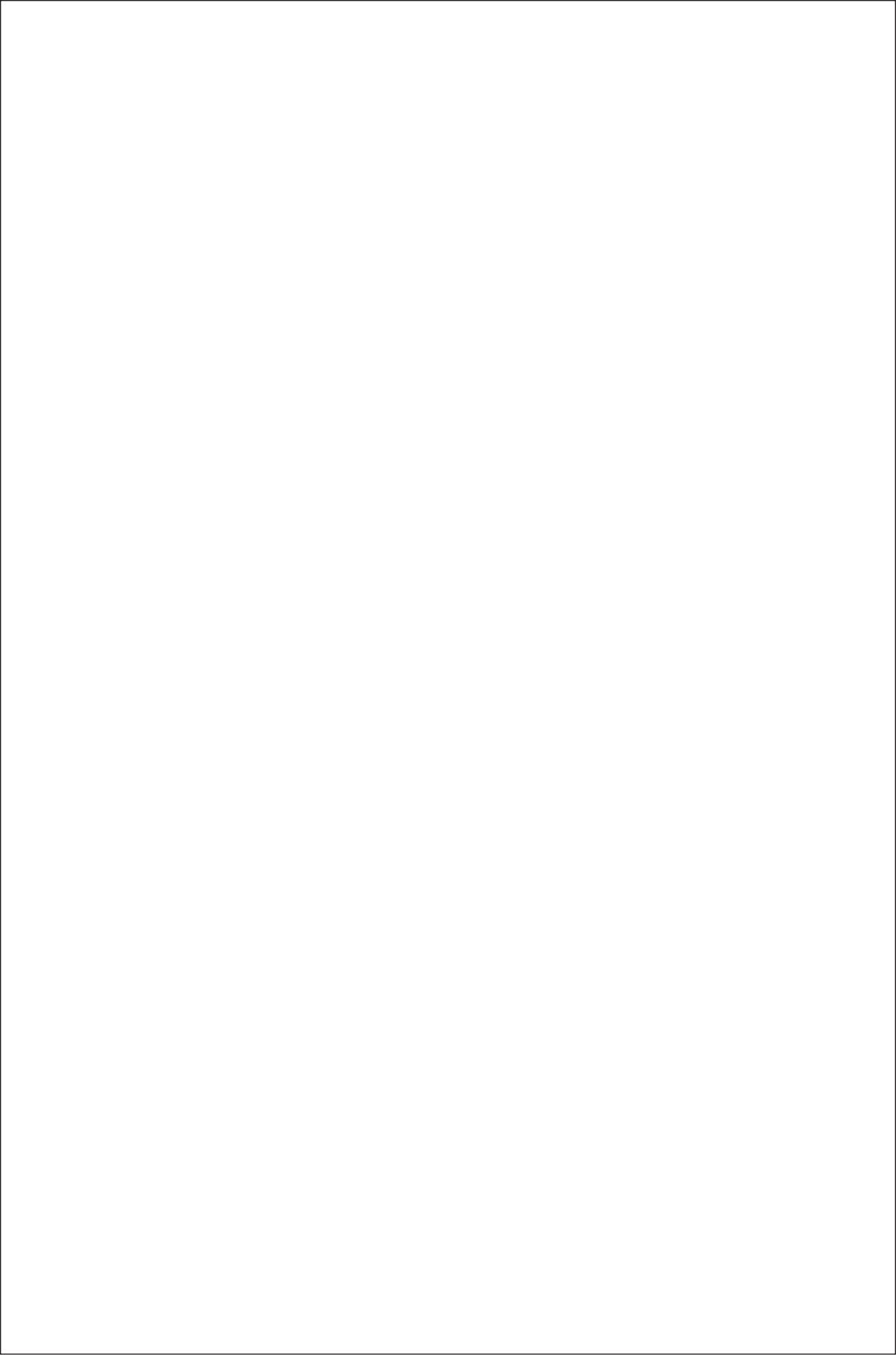


**TO YOUR
HAPPINESS**

**A Self-Healing
Guide to
Peace of Mind**



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Guide to
Peace of Mind**

PATRICK BICKERSTETH, Ph.D.

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Cover Artwork and chapter illustrations

Danyella Axani

Editing

Carmen Hrynychuk

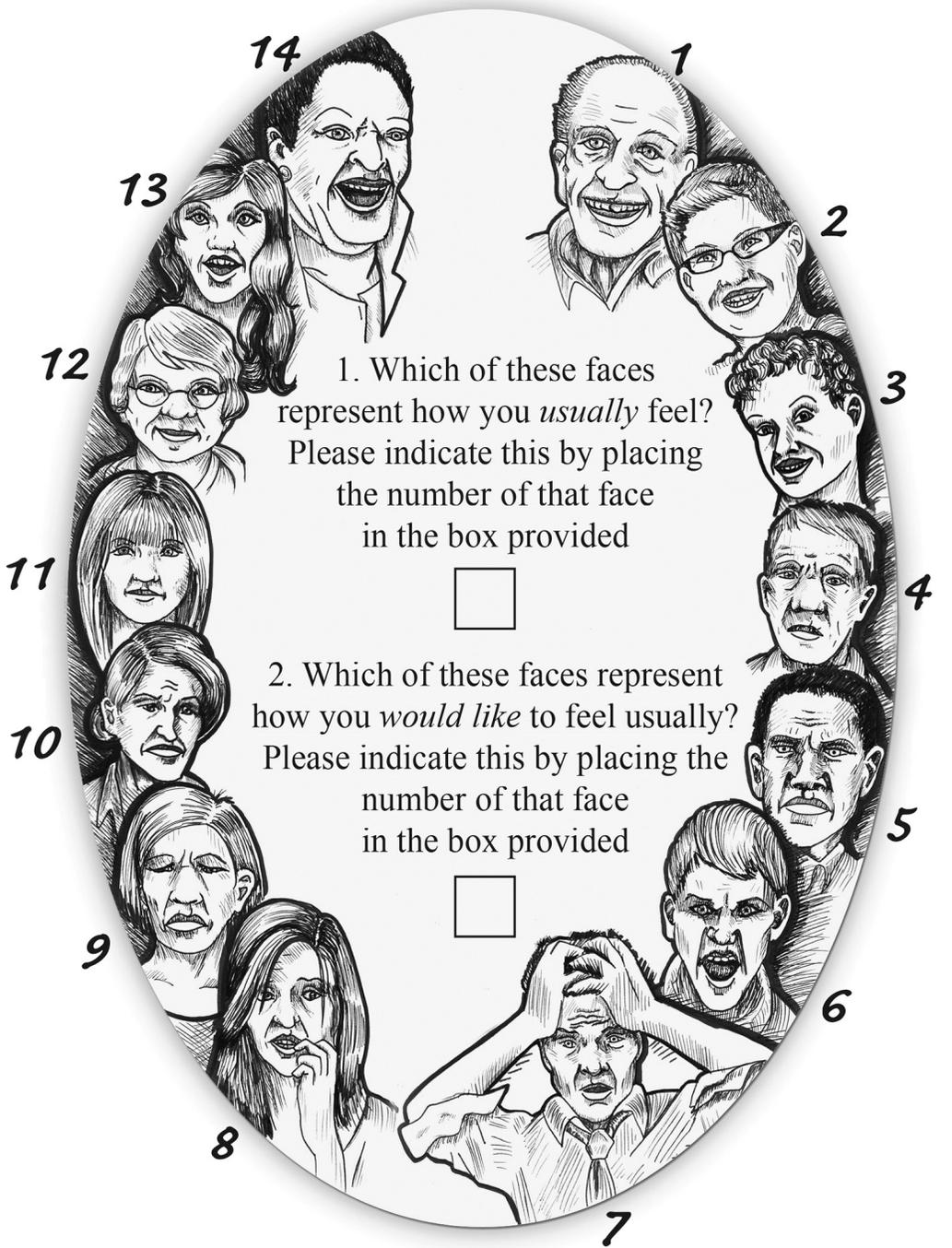
Karen Virag (posthumous acknowledgement)

Book design

Yuet Chan

*I dedicate this book to
you my children—Bertrand, Andrea, Neema & Rita—and
your loved ones. Among all of the useful and enduring lessons
you have learned and will learn from others,
this book teaches each of you ways to renew your life
and claim peace of mind,
the joy of living.*

*I also dedicate it to
All who suffer from the aches and pains of emotional life,
your loved ones and to all readers.
Among all the wonderful remedies out there,
this book offers you peace of mind, the joy of living,
if this is what you seek.*



1. Which of these faces represent how you *usually* feel?
Please indicate this by placing the number of that face in the box provided

2. Which of these faces represent how you *would like* to feel usually?
Please indicate this by placing the number of that face in the box provided

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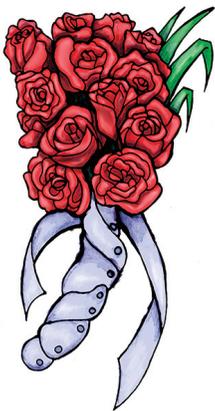
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Acknowledgements

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

My present condition of improving quadriplegia, a condition that came most unexpectedly, has taught me that one cannot predict life, even in the smallest detail, on a day-to-day basis. For that reason, I now make it a practise to carry out important tasks without procrastination. Acknowledging the benefits I have received from others is of paramount importance, and I see the publication of this book as a probable avenue to reach at least some of the people to whom I owe gratitude. This life is short; I will not allow this opportunity of thanking them to pass by. This is a duty I am very happy to discharge! Whether or not this



book is a bestseller is not the point. In fact, its retail performance is no measure of the worthiness of the individuals and groups I am now going to address.

To my darling wife, **Ildiko Bickersteth**, B.Ed., I grant the highest place of recognition for your all-encompassing and indispensable contribution to the writing of this book and to my recovery from the effects of quadriplegia. In combining the roles of driver, caregiver, administrative organizer, personal adviser, advocate, best

friend, and wife, you have shown unparalleled devotion! Our mutual love has never burned brighter. To you, the cornerstone of my joys in life, I publicly declare: I love you, I am proud of you in every way, and I thank you wholeheartedly just for always being here.

I also owe immeasurable gratitude to you, my children, among whom I make no distinction or gradation with respect to my love and only, officially, describe you as step or biological. By showing up in my life, you confirm that the good Lord wants the best for me. I thank you for that honour. I thank you also for standing by me, as caregivers and fellow sufferers, during my partially incapacitated condition while writing this book. I love you dearly and am proud of you Bertrand Bickersteth Ph.D.; Andrea Dennis B.Ed.; Neema Bickersteth, M.Mus.; and Rita Mertz, B.Comm.

My siblings, you are undoubtedly a part of the grand design that is the context of this book. More immediately, I thank both of you—my dear big brother and little sis—for concretely expressing our mutual love by helping to take care of me. I have always been proud of you; now, I am even more proud, as you have demonstrated your concern for me. More remotely, I am indebted to you for the many miles of self-worth I have enjoyed from your accomplishments, as the interesting journey of life has brought me, gratefully, to this point. From the bottom of my heart, and with much fondness, I thank you for everything Lloyd Bickersteth LL.M. and Agatha Domingo.

You, my dear sister-in-law, deserve to enjoy the spotlight of special thanks. You took time from resting or visiting with

your sister Ildiko to be my caregiver and to avail me of your professional skills as a speech therapist. By being present with our family, you were absent in yours. Such generosity with your time and commitment needs to be acknowledged with sincere gratitude, which I offer liberally to you, my beloved sister-in-law Marosits Anikó and my dear brother-in-law Marosits István.



The unofficially canonized saints of patience, motivation, and discipline—the main reasons I am who I am today—and the primary road-builders to the writing of this book are my parents, especially my mother. Her love for us, her children,

shaped my understanding of selfless love. By example, she taught us tenacity. They have both passed on. Mom and Dad, if we are communicating spiritually as I write, you will understand the full extent of my respect and love for you both. Your legacy of faith, humour, and an excellent work ethic lives on! Saying “thank you” for being the wonderful parents you were seems insufficient. May blessings of celestial magnitude attend your rest.

The following wonderful people also made this book possible, by acting as my scribes at a time when I was unable to write or type the manuscript, due to quadriplegia. For their sincere effort and pleasant disposition, I offer my unconditional gratitude to Deborah McCrae, Eugene Rayos, Kerri Keith, Lourdes Ampatin, and to Marilyn Broadhead, my typist.

The input of my friends and colleagues—who acted as

professional readers of a portion or all of the manuscript—was immensely valuable, and I cannot overstate my appreciation for the work you did. In my opinion, you demonstrated, by the thoroughness and good will you brought to the task, both an intellectual attitude and a praiseworthy generosity. My sincerest thanks to Robert Flood, B.A.; Monika Igali; Judith Kovacs; Eva Penzes Wright; Miri Robson, Ph.D., R. Psych; Wendy White, MD, FRCP(C); and Jerry Rose, Ph.D., R. Psych.

To the medical staff in two countries (Mexico and Canada) and four hospitals, and to you, Dr. Kiraly, my family physician, who took me on, despite your already full patient load, at a time when almost no one was taking new patients—to all of you who, I choose to believe, provided the best care you could in connection with my accident, I offer unlimited gratitude. I spent the most time, as an inpatient and an outpatient, at the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in Edmonton. I am sure I will continue to remember the kind, friendly, and conscientious specialists, therapists, nurses and assistants, whose bedside qualities and expertise I consider exemplary. My thanks also go to the janitors, receptionists, and students with whom I crossed paths only briefly or occasionally, but whose contributions to my recovery I greatly value and honour. In very many meaningful ways, you all equipped me to write this book. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

The education and training that laid the foundation for my profession as a psychologist and, therefore, for this book, took place at the University of Alberta, in Edmonton,

Alberta, Canada, under many professors who shaped me from a submissive, graduate novice into a confident, but chastened, inquirer, critic, and thinker. Distinguished academics of no small repute, you deserve the highest praise for your notable qualities of scholarship, leadership, and human understanding that led to my growth and achievement. You made it possible for me to earn both a master's and a doctoral degree in educational psychology. I feel the need to also acknowledge several people who trained and taught me in workshops, classes, and symposia. In doing so, they helped situate me in a broader field of practice and service.



To all of you illustrious teachers, I offer profound gratitude for preparing me to write this book.

A special thanks to my healer friends—although I may or may not have been aware of their good works at the time; my work colleagues; pastors and church members; my ex-wife; my long-time friends; the patients at the Glenrose—some of whom made a point of assuring me I would get better; my friends everywhere who communicated with me and the Universal Creator through prayer, love, and goodwill; but especially you in Calgary, Spruce Grove, and Edmonton, Alberta. You gave me continual psychological and spiritual comfort, and I say to all of you—everything you did, from that fleeting thought of empathy to the gifts of your presence in hospital and at home; from the tangible gifts of money and electronic items

to your encouragement and tears shed over the sudden and dramatic change in my circumstances, which you saw or heard about—everything you did made an appreciated difference for my good and contributed to the positive direction of my recovery, whether seen or unseen. For all these



unquantifiable acts of kindness, I thank you, I thank you, and I thank you again!

I acknowledge, with respectful gratitude, the editor of Hay House Publishers, who gave me permission to reprint the works of Dr.

Wayne W. Dyer and Bruce H. Lipton, Ph.D. The truth is that some quotations cannot be rendered any better than they were originally stated. When the writing of a highly respected author commands great persuasive power, less accomplished people like me are only too happy to copy.

I also wish to acknowledge the editor of SparkNotes for the use of Portia's speech on the quality of mercy, rendered in modern English from their *No Fear Shakespeare, Merchant of Venice*. This trustworthy rendition provided the right literary flavour that I needed for that section of the book.

Therefore, to the writers and publishers of the words that I included in this book, I offer a deep, ceremonial bow of appreciation.

I express my indebtedness to Subhamoy Das, Guruma Bodhi Sakyadhita, and Pastor Wendy Thomas who served as professional editors, respectively, for the section on Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian views on suffering. I feel privileged

to have collaborated with you on this topic. Sharing your knowledge and providing the service promptly, with a spirit of kindness and generosity, clearly exemplified the selflessness and love that is a very strong common thread in the teachings of all three faiths. I feel a responsibility to publicly give you the accolades you justly and truly deserve. Your fellow believers should know that you genuinely do practice what you teach. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

There cannot be enough gratitude for everyone and everything we encounter in life. Therefore, I consider it to be serious neglect to omit anyone who has added favourably to my easy and blessed improvement— which close contacts have described as “miraculous”—and to the writing of this book. So to each person who believes I have not included her or him in any of the previous groups, despite what he or she has contributed to my life, I now admit I owe an important debt of gratitude. In no small way, you are my benefactor, a necessary puzzle piece, and a required and attractive stitch in the tapestry that represents who I am today. Truly, I don't know where I would be today if we had not entered into each other's reality. Thank you for being here for me.

To my Spiritual Source, the Creator of the universe and all life, the God of all ages Who always exists, my Father and Sufficient Benefactor, I give thanks to You and praise You, because You are good and your abundant, infinite, and kind love is eternal. My soul glorifies You, my Lord, and my spirit rejoices in You, my Saviour, Who has been faithful to those who believe, in all generations. Because You are my

God Who continues to bless me richly in many ways, this time in the writing of this book, I offer my gratitude to You now and continually, as I learn to be the way You want me to be. You knew, before You created the world, that I would write these words; you also knew that my intention is to proclaim You—and my allegiance to You—to the whole world. May all who read this book feel your peace, always.



Preface

As the saying goes, give a man a fish, and you have fed him for a day; teach a man to fish, and he will eat for a lifetime. This is why I have written this book—to teach people “how to fish” for themselves.

It is common knowledge among psychologists that many people who need counselling simply can't afford it. And although some do receive help pro bono, the vast majority do not. The profession, as a whole, is aware of this and, in response, has taken on the task of providing self-help information to the general public. With this book, I follow those footsteps, offering my perspectives and clinically established techniques that, I believe, will help people “learn to fish.” I call this approach *self-healing*. I emphasize that term because I want those who are struggling with emotional problems—even severe ones—to read this book and know that they have the ability within themselves to learn the skills needed to take personal responsibility for getting better. To that end, you will find many of the successful treatment methods I have used in my 40-year career as a psychologist between the covers of this book.

Many have written—and others will continue to write—fiction and non-fiction accounts, based on real lives, that provide messages about suffering and healing. There are

many such examples of inspiring contributions, some of which have won prestigious awards. A book like *To Your Happiness: A Self-Help Guide to Peace of Mind* brings together the apparent intentions of those writers into a practical, applicable set of treatment approaches directed at specific conditions.

For many reasons, I have tried to avoid overloading this book with technical jargon and name-dropping, neither of which helps healing occur. This book is also not an academic exercise, but rather a guide for any person who might be seeking to improve mental health by taking personal responsibility and putting self-healing ideas into practice.

My goal for this book is simple: to provide a source of information to which someone with an emotional problem may look for suggestions about how to live with a minimum of distress. Put another way, this book provides tools or “recipes” for strengthening emotional health, as well as general treatment ideas to help a sufferer build strong protection against threats that might cause unending agony. The majority of the tools are easy to use or adapt. A few, however, will require the help of a qualified professional when a special set of procedures or actions is essential for the treatment to be effective.

I need to emphasize, above all else I have stated, that it is your choice and total responsibility as a self-healer to decide if and how you will use the ideas from this book. The truth is, I have written this book to help you; but that can only happen if you wish to help yourself.

Admitting to having mental problems is difficult. This is

understandable. Accusing someone of being mentally ill is, unfortunately, a common insult. In fact, true denial of anything (in this case, mental illness) is actually believed to be an unconscious coping mechanism. In any case, whether the denial is conscious or not, my hope is that those who cannot accept that they have a condition, don't know they have it, or resent being told they do, will have a source of useful, impartial information that can be used to assess their own behaviour. Moreover, they will be able to select a treatment to begin their healing. (Initially, it is usually difficult to be open, even with an unbiased acquaintance or professional. Free from public shame or fear, they will be able to follow a treatment program using self-healing methods that are, for the most part, research-guided, until they feel they either need face-to-face consultation or can continue self-healing.

A Bright Future

I hope that from these humble beginnings, self-healing can have a bright future that will offer multiple benefits: a better and wider understanding and acceptance of emotional problems; less secrecy about mental illness; people taking more responsibility for their own care; greater availability of affordable treatments; and shorter wait-lists for those treatments. These are areas of mental health (MH) that may benefit from a self-healing approach.

In fact, I dream that the self-healing method in mental health (MH) will evolve to the point where an accredited MH professional will be able to reply electronically to an enquiry for advice on emotional problems, or any other MH needs, with an email or text message, such as “Use program XX on your e-health tablet tonight, and report back in the morning.” In this reality, the MH practitioner would also have the electronic means to monitor the sufferer’s compliance with the treatment plan.

That’s in the future, though. For the present, let’s start with self-care and helping people help themselves.

Introduction

This book is meant to serve as a resource to help people manage unwanted emotional reactions and provide hope for those who suffer. The focus, in the pages that follow, is on dealing with emotional trauma, though how one deals with sadness, shame, anger, anxiety, and similar emotions is usually the same whether the emotions are caused by trauma or not. This book is likely to be most useful to those who cannot see a mental health practitioner for any number of reasons. Some people cannot afford it; others are ashamed or worried about people's reactions to their need for help. There are those who are not comfortable outside their home base or who have had a bad experience that's turned them against therapy. Many people have great difficulty trusting strangers. Some may have a physical handicap that makes it difficult to get around. Others may be shut in for a variety of reasons. Whatever a person's circumstances, I believe everyone is entitled to mental health information through which, hopefully, emotional self-healing can be learned and performed. Still, I am aware that those who seek help need to have alternatives. This is why I encourage readers to recognize their right to obtain one-on-one treatment from a trained professional, whenever it is considered important to do so. Both word-of-mouth referrals and information from

professional organizations can help you connect with the appropriate treatment sources. This is not to suggest that a healing path is an either/or proposition—that is, either self-chosen or practitioner-guided. Indeed, both treatment routes can be used in a mutually supportive fashion.

How to Get the Most Out of This Book

Interpret the “Secret Messages”

At the beginning of each chapter, you will find an illustration that contains an image for you to interpret, based on what you make of that chapter’s reading. After you’ve finished a chapter, turn back to the illustration, and ask yourself, “What does the illustration tell me about what I have just read?” The answer should bring out the essential points of the chapter. The message is “secret” in the sense that you interpret the illustration in a way that’s meaningful to you. In other words, you alone can break the code of the illustration to reveal a better understanding of the chapter.

Complete the Assignments for Self-Healing

Another feature of this book is that it provides hands-on practice with your self-healing planning. There are assignments at the end of each chapter, and it’s important that you complete them all. Once you have read through all the chapters and worked through all the assignments, you will have a strong starting point for your self-healing program.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 has a section that briefly explains what each chapter of the book is about. Be sure to read it to help you decide whether to go chapter-by-chapter or to first choose chapters that look interesting. The assignment at the end of the chapter will also assist in recording your selections. I suggest you number your choices in the order you would like to read the chapters.

My Attempt at Addressing a Literary Equality Issue

I want to call attention to my deliberate use of the feminine and masculine pronouns. This feature in the book is intended as a literary stand: that of removing the tacit promotion of male leadership in literature. I believe the almost universal practice of putting the masculine pronoun first (whenever both are stated) is wrong. It has been accepted for too long and, as such, has remained unconscious in people's writing. While some writers choose to use the feminine as opposed to the masculine in such circumstances, I wish to highlight the equality of both genders by interchanging the pronouns (for example, "she or he" and "he or she") in alternate chapters throughout the book. Perhaps the emerging approach of using "they" and its derivatives is the way to go. For my present purposes, however, the alternation feels less diplomatic and, as such, more satisfying. Being the deep-down pacifist that I am, however, I will also use a form of "they."

Look at the Landscape of Your Emotional Problems

If you have selected this book to help with your self-healing, consider the chapter titles as broad guidelines. You might begin by looking at the landscape of the emotional problem. That is, ask what the problem looks like to you, the sufferer. Do you see it as a small issue that just needs some pruning, so to speak, to bring shape to your life, or is it deep-rooted, calling for a complete makeover? If you were able to turn this problem around, where and how would you start? What would you do next? This book suggests paths, but it's up to you to decide which paths you prefer. As you begin to see the possibility of letting go of what's keeping you stuck in misery, you may wish to explore what the consequences of letting go are likely to be.

Chapter 1

THE JOURNEY BEGINS **Step by Step to Peace of Mind**

Taking It Step by Step

A very important yet often missed step in the healing process has to do with the wish to get better. To explain the significance of this first step, I will use an example from my youth:

Once, when I was in grade school, I fell ill with a fever three days before a dreaded oral math exam. Being nowhere near winning the Nobel Prize for mathematics, I hadn't the slightest desire to get better in time to take that test. In fact, my only desire—a very strong one—was to miss it, and what better reason than being ill. Unfortunately (from my point of view), the fever disappeared after a day and a half, leaving me plenty of time to recover. Just when I was sure my fate was sealed, my mother, who had been completely spooked by the spike in my temperature, insisted that I stay home the rest of the week. Hooray!



I imagine that many readers can identify with this story, which demonstrates that sometimes a person (child or not) has no desire to get better and that persuading a “happy” sufferer to embrace the healing process can be difficult. The odds of such a person taking self-healing seriously are very low.

*The first step to getting better
is to want to get better.*

You can see that the first step to getting better is to want to get better. When you do, you will find yourself eager to follow the recommended process or steps (as closely as possible) with serious effort—always—even if the treatment plan is self-designed. Following that path means not letting your need for peace of mind send you off in multiple directions, trying everything that looks promising. By straying from your path, you may end up getting nowhere, without getting better. **Remember: distraction is a purpose killer.** You need to stick with a plan to the end, unless it is clearly proving to be unhelpful. At that point, you will then need to choose a new approach to follow carefully. It is imperative that your desire to improve your mental health is coupled with ensuring that you do not lose sight of where you are headed with any part of your healing program.

Healing is an important task, and a person cannot be half-hearted or uninspired to engage in it. **Therefore, the second step in the healing process is to enter into it and continue with a spirit of curiosity, regardless of the**

*Lack of interest deprives learning of its joy,
and joyless learning soon ends.*

results. For even though you might have started cheerfully enough, you could lose your motivation if you do not see the desired changes. If this happens, you will need to find ways to keep going. Lack of interest deprives learning of its joy, and joyless learning soon ends.

When building or producing anything, it is sensible to learn and apply basic steps or rules before proceeding. The idea of progressing through learning stages does not necessarily need to be stated, because it is commonly accepted as true of most activities we become good at in life. Yet, when it comes to emotional behaviour change, we assume there are no basic rules or steps to follow, even though, as you are about to learn, there are essential step-by-step tasks called for in applying any therapy. **This, then, is the third step to starting your healing program: acknowledging that there are steps and rules to the process.**

The Six Stages of Self-Analysis for Healing Readiness

The following stages of self-analysis will help you decide how ready you are to do what is necessary for any kind of healing, including self-healing. Read these stages, and decide what stage you are at. I suggest you need to get beyond Stage 3 before you can start using the self-healing

ideas presented in this book. The further beyond Stage 3 you are, the greater your chances of faithfully and successfully practising the treatment ideas I am suggesting. It is very important, however, to consider the stages one after the other, without skipping any, to arrive at the one that best describes what you know about yourself.

