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## **Fear: Don't Sweat It**

by Barbara Gulbranson

What do you do when fear shows up in your life? Do you remain gripped with anxiety and worry? Or do you remember that you are connected to a Divine Power no matter what seems to be going wrong in the outer world?

Recently, I had a magnificent opportunity to overcome fear and practice spiritual empowerment. At a minister's conference in Arizona, I decided to participate in a Native American sweat lodge. When I heard about how a sweat lodge is a sacred place of purification and spiritual transformation, I was drawn to the program. At that time, however, I didn't know that this meant being in a small, dark, blistering hot space for over an hour - not an appealing proposition for someone terrified of tight spaces.

When I arrived at the sweat lodge, I saw an igloo-shaped structure that looked tall enough only to sit or kneel in. The lodge was made of tree limbs and covered with a tarp of several layers. It was sealed with rocks around the edges to retain the heat. Curiously, I peeked inside and saw a large hole for the smoldering rocks, a big kettle filled with water and a ladle to scoop water and pour over the red-hot rocks to create steam.

Before beginning the ceremony, our group of 8 men and women gathered outside the lodge with the Shaman who passed the peace pipe and explained what would happen next. I told her that I was terrified of being closed in, and she assured me that all I had to do was speak up and she would quickly let me out. Even so, I was quaking with fear, but something urged me on. Upon entering the lodge, we were smudged with sage from the top of our heads to the soles of our feet. Then we crouched down and crawled into the lodge on our hands and knees because the

space was too small to stand up in. The Shaman let me enter last so that I would be near the flap in case I had to exit.

Once we were all situated inside, the fire marshal brought in blazing hot rocks, and the Shaman poured water over them. The hissing of steam filled our ears, and it rapidly became hotter than a sauna. Fortunately, we were allowed to drink water inside. As soon as the Shaman began the prayers, I interrupted. "I have to get out," I pleaded. I simply could not endure. The Shaman calmly told me to touch the ground with my hands and relax. I couldn't bear the darkness, the tight space and feeling trapped by a sealed flap. I panicked. As my hands touched the ground, I discovered that I could slip one finger out of the bottom of the tent-like structure and into the outside air. "Ahhh! Freedom. Part of me is outside of the tent," I thought. So with my finger exposed to air, I stayed in the sweat lodge for a few more minutes. We prayed, we purified, we healed and we gave thanks. The Shaman also gave us Native American names (interestingly, mine was "Fearless Finch").

The ceremony was transforming, and I will never forget the wonderful feeling that lasted through the evening and into the next day and perhaps incorporated into my soul structure. All the sweat lodge participants shared a common bond, and we were awestruck at the magnitude of the experience. When we exited the sweat lodge, I found out that we were inside for 90 minutes. Ninety minutes to obliterate a lifetime of fear.

Basically, fear comes from not remembering who we are. When we don't recognize our eternal connection to our Source, fear can take over. It's the human mind that creates fear, and it gains even more momentum by the society that we live in today. Certainly, we can remain calm, peaceful and grateful no matter what is going on in the world around us by strengthening our faith and deepening our connection to our Creator.

Dr. Ernest Holmes, founder of Religious Science, calls fear "misplaced faith." So where do you choose to put your faith? Indeed, if we put our faith in the government, the news reports or the health care system, the world can seem frightening and hopeless. However, if we appreciate the goodness and wonder of life and understand there is a spiritual current running through all of creation, we can shift from fear to fearless. And this may be easier than you think.

Just ask yourself if there are any tight spots in your life? Is there any place where you feel constricted or that you can't breathe? Are you living with one finger outside of the tent, or are you fully engaged in life with passion and joy? Living a life without this type of anxiety is well within reach. When you feel frightened, or when you see destruction or tragedy in the world, look fear squarely in the eye and see the Presence and Power of God. See the love, the light, the gift, the everlasting Presence of the Divine in every human-created adverse condition that arises. State that:

*God is in action in my life and in the world. I am eternally connected to this loving Source that sustains me at all times.*

And pour your love out to everyone you come in contact with. Take comfort knowing that the Earth is undergoing a huge shift where everything unlike God will fall away from our experience once humanity reaches a critical mass in consciousness.

When fear arises, take the opportunity to demonstrate spiritual principles that transcend outer appearances. Have confidence that by expressing peace in the quake of a storm and love in the face of fear, that you are doing the work of Spirit to raise not only your vibration but the vibration of the planet. Practice gratitude, love and faith and you won't sweat the scary stuff anymore.

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