

Affirmation Test: Try saying "yes" using your stomach muscles (diaphragm) to push out the "yes." It doesn't have to be loud, just full of energy. After 10 or so times you can feel the affirmation in your body. "Yes I can do this; yes I will go forward; yes I will expand." It makes you feel expansive, strong, courageous. Now try the same exercise saying "No" Don't do it too much, you'll get depressed. It is a contraction; a shutting down; it's uncomfortable.

Few, if any, of us can avoid the gray cloud that floats over civilization today. Real treats of war and terrorism are in the news everywhere. Can we avoid the feelings of helplessness in the face of such great threats? What can we do? Our basic fight or flight is intrinsic. Do I run or do I stand and fight? Do we let fear fuel anger? Or maybe we stand up and look fear straight in the eye.

I have spent the years traveling across the world visiting clowns who work in hospitals. Have you considered that you have a specialty? You have a skill that no other has - not the doctor, nurse or priest. As hospital clowns we know more about facing fear than most people in the world. Do you know you are an expert at transforming fear?!

Most fear is the mind projecting forward and there is plenty of that in a hospital, but there is also real fear of immediate bodily harm. This contracted environment is the normal environment that we face when we go into the hospital. It is like a soldier walking into a battlefield against great odds. It's a big job and we do it well!

Let's recognize and praise the courage it takes for clowns to walk head long into this environment never knowing what will be around the next corner. We walk in with an open heart projecting love, warmth, mirth, compassion and expansion.

What do we have for armor? We don't block or take professional distance. We cannot close off our spontaneity and our hearts. In order to do our work we must be open. So what protects us from the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" to quote Shakespeare. What keeps us from taking on the contraction and fear?

First of all, we have learned that there is little that can harm the outpouring of love. When compassion is being given, little can withstand its passion. It might be a little hug, but it can give a lot of hope. The smallest touch of human kindness in these moments is a huge amount of love.

Worthiness and Confidence and Knowing

When you walk into a hospital (as a clown) you are not waiting for someone else to be light, to be cheerful, to be positive. Sometimes we work off of each other, but mostly we clown one-on-one. We are the lightness, and the joyful spirit (even the pathos of the hobo clown is light in the corridors of a hospital) And we are worthy of this task simply by our choice to do it.

It is not a matter of believing we can do this. We KNOW how much good we do. It is our experience. We can see the smiles and the icicles of fear melt right in front of us. As we walk down a corridor, how many people pass without smiling? Not many. It is a skill we have developed. There is strength in this knowing. We can be vulnerable and strong at the same time. Our mere presence is funny. But it is more than that. We are fun not just funny. We invite fun and play. It molds our attitude and that is what makes us a symbol of hope. Hope is always present when we are at play.

Come play with me in my world. I will fall down, laugh at myself and get up again not remembering that I have just fallen. Clown lives in that moment of presence - presence of the stillness of moment.

As long as we can play we can find a way to the heart. But play in the face of danger, grief, terror, tragedy? But we have learned to play with great respect -- very softly, very quietly, very gently. There is a tremendous amount of love and strength in gentleness. And everyone alive wants to be treated with gentleness. We are after all human-kind. But how can we sustain this attitude?

Working from a Place of Stillness

I've often experienced during meditation that I am lying on the bottom of the ocean. A war could be raging on the surface and it would not affect my stillness. It is the hum and light of the Universe that supports our life and it supports our lives as clowns. We open our hearts and expand our minds and we invite that stillness. We know it is there and we move everyday on this trust. It is the stillness of the present moment felt in spontaneity. When we improvise spontaneously our awareness is heightened and we rise to a level of watcher or *inner director* as I like to call it. It is not a detachment, it is a witnessing. It is important to know this; to keep an inner eye on it and recognize that this infinite stillness is there and supports us. With this stillness flows light and joy. We share that joy, that beauty and this is our gift to the world. Most of us hospital clowns do this spontaneously without all the analyzing. But maybe in times like this we need to always be aware that it is there.

I'll never forget the words of Karen Ridd I heard so early in my clown training. "If their [children's] pain is controlled, they'll play right up to the end of their lives. If you can make that happen, you can't help but feel a bit of awe."

Awe is a near opposite to fear, as happy is to sad. When we are in awe, we move past fear into a spiritual realm - into a stillness. Awe is stepping outside and watching. It is an attitude shift. This shift can happen when our commitment is strong.

Our choice to go beyond fear can fuel our commitment and make us more determined to serve humankind with kindness, gentleness, and love. It is our decision. We can close down our doors, seal our houses, or we can march forward with our red nose badges in the face of it all. And we do. **Don't ever underestimate the grace and power that is behind you to do this.** [Wow! I didn't write that last sentence It just flowed out of my fingertips.]

So let's not underestimate what we have to offer, let's not give up in the face of great challenges. Keeping a clear path to the light in our hearts, let it reach out and glow. We are much bigger than we think. Clowning is a wonderful jewel in which to glow (and so is this newsletter) However, it is only the light bulb, not the power source. It is up to us to have the courage to keep this light glowing - to keep the windows to our stillness clean. Then all we have to do is just be our vulnerable playful selves. Our mere presence will bring hope, the destroyer of fear.

So, breathe in deep, breath out long. Take a big gulp of the Universe, think soft belly, and blow out all the fear and proceed gently.