

Literature and Coping Skills
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Lecture No. 17
The Psychology of Fear and Anxiety-I

Hello, everybody, I am Ajit K Mishra, your course instructor for literature and coping skills. I am back with another segment of the course, if you remember until now, we have been talking about literary experiences starting with existential concerns, emotional wellbeing, personality, and then higher order thinking alongside simulation, and emotional intelligence and empathy.

So, when we look at these forms of literary experience, it will definitely come to know that they are important, and our interactions with literary texts help us, not only develop these skills, but also reaffirm those skills through focused understanding of each one of them. Then we moved to the next segment that was poetry and healing, and while discussing that particular segment, I told you how poetry is extremely important, extremely useful in helping us treat our mental challenges in order to help us take care of our everyday mental wellbeing choose, so that was how we focused on a variety of aspects related to poetry and healing, starting with poetry, therapy, and then moving to verbal imagery and healing. Finally, coming to the power of rhetorical prosody. So, I am sure you might have passed through these stages with utmost focus. If you have done so then you must have enabled to understand the power of literary experience and the power of poetic healing.

That is how we come to the next segment. Starting with this segment until the end of this course, we will be focusing on a variety of practical issues, or application issues. I was in fact preparing you all for these application issues to come. So, I am going to focus in a variety of things each week, starting this week, and for this week, I have in mind the ideas associated with fear, fear because it is one of our most basic emotions.

If you remember and if you can recall, our basic emotions, then you can quickly associate your mind with the idea of feel. So, happiness, sadness, fear, and anger, are the four most basic human emotions that we all experience, every now and then, when it comes to feel it is something that we all experience, all the times. And it is not something that happens in the

case of the other emotions, like happiness or sadness, we do not become sad, every time always, we are not always happy either.

And similarly, we are not angry, always, we may be angry for a certain period of time may be a prolonged period of time. But we are not angry, ever, always. But when it comes to fear, it is something that does not leave us even for a moment. We are constantly hounded by fear. Therefore, it is very important that we all start with the idea of fear, and how it in fact affects our existence, how it affects our behaviour, our emotional responses, and how it affects our overwhelm, or wellbeing status.

So, our understanding of fear is very important. Not only that, at the end of this segment, you are in a position to understand how fear can be taken care of, with the help of certain literary texts, I have tried to do so. If you remember, I talked about how literary texts are, in fact, wonderful simulated walls, that help us immerse that helps us engage in the activities that go on in those walls. And then when we come out, we come out wiser, because we have participated in those activities.

So, therefore, it is important that we pick literary texts and then see how these particular things happen, take place, so that we can develop certain coping skills, and with the help of those coping skills, or we can devise certain coping strategies to help us take care of these challenges to our emotional wellbeing, on a regular basis. So, it is very important that we take care of these issues.

So, let us take a look at each of these components, today. This segment is otherwise called conquering fear. Because we all know that until and unless we are able to conquer fear, we are able to defeat fear; we will not be able to get rid of fear. I do not say that, once you conquer fear, fear will not return to you, no, that cannot be the case, because fear will never leave us even for a moment, I have already told you all that.

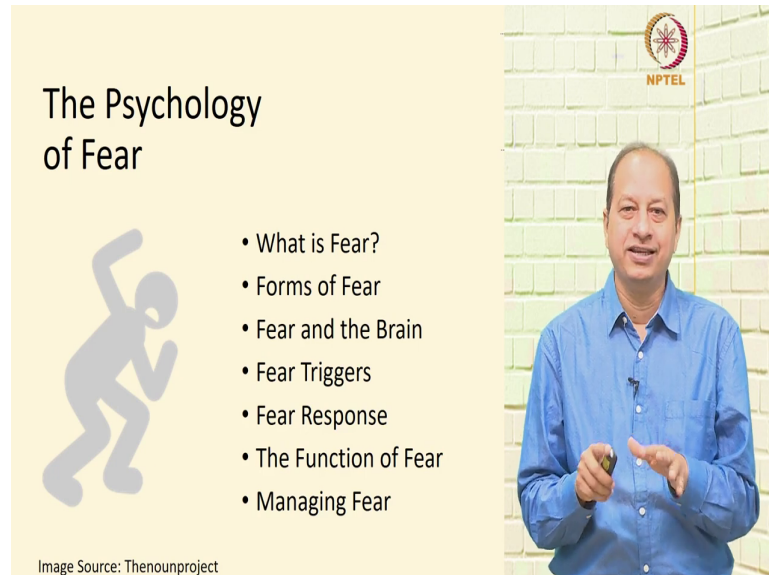
So, what is important here is that fear, once conquered, will give you an ability, an understanding of how to conquer fear on a regular basis, it will keep coming, it will come back to you stronger. But once you know how to conquer how to take care of fear, you are prepared, you know how to do that, because you have done that once; so that is the idea with the kind of coping skills that you develop, when we pass through these literary pieces, especially poems that have been chosen with utmost care, so that they give you a wonderful

experience of how to take care of fear. So, you are going to develop those abilities. And you are also going to help others develop those abilities or skills in them as well so that is the whole idea for this week.

