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# A Post-9/11 Watershed: Uniting the Fearlessness Movement

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Abstract: The author makes the case for an *Integral Curriculum Revision* (ICR), like no other curriculum reform, transformation or revolution, this planet has seen in history. ICR offers a 'curricular' meta-theory encompassing and transcending those curricular theories and models that have come before it, be they sacred or secular. ICR is a reconceptualist curriculum for the 21<sup>st</sup> century which places the nature and role of fear and fearlessness in the forefront of its holistic-integral design and implementation. The author suggests that the post-9/11 era has called all humanity to see our critical situation and the challenge to qualitatively change our relationship to fear and fearlessness on a massive scale, bringing it to another level—a watershed of fearless spirit that can heal and unite, that can bring justice, wisdom, and compassion. The (post-)postmodern educational task is before us and waiting: to build a unified force *via* an ethical coalition of fearlessness (Fear Management System-7) that in managing fear does not create more fear—and only a fearlessness movement can do that adequately. The major innovation of ICR, beyond other curricula's of change and progress is that it provides insight into the inherent and constructed *Fearlessness Movement* worldwide, through time, and across cultures and geographies. Truly a global perspective, ICR is the first universal theoretical framework and vehicle ready to unite the great forces of consciousness and living spirit into a holistic-integral perspective that can assist all dimension of societies to evolve in their quest for freedom from fear on a path towards Love.

## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FEARLESSNESS MOVEMENT(Telos)<sup>1</sup>

Tapping into the common root of the spirit of fearlessness is an act of fearlessness itself; whereupon, the strongest forces to resist Fear's Empire can be invoked. Nothing less is truly effective—nothing less, will create results that end up lessening the construction of fear in our attempts to manage fear. –RMF

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<sup>1</sup> *Telos* is a philosophical-theological Latin term, attempting to describe the largest inherent "purpose-full direction" of development of an organism, society, universe or God or Spirit, or of evolution, consciousness-- whatever, terms one uses. The author has built a theory of fearlessness around this notion of an *ethical telos of fearlessness* (for secular and spiritual uses), whereby evolution moves in the long-run from fear to fearless (i.e., Fear Management System 0 to Fear Management System 9 and beyond; see Fisher, R. M. (2007). *The Need for Holistic Fear Management*. Technical Paper No. 29. Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute).

God is fearlessness. - Mahatma Gandhi

Do not be afraid of fearlessness. – XIV Dalai Lama

Truly the case made in this technical paper is a summary briefing of a much longer story<sup>2</sup> of the Fearlessness Movement (FM). It begins with the author's personal and professional overview of initiatives and ends with a rationale for naming FM as a legitimate, and exceedingly powerful latent and immanent historical (and evolutionary) movement—especially powerful to bring **liberation** to the planet, if and when its various branches can see their common root—then, a coalescing of the Fearless Spirit is possible and unpredictable. Perhaps, the fearless spirit is another name, in another time and culture, for the ancient notion of 'Holy Spirit' or 'Sacred Spirit' found in many religious and spiritual traditions.

The word "Fearless" before Spirit is primarily intended to give a qualifier to an ideal, be it secular or religious— an ideal,<sup>3</sup> which is required to haul us out of the terror, desperation and difficult times we all experience, at some level, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. "Fear lies at the center of so many of our problems," writes Unitarian Universalist minister-theologian, Forrest Church (2004)— and "Surely 9/11 is responsible for fear's heightened presence among us..." (p. xiv). In this technical paper, the argument is more focused around identifying a lack of coalescence of fearlessness is at the center of so many of our problems,<sup>4</sup> and surely since 9/11 this has been exacerbated.

The longer story of the FM is, in many ways, the story of the evolution of consciousness<sup>5</sup>, of spirit, of life forces expanding their awareness, and

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<sup>2</sup> Use of 'story' here is indicative of the constructive nature of 'truth' and 'reality' as postmodern thought/theory/philosophy has shown that all 'Truth' claims are relative to some degree, and thus any claims of only *one* Truth are suspect, distortive, and indeed inevitably partially true only.

