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Freedom from post traumatic stress

By Elise L. Moore

It wasn't terrorism. But it was the result of being afraid. Damir Igric attacked a bus driver outside Manchester, Tennessee, in October, 2001. The bus was wrecked and five people died, including the attacker.

Mr. Igric had fought in the bloody Balkan wars during the '90's. Like some veterans from World War II, Korea and Vietnam, he was troubled by post-traumatic stress syndrome. The events of September 11 seem to have triggered similar responses in some folks. To counteract this, Dr. Bernadine Healy, former president of the American Red Cross, said in a television advertisement that we should "avoid repetitive viewing of the terrible images and do something [positive]"

How to avoid becoming depressed or fearful in the face of a continuing threat? The primary enemy is not a person, a chemical or a religion. The first enemy is fear. This enemy needs to be faced now and defeated. We don't need to wait for another event. Finding a way to replace fear with courage and confidence prepares us mentally and physically to think and act wisely.

The first step in overcoming fear is to realize that the fear is in our own thought, not outside somewhere. Fear is a reaction. Recognizing that fear is a response to an event—not the event itself—provides a basis for handling it. We might not have control over events, but we can gain control over our response to them. We gain this control in our thought. Someone else doesn't need to change in order to do this. We have to change our thought and how we respond. There are choices. We can choose to respond differently.

Some people naturally respond to scary situations with courage. September 11 was full of stories of people who overcame fear and responded with compassion, determination, fortitude. Garfield Sands, the injured Greyhound bus driver, crawled out of the window of his wrecked bus and ran 200 yards to

signal for help. Help was right there, with emergency officials arriving almost immediately.

But what if the first response to bad news is panic or fear? It may seem that feelings just happen and that we have no control over them. Or events happen and we don't know what to do. The sun shines; we feel happy. A funeral, we feel sad. Unbridled hatred, we feel afraid. But feelings, like thoughts and actions, can be changed.

The best way to change anxious thoughts and feelings is prayer. Prayer is opening a communication with God. Even if we don't know what to say, simply turning our thought to God brings a blessing. Prayer is like opening a door. It allows God's angel messages to enter thought, to be seen and heard mentally. God does know what we need. And divine Mind will communicate the wisdom, guidance, calmness and courage necessary.

Prayer is a choice that helps overcome fear. Stress of all types is lessened through prayer. Sometimes the effect is immediate. Sometimes it's necessary to return to prayer over and over until fear is thoroughly replaced with a conviction of the presence and power of God. But the most important choice to make is to decide to turn to God and pray.

Here are some hints on how to start praying about fear:

- 1) If you're feeling panicked, helpless or hopeless, trust that you are seeing a skewed view of reality. What you are seeing is not all there is to the situation. Trust that good is right there, even though you aren't seeing it.
- 2) Try not to be aghast at any situation. Stop permitting negative visual and mental pictures from running over and over in your thought. There's no need to daydream or imagine endless scenarios. You can take control of your thinking.
- 3) Turn to God. Praying the Lord's Prayer or familiar passages from the Bible is a powerful way to open thought to God's power. Affirming God's presence, power and goodness will replace fear with an awareness of good. Be patient with yourself. If fear is a habit, you can be encouraged by even small victories. Persisting in keeping thought turned toward God enables you to feel His thoughts guiding your thoughts and actions. Fear will yield. Courage and confidence will become more natural. A sense of God's power will dawn.

And God does promise to stay with you: "I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee."