



THE SUM OF ALL FEARS

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What scares you? This question will easily elicit a multitude of answers, some being concrete, and some simply unexplainable. Fear is known by many names. All of them end with –phobia. A few common—and not so common—phobias are: acrophobia, the fear of heights; algophobia, the fear of pain; androphobia, the fear of men; arachnophobia, the fear of spiders; bibliophobia, the fear of books (common among some students but quickly and strangely dissipates on or around major exam periods, and then they become instant bibliophiles or lovers of books); claustrophobia, the fear of confined spaces (won't do for frequent elevator users); dentophobia, the fear of dentists (normal, right?); and many others from A thru Z.

According to Wikipedia, a phobia is a category for an anxiety disorder that affects an individual, whereby the individual tries to stay away at great and sometimes exaggerated lengths from the thing or event that causes his irrational fear. There are typically two classifications of phobia. A social phobia is apparent in social events or situations; agoraphobia is an example. A specific phobia is derived from a physical being, object or thing; arachnophobia is an example.

Studies show that a phobia usually originates from an experience early on in an individual's life that caused trauma and eventually leads to avoidance of whatever it was that had caused that trauma. Treatments are varied. Desensitization has been proven to show sufficient effectiveness, while hypnotherapy and neuro-linguistic programming have not really been proven as effective phobia treatment methodologies just yet.

What causes irrational fear in certain people can sometimes be a form of entertainment for some inconsiderate people. Fear should never be used as a weapon against any one—it should be understood and treated. However, there are phobias which do not relate to any form of fear. Such phobias are mere discriminatory or prejudicial attitudes. Xenophobic people dislike strangers or the unknown. Homophobic people dislike other people with different gender orientations. Such individuals suffer from bigotry, which has nothing at all to do with fear.

If you suffer from any of the known phobias, you can seek help. There's hope for you. But if you suffer from plain and simple bigotry, you need to take a good, hard look at yourself. We must not stay away from things or people because we hate them, and then justify such an action as fear. Real courage is being able to accept your incapacity, and doing something about it. Denial is cowardice personified. It shows a selfishly weak individual who has no guts to face his fears. Admission is the primary, and probably most important step to take. Then and only then can your fears be positively addressed. Mind you, that takes a lot of courage.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Are you or anyone you know affected by any form of anxiety or phobia? How did that fear or anxiety start?
2. How can a person with this type of disorder seek treatment?
3. Denial is easier than direct admission. How does continuous denial affect self-esteem and personal relationships?
4. If one of your children/future children had an apparent form of anxiety, how would you as a parent help your child?
5. Is it ever easy to face your fears? Be able to elaborate on your answer.