<sup>3</sup> This "ideal" of "fearless" is predominant in a lot of the research literature and in diverse traditions throughout history, but for sure there is also a strong and highly resistant movement against "fearless" as an ideal as well (see the authors other publications).

<sup>4</sup> The sad and problematic critique of society by Church (2004) is that he does not include a theory of fearlessness or show an understanding of the FM in his book.

<sup>5</sup> "Consciousness," like "evolution" are large concepts and theories that are constructed on a lot of complicated data, and speculation. Without attempting to define such concepts, as so many scholars have, I prefer to advise the reader to read the work of Ken Wilber, an integral and transpersonal philosopher on these topics—of which I believe are some of the most insightful and useful available in the literatures. A good start is Wilber's (1981) book *Up From Eden*, and his tome Wilber (1995) *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*. A more popularized account of his

of an-ever-growing embracing compassion of Being. This story is a cosmology (in part), and a 'syncretic' collage of cosmologies from around the planet, in which human beings attempt to make sense of this struggle for meaning and struggle for growth and freedom as a species<sup>6</sup> (if not as a planetary, or cosmic, consciousness).

#### Short Autobiographical Reflections

Recently the author has been writing an encyclopedia on "fearlessness" as it has shown up as a concept and phenomena in various ways and traditions around the world and through time.<sup>7</sup> Fascinated by the diversity of conceptualizations, discourses, and ways of fearlessness, the author felt this deep (mystical) resonance with fearlessness as an actual movement on the planet—that has been here since pre-recorded history and continues to 'fight' for its right of valuation in a world so often ruled within the context of "Fear's Empire" (to use Benjamin Barber's latest term for a post-9/11 era<sup>8</sup>).

Fear's Empire is a macro-term for all the little pathways and movements that occur in human societies, that in one way or another, flow into the same "pool" and serve the regime of Fear's Empire by creating more fear instead of less. Such a flow has been called various names, like an "economy of fear" or "organized fear trade." There are lots of complex reasons for why fear management by humans, since the beginning of time, has taken rather questionable roads, yet, has done 'the best it could' under the circumstances and with the knowledge it had to work with at the time. The argument of this paper and the FM concept, is that it is inherent and constitutional that less fear is better than more fear to create ideals of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True—that is, a world that is truly healthy, sustainable, and creative. This is likely what Gandhi, a universalist in his own right, meant by saying "God is fearlessness." That is, "God" (or Spirit)

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view of the evolution of consciousness and his integral theory is found in Wilber (1996) *A Brief History of Everything*. Also see the Internet by Googling "Ken Wilber" or "Integral Movement."

<sup>6</sup> The *religio* aspect of fearlessness is implicated here, if one defines religion the way Forrest Church (2002) has: *Religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and having to die*" (p. 6). That human response is one of "fear" and "fearlessness"—so to speak—at least those aspects are of major significance in the *religio* (spiritual) path and *telos*. Church, F. (2002). Our Universalist mission: Proclaiming a theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *The Journal of Liberal Religion*, 3(2). On-line at [http://meadville.edu/LL\\_JournalLR\\_3\\_2.htm](http://meadville.edu/LL_JournalLR_3_2.htm).

<sup>7</sup> *World's fearlessness teachings; An encyclopedia of sacred and secular ways to non-violence*. (in progress)

<sup>8</sup> Barber, B. (2003). *Fear's empire: War, terrorism, and democracy*. NY: W. W. Norton & Co.

is not intended to become or feed Fear's Empire.<sup>9</sup> The story of why this has come about is a long and tangential one beyond the scope of this brief paper.