Stage 1—You reject or deny that you have a problem; therefore, you see no need for change or problem solving. Or you don't care because you have not seriously thought about the topic.

Stage 2—You accept that you probably or truly have a problem and want to know what to do about it.

Stage 3—You accept you definitely have a problem that needs a solution or treatment.

Stage 4—You are interested in all possible solutions and healing ideas.

Stage 5—You want to and intend to follow healing instructions and plans as a way of showing commitment to improving your emotional health.

Stage 6—You are motivated to continue seeking or applying solutions or treatments to maintain positive changes.

I think some people are surprised to learn that emotional healing is almost always a stage-by-stage experience, with many ups and downs. Having helped many people recover from serious emotional setbacks, I have observed that a person will sometimes feel that he or she has made good progress, and then an experience, recollection, or reminder

of something causes a big change in that person's mood. Sometimes this change can make you feel more depressed, enraged, anxious, or humiliated than you thought you'd ever be again. Other times, it may be uplifting and can take you up a notch or two. Just as a sag in mood can be frustrating and disappointing, an upward surge in spirits can be energizing. The truth of the matter is that for healing to occur and to remain stable, all the ingredients must be present and working together to produce the momentum for crossing the line into wellness. The eminent psychologist William James (1842–1910) illustrates this point perfectly in a story, which I will recount in my own words:

A father of a boy in kindergarten held a knife upright on a table and asked his son to tell him what he saw. The boy said that he saw a knife. After trying unsuccessfully to make his son give the answer he was looking for, the father cleverly replaced the knife with a pencil, which he remembered was an object familiar to his son from a class lesson that the father had watched. The boy now stated, to his father's satisfaction, that what he saw was an upright object. Once all the components were present, they clicked together to produce the desired response.

The obvious importance of this story is that James was illustrating how our minds connect thoughts. But this story also said something to me about how healing takes place, and it is this: Be patient. Always make the effort to attend to all aspects of your problem or illness, as well as all healing ideas, and you will see the required solution or desired result in due course, when all the pieces are in place. When we concentrate

on something, we set up a chain of thinking in which similar thoughts attract each other. The boy was unable to produce the appropriate response because one important item in his chain of thoughts was missing. The upright pencil filled in the gap, linking the other connected ideas that were already in place. We must note that the boy was not wrong when he stated that he had seen a knife, but his answer was not enough for the breakthrough experience of success. Similarly, when you are faced with difficult problems in life, you will come up with answers that are okay, but not perfect. So be sure to keep the merely okay ones in mind; they will contribute to attracting other okay answers, and at some point, something will link them all together to produce the healing boost you desire. Once you've made that connection and found your motivation, you can begin to take your next steps, a phase I call Plotting the Course to Peace of Mind.

Plotting the Course to Peace of Mind

I use the term *plotting* because my method involves learning selective ways of thinking and reacting, as well as the essential ideas and skills needed to achieve and maintain peace of mind. With such guidance, you will also be able to determine the current nature of your problem, such as how it became what it is today, and understand why some of your previous attempts at dealing with it have not improved your situation or have only made things worse. Each chapter in this book will recommend better ways of looking after yourself, although your own self-planned methods might be just as effective.

If your distress has been virtually controlling your life for some time, an important landmark on your path to finding happiness would be the point at which you decide to take charge and start learning to cope. Of course, there will be obstacles on this journey. This book discusses some of the most misunderstood ones, suggests ways to identify the ones that apply in your life, and explores how to overcome or cancel them out. I believe that the information you encounter as you read this book will be relevant, important and useable. The brief descriptions that follow are gleanings of some of the lessons you will learn from this chapter forward.

The Chapters at a Glance

Chapter 2

In most situations of emotional pain, a persistent problem seems to be the inability to let go of what is causing the pain. Often, when people don't know how to make sense of a problem, they turn it over and over in their minds, thus enlarging it and repeatedly reliving aspects of the event from which the problem arose. Letting go is critical for emotional healing. This chapter provides ideas on how to approach this matter.

Chapter 3

A person suffering with an emotional difficulty may believe that he or she needs to search for an answer to it. Sometimes, however, the problem itself needs to be defined

in a way that will make healing successful, regardless of what's behind it. There may also be psychological aspects of having the symptoms, as well as reactions that need to be understood in order to properly address the person's emotional state. For example, are there attitudes or underlying mental activities blocking the true expression of the problem and, therefore, your healing progress?

Chapter 4

Your emotional condition can be an obstacle to healing. Fear, for example (which often intensifies and becomes anxiety), is a very common cause of suffering. The study of fear has offered scientists a well-placed window into how many other emotions occur in the brain and affect our behaviours. In this book, you will learn about the different ways that fear shows itself and how it can take over a person's way of behaving. If you suffer from fear and anxiety in this way, it is important for you to learn about the characteristics of a safety-oriented personality and the relationship difficulties associated with this chronic emotional state especially in work situations. Whether in its own right or related to the safety-oriented personality, some people take on a victim stance, which further complicates their mental health status. It will be good to learn that there are management techniques through which afflicted individuals may gain control over their reactions and consequently enjoy appreciable relief.

Chapter 5

At a certain point in your reading, as you identify the different aspects of your distress and what has or has not worked before now, you will likely come to a realization that you are on a better path to peace of mind. That path includes talking about your problems in a controlled manner rather than keeping silent. It also requires that you deal with feelings of shame, which are often a barrier to getting help or to facing up to some underlying aspects of your condition. In effect, you will learn about and obtain solutions to dealing with self-defeating behaviour.

Chapter 6

Earlier, I alerted you to be ready to respond to obstacles. A few chapters into the book, I identify and describe some of the more unyielding or powerful ones, such as resistance and negativity. I also discuss some of the places these obstacles are encountered. In that context, I present information regarding some common misconceptions about what to expect in the counselling process, as well as how hypnotherapy and self-hypnotherapy work. Deficiency in self-awareness and the many aspects of thinking in a closed box are presented as barriers to healing (for example, perceptual-emotional reasoning). I also show you how self-talk can work as an aid to healing.

Chapter 7

How our two minds (conscious and subconscious) play a significant role in allowing or disallowing healing, especially

from emotional complaints, is a topic not often discussed. You will find out how subconscious behaviours are formed and how the two minds work together for our good. Another aspect of our psychological functioning is the ego. As you will learn, it, too, plays a conscious and subconscious role in acquiring and relinquishing emotional hurts—and it can be stripped of its power. Indeed, as a false image, the ego can provide a cushion against fear and shame, but the price is costly. In order to become a better version of yourself, it is better to adopt a healthy form of ego, even if it portrays you as imperfect. Contradictory as this may sound, you will learn that it is true.

Chapter 8

I go on to present a core, though surprising, truth about emotional self-healing: Your thoughts hold tremendous healing power, and you can use them in specific ways to bring about that healing. In this process it is important to recognize the appropriateness of starting with setting goals. Goals are very important when dealing with thoughts, so one needs to learn their requirements. The ways you think about or interpret events are critical in determining whether you will succeed in healing an emotional problem. One method of healing troubled thoughts, shown by scientific research to be effective, is expressive writing. It can be used to put forward thoughts relating to emotional pain and reduce or eliminate the pain's power. I also provide other suggestions for bringing worried thoughts under control. When angry thoughts are not controlled, the resulting angry behaviour

can become socially inappropriate as well as dangerous. You will learn how the emotion of anger works in the brain and how it is harmful to the body, leading to such serious medical conditions as high blood pressure and stroke. Fortunately, you will also learn ways to effectively manage being frequently or extremely angry.

Chapter 9

Then comes some core teachings about forgiveness that reflect what Nelson Mandela described as follows: “Forgiveness liberates the soul; it removes fear; that is why it is such a powerful weapon.” I describe some research results that show this power. I point out how *forgive* and *forget* should not necessarily go together and describe certain problems that revenge, rather than forgiveness, could present. I then explain how forgiveness can benefit your emotional wellbeing.

Chapter 10

Although this book’s intention is to promote self-healing, this chapter discusses other available avenues for emotional healing so that readers can make well-informed decisions when choosing an appropriate treatment style. In some cases, the individual’s choice may be directed by whether or not the treatment of choice needs to be administered by only licensed individuals. In other situations, an individual’s choice may be limited by the availability of practitioners with satisfactory training and experience in the specific area of need. I have chosen to present the following methods

of emotional management—what they are, how they are used, and their clinical benefits:

- The use of medication
- Electro-convulsive Therapy (ECT)
- Hypnotherapy
- Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Prolonged Exposure (PE)
- Mindfulness Meditation

Chapter 11

In most situations, sufferers may consider themselves victims of circumstances, of other people, or of some mysterious power. Learning the many ways in which this attitude may be reinterpreted can transform your thinking about your circumstance. Teachings from faiths and philosophies can inspire those changes, regardless of whether you practice a faith (such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism) or do not profess one at all. My goal in giving you this information is to emphasize the unnecessary additional emotional pain that deliberate victimhood can cause and to provide you with ways to get out of the “Why me?” trap.

Chapter 12

Because mainstream thinking seems to approach the body and the mind as different and separate from each other, the tendency is to believe that they act independently. However, you will learn how mind and body can work cooperatively to influence each other in the management

of emotional problems. In this regard, you will discover how the energy that resides in both the mind and the body can be used to predict and guide the activities in which you regularly engage. You will also learn how to make other important decisions, such as which treatment option will work best for you, whether it is in your best interest to go out with a certain individual, or whether you should buy a particular home. In other words, this area of functioning provides many avenues for mental-emotional peace in a variety of life circumstances.

Chapter 13

Nightmares represent another area of learning in the emotional healing journey. It is common knowledge that solutions and directions for problems can come while dreaming. And from that point of view, even bad dreams or nightmares are believed to have usefulness. All too often, however, people try to find the meaning of their dreams using methods that amount to guessing. Often these guesses are based on the application of standard symbols or folklore, mixed with a touch of the mysterious and a dash of superstition. I present a novel psychological perspective and offer suggestions as to how to feel better after a nightmare. Nonetheless, you may have another way of understanding how your dreams and nightmares relate to your emotional condition, so feel free to use the ideas you believe will best help you improve your emotional health.

Chapter 14

Earlier in the book, I established that your thoughts can and do play a part in emotional self-healing. I now describe additional forms of thought power. Not only is there a direct connection between your thinking and your emotions, but also between your thoughts and the person that you are. As such, the contents of your thoughts are critical in shaping your behaviour, personality and, in particular, your emotional wellbeing. With such an all-encompassing creative capability, this area of your life definitely claims superiority over any other healing tool. In this regard, you can use it to make a better person of yourself. Therefore, I attach great importance to the skillful use of this valuable resource: our thoughts. As a means of achieving emotional peace, I officially document this method as Thought Replacement Therapy. I provide numerous examples of ways to use this skill of thought replacement as a tool for emotional self-healing.

Chapter 15

Although the healing techniques and methods I have introduced so far can be taught, it's important to note that many ways of improving and maintaining emotional wellbeing come naturally. We only need to be aware of them. Here are some examples of the topics I explain in this chapter:

- Reducing exposure to negative experiences
- Learning how to use self-talk

- Taking it easy
- Helping others
- Participating in formal group experiences

Chapter 16

These additional suggestions can bring peace of mind when your world is less than cheery or comforting because they engage your mind in a way that is uniquely meaningful. At the same time, they speak to the soul:

- Song
- Music
- Poetry
- Laughter, humour, and cheerfulness
- Nature (the effect of forested areas on your psyche)

The information I present at this point teaches a wide range of “natural” ways to boost mood, whether it is sagging or not.

Chapter 17

A relatively new and interesting field is the practice of Energy Psychology, which applies skills well known in Eastern medicine for more than three thousand years to heal mental-emotional conditions. Modern-day theories of quantum physics appear to be aligned with this ancient knowledge. While ordinarily, energy is seen as the power that makes work happen these new areas of study and treatment are now demonstrating that spiritual sources of energy can, indeed, be used to change our physical

and mental functioning. This is fascinating information! Learning to apply energy-based techniques, however, is not a complicated process. I provide recipe-style information that teaches how to use them. You will also learn about the effectiveness of any form of spiritual faith in developing emotional strength and how steps such as being grateful, using breathing exercises, and applying active hope can provide you with unlimited emotional value.

Chapter 18

All good things must come to an end; but even as I bring closure to this learning course, I still want you to leave with some goodies. I acknowledge that I'm leaving you with the great responsibility of continuing your self-healing. The truth is, of course, that you now have, at your disposal, all the information you need in one place—this book. There is no expectation, however, that you must become very good at using all the techniques and applying every idea presented as teaching topics. Proficiency often takes time, and you need to keep that in mind. In the meantime, you need to have goals that will help you accomplish the tasks of self-healing, and you need ways to measure your wellness success. For this, I provide **The Bickersteth Emotional Wellness Scale (BEWS)** in Appendix 1.

I hope these summaries of the chapters excite you enough to want to get going right away, either chapter by chapter or by seeking out particularly interesting or needed information. Regardless of your style in reading, my hope is that you will take the entire journey and read the whole

book, completely. So, bon voyage!

When all is said and done, the sufferer is the one most responsible for getting better, especially with regard to putting a self-healing agenda into practice. The ideas suggested in this book are important recommendations, but they are also easily complemented by other methods. I encourage you to discover those additional activities and explanations that will contribute to your wellbeing.

Expanding Your Comfort Zone

If you are wondering whether there will come a time when your discomfort and distress will go away, the answer is *yes*. But you must decide, intentionally, to let go of them unconditionally. I wish I could tell you a simple way to get back your peace. I wish I could say something like this:

A few times a day, focus on the bad feelings that your problem brings, and tell yourself, with a strong desire, ‘I want these feelings to go away and happier ones to take their place.’ Then take a deep breath, and breathe out. Continue to repeat this wish a couple of times as you move your eyes (not your head) from one side to the other, six to eight times. Then take a very deep breath, breathe out, and do another round of repeating ‘I want these feelings to go away,’ followed by another deep breath. Next, look up and down from ceiling to floor about six to eight times, and then take another deep breath.

If your disturbing emotional feelings became weaker, or even left you altogether, after doing this, what would you think? If I were in your shoes, whether or not I believed in what I just did, the fantastic results would keep me repeating the actions and words to get more of the benefits. Now this is all about “What if...” and about whether you are willing to boldly go into areas in which you may not be at ease in your search of peace of mind.

How about if I suggested this routine? Each night, just before going to sleep, tap your chest on the #8 spot (see diagram of Emotional Tapping Points) 20 to 30 times with two, three or four fingers of both hands, each hand following the other in succession. Tap comfortably—not too hard or fast and not too soft or slow—with your eyes closed, while taking deep breaths and repeating to yourself: “Awful feeling go away, make me happy night and day.” And each morning, right after you wake up, do the same. But this time, repeat these words: “Change my thoughts to feel just right; make me happy day and night.”

There are those who would instantly reject these suggestions as hocus-pocus (such people have set expectations of how their self-healing must be carried out), but there are others who would try them out, if only out of curiosity or to prove a point.

If either of these techniques works for you, there is a strong healing power in your system that this book does not cover. As you read further, you will have a sense that you have already regained the happy life that is the objective of this book. Still, I advise that you keep reading

because there is more useful information to come.

If these “prescriptions” worked for only a short time, regardless of your persistence, or they seem too unrealistic, you need other strategies for rescuing your emotional life. You need to learn how to move into the future without the baggage of the past. That is to say, something more explanatory that is proven to work is needed. The rest of the book will address this. I must stress again, though, that nothing stated in this book is to be taken as indicating that other professional opinions are irrelevant. There are many forms of treatment for psychological and emotional problems. This book merely suggests additional or different ideas and tools. The choice is yours. What is not familiar to you is new learning; keeping an open mind as you progress through the book will greatly broaden your zone of comfort.

Questions to Ponder on the Path to Self-Healing

Let us start with some questions to help you move along the path of self-healing, the most necessary of which is this: What does it take to put an end to emotional suffering, and how will you do it? A simple answer would be to say, “Let it go, and move on.” For many who are experiencing traumatic or distressing emotions, however, letting go can be a complex activity. So there are related issues that, in general, need to be considered. How are you, a sufferer, to describe letting go, so as to be able to move on, since the way we look at things is the way they will affect us? The

following are questions about the process of letting go:

1. Would healing be more effective if you understood what was included in the letting-go activity?
2. What are the important reasons why disturbing mental pictures tend to stay in the foreground and not in the background of your memory or thinking?
3. Is there an answer to why you have the distress—an answer that will lead to a cure? Whether or not you find it, are there consequences of this search for your healing?
4. Are you aware of any particularly powerful aspects of the traumatic experience that might lead to a serious disorder, and is it possible that you have one of these conditions right now?
5. Can you describe your reactions and, from that description, determine how severe the effects of the suffering are?
6. How confident are you in picking a starting point for self-healing and using all available learning and resources to succeed?
7. As you try to free yourself from or reduce an unbearable distress, can you make a list of what to change, remove, or maintain in order to get better?
8. How prepared are you for the ups and downs and obstacles to progress that you will meet as you journey towards wellness?
9. If you could put your guiding beliefs for healing in the form of a mantra to keep you focused, how would it go?

So now you see that the plan for letting go of traumatic or disturbing emotional feelings includes many concerns that are not easy to see at first. After you have read much further, some of these questions will make more sense, but at this stage, these points are only ideas to consider—food for thought.



ASSIGNMENT

After Reading Chapter 1

If you assessed yourself as being ready for self-healing as you start on the journey to become a happier, healthier person, use this page to note which chapters, as described in Chapter 1, are of particular interest. State the reason for the interest.

✓	Book Chapter
	<p>Chapter 1: The Journey Begins <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>
	<p>Chapter 2: The Landscape of Healing <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>
	<p>Chapter 3: Serious Emotional Problems and How to Lessen Them <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>
	<p>Chapter 4: The Fear That Can Obstruct Your Progress <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>

✓	Book Chapter
	Chapter 5: The Path to Peace of Mind <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i>
	Chapter 6: Barriers to Healing <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i>
	Chapter 7: The Interplay Between the Conscious and Unconscious Minds to Provide Us With Peace of Mind <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i>
	Chapter 8: Taking Charge of Worry and Anger <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i>
	Chapter 9: Forgiveness Leads to Peace of Mind <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i>

✓	Book Chapter
	<p>Chapter 10: Formal Interventions Requiring A Professionally Trained Practitioner <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>
	<p>Chapter 11: Why Me? — A Serious Barrier <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>
	<p>Chapter 12: Mind and Body Working Together for Our Good <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>
	<p>Chapter 13: Why Nightmares May Show Up During Troubled Times <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>
	<p>Chapter 14: Self-Healing: Some Guiding Principles <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>

✓	Book Chapter
	<p>Chapter 15: Creating Opportunities For Self-Healing <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>
	<p>Chapter 16: Small Pleasures, Big Gains <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>
	<p>Chapter 17: Where Is Your Energy? <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>
	<p>Chapter 18: Epilogue: “Are You Here Yet?” <i>I plan to pay closer attention to this chapter because . . .</i></p>

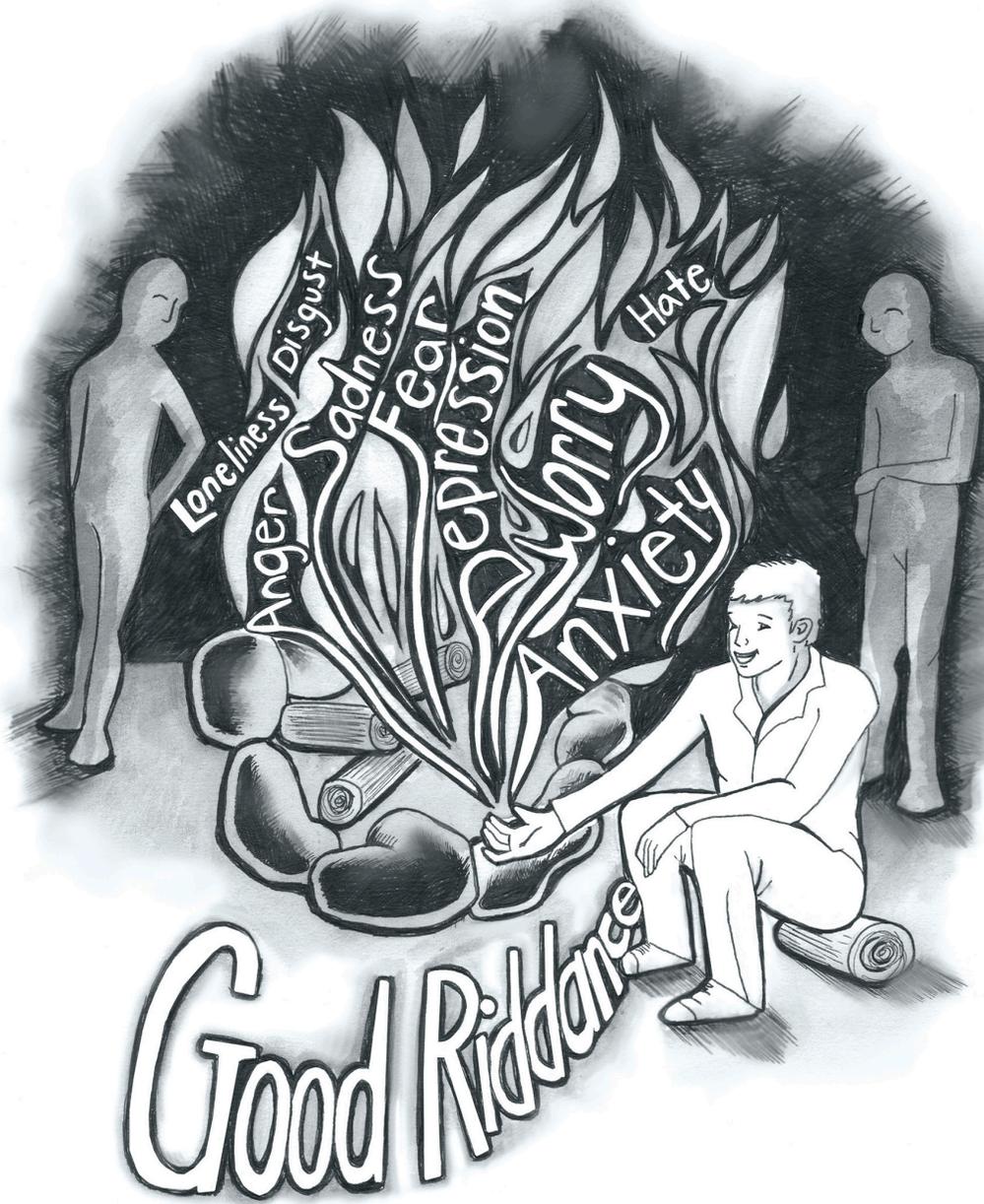
Chapter 2

THE LANDSCAPE OF HEALING

Learning to Leave the Past to Control the Present

*Life can only be understood backwards;
but it must be lived forwards.*

—Kierkegaard, philosopher



The Past

Use the past yourself to teach

And not your sorrows to redeem.

If your full power you would reach

Enjoy today and keep your self-esteem.

— *Pat Bickersteth*

What Is Letting Go?

Most people are able to cope with the ordinary stressors of everyday life. They are able to put away an offending experience and not let it bother them. In other words, they are able to let go. But on rare occasions, a person may be faced with an extremely troubling or traumatic incident that keeps her or him locked in with the thoughts and feelings connected with the unpleasant occurrence. These thoughts and feelings just don't seem to go away.

A terrible experience can stay in our consciousness and continue to control our lives long after the actual event has ended. People in this situation may feel as if they are engaged in a desperate, mental struggle to make sense of the trauma or distress. One of the results of this struggle is that the person usually experiences strong, unwanted feelings (such as sadness, fear, shame, frustration, or anger) which might not have shown themselves earlier. To complicate matters, other events that involve loss, threat, injustice, violation, victimization, and the like might come along in the course of everyday living and add their own painful emotions. If this happens, the new, strong emotional reactions become even more intense. Making correct sense of these bad feelings and experiences is one of the first steps in learning to let go.

Ways to Make Sense of Bad Experiences

Look at the problem in a different way—Sometimes, to make sense of a bad experience, you may ask yourself,

“Why did this have to happen?” and strive to sort out the problem. Although this may seem like a logical path to solving a problem, engaging in an attempt to explain why an event happened is a painful and fruitless exercise. Instead of doing this, you could aim at freeing yourself from the holding power of a distressing event by distracting yourself from the problem or looking at it differently. Distraction or looking away could mean shifting your thinking by comparing the non-threatening aspects of the problem with something similar in your immediate experience.

For example, imagine that you and your partner go to a house party. Your partner gets into a loud argument with another guest, who punches her or him in the face. You never expected something like this to happen and were ashamed, scared, and shocked by the incident. This happened three months ago. You think that by now you should have had enough time to get over your troubled feelings, but you find that you are still upset by this incident. In such a case, how do you look away when the memory of the incident shows up? To begin, switch your thoughts to a topic close to the discomfiting event to make the shift less disjointed. For example, try as hard as required to remember all the people who could have been at the party but were not, and imagine what they might have been up to elsewhere. Try to remember how many people were at the party. What colour was the hostess’s outfit? What about the attire of the other women? Now add another shift: How did these colours compare with what the women wore to another social event you attended? Even if such an event occurred a long time

ago, it would be a worthwhile challenge to try to remember. Or think about the types of food or drinks at the party, the house's décor, and what you thought about the neighbourhood. It is very important to keep your thoughts away from anything that causes anxiety. As soon as your thoughts go there, bring them back to a non-disturbing topic.

Here's another example of distracting yourself with a related jumping-off idea: You begin to feel sad about a break-up, separation, or divorce. In your increasing misery, you say to yourself, "I have not been happy since such-and-such left; I have had few moments of brightness in my life." This trend of thinking usually gets sadder and sadder and more difficult to let go of. But now you are understanding that you can learn to let go by using a part of the very thoughts that have prolonged your sadness. So you may ask yourself, "What is a moment anyway? I wonder how many moments make a second or a minute. Who came up with the idea? How did time first become a clock? Maybe someone was talking about things as I am now and stumbled on an invention," and so on. The suggestion of keeping your thoughts close to the event is not intended to discourage you from using unrelated thoughts as a distraction. It is to help make the process seem less of a strain. In fact, you can use any train of thought that will shift your thinking easily.

Think of a peaceful distraction in the present—Topics of peaceful distraction are numerous and could include the weather, enjoyable events, or events related to problem-solving or inventing something. The topic should be comfortable for you, and as soon as you can bring your thoughts

Every time you stop yourself from dwelling on how bothered you are by the mishap, you have succeeded in letting go of something, thus reducing the weight or intensity of your turmoil.

to the present, do so. It is always best to stay in the present moment and to comment on current issues—what is happening now—with as much detail as possible to keep your mind in the present. Sticking with present circumstances seems to almost guarantee that you'll be able to avoid dwelling on upsetting scenes from the past.

Decrease the importance of the emotional pain—Another approach that makes letting go possible is to deliberately work on decreasing the importance of the emotional pain and allowing other less- or non-troubling matters to replace the distressing ones. Every time you stop yourself from dwelling on how bothered you are by the mishap, you have succeeded in letting go of something, thus reducing the weight or intensity of your turmoil.

Not letting go of serious hurts tends to make a person lose self-esteem and become unable to effectively manage present problems or think about important future goals. This is due to the mental struggle that develops. When a person constantly tries to explain why an event happened or how it could have happened, self-putdowns, self-criticisms, or too

much attention to entitlement may become an unwelcome part of the picture. And this will pull you deeper into what the problem is doing to you. You need to cut ties, not strengthen them!

If you have been struggling along these lines for some time now, you may feel as though your problem has completely taken over your mind and is threatening to hold you hostage. Perhaps you are in the full grip of an emotional pain that is constantly in the forefront of your mind—a pain you must continually push back. This constant questioning and blaming of self and fate is one reason why some sufferers have difficulty sending this kind of experience to the back of their minds. Very likely, you often feel trapped and hurt. It is important to realize, though, that it is not the incident itself that hurts but rather the negative feelings that accompany your thinking about it. An important distinction between pushing something to the back of your mind and using distracting thoughts to shift your thinking is in the purpose or goal of doing either. Though a fine difference, in the former case you may be using a denial strategy; in the latter, you distract yourself as a deliberate first step to letting go of the problem.

It is important to realize, though, that it is not the incident itself that hurts but rather the negative feelings that accompany your thinking about it.

Letting go means briefly acknowledging but then thereafter refusing to give attention to those thoughts and images that produce the mental reactions that continue to barge in and upset your peace of mind. Acknowledging however does not mean agreeing with. It means that you accept your awareness of the thoughts so that you can consciously reject them. When you are able to release yourself from responding to those mental troublemakers, stop struggling with the past, and start focusing on the present with a goal of producing peace, you will feel liberated.

Reacting to a Troubling Past

The stages of reacting to a distressing event could go something like this:

Stage 1—An event occurs that makes a person's normal life feel painfully different or deeply unsettled. For example, perhaps a thief enters your home and robs you while you are sleeping, or a close friend insults you in public and walks away, wanting no further contact with you.

Stage 2—This person's normal mood is replaced by a disagreeable or disturbed state of mind. The awareness of this new disposition may occur soon after the first stage, although it is possible for substantial time to pass between Stages 1 and 2. The low spirits in the second stage may not be continuous or clear at first. Nonetheless, when feelings caused by an alarming change stand out in a person's awareness, they create an imbalance. An example of this imbalance is seeing one's present life as damaged because of a desire for a perfect past life that was actually non-existent.

For example, some people who find out in adulthood that they were adopted as children may greatly resent their history and wish that their lives had been different. Another example is to see a present unsatisfactory state of affairs as much worse than life was in the past, although it was never true that the past life was at all great. The imbalance causes the person to see the unwanted event or feeling in a much worse light.

Stage 3—The person mentally tries to figure out how to get back a past life that was free of worry. Stage 3 is very much like grieving.

Stage 4—The grieving of Stage 3 goes on for a while and then rolls over into Stage 4. In this stage, the person starts searching in her or his mind for a solution or a convincing answer that will remove the suffering.

Accepting That the Past Is Past

Letting go begins with accepting that a conscious return to the past to correct a situation is not possible. Life is not like viewing pictures on a digital camera—deleting an offending scene and replacing it with a reshoot. In other words, letting go begins when one accepts that the past is not an actual physical place where conscious changes can be made or where events can be rearranged, rewritten, or corrected. The past is nothing more than the ideas in our memory. It is a remarkable thing to realize: Our thoughts are our past, and the past is only a collection of our thoughts. Do not gloss over this fact. It is key to a proper understanding

*It is a remarkable thing to realize:
Our thoughts are our past, and the past
is only a collection of our thoughts.*

of where to look to find respite from distress.

Therefore, as you consider how to escape the misery of terrible events, you need to be aware that you have only one choice: you must learn to accept that the present is the only setting in which to address any problem. That is, you need to realize that when you are struggling with a terrible incident in your head, it is only the information of that terrible incident you are carrying around. A strong desire to change the past (or restore a past state) can only create more stress in your current life and make the battle harder. With this understanding, it makes sense for sufferers to focus on the present and on taking steps to bring this life back to normalcy.

The task we face when tackling a past grievance is to decide whether or not to listen and react to the messages coming from it. Remember: our thoughts are our past, and the past is only a collection of our thoughts. Therefore, from this standpoint, the past may be looked upon as a lifeless guidepost rather than a participant in the present. Without a clear understanding that your past is only inactive information, you can disrupt the life you are living by turning your attention backwards, even though you want

When we try to stop, arrested by the emotions of a past event, we pit ourselves against the progress of time and against the tide of other events to be attended to and experienced.

to move forward. This means that, psychologically, you are being pulled in two opposite directions. This is a form of emotional disturbance—a condition in which an emotional reaction is out of control, disturbing or disrupting the normal pattern of reacting. A disturbance can range from fleeting and mild to continuous and severe.

Another form of disturbance can come about when our current experiences, wishes, hopes, and plans move us forward along the path of life, until something happens that causes us to say, “Wait! I can’t go on yet. There’s unfinished business I have to take care of.” When we try to stop, arrested by the emotions of a past event, we pit ourselves against the progress of time and against the tide of other events to be attended to and experienced. In reality, we cannot stop our lives from going on. In effect, we are opposing the force that is pushing us naturally forward, unnaturally trying to stay in the past and vainly attempting to rearrange or erase the painful event. We must learn to let go of problems that hold us back.

Letting go means finding a way to move along with the passage of time and agree with the changes that happen, rather than trying to resist them. By “agreeing with” I am not suggesting you look upon life’s trials as unchangeable or permanent. Rather, I propose that you accept another truth: **We cannot change the past by blocking the present or the future.** The more involved we become in making the present happen, the more we let go of the past so that it *becomes* the past. In doing this, our original connection with the trauma or distress grows weaker as it recedes further into the past, and we let ourselves progress from the present into the future in a normal and natural way. Otherwise, we set up a disturbance in our mental state that registers as anxiety, depression, an anger problem, and so on, depending on the characteristics of the specific hurtful experience.

To reiterate, letting go means separating the past from the future by focusing on the present as normally as you can. This is the starting point of a new way of living life. To enable this new life, sufferers must use all the tools and skills they can assemble to develop appropriate ways of living and viewing experiences as they occur in the present. Furthermore, it is necessary to use this approach regardless of whether or not these experiences seem connected in some way to a past trauma. This is important because the problem is not the past trauma at all. The problem is the pain or suffering caused by the trauma. It is easy to see how a sufferer would tend to regard the time period in which an event occurred as important, but it is not. It only feels that way because it marked the start of the present misery.

Learn to Acknowledge the Present and Bring It Under Control

One way of releasing a nuisance pain from the past is by starting to acknowledge the present as having an identity of its own. That is to say, rest your attention on present circumstances—perceive, review, and address them according to their current importance. Include those aspects that are causing suffering and despair in the present. The goal of this exercise is to bring the present under control by taking proper action to feel comfortable with what's happening now. It may, however, take more than brief practice to get to this stage. As you gain better direction over your reactions to current situations, you will feel more confident about your ability to make it through. The longer you maintain this optimistic feeling, the more evident it will be that you shall overcome! Remember not to be disappointed if your attempts at getting better do not seem wonderful right away. It sometimes takes many drops to fill a cup, but every drop raises the level.

Remember not to be disappointed if your attempts at getting better do not seem wonderful right away. It sometimes takes many drops to fill a cup, but every drop raises the level.

Once you feel that your self-control over staying in the present is improving, you are in a better position to see a positive future. Believe me when I tell you that your self-healing requires you to re-interpret your past emotions, behaviours, and beliefs as data—useful information. Doing this allows you to work on your emotional disturbance in the present and to be happier today. Being happier today will allow you to see and be in a position to create a future that is tolerable or even happier than the present, especially when you make that kind of future your goal.

If you choose instead to continue to live in the pain, fear, or anger of the past, you will need to answer the following question: “How much distress do I need to generate right now to solve my problem or to let go of what happened?” If the answer is “none,” then it makes sense to look for ways to deal with the effects of the problem that is causing your present misery.

Let’s apply the above question to another situation. When someone feels tired, it’s because something happened to the person’s body that was translated by the mind into a feeling of tiredness. Maybe the person lifted large concrete blocks or heavy furniture all day, worked endless hours at a computer, cleaned or cooked, or climbed a lot of stairs. The question could be asked, “How tired do you have to feel for the problem (the event that caused your tiredness) to go away?” The answer is likely to be, “Don’t be ridiculous. That work is done. Now I just have to rest.” In other words, no amount of tiredness after the blocks were lifted, the office work was completed, or the stairs were climbed would

make any of the events go away or “un-happen.” Unfortunately, in a similar way, an upsetting or traumatic event cannot be made to go away after it has happened nor will feeling more emotional pain solve the problem. This is why it is so important to learn to let go—to accept that the past is past and to accept the present and bring it under control.



After Reading Chapter 2

Use this exercise as your first attempt to plan to let go of your lingering emotional problem by describing the following:

1. Your current stage of reaction:

2. What important ideas or clues in this chapter will help you know where to look for and how to prepare to deal with the emotional problem(s) in your life? Just write down the page numbers of your answer, adding very brief notes to remind you of which passages you have in mind.

Chapter 3

SERIOUS EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS AND HOW TO LESSEN THEM **Emotional Disorders to Defend Against and Conquer**

Introduction

As you just learned in Chapter 2, the past has a habit of interfering with the present and the future. Some effects of past trauma can lead to many serious emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, and panic reactions, as well as anti-social attitudes. They can also lead to more serious problems such as dissociation, traumatic amnesia, and suicidal thoughts. In this chapter, you will learn more about these emotional conditions and how to deal with them.

There are three parts to this chapter:

- Part 1: The Many Faces of Life's Emotional Problems
- Part 2: Traumatic (Emotional) Amnesia,
Memory Retrieval and Suicide
- Part 3: How Trauma Can Affect You



Part 1: The Many Faces of Life's Emotional Problems

Looking for an Answer

Let's start with a hypothetical situation. Imagine that your investment advisor took out your money (a little at a time or all at once) and lost it. He or she may have attempted to cover the tracks, denied taking the money, or even tried to blame you. Whatever the case, this person cheated you, and that was not right.

In a normal situation, you trust your advisor and assume he or she is committed to working for you and protecting your money. This is how life is supposed to proceed. However, when the once-trusted advisor broke your trust, you were upset. Apart from the loss of the money (even if it was temporary), the betrayal of trust and the experience of being deceived would likely create feelings of helplessness, frustration, anger, hurt, sadness, shock, fear, resentment, or a combination of these. Furthermore, you plain old wish it hadn't happened! This hypothetical case is simply to lay the groundwork. Your problem is likely quite different. Maybe a very good friend betrayed you; you lost a job or job opportunity due to circumstances beyond your control, yet someone else could have intervened on your behalf; or maybe your life or a loved one's life was put in danger (or lost unnecessarily) through another person's fault.

Every time you think of the distressing experience, you probably grieve the loss of your peace of mind and

resent having to deal with the disruption. This experience still produces mental pain, as you think about the events over and over, questioning why it had to happen or looking for “the answer.” By doing this, you bring these mental images into the present and make them a constant present reality. This only makes the emotional pain of the past stay alive.

Indeed, the more resentful you are of a problem and its disruption to your peace and contentment, the more frequently you will create upsetting mental pictures. These hurtful images, in turn, produce further resentment, resulting in a feedback loop of distressing emotions. By hooking all these reactions together while you analyze your grief, you end up giving these displeasing feelings even more life and energy. Soon, if allowed, these now powerful emotions will begin to clutter and obstruct from view (or distort) a large amount of what is normal or okay about your present life. In effect, starting with a single awful experience, your life has become, by stages, a bundle of serious emotional problems with which you regularly struggle. By this stage, you are deep into the “head struggle,” which, in the section titled “The Process of Releasing,” is described as the fourth stage of “finding the answer.”

In this hypothetical situation, the past took over the present, and the result was that you began to view the world in an irrational way. Simply put, a past troubling experience became a screen through which you interpret the present and the future. Doing this can make both periods of life seem very unpleasant and uninviting. This can cause serious

emotional reactions, such as depression, anxiety, and panic attacks, the definitions of which I will now step you through.

Defining Depression

Depression is usually described as a condition in which you experience some or many of the symptoms of depression, most of the day, on nearly every day, for at least two weeks. Symptoms may range from mild to severe. So let's say you believe you are depressed and not just having the blues or disliking something that happened. What does that look like? Before we delve into the answer, read this CAUTION:

A Note to the Reader: Because we are not face-to-face, the ideas I am presenting are suggestions only. If we were together in person, I'd be able to not only hear how you say things but also receive non-verbal impressions from you. These factors could have a very different effect on my statements to you. In this situation, you are your own therapist, and it will be up to you to decide whether or how you will apply these suggestions. My goal is to empower you to become a well-functioning person, emotionally. Recognizing the symptoms of depression is a step toward achieving that goal.

Some Symptoms of Depression

- Loss of motivation—You don't feel like doing much of anything; you aren't motivated to start or continue doing most activities; and almost nothing inspires you to act, to produce, or to engage in anything.

- Feelings of moodiness—These may come in cycles, sometimes called mood swings, or they may come separately, at different times. You may experience low or high levels of happy, sad, or excited emotions for brief or extended periods that are not usual for you and that feel almost unnatural. Laughing or crying may feel almost unbearable (you want to stop). Laughter or upbeat behaviour does not feel right—like it has no depth. These feelings change to contrasting ones seemingly without cause and especially when you are alone.
- The amount of interest you are able to show may change and become very difficult to control. From time to time, you may have a tendency to lose interest or to have no interest in most things. Ordinary, everyday activities like dressing neatly and grooming properly fall by the wayside (usually brought about by a combination of lack of interest, lack of motivation, and/or neglect from over-worrying). Or you may become over-engaged or involved in activities that give you brief, a little or no pleasure.
- You experience changes in energy levels. Sometimes you feel a general lack of energy; you are tired for no real reason. At other times, usually in specific situations, you may show tireless effort. In other words, your energy level could go up or down. When it is up (and this may be rare), you want to work yourself to the ground to bring on an agreeable feeling. But usually there is no sense of satisfaction or pleasure in what you are doing.
- Your concentration or ability to focus and make important decisions becomes greatly reduced. Even attending to

everyday occurrences, such as watching TV or listening to what someone is saying to you, is difficult because you keep missing parts of what's coming at you. Sometimes you are able to concentrate for a while with effort, sometimes not.

- You find yourself developing a tendency to take inventory of your life, being quick to blame yourself for events or their bad results. You may feel guilty about many areas of your life because you have done or have not done certain things, and you feel in some way responsible for how things turned out, especially when your worries involve other people.
- Feelings of frustration and/or irritability are likely to increase. Things get on your nerves easily; you seem to have very little patience in many situations; and you tend to lose your temper quickly.
- Changes in your speed of activity or of movement are probably occurring. You may feel slowed down or heavy when you move or do things; or you may feel unable to keep still or take it easy. You seem to want to be on the go, and these feelings match your accompanying thoughts, which may sometimes speed up or slow down.
- Your sleep patterns have probably changed. You find yourself sleeping for hours at a time without feeling refreshed; you may be unable to fall asleep; or you may have difficulty staying asleep for extended periods.
- Maybe you are doing a great deal of worrying, which brings a tendency to look at the bad side of an event in the past, present, or future. This causes you not only to

worry more but also to feel threatened or anxious. You may feel hopeless about many things or about your life in general and, therefore, feel ashamed.

- Sexual interest may have decreased substantially. This is accompanied by a feeling of diminished pleasure whenever you do engage in it; or you may show an increase in sexual activity, which is mostly unsatisfying and very likely prompted by a desire to seek pleasure—which usually never stays.
- Changes may have crept into your eating habits or patterns, and you may have also observed changes in your weight. You may feel a need to eat more and/or drink more alcohol than usual. This may feel more like a need to do something pleasurable or to fight boredom (though you're likely to feel better only for a short while). On the other hand, you may be experiencing a loss of appetite—which is more like a loss of interest or pleasure in food.
- You may be troubled with feelings of low self-worth. In your state of feeling unmotivated, lacking in energy, not caring about your appearance or your eating habits, and feeling guilty about a number of life events (things that have happened for which you may take responsibility), you will likely feel ashamed of the guilt and depression. All of these reactions are part of your depression. In these circumstances, some people begin to see themselves as useless or worthless.
- In some of cases, although the feeling of low self-worth or low self-esteem was there before the depression for the reasons just stated, it may become worse. In other cases,

it's the depression that leads people to feel they have no value. As a result, they become discouraged and lose their sense of self-esteem.

I hope you have realized that being depressed does not mean the depression is active all hours of your waking life, although it is felt most of the time. You also need to know that while you may not have every complaint I have described, you will be aware of some of them on most days.

A person's encounter with either an unresolved traumatic experience or a struggle with an unmanageable mental or physical condition can produce a depression that includes several of the reactions described above. More often than not, however, it would not take much for a person to become depressed if he or she feels lost and unable to find meaning or purpose in life or has lived a distressing childhood. More generally, people who continue to have a negative view of themselves, of the future, and of the world are probably depressed. Take heart though. Many of the techniques described in the rest of this book can be applied successfully to depression.

Defining Anxiety and Panic Reactions

Anxiety and **panic reactions** are kindred conditions in that they share most of the same anxiety symptoms. They differ, however, in what triggers their occurrences. Anxiety is a less intense form of fear than panic, and panic is fear upon fear. The kinds of treatments to which they respond are also different. Both are seen among those who suffer from emotional trauma, depression, and other mental-emotional problems.

Anxiety is a common condition in which a person responds with uneasiness or fearful expectation of harm or danger. It is accompanied by a disagreeable feeling. People with anxiety have a sense that something unpleasant or dangerous will happen that could overwhelm them or even cause death. These people feel unable to escape or to stop the real or assumed threat, which can take many forms: the sound of screeching tires; a surge in a crowd; the fear of someone breaking into their home; seeing someone who reminds them of a victim or perpetrator of a horrifying accident or crime; a group of people whispering; thunder and lightning; a child crying; being the victim of a crime; or hearing an account of a crime or disaster. Moreover, witnessing or listening to an account of an actual crime or disaster may also bring strong feelings of dread. Even being in a public, open space or in a crowd can cause anxious feelings to arise. In fact, anything that has even a potential of physical or emotional harm (regardless of knowing or not knowing what the outcome will be) tends to stir up feelings of fear that linger and become anxiety—the condition of continually reacting with fear.

The Range and Symptoms of Anxiety

Our anxiety reactions can range in severity from mild to extreme. Generally speaking, short-lived, understandable and, therefore, manageable anxiety is at one extreme. Panic, terror, and uncontrollable and disabling anxiety is at the other. The triggers for both or types at various points within the range depend on a person's history, genetic makeup,

state of health, circumstances, beliefs and perceptiveness, as well as other specific or unique situations that could lessen or increase the anxiety. In short, although we generally react similarly to similar events, we do not all react in the same ways at all times. Nonetheless, in most instances, anxiety appears to be accompanied by or capable of producing the following complaints in many situations:

- Increased heart rate—heartbeats are faster and feel stronger
- Muscle tension in your stomach, neck, and mouth area—usually with clenched teeth
- Difficulty breathing—breathing too fast and shallow or realizing you have been holding your breath
- Quivering, shaking or trembling as if it were cold; feeling cold even when the temperature is normal
- An unsettled feeling, usually centred in the chest or abdomen
- A feeling of fear that the worst is happening or about to happen
- A feeling that you will be or are overwhelmed, lost, or without protection
- An inability to break free from certain worried thoughts or threatening images
- The need to do specific actions or behaviours to relieve a strong, compelling, or stressful feeling

A person who is participating in or anticipating doing something—willingly or unwillingly—in which protection or support may be lacking or who has suffered a trauma (a massive or overpowering fear), serious depression, or any

strong emotional pain, usually experiences some or most of these symptoms.

The Range and Symptoms of Panic Attacks

Panic attacks may cause the same reactions (or complaints) as anxiety reactions, except for the last two stated above: an inability to break free from certain worried thoughts and the need to do specific actions to relieve the strong anxiety feeling. These two are not considered typical of panic. For example, in a panic-attack situation, something could happen or you could think of an event or person that raises an existing fear to a much higher degree. This could cause additional reactions on top of the anxiety feelings you may already be having.

See if you recognize these characteristics of a panic attack as complaints you clearly remember having:

- Hyperventilation—taking abnormally deep and long breaths quickly that sometimes result in dizziness or faintness
- A feeling of tightness in the throat and/or extreme chest pain—often mistaken for a heart attack
- A feeling of being close to losing control or going crazy
- The sudden occurrence of extreme feelings of fear without any warning and without any way of escaping them

Fear at a level that is out of proportion to your current situation or, more often than not, completely unrelated to that situation. These strong feelings pass in a few minutes but may reoccur in repeated attacks that can continue for hours.

A distinctive feature of a panic attack is a strong fear of having another attack that could happen in a dangerous or face-losing situation—or the fear that the attack could even be fatal. Though some panic-stricken people feel it convincingly, the fear of dying from a panic attack is usually seen as groundless. However, because of the intense fear of what a subsequent attack could cause, these people avoid going to certain places or being in certain situations. Such fear can become severe enough in some people to prevent them from leaving their homes, the only places in which they feel safe. The fear of future attacks is the reason a panic attack is sometimes described as the fear of fear. When panic attacks cause the additional reaction of being shut in, it is called *agoraphobia* (fear of open spaces or being outside).

Anti-social Attitudes

Anti-social attitudes may result from feelings associated with trauma or emotional turmoil, including sadness and shame. They may, however, be taught by parents, older siblings, or others in a position to influence an impressionable child or adult. These attitudes may include resentment toward certain people and situations and a need to escape or reduce feelings of numbness or boredom. Anti-social attitudes probably arise out of a person's loss of sensitivity to the broader range of feelings. A person displaying these attitudes

- has a reduced sense of empathy or caring;
- may have an inability to reflect and, therefore, a tendency to act impulsively;

- is unwilling or unable to take responsibility for certain actions;
- uses anger and resentment in reaction to perceived injustice or to avoid feelings of guilt;
- tends to act out as a cover for shame or out of a feeling of being overwhelmed;
- may use misinformation, misrepresentation, and half-truths usually to avoid punishment and/or
- reveals low self-esteem.

These anti-social behaviours can also lead someone to frequently recall and worry about his or her unworthiness or flaws in a mental environment in which the past is hated, the present is unbearable, and the future is feared. These mental challenges can explain why someone who is showing anti-social or deviant attitudes might sometimes prefer to “forget” a painful, confusing, or frightening experience by trying to suppress it.

Psychological Defence or Coping Strategies

Suppressing a problem won't solve it. It never does. Despite one's wish to avoid a disturbing experience, it usually keeps popping up. Nonetheless, we have been equipped by nature with built-in abilities that allow us to defend ourselves against strong emotional threats that are too powerful for us to consciously control. By utilizing one or more of our many psychological defence strategies, more often than not, we can succeed in obtaining a measure of protection against the more hurtful effects of overwhelming emotional

disruption or trauma. Protective mental devices include denial, projection, disassociation, and traumatic amnesia.

Denial — thinking and reacting as if a painful experience did not happen when it may be obvious to others that it did. Using denial, a person manages to see an event and/or its psychological impact from a point of view that calls forth a different, more enduring emotional reaction than the real impact would have produced.

Projection — perceiving someone else as acting, feeling, or thinking in a particular (usually inappropriate) way that is really true of the perceiver allowing one to be more comfortable identifying this behaviour in others than in oneself.

Dissociation as a Defensive Strategy

What Is Dissociation? ¹—Most mental health professionals agree that disassociation describes a temporary change of identity that is usually caused by a traumatic event that happened during childhood. Experts suggest that severe stress from a trauma or some other serious mood disturbance can trigger the expression of an adopted identity state known as *dissociation* or *dissociative behaviour*. It is to be noted, though, that people who have not been traumatized can experience dissociation, although this happens far less frequently.

In the majority of cases of trauma or other serious emotional suffering, it is believed that a sufferer uses dissociation as a protective cushion against contending with the full impact of the traumatic experience. In other words, when a

person “changes” his or her identity, he or she is attempting to make a bad experience bearable.

Dissociation is complex and frustrating. Many people, especially children, seem to have the ability to separate their real lives from the dissociative experience. In doing so, they are apparently able to adopt imagined characteristics of people, animals or objects that can protect them from the trauma. In my opinion, during the occurrence of a dissociative behaviour these sufferers perceive the imagined safety characteristics as part of their own personalities. Accordingly, there are times when they can voluntarily act out these borrowed parts, such as when they are asked to bring a certain trait of the dissociated personality to the front.

It is not to be thought, however, that this condition is like a hide-and-go-seek game. Some who have this illness seem to be aware that their displays of dissociative behaviour, which can be confusing, exhausting, and extremely distressing, occur mainly to block a more unpleasant reaction and thereby provide emotional safety. Because of the origin of dissociation in some form of traumatic violence or extreme emotional disturbance—and the need for vigilance to ward off more serious harm—people in a dissociated state can sometimes be aggressive to themselves and to others. Therefore, it is essential for others (treating agents and advocates) to monitor the behaviour of the sufferer to prevent self-harm—an apparently constant risk among this population—and harm to others.

Dissociation can be useful. It appears that the length and frequency of a traumatized person’s dissociated state is

directly related to the seriousness of the trauma. Dissociation is not seen as a totally conscious activity, at least in the case of serious traumatic encounters, although as noted, people sometimes seem to voluntarily go into and out of the state (for example, in a therapy session). In general however, the tendency to dissociate appears to manifest itself as an automatic reaction, probably resulting from a naturally built-in protective mechanism. It has been suggested that during the occurrence of a traumatic experience, dissociation may be semi-consciously helpful to the victim by blurring his or her physical and/or emotional involvement, which results in perhaps disorganizing awareness so that there is no complete memory of the event. Later, however, disassociation may have a tendency to disrupt a person's connection with others, especially an intimate kind.

Reducing or Eliminating Dissociative Reactions

To reduce or eliminate dissociative reactions, it might help the sufferer to pay attention to the triggers. For example, are the triggers only reminders of the trauma? Since dissociation appears to be the result of a person having difficulty tolerating seriously painful, physical, and/or mental experiences, freedom from the unpleasant effects of dissociating is likely to come from learning to manage the cause of the pain—the triggers that represent the original painful event. Here I must remind you again that people with more serious cases of disassociation should seek professional help.²

In applying any self-treatment to reduce or eliminate

Here I must remind you again that people with more serious cases of disassociation should seek professional help.²

dissociation, always make a point of stopping yourself from completely fixing your focus on parts of the problem. In this way, you will avoid being drawn into a dissociative reaction through such deep involvement. You are to recall aspects of the trauma only to apply the suggested technique and then move on. A treatment that can be used to deal with dissociation, described under the heading “Using Expressive Writing to Cope with Distress,” emphasizes the need to refrain from deep reflection. You may proceed to that section now (in Chapter 8) and then return to this page to continue.

Based on that treatment idea, my suggestion here, with respect to dissociation, is that you do one extra narrative which you will revisit eight to twelve months later for a comparison with another written account of your trauma at that time. But be aware! You will not be reading the two versions yourself; you’ll need to give them to someone you trust and ask if the most recent story has as much detail as the first. According to some research in this area, you will likely be told that your newest attempt is a lot less accurate than the first. If that happens, it is good news. Almost definitely you are getting better! It probably means you have forgotten some of the details. I would interpret

this memory loss as an indication that the ground on which your dissociated responses stand (their foundation) is falling apart. This is probably the stage to begin reviewing the beliefs or perceptions about some of the remaining parts of the trauma to make the more hurtful aspects less troubling (using the ideas described in Chapter 8 under the topic “Analyzing Distress”). Wow! Wouldn’t it be wonderful to improve to the point that you have clearly rid yourself of some part of your problem? In that spirit of anticipation, keep working on your troubles with determination and hope. One of these days, you will have good reason to celebrate another major victory over them.

Since dissociation seems to involve a self-made identity, finding ways to convince yourself that this new identity is not your original would probably not be very difficult. And if it is not difficult for you, it is probably not difficult for those around you. As such, it is not necessary to attempt to hide your symptoms (if you do at all). In fact, more healing would be expected and very likely achieved through the added motivation that comes when you realize (and others understand) that your created dissociative personality can be replaced.

Reducing the pain of disassociation—There are other possible ways of reducing, if not removing, the emotional pain of dissociation. Although self-distraction is commonly suggested for certain emotional problems, it may not always be possible to use this method when you are in a deep state of dissociation. That is because, in your dissociative state, a strong threat in the physical area or in your mind will have

likely caused you to lose contact with reality. In such cases, a sufferer engaged in self-healing has a few choices to reduce the pain of dissociation:

1. First of all, you need to fully accept the dissociative behaviour as the best coping mechanism you've had until now. But from now on, you will also have to be tireless in telling yourself that there has to be a better way to deal with your emotional disturbance. You need to accept that your dissociative reaction is real, regardless of whether or not others are aware of it. Without giving details about its cause, you may in fact be able to put others at ease by talking about your condition. This will make it easier to organize your thoughts about your state of mind as you ask for help from others (for instance, regarding the technique described in the next paragraph). All the while, you will be sure never to give up trying to find self-accepting ways of getting out of each occurrence of a dissociated state. And in doing so, you cannot allow yourself to fall into the trap of feeling compelled to repeat whatever works, for you to avoid the anxiety the dissociation causes. When that begins to happen, you will likely be developing an obsessive-compulsive disorder. Therefore, it is necessary to stay flexible and shift from trying one method to another. Don't allow yourself to get attached to one way of relieving your dissociative symptoms. In fact, this advice is useful for using all forms of self-healing techniques that bring soothing or relief from discomfort or pain (such as those described in this book).
2. You may also need to enlist close friends to help you carry

out treatment plans. For example, ask a trusted friend to touch you on the arm or shoulder and call you by name to interrupt an ongoing dissociative fantasy. Another option is to ask a friend to walk away with you to another area where he or she can encourage you to apply a certain treatment method. If you can enlist the help of friends, you are already showing that the huge burden of this disorder is already getting lighter and you are beginning to control your exit out of the dissociative state.

3. Other tactics to try are grounding activities: touching a familiar object (like car keys or change you may have in your pocket) or focusing on a photograph, an item of furniture, a decoration, or any object that belongs to the material world. Attempting to be in touch with the material world when the dissociative behaviour is about to occur is likely to put you in control of the experience; and constant self-observation (especially at the beginning of these episodes) may teach you which smells, tastes, objects, mental images, and touches tend to trigger dissociation. This kind of information could help you discover and correct what you are perceiving during periods of altered consciousness.

Attempt to interrupt a developing dissociative episode—One of the main goals of treatment for disassociation is to gain control of your thoughts, perceptions, and reactions. Therefore, when you feel a dissociative episode coming on, do your best to control your attention. If you can, use self-talk as described below.

Control your attention—If you feel an episode is about to happen, tell yourself that even though you sense disconnection from reality as a way to help you cope, you don't need to disconnect. You can cope in other ways—by trying to bring your attention to what is real in your current environment. The more often you succeed in disallowing your attention from being totally controlled by your dissociated perceptions, the longer your mind will stay in touch with the real world, making normal life more available to you. I encourage you to keep trying to obstruct every dissociative reaction so as to eventually be able to control it.

Use self-talk—Sometimes, outside of the dissociative experience, it is beneficial to use self-empowering and inspiring self-talk to boost your healing confidence and progress. There are many examples of this kind of self-talk in Chapter 18 (Motivating Self-Talk).

Caution: When applying any of these suggestions, you should be very careful to use only items (mental or physical) that are clearly not related to either the memory of a traumatic or bothersome experience or to other problematic emotions. Professional therapists and scientists do not know everything about how and why people dissociate, although there is wide agreement that as a reaction to trauma or extreme stress, disassociation appears mainly to prevent the sufferer from a more destructive psychological response (for example, a total psychotic collapse).

In other words, because the suggested disruptive nature of the interfering dissociative experience tends to be

In effect, the automatic distraction by one event (dissociation) prevents a person from coming into full contact with another (the traumatic event) that could cause much greater psychological harm.

compelling enough to occupy a significant part of one's attention, the sufferer misses taking note of the total harmful experience or a significant part of it. Instead, the person is exposed to something emotionally less damaging than he or she could have experienced without the dissociative buffer. In a sense, detachment from the real world blocks the occurrence of a more serious psychological reaction in much the same way that coughing or sneezing prevents an object from blocking the respiratory channels to cause a probably fatal outcome. In effect, the automatic distraction by one event (dissociation) prevents a person from coming into full contact with another (the traumatic event) that could cause much greater psychological harm.

Effects of Disassociation and Possible Ways to Manage Them

Disassociation affects your attitudes, thoughts, and behaviour, as described below.

Attitudes—The experience of dissociation (whether the result of a physical incident or not) is a natural reaction

to help you cope with an excessively troubling or deeply harming emotional injury. As such, you may try to treat the dissociative condition as the expression of an emotion. As with any emotion (whether you have control over it or not), acknowledge it, rather than fight or deny it.

Thoughts—Treat the troubling memories of your trauma, whenever they come up, as if they are under your control, and realize that they keep alive the other “characters” into which you could change (that is, alternate “characters” or alters, as they are sometimes called). Tell yourself that the sensation or awareness of a different personality is temporary and will soon go away because you do not need it anymore and must now think about other matters. If you can believe thoughts are creative, and you can use them to alter your reality, your task now is to build mental pictures of pleasure and enjoyment that will serve as safe places, free of dissociative symptoms. Recall that all memories and mental images are just thoughts and you can form counter thoughts and images for the express purpose of neutralizing the troubling ones. As such, you are at liberty to create or imagine mental scenes (never to act out) that are horrible, pornographic, impossible, socially unacceptable, wickedly creative, or even very funny etc., only to cancel or drive out the dreadful images that are causing your disturbance.

You want to feel good again with your real self as a whole person. Look for other ideas that will give you strength to shift from the dissociated state. As suggested, use grounding ideas and empowering self-talk (see above and Chapter 18). It is probably not worth getting into conflict with any alter

by intensifying the negative emotions or feelings connected with it. Remember, you installed the alternate identity to protect yourself from the all-at-once memory of a traumatic experience. The alter is your creation. And even if your creation was a partially or totally unconscious act, as the creator, you are smarter than it! Therefore, find clever arguments with which to coax an alter to “come home” and reunite with you so that, as one, you can be strong enough to fight the trauma—your common enemy.

Your goal should not be to dump a nuisance part of yourself; rather, it is to recognize and appreciate the good work the alters have done and then bring all of you back together. When it comes to remembering what caused such an extreme reaction (if not already uncovered), you will need to proceed very cautiously, interspersing memory recovery with longer and longer periods in your safe zones to help yourself tolerate the more difficult aspects of the trauma story. Consider a welcome-home ritual for each alter that drops off and allows your real self to re-assert itself in that area of your functioning.

Caution: If you have addictions, you must celebrate in a way that does not include these problems.

Behaviour—If possible, leave the place you are in when dissociation threatens to start or starts. Ground yourself, and do anything you can to act in opposition to what the dissociated state might be prompting you to do, ensuring that the counter behaviour is socially acceptable. Also, try to do something that will produce a reaction opposite to

(or at least different from) the negative emotion(s) you are experiencing. For example, focus on remembering funny experiences or calling a previously coached close friend or colleague who is aware of your needs and is prepared to distract you and bring you back to the present. If you have skills in mindfulness meditation, you may find them useful at this point, because when you are doing this meditation, you have control of your thoughts and they are in the present, real world. There are many examples in Appendix 9 (Mindfulness Meditation Exercises).

Part 2: Traumatic (Emotional) Amnesia Memory Retrieval and Suicide

Another condition that traumatized people sometimes suffer from is a kind of emotional amnesia which is a total forgetting of a whole or a part of an experience. Traumatic amnesia has nothing to do with a poor memory, nor is it the same kind of traumatic amnesia that can result from a serious brain injury. It is also different from age-related forgetting in which a piece of information may seem totally lost. In this case, unlike the traumatic kind, the person is able, in most instances, to recall the material when reminded. Rather, traumatic amnesia is believed to be a psychological reaction to an overwhelming experience. Usually, this experience is a trauma or severely stressful event. Because of their similarity in separating the sufferer from a potentially destructive encounter, traumatic amnesia is sometimes believed to be a type of dissociative response. Whether as

a form of dissociation or as a different condition, this amnesia does appear to allow people to remove an unbearable experience from their immediate awareness. Have you ever suffered or do you still suffer from an unexplainable amnesia since your traumatic experience? If you did not know it before, now you know that your forgetfulness is very likely a result of an emotional shock.

Healing traumatic amnesia—The healing of traumatic amnesia is rooted in the person's need to feel safe. Since a person's brain has an ability both to file and release repressed information, healing also depends on the readiness of the brain to reprocess or re-file those aspects of the information that are "forgotten" or repressed. On a conscious level, it is difficult, if not impossible, to remember something you do not know you have forgotten. But subconsciously, it is the passage of time and reduction in the degree of the trauma-stress that will help your brain to produce some memory recovery. At the point that this starts to occur, you may recognize flashes of previously forgotten information which are signals of the reducing strength or stability of the amnesia. With your increasing sense of safety and protection, you will very likely be able and ready to attach a more acceptable meaning to the recovering memory of the once disturbing experience. In this way, as further elements of the blocked memory are released, you will become more capable of making a conscious effort to move away from (in other words, let go of) the trauma. As such, you may then reach a point of releasing (that is, remembering) larger chunks of the forgotten incident. You will likely need to

make more use of your “safe place” to help you accept some of these recollections when they begin to show up.

Here are some helpful methods that will assist the healing process as you begin to feel safer:

- Positive self-talk, discussed in Chapter 6
- Thought Replacement, discussed in Chapter 14
- Self-hypnosis, during which you can imagine yourself in your safe place dealing with the “new” memory, as explained in Chapter 10
- Tapping, described in Chapter 17
- Seeking additional trauma treatment from a trained professional, if you believe you need one
- Self-soothing, one of the recommended “Small Pleasures” described in Chapter 16

Furthermore, psychological and biological circumstances could probably help you become more accepting of the traumatic experience that caused the amnesia. Psychologically, the assistance would come through developing trust, gaining knowledge about this condition, frequently using self-accepting and encouraging self-talk, and practising showing acceptance. Biologically, the assistance would be provided by increased connections in places in the brain that contain positive attributes of yourself and others. This would make it easier for the intensity of the negative emotions that support the amnesia to subside. This, in turn, would allow you to recall (and, hopefully, talk about) more aspects of that experience without uncontrollable anxiety, shame, or other unwanted emotions.

It is thought that traumatic memory improves as a person develops understanding and acceptance of the experience at different stages of healing. As a person heals and begins to be less afraid of different elements of the trauma, his or her sense of safety gets stronger. Therefore, if you are suffering with traumatic amnesia and are starting to wonder when the amnesia will completely go away, it is not wise to try prematurely to deliberately recall the events that led to the amnesia in hopes of removing the memory block faster. As a matter of fact, forcing recall will not necessarily improve your sense of safety. Being able to comfortably—rather than anxiously—“remember” the least acceptable or manageable parts of the unwanted experience would indicate that your ability to cope is improving.

The Three Stages of Memory Retrieval

At some point in your healing, you should be ready to let go of more of the protective amnesia. Hopefully, soon you won't need this defence mechanism at all. When you reach that point, you will be able to ask yourself about the suspected gaps in your memory: **“Why does it seem like a period of time is missing, or why does it seem like a piece of information is missing that I can't remember?”** It might turn out that self-assisted memory recovery is not even realizable in some cases. Nevertheless, trying to voluntarily bring your recall of items that could be psychologically harmful under your control and learning to be comfortable with the uncovered information may be possible by following these three structured stages:

Stage 1 of memory retrieval—At the first stage, you may focus on improving control over other skills as a steppingstone to developing control over the amnesia. In other words, to be effective in managing your emotional state, you might benefit from taking charge in other areas of your life before attempting to master more complex characteristics in your functioning. For example, you could learn to organize and follow a day's agenda or timetable, which can be repeated (see Appendix 1, the Bickersteth Emotional Health Recovery Plan). As part of such a plan, you may set goals and hold small social events such as dinners or gatherings with friends. Other activities involving more people and/or components added to the plan may be used, provided you have more advanced social skills at this point in your recovery. Since the goal is to develop trust and safety through control over the events of your life, any other ways of achieving this mastery, beyond the examples provided above, may be adopted. You will do well to note, however, that as your sense of safety and confidence increases, the still-frightening flashes of remembering might also increase in frequency and/or length. By now, however, you are stronger and can settle yourself faster than before after such unwelcome incidents happen.

Stage 2 of memory retrieval—At this second stage of aiding the self-healing recovery process, you will probably appreciate the value of further removing potentially obstructive, negative emotions in your reactions to other life stressors. You would have learned to do this at the first stage. Therefore, techniques such as Thought Replacement

(swapping negative thoughts with positive or neutral interpretations), acquiring relevant knowledge, and developing interpersonal associations that promise to bolster self-esteem and develop self-love have become your front-line tools for dealing with the problem. Generous amounts of self-soothing, mindfulness meditation, and relaxation exercises are to be added to these. Other self-healing skills to help release at least some of the information in the “protective custody” of dissociative amnesia include self-talk, tapping, and self-hypnosis. When you believe you have created a stable emotional environment, marked by a trustworthy sense of safety, it will be time to progress to a higher level, and that is Stage 3.

Stage 3 of memory retrieval—When you reach this stage in memory retrieval, you may wish to choose times when you are the most relaxed to practise recalling detailed chronological events in your developmental history, including the period before and after the hidden, emotionally crippling situation. You probably know only too well that when you frequently turn things over in your mind, some parts of your life story can get mixed in with other details. This could create confusion about what actually took place right after and just before the point where you believe there is a gap. Even with this mix-up, you may recognize that there may be a missing piece and believe that you likely lost that part of your memory—especially if you come across information you do not recall that confirms something about your activities during that missing time. For example, you receive a reply to a letter you do not remember writing; you

The possibility of a traumatic amnesia needs to be addressed in self-healing, even though this condition might seem to provide some degree of emotional protection.

are told about an event you had participated in but do not recall it at all, even when reminded in detail or find food in the house only you could have bought, but you have no recollection of purchasing it.

To you, such a gap is beyond doubt and is very disturbing each time it comes to mind. If the gap in your memory belongs to a time that's fairly recent, you will be sure of it. But if you are thinking about a period that's quite distant, you may not be able to accurately recall all the events of that time, and you may be mixing the cause of your grief with what your imagination has added to it. In effect, even when you reach a level of comfort and are purposefully trying to recall the events related to the trauma, you may still have difficulty distinguishing what is really factual from what your memory, which contains the actual events mixed with your imagination, tells you is factual.

The possibility of a traumatic amnesia needs to be addressed in self-healing, even though this condition might seem to provide some degree of emotional protection. I must, however, stress that it is not easy to shift from a place of relative comfort provided by your amnesia to a place of

potential agitation from the remembered material. Such a shift requires courage and strong commitment to do what it takes to function as normally as possible. People do not usually use forgetfulness to gain emotional stability; normally, they forget when they are in a state of compromised functioning. Nonetheless, intentional attempts to recall traumatic events need to be free of anxiety, measured, and gradual.

Learning to organize your life will also help you create feelings of being capable and self-reliant. These feelings will replace the usual sense of incompetence, self-condemnation, or other forms of self-disapproval that tend to accompany trauma or other emotionally degrading experiences. By implementing some of the above suggestions, you will learn to apply successful problem-solving and decision-making skills. Thus, even if the traumatic amnesia itself does not diminish satisfactorily, the skills you pick up will be beneficial.

The hope is that the greater the self-confidence produced by these remedial tasks, the braver you will become, making it more likely that you will be able to address the amnesia and the negative experience that made it necessary. As you already know, if you suffer from this type of amnesia, it is no fun. It is a demon that must be fought and brought down. You and others living with mental problems probably have supporters who want to see you get better and live a happier life. However, if the ideas so far presented are not helpful to you for this condition, the help of someone—a friend whom you trust or a professional who works in this area—could be valuable in inspiring confidence and self-trust.

Sometimes, Managing Strong Unwanted Emotions Is Like Fighting Demons

From time to time, protective psychological devices may lose their effectiveness, and you might find it difficult to suppress or deny aspects of a problem. You may become overwhelmed with the unbearable images that flood your mind as the shaky sense of peace made possible by your psychological defences begins to crumble. If you succeed in patching up the “hole” through which reality escaped (and such repair work could generate its own unpleasant emotions), there is a chance that the pseudo-peace can return. Each recurring crack, however, makes the seal weaker. In addition, holding yourself back from viewing the “mess” requires energy that is exhausted over time. (In such situations, other sources of energy can come from caring about or for yourself or others, conforming to social norms, or keeping a balance between fighting to protect yourself from current suffering and withdrawing when faced with other stressors.) This process is going on right now if you are suffering with a trauma or serious emotional problem. Indeed, as this underlying emotional power of the trauma continues or gathers momentum (fed by unrelenting illness-compounding thoughts) and exerts a counter force against the defences around it, exceptional resources are required to continue to contain and “shut in” these monstrous mental images.

In other words, these images and their emotional baggage hold the attention of the sufferer so completely that a vast amount of energy is required to respond to the “needs” of the trauma. These are, in part, the desires produced by

irrational thinking and psychological demands for peace of mind. Expending such energy is exhausting and, in some cases, puts so many demands on the sufferer that he or she is faced with the threat of destructive emotional pressures. More often than not, the sufferer does fight to resist these irrational forces of self-destruction. But at times, when restraint gives way to fatigue, this indicates that the person's "security system" is completely falling apart, leaving the sufferer unable to cope.

At this point, the sufferer may give in to total defeat and think that suicide is a possible solution. I plead with anyone who is considering suicide—do not do it! There is another way! You are not thinking straight at this point. Don't destroy everything because one part is not working right. Get help to fix it.

Talk about your suicidal thoughts if you have them— Things go wrong in everyone's life. Sometimes life is unfair, despite your best efforts to do the right thing, work hard against great odds, or make significant sacrifice. The story has been told that Bill Gates, who for many years was ranked the richest man in the world, "failed" (and I cringe when associating this word with such people who are shining examples of success) in his first business attempt. A similar story is told about Stephen King, another famous "failure" whose writing was rejected by several publishers at first. As the story goes, at one point, King was so dejected that he tossed his first unfinished manuscript into the garbage bin. Reportedly, his wife convinced him to finish it (which means he talked, listened, and took her advice).

Today, by at least one count, he has sold over 350 million copies of his books. I added scare quotes around my use of the word “fail” to signify that, today, no one sees these people as failures or cares that they “failed” once. In fact, their so-called failure taught them to succeed and is an even more powerful lesson of perseverance to us, their admirers. What if either of them had committed suicide out of frustration, disappointment or shame?

Horatio Spafford was a wealthy Chicago lawyer who lost his fortune in the great fire that ravaged a very large part of that city in 1871. He pulled himself together, worked to recoup some of his losses, and helped to rebuild the city. I hope you do not miss how he handled the disaster. There’s more. To take time away from the stress and struggles, he sent his family on a voyage to Europe, and he was to follow. Again, do not gloss over another example of how he continued to manage his circumstances. He received a telegram from his wife, however, that read, “Saved alone. What shall I do?” The ship had sunk, and all four of his daughters had drowned—a tragedy beyond the comprehension of many, no doubt. On the journey to meet his wife, the captain of his boat showed him the place his family’s ship sank. He did not jump overboard out of grief; instead, he returned to his cabin and wrote one of the most stirring and inspirational songs, which continues to serve as a confirmation of hope, faith, and confidence for many Christians. The song is titled *It Is Well with My Soul*. Translated loosely in modern English, the lyrics mean, “No worries! Everything is just fine. I am at peace where it counts—in my soul.”

Regardless of whether a person is religious or not, this is a remarkable story of a survivor with an upbeat attitude at a time when one would expect despair, utter gloom, and despondency. Neither Horatio Spafford nor his wife chose suicide. He took the rational and honourable path of hope (with his wife) in the face of undeniable adversity. As a result, we remember him today for his faith-based response to their tragedy and for passing down an admirable legacy in the form of a beautiful hymn, which has brought joy to many for generations and probably saved many from tragic actions. I give these examples for you to see that suicide can be a mistake of huge cultural, monetary, and spiritual proportions. Rejecting and avoiding it can benefit not only the individual but also society and even the world.

Talk to someone. Call the Emergency Helpline in your area, talk to a spiritual leader, or go into any hospital or medical clinic. Please do not stop yourself from making contact with someone by second-guessing and, in the end, rejecting a source of help at this life-and-death point. Remember that in that moment, your brain is not working right. Under such unfamiliar pressure, you cannot trust your own thinking; you need to rely on another person's thoughts. If you are in a situation in which no one is available to you or there is no place of safety to go to, at least continue reading this book, and learn how to remove the strong emotional feelings that are pushing you in that direction. Do not make the mistake of choosing to enter an unknown (and probably more awful) "world" by forced death when you could have found a solution in this familiar world. Talk, and take advice. You

may need professional care, especially if you are on medication. Did you know that some medication causes suicidal thoughts as a side effect? It is true. It happened to me!

When a person's brain is faulty, thoughts of suicide or of killing someone else are no different from regular thoughts that lead you to take any other course of action. How could they be? They are from the same brain where you get directions for everything else. I did not even recognize that those thoughts were strange to my usual way of thinking. They can be as convincing and real as any other thoughts. Although I was in hospital and almost completely paralyzed, my brain was working hard to find a way to do it. When I talked to a Padre (a military minister) about my suicidal thoughts, I became confused after he discouraged me. I was confused by the fact that my brain was telling me it was a logical act, but he did not at all see it that way. I did not use any form of the word "suicide" to him. Instead I tried to engage him by asking him to "do something important for me." In other words, the other parts of my brain that were working "normally" went into action to find a way to get him to do what "I" wanted. This only goes to show that mental illness does not necessarily include the working of the whole brain, and (because of what happened next) it may not necessarily be active 24/7.

Reflecting seriously on his lack of support—in particular, admitting that he had made sense about everything else he had said to me, I realized that I, not he, was the one not being rational. I did not know at all at the time that medication was the cause of those thoughts. Just as some

medications act on the brain to create a realistic feeling of being happy or calm, so, too, can some others make you want to die. This helps explain how some types of mental illness that “tell” you to do bad things may not have been accurately diagnosed at that time or even perceived as mental illnesses. In all these cases, the brain is altered in a way that puts it out of order.

As you read on, you will come across explanations of how long-standing or frequent fear and anger can cause actual physical changes in the brain, and these changes will affect the way a person thinks and behaves. Extreme anger, fear, sadness, self-disgust, and shame can lead a person to take desperate action. But these emotional feelings do change, and as you will learn, you can easily change them yourself, long before they push you to the edge. Talking can certainly help.

I have come across people who were ready to take their own lives but did not. Things changed, their problems were solved, and life became normal or much better. Later, some of these people told me they could hardly believe they had seriously considered suicide and were very happy that they rescued themselves or were rescued from a pointless death. I, too, feel exactly the same after my own brush with suicidal thoughts. I hope you are learning that even though your pain is real and feels as though it will never go away, suicide is a deadly overreaction.

No one who has hope wants or plans suicide. The person who wants or plans a suicide is displaying a deliberate blindness to a new possibility. Instead of putting forth mental energy on this hope of escape that is selfish and unconcerned

about its consequence for others and promises only a possible result (I remind you, again, that you don't know what that death entails), why not use the hope that has made you live each day till now? At least you can say, "I will see what tomorrow brings." Read more about hope under the heading "Have Hope" in Chapter 17.

With this hope you will be able to move on from feeling defeated, trapped, worthless, or helpless to making yourself emotionally sound. Start by planting your thoughts on the need for hope. Hope is good. It will guarantee a chance to make your life better.

If you have thought seriously about suicide or attempted it, now is the time to write down a contact list with the phone numbers of people (though it can be just one person) who can support you. Include at least one hotline to the mental health emergency services in your immediate area. Put another copy of this contact information in the place provided at the back of this book.

Part 3: How Trauma Can Affect You

Of course, there are other ways to describe or explain how trauma or severe stress affects people. Your trauma or emotionally damaged condition may also be seen as a severe shock because of how it totally destroyed your peace of mind. Undoubtedly, the event that caused it was an extremely threatening event to which your immediate reaction was, most likely, ineffective or inadequate. After that first attack on your sense of safety and peace, from which the trauma developed, every recollection also brought strong,

disturbing feelings. Indeed, it is likely that your reaction to remembering the experience may feel more distressing than when the event first happened. At that time, you were partially distracted or shielded by the shock of the event. If your circumstance was similar to the one I have just described, you might not be fully aware of your psychological and physiological reactions to the trauma. Nonetheless, because the brain keeps the original experience intact, your recollections of the event (as many as your built-in protective devices will allow) will affect you in much the same way as when you were first confronted by the trauma.

Also, because of the trauma, you will spend a lot of time deep in the thoughts and images you bring forward to make sense of the problem. The volume of mental activity around the traumatic event often takes up a significant amount of mental processing time and energy. This means you are left with increasingly less ability to respond effectively or appropriately to the moment-to-moment happenings of each day. That is to say, you will give more time and attention (energy) to what is going on in your head, and less time and emotional energy to the outside world. In effect, your primary concern is much less about ordinary daily affairs and more about figuring out the trauma. This will cause frequent interruptions to your awareness of the moment-by-moment passage of life events. Consequently, attention, concentration, and memory are usually impaired. As you will learn, even without a traumatic occurrence, a safety-oriented personality can also cause you to be inwardly preoccupied. That being the case, if there were

an additional serious threat to your safety or wellbeing, you would likely react blindly (from being overwhelmed) and fall victim to a more severe emotional difficulty. This state of affairs would, no doubt, result in greater damage to your mental abilities.

Moreover, your mind would be so full of thoughts about your emotional difficulties that these themes would probably show up in dreams, which will likely become nightmares instead of a vehicle for helping to solve awake-time problems (See Chapter 13). The high importance and urgency of the troubling mental images usually leave the sufferer in a state of almost constant readiness to react. Being continuously on edge tends to disrupt sleep and, as a consequence, may produce irritability, although the nagging problem is irritating and frustrating by itself. In attempting to decrease or escape the uncomfortable effects of the memory of a trauma, the sufferer tries to avoid situations or aspects of situations that are comparable to or reminiscent of the circumstances of the distressing experience.

As the sufferer pays more attention to personal turmoil, he or she begins to show less interest in various activities in the “outside world.” Because of this, the sufferer will pay little or no attention to many events that could occur and will show very few positive emotions (affection, empathy, patience or pleasure) in response to many events that could occur. One way to attempt to keep a distance from the pleasant feelings that he or she would least want to experience involves showing some contrary reactions, such as irritability, aggressiveness, and withdrawal. A fear of having

their weakness exposed could also cause sufferers to limit close contact with others. Yet another aspect of a trauma or other serious emotional distress is a heightened awareness for safety. This attitude is likely adopted as a way to protect the individual and his or her loved ones from further harm and distress.

Understandably, the victim may become numbed by the progressive loss of interest and enjoyment of the daily activities in which most people participate. After a certain point, he or she adds to this pattern by actively withdrawing from situations that remind him or her of happier times. As a result, more numbing occurs, and the sufferer accepts this by saying, "What's there to enjoy about life now that this has happened?" A person who lives life this way is not functioning normally. Family, friends, and other close associates would probably find it difficult to understand or tolerate the sufferer's sometimes insensitive, senseless, or puzzling behaviours.

Naturally, no two sufferers of a trauma or other emotional problem will react in the exact same way. That's because not everyone is affected to the same degree by similar circumstances. An example of this can be seen with veterans who have fought together in the same company and in the same fierce battle in which the enemy inflicts terrible casualties. Surprisingly, not all the fighters, or even all those with physical injuries, suffer emotional injuries. And of those who become victims of post-war anxiety, the effects may vary. Some are affected mildly and briefly; others are affected mildly but for an extended period. In other cases,

You need to be grateful for those times of relief instead of being disappointed that all the pain did not leave for good.

people who were exposed to worse threats may display only moderate symptoms. Quite often, however, severe reactions can take years away from a person's life. Of course, these levels of suffering do not happen only to soldiers. Your suffering may have come from a completely different source, which does not make it any more or less important than the suffering of others. Nonetheless, you may fit into any of the victim groups described above. I suppose that if you have suffered the distress of a chronic emotional condition, you probably know that the pain is not present 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at the same level, and your reactions, therefore, change accordingly. You will also know, too well, that the hurt does not go away completely, but will seem to submerge at times. You need to be grateful for those times of relief instead of being disappointed that all the pain did not leave for good.

Work on your tender feelings—Although some sufferers may believe they are trapped and helpless in a “tasteless,” “colourless” world of non-stop despair, I sincerely hope they will be interested (which is what it takes) to learn they are neither trapped nor helpless. If you are one such person, you can attempt to regain your old sense of connection and

sensitivity by starting to work on your “tender” feelings. To do this, you need to build a foundation that will lead to appreciating people by purposefully placing your attention on and thinking about how nature displays tenderness—in the fragile new shoots of vegetation, the soft and vulnerable quality in the newborn of all species, the care that birds take in sharing food with their young, and in all the other ways nature teaches us to be gentle and loving. While engaged in observing, you would further boost these activities intended to “de-numb” yourself by thinking about what you observe. For example, as you examine new buds or shoots on plants, you may consider their “delight” in seeing their new world: try to imagine what they “see,” and feel their “excitement.” Then, in stages, you may progress to human interactions.

Young children and pets can heal—Consider taking a period of time (one week, a couple of months, or any amount of time in between) to regularly watch animals playing (not fighting), especially young ones (I include young children in this). Mentally join in the play and play along with them, when practical. Observe people showing affection for one another, and think fondly about times when you have done the same, even platonically and when you were younger, with your aunts. Copy the spirit of that affection with your romantic partner, if you have one, but be sure to announce beforehand that you are trying to keep alive or restore the intimate relationship between the two of you. Watching movies or reading about people in love could help reawaken similar emotions in you, if you had them before. If you did not, opening yourself up to such experiences could perhaps

help you “fake it till you make it” sincerely!

Pets are increasingly being recognized as having a powerful therapeutic effect on people who suffer from a variety of physical and psychological problems. I have seen remarkable turnarounds in people who, previous to the pet therapy, seemed almost totally uninterested or unresponsive in showing emotions such as fondness and pleasure. So, if possible, try to relate to a pet, ensuring, of course, that it is not a dangerous animal.

Consider also how genuinely moving art, music, and various types of stage performance can be. For some people, there is much to be said for participating in these leisure activities, which seem capable of touching people’s sensitivities and, therefore, helping them feel less numb. Of course, you can enjoy these pastimes at home, but venturing out will add other active ingredients to the general healing plan, such as being in public and in the company of others. Practising engagement in such activities will help bring your thinking and behaviour closer to what is socially acceptable, as will being in stimulating surroundings and, quite possibly, in the company of an appreciative loved one, romantic target, or friend.

Trauma-related reactions disrupt the brain’s function—As explained by neuroscientists, yet another way of understanding trauma-related reactions is to see them as the result of a disruption in the way brain systems function. It appears that the outward reactions to traumatic experiences are a reflection of brain-based activities and vice versa. That is, when an event occurs, the brain takes note and reacts in

accordance with the demands of that event on the person. For example, when there is a knock at the door, the brain “hears” the knock through the ears and “tells” us to find out who it is. It does that by sending messages to our legs to move in the direction of a window or peep-hole in the door to peek out, see who it is, and decide whether to allow

When stress causes a neurological system to work harder than it is designed or accustomed to, a malfunction or overload can occur.

entry. The degree of caution the person uses will depend on the extent to which his or her safety was compromised in a previous experience or by how troubled he or she was by someone else’s description of a similar experience. The greater the perceived threat from the knocking on the door, the more disturbing the experience will be.

It also appears there are specific places in the brain that process the information that “tells” us how to respond. The processing activity is based on a complex system of communication among the brain cells that results in some decision or action on the part of the person encountering or responding to the event. The messaging system is said to involve brain cells numbering in the billions, as well as neurological impulses and the release of hormones and

substances known as neurotransmitters. When stress causes a neurological system to work harder than it is designed or accustomed to, a malfunction or overload can occur. In a state of overload, the brain works much less efficiently and, as such, is not capable of responding to all the requests it receives to process information.

For example, when we are threatened in some way, the brain makes us more alert and tense than usual so that we are ready to react. When the threat passes, we soon relax and carry on normally. In the case of hearing someone knocking on the door, a person will at first become fearful if he or she senses danger but will relax if the noise indicates that someone is simply putting items in the mailbox and leaving. If, however, there is no indication that the person outside was there to drop off mail and indeed never left, the occupant of the house will continue to be in a state of alert and tension.

Sometimes, when the threat is large enough, as in a traumatic situation, relaxation never returns or returns only for very brief periods, and the person's state of anxiety continues. This prolonged state of high anxiety could signal that the messaging system is reaching a state of overload, caused by the heavy demand to process the threatening event. As a result, the message to relax is never sent. Ordinarily, a person's messaging system will return to normal when the malfunction is cleared, usually by reprocessing or reinterpreting the event. This allows disposal of the problem or gives the experience new meaning that the person is able to accept. That relieves the brain of the need for the kind of heavy processing that previously caused the overload.

With the continuation of an anxious state in a person already suffering from a trauma his or her behaviour begins to show characteristics of one or more identifiable disturbances, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In other words on the outside we see certain patterns of response to various situations (for example that's labelled PTSD) while in the brain there are changes, which are causing these behaviours. Now, newer threatening events (such as the person at the door) add more layers of anxiety, which on the inside create a heavier processing load that further disrupts brain functioning and make the original trauma worse on the outside. If, on the other hand the visitor at the door was someone who had promised to bring good news personally, that would lighten the load and reduce the sufferer's feelings of anxiety.

Part 3: How Trauma Can Affect You

Shadows and Masks May Seem Real

Shadows—When we sense a threat but don't know what or where it is, the resulting feeling of alertness motivates us to search the immediate environment for danger and prepares us to avoid it, even before we can assess it. Sometimes, we perceive a situation that resembles a previous threat and react as if it is that feared experience. In this sense, the similar encounter is like a shadow of the actual threat.

Although the shadow might not be the real thing, that does not make it any less frightening. It is no consolation that the shadow of a fierce dog does not bite and that the

shadow of a door does not slam. Similarly, when the experience is positive, our reaction to its shadow is also positive. For example, although the shadow of food is not filling or delicious, and the shadow of a vase of flowers is not sweet smelling or colourful, these shadows sometimes produce positive responses similar to the responses we make to the real things. You recognize, I am sure, that much of the encounter is being carried out in your mind.

Therefore, it is important for people who suffer from serious emotional conditions to recognize that they will encounter situations in which shadows seem real. The point of these statements is to stress that shadows can make us feel as if we are in the presence of the demons haunting our lives. Therefore we need to learn to recognize and react to them differently. It is valuable for you to learn to either ignore or confront the shadows you encounter. When you realize you are feeling increasingly anxious about a situation that could hurt, you need to do your best to ignore the false threat and to take steps to decrease your anxiety level. Knowing it is a shadow allows you to address the deceptive incident with confidence, as an exercise in self-empowerment.

Shadows are sometimes difficult to spot, however, because they share many characteristics with the real problem. Most of the time, it is only by calm assessment that we see a difference. For example, if your father called you a loser the day after you lost a job, you could react in the same way to being let go from work as you do to being insulted by your father: upset, angry, and ashamed. Now you have two emotional problems! If you wished to remove some of the mental load,

Remember that your main task is to lighten the load that negative feelings put on you and to recognize that it is quite reasonable to make up your own rule to help you do this.

you could conclude or decide that one of the two is a shadow attack, not a real one. Based on whatever rule you use to label an event as a real threat, your reaction to the shadow ought to be much weaker. In this example (the job loss versus what your father said), both scenarios may seem to be real threats, but because each is independent and has a life of its own, one may be given the status of a shadow. This approach may, however, prove to be unworkable when the similarity between two situations or issues is such that it is difficult for you to feel a difference in their emotional power. Even in this case, a painful blow from the one incident may be slightly more noticeable than that from the other. This lesser blow will allow you to identify the shadow.

Remember that your main task is to lighten the load that negative feelings put on you and to recognize that it is quite reasonable to make up your own rule to help you do this. Once you make the rule and are able to use it to decide which of the two occurrences hits you harder and is the real threat, you may then react to the shadow in a milder way. In the situation described above, you could conclude,

for instance, that the job loss is more serious because your father has always been critical and unsympathetic, so now is not the time to fight that battle, if it is to be fought at all. Accordingly, you either ignore your father or do or say something to end the matter between the two of you so that you can turn your attention to dealing with how to move forward from (and let go of) the loss of your job. This time, it was not easy to tell the shadow apart from the real emotional challenge, was it? Nonetheless, in many other circumstances it will likely be much easier.

When you take the deliberate approach of denying your full attention to two problems, your suffering should lessen. The idea of distinguishing shadows from real stumbling blocks helps sufferers reduce their emotional burden by “calling the shots” as to which problem to attend to immediately, as opposed to later or not at all. This method of choosing between undeniable versus doubtful features of troubling issues is a way to handle psychological difficulties by instantly removing the sting of those seen as shadows. It takes a cool, self-observing mind to do it right. So try out this new tool during a period of calmness—perhaps after taking three or four, slow, deep breaths while in a comfortable physical state. That is, tackle this problem the same way you “clear your head” to choose which of the two seemingly important tasks needs to be done first.

By the time most people get to the stage where they can effectively deal with shadows, they would likely have been working on their problems for some time and may be more familiar with the true nature of their emotional reactions

than are the newcomers in this circle of sufferers. In some cases, however, skill is not required to identify shadows. For instance, in the previous example of the unidentified knock on the door, someone who does not have a peephole in the door might call on a neighbour to take a look and report who he or she sees standing there. And if the person knocking is an unknown stranger, he or she might choose to send someone to either ask questions or provide paper for the stranger to leave a note in the mailbox. Of course, for this idea to work, the neighbours would have to be friendly and understanding. Without knowing who was at the door, a homeowner with an emotional problem might react with great fear, believing that a threat to his or her safety was on the other side of the door. Once it is ascertained that the unknown visitor could not harm, it would be easy to see the visitor as a shadow of the real threat and, therefore, the homeowner would no longer be seriously frightened.

It is acknowledged that sometimes these suggestions could be difficult to implement. To you, who try to achieve these goals for healing unobstructed by these difficulties, I say, “Congratulations! Keep up the good work!” You demonstrate that you work by the proverb “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

Masks—As specific aspects of the trauma or complex emotional pain come to the fore, the severity of their disturbance may cause sufferers (consciously or unconsciously) to try to push them under the surface, using cover-up ideas and forcing the expression of faked emotions. Burying the way they are really feeling by playing up, making up other

feelings that are easier to accept, and pretending that is how they really feel is like putting on a mask.

One effect of this kind of masking, over a period of time, is to create layers of manufactured or false reality by which the sufferer attempts to distance himself or herself from the real emotions as a way to operate as if the true reality (the trauma or some aspect of it) is not happening. Another result of disguising the real problem is that other people may take the mask as the sufferer's true personality, and this could interfere with proper or timely care. Obviously, this pretender will not be able to benefit from self-healing. The mask(s) must go if you want to get better.

When to seek professional help—If you generally find that your numerous attempts to use self-healing are not succeeding, it's probably an appropriate time to seek professional help. Even if you have seen improvement in some areas of your mental health by using a self-managed approach and feel stuck in only one or two aspects of your healing, it still makes sense to seek help. When you do, you may present the problem as follows: "Ever since I was attacked, I have had problems answering the door. Even when I don't answer it, I am so scared that I am unable to sleep the whole night. What can I do to overcome my fears? So far, I have been able to deal with the attack itself. Only these fears are still lingering. Can you help me?" Make sure, though, that you have completely read and applied everything useable in this book first. If obtaining professional counselling is out of the question for you, keep on questioning and learning about your problem. Hopefully, you will make progress or

decide later to find help with a qualified person.

On their own, sufferers choose many different strategies or rules for living life in a way that will ensure they are protected from the injuries that caused their traumatic emotions (such as numbing themselves to the degree necessary). The feeling of being numb is apparently a counter-emotional reaction that disconnects a person from the need to respond emotionally. And it does not usually appear to be a conscious behaviour. Nonetheless, being in a numbed state would allow a person not to care about how he or she relates or “lines up” with respect to socially acceptable behaviour towards people and various situations. By strictly applying certain rules (e.g., “What I can’t feel doesn’t hurt”), the sufferer may be able to operate in an alternative reality, which he or she does by turning to other ways of feeling “real,” such as seeking pleasurable or stimulating sensations from food, sex, drugs, alcohol, spending money, or being aggressive—as opposed to dealing with the trauma that created the numbed reactions in the first place. To ensure the full benefits of de-numbing, a sufferer’s behaviour tends to be excessive or abnormal, giving rise to further psychological problems of addiction or other afflictions. In such circumstances, if self-control is not producing satisfactory results it is time to seek professional care, whether in individual or group treatment.

Trauma affects people differently—If you are suffering from a traumatic experience (maybe more than one) or from serious mood problems, you are likely familiar with the above statements and may be able to put them in a con-

text that fits with your situation. As previously pointed out, not every trauma event leaves the same effect on each person who experienced it. Often the amount and/or type of suffering is different. Sometimes the severity of the trauma causes a person to behave as if the experience is happening to someone else. This condition is a very serious psychological illness (explained above under the heading titled “Dissociation”). As already discussed, dissociation may be seen as a coping process. These are all efforts at preventing awareness of the painful or punishing effects of the toxic images generated by the trauma.

Generally, the brain is aware of everything that’s happened to you internally and externally, including what’s happened around you at the time the distressing incident occurred. So although you may be unaware of all the details, the brain processes the whole story—all of what was seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched—and the effects of each. The brain also processes all the information that was received at the time of the disturbing event, including how you were understanding and reacting to everything. It all comes under the description of processing, regardless of whether or not the person can remember every piece of information afterwards.

So it turns out that as a result of this processing, natural psychological activity in the brain allows the unbearable parts of an experience to be hidden away from consciousness (already discussed under the heading titled “Traumatic (Emotional) Amnesia”). We do this by creating a somewhat false “reality,” using rigid rules embedded in our brains to

adjust to overwhelming, unwanted realities. By this method, the brain “takes care of” the ordeal, or the most damaging parts of it, in a way that hides or masks the emotional pain and makes the trauma bearable. In other words, these strategies assist in increasing a sufferer’s endurance with respect to the pain produced by the mental images of the troubling event. Wouldn’t you agree that this seems like another type of mask?

Many people use masks to protect their image from the stigma associated with mental problems or to present themselves as free of certain socially unacceptable qualities. These people are probably afraid or ashamed of how others might relate to them. Therefore, they might put on masks to cause certain reactions—for example, to frighten. In this case, the likely unconscious message is, “If others threaten me with their undisclosed intentions, I will frighten them first.” The mask of pride can take many forms, such as a genuine display or pretence of bravery and self-honouring performances. This mask may be used to cover over the disturbing event itself, as well as its symptoms which this person might feel are hidden from others, but could be exposed.

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Such a possibility of exposure must be prevented in order to hide their shame. For this reason, they wear a mask of pride. Wearing a mask is not necessarily evidence of deceit or moral weakness. In fact, it almost always appears to be a way of coping that is commonly employed by people living with mental problems, including strong feelings of low self-esteem, incompetence, and/or poverty.

Generally speaking, the greater the pain, the greater the fear of becoming completely overpowered and destroyed. Even when the emotional condition does not worsen, the overwhelming and ever-present fear might be that the trauma could reoccur or that the person would not know what will happen next in the painful experience. Another nagging problem might be whether or not the person could keep an adequate distance from the pain now and in the future. Could it be that a persistent mental difficulty could lead the sufferer to always feel a need to be protected from the full weight of its psychological burden? If so, a traumatic condition likely produces the additional feeling of being totally and helplessly vulnerable to something awful that will unfold without warning. The use of masks and other sometimes complex, self-protecting methods can be understood as the best a sufferer could do to make life in the present bearable.

I must stress that not everyone suffering from emotional disturbance wears a mask continuously. And furthermore, many people without such a condition will use masks in certain situations. As an example of how widespread the use of masks could be, it is my opinion that a person who looks

you in the eye and lies to you does so with a slapped-on mask of innocence. So, too, may the person on the phone from a company or government office who tells you he or she cannot grant your request because of “policy.” This stance may represent a mask of authority that the person is using to hide the incompetence or tardiness that is the truth.

More than occasionally, some sufferers may single out one or more events or people whom they blame for their present suffering—believing that their lives would be much easier without these damaging forces that will soon be interpreted as part of their trauma. Illogical or emotional reasoning could cause a victim to hold such a belief. But when this blaming attitude is not false thinking, it is probably another example of the mask of innocence worn as a protection from feeling the guilt of self-blame.

Being able to use self-protective techniques is one of nature’s ways of helping emotional trauma victims deal with the very strong effects of their inner, negative, psychological experiences. Emotional reactions such as depression, anxiety, dissociation, amnesia, and probably the use of certain masks all seem to be part of this self-protection, which, to some extent, is associated with being unable to make the bad event “unhappen.” With these devices, the victim has available psychological tools to “wall off,” mask, disguise, or create distance from the most troubling aspects of the trauma or severe emotional condition and prevent further harm.

Some forms of retreat also allow sufferers a chance to try to make sense of or fight the existence of the trauma or

disturbing experience. These are useful probably because they stop the ordinary moment-by-moment events of everyday life from obstructing the sufferer's ability to focus on the trauma (for example, by causing widespread loss of interest or producing numbed reactions).

Living life this way demands heavy, ongoing use of the brain's information-processing systems. The brain could become overloaded with tangled, emotional concerns, leaving the unfortunate sufferer with less processing and coping ability. Unconscious withdrawal or avoidance seems to be a safe way of saving traumatized people from exposure to more emotional stimuli that could add to the overload. In this way, the brain is able to make "room" to process the ever-demanding aspects of the distress. In effect, making the sufferer unavailable acts as a protective device that shields an afflicted person from further psychological injury.

Reprocessing the Trauma or Serious Emotional Difficulty

Although a trauma or distress may be dominating a person's life, there is still opportunity to reprocess the trauma or difficult, emotional problem. Reprocessing occurs when a person seeks and gains both a clearer understanding and acceptance of the issues that are the components of the existing problem(s). Apparently, both processing and reprocessing are psychological and neurological in nature. In other words, the numbness, lack of empathy, unexplained loss of interest in leisure activities or social events, and leave-me-alone feelings are all examples of normal reactions to a

trauma experience that have been processed but, likely, not reprocessed. The first level of processing is how the person comes to view the experience as distressing or traumatic. In order to change this way of perceiving the problematic events and feelings, the person has to be able to feel better about what happened either directly, by working on the brain (for example using a technique called Eye Movement Desensitization-Reprocessing), or by attaching a different meaning to various aspects of the trauma or distressing incident. After being satisfactorily reprocessed, trauma experiences are better understood or accepted. There is more than one way to reprocess satisfactorily— to work on, attend to, or sort out over and over—until you get to a point at which you feel satisfied or find the trauma easier to handle.

So, in consciously aiding reprocessing, you consider the problem from different points of view. This includes putting yourself in the offender's shoes, seeing him or her as pitiable in some way (as if he or she were also a sufferer), or just accepting that others might have suffered from your words or actions—even if you were misunderstood. Of course, it is also important for you to protect yourself from further harm. So be aware that through reprocessing your troubling thoughts you may also come up with “What if?” scenarios in which you examine how you allowed one part of your life to choke off or push aside your whole life. Remember that you are doing this thinking to help yourself feel better, not to make things worse in your head. Fortunately, unconscious activities are also occurring in your brain, aimed at reducing the overload. When your difficult emotional situation is

satisfactorily reprocessed, it will become included in normal functioning as an important learning experience and lose its tormenting and burdensome quality.

I trust that you are not supposing that the processing or re-processing I have been discussing is always fast or immediate, though it might be. More often than not, it takes some time to arrive at a point of feeling free of heavy, draining emotions. With patience, however, “patients” in self-treatment who choose to use one or more of the coping methods I’ve discussed so far may begin to experience a gradual improvement. They may also come to realize that while their healing tends to be up and down, it will eventually blossom into recognizable progress. So, if you have not yet come down this road, you now have a general idea of what to expect. Of course, no two people go through recovery in exactly the same way, but the overall experience tends to be quite similar.

Managing the problem in small chunks—By chipping off little bits first, then small chunks, you make it possible to lop off larger pieces from the huge rock of the emotional problem and reduce it to a manageable size. Eventually, it will take only one or two more taps from rational thinking and regular practising to shatter the now weakened power of the disturbance. Your other main task, in addition to consistently applying the skills you learn, is to persist in hope until the return of your peace of mind. Despite everything that will happen during this journey, learning to wait expectantly for the joy that follows diligent work on self-healing will be one of your greatest advantages over misery.

Tempus Fugit: Time Flies—Another coping process that often comes with the trauma package shows up in the feeling that life is shorter than it is supposed to be. Most probably, this sense of a reduced future comes from a sufferer's fear that his or her trauma experience presents a significant survival handicap. In other words, he or she continues to feel severely anxious that there might not be enough time to overcome the power of the trauma or to outlive it. People troubled to this extent cannot see beyond the hugeness and complexity of their intense negative emotions. Although they may logically realize that they will have a physical future, they are emotionally unable to create clear, mental images of that future. The images they can come up with seem foggy, confusing, and as good as non-existent. The fear that time is passing too quickly does not only affect sufferers of mental-emotional problems. For most of us, life as we know it seems surprisingly short. That is why we all need to grasp every opportunity to live out our years, losing as little time as possible to unwanted emotional issues. Now is the time to free yourself from emotional turmoil!



After Reading Chapter 3

1. Use the information in this chapter to describe your current mental-emotional state.

2. Based on the information in the chapter, which behaviour(s) are used or come forth most frequently in connection with your emotional difficulties? Number them in order of seriousness.

3. Which emotion(s) are very difficult to manage and require the most energy to bring into the present under your control?

- a. Describe the kind of mask(s) you have had to wear on account of your emotional problem? Use your own words to describe each mask.

- b. Of the suggestions provided in the section titled “Reprocessing the Trauma or Serious Emotional Difficulty,” choose at least one and attempt to reprocess one (or a part of one) of your troubling emotions. Describe how you might apply the suggestion.

Chapter 4

THE FEAR THAT CAN OBSTRUCT YOUR PROGRESS

Do You Have SOPS? How Fear Challenges Lives Daily

Part 1: How Fear Shows Up in People

Understanding How Fear and Anxiety Arise

Fear is a powerful emotion or feeling that can obstruct a person's release from suffering. Like all emotions, however, fear is necessary for our survival. It is what warns us about and stops us from entering situations that could hurt or destroy us. Were it not for fear protecting us from danger, we would have died out as a species long ago.

Anxiety is the continuation of fear, even when the thing we fear is not actually present. Anxiety is a common reaction to emotional trauma. Sometimes, people who suffer from serious emotional conditions will display anxiety reactions that can develop into an anxiety disorder.



The human mind is designed to handle an ordinary amount of fear and anxiety. In serious cases, however, a person's troubled emotional state may exceed her or his ability to return to normal functioning. Therefore, sufferers who wish to apply self-healing suggestions need information about patterns of emotional reactions that will help restore their wellbeing. In other words, if you are ready to walk the talk, you need to learn the talk. In this case, the talk is about how fear can interfere with everyday life, sometimes creating very serious limitations.

Affect

It has been observed that our emotions are complex, in-born, predetermined activities in the body and brain that are triggered automatically when the brain detects a pattern of events that meet certain neuro-biochemical criteria for a brain response. At this stage of a response, we are not yet conscious of the emotion. We become aware of these neurological activities only at a point when they are communicated to us by the brain as feelings. Writers on this topic suggest that before the point at which we become conscious of them as feelings, the brain continues to use these neurological activities to send messages to us in a form one writer has described as an affect.

Although it's believed that an affect can be read on our faces and in our body language, some of its work takes place outside our knowing. According to this thinking, an affect is the natural means whereby humans become able to tell that something has happened (internally or in the outside

environment) that requires reaction. The body acknowledges this neurological message by reacting affectively, meaning the brain immediately calls upon the parts of the body that need to react. And for every event (from threats, to joy, disgust, sadness, and injustice), an affect is triggered. Simultaneously with or immediately following the signal from the affect, the brain is expected to take inventory of (or just know) the skills and abilities available to respond. When an animal is equipped to respond, it does, and life continues. When no skill is found or when what's available is inadequate, the event is marked as a threat, and most likely, the fear emotion kicks in. Apparently, the affect motivates a fight, flee, or freeze response, and the fear emotion takes control. For either fight or flee, specific organs (such as the heart, lungs, sweat glands, and muscles) become involved, usually in combination and the activity in these organs increases. At this stage, the fear emotion—which the affect stage kick-started and the subsequent affective body activities make more pronounced—is at play. This emotional reaction is later interpreted as a feeling of fear by the brain's labelling system. This whole process, from the time the brain picks up the initial signal to when we recognize what we are feeling, usually takes less than a minute.

Research suggests that as infants we start off with automatic expressions of emotional behaviour, having very little or no conscious control of them. As we develop, however, we learn to take charge of our emotional responses in a variety of ways. With different degrees of skill and intention, we learn to choose how we show a feeling or emotional

reaction (in this case, fear). Please note that for the purposes of explanation, I have followed the current point of view that emotions precede feelings. However, I have used and will use these words interchangeably, as people usually do.

Before we show fear, the brain has already subconsciously determined that the event to which its attention was called was not a fight, flight, or freeze kind. If it had been, one of those responses would have been triggered automatically. When this is not the case, the brain, from memory, compares this occurrence with other events that frightened us and, based on the similarity, labels the event with its own fear identity. In short, after the brain makes its determination, it sends out a call to the appropriate organ systems saying, “Watch out” or “On guard” (a frightening but non-fight/flight object has just shown up!). Following this stage, a person can consciously evaluate the nature and level of a threat and, thus, voluntarily consider action. It is possible, however, for a feeling of fear (or any other type of feeling) to arise without any preceding fear object causing it, such as when there is irregular brain chemical activity. That is when the individual might mentally scramble to find an explanation for it. Usually, the body-and-brain feeling of fear is followed by the recognition of a real source that can be labelled. At this point, we are fully in charge and can control the direction of our attention, thoughts, feelings, and action towards a goal. For the purpose of self-healing, this is when we can aim our intention at reducing or stopping a negative emotion (e.g., fear) in favour of a positive or neutral one.

Although fear is believed to occur when the brain recognizes a pattern of stimuli similar to previously encountered stimuli associated with a frightening experience, it seems the current experience need not be identical to previous ones. Likely, the various characteristics of the present experience need only include important details or a sufficient number of previous fear elements to trigger the same response. In addition, the fear response may be activated regardless of whether the event that causes it is personally experienced, witnessed, or communicated. It does not seem to matter whether or not the events are clearly fearful, suggestive of, or parallel with any single previous experience. At some level, a person's brain perceives the fear factor in the pattern of stimuli and reacts to it with a safety-directed purpose.

Of course, some experiences, such as being physically threatened, have a built-in fear reaction. And the more life-threatening we assess the situation to be, the higher the level of fear response produced by the brain. In other words, how we perceive what happened at the moment we became aware of the event determines how we will assess its seriousness, genuineness, or power. The person who will be traumatized will have perceived certain aspects of a frightening experience as powerful or overpowering and, as such, will show a reaction ranging from strongly challenged to helpless.

In processing an overwhelming experience, it appears that the amygdala (the brain centre that originally sent out the "Danger! Danger!" message) can become "overloaded." As a consequence, it's very likely to go into a state similar

to lockdown and become unable to do its job properly—completing activities such as fully processing new incoming messages or sending out the “Relax!” or “All clear!” signal that will stop the fear reaction. As such, the person continues to feel and act in a defensive-protective manner, sometimes long after the actual threat has ceased (a sign of anxiety). Therefore, reducing overload or giving the amygdala “a break” will definitely help the traumatized or extremely distressed person to get better. Relaxation, meditation, and diversion experiences are known to do just that. Here are examples of some:

- Watching funny movies (and responding to the humour)
- Enjoying music
- Doing a loved or enjoyable project
- Playing aerobic sports or games
- Playing with kids or socializing with others who bring pleasure
- Composing music, writing poetry or doing artwork

Do any and all of these with a focus on leisure rather than perfection. In general, disallowing or reducing close attention to “the problem” will help bring respite from overstress. The expectation is that relaxing activities will help thin out or dilute the load. Hopefully, with strong enough pleasant feelings, some of the emotional pain will be neutralized or pushed out. This shift in attention will allow the brain “more room” to reprocess the frightening material and be able to send out the “All clear!” or “Threat is under control!” signal soon enough.

The Fear-Based Personality

Once you understand how fear and anxiety arise, you and your supporters will need to make sense of those patterns of thinking and behaving that arise from fear. Everybody feels afraid at some point in life. Usually, most of us can deal with it. The expression of this kind of fear is relatively straightforward with very occasional social or personal concerns that are crucial.

Some people, however, seem to perceive threat in everyday situations that the rest of us find completely non-threatening or much less threatening. Such people are said to have a fear-based (or anxiety-based) personality.

As you attempt to understand your condition, perhaps it will be helpful to see how you fit into the big picture of fear-controlled thinking and behaving, as described under the next heading. In the next section, *phobia* means “unhealthy fear” and *poly* means “many.”

Fear-Based Categories

Fear—reasonable dread of people, animals, situations, or phenomena that most people would understand or exhibit, under similar circumstances.

Phobia—a more intense form of fear that is typically unreasonable.

Polyphobia—the presence of additional phobias; a few or several fears that are unreasonable to other people. When this pattern of fearfulness has become mixed in with a person’s overall functioning so that it directs her or his normal

way of thinking and behaving, this would constitute a fear-based personality.

Affected people may develop these fear traits genetically and/or as a result of their own experiences, although sometimes they are exposed to fear symptoms through behaviors displayed by their parents or guardians during their upbringing or through some other mode of transmission. And because the brain administers everything that happens in us, it is reasonable to expect that sometimes, although very rarely, a person may be born with a brain defect or malfunction which may be the basis of this personality style. Fear-based reactions, then, will likely become a normal way of responding to life events in a variety of circumstances, sometimes without any known connection to anything that would be expected to cause fear or insecurity.

Because people with a fear-based personality regularly tend to expect harm, their thinking and actions are ready for self-protection most of the time. Such people will be skilled in ways to ward off harm and employ some of the following techniques:

- Ignoring or refusing to comment or commit in certain situations, especially where there is perceived risk, blame or fault-finding
- Making allowances, giving in, or being humble when they do not mean it at all

So to feel protected, a person with a chronic fear-based problem (fear-based personality) would consider it important or necessary to

- always be alert;
- acquire as much information as possible in a variety of situations;
- monitor, influence, or control all situations and events that might affect them;
- attempt to do things to completion or perfection—and sometimes just to please; and
- distrust unexpected change, confusion, or perceived disorderliness.

Fear and Safety Are Like Two Sides of a Coin

Although I have described this personality as fear-based so far, it is necessary to point out that it is equally true that the need for safety is also a motivator in the same situations. Safety and fear are like two sides of the same coin. When you feel safe, you are not afraid. So then, the patterns described above may accurately apply to a “safety-oriented personality style.”

Attributes of the Fear-Based or Safety-Oriented Personality

A need for control—Being in control is very important for those who are continually fearful. These individuals tend to use their own emotional sense (feelings) to make decisions rather than a more objective method. For example, some fearful people might prefer to trust their feelings about the weather forecast over a thermometer reading, or they might consider how they feel first thing in the morning

as an indication of how the rest of the day will go. Understandably, the power to foretell unpleasant possibilities is very important to those who are trying to stay safe because it helps them manage their uncomfortable nervousness when life is not going their way.

Emotional or perceptual reasoning tends to allow people with a fear-based personality to think that their self-imposed expectations can control or predict what effects an event will have based on their feelings (usually resulting from current experience-based perceptions or beliefs). Fear-focused people seem to feel safer making themselves the main guide for how situations will turn out. But their understanding of what's happening around them (as well as what they accept as factual) may, unfortunately, conflict with that of many others and not seem acceptable, unless the fear-focused person is compelled in some way to conform to the common view. In other words, people with fear-based personalities make their experiences understandable or reasonable to themselves by a kind of perceptually-based thinking that's processed mainly through emotional channels or coloured by their moods. In most situations, it is the accompanying emotional reaction in that moment that guides their thinking and behaviour.

People with fear-based personalities usually attempt to bring other people and situations under their control, especially those over which they have influence—and they are often successful in doing so. They'll use a variety of methods (including intimidation and conflict) to maintain that hold, or they may even flatter and curry favour with certain

people whose relationship they are afraid to lose or when they fear that losing will be costly. In any case, the goal is to fix the situation in order to achieve control. As such, many who experience the more negative styles of the fear-driven individual are likely to feel overpowered or unnecessarily put upon from time to time. In general, it seems that the person with a fear-based personality strongly desires to control others to act or think in agreement with her or him.

Matters are almost always taken seriously—Safety-guided people present as living life on the serious side and see most of the statements and behaviours of others as significant. Quite frequently, a fear-driven person will attach special meanings to statements or express a belief that the speaker is sending her or him a special message. Jokes or gibes are likely to be mistaken as real-life events, especially when they seem to parallel real life or untoward situations. Fear-driven people are often overly sensitive and perceive neutral comments as criticism. They are usually also pessimistic and tend to hang on to negative comments and interpretations. Their motto seems to be, “Always expect the worst, and if something good happens, it cannot be trusted or expected to last.” Seemingly, they also want to get things right, to always be on top of situations, and to produce results that are considered significant. As such, they tend to give undue attention and/or effort to making things perfect or commendable.

Time is very important—Time seems to be exceedingly important in the lives of many fear-driven individuals,

who seem to have a need to keep accurate time and expect others to consider time just as important as they do. Some people with a safety-oriented personality tend to measure elapsed time against amount or quality of work done. Time must be used efficiently to reflect an output they consider worthy. Another tendency related to putting value on efficient use of time is a need to keep moving things along. As such, not only does it seem relatively rare for the fear-driven to indulge in any idle time but they also do not appear to be comfortable with time gaps during or between activities or projects. This tendency of needing to always be doing something may be responsible for an oft-observed characteristic of this personality type: impatience.

It is likely that being afraid most of the time may cause a fear-driven person to want to move along to get to a conclusion, destination, the next task, or even a punchline so that she or he can get to the urgent task of assessing or safeguarding her or his safety or image. In other words, the “next thing” could be any event or idea that could bring exposure to physical harm or shame—or prevent this person from dealing with a possible threat.

The fear-driven tend to be impulsive—From a habit of impatience would likely come an impulsiveness that people with this personality style sometimes display. It is probably commonplace for the right or wrong words to escape their lips, for their muscles to be engaged for action, or for them to initiate action before intended. Safety-driven individuals often have missteps because of wrong timing or they make

an incomplete assessment of a situation. All of these behaviours are usually due to impatience, but they also stem from feelings spurred on by a strong fear of the moment or by a need related to fear. Once the impulsive behaviour is performed, whether out of fear, perceived pressure, a desire to avoid shame—or just arbitrarily from habit—the fearful individual will likely feel a need to defend the behaviour or cover it up. Expectedly, such an attempt would be made if she or he thinks the impulsive behaviour may be judged to be wrong or inappropriate. Sometimes, however, the action of this individual may not be perceived as wrong when it suits the context, except that it was not intended at that point or stage and may impact subsequent events in an untoward fashion.

Another explanation for the hasty behaviour seen in this group may be that when a person is frequently on guard, fear may soon become an obsession. As is the nature of obsessions, the sufferers will perform behaviours or actions that the fear-filled thoughts (the obsession) force them to do (the compulsion) in order to feel relief from the tension or pressure created by the fearful state. In short, these individuals may also act or speak impulsively as an obsessive-compulsive reaction, not only because of the above-described causes.

Difficulty delaying gratification appears to be another manifestation of impulsiveness in the fear-controlled. This is a problem more related to timing than to use of time. When a situation presents a hidden/unknown feature to this kind of person, she or he becomes excessively anxious to get at the unrevealed information. The relief that comes

from satisfying this strong desire appears to be gratifying, regardless of whether the resulting experience is good or bad. Generally, it is the strength of the emotion that determines how urgently very fearful people will need gratification. The more pressing the need, the greater the degree of impulsiveness they will be expected to exhibit. This is also true of a non-fear driven person. But for very fearful people, the sense of urgency will tend to arise much sooner and in many more situations.

Appearance and image are very important—To people with safety-oriented personalities, appearance is very important, probably because it is first-level information that could make them easy targets for attack. Looking odd, appearing incompetent or weak, or being seen in the wrong company are all signals of social weakness that are not safe to broadcast. Accordingly, in most situations, they tend to present an image of themselves that is fault-free and likely to be approved of, accepted, or liked. In this way, their safety stays protected—even in circumstances in which observers would see no threat at all. People with a fear-based personality may also adopt exaggerated mannerisms or behavioural styles, including special vocal and joking styles to attract attention, probably with the same goal of making themselves likeable or acceptable in order to fend off threat or rejection.

They tend to be competitive—People with a fear-based personality tend to compete for attention with those who have admirable qualities that may obscure opportunities

for them to be acknowledged; those who have leadership potential around them; or those who have challengeable power over them. They are seldom open about their competitiveness. In order to neutralize threats, this individual, in many situations, tends to be prepared with tactics such as building an alliance or employing acceptance strategies (e.g., maintaining affiliations, forming conspiracies, hero-worshipping, soliciting or openly appearing to need praise and acknowledgement, and sometimes using self-promotion). These are all attempts to be on the good or winning side of life.

Extremes of behaviour are present—Under special conditions, people with safety-directed personalities sometimes deliberately choose one of two extremes of behaviour that fit the stereotypes of wimps and bullies. Sometimes when they are in a situation in which they think their worst fears might be coming true, people with fear-based personalities may assume an attitude of being cooperative and appeasing that is not necessarily characteristic of them (wimp). Other times, they may react with boldness and aggression that is also atypical (bully). Both behaviours are likely intended for the same purpose—to control the current situation and to ensure that subsequent events (present or unknown) will not cause them harm. In some cases, a great fear of a future terrible danger (whether in the near or distant future) can cause an extraordinary response: both the powerful bully and the favour-carrying wimp existing together in the same fear-driven person! Indeed, most safety-prone people are capable of displaying a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde kind of

personality (sometimes gentle and kind; other times hostile and nasty). When these opposite behaviours represent a person's regular pattern, quite possibly she or he is showing the wimp or bully face of a fear-motivated person, even within a single encounter. Undoubtedly, the person will learn from experience that one of the two personalities pays off more than the other and tend to use that one more frequently, as the situation requires.

Keeping a step ahead of situations is important—Always seeking information, being secretive and manipulative (as in, not disclosing their full agenda), striking first or harder so as not to lose face, or retreating selectively from interpersonal interactions and disagreements are other ways safety-controlled people attempt to protect themselves (though not obviously) from expected opposition or defeat. These strategies allow a fear-prone person to be at least one step ahead of a threat.

Secret weapons against harm—Sarcastic humour, secretly held resentments and contempt, displays of extreme shock responses for effect, strategic non-involvement, and presentation of emotional distress or breakdown are all channels for the negative messages that act as roadblocks to actual or possible untoward consequences for the safety-oriented. Along with condescension or ridicule (usually camouflaged to the extent perceived necessary), these weapons may be used to disarm or defeat someone perceived as actually or possibly having harmful intentions or to empower the fear-prone against potential sources of harm.

Threats are seen everywhere—People controlled by fear seem to have information antennae that are always sweeping the internal and external environments for threats (things that could go wrong or are not right). As such, they usually exhibit shifting or divided attention, which causes them to miss parts of information; and they have a tendency to minutely analyze others' statements and behaviours for messages that might definitely or probably pertain to them. They also tend to believe in superstitions, probably to avoid any chance (which for them is ever-present) of becoming victims of the harm-bearing messages in some of these beliefs.

Fear is hidden and shame is constant—People with a fear-based personality tend to hide their fear and almost never admit to it, likely to avoid exposing an emotional reaction that could be seen as a weakness that could diminish their image or result in abuse. A fear reaction in humans tends to involve a feeling of loss of control, followed by a sense of shame. It seems unavoidable that both brief and continuing fear call up shame, probably because fear is not seen as a virtue and makes us aware that we are vulnerable. On the other hand, it appears that shame results from an awareness of deficiency. People with a fear-based personality tend to feel constant shame, which is one reason they hide their fear tendencies. In fact, the relationship between fear and shame seems interdependent in the life of someone with a fear-based personality. Such people are constantly afraid of being shamed and constantly ashamed of being afraid. In other words, fear and shame invite each other

because when fear calls attention to our vulnerability, that awareness triggers shame; and whenever we are ashamed of a deficient aspect of life, we feel vulnerable, which makes us afraid. Nonetheless, when this happens (for example, after a fall) we have the option to react in a positive way by acknowledging the flaw of which we are conscious. More often than not, the person with a safety-oriented personality tends, instead, to respond negatively. One way is by attacking the person or people they blame for causing the feeling of shame. When this is the case, a weapon often used is retaliation. When fear obstructs retaliation, this leads to more shame. As a result, fear-driven people tend to use a passive-aggressive style of self-empowerment. That is, in certain situations (for example, when they feel at a disadvantage) they are afraid to attack or assert their power directly and chose, instead, to hit back by doing something not clearly related to the problem or that is not openly hostile, such as using humour or sarcasm to hide that they are really standing up to the other person. In those situations, the use of indirect confrontation, which is really just a veiled anger reaction, is a way of counteracting a perceived attack or injustice. Another way that someone with this personality might cover up fear or shame is by not changing a response that is or was in error and continuing the response or repeating it on a subsequent occasion, very likely to avoid a shame backlash.

Fear-based thinking may produce aggression—Because of their need for control, people with a fear-based personality may feel entitled to have support or compliance from people around them (and even from society at large) at certain

times and will be strongly inclined to enforce their controlling wishes. Remember: To someone with a safety-oriented personality, failure to succeed leads to shame. It has been noted that, generally, this group responds extremely negatively to shame and has a tendency to strike out privately or publicly, in retaliation. It is also expected, however that like people in the general population, fear-prone individuals will use self-disapproval in reaction to shame but will do so to a much greater degree or extent. In certain circumstances, the desire to assert power (as a means of controlling people and circumstances to ensure safety) may lead to physical, verbal, or emotional abuse or to other forms of bullying and cruel behaviour. In a broader societal context, these behaviours could include terrorizing and predatory acts.

Since these individuals also tend to relate to events and statements as having personal meaning (described as personalization), there is a greater chance for many interpersonal situations to lead to conflict and result in unpleasant outcomes. Domestic violence, parental bullying, and other types of socially unacceptable or dangerous behaviours are examples of situations in which we are likely to find displays of the aggressive side of a fear-controlled personality. These consequences are all the more likely because, as revealed in research studies, one characteristic of shame is a reduced sense or lack of empathy. This means that individuals with a fear-based personality usually will not be able to think or feel that their behaviour is wrong towards the people or person they are acting against or attacking from shame, even when such a response is based on perception rather than fact.

A fear-based personality may suppress or inhibit empathy—Empathy is the tendency to be concerned about the feelings of others, and as already stated, research shows that people with high-shame characteristics are low in empathy. This is likely because, while they are in a state of shame, they usually tend to be in “attack mode” and are extremely self-conscious. Therefore, they are unlikely or unable to be interested in considering the feelings of others. As such, no empathy registers. In the absence of empathy, a person would be likely to violate the rights of others in situations that threaten to expose—or actually expose—someone to shame. In this sense, a lack of empathy contributes to anti-social behaviour in the fear-based individual (See description of some anti-social characteristics).

Guilt is common—People with a fear-based personality typically tend to feel guilty about many thoughts and actions. Most likely, their feelings of guilt arise because they think their thoughts are wrong, feel they neglected something important, or believe they caused a problem that could backfire, thus leaving themselves open to criticism or blame. Interestingly, people who experience guilt frequently are very likely to blame or “guilt trip” others directly or indirectly to free themselves from feelings of guilt or to protect themselves from possible or actual blame. Typically, in using guilt to their advantage, they may wish to keep someone, as it were, on a leash of indebtedness, as a method of control. Alternatively, these individuals may be keen to make amends by choosing an action that will appease and improve their image or likeability.

Low tolerance of others' emotional expressions—Fear-prone people do not appear able to stand extreme situations or conditions. For example, they seem unable to deal with a certain amount or level of emotional expression from others. As such, they seem capable of enduring such emotions as fear, anger, sadness, excitement, and joy from other people only in a narrow, medium range of intensity. This is probably because they experience opposites (e.g. lows and highs) as being outside of their ability to manage or control and, therefore, outside of their zone of comfort. Since reduced sensitivity to the feelings of others does not occur only in regard to shame situations this low tolerance may also be due to low empathy.

Low tolerance of bodily and environmental discomforts—Safety-oriented people seem able to tolerate only a certain degree of bodily discomfort and, as a result, are inclined to complain of a variety of physical problems and identify them in detail. For example, they tend to describe bodily discomforts such as headache, backache, and pain in specific internal body parts. They may also fret over such feelings as fatigue and dizziness. Some seem to become unsettled by certain noises and voices. Other examples of intolerance include reacting negatively to extremes of temperature, disliking the feel of certain textures of clothing, or expressing great dislike for extreme weather conditions. It is to be noted that a few of these tendencies, if expressed occasionally, are not remarkable, but they would be notable if one person were to constantly express them. This is the case for people whose view of life is dominated by fear or a need for safety.

Preference for certain types of motion and colour patterns—Some fear-prone people have strong reactions to extremes of motion. They also seem to prefer rhythmic to non-rhythmic patterns and monochromatic surfaces to multicoloured ones (in specific areas or generally). Some are bothered by fast moving stimuli, such as things darting, blinking, or flashing in their immediate visual field. Such characteristics appear more typical of people in this group than of most others.

Order and cleanliness are necessary—Fear-driven people show an apparent need for orderliness and display an inflexible desire to return things to their original or proper placement. It is important to them to be always completely presentable. They restore smoothness and straightness to ruffled, rough, or askew objects, and rearrange jumbled or mixed items into some order. They also tend to avoid contact with dirt and the possibility of contamination, spending an unwarranted amount of time in regular, constant cleaning of surfaces and objects

Many likes and dislikes are based on fear—In many instances, safety-oriented people may admit to having a dislike for certain animals, people, or places—opinions others may share. However, in the case of people with a fear-based personality, there is generally more than ordinary fear below the surface. This usually indicates anxiety. Although some people develop these tendencies early in life or in special situations, trauma or other extreme emotional circumstances have been known to cause a person to become fear-energized and show many of the above symptoms.

Care or indiscretion with money and possessions are usually safety-directed—Fear-driven people can seem stingy or careful parting with their possessions, including money. With respect to money, these people often claim to be thrifty, whereas their behaviour is really motivated by a strong fear of being unable to provide needed goods and services for loved ones or themselves at a critical time. In certain circumstances, some in this group display the opposite tendency. Fear is sometimes the explanation for people who hoard money or frequently spend money, seemingly foolishly or thoughtlessly. People who do this while suffering from a serious fear or anxiety condition (but not at other times) are most likely fighting boredom, numbness, or helplessness.

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Fear may be disguised—In the course of life, fear-based personality traits intertwine with other psycho-social outcomes (such as intellectual abilities, education, self-esteem, morality, socioeconomic standing, power, cultural values, etc.). As a result, these ways of behaving may not be recognized as self-protective safety tactics. For example, a dictatorial leader may use power to protect her or his fear of being contradicted or challenged because any form of opposition

would likely lead to shame or humiliation. A fear-directed person who has self-esteem problems may insist on being right about most matters as a way of covering up that weakness or, conversely, may complain that she or he never does anything right as a way to attract sympathy instead of disapproval. In trying to avoid the criticism about a deficiency they may have denied, such people would refrain from undisguised lying or lying without a way out if challenged.

Other types of safety-driven people may take on culturally approved causes, such as community, religious, or social activities that include charities, political volunteer campaigning, fundraising, and other interest-group roles. There are a number of reasons why a person with a fear-based personality would become involved in outside groups:

- To extend personal influence
- To maintain an always-available shelter with friends
- To have recognized membership in a group of like-minded people that offers status, visibility, or any other desired characteristic

In all cases, the underlying goal of fear-prone people is to have access to people who would protect them. The sense of security they get with these activities (that they don't get elsewhere) is probably the tipoff that safety is the basic reward for these involvements, though this motivation may not be all that obvious.

Safety-oriented people sometimes behave in unconventional and insensitive ways—In their attempt to secure safety (in a context of acceptance), fear-based people

sometimes behave in ways that may seem put on or unconventional. These behaviours may make them appear immature, unintelligent, over-the-top, excessive, and inappropriate at times. In certain situations they may even appear deceitful or untrustworthy. On the other hand, sometimes the cautious side of the fear-based tendency may be expressed in proactive and unusually perceptive thinking. Probably helped by the state of low empathy, other ways of behaving may include rude, unrestrained, candid and/or insensitive reactions, usually in private or when sheltered.

Fear of criticism and blame is very strong—Perhaps one of the strongest social fears that threatens a person with a fear-based personality is that of criticism or blame. In fact, a person with this kind of personality tends to perceive blaming or criticism, even when neither is intended. Very likely, this alertness or sensitivity is shown because she or he experiences expressions of disapproval as direct attacks which have shaming as an objective. Fear of the mental or physical harm of shame seems to underlie many behaviours exhibited by someone with this kind of personality. As such, she or he would tend to avoid criticism or blame and guard against it in most situations. The defence put up by these individuals to protect their innocence or reputation also tends to be very strong and often involves anger or even hostile intensity. At other times, much less emotionality may be displayed, depending on the importance of what stands to be lost or gained, the accuser, the accusation itself, and the locale where any of these important factors plays out. In contrast to this intolerance of blame or criticism is

the apparent insatiable desire to be acknowledged, loved, and admired.

Constant thinking and fault-finding—In response to their excessive fear and attempt to devise strategies to control and manage all aspects of everyday life (which they perceive is always threatened), people with a fear-based personality feel the need to engage in constant, counterbalancing and worried thinking, leaving them in a continuing state of tension. More often than not, they tend to be in a grumpy mood and to complain frequently (probably due to feelings of vulnerability, rejection, isolation, and/or discontent). In this mood, they tend to be provocative or conflict-prone. Because these reactions and their causes are repeated numerous times in a person's life, many of these fear-controlled behaviours become habits. This lifestyle which can be exhausting, guilt-producing, and stress-promoting often adversely affects the person's ability to relax or sleep well—something research has consistently confirmed is critical for good health and the best level of functioning.

Abstract reasoning and imagining may be difficult—Individuals with a safety-guided personality appear to exhibit a factual and non-speculative thinking style and may seem to have difficulty with abstract logical reasoning. For example, they sometimes seem unable to relate to “What if...,” “Imagine if...,” or “If...then” events. Such situations do not give them assurance of the actual outcome. A lack of firm or stable targets from which to gain information about how the abstract situation will turn out (in favour of

or against the individual) may throw off the fearful person who needs “something” to relate to emotionally. This absence of emotional cues is threatening and causes the fear-driven individual to lose focus as her or his attention is interrupted looking for reassuring “landmarks.” Therefore, a person with this kind of personality has greater comfort with perceptual-emotional reasoning.

It needs to be noted that this fact-based thinking process that a safety-inclined individual apparently uses is applied to all forms of thinking including non-abstract situations. For example, concrete thinking may be involved in doing an action such as reacting to a moving object. In this case, the fearful person’s thinking would be directed by how comfortably she or he relates to the object. The type of emotion-based thinking in both the “what if” and non-verbal situations, however, would be different from the intellectual form of concrete reasoning. This latter type of information processing in adults may arise from an intellectual deficiency or a developmental delay, both of which are not considered to be directly related to emotional functioning. Nonetheless, it is possible for a person with a safety-dominated personality to express both intellectual and emotional concreteness which would likely show up as an extreme form of response inflexibility.

People in this personality group would be expected to have difficulty anticipating the behaviour of objects in motion, for example. The faster the motion, the more confused they could become. For example, playing or following a game of soccer or hockey would be more challenging than

playing or watching a game of football or basketball. By comparison, volleyball and tennis would be easier to follow or play because there are fewer or slower movements, fewer players, and fewer contact points to track or anticipate. In other words, there are fewer next occurrences to imagine.

Very likely, the fear of not being able to control their safety would be the main problem that fear-driven individuals face in the above examples. An abstract or imaginary situation does not provide a safe or reliable way of determining or guaranteeing safety. In the motion-related examples, not knowing how to dodge or avoid an approaching object could result in being harmed. In such situations, the safety-regulated person's confusion or panic would likely be due to her or his inability to work out a strategy fast enough to guarantee safety (in other words, a strategy that's not based on emotion).

Part 2: Social Management and Biological Aspects of SOPS

People with a Safety-Oriented Personality Style (SOPS) Tend to Encounter Serious Relationship Difficulties

Unless you've been in a close partnership (business, social, family, or romantic) with someone who has SOPS, many of the problems attributed to the nature of a safety-driven personality will not be obvious to you. Some who are in such relationships may see a person with this personality as divisive, partial, and/or adversarial, whereas others may see that

person as fair, cautious, thoughtful, or humble. Still others may perceive safety-controlled individuals as attention- or compliment-seeking, rule-bound, or rigid in the way they approach situations. As such, those who believe these qualities are positive will have a good relationship with the person who has SOPS.

Indeed, fear-controlled individuals change their behaviour depending on the threats they perceive in specific situations, regardless of their relationship with the others they are with. This why it may be difficult for some people to encounter the different ways in which a person with SOPS behaves. As such, partners are likely to struggle to maintain peace, smoothness, and optimism in the relationship. Often these partnerships tend to break up within a relatively brief period (although they sometimes go on for many years). Some potentially bumpy relationships will, however, hold together relatively well if the partner is subservient, admiring, and/or extremely patient with the person who has SOPS. When the partner does not show these qualities, the fearful person's behaviour and persona would likely depend on whether she or he considers the partner influential in or beyond the partnership.

For example, the safety-seeking person would tend to submit to the partner who is capable of contributing to her or his desired image or has an importance or advantage that would counteract any perceived threat to the safety-oriented person. On the other hand, in a relationship in which this person believes she or he has more of these attributes (more power, better support and/or resources, etc.) the partner is likely to

perceive or experience the individual with SOPS as impatient, critical, controlling, picky, demanding, a perfectionist, selfish, or at worst, a bully. If the safety-directed individual does not believe she or he has the overall advantage, people are likely to perceive her or him as supportive, kind, considerate, a pleaser, or a wimp (since, in such circumstances, the fear-controlled individual is likely to feel vulnerable). Nonetheless, some people who are controlled by safety needs are self-guarded and careful enough to always choose the situations in which they show certain characteristics. As a result, those who are not familiar with their fear-governed side could find it hard to believe that this other side exists.

In maintaining control, these individuals may not only find it difficult to adjust to changes others make to situations in their lives but may also avoid making changes themselves, especially ones that involve the people around them. Understandably, when fearful people become relatively comfortable with the people they know, they feel safe and, therefore, would not want to risk exposing themselves to the unknown characteristics of new people and the unpredictable state of affairs that is likely to produce. Even when a situation is not working out, safety-controlled individuals find ways and convincing reasons to prevent change and preserve conditions that can be difficult to endure by both the person with SOPS and by others with whom she or he is in a relationship. On the other extreme, an individual with this personality will sometimes make unnecessary changes in an attempt to do damage control or protect against possible blame, attack or hurt.

In their role as supervisors or leaders, safety-driven people tend to be either domineering with tendencies to micro-manage or unassertive and liberal. As associates, they may show an inclination to take over control of the direction or nature of a project or plan, unless they are in the uncharacteristic mode of wimp or bully. In both the role of leader and associate, safety-oriented people act as if they have to take on more responsibility, although this is not actually the case. They will negotiate, provided they think they are in control, and if they feel the balance of power or safety is in their favour, they will threaten or challenge. Otherwise, they tend to avoid open intimidation or confrontation. The constant need for control often puts people with SOPS in a disagreeable mood, provoking them to establish their power over those with equal or less power who threaten their safety.

One result of operating in an environment in which the leader is someone with SOPS is that some of the partners or employees may become “yes-men.” As such, those individuals are likely to be held in high regard or form part of an inner circle and be trusted (even if their performance is ordinary or poor), while others are likely to become shunned, devalued, or classed as disloyal and untrustworthy (despite good and sometimes noteworthy output). When not a micro-manager, this supervisor will show a tendency to allow the people who are favoured or feared to carry on as they think best. Sometimes, however, this lack of actual directing or supervising may cause the quality of work to drift down to a level of comfortable incompetence. The fact of the matter however is that this leader with SOPS may not

necessarily approve of such a pattern of productivity but is in denial or not bold enough to bring about reform.

Another result is that the safety-controlled leader will tend to restrict the activities of the partners or employees to areas in which she or he is comfortable or can convincingly feign interest. Ultimately, however, the motivation would be to avoid a feared outcome. Saving face and keeping up appearances would tend to be critical skills in achieving this goal. In most situations, however, the very strong tendencies of showing the face that counts, hiding the one that appears flawed, and being quick to self-defend seem to be hallmarks of people with a fear-based personality. Underlying these tendencies is quite possibly the strongest threat of all: shame. Avoidance of shame is not peculiar to those with SOPS. Shame is a social discomfort that few can tolerate without having negative reactions.

The shame that the safety-conscious person wants to escape, however, appears to be always intolerably close, and it may not take much (from the perspective of those who are not fear-driven) to provoke a defensive reaction from the person with SOPS. Sometimes, because of this weak spot, the reactions of this individual during an interaction can quickly turn from being easily offended to being aggressive (even ferocious) when the situation becomes too overwhelming and she or he feels cornered without a way to reduce or escape the shame. At this point, the safety-driven person will fight with all she or he can muster to save face (dignity and self-worth), because losing this power struggle would bring the ultimate shame, and that is too much to

give up. This reaction of fierce self-defence due to shame can arise in private when there is only one other person (even if very close) or in connection with an incident that occurs with no one present. The explanation would be that the safety-driven individual could not afford to ever be found out and, thereby, lose face. People with SOPS, more than others, seem to have a need to keep up appearances; and when they are unable to do so, they need to save face. Failing that, they are desperate to cover up. Among friends or people they know they try to reassure so as to be accepted or liked. When they are covering up to neutralize a perceived threat, they may adopt a playful, endearing, or positive attitude. On the other hand, whether as manager, partner, or spouse, the operating style of someone with SOPS will tend to create an atmosphere in which some people will put up a pretence of support if only to show expected unanimity with the person with SOPS—or avoid conflict.

In a nutshell, SOPS is exhibited in a style of wanting to always look good, do good, and be good. Whenever people or situations appear to block the fulfilment of these desires, the person whose life is controlled by an unusual need for safety quickly becomes filled with the shame of having a flaw exposed and the fear that her or his protection from harm is being lost or threatened. Therefore, she or he must control events to avoid this and will show unmistakable disapproval (ranging from displaying annoyance to lashing out with words and behaviour) or humour and pretence (as the situation warrants) to stop any perceived attempts that could bring disrepute. On the other hand, no behaviours of others

Victim attitudes are not to be understood as separate or static qualities of sufferers. They are constantly alternating, depending on the current situation. These roles are neither enjoyable nor satisfying to the person.

bring greater comfort to a person with SOPS than those that glorify, even when she or he solicits or plans such compliments, as long as these are totally free of any hint of harm.

The Three Faces of Victim Orientation

Victim orientation seems to be a related and parallel process of personality development in people who have very strong safety needs. To protect themselves as they navigate a world filled with potential harm, people who must always be kept completely safe tend to adopt one of three alternating stances:

- A helpless victim stance—“It’s not fair that I can’t stop fate and people from causing my suffering.”
- A blaming prosecutorial stance—“You don’t understand how much I suffer. You and others are guilty of adding to my troubles.”
- A messiah or martyr–rescuer stance—“Now I have to bear the brunt of this for you, too.”

Victim attitudes are not to be understood as separate or static qualities of sufferers. They are constantly alternating,

depending on the current situation. These roles are neither enjoyable nor satisfying to the person.

When Safety-Oriented People See Themselves as Victims

With this victim attitude, people with SOPS usually see their lives as unfairly burdened, which creates feelings of resentment, frustration, and anger. Such people are likely to have grown up in environments filled with feelings of dissatisfaction that bear the message: “Life has given you a raw deal; people will unfairly pick on, oppose, or blame you, the victim. So always be ready to protect your image. You cannot trust anyone but yourself to get things right; it is others who create most of your problems.” This internalized message leads the person who has it to make negative evaluations of people and circumstances, to trust only those with whom they have close and interdependent relationships, and to expect special consideration, understanding, and acceptance in all situations as proof of the loyalty or sincerity of others. Such thinking also allows the individual to behave in socially inappropriate ways. She or he can justify this as “their turn” to strike back or get something back. Because of the need for safety, however, such self-proclaimed deserving actions are usually done secretly or privately.

It must be remembered that these beliefs and the sense of victimhood they produce were originally brought about by the person’s need to protect her- or himself from persistent fear which was probably felt in childhood and/or learned from an anxious parent. As a result of being influenced by

a victim mentality over a long period of time, the negative thinking and behaviours that are the outcome of this way of thinking also become ingrained and may no longer arise directly from safety considerations. The feelings of unjustified victimization from people and life in general would likely lead to an underlying desire to retaliate in some way. In certain situations, such disgruntlement could give a person who constantly requires safety good reason for acting out with unacceptable behaviour. In other words, people with SOPS would sometimes act out because their sense of victimhood makes them feel they have a right to strike back. This apparent feeling of entitlement partly explains why some people in this group engage in anti-social acts, ranging from trivial and minor to serious and horrific. Nonetheless, they may still be held back or urged forward by a need for security while in an anti-social state of mind.

Managing a Close Relationship with a Highly Safety-Conscious Person

It seems obvious from the characteristics of this condition that to keep an ongoing, warm, and friendly relationship with a safety-oriented person would be, to some degree, frustrating or challenging. People who are in such relationships have undoubtedly encountered many of the hurdles described earlier which get in the way of having a predictably smooth relationship. Still, these same people would readily agree that there are times, even periods, when working with, living with, or being in any other close relationship with a person who has SOPS has been refreshingly pleasant and

conflict-free. Accordingly, these relationships require special management or response patterns on the part of the partner, associate, or employee in order for it to succeed.

Now it may come as a surprise to you that others have difficulty adjusting to your safety-oriented personality style. On the other hand however, you, too, may have encountered problems with such a person and, therefore, in moments of favourable mood, self-honesty, or self-realization, you may have concluded that people with whom you are in close continuous contact are aware of the characteristics you have allowed them to see. It is good for those who care about you or are learning about this personality to know how to react in ways that will nurture the relationship they have with you.

In general, patience and perceptiveness are perhaps the most important qualities needed to manage or prevent conflict with a person who reacts under the strong influence of a need for safety. The following are ways a person may exercise patience in order to fairly successfully manage a close relationship with someone who is safety-oriented:

- Bear provocation, annoyance, misfortune, or emotional pain without complaint, loss of temper or irritation
- Have the ability for perseverance in the pursuit of peaceful co-existence and caring in the face of continued negativity

In reality, extraordinary patience and perceptiveness are needed to absorb the frequent and sometimes unnecessary, defensive, and/or provocative approach or response from someone who tends to feel confronted or shamed.

Perceptiveness involves the ability to recognize, anticipate or, better yet, “sniff out” when a situation or conversation is heading into conflict territory, as well as the desire to stop its progress before it produces a defensive reaction from the individual with SOPS.

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Being able to give up one’s entitlement for being wronged (particularly when the safety-driven individual plays the victim) would help to diffuse a potential clash that otherwise would have occurred if that person had been made to feel ashamed for the wrongdoing. It appears that total submission or complete admiration for such a person is often what it takes to get along with someone with a safety-oriented personality.

Other ways to reduce the intensity or full effect of a safety-conscious person’s reactions are to respond using the following tactics:

- Consider using deflection. For example, deliberately responding to a “provocative” comment with an innocent tone and/or statement that is totally devoid of conflict

or even the potential for one. Let's say your spouse said something like, "I couldn't ask you, knowing you don't care." Instead of opening up the possibility for a fight over misrepresenting you as insensitive (a quality no one in or out of your circle would agree you are) you simply state, "Of course I care." Resist even beginning that sentence with, "You know that," and continue with, "So what was it you wanted done?" (if the event has yet to occur). A variation of this is to try to reframe a statement or reinterpret an event so as to soften the effect on you or to keep sparks from flying, as would have happened if left with its original meaning or intent. If, for example, someone is not on time for an event, it may help you—as an assistant to the person controlled by safety needs—to suggest (in the presence of your boss) the possible problem(s) that could explain the lateness, both before the individual shows up and after the latecomer arrives.

- You could also ignore an offensive comment or action either openly (to make a point that you are not going to get drawn into conflict) or by pretending to be unaware of what just took place. In the same light, you may be able to avoid conflict by faking ignorance on a matter that need not be explored.
- Withdraw from a stand you were taking or temper a certain attitude or posture. Doing so might bring peace to the relationship at least temporarily.

Because the basic problem is fear or a need for safety on many levels, a person with this personality would feel particularly at risk exposing weaknesses in a close relationship

because it could result in some type of harm (environmental, social, physical, and/or emotional). As a result, the people who have the closest emotional relationships with these individuals (spouses, children, assistants, or anyone whose conformity the fearful person expects or can control) would have the most need of safety-enhancing skills, since it's in their presence that the person with a safety-oriented personality would feel most vulnerable.

Bear in mind that since fear or anxiety is usually the basic energy guiding this individual's way of behaving, protection or escape from the perceived harm (present, anticipated, or imagined) will generally be welcome. Be aware also that because of this individual's complex reaction pattern however, she or he may not always openly acknowledge this "rescue" in specific situations, likely due to feelings of shame.

One other detail in addressing this pattern of behaving is the fact that the safety-oriented individual may not always be aware of the exact reasons for her or his sense of anxiety—or that it even is anxiety. She or he may only know that the uncomfortable or irritating feeling is there. Therefore, those in a close relationship with this individual need to try to step into that person's shoes in order to understand how fear of shame or injury is motivating the safety-conscious behaviour. Being successful in having empathy for someone with a safety-oriented personality will likely require you to introduce compassion into each interaction, rather than anger or hopelessness.

It is important to be aware that these individuals do not necessarily enjoy their own behaviour. In fact, quite often,

Being successful in having empathy for someone with a safety-oriented personality will likely require you to introduce compassion into each interaction, rather than anger or hopelessness.

their feelings of shame come from a sense of proneness to being in the wrong. As a result, sometimes the emotional reactions of safety-oriented people are more against their own inappropriate response tendencies than against the other person(s). This understanding should, hopefully, assist the friends, family members, co-workers, and romantic partners of people with this personality type to be more accepting of the ways of a person with SOPS.

Inside the Brain That Creates a Person with a Safety-Oriented Personality

Researchers in the field of neuroscience provide information that can be used to explain what happens in the brain to result in the condition in which fear is constantly creating a strong need for safety.

We are told that when an emergency situation occurs that causes fear or stress, the brain directs several activities in response to the perceived danger. One of these actions is the release of neuro-chemical substances containing coded messages that tell organs what to do. One such “messenger”

substance called cortisol is carried in the blood, providing various muscles with the extra energy needed to react to a threat. Let's say you barely saw a car about to run you over, and you jumped out of its path in the nick of time. This would be one such "Danger! Danger!" situation or fight-flight activity to which your brain had to respond quickly. It gave your body the additional cortisol needed to boost the power (energy) in your muscles that enabled you to take emergency action and escape from harm.

Once an emergency is over, a return to normal is made possible by another set of instructions from the brain, one which stops the availability and action of cortisol. This is important because although cortisol helps keep us safe from sudden danger, it begins to accumulate and cause damage when left in the body longer than necessary. It appears one of the dangers of having large or continuous amounts of cortisol in the system is that it damages delicate parts and/or organs in the amygdala and hypothalamus (where it is believed this substance mainly does its work) and causes disruption in the functioning of these brain organs. In other words, when we continue to perceive a situation as frightening or stressful, the need for cortisol remains in place. Its action of stimulating the parts of the amygdala and hypothalamus that are responsible for responding to fear or anxiety continues to occur, though not necessarily at a constant level of intensity.

When that happens, the person in a state of cortisol stimulation will continue to feel and act afraid or anxious to some degree. The longer this goes on in the person's life, the

more likely it is to become a habit or familiar way for the brain to react (that is, keeping cortisol available longer than normally necessary). As such, the person comes to perceive many internal and external events with a sense of apprehension. Over time, the person's typical way of behaving (that is, her or his personality) becomes fear-controlled. More often than not, the things this individual thinks about or does will be aimed at removing or avoiding this unpleasant feeling of fear. This means that in addition to events that people generally react to as dangerous or harmful, there will be many more (including social experiences) that a person with a safety-based-personality-in-the-making will learn to recognize as a threat of injury or hurt. In other words, they will see the possibility of being hurt in many ways—environmental, physical, mental-emotional, and social. As such, they are likely to be on guard as they move around or interact socially. It should not be surprising that the behaviour of these individuals will be geared to respond with defensiveness or self-protectiveness, as well as with various means that will address their concerns for safety in all situations, especially those that carry a risk of social and/or psychological hurt from shame.

Who Is Likely To Have SOPS?

If the basis of this type of personality is a need for safety—a natural emotional state that everyone experiences—how is it that only some people acquire a safety-oriented personality? A reasonable explanation is that a safety-oriented personality represents a state in which the ordinary

emotion of fear is out of normal control and becomes unmanageable or very difficult to manage. Since being in such a state makes the individual feel threatened, afraid, worried, or over-cautious most of the time, this person will tend to use a style of behaving that will make her or him feel safe in everyday life. These self-protective ways of acting and their consequences have already been discussed in the preceding sections. So how does this fear/safety condition arise?

It seems clear that well-defined physiological activities in the brain, as just explained, are likely responsible for sustaining a state of fear frequently when there is no obvious threat to the safety of the individual (except in the perception of the safety-conscious person). Accordingly, a long-term expression of this pattern of safety-seeking behaviour would contribute to the formation of a safety-oriented personality. In tracing the origin of this personality formation, it would be expected that a very frightening experience kick-started this fear-producing neuro-biochemistry in the brain in the first place. That being the case, severely frightful circumstances in early childhood, seriously threatening experiences in adulthood, or exposure to the strong personal safety needs of parents who are unable to manage adversity would, almost certainly, serve the purpose of initiating the development of a safety-oriented personality.

For example, people who grow up in countries where there has been genocide, war, persecution, military-supported or countered revolution, or serious insecurity are more likely to be persistently anxious or afraid. By adulthood, fear is ingrained in their outlook of life. This pattern may

also be true of people who have suffered sexual, physical, or emotional abuse (especially early in life), as well as people who experienced continual peer, parental, or governmental oppression or bullying. Other potential fear-prone groups include people who were involved in a life-threatening accident (or serious, multiple accidents); those who participated in combat or firefighting (or other long-term dangerous work situations); those who were subjected to terrorism, assault, kidnapping or burglary; those who have faced intolerable uncertainty (from a terrifying disease or illness); or those who have experienced a significant destruction of peace in their lives for an extended period. Others in this group may have been re-exposed after an initial significant exposure, sometimes regardless of the length of time in between. After several years of living in a state of being easily frightened, expecting harm, and needing to feel safe, their circumstances would likely cause them to develop the distinct anxiety disorder called SOPS, the behavioural characteristics of which have been described in greater detail under the heading, “Attributes of The Fear-Based Personality.”

Can you change your safety-oriented personality?—To attempt to answer this question, we need to look at the working of a set of structures in the brain—somewhat different from those parts responsible for preparing the body for a fight or flight response. I say “somewhat” because these other areas include the amygdala, which comes up in every explanation of emotional behaviour. Recent research studies suggest that the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex are largely responsible for storing and managing our emotional

memories. Other memories that do not have emotional importance (such as how we do things or facts related to events) are managed and stored in other parts of the brain. Some of these studies have pointed out that our ability to keep or let go of the fear we experience is controlled by these two organs, especially the prefrontal cortex. A neurotransmitter called dopamine, which is another substance that carries chemical messages in the brain, plays a part in how much fear we show as we go about living life. So then, a safety-oriented personality can be greatly influenced by the amount of available dopamine (apparently, the less there is, the more fear-prone the person will be) or by a fault or abnormality in specific areas of any or all of the following structures: the amygdala, which causes the individual to react with fear; the prefrontal cortex, which controls how the person will react; and the hippocampus, which could provide meaning or context for a current event (by supplying reminders of the time, place, circumstances, etc. of previous fearful events).

The good news is that there is strong evidence that the sufferer whose condition may be the result of faulty neuro-biochemistry may come to realize peace of mind because, as research in the field of neuroscience has demonstrated, we can change or rewire our brains—and this is happening to you and me right now (a.k.a. neuro-plasticity). It happens even more so as a result of frequently using new ways of managing your emotional states, such as the suggestions offered in this book, which you can practice in your self-healing program. The basis of brain transformation is

described in the section titled, “Your Thoughts Can and Do Rewire Your Brain,” in Chapter 8, under the subheading, “Managing Anger.”

Advantages and Disadvantages of Having SOPS

There is an upside, downside, and caution to this kind of personality functioning:

The upside

- On the upside, a safety-oriented person who thoroughly and routinely analyzes everything, particularly from a safety standpoint in order to uncover relevant information, is very likely to be successful in addressing almost all aspects of a situation or issue under review or in operation, especially where the detection of flaws or errors are concerned. Such a person needs to be in a relatively safe environment to be able to show this safety-directed tendency as strength.
- People with a safety-oriented personality would also excel in matters of keeping to expected or established procedures because their way of living involves habitually sticking to routines and being or appearing cooperative with those who call the shots.
- People driven by a need for safety will often demonstrate high efficiency in situations requiring a need for cleanliness and order (for example, working in healthcare or in chemical and technological laboratories). Those who fear such things as disease or contamination tend to be very

clean (although observers might consider their behaviour as extreme).

- Due to their general readiness to please (in order to avoid problems), people whose way of life is guided by a need for safety will likely do well in situations requiring diplomacy or caution, as their thoughts and behaviours will be directed at peaceful resolution.

The downside

- On the downside, even when a very safety-conscious person is demonstrating helpful strength, she or he can quickly take on a defensive-protective attitude any time security is threatened. This is because when a person's main concern is to preserve safety, fear of her or his safety being endangered will always have the greatest power in determining how she or he behaves.
- A person in a self-protective mode limits her or his chances of making progress in life (in an emotional sense) because she or he is afraid to learn new ways of doing things to survive or improve (for example, converting adversity into opportunity). When a significant other person (a loved one or a child) is under his or her protection, the safety-driven person also tends to restrict that other individual's activities for the same protective reason. In other words, fear could prevent these people from engaging in activities that would produce improvement with respect to self-healing or could become an obstacle to obtaining good results, unless they can tell that the growth possibilities are transparently favourable. In effect, new situations

are generally viewed either with caution or avoided, and opportunities for advantageous involvement are often missed or underutilized.

- Perhaps a very important result of frequent and long-lasting fear (and the same would be true of long-term unmodified anger) is a probable risk of an extensive and progressively debilitating physical condition in later years. This would likely occur because of a breakdown in a variety of organs, organ parts, and organ functioning from being under constant tension for many years. Frequent and prolonged tension that results from over-stimulation (due to the action of cortisol, adrenaline, and other stress-related hormones and substances) is likely to cause these harmful consequences to bodily health. This is a strong reason to recognize that relatively constant and/or excessive fear or safety-driven attitudes need to be modified or healed.
- For a person with SOPS, this means continual attention to techniques and ways to acquire and maintain peace of mind. Perhaps it's not overstating the case to say your physical and mental longevity depend on it.

A word of caution

Whether or not you have not already identified yourself as someone with a safety-oriented personality, operating on the concepts of this personality functioning could assist in determining whether or not you will do well in certain occupations or tasks. For example, you may not be a good fit for jobs involving exposure to danger (such as the military, police, and certain security services); those in which shame

is always a possibility (such as performing/acting and public speaking); or those with any uncomfortable combination of fear and shame.

Finally there is a credible solution to the puzzle as to why in the same situation of danger only some people develop an extreme anxiety reaction, (such as PTSD). I now strongly suggest that at least some of these sufferers are very likely prone to SOPS. So a test of its attributes could be useful in giving you an idea of whether or not you are a high enough risk to consider avoiding such employment or volunteer activities, for the good of your mental health.

Self-Treatment Ideas

A person with a very strong safety awareness tends to constantly monitor her or his internal and external environment (using all senses) for harm or danger and, therefore, seldom feels secure outside of a self-protective way of behaving. Without a doubt, the most serious consequences for a person whose life is guided by fear of being harmed are ongoing

Without a doubt, the most serious consequences for a person whose life is guided by fear of being harmed are ongoing stress, a large thinking load, and frequent disappointment caused by unrealistic expectations of total safety.

stress, a large thinking load, and frequent disappointment caused by unrealistic expectations of total safety. Given this, people with a fear-filled personality would benefit greatly from relaxation exercises. Learning to relax will be difficult for someone who has lived a long time with a tense body and a fear of harm when not on guard, especially in the company of a stranger. This is one of those situations when special effort is required on the part of the sufferer to counteract the strange feeling of allowing relaxation to occur whether alone, with someone else, or in a group. Purposefully allowing yourself to relax is a way of keeping control and relaxing at the same time because it is on your own terms.

I recommend you start with Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PRM) (Appendix 4 - Version 3). Please note that for your safety, you need to be sure you do not have a physical problem for which this exercise is unsuitable. Otherwise, take note of the goal of the exercise as stated in this quotation from Appendix 4: “The goal of PMR is to provide a feeling of relaxation all through the body and also to enable a feeling of calmness, security, and/or self-confidence.”

In addition to learning and getting used to being in a relaxed state, people who are prone to frequent spells of fear need to address other aspects of their behaviour in order to make progress in self-healing. The following methods may prove useful:

Self-treatment stages—Begin self-healing by paying close attention to the examples of your speech or actions that others have described as unfavourable and start the healing process by working on those unacceptable patterns.

Perhaps you have introduced a comment with, “I know you will call it negative when I say... ” or “There is no other way to describe it except as stupid.”

You might have replied to a comment about your attitude with statements such as these:

- “I’m not being negative or suspicious at all; I’m only....”
- “No, that’s not fault-finding! Why do you always try to put me down?”
- “Don’t tell me I’m being paranoid again when I’m only trying to be cautious.”
- “How can you be so cruel? I am not playing the victim.”
- “Why are you are always correcting me?”
- “There you go again, Mr. (or Mrs.) Perfect!”
- “I know, I know. You don’t have to tell me.”

These kinds of thoughts or words from you are likely protests to others who have found your behaviour displeasing. You need, however, to refuse to allow yourself to read into those comments that bring out the above reactions from you or view them as someone’s desire to guilt-trip or attack you. In other words, you will be wise to receive those observations from others as well-meaning. Even when you recognize that the speaker may also have SOPS, it is still good for you to learn about the problem behaviour that your SOPS causes.

Although they may not be good at abstract reasoning, safety-oriented thinkers tend to make up “What if” situations about something they believe could go wrong or cause harm or danger (but that may or may not happen).

And this adds to their fears. At this stage in self-healing, the point is to learn to identify that your attitude is of no benefit. When you can catch these kinds of thoughts before they become words or behaviours and apply the technique of Thought Replacement, you will be on the way to gradually dismantling your safety-oriented personality and, eventually, changing your subconscious messages. To be successful in any of these tasks, you will need patience to keep trying tirelessly till you get to a point where you can truly accept that fearful, what-if thinking is unhelpful.

The next stage is to learn to change unhelpful or judgemental thoughts into neutral and non-judgemental ones by quickly looking for an angle or interpretation that is more socially acceptable. There will be times, of course, when it will be easy to replace threatening observations with non-frightening responses. For example, you may be able to respond in a better way by simply asking yourself why you take offence or are threatened as well as what it is that you find interesting, curious, or difficult to accept about the thing you perceive as a threat. Reminding yourself to relax will also always benefit you. At other times, in order to change from a negative line of thinking, you will need to work at rejecting fruitless and self-deceiving thoughts, such as believing you should be perfect or above correction or that you can stop all harm from happening to you. Again, I remind you that the more often you practice these new ways of behaving, the more permanent the corresponding changes will become in your brain. This means that after a while the new attitudes and behaviours will feel natural.

A Thought Replacement Technique to Fight Worry

In addition to many suggestions for helping you overcome the tendency to be ruled by safety needs and safety-oriented reactions, you may also use counting combined with the alphabet to interrupt worrying thoughts so that you can get rid of them. For example, begin by saying, “A, B, C, D, 1, 2, 3, 4, E, F, G, H, 5, 6, 7, 8, I, J, K, L, 9, 10, 11, 12” and so on. If you think you missed a letter or number, start again.

When you get to 12 the second or third time (or after you have started over 2 or 3 times), you may switch to non-worrisome thoughts. Or you may quickly identify and start counting any group of objects, such as the slats of a window or door blind, items in a picture, books on a shelf, floorboards, balusters or spindles of a railing, or a set of leaves on a houseplant or tree.

When you make a mistake, start again. I identified the objects in these examples from my position at my computer. They work. The trick is to plug up any hole or gap in your thoughts very quickly with something you choose to put in rather than let another thought enter automatically. The objective, of course, is to distract yourself from worrisome thinking; and you do this whenever you catch yourself becoming locked into a worried thinking pattern. Every time you catch yourself worrying, say, “Stop!” to yourself and immediately start the counting game or exercise. Always, always switch back to normal thinking when you feel comfortably engaged doing the exercise.

Enlist help—Sometimes the Thought Replacement Therapy technique may take the form of getting rid of a troubling idea or worry by disagreeing with the thought. You can apply this approach to other disagreeable feelings as well. You may say, “There is nothing going on here to cause my fear (sadness, frustration, or anger).” or “That is not the only possibility.” Then come up with some other less- or non-frightening way of looking at the anxious thought.

Now it could be that, although you try very hard, you are not able to argue against the strong emotional feelings pushing you to react with fear or sadness. This would present a good reason to call for assistance from someone, such as a spouse, close relative, or friend, to help you find reasons why your thinking and feelings at that point are not justified. Perhaps this approach would go over better if, before hand, you prepared this person to help you in this way. For example, you could say something like this to the person: “Sometimes I have a strong attack of anxiety (or name the other emotion) that is very painful and hard to get rid of. When I tell you I’m having one of them, ask me what I am thinking that’s making me sad or afraid, and help me by arguing against my thinking so I will see things differently.” Please be willing to use this method if you are not succeeding on your own. By involving another person in this way, you can be helped to manage a wide variety of other emotional reactions, such as disgust, inferiority, and shame, especially when these feelings unnecessarily rob you of mental peace or could put you at risk to act in a socially inappropriate manner.



After reading Chapter 4

1. If you have a fear or anxiety problem, under which Fear/Safety-Based Category would you place yourself?

2. If you are someone with a safety-oriented personality (SOPS) or just a tendency to be afraid or anxious, set out a plan to help you manage your state of fear or anxiety, using the information in this chapter. Remember, however, that you have lived with the condition for a long time, so do not expect to change all of your reactions all at once. Here are some suggestions for you:

- 1) Select one or two of the attributes you have, and use any of the ideas mentioned in the chapter and in the rest of the book to counteract your usual reaction.
- 2) **Every day**, practice taking a break from over-thinking with any one or more of the following techniques: mindfulness meditation, self-hypnosis, humour exercise (print, sound, visual, mixed), listen to relaxing music. The exercise should help to prevent your attention from straying to worrisome thoughts or intentions. These are all ways to give your amygdala a break.

Self-Management Plan:

Chapter 5

THE PATH TO PEACE OF MIND

What to Believe Along the Way

Accepting What to Let Go

Taking a path to peace of mind is about learning to let go of the disturbing or traumatic emotion that is causing distress. Not surprisingly, in their desperation to rid themselves of the pain of anxiety, depression or other severe distress, some people expend effort in the wrong direction. Misplaced energy will not produce healing. I hope you remember my repeated caution that to continue to want something that's unattainable only creates frustration and more misery. As I have stated, the emotional pain comes from continuing to deny that the thing you desire is unattainable. In effect, it is like chasing after a mirage, even though you know it is a mirage. Doing so almost guarantees that, before you know it, you'll get locked into trying to restore your peace by mentally attempting to make the disturbing or traumatic



You know and understand in your conscious mind that transforming the past is not possible. But in the absence of a better solution, you cling to your subconscious desire for a changed past.

experience un-happen. And even though you know this is impossible, you may begin to see the failure to achieve this mental process as “the enemy.” In a state of anguish, however, it is easy to lose track of who the enemy really is.

Who or what is the target of regret when someone says, for example, “How I wish this had never happened!”? Time? The troubling event itself? Some other source of the misery? I trust you are now learning not to point to anything or any person out there, but rather to what’s going on in your head. Why? Well, here is a reminder and another way of explaining it:

Continuing to assume that relief will come from getting rid of or changing a person, place, or circumstance is akin to waiting for a Saviour who will bring liberation (in this case, to your traumatized feelings). Alas, such a Messiah was never promised. What you can do and have to do is understand and accept that your subconscious denial is a psychological protection against being overwhelmed by your distress. The message in your conscious mind is different. You know and understand in your conscious mind that transforming the past is not possible. But in the absence of a better solution,

you cling to your subconscious desire for a changed past.

We use information from our subconscious mind to fill in the gap where a real-life satisfactory solution would have fit. As we bounce back and forth, here and there, trying to solve a problem (always returning to the subconscious information), we collect a large number of details consisting of many other possible interpretations and scenarios and go through a roller coaster of related feelings or emotions. **The subconscious solution is a mental wall that stands between intolerable facts of real life and the unstable sense of security the denial process provides, even though it is make-believe.** At best, the kind of peace that a defence mechanism such as denial offers is shaky. I have likened this state of mind to the kind of information you might get from a mirage. And no one wants to pursue a mirage. It is one's misperception (and the inviting quality of what the person is seeing) that causes someone to believe that a mirage might be a real thing that is reachable. Indeed, this is an example of one of the many misleading dead ends one is likely to encounter on the road to peace of mind. You noticed that I said, "...on the road to peace of mind." Yes, peace of mind is still ahead, despite these errors in understanding and thinking. Making a past event meaningful in the present is a mental activity. As you will recall, to do this, the event has to be recalled from memory because it no longer exists in the physical world. Therefore, it is not possible to control a past event from the present.

The truth is that events themselves are neither good nor bad; it is how they are interpreted that makes them so. In

many instances, the society in which an action takes place is a deciding factor in whether or not a person sees a particular action as a good or bad thing. For example, no matter how wicked a crime, there are ways someone might defend it; no matter how glorious an accomplishment, there are those who could condemn it. Likewise, it is not an event but how a person chooses to view it that creates distress. I repeat this because I know how difficult it is for some sufferers to accept that a wrong that causes so much anguish cannot be undone. Does this mean that an unpleasant occurrence remains alive in the past forever? It does not.

*Remember, how you react right now is
what you can change.*

Remember, although an event (actually, the record of it) cannot be erased from life, once something has happened, that is the end of it happening. You can, however, in the present, respond to the mentally recorded history or memory in a healthy way.

In other words, once a person gives up the unattainable part of a scenario, the path opens for the realization that you can address your traumatic feelings (rather than the event) and understand that your emotional reaction is the present event of concern. At the point of accepting that the occurrence of an unwelcome incident is a done deal, you are heading for rewarding, healing territory. Taking this new course of action makes it possible for you to connect

with several treatment opportunities that are not available to sufferers who refuse or are unable to switch their attention from the past to the present. Remember, how you react right now is what you can change. Here is where healing actually takes place.

A future event may be considered along similar lines. Thinking you will visit a sick relative next week does not change the fact that the visit has not been made. Until you do it, nothing has changed. Well, wait... Something does change. The stated desire in the present to make the visit could become a reminder to do the action in the future. However, that future time, when you get to it, will be the present when your intention can come into being. With respect to self-healing, the immediately occurring event (that is, the unpleasant emotion you are feeling right now) is what you can change by choosing to create a bearable present and proceeding to make it happen. This will not only release the present from being anchored in the past but also lay down a basis that will allow you to begin to anticipate an optimistic future.

The magic of this realization (when it hits home) is that the frustration of not obtaining something that you falsely believed to be there will disappear. The task, then, is to begin to make sense of your present realities, consider your day-to-day options for peace, and plan how to run your present life so that you experience the least damage to your self-esteem and life's purposes. At this stage, you would hopefully have come to understand that you cannot possibly right the wrong of a past happening. Discovering that it was not

Trauma healing has everything to do with the present and nothing with the past once you recognize that the disturbing event is only a collection of thoughts.

sensible to think otherwise, however, leaves some people to feel cheated by their previous efforts and thinking.

In that situation, one could begin to focus on this new dissatisfaction, replacing one distress that could not be relieved with another that can. An acquaintance of mine called this “grieving the loss of my dreams.” This attitude, if you have it, may be translated as “grieving the giving up of my protective fantasy,” which must be done for you to get better.

All the same, the need to confront this new feeling of having wasted your energy would be a thing of the present and, therefore, could be more easily addressed as a present issue. Once you realize that you cannot rewrite the past—that the grieving needs to be uncomplicated—this new realization that it didn’t make sense to hold on to that wish for so long will be easier to handle.

Within the practice of self-healing, it is important to allow time for letting go of each problem (old or new) and to not take the self-healing for granted. Remember that deep grief can diminish your motivation for other healing activities. In recognizing how necessary it is to try to relieve each painful situation as it comes up, you are showing that you understand what letting go means.

This way of reacting represents progress in healing. More often than not, too little weight is given to the realization that the battleground for healing trauma is here and now. Trauma healing has everything to do with the present and nothing with the past once you recognize that the disturbing event is only a collection of thoughts. There have been instances, however, when a sufferer who grasps this point reacts by saying, “I must be stupid not to have realized this.” Unfortunately, intelligence doesn’t stand a chance against the blinders that suffering puts on people. It might not be easy to understand that adjusting to trauma is more a matter of attending to the appropriate thoughts in the present time than it is about understanding the details of the what, where or when of an actual event.

Talking Is an Important Step

Another course of action to achieve peace of mind is to start talking about the problem. Inviting outside involvement is vital in learning how to release or overcome traumatic feelings. And allowing someone else in is a sign that a person is making progress toward a satisfactory resolution of the problem and, therefore, is beginning to heal.

The value of talking about our emotional feelings—As a step towards healing, talking helps because it releases trapped or blocked emotions—feelings, we have difficulty expressing. Talking gives material form to thoughts and feelings. Unlike ideas, words have boundaries and put limitations on what the brain can process. Thoughts are lightning fast and, therefore, are capable of overwhelming a person

who is trying to understand them. Talking is much slower. It allows the mind (within the boundaries of the words we are using) to structure thoughts for grouped processing and easier comprehension. Getting it out (as well as letting the listener in) is usually the motivation behind talking. Therefore, connecting with others can have a more powerful releasing outcome than talking to oneself, although talking in your head about your problem (or out loud if you need to) is important.

In talking to release an emotion, you need to select your listeners carefully—a group or person who is trustworthy, sympathetic, and not easily overwhelmed. At the same time, you need to be aware of not pushing people away by giving too much information about your difficult situation. You also need to make a distinction between talking to get rid of nagging emotions and talking to keep your battle with the past alive. The former is a good goal; the latter is not, whether you talk to another person or in your head. In other words, you will not benefit from self-talk or talking to others if your goal is to “find the answer out there,” a pursuit that has been shown to be impractical, even pointless.

How listeners can help—As healing continues, a person—and sometimes those closest to him or her—needs encouragement, support, and understanding. Because there is a general tendency to expect the same pattern of adjustment in people with a similar condition, it is important to recognize, not only at this first step, but also throughout the entire healing journey, that (except in extremely rare instances) no two people’s experience of an event is identical.

This is why a sufferer needs to be assured that his or her reactions are valid and that lapses or setbacks (which usually take the form of occasional, seemingly illogical thinking and behaviour) are normal. We are all only human, after all!

As you begin to make sense of your problem, you must learn to let go, by which I mean releasing or weakening your attachment to your distress. In other words, you need to look away from what is causing the distress and, in doing so, escape the direct influence of the problem. As an analogy, think of the effect of forgiveness; it disengages the person who has been hurt from the grudge he or she has, neutralizes feelings of resentment, and helps the hurt person achieve peace of mind. In much the same way, letting go of a fright, a hurt or an offence, breaks the connection that plugs one into distressful feelings so that they no longer have an effect on the sufferer. Talking helps to do this as happens when a person attends counselling. It is not the job of the listener to agree with you on whatever view you have of your problem. It is enough that your listener is kind and non-judgmental. That's why it is important to exercise care in choosing a person to talk to.

Counter-Attack: Regaining Power after Letting Go

After that very important step of giving up the idea of undoing the past, on your journey of self-healing, you will be ready for the next stage of becoming strong again: regaining power.

Usually, the person(s) or circumstances identified as being

responsible in some way for a distressing event would become an object of resentment. Some sufferers have referred to this person or circumstance as “the enemy.” And it is the perceived power of the enemy that continues to torment and preoccupy them. You may have already faced or have yet to face your enemy. However you choose to describe your hurt, remember it is what you’re suffering today that is the target of your actions. This means that today’s enemy may have to be confronted directly or indirectly so that you can control it. This is an important step in making a transition to the present (rather than dwelling with the trauma in the past).

Sometimes when another person is the enemy, you may wish to confront him or her. This step, while possibly self-empowering, could turn out to be an experience in re-victimization. Some offenders, full of shame as they are likely to be (or mentally disordered in some other way), may choose to strike back to stop the sufferer from smashing through their mask of innocence to expose their massive shame. On the other hand, the sufferer may have taken the step of confronting the guilty person out of a sense of shame. This could complicate your attempt to get the offender to accept responsibility by causing you to act under the direction of shameful feelings.

In his book *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex and the Birth of the Self*, psychiatrist Donald L. Nathanson suggests that people try to tolerate feelings of shame or humiliation by

- withdrawing (hiding, pulling back);
- avoiding or deflecting the source of the pain;

*It is in refusing to give up control of your life
to anything or anyone else
that you gain your greatest victory.*

- attacking others or another person or situation; or
- attacking themselves when there is no one else to blame.

None of these ways is healthy or will make you stronger. Some guilty parties, however, act in these ways in order to be released from facing up to the shame that haunts them. An offender in a trauma scenario could choose to attack a victim who wanted him or her to make good for the wrong done. The victim who was expecting to be pacified or appeased could instead, by this aggressive action, just reopen a wound that might have been starting to heal.

A victim who chooses to confront an enemy needs to be prepared for counter action and, therefore, may be well advised to ensure personal emotional protection before making a move. For the sake of gaining greater control over any unwanted emotional fallout, I would challenge the offender, mainly to assert that I would no longer play the victim and to send the message that the offender's power was no longer effective. To succeed as presented, the sufferer would need to carefully plan how and when to meet with the offender, and in whose company, so as to safely get the upper hand. This plan need not involve aggression or attacking. Rather, the plan would be to identify the damage the offender caused and to enact your decision to take back power. It

is in refusing to give up control of your life to anything or anyone else that you gain your greatest victory.

If you choose to adopt a non-conflict strategy, be sure you approach the meeting neither wishing for nor expecting to receive the offender's repentance. Instead, you, the victim, are purposely attempting to prove (mostly to yourself) that you are capable of taking control from the enemy. Needless to say, for healing to occur, the offender and victim do not even need to communicate. Even so, I believe it is much safer, more predictable, and far more useful for sufferers to put all of their efforts into self-management than into attempting to get back at others or to make others respond in specific ways. Some people write letters to the offender but burn or destroy them. Definitely, I would advise not sending the letter to the offender since this could open the door to an abusive reply.

Here is another approach that might work for you. This is a plan for moving one deliberate, thoughtful step at a time to take away the power that the hurtful event is exercising over your life. This approach to unshackling yourself from the hurtful experience is valid because trauma, or other forms of emotional distress, can occur even when there is no human offender to be made responsible (for example, a natural disaster, a major illness, or serious injury).

1. The first stage of this plan for self-healing your emotional pain must begin with understanding, accepting, affirming, or deciding that this procedure is about using inner skills to control your own emotional state. This is because it is in you that the problem really resides. In

other words, you need to admit clearly to yourself that you now own the problem and will take care of it yourself.

2. The second stage of self-empowerment involves questioning yourself and coming up with honest answers. As a sufferer, ask yourself the following: “What is upsetting me the most about the incident?” If the answer is that someone else or a situation caused your distress, you must find ways to change that belief because in this process another person or circumstance cannot heal you. Therefore, more work is needed at Stage One. You need to arrive at the point of realizing that the problem is in you; otherwise, self-healing may not work. As a matter of fact, no other kind of treatment is likely to succeed if a sufferer from an emotional condition continues to state that the disturbing memory of the unpleasant incident is not under his or her control. Indeed, everything that happens to a person is up to that individual to tackle, except when their intellectual, developmental or social skills make them incapable. Let me be clear, however, that what you cannot change is the fact of the occurrence, which is in the past or in your memory. All you can do in the present is remove the disturbing emotional reactions that go with the recollection.
3. The third stage of self-empowerment begins once you know the main causes of your distress and are ready to start doing something about them. It would not help if you stated only that your main upset comes from the way a certain person or situation makes you feel. You also need to say how exactly you feel, how long it lasts, and

when it is that you feel this way. If there is anything that helps to reduce your bad feeling from this trigger, note it, since you may need to use it more, provided there are no other problematic aspects.

4. The fourth stage of this plan for self-healing involves applying a method to the troubling emotion, thought, or behaviour. Each time you set out to deal with a reaction, whether caused by a trigger or not, you will need to ask yourself what feeling is bothering you *right now*. That feeling, which must have arisen from a thought or behaviour is the one to address.

A serious problem that stands in the way of acquiring emotional wellbeing in the present concerns the triggers or reminders. Triggers are the mental images, feelings, sensations, physical objects, or living things that cause you to react in the same way as you did when the troubling or upsetting event first happened. Sufferers often avoid triggers because they don't want to revisit that overwhelming psychological experience. Examples of this are body tension, shaking, stomach cramps, fear, perspiration, irritability, and difficulty breathing (sometimes with chest pain), to name just a few. These are some of the anxiety symptoms described in Chapter 3. Sometimes you may have them in a situation that seems unconnected to your trauma; this indicates that your brain is picking up subconscious reminders. For this reason, the main triggers for your anxiety also call for close observation or study so that you can understand how or when they affect you and find ways to make them relatively powerless.

Specifically with respect to triggers, regardless of whether

those strong feelings of anxiety come from nowhere or from your thinking about, reading about, hearing about, or imagining some aspect of your emotional difficulties, ask the same question: “What is it right here and right now that is upsetting me?” When you identify the source of your discomfort, you may use one of these socially acceptable methods to deal with it:

- Leave the area.
- Discuss (negotiate if need be) with anyone who is in a position to make your life more comfortable.
- Discontinue or change something.
- Tolerate the presence of the provoking situation by ignoring it, shutting it out, or finding good reasons for not reacting to it.

If the source of your suffering is internal, remember that the cause has to lead to a presently occurring emotion for self-healing to be useful or helpful. The above suggestions should help even if you cannot find what exactly is triggering your emotional reactions.

Another question you can ask yourself right at the outset as you estimate your readiness to delve into emotional self-management is this: “What do I need to change to get better?” If your answer includes someone or something outside of yourself, it indicates you are probably still holding on to the past. You may have to work some more to bring the problem totally into the present. You will know you’re here when the only correct answer involves an emotion or a group of emotions within yourself (not others) in the

present. There are many suggestions in this book about self-treating disturbing emotional reactions in the present.

Memories are never really lost—You probably recognize by now that the things that trouble us are all kept in the memory storage areas of our brains, and we call them the memories. One such storage site is the amygdala (located deep inside the emotional control centre of the brain). One of the jobs of the amygdala is to function as a storehouse for our recorded emotional memories. The brain's record-keeping function is always active at a subconscious level and, as such, can record unpleasant feelings (triggers) of which you are unaware. This is why it's important to pinpoint all reactions that are similar to the known traumatic ones and to group them as the power of the enemy, in some of its disguises, so that you can use self-healing techniques to try to reduce the strength of that foe.

Once you know from where your most unpleasant feelings are coming, you can address them. Although the description of this approach came about as a non-hostile alternative to seeking relief by engaging the offender, it, nonetheless, stands on its own as a practical self-healing strategy. It seems reasonable to tackle your most distressing feelings and to understand their role, as well as that of the memories or thoughts that produced them.

If I asked you why the image (memory) of, say, a certain family member always enrages you, and you say, "Because I hate him for what he did to me!" your answer means that your strongest feeling is that you were unfairly treated by that person (because one of the roles of anger is to react to

injustice). Now, using my most diplomatic and empathic words, I must first point out that what that person did to you no longer exists; and next I must ask, “So what are you going to do about your hatred, now?” I am hoping you will see that your best choice for action in dealing with your present angry feeling is in the now. So, again, it is beginning to look like, no matter how you choose to go about it, your goal should be to get rid of the present, unpleasant emotion so that it will lose its power over you.

When the memory of an upsetting event dies away, the feeling that went with it also dies. Because it appears that our memories are never completely lost and that we cannot remove them whenever we decide to, it may seem like we are condemned to be under their influence forever. However, it is not necessary for a memory to go away for a feeling to lose its energy. There are techniques for achieving this.

One technique is to attach another emotional response to a remembered event as a way to render the “memory” harmless. I use quotation marks because when you learn to reprocess and change a previously disturbing memory to make it less threatening, it, in reality, is no longer the same memory with which the new feeling is coupled. Let’s look at this another way:

Research tells us that our memories are not all kept in the same part of the brain and that pieces of memory come together to create a whole memory. As we call upon information relating to a troubling incident from different places in the brain, not all of the information will be frightening or unsettling. Inspecting related information and associating other

thoughts with the distressing ones may attach new meaning to the originally bothersome ideas. For example, if someone insults you and leaves you feeling ashamed, so, too, will the memory of the incident bring up feelings of shame (from your amygdala). That memory may, however, also include where it happened and who was present (brought forward from another storage site). In considering this related information, you may decide that no one of significance witnessed the scene, which would, therefore, make you feel much less shame. This is a new reaction.

When working on attaching the new reaction, you will need to tell yourself that shame is not really necessary in this situation. The relief from that thinking is another new reaction. And if you bring up this new point of view from now on every time the memory comes up, that new reaction will become the favoured one when you think of the event. In fact, after a while, this new reaction could cause the event to acquire another new and more empowering reaction: that the incident is actually a non-issue.

A new understanding or viewpoint can change our reactions sometimes in subtle ways. Provided a person's mind is not severely disordered, similar memory elements from other storage sites can also come under the influence of a different point of view. As more of the similar details lose their original, disturbing quality, the more different a person's reactions will be. And as one learns new reassuring lessons, he or she becomes less and less disturbed. This is probably why telling and retelling your story in safety can lead to healing.

When we choose to address the emotional side of a

Thought Replacement seems to be one of the best techniques for changing troubling emotions.

disturbing experience, we make it possible to reprocess the original emotional reaction by selecting thoughts that will bring about how we want to feel. Indeed, when the feelings that used to accompany a memory are not exercised in connection with that memory, the emotion fades away. Thought Replacement seems to be one of the best techniques for changing troubling emotions. When plagued by distress, we need to reduce our suffering; otherwise, we are likely doomed to re-experience the event with its old meaning, as well as with the added painful effect of *déjà vu*. As such, we cause another group of unwanted feelings to arise (in addition to the ones caused by the original event). In other words, as long as the original trauma reactions are unresolved, every recall will probably feel twice as painful.

Clearly, there are ways to change both the upsetting memory of an unwanted experience and the distressing feeling that goes with it to obtain healing. For you, the sufferer, the question now is this: How willing are you to seriously get down to healing yourself with **determination**, **perseverance**, and **self-honesty**? These three are the minimum and always required! The sooner you get rid of what makes the trauma hurt, the better. Even if you do it in bits and pieces. Little-by-little or all at once, removing the whole stinger must be the goal.

Remedies for Changing Self-Defeating Behaviour

Today there are remedies that are proving highly successful in identifying and changing long-standing, self-defeating behaviours. Here are a few I will be talking about.

Energy-based treatment—The emerging field of energy-based treatments appears to hold promise for completely managing troubling emotional problems, especially those associated with fear. In fact, energy-based treatment, which can be self-administered (as discussed in Chapter 17), is probably the most appropriate for healing troubled emotions in someone with SOPS.

Habit formation—A troubling emotional reaction may become a habit. When we regularly repeat a behaviour, as if without thinking, we are showing that we are no longer choosing the behaviour; we are sliding into it automatically. This is likely because it has become hard-wired into our brain as subconscious behaviour. A great hope of victory over unwanted subconscious actions, especially when they create emotional turmoil, comes from the “new biology,” introduced by Bruce Lipton in *The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter & Miracles*. This distinguished researcher teaches us that our beliefs or perceptions can control our biology, including our hard-wired behaviours. He has demonstrated that it is not our genes that cause changes in our development or that dictate (as was previously thought) that our life will go only in a certain, fixed direction. We can be confident that we ourselves can

alter whatever we choose to, since it is possible to direct our own life forward! Very encouraging news, don't you agree? It is in light of this view that I suggest the following self-healing ideas for altering faulty probably subconscious habits.

Self-treatment methods—To treat a habit that has become comfortable for a long time and that now occurs automatically, a person needs to get at the subconscious messages supporting it. One door into the subconscious mind is through **muscle testing** (described in Chapter 12). Here then, is more opportunity for change in those whose lives, maybe like yours, have been