I am going to focus on fear and anxiety. Or for the sake of convenience, I am going to focus on the idea of fear first, and then in my next lecture, I will be focusing on the idea of anxiety. For the sake of convenience, I have kept them separate, because they are a little different from each other. Although most people think that fear and anxiety are the same. But they have certain subtle differences.

When fear is all about observable danger anxiety is not necessarily that it is highly diffuse, it is unfocused. So, it is characterized by the absence of an object because it is object less. So, therefore, we need to understand these subtle differences between fear and anxiety. Although they are very closely associated, they are different. And that is a reason why I have kept them separate for our understanding of each one of them. So, let us focus on what I am going to do today.

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The Psychology of Fear

- What is Fear?
- Forms of Fear
- Fear and the Brain
- Fear Triggers
- Fear Response
- The Function of Fear
- Managing Fear

Image Source: Thenounproject

The slide features a yellow background. On the left, there is a grey silhouette of a person running away from the viewer. On the right, a man in a blue shirt is speaking. In the top right corner, there is a circular logo with a star and the text 'NPTEL' below it.

So, I am going to focus on fear. I mean, the moment I talk about fear all you think about the idea of fear, you get a variety of images in your mind. So, fearful faces, dropped Jaws, eyes wide open, caped mouths, you can imagine if I asked you to draw a few images of fear, you can do that easily, because you know how fear brings about certain changes to your facial contours.


So, therefore, this is one such image that will probably give you an idea of what fear is and how it looks like and how it, in fact, affects our body language. So, today, I am going to talk about what fear is so that we understand the different forms of fear, the types of fear, and then I am going to focus on fear and the brain. So, while talking about the psychology of fear, I am also going to link it with the neurobiology of fear so that we get to understand it even better.

So, then I will be talking about fear triggers, those causes that, in fact, produce fear in us. Although I have already told you that fear is very, very inherent, it does not go away but these are the causes that bring that inherent fear up in a strong manner. So, the fear triggers are important for us to understand. And then I am going to talk about fear responses, how we respond to fear when we are faced with it.

And then the function of fear, does fear perform any function or the only function that it has, is to keep us in a challenged, distressed and disturb state. So, let us check the functions of fear as well. And then finally, how to manage fear. Because fear is something that, in fact, poses a great deal of challenge to our wellbeing, especially our psychological or emotional wellbeing. So, it is very important that we learn, we develop skills, to manage our fear so that it does not destroy us.

Fear is okay, it will never ever leave us. But to surrender, to succumb to the pressure of overwhelming fear is never a good idea. Therefore, it is always a good idea to develop certain management skills, with the help of which we can overcome fear. So, these are the things that I am going to talk about in this particular lecture. So, let us take a look at each one of them.


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What is Fear?

- Fear is one of the universal emotions experienced by everyone around the world
- Fear is a challenging emotion
- Fear is an unavoidable facet of the human existence
- Fear arises with the threat of harm, either physical, emotional, or psychological, real or imagined
- While traditionally considered a “negative” emotion, fear mobilises us to cope with potential danger

Image Source: Pixabay



So, we will start with, what is fear? The moment I asked you this question, you may definitely get a variety of ideas in your mind. Fear is this, fear is that, fear is not this, fear is not that. So, it is quite natural, because we all know what fear is- because we all experience fear.

So, let us take him out, take an image, and try to draw certain ideas out of it. So, is that fear according to you? Of course, nothing comes out of us. And that is what the image is trying to tell us. It comes out of us because it is very much inside us. And when does that happen, when we allow fear to come out of us, and try to scare us, frighten us. First, no, become huge, and then try to scare and frighten us. We do not know what to do, then, because it has become so strong and huge that we do not know what exactly to do about it so that is how fear emerges as strong, huge, scary and frightening.

So, fear is, we all know it is a universal emotion that is experienced by everyone around the World it is not that we Indians are more scared more fearful, or in comparison to the US people or the UK people. And to the UK, people are less fearful in comparison to the Chinese people, or the Korean people. That is not the case. It is universally felt in a universally experienced emotion.

So, fear is experienced, almost in the same way, everyone, or by everyone and everywhere around the world. So, it is universal. And then fear is we all know it is a challenging emotion, because the moment we begin to experience fear, we have a certain challenge right in front of

us. There is an object, it can be a real one, it can be an imagined one, but there is an object, there is an observable danger, and therefore that makes us feel fearful.

Because that challenges us that poses a huge challenge right in front of us. And you all know, the moment we have a challenge right in front of us, we promptly move to survival mode. And we are out of the safe mode and then we move to the survival mode. And once in the survival mode, we know that we have to struggle in order to overcome that challenge, because the challenge will gradually become large, and then it will begin to scare us like this image.

