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Freeing the Soul from Fear

By Robert Sardello

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Since the collective cultural trauma of 11 September, the initial impact of the terrorist acts has subsided into a general and pervasive feeling of fear and anger. Perhaps our military response in Afghanistan will help appease our anger; but what of the fear that has surfaced and clings to all of us in greater or lesser intensity? Have those fears been with us all along but have now broken through to the surface as a result of being assaulted?

Robert Sardello, co-founder and director of the School for Spiritual Psychology in Greensboro, North Carolina directs our attention to the continuous battle in our souls between fear and love. Originally published in 1999 and then reprinted in 2001, his book offers a series of meditations and techniques that can aid one in loosening the grip of fear by imagining it fully, embracing it and then allowing it to dissolve by focusing one's attention through what he calls "imaginal consciousness." His interest is not just in the soul of the individual, but the world's soul as well, given form in

in art, literature, mythology. Part of the goal of imaginal consciousness is to retrieve the presence of beauty in our everyday life.

Author of two previous books, **Facing the World with Soul** and **Love and the Soul**, Sardello believes that we make a mistake by trying to jettison fear from our lives or from the world. It simply can't be done. As a reality it is here to stay; but it can be transformed into love. His book, then, as he himself admits early on, is actually a book about love, as were his earlier writings, but he approaches it this time through a deep meditation on the origin and nature, and mutations of fear.

Consider just a few of his chapter headings: "The Body in Fear"; "Terrorism, Time Collapse and Anger"; "New Appearances of Fear in the World"; "The Ecology of Fear"; "Love Casts Out Fear"; "Artistic Living." The range of his exploration becomes obvious. Two insights of his struck me as I read these and other chapters. We mistake fear as something that "we have." He argues against such a notion that fear somehow belongs to us. Rather, Sardello suggests we think of fear more accurately: "Fear has me." Fear is autonomous, to his mind. It has its own independence and so when we think we can rid ourselves of fear, we have set out on an impossible road to perform an undoable task.

He then discusses how fear changes our way of being in the world: it closes off receptivity, destroys the permeable membrane between myself and world; it cancels out love; it discards or rejects what is not familiar; it ambushes other ways of being in the world, especially more deeply imaginal ways; it keeps one busy and active with no time for contemplation. People living in fear spend much of their time protecting their egos from what is new, different, strange and foreign.

The chapter on terrorism I found particularly provocative. Sardello claims that part of the terror in terrorist activities is that the “terrorist joins his very being with death” and by so doing, he “kills the sense of a future, a life destiny,” an attitude which then seeps into all of our lives. What the terrorist cannot tolerate—and read the newspaper or watch the news specials for these traits—is ambiguity, metaphor, imagination, creativity. The terrorist also literalizes death, making it “stronger than life.” In some imaginal ways, then, we can each become our own terrorist, Sardello suggests, by the act “of losing faith in life.” Terrorism can actually kill the soul by turning us all into objects to be incinerated in an act of destruction.

Interestingly enough, for Sardello, the above description offers one of two kinds of fear. Later in the book he outlines a second kind of fear, which presents itself as awe, as wonder through which we become “aware of our

human deficiencies.” Freeing the soul from fear—and the word “freeing” here is as important as the word “fear”—requires, in his mind, “seeking transformation” of the first fear and the embrace of the second. For to free the soul from fear is to feel the full and deep sensation of freedom, which can only be gained through a heightened and more empathic consciousness.

The latter chapters that develop his original insights on fear reflect a style of writing that embodies a lucid and accessible prose. These chapters reveal how to develop one’s powers of imagination and contemplation, a more accepting and receptive stance towards the world so that the invisible presences that lie behind the phenomenal world can have an opportunity to emerge. His call is for the development of an aesthetic attitude towards the material world so that it can disclose its deeper senses than simply those offered to perception. To imagine more fully is to love more fully.

He then walks the reader through several kinds of love, including spiritual love, which includes the continuous concern with the well-being of the other. The goal of this form of love is “to bring imaginal consciousness closer with ordinary consciousness” in a spirit of gratitude.

Only with this shift in consciousness can the soul transform fear. In our time of increasing insecurities and fear of further terrorist acts,

Sardello's book offers an effective anodyne to the disease of our age. A website offers an on-line guidebook to be used in conjunction with the book.

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