

“Worry gives small things big shadows.”

Swedish proverb

The clap of thunder shook the house with such force that pictures on the bedroom walls rattled. From the room at the far end of the hallway I heard a small voice declare, “Oh my!” The sound of little feet could soon be heard padding toward the bedroom. In moments our four-year-old granddaughter Alexis was scrambling onto the bed and diving under the covers between my wife and me. After a few moments, she popped her head out and looked around.

Half asleep, Alexis’s mom, Bethany, came trudging down the hallway, leaned against the doorframe and yawned. “Everything OK?” she asked. “I thought I heard Alexis.”

“It’s OK,” my wife replied, then pointed to the little visitor snuggled between us. Bethany nodded, yawned once more, and then headed back toward her room. For a short time, we were fortunate to have both our daughter and granddaughter living with us.

“My goodness,” whispered Alexis. “That was very loud.”

While my wife adjusted the covers to accommodate our little guest, I rolled over and closed my eyes. Just then another crack of thunder shook the house as lightning lit up the room. Alexis yelped and ducked beneath the covers again. Sleep seemed doubtful at this point so I got up for a drink of water. As I was leaving, Alexis reached out and touched me on the arm.

“Are you afraid, Opi?” she asked. She always called me Opi, a variation on Opa.

“I’m a little afraid,” I admitted. “That last thunder clap was sure a loud one.”

“Don’t worry, Opi,” she said. “I’m here and you’re safe.”

With that simple statement, our granddaughter had verbalized one of the greatest needs of humankind: the need to feel safe and secure – to be free from fear.

It’s easy in this time of financial turmoil, global conflict, and pandemic threats to develop a fear-based mentality. Fear prompts us to enter a state of protection where we begin to lock down, to alter our usual patterns of behaviour and to limit our travels.

Dr. Bruce Lipton, author of *The Biology of Belief*, claims that most people live in a state of “low grade” fear. Lipton suggests that when we are living in a perpetual state of fear we become less capable of making good decisions. “We’re just not as smart,” says Lipton.

The blood that is drained from other areas of our body (including certain parts of our brain) is pumped into the muscles and other vital organs, preparing them for quick and powerful action: fight or flight.

“What’s more important,” asks Lipton, “solving a complex math problem or getting the hell out of a burning house?” The only problem is we’re seldom standing in a burning house. Fear (even a low grade fear) keeps our body locked in the perpetual state of fight or flight. So here we are, walking around with this volatile chemical cocktail flowing through our bloodstream and wondering why we feel exhausted and achy – susceptible to every virus that happens by.

Yes, there are places in the world where people feel fearful and unsafe much of the time. Is that the case with you? Have you investigated your fear? If you don’t, you’ll likely find your world becomes increasingly smaller. Enhancing self-esteem and expanding personal awareness requires that you move from a state of fear and protection to one of love and growth. There are many ways to do that. The first step is finding the courage to take the first step.

American Zen teacher, writer and speaker, Cheri Huber once wrote, “Every time we choose safety, we reinforce fear.”

If you weren’t afraid, what might you do? Stand up more often and speak your mind? Introduce yourself to new people and build friendships? Challenge your current belief system and begin to ask the tough questions? Decide once and for all to tackle that project you’ve kept on the back burner for years? Could you reach a point where you laugh because you now find enjoyment in the things that once frightened you? If you weren’t afraid, what might you do?