



CHANGING MINDS, SAVING LIVES – PSYCHOANALYTIC INSIGHTS

Welcome to Pamela Nathan’s psychoanalytic series, taking simple gems from the psychoanalytic dreamtime that may become tools for living...

“I draw on stories from the consulting room, from friends and from my own life and fictionalise them, with some poetic licence” – Pamela

FEAR

How I discovered my fearless spirit on the mountain side

By Pamela Nathan

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Fear locks you in callipers. It likes to pinion you, and clutches at your throat and chest in a vice-like grip. You can lose your grip. It is icy, and can land you on a precarious goat ledge on the side of a mountain freezing you to the spot. Fear likes to snowball and envelop in galvanising speed.

If you can unlock the frozen fear you can try anything! With no fear you can climb mountains and ski down them, too!

I found myself on the icy edge. I had to get down the mountain – a real one. The ledge was perilously high. I looked down. It was almost a sheer drop. A “black run” for sure, meaning very icy and fast! I looked behind. Even if I took my skis

off and walked it would be up three hills of snow and take all day. I looked ahead. There was only one way down the mountain. I had to traverse a goat ledge to get to a wide arc of the mountain which could allow some wide turns down. I froze. Then I took one step forward with my ski. It was as slippery as all hell. The stock bounced off the snow. There was no other way. I could only inch my way forward. It took half an hour but I got to the arc and then I got down the black run. I told myself not to stop, not to look, just to keep the hell skiing! I got to safety.

What are these fears?

Fear of falling

Fear of heights

Fear of failure

Fear of pain

Fear of loss

Fear of dying....

Of course, fear can be locked away in the deep, dark recesses of the mind. Fear can be temporarily assuaged by flights into mania - drugs and alcohol - or garrisoned by walls of denying defences. But usually there comes a time when you can't run no more or ignore the warning signs. The fear avalanches.

How to meet your fears

Know them. Feel them. Wrestle them. Fight them. Conquer them.

I learnt that there is always usually a way out.

I knew I was my own worst enemy! Most people feel fear, but they take action anyway.

I kept talking to myself and telling myself I can try and I can do it!

I knew how much the fear was costing me – pain to the legs!

I learnt to slip and slide and not resist the turn.

I watched the fearless dance the slopes, inspired.

I got back on the horse, trying a hard slope after the one I inched down in terror.

I got a foothold.

My fear melted like the ice warmed by sun.

Oh, wow, what a feeling to see a wide slope of snow in front and claim it as your own, openly embracing the steep space with abandon, speed and rhythm.

On the day I found my fearless spirit I saw a woman walking down the slope. I stopped and asked if she was OK and if there was anything I could do. "Oh I am a little afraid of this slope". I knew the feeling. I told her so and then skied on, pointing my skis straight for the incline.

Sometimes we need help

There is just one more thing about fear. I was in fact skiing in boots tantamount to callipers. A look of horror glanced across the ski shop attendant. "Oh my god you don't have foot beds in these boots!"

The day before I had gone in there and told another attendant, the one with the soothing, counselling voice, about my agonising boots. She examined the boots very carefully, looked up and said "I can't see anything wrong". "Are you telling me my pain is all psychological?" She said nothing. I put my boots and skies back on and allaying mollification, skied a vertical blue run in shooting pain. The next day, still in great pain, I returned to the ski shop. I felt devastated. I thought that "today marks the end of my skiing!" I consoled myself with the astonishing beauty of the mountain and lakes.

It turned out there was in fact an impediment, a barrier which exacerbated my fear and caused suffering. The recognition of pain and the discovery that something was actually causing my pain made me want to cry with relief.

On the last days on the ski fields, I was limbered up, had an iPod in one ear, my footbeds cushioning my boots and I sashayed down the steep slopes.

Mountains can be frightening foes or they can be friends. It all depends what you do with that FEAR! My experience and advice is scale those mountains up on high and ski down those mountains and then there are no more mountains of fear.

About Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis can be likened to a thinking heart (Alvarez). Psychoanalysis encourages thinking about emotional states and experiences, discovery, difference, searching for the truth and developing, centred relatedness, and finding a voice in holding environments. It teaches us how to 'walk in each other's shoes' by developing empathy for ourselves and others.

The psychoanalytic process honours pain, loss and trauma alongside restoration, aliveness and the appreciation of beauty, restoring the human in the development of understandings, engagement and containment, so healing, psychological strengths and new ways of being can be achieved.

You don't have to be on the couch, so to speak, to be able to appreciate the riches of psychoanalysis or to live life with truth, responsibility, self-consciousness and humanity. Psychoanalysis and its gems can change minds and save lives.

Who can benefit?

If you are in pain or distress or difficulty, have experienced repeated failures, want to know more about yourself and want to find a home for your feelings and healing for your suffering, make changes and save or live your life, then psychoanalysis can help.

For more information about how CASSE can provide support for individuals and communities to think together about how to develop secure relations and psychological wellbeing for today and the future, contact us:

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