us from the mind’s grip. As a last resort, many of the wisdom teachings advise us to kill it off entirely.

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Please stop here for a moment or two if you will, and try to take in what I have just suggested, without regard for what the “mind” “thinks” about it all. Consider for a moment the possibility that the thoughts, assumptions, and mechanisms of understanding that comprise your mind might be rooted in *a profoundly erroneous idea about you and your life*.

Can you see that, if what I say is true, then no one is to blame for any of it? Neither you, nor the mind, nor even the fear, really — after all, the fear of life struck spontaneously, accidentally, through the fault of no one.

If you look at yourself in the manner we speak of, the fear will go whether you understand it or not, but I believe that understanding the actual cause of the problem the looking provides a cure for will profoundly affect the course of recovery from the consequences of a life crippled by fear.

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So, about the fear:

The fear of life comes upon almost all of us accidentally at birth, when the shock and violence of our arrival sets the context within which our entire psychology — all of our understandings, all of our bedrock assumptions, our likes and dislikes and our sense of identity — will take form. The fear of life is the cause of all human aggression and self-destructive behavior.

The fear of life is a psychological autoimmune disease. It seeks to protect us from the danger of being alive by holding life itself at arms’ length, lest we fall in and perish. It warps the lens of personal psychology through which we perceive the meaning, validity, and the likely effect of everything that happens to us, with us, within us, and around us. It creates and maintains the delusion that life is not safe, that life is not to be trusted. It poisons our minds and our relationships with one another, and with the earth itself.

All of our self-hatred and hatred of others, all of our self-defeating and aggressive habits of behavior and relationship, and all of our misery and disappointment in ourselves and in our lives spring from one simple cause, which is the fear of life, which drives us insane.

There is, by the way, [a surprising level of agreement among mental health professionals](http://justonelook.org/ebooks/other-authors.html) for this view that the fear triggered by birth is the cause of much misery throughout life.

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The fear of life is not among the natural fears that we are familiar with, fears that come and go in reaction to arising events in our lives. The fear of life is a silent, false assumption that life is untrustworthy and dangerous, and it shuns interest or awareness of itself.

The presence of that unseen assumption stains the development of the individual’s entire psychological structure. And it is the source of all resistance to any efforts from forces outside of its influence to set right the individual psychology.

Along with the revelation that nothing you based on the assumption that psychology is the problem has ever given you any permanent relief, understanding the actual cause of the problem also gives rise to two other important insights: first, that you are not responsible for the madness of your own mind; and second, that you need not attend to its shenanigans as it disintegrates and regenerates after the fear of life is gone.

When you see the actual cause of all the trouble, the almost worshipful relationship we usually have with thought and belief vanishes. Thoughts and ideas that previously would have been a cause of obsessive concern are then known to be of no consequence.

So, although it is not necessary that you understand the fear of life and its nature to free yourself of its influence and its psychological minions, when the fear is gone, and the wondrous and powerful direct experience of life begins to rush in, you will find that understanding to be deeply empowering and helpful.

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