So, we also know that it is an unavoidable facet of our existence, we cannot avoid it. Even if we want to avoid it, we cannot, how are you going to avoid fear? It is so integral to our existence, that we cannot do anything about it. So, experiencing fear is very, very natural and universal. Because it is an inseparable part, integral part of our existence. So, we cannot avoid fear. So, when you know you cannot avoid fear, you have to do a few things about it.

So, how does fear arise? Fear generally arises with the threat of harm. It can be physical, emotional, or psychological. It can be real or imagined. So, the moment we think there is some kind of harm, something is going to harm us. It can be a physical thing, for example, you suddenly find yourself right in front of a speeding car, you begin to think that that car is going to harm you, because it is going to crash you if you do not get out of its way-so that is physical.

Even I mean, the moment you see a rabid dog, barking right in front of you, you feel it is going to harm you probably, because that is physical. And there is an emotional stimulus as well, that can cause or similar type of harm to you, and you are scared of it, it can be emotional harm. So, it can also be psychological harm. So, fearing being believed by your schoolmates, your classmates, so that is a kind of psychological threat.

So, you are not like to go to school, or you do not like to go to your college, your institution, because you think you will be bullied every time you go there. So, it is kind of psychological harm or threat that will cause a great amount of fear in you. So, it can be real, or it can be imagined, for example, you are imagining that you are being crushed by a car or speeding car, that can also cause a great amount of fear in you. But there is a difference between the real and the imagined causes of fear.

So, when it is imagined that is not going to cause you any actual harm, since it is going to be short lived. If it is a real, that is going to cause you an actual harm. So, we will come to those issues in a while. Now, this is the most important aspect about fear. We all know that fear is a challenging emotion; it is a distressing, disturbing emotion. And it promptly pushes us to the survival mode. It takes us out of the safe mode and pushes us towards or into the survival mode.

Therefore, it is not a friendly emotion. It is not a good emotion to experience we all dislike fear and that is the reason why, human civilization has detested the idea of fear, because they always associated with the ideas, comedies. So, therefore, fear has been an abominable, detestable, human emotion. So, fear has been accorded all those negative connotations. And therefore, we shun fear. We dislike fear, we hate it strongly.

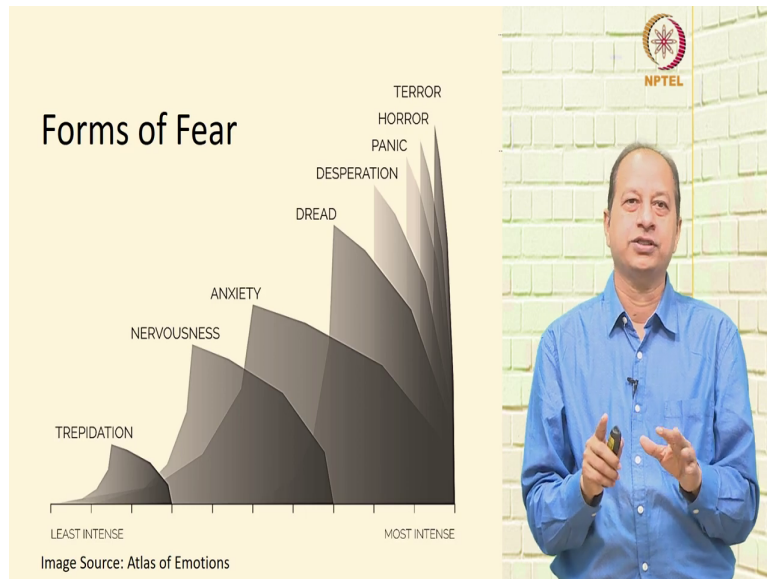
So, but when we look at the idea of fear, when we approach the idea of fear as an emotion, we understand that it is not as bad as it has been painted, to be. It has a brighter side to it, as well. And it in fact, offers us a world of opportunities. So, while traditionally, it is considered to be a negative emotion, fear, in fact, mobilizes us to corpus potential danger.

Just imagine, you find yourself right in front of a speeding car, what exactly are you going to do? You are going to protect you are going to save yourself, you are not going to surrender to that fear. Because we are evolutionarily designed in order to return to the safe mode in order to overcome struggle and overcome our distressing emotions so that is the beauty of this evolutionary design.

So, fear, in fact, helps us cope with potential danger. So, if you are experiencing fear, that means you have an opportunity to develop certain coping skills in you as so therefore, fear need not be shunt, fear need not be hated on this slide. So, we have just taken a closer look at various ideas associated with fear, I think you might have been able to look at both the sides of fear.

So, let us take a look at the other components. So, once you begin to take care of fear, and once you know that fear is, in fact, extremely helpful in developing certain coping skills in you, the fear will gradually begin to disappear.