Although the study of 'good vs. evil' had been intriguing as theodicies are, the author in the mid-1980s was searching for deeper roots to this problem. He was looking for explanations that had roots and perspectives that could appeal to a modern and postmodern people and analysis—not merely based on premodern traditions (languages) of understanding 'good vs. evil.' The outcome of that research inquiry led to a major transformative personal experience in late 1989, and the author co-founded In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.<sup>10</sup> A conscious learning community and public educational Centre were established to support and experiment with contemporary 'fear' vaccines (or fear management approaches) in unique combinations. The goal was to develop a better understanding of "fearlessness" as the path of weaving between Love and fear—or in more political terms, between Freedom and fear. Such themes, were the newer versions of Good and evil. Fearlessness was at least, very interesting as a concept that seemed to have more purchase and intellectual credibility than "hope" or "faith" (in a postmodern world) as primary to the universal movement of managing fear that is found around the world and through time.

The question leading the research was: *what is the most appropriate perspective to take in being able to assess and implement the 'best' fear management strategies in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world* (especially, in a post-9/11 era). Surprisingly few people were writing or talking about this in a systematic critical way. Rather, everyone seemed to be pushing their 'pet' theories and fear management regimes. The result was and still is, a lot of confusion and conflictual competition for "best." A new theoretical holistic and integral framework (a la Ken Wilber and Spiral Dynamics theories) seemed to be needed to get beyond 'narrow' approaches. The author has published many monographs on this quest, mostly as exploratory papers, which are still open for development and testing. He has called for "fearless leadership" (Fisher, 2003), "'Fear' Studies" (i.e., new fear education and research) (Fisher, 2006),<sup>11</sup> and new "holistic fear management" (Fisher, 2007). Now, in this paper, he calls for a new coalition of the FM itself.

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<sup>9</sup> If one chooses to use religious language, Fear's Empire is "evil" by any other name.

<sup>10</sup> For a summary of In Search of Fearlessness Project and its sub-projects see the authors website: [www.feareducation.com](http://www.feareducation.com).

<sup>11</sup> Fisher, R. M. (2003). Fearless leadership in and out of the 'Fear' Matrix. Unpublished dissertation. Vancouver, BC: The University of British Columbia.  
Fisher, R. M. (2006). Invoking 'Fear' Studies. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 22(4), 39-71.

## Fearlessness is a Movement Itself

In Fisher (2007) the author traced in some detail an introductory outline for researching on the history of the fearlessness movement.<sup>12</sup> That information won't be repeated here but it adds substantive data for what is to follow. *Fearlessness* is many things—with no one definition or meaning adequate to cover the complexity of the topic. That is the finding of 18 years of research. Of course, the same applies to *fear*. Elsewhere, the author has suggested a dozen or more meanings one can find for fearlessness<sup>13</sup> in the literatures around the world. In this paper the focus is on the universal “movement” dimension of the *spirit of fearlessness* throughout time and place. A short story, told to the author many years ago, which circulated for awhile, is useful as an introduction:

Long ago, a young Buddhist monk, who had studied hard for years to reach enlightenment, was frustrated and approached his master teacher for advice. The master told him that there are two ways to enlightenment. One is by the means already attempted by the young monk: discipline, hard study, and so on. The other, he said, was by attending a ritual the Buddhist elders hold for initiates once a year. It just so happened that that time of year was tomorrow, so the young monk was interested and asked more. The master told the monk to go to this place on the mountain top and there will be others there and he can decide if he wants to do the ritual as a one-day one-way ticket to enlightenment. The young monk was very curious and arrived early at the mountain top the next morning. As the other initiates gathered and the older teachers as well, the master teacher told them how the ritual works and how they could reach instant enlightenment today—if all goes well. He said: “You are gathered today because you wish to participate in the instant enlightenment ritual. Of course, enlightenment is not guaranteed but here is what you will encounter.” The old monk pointed to a door way built into a small building with no windows. “There. One at a time, you will enter this dark room. The door will be closed behind you. The room is completely black. There is another door on the other side of the room. If you can get from one side of the room to the other and open the door to exit, you will be instantly enlightened. Of course the task is challenging because once the door closes behind you you'll be visited by 10,000 fears, those of your own, and those of all generations before you.” With that the younger

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<sup>12</sup> Fisher, R. M. (2007). History of the fearlessness movement: An introduction. Technical Paper No. 22. Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute. The author referred to his own In Search of Fearlessness Project (1989-) as a “new social movement,” among the many new social movements that have arisen as emancipatory efforts since the 1960s in the West (e.g., civil rights, feminism, environmentalism).

