

## Thriving or Surviving, Trust or Fear: What Is Your Mindset for 2017?

By Ron Pevny

As I become more reflective during this season that calls all life in the northern hemisphere to quiet down and go within, I look back on a tumultuous, bi-polar year for planet earth.

On one hand, the human community has been inundated with disempowering images of (and for so many people and our non-human relatives direct experience of) violence, greed, cruelty, exploitation, fear and inability or unwillingness to seek a larger vision of the greater good, beyond short-term self-interest.

On the other hand (and much less visible in most media), the creativity, vision, consciousness, passion and compassion of the human spirit are shining brightly amid the darkness, providing hope and dynamic energy for a world perched on a razor's edge between collapse and transformation.

As I look at 2016, I see two vastly different levels of consciousness driving these two realities: the "leaders" who promote and shape them, and we, the people whose personal and political choices are shaping our collective and personal futures.

As we approach a new year, I would like to share with you some of my thoughts about the importance of being aware and intentional about the consciousness that we who aspire to age well carry into the year.

Do we approach our lives through the lens of survival, or of thrival?

Does our predominant disposition seem to be fear or trust, and which of these do we feed in our daily live.

I define survival consciousness as being primarily focused on safety, holding on to what we are and have against the fear-inducing onslaught of change, threat and uncertainty from the world around us and from the reality of our aging. The survival mentality sees change as inherently dangerous and to be resisted, while stability is the most highly valued goal.

The consciousness of thriving acknowledges the need for safety and takes appropriate steps to support our security, but looks beyond safety to what it means to be truly alive, growing, and expanding. It holds as the highest value aiming high toward fulfilling our potential as beacons of light during these critical times and to trust that we are supported in doing so.

We humans cannot have true wellbeing without continually growing, stretching beyond our perceived limits, shedding old skins that constrict our potential. People cannot remain stable, cannot stay on a plateau for long periods of time. We either grow or stagnate, and we have choice about which path to embrace. We have a choice as to whether we confront our resistance and fear and expend the effort to grow toward the light of our potential, or allow ourselves to die slowly, to gradually wither and withdraw from life.

The great Chilean poet and politician Pablo Neruda wrote beautifully of this choice in one of my favorite poems, "You Start Dying Slowly." Here are two of the stanzas from this poem:

*You start dying slowly*

*When you become a slave of your habits,*

*Walking everyday on the same paths...*

*If you do not change your routine,*

*If you do not wear different colours*

*Or you do not speak to those you don't know.*

*You start dying slowly*

*If you do not change your life when you are not satisfied*

*With a job, or with your love,*

*If you do not risk what is safe for the uncertain,*

*If you do not go after a dream,*

*If you do not allow yourself,*

*At least once in your lifetime,  
To run away from sensible advice.*

Perhaps the most important realization along my journey of growth is the huge role fear and trust play in defining how I experience my life. I have seen how easily fear arises in me, and my automatic inclination to expect the worst. When fear reigns, my moods, attitudes, choices and perceptions are colored by it, and I feel disempowered, vulnerable and hopeless.

Survival consciousness reigns supreme. In stark contrast, when trust is strongly present, I am hopeful, I feel strong, and I am in touch with the best in me, so that I can contribute my best to my wellbeing and that of the world around me.

Transforming fear has not been easy for me. I am grateful that over many years I have been blessed with experiences of deep, heart-level knowing that I am supported by a loving power much greater than my fearful personality. I imagine that this is true for all of you also, but these experiences are easy to forget when our attention is elsewhere, and especially on safety. My challenge when I am assailed by fear has been to intentionally focus on remembering these experiences of support—remembering how they felt as they stirred my body, mind and spirit.

My most important daily growth practice is to spend a few silent moments each morning, outdoors or at my altar, before engaging in any other activities, remembering and affirming that I am supported in my growing and thriving. I commit to living in trust that day, acknowledging fear when it arises but not giving my power to it. And slowly but surely my tendency toward fear is being replaced by a deep trust in my life and the LIFE I'm part of. Such reprogramming of old, disempowering patterns is possible. It takes commitment and effort, but is crucial if we are to thrive rather than just survive in our later chapters.

Using whatever ways work for us, it is critical that we strive to be aware and intentional of which consciousness in ourselves, survival or thrival, we feed each day. Do we feed ourselves a steady diet of fear and greed-inducing imagery, life-numbing foods, various addictions, and disempowering relationships. Or do we feed ourselves inspiring words, ideas and images, and meaningful relationships

that bring out the best in ourselves and others? Do we feed our bodies health promoting foods and plenty of exercise, and feed the spiritual dimension in ourselves from which trust and vision springs? Do we live for ourselves (which feeds only survival) or be of service to others so that together we can all thrive?

I believe it is impossible to truly thrive if our daily consciousness is primarily one of fear and survival. With such consciousness, we will choose “safe” numbness rather than risky aliveness. We will settle for aiming low or not aiming at all, telling ourselves we are OK being less than we can be. But if we want more, if we want to thrive in whatever circumstances life presents, then our starting place needs to be an honest assessment of the filter, the consciousness, through which we view our lives and the world around us, followed by a determination as to whether this consciousness will truly help us create lives of hope, service and fulfillment.

As you look toward the new year, I encourage you to commit to something more important than just a self-improvement resolution or two. Even if you are successful at keeping these, you may accomplish little more than improving who you have been when what you most need is expansion into the new, empowered self you can become. I encourage you to take time to honestly examine the consciousness you are carrying into 2016, because that lens through which you view life will play a major role in shaping how the year unfolds for you. I can think of no more-valuable resolution New Year’s resolution than to do this. If you decide to commit, or recommit, to trusting and thriving, the principles and practices of conscious eldering can offer invaluable support. May you thrive in 2017.

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