

THE FRIGHT SYNDROME

OR THE WARRIOR'S AWARENESS

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The Fright Syndrome

Some of us have trained in the Martial Arts for most of our lives, some for a few years. We train for many reasons, but as a Christian Martial Artist, I pray I will never need to use what I have learned to injure or kill another person. But if the need arises, we all know we could defend ourselves or our family. Or could we? We have trained for years. We have broken boards, blocks and spent hours on technique. We have arrived at the Black Belt level and perhaps moved into the second, third or higher Black Belt level. What would happen if you or I had to defend ourselves or another in a life-or-death situation?

If you drive an automobile, you have probably had the experience of cruising down the highway, minding your own business, listening to the tunes, or thinking of the past or possible future experiences in your life. Life is good ... and you haven't a care. You look up to the car in front just in time to see the biggest brake lights in the world; the vehicle in front is stopping so quick it is standing up on the front wheels. You slam on your brakes and focus entirely on the impending crash. You stopped inches from the car in front, avoiding the crash. "Great!" you say. You can't think; your heart is pounding, you may feel sick, your hands may be shaking. You are so upset you pull off the road and sit there for a few minutes until all your systems settle back down. Ever happen to you? It has to me.

Have you ever read about police shooting it out with the bad guy, firing a ton of lead and no one getting hit or seriously wounded? A couple of months ago, a local police officer answered a call regarding someone trying to steal a car. It was late at night, in a lighted parking lot. As the officer approached the car in question, a man in the car, attempting to steal it, opened fire and shot five rounds. The officer responded with fire of his own. Both were very close to their targets; neither was hit.

On December 3rd, 1994 in the Washington Heights section of the Bronx, New York, in a city and state where firearms are illegal to own, let alone carry, three policemen came upon a robbery in progress. The perpetrator was armed with a 45-caliber pistol. There was a running gunfight for two blocks. The perpetrator fired nine times at the officer; no hits. The officers fired 48 shots at the robber; 30 by one officer. Of 48 shots the perpetrator was slightly wounded in the hand and leg. Neither wound was serious. The perpetrator would try to commandeer a taxi and when the driver resisted, he would shoot the driver seriously at point blank range. How could police fire 48 times at distances less than 30 feet and miss? Police must qualify and train not only in the beginning of their careers but also on an ongoing basis. How can they miss?

In the past 100 years police have improved their weapons, training and tactics, but the "ability of police to hit opponents in gunfights appears to have improved little over the past 100 years". Perhaps there are biological limits. The American Journal states "biology sets the absolute limit for performance. These biological limits define what is possible in combat handgun shooting." Does this pertain to the Martial Artist? Let me add some icing on the cake:

- A. Only one of every four shots fired actually hits the bad guy (somewhere)
- B. Only shots to the center of mass start to get his attention
- C. The majority of shootings will take place well within 21 feet
- D. Police shooting it out with the bad guys is not new business

Have you ever listened to the cockpit recorder of a crashed airliner on the evening news? Usually, there are shouts of “Oh, my God” or the like, and then silence. You may say, “but the pilot is too busy trying to save the plane to talk.” Perhaps something else is happening. On September 8, 1994 U.S. Air Flight #427 crashed near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There were 23 seconds from the time an emergency was declared until the plane crashed. The last 21 seconds of the recorder was silent; 21 seconds of no sound. What was happening?

Perhaps we can shed some light on what was probably happening. “Ninety percent of aeronautical accidents are attributed to pilot error... Psychologists feel pilot anxiety causes inaction in emergency situations.” The psychologist adds that pilots tend to fixate on inappropriate action or objects in emergency situations.

So, what do police shootings, pilots freezing up, a near crash in our own automobile and the Martial Artist have in common? There is a physical, biological reaction to life-threatening situations. It is a predictable and uncontrollable physiological response which will occur regardless of physical condition or training, if we are surprised and realize our life is in danger.

We can see this response even in less threatening settings. For example, the basketball player who needs the free throw to win the big game. He makes the free throw a thousand times and misses the one needed to win. Say it doesn't happen, ask Donyell Marshall of the University of Connecticut about the NCAA basketball tournament game last season. In the jargon of sports, he “choked”. He became “unglued under pressure”.

So what causes us to freeze up, to choke, and to forget our years of training? If we are surprised and feel our life is in danger, there is a physical response out of our control. Our body takes over and we suffer the results.

Some or all the following begins to happen with the body alarm reaction:

- A) Diminished Visual Capacity
 - 1) tunnel vision takes over
 - 2) lose peripheral vision
 - 3) lose depth perception
 - 4) inability to focus causing blurred vision
 - 5) inability to lift or close the eyelids
- B) Saliva production falls
- C) Heart rate increases rapidly (at 145 beats per minute tunnel vision will occur)
- D) Blood pressure increases precipitously
- E) Concentration seems enhanced or dreamlike

- F) Breathing alters, panting (causes hyper- ventilation)
- G) Dizziness
- H) Numbness of extremities
- I) Fainting
- J) Flushes or chills
- K) Nausea
- L) Chest pains
- M) Adrenaline (epinephrine) released
 - 1) Blood flow diverted into large muscle groups, chest area to fuel the internal furnace to churn out large amounts of energy; the fight-or-flight reflex
 - 2) Face becomes pale, hands and feet are cold and clammy; blood has literally been drained away; veins in arms disappear
 - 3) Trembling begins in hands, then knees and feet
 - 4) Strength increases as does pain tolerance; the body is gearing up for the “ultimate effort”

If you displayed these symptoms in a hospital, they would treat you for a heart attack.

This “survival instinct”, assuming you don't faint or freeze first, creates such extreme concentration that you will be unaware of other dangers on your flank. You won't even be able to hear shouts from someone standing beside you. It is no wonder pilots can freeze up or police miss their targets.

The bottom line is: Surprise (sudden realization of threat) equals accelerated heartbeat equals decreased motor skill capability and diminished visual capacity equals conditions that make effective action impossible, in a situation where the enemy is agile, mobile and hostile.

Surprise plus fear equals inactivity or ineffective response.

If you can break the fear and surprise, then it makes sense that we can change the outcome. But remember, once the body reaction is well under way, it is nearly impossible to stop the freight train.

As a Christian, I am compelled to address the issue of fear. If a person has no fear, they are dangerous to the enemy for they are not afraid of death or anything else. If we can conquer our fear of death, what else can we be afraid of in our life?

The first step in conquering the fear of death is to accept what Jesus Christ has already accomplished on our behalf. We are all sinners, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23. The result of that sin is death, “For the wages of sin is death”, Romans 6:23. But the way out of death is to accept that Christ died for us “in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”, Romans 5:8. That Jesus took our place is pivotal in understanding and conquering fear. Romans 5: 18 states it much clearer than I could. It states “so then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all

men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men”. You must accept what Christ has done for you; you must have a personal relationship with Him. You must ask forgiveness of your sin and ask Him to take over your life (Revelation 3:20, Romans 10:9-10, Romans 10:13).

Fear doesn't come from God, but He gives us power, love and discipline. If your savior is Jesus, then you have mastered your fear of death, but it must be a daily working mastery of fear based upon a relationship with the King of Kings and Lord of the universe. Then you can say, feel and know that “perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?’” I Corinthians 15:55-56.

The Marine Corps in World War II during the Pacific Campaign designated five levels of danger. A Marine officer named Jeff Cooper would streamline the codes down to four. I propose the Martial Artist can adopt the levels of danger to three.

Condition Green: Level one - no perception of danger. One is unprepared, not watching, not on guard. This is where most of us spend nearly all of our time. Life is good; no threats, we drive our cars, go to church, shop, visit one another, never knowing or watching for danger. Attacked in Condition Green and we will probably be annihilated.

Condition Yellow: Level two - total awareness. Asked your location, who is behind you, to your flanks, you could answer without looking. You are alert, on guard, watching, listening, observant of your surroundings.

Condition Red: Level three - you have encountered a dangerous person or situation. A verbal challenge is in order; someone is trying to harm you or someone else. The situation warrants a response.

We train as Martial Artists for years and perhaps our entire life. We may be in condition green all our life. There is a chance you will never find yourself in condition red. And, if you do so, it will probably be very short in duration and will happen once or maybe twice in your entire life.

Maybe we need to rethink our attitude towards ourselves and our environment. If we spent more time in condition yellow, less in green, then we could minimize the red or eliminate it altogether. If you know a threat is coming, can we not avoid it or stop the threat short of life and death?

I submit to you, the reader, that we all spend the majority of our life in condition green, when the majority should be in yellow. Does the Bible tell us anything about condition yellow? Does it tell us to watch and be alert? In Judges 7 Gideon is chosen by God to deliver Israel from the enemy. Chapter 7:3, the fearful are sent home. The fear factor is dealt with first. Of 32,000 men 22,000 left for home, afraid and trembling. In verses 5, 6, and 7 of the same chapter, Gideon has the men separated again; this time by the manner

by which they drink water. The larger group got down to drink, and in the process were not watching or on the alert. The smaller group of 300 men brought the water to their mouths lapping like a dog. They were alert, watching, waiting for the enemy, weapons in hand. Three hundred of 32,000 men made the final cut.

In the book of Nehemiah chapter 4, the Jews were attempting to rebuild the wall. The enemies were conspiring to come and destroy them. The workmen prayed, they carried their weapons while they worked, they watched, they were alert and were victorious. "So we carried on the work half of them holding spears ... each wore his sword ... each took his weapons to the water".

In the New Testament the following verses attest to the alertness we should exhibit:

- A. I Thessalonians 5:6 "So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober".
- B. I Corinthians 16: 13 "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men be strong."
- C. I Peter 5:8 "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"
- D. Ephesians 5: 15 "Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise"
- E. I Peter 1: 13 "Gird your mind for action. Keep sober in spirit".

There are some practical steps to use in condition yellow, any of which will alert you to condition red. A partial list of these would be:

- A. Any unnatural impediment to your movement (on foot or in a car)
- B. Correlation of someone's movement to your own
- C. Any sudden change of a person's status
- D. Predatory movements, i.e. circling
- E. Verbal exchange initiated by a stranger
- F. Glancing between strangers at you
- G. Person closing on you from oblique angles
- H. A hidden hand
- I. Bumps, shoves, push or grab
- J. Relative absence of other people

Some would say there are no victims, but volunteers. I don't wish the reader to be a victim or a volunteer. We don't have to be surprised. We can control our actions. We can avoid the fright syndrome and have the warrior's awareness.

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