<sup>13</sup> See Fisher, R. M. (2006). An integral fearlessness paradigm. Technical Paper No. 20. Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

monks were taken aback, momentarily. Then the master monk spoke one more time before the ritual was to begin. He said, “I have one piece of advice for you. When you enter the dark room and the door closes... keep your feet moving until you get to the other side.”

Perhaps one interpretation of this story is that enlightenment, or fearlessness, is as simple as “keeping one’s feet moving” when in the face of fear or terror (real or imagined). Many would call that bravery or courage, and at one level that is appropriate. However, fearlessness is much more sophisticated as a fear management movement, and in this case it is a movement of an entire species through time and across cultures that is being discussed. Fearlessness is more than a behavior, a technique, a way of coping with fear and overcoming it (see Fear Management System-7 in Fisher, 2007). If fearlessness is indeed the way of enlightenment, or is god itself, then, we have to imagine fearlessness as much greater than keeping one’s feet moving, but that is part of the path too. Fearlessness is a universal spirit—is the spirit—of rebellion and resistance to oppression-repression (due to ‘fear’<sup>14</sup>)—fearlessness is what consciousness (and the living organism) does with ‘fear’:

In a nutshell, I refer to “fear management” as the essential life-process or securing defenses against threat (real or perceived) of one kind or another.... Because I am focusing on humans and culture, the innate force that manages fear (i.e., threat and one’s defense systems), is worth labeling “fearlessness.” Yes, I am suggesting that fearlessness appears the moment fear appears and its rebellious purpose is to overcome the limiting ([if not] toxifying) aspects of fear (‘fear’). (Fisher, 2007, pp. 4-5)

Fisher (2000)<sup>15</sup> documented evidence for “A Movement Toward A Fearless Society” as it appears in various social movements across disciplines and in various parts of the world, sacred and secular. This is being further elaborated in the author’s current encyclopedia of fearlessness. In this latter publication there are at least the following world fearlessness movements identified and described (listed in no particular order):

A Course in Miracles, The League for Fearlessness, In Search of Fearlessness Project, Lucis Trust, Shambhala Sacred Warrior Trainings,

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<sup>14</sup> The use of (‘) marks on the word *fear* indicates a deconstructive and reconstructive postmodern (integral-holistic) approach and meaning is involved, and not just a simple dictionary meaning of “fear” as a “feeling or emotion.” See the author’s other publications for further clarification of complex culturally (politically) modified ‘fear.’

<sup>15</sup> Fisher, R. M. (2000). A movement toward a fearless society: A powerful contradiction to violence. Technical Paper No. 10. Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

Fear Matrix Removal Program, T.E.L.S.T.A.R., Alcoholics Anonymous, Free School Movement, Freedom from Fear Foundation, Eupsychian Network, Aquarian Conspiracy, The Light Institute, Unitarian Universalists, Human Potential Movement, Schools Without Fear, Self-realization Movements, Omega Institute, Global Renaissance Alliance, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Anti-violence and Peace Movements, Gandhian Satyagraha Movement, Attitudinal Health Movement, Existentialist and Spiritual Movements, Religions, Culture of Fear critics, Spiral Dynamics, Integral Movement, etc.

