



Fight, Flight or Freeze?

I read an article recently. While it may seem a little “woo-woo” for your taste, stick with it. I think you’ll end up glad you did. ☺ In it, the author references Aaron White, who wrote a post about how fasting and silence could be a strategic response to the raging noise and insatiable appetites of our time.

Most people are familiar with the “fight, flight and freeze” response when it comes to fear. This is the result of a massive, automatic adrenaline dump called the Amygdala Hijack. This adrenaline boost comes in handy when dealing with a sudden bear attack, but it is less helpful when we are trying to navigate the modern world.

Fear can cause defensiveness, paralysis or avoidance. These reactions can keep us “safe” but also often prevent us from experiencing life in its fullness. They can also cause us to hide our fear or draw attention away from it by adopting a fake confidence. But if there are real dangers, pretending they aren’t there doesn’t make them go away. I remember talking about the practice of stillness and silence with a group of men in an addiction-recovery center. One man spoke up:

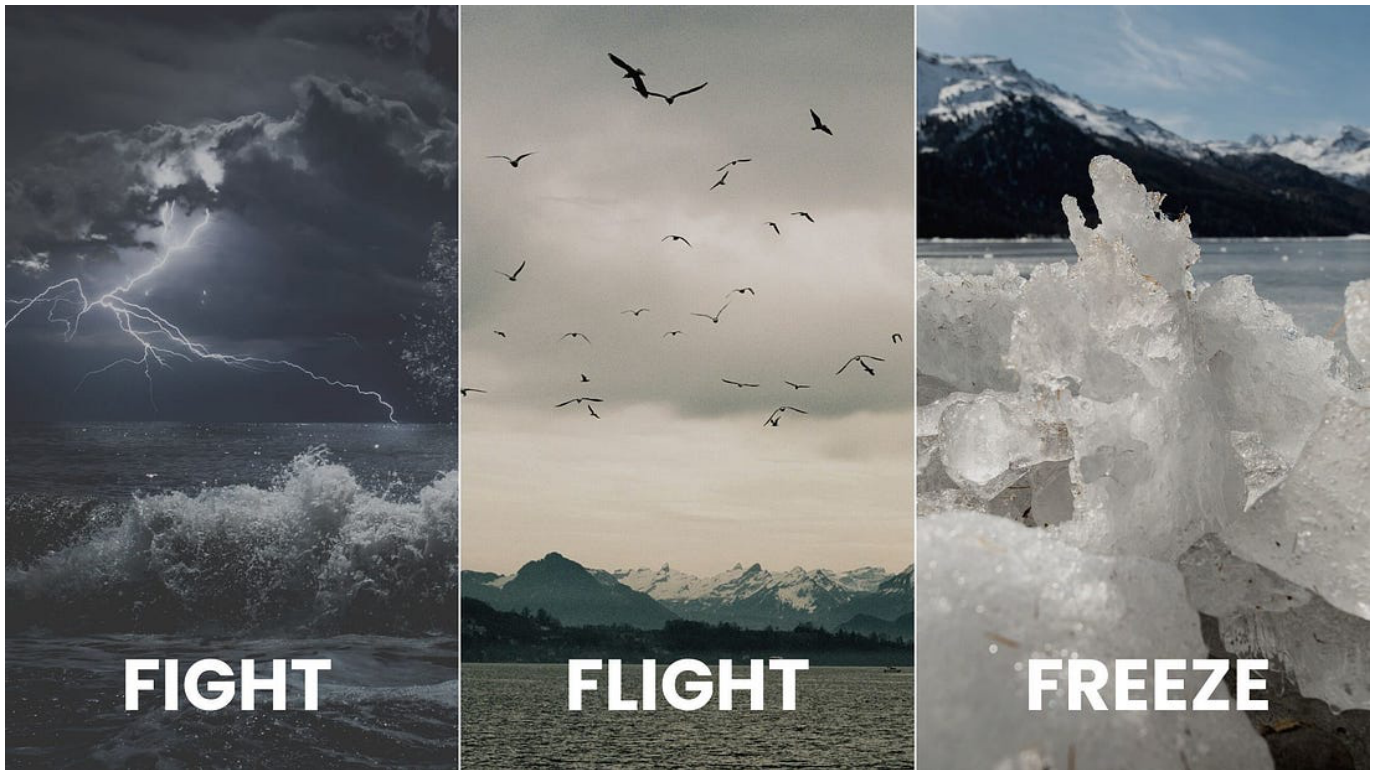
“I can’t do silence. My mind is a dangerous neighborhood.”

I replied, “I believe you. But you’re walking around in that neighborhood all the time anyways.

Isn’t it better to see what’s there, even if it is scary, rather than stumbling through it blindly?”

Fear is part of the human condition... But when shame, pain or fear take over this often leads to cover-ups and hiding. We use habits, addictions, and sins to comfort and distract us from the painful truths we don’t want to face or feel, and then we try to hide those habits as well... We fight, hard, against acknowledging the reality of our condition, like a person who refuses to go to the doctor out of fear they might find something bad.

*To make matters worse, our culture intentionally reinforces our fears, because **people who are afraid and distracted are easier to control and manipulate.** We are conditioned about who to fight, what to run away from, when to freeze, and **how to solve all our problems through the latest purchase.***



Choosing to fast and to be silent is a way of participating in... freedom. It is denying ourselves certain inputs (food, speech, noise) so that we can be freed from our unhealthy relationships with them. We intentionally empty ourselves of some of the things we have (mis)used to give us temporary comfort...

Now, it is hard to do this. Of course it is. We have come to rely on food and noise (interior and exterior) to comfort us in all kinds of ways.

So fasting and silence represent a kind of detox for most of us.

Anyone who has gone through any kind of detox knows it is not an easy process. We often come face to face with things we have been hiding from ourselves, but without our drug of choice for comfort, numbing or distraction. But it is exactly this process that gives us the opportunity to see things clearly

What's fascinating is that modern brain research seems to reinforce the power of this process. Neurologists have found a link between prayerful meditation and the ability to quell anxiety and develop impulse control that offsets emotional hijacking from the amygdala. It appears that learning silence, stillness, and freedom from an unhealthy reliance on certain things can be an actual body, soul and spirit tool for calming fear and anxiety.

Fasting and Silence... may seem oddities in today's world. Might these practices, utilized from time to time, help break the rapid reaction – the knee-jerk reaction - expressed in Fight, Flight, Freeze when we encounter FEAR? Why not give them a try. If not, the old adage will prove true: *You keep doin' what you been doin', you'll keep gettin' what you been gettin'.*

I'd love to hear your thoughts on this. Agree, disagree. It's OK by me either way. Let's encourage each other to practice a different way; a way that might free us from some of the traps we so easily fall into...