

The Wright brothers have a lot to answer for.

If they had less time on their hands they might have been more than contented travelling on terra firma. Why couldn't they invent something much less terrifying like corn plasters or Pop Tarts? My fear of flying is therefore their fault. That and the package holiday to Turbulence Hell in 1995, ending an unblemished phobic record on my part.

It's not what is actually happening we are interested in; it's what we think is happening. The plane is falling apart, turbulence will kill us all, the dinner tastes worse than the carton it came in. Not that any of us would have tasted an airline meal lately. This fear we all have is born out of emotion, not logical reasoning, but people try to 'convert' you by trying to reason with you. Ever been confronted by something like this?

'You are more likely to get kicked to death by a donkey than die in an aeroplane'

I actually researched this fact, and unfortunately it is true. 1000 people die every year in aeroplane related events (out of 2,000,000,000 who travel), and 1300 people every year get kicked to death by a donkey (no figures available for how many stand too close). Does this make us feel better? No, it just makes us feel scared and guilty, instead of just scared. However, what we do is try to reason back with them. Ever said anything like this? I have.

'It's just so unnatural to be 7 miles up in the air'
'I don't need to go abroad to enjoy myself'
'Aeroplanes pollute where the world hurts the most'

It's interesting, and I am sure you could add more to the list, but they all have one thing in common. They are baloney. Well in relation to most of us they are. We have already established this has nothing to do with reason, and everything to do with emotion, so why do we justify our fear with reason? That's the balonic (yes it is a word, if it isn't, it is now) bit. I therefore realised that there is one inescapable truth here:

The fear is born of emotion but we try to justify it with facts.

That is why most people never overcome the fear, they are tackling the wrong end of it. Don't believe me? Then how many people have managed to talk you out of your fear of flying with reason alone? Not many I bet, or you wouldn't be reading this.

I was the worst flyer ever after 1995. The only time I flew, when I had to, was in 1999, and it took a bottle of horse tranquillisers and beta-blockers to do it, and it was the second worst event in my life. My phobia was so bad that I couldn't even watch 'Airport' on ITV because I broke out in a hot sweat. It was only when I realised that fear was running my life for me I tried to do something about it.

I used lots of things, but found that first you have to confront the emotion and try to control it. After reading lots of books only one thing helped me, and that was hypnotherapy, and lots of it. You have to be open to the process and throw yourself in, but this got me back on a plane, without pharmaceutical help. This helped me tone the emotion right down, and help me gain control of myself again. Then the miracle happened. I actually started to reason the whole donkey Vs aeroplane death match. Reason, with a reasonably clear head! This is because the hypnotherapy opens your mind to listen and then you can start the reprogramming process. One resource I found

the best for this was www.fearofflyinghelp.com. This really helped me with the facts, and did take the edge off for me.

The end result isn't anything miraculous, you can never expect to be totally comfortable after experiencing enormous amounts of fear, but it just doesn't seem as important anymore. The net result is that airports are OK now, and I can do the flying thing, which means a nice tan once a year, but mostly it is the satisfaction to face your biggest fear and stick two fingers up. Now it is only my wife who has the final say on our holiday destination, and I can live with that!

By David Bean [dsbean@btinternet.com]