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So, we now come to the idea of forms of fear. So, when you have a close look at this image, it is very popularly called the fear cliff. So, you can see various Cliff images here. So, it all begins with trepidation then moves to nervousness, anxiety, trend, desperation, panic, horror, and then finally, terror. So, when you look at the horizontal axis, you will find that we start with the least intense fear forms of rear types, and then move gradually towards the most intense.

Now, the idea is, if we do not know how to take care of our fear, if we do not develop the skills to convert fear into something positive, something exhilarating, exciting, then we will gradually get trapped inside the fear spiral. And once that happens, we will spin around, spin around and finally hit the rock bottom. And when that happens, we will be unable to move out of it. Because the spiral will gradually narrow down, and then you will feel short at the bottom of it.

So, it is never a good idea to allow fear to overwhelm you, if I can take back to the image that I showed you a while ago, if you allow fear to emerge out of you, a huge, strong and gigantically that it becomes unmanageable, that will lead to problems for you. So, it is always a good idea to focus on these types, these forms of fear, so that we know how to keep it to a manageable limit. I repeat, fear will never ever leave us. It is here to stay with us.

So, the whole idea is to learn how to cope with it, how to manage it. So, in order to be able to manage fear properly, it is important, it is imperative that we get to know the different forms of fear. So, if I can focus on the idea of the least intense forms of fear, let us start with

trepidation. So, it is kind of apprehension you are fearing you will not know what it is you will experience since it is very much within you, you experience that there is something that is fearful, that is trepidation, which is not a problem for you at this stage because it is very, very mild and manageable.

So, we all experience apprehension, nervousness, fear of a mild variety of mild kinds so that is not a problem at all. That is an indication that we are existing Well, we are properly living therefore, we are experiencing fear, we are not becoming insulated to it. And then, if we do not contain it for you, at that particular stage, it will become a little stiff and bigger and it will get converted into nervousness.

So, you will not be able to perform your everyday activities with ease and confidence. It will become nervous, it is not that you will stop performing your everyday activities, you will do that. But with a lot of nervousness, you will show nervousness for almost every activity that you perform every day.

So, that will become larger, the fear factor, the fear form will become larger and it will lead to nervousness so will constantly feel nervousness in everything that you do. If it is not contained at that stage, it will be even bigger. It will turn into anxiety. So, the difference between fear and anxiety is that fear is quantified or characterized by an object. Whereas anxiety is not. It is a kind of formless object less feel; it is very, very diffuse in nature.

So, fear is anxiety, which is objectiveness, which is so diffused that we cannot pinpoint, we cannot name it, it becomes extremely difficult for us to manage anxiety. So, anxiety will become larger than trepidation or nervousness. If it is not taken care of, even at this stage, it will turn into a dread, and the cliff will become stiffer and sharper, because it will begin to disturb you substantially, it will begin to affect your mental wellbeing substantially, therefore, it is going to be very, very difficult for you to overcome this particular kind of feel.

So, it is an extreme kind of anxiety that is dread. So, if dread is not taken care of, it will turn into desperation. So, it will become hopeless, you will not find hope anywhere, once you become hopeless, you will not want to do anything, you will begin to withdraw from your everyday activities, and you will gradually become dysfunctional. So, because desperation has taken over you, hopelessness, or rules over you overwhelm you, then it will turn into panic, you will experience the panic button pressed every now and then.

So, you will begin to fear everything, you will begin to fear your environment, your surrounding people around you, you will begin to fear the chairs the tables, the pen, your laptop, everything around you, because you will press that panic button every now and then that will become even stiffer and sharper. And then harder, once you find yourself in that position, you will be in a state of shock.

And once you are in a state of shock, and the executive brain will stop working, it will not send the right kind of signals, the right kind of overcoming or coping signals to you. And then you will not know what to do, it will be completely frozen, overwhelmed, at that particular stage and then finally you come to the sharpest of it all. That is terror. So, we will begin to tremble, you will develop an array of mental challenges, mental problems, that is how people experience fear at different stages.

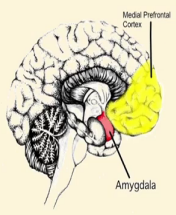
So, these are the different forms of fear, some of them are manageable, because they are least intense or less intense. Some of them become absolutely unmanageable, because they are so intense, that they will not allow you an opportunity to manage them. They are extremely sharp, and they are so strong that they will promptly overwhelm so that is why it is very important that we understand these forms of fear so that we know where to contain them.

Trepidation is okay. You are apprehensive of certain activities that are okay. Nervousness is okay. Because you are going to write an exam, it is quite obvious; it is quite natural and makes you nervous. Anxiety is okay, because you are going to face an interview panel, you will definitely be anxious, that is not going to disturb you. But anything beyond that, starting with dread, desperation, panic, horror, and then terror is definitely going to cause a lot of problems to all of us.

So, it is very, very important that we understand, but then you can see that those darker areas, each of these forms have darker areas as well. So, trepidation, if it is prolonged, will definitely cause problems. Similarly, nervousness, anxiety, if they are prolonged, they are going to cause a lot of trouble to you as well. So, we need to cut down on this particular aspect of these forms of fear. So, it is important that we begin to understand these forms. And then we also begin to manage these forms of fear.


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Fear and the Brain



- A threat stimulus triggers a fear response in the amygdala (the integrative center for emotions and emotional behavior)
- This activates areas involved in preparation for motor functions involved in fight-or-flight
- This also triggers release of stress hormones and activates the sympathetic nervous system
- The prefrontal cortex helps the brain interpret the perceived threat contextually

Image Source: Psychology Today



So, that brings us to the idea of fear in the brain. As I have already told you, it is important that we understand the neurobiology of fear, so that we get to know how it works and how it affects our overall well being. So, this is an image to suggest to those parts of the brain that in fact, you are coming to act or action whenever we experience these emotions, including fear.

So, and it is very important for you to understand that this been sized or peanuts sized area that is called Amygdala, is the most important area because it in fact regulates all our emotional responses or reactions in association with the prefrontal cortex, very popularly called PFC and even the medial prefrontal cortex, the hypothalamus, the hippocampus, all these areas get activated whenever we are faced with certain emotional stimulus. So, amygdala, in fact, regulates all our responses and reactions.

So, it also prepares us for the fight or flight responses or instincts. So, whenever there is a threat to stimulus, it can be anything, it can be a speeding car, it can be a snake, it can be a barking dog, whatever is the threats stimulus that triggers a fear response in us. And that fear response is registered, it is triggered in the amygdala. Because amygdala is the integrative center for emotions and emotional behaviour, as I have already told you.

So, any fearful or threat stimulus will definitely trigger of your response in the amygdala, it all begins here. And then this activates areas that are involved in the preparation for the motor functions involved in our fight or flight responses. For example, in association with the medial prefrontal cortex, and the hippocampus, so all these will become activated and then prepare us for the fight or flight responses.

This also is going to trigger the release of stress hormones and like cortisol. And then simultaneously it also activates the autonomic nervous system. If you remember I talked about autonomic nervous system while talking about simulation and higher order thinking. So, an important part of the autonomic nervous system is the sympathetic nervous system, the SNS.


So, the sympathetic nervous system will make you experience that emotion, it will grow stronger in you, it will lead to heartbreak, increased heartbeat, pounding, racing heart, it can lead to palpitations, sweating, even some kind of trembling, and a variety of physiological changes in your body. So, the sympathetic nervous system gets activated. And then finally, the prefrontal cortex, which is located here, you can see in the highlighted area in yellow in the image. So, the prefrontal cortex helps the brain interpret the perceived threat, contextually.

Now, this is very important, because there is something that is very, very interesting when it comes to the interpretation of a threat stimulus by the brain, especially by the prefrontal cortex of the brain. I will cite an example explain this, for example, you visit a zoo, you see a lion inside the cage, although you will experience some fear, but the prefrontal cortex will help the brain interpret the perceived threat in a very different manner, not be very, very afraid, you know that you are very safe.


So, you do not realize that you are suddenly moving out of the safe state or safe mode, and you are entering the survival mode, because you know that there is a cage to protect you not to confine the lion, the cage, in fact, protects you, and it makes you feel safe. So, the brain will interpret that particular context in a different manner, you will not be extremely afraid, although you will experience very mild fear, it will not be afraid.

On the other hand, imagine that you are faced with a lion, and there is no cage right in front of you, you see a lion. Now, the prefrontal cortex will interpret that particular context in a different manner. So, the prefrontal cortex plays an important role in the interpretation of the threat stimulus, contextually so that is how we can understand the brain functions, when it experiences the fear emotion.

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Fear Triggers



- Specific objects or situations
- Imagined events
- The unknown (FotU)
- Social interaction and/or rejection
- Death and dying
- Failure
- Loss

Image Source: Iconfinder



So, these are some of the fear triggers, I will take you quickly to the idea of fear of triggers, so that you understand the basic and the most important causes of our fear. It can be specific objects or situations. For example, there is a situation in which you unwillingly enter into a fight with somebody. We suddenly realize that person is stronger enough to overpower you, you will experience fear.

So, it can be the fear of a specific object, or situation, it can be flying an airplane. So, fear of flying an airplane, fear of diving into the swimming pool, it can be a specific object, or fear of anything for that matter, which is an object, or it can be a situation that will trigger fear in you.

And then it can also be imagined events, but then even in imagined events, you are able to see those objects, you are imagining something, you imagine that you losing something, you are getting injured, you are being crushed by a speeding car, you are being taken away by zombies, so anything can be imagined, but then even in your imagination, the object needs to be observable. And then we come to the idea of the unknown, fear of the unknown. We do not know that, but it continues to scare us, make us afraid of it.