On top of those movements and along with them are the teachings of a multitude of individuals, past and some still living (as we know it) (listed in no particular order):

Amma, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Gavin de Becker, Erich Fromm, Abraham Maslow, Ken Wilber, Dalai Lama, The Baileys, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Matthew Fox, Aristotle, Swami Akshara, Pema Chödrön, Margaret Wheatley, Marriane Williamson, Charles D. Bass, Forrest Church, Benjamin Barber, Rhonda Britten, Sai Baba, Osho, Paulus Tillich, Noam Chomsky, Chöygam Trungpa, etc.

The movements and names above consist of teachers and teachings that, more or less, involve assisting humanity to better manage fear ('fear'). They are more or less sophisticated in their teachings. They range across a variety of political stripes, and across disciplines and cultures, and time. The list is much larger than the small sample shown, but at least one gets the impression from this that there is a FM whereby the movement supports the goal of freedom from fear (again, more or less). One could not say they all would agree on everything about fearlessness or freedom, nor would they all even use the word *fearlessness* or *fearless* in a positive vein; however, the author finds the 'spirit' in their work is the same universal rebellion—that is, a resistance to merely being victimized by *fear*. They all teach a way of coping, managing (sometimes transcending)—that is, a moving out and beyond being merely a servant to Fear's Empire. It is striking when one studies all these variants or branches of one FM. The accumulated wisdom of them all is quite staggering, and that is the purpose of the encyclopedia: to demonstrate the power and wisdom, the compassion and force, behind the FM.

However, that said, there is no "official" FM on the planet today<sup>16</sup> that has coalesced and named itself such—that is, named itself in the name of

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<sup>16</sup> The author is well aware that "new social movements" in the past 60 years or so have a characteristic postmodern feature of maintaining diversity and fragmentation (like "cells" when referring to groups, resisters, or terrorists). There is an advantage in fighting the 'Big System' (e.g., Fear's Empire) to stay loosely-organized and in networks, etc. That said, the uniting of the FM per se, would not

uniting all these variant movements or branches into one 'stream'—one torrent—one FM. Which is most unfortunate. And that is what this short technical paper is aiming to inspire. A new coalescing dialogue and synergy is required of the latent unified FM. Why could it not unify? Why would it? Where would this start? Who would lead it? So far, the author has found great resistance among many in this movement (certainly not all have been contacted) to unite. Of course, they have their differences. That ought to be okay—as we all will never all agree upon all things. But why not unite on what we can agree upon?

The author is convinced this is not that big of a step. We are so close—and we are being called to take that next step. History will tell us the consequences of our choices, if a post-9/11 watershed of change and transformation will happen. The author predicts that Fear's Empire is growing, and it will do everything in its power to continue with its coalition of forces—of fear ('fear'). Yes, indeed, that unity is already well in place. Yet, clearly, one can see from the research presented here that there is a resistance growing as well—a rebellion and revolution in latent form—more or less—waiting its inevitable moment—nourishing its inevitable movement—to undermine, if not overthrow Fear's Empire. Without a coalition of the FM, that rebellion will remain weakened and disabled to a large degree. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way known of how to do this but indeed there are hints to be found within all these movements and their teachers.

A critical integral (holistic) theory is likely going to be required for uniting the FM branches, and returning their energies to a common root source. This is not the publication to describe that critical integral theory and framework (see Fisher, and Wilber, and Spiral Dynamics theories). What is needed is a post-postmodern framework to unite the various fear management systems (FMSs 0-9), as this author has been working on for the past few years. Until that is developed precisely, there is still the basic scaffolding there already to begin to bring the spirit of fearlessness along its evolutionary and revolutionary track, so to speak. The author looks forward to dialoguing with any who would like to be part of that building of a new coalition along these lines of post-postmodern critical integral theory of fear management systems. Of course, that is the author's ideal curriculum, *Integral Curriculum Revision* (ICR) for such a coalition, however, any attempt at cooperation and a coalition is worthy and the author is more than willing to participate and assist the cause.

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entail a diminishment of such a postmodern 'loose' approach either. Both are compatible in the author's vision of the FM.