And then social interaction or rejection so that will cause a great amount of fear in us and people stop moving out, people stop seeing friends, and people stop going to social gatherings because they fear rejection. Public speaking is such a fearful area because people think they may be rejected, they may not be accepted. So, there are people who fear public speaking.

They are very comfortable with speaking informally with their friends, but they are very, very scared, afraid when it comes to public speaking, because they fear rejection. And then the fear of death and dying although, death and dying has to do with anxiety more than fear. Because these are object-less things. But then when we see people dying right in front of eyes, we experience fear.

So, death and dying, also trigger fear right in front of us. So, for example, during the covid 19 pandemic, whenever we listen to the news of people dying, because of this virus, we would be afraid, we would experience fear. So, death and dying, can also cause fear in us. Then failure, we all know we all are afraid of failing; we all are scared of failing so that is one big reason why most people do not even try to attempt because they are so scared, so afraid of failing.

And then, finally, the fear of loss. We are constantly hounded by this particular fear. So, the idea of loss causes a lot of fear in us, we may lose our near ones, our dear ones. I will lose my smartphone, so that is also a cause of a great amount of fear in me. So, I may lose my limbs, it can be anything. So, the idea of loss triggers a great deal of fear in us.

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The slide is titled "Fear Response" and "Species-Specific Defense Reaction (SSDR)". It features three orange boxes, each with an icon and text. The first box has a "Freeze" icon (a face with wide eyes and a frozen expression) and text: "Freeze" and "• This reaction is rooted in our evolutionary response to keep us hidden from a predator". The second box has a "Flight" icon (a person running) and text: "Flight" and "• Our next instinct is to get away from whatever is causing our fear". The third box has a "Fight" icon (a person in a fighting stance) and text: "Fight" and "• If you can't get away from what's causing your fear, your response is to fight". On the right side of the slide, there is a video frame showing a man in a blue shirt speaking, with an NPTEL logo in the top right corner.

So, how do we respond when it comes to fear situations or threat stimuli? How do we respond to our fear forms? So, this is called a specific defense reaction. And this is species specific, so therefore it is very popularly called SSDR species specific defense reaction. So, when it comes to the human species, it is characterized by three specific difference reactions.

So, the first is freeze. That means you are suddenly faced with fear stimulus or threats stimulus, and your executive brain stops functioning, you do not exactly know what to do about it, you are so hounded, so shocked, that you suddenly get frozen so that is why this particular stage is called the freeze stage. Because it is so natural to us, because it is so rooted in the evolutionary response.

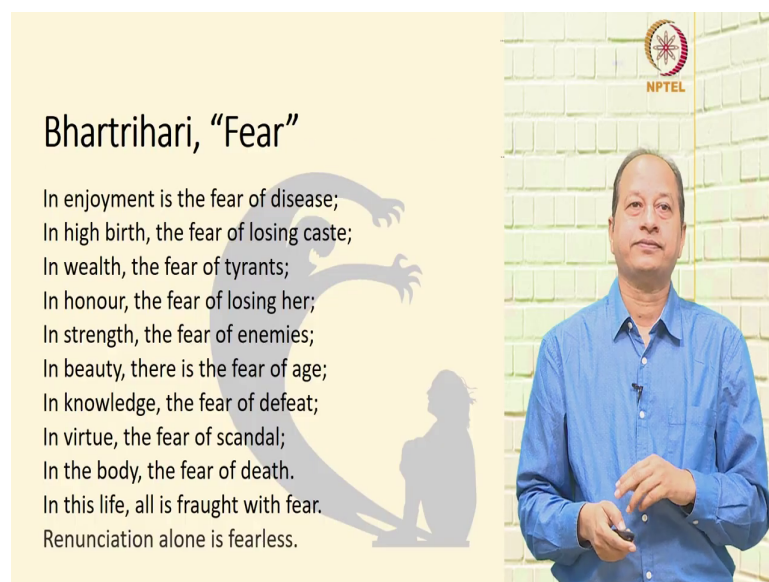
We freeze, for example, you might have seen how the other species of animals behave, and they suddenly stop, whenever they sense a threat stimulus did not make any movement. So, humans also do that. So, there are two ways of doing it. One is to protect you from predators. And the other is you have suddenly lost contact with yourself, you do not know what to do, you are so shocked. Therefore, you are frozen.

The other responses, this particular one with which we are extremely familiar now, the flight response, we begin to run away from the imminent danger, the threat stimulus, so that we can protect ourselves, we can make ourselves safe so, that is a very, very natural response to, its natural instinct to take a flight to run away from the threat stimulus. And then we come to the fight or stage, the fight reaction or fight response.

So, when you know you cannot get away from the threat stimulus, you cannot run away from it. You are left with no other option but to fight for example, you do not know swimming, and somebody pushes you into a river. What exactly are you going to do? Are you going to stop doing anything if you enter a state of shock, if you are frozen, then you will not do anything. You allow yourself to be drowned.

If you have not frozen, if you are not experiencing a great amount of shock, that means you are going to do things to fight and come out. Even if, I mean you are not able or successful in coming out you will still fight, so the fighting instinct will be activated so that is how we humans respond to the threat to our stimuli or fear or stimuli through these forms.

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Bhartrihari, "Fear"

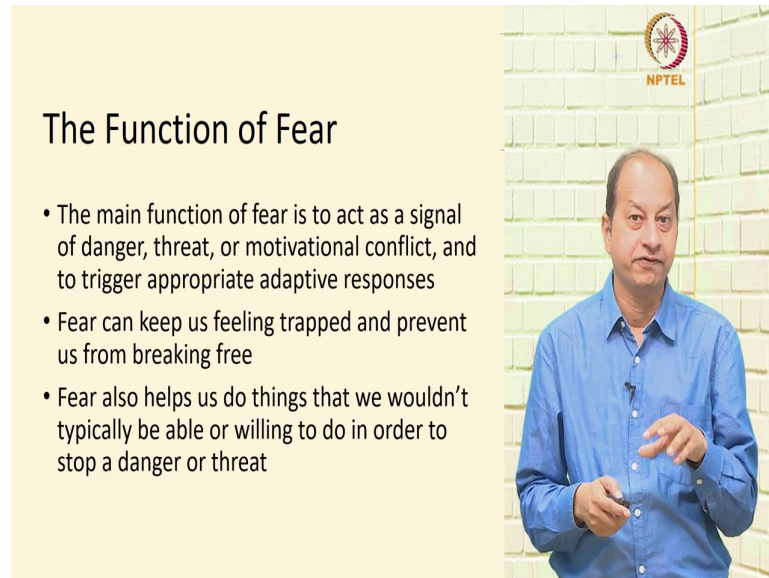
In enjoyment is the fear of disease;
In high birth, the fear of losing caste;
In wealth, the fear of tyrants;
In honour, the fear of losing her;
In strength, the fear of enemies;
In beauty, there is the fear of age;
In knowledge, the fear of defeat;
In virtue, the fear of scandal;
In the body, the fear of death.
In this life, all is fraught with fear.
Renunciation alone is fearless.

I can quickly take you back to something that I have already talked about, if you remember Bhartrihari fear of death that I talked about while talking about existential concerns, lecture 2. So, you can see how wisely Bhartrihari had listed various types of fears, various kinds of fears that we all experience every day, every moment. So, fear of disease, fear of losing cast, fear of tyrants, fear of losing honour, fear of enemies, fear of aging, and developing wrinkles, fear of defeat, fear of scandal, fear of death.

And then he goes on to say that everything, our whole life is fraught with fear. That is exactly what I told you at the beginning of this lecture, that we cannot escape fear. it is so basic to our existence, it is so integral to our existence. So, therefore, what is a way out? The way out is this renunciation alone is fearless.

By renunciation, he does not necessarily mean that we will stop doing everything, we will withdraw from our life, our existence, and we will not feel any fear. Now, that is not the thing. Renunciation means renounce fear, and then embrace life, do things that will help you overcome fear, we will take a quick look at what they are. So, if renunciation happens, then fear can disappear.

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The slide features a yellow background. On the left, the title "The Function of Fear" is written in black. Below it, there are three bullet points. On the right, there is a video thumbnail showing a man in a blue shirt speaking, with an NPTEL logo in the top right corner of the thumbnail.

The Function of Fear

- The main function of fear is to act as a signal of danger, threat, or motivational conflict, and to trigger appropriate adaptive responses
- Fear can keep us feeling trapped and prevent us from breaking free
- Fear also helps us do things that we wouldn't typically be able or willing to do in order to stop a danger or threat

So, I will quickly take you through the functions of fear, we have already discussed some of these functions. So, we know that fear gives us a signal of danger threat, or even motivational conflict. And at the same time, fear also triggers appropriate adaptive responses. So, we just talked about adaptive responses, two of those adaptive responses are flight and fight. Freeze is not an adaptive response; there are times when freeze can be an adaptive response.

So, if we can include these SSSDR responses, starting with freezing, then running, and then fighting, we can call them adaptive responses. So, fear, while giving signals of dangerous threat, and conflict also triggers our adaptive responses, so that way, fear is not negative a lot, it has a brighter side, as well.

Then fear can keep us feeling trapped, and prevent us from breaking free. If we do not, you know promptly resort to adaptive responses. If we do not activate our adaptive responses to fear stimuli. That means we will gradually get trapped within the fear spiral and it will be extremely difficult for us to break free. And then, fear also helps us do things that we could not imagine.

So, there are various other ways, for example, you will suddenly be pushed inside or into a river by somebody and you do not know swimming, still do things, you will suddenly be hounded by fear. And you will begin to do things to fight that particular fear stimulus that is being inside water. And you will do things to come out of the water and protect yourself, preserve yourself.

So, you may throw your hands, you may do things, if you finally come out of it, then you suddenly discover you could do that. You will never imagine that you could ever defeat getting drowned and come out of it and preserve yourself, so that is the power of fear. So, fear is not negative alone.

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Managing Fear

1. Panic
2. Inertia
3. Striving
4. Coping
5. Actualisation

That brings us to the idea of managing fear, because it is very important that we learn how to manage fear. Unless we do that fear will continue to disturb us and it will finally destroy us. We will enter the extreme and the sharpest form of fear that is terror. So, this is how we all start with, because the moment we are faced with fear, the panic button is promptly pressed and we begin to panic, we do not know what to do, we begin to howl, corral and you try to run in all directions, because we are panic stricken.

And then the inertia stage the frozen stage, you do not know what to do, because the executive brain has stopped functioning, and it is stopped sending the right kind of signals to your right brain, the creative brain, so you do not know what to do because you do not know

how to cope with that particular challenge. So, that is the stage of inertia, you are completely frozen, you do not know what to do.

And then, if you are not completely frozen, if that fighting instinct is still active, it is not completely switched off, then it will begin to strike, struggle, there is a struggling stage, we all struggle with fear. So, because we all start with a panic stage, and then we go to the initial stage, we do not know what to do, because our mind does not find any responses to that particular challenge.

Then, at the same time, as I have already told you all that, we are evolutionarily designed to fight our way back into the safe mode. And that is exactly what helps us struggle and strive to return to that safe mode. So, the striving stage will definitely try to move forward and do things in order to help us overcome that particular challenge. And that will take us to the coping stage.

Now, we know what to do, how to focus on that particular challenge, so that we can overcome those challenges and return to the safe mode. And when that happens, when we are successful in coping with those challenges, we will enter the actualization stage. Now, we can rejoice, we can be happy, because we have discovered how to overcome that fearful stimulus. So, therefore, we have discovered we have not been able to overcome the fear only.

At the same time, we have also discovered, we have devised strategies to overcome that particular fear in a certain way in a certain manner. So, we have every reason to rejoice, because that is the actualization. The actualization stage is very important, because it gives you insights into two very important things; it helps you overcome that fear. At the same time, it instils a particular coping skill in hue. So, managing of fear passes through these stages.

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“Every time your fear is invited up, every time you recognize it and smile at it, your fear will lose some of its strength.”

Managing Fear

- Visualize yourself as unafraid
- Name the fear
- Confront your fears
- Avoid avoidance
- Deal with the fear directly

Image Source: VisualPharm

So, managing fear is also about fighting your fear of stimulus. So, how do you fight your fear stimulus? So, but before that, let us take a quick look at this particular statement. “Every time your fear is invited up, every time you recognize it, and smile at it, your fear will lose some of its strength”. So, that is the power of fear, it is taken from a Vietnamese Zen leader, Vietnamese monk and Zen leader hang. So, he is very right in saying that.

So, all we have to do is to invite our fear, come to me, show me your face. And then recognizing our fear, the moment we begin to do that we are fighting our fear so that is the power of fighting your fear. How do you do that? By visualizing yourself as unafraid, you are not afraid. So, the moment you accept that you are afraid if you visualize your fearful faces that will reflect on your actions as well. So, the way we think, the way we imagine, the way we feel, get reflected in our actions as well.


So, if you visualize yourself as unafraid, you can fight your fear well. Then name your fear, if you have a certain type of fear, try to name it. If you remember, I talked about to name it to tame it, Dan Siegel’s popular concept. So, you name your fear at the moment you begin to name it, that means you are inviting, you are recognizing it so that way, your fear is losing its strength, it will not grow bigger or larger than you are.

And then confront your fears. And that is exactly where you need certain coping skills. And we are going to talk about certain coping skills when we take up the point of peace, for analysis and discussion. So, this is a very important thing, because you need to avoid avoidance. So, taking a flight running away from your fear can help you remain secure for a

short period. But until and unless you have fought and you have overcome your, your gigantic field, then you cannot contain it. So, you need to avoid avoidance as well.


And then deal with your fear directly. You do not need anybody's support to deal with your fear, because it is your fear, it is very much within you. And you have allowed it to grow larger in size, to grow bigger in size, to become stronger in proportion. So, it is completely up to you have to deal with your fear directly. So, you have to devise, each one of us has to devise a way with the help of which we can overcome our fear.

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So, that is how we come to the end of this lecture. I am sure you might have been able to take a close look at the idea of fear, starting with the psychology of fear and then the neurobiology of fear, management of fear, which is a very, very important thing for all of us to do. So, these are some of the sources from where I have taken the ideas for this lecture. When we meet next, I am going to talk about the psychology of anxiety. Thank you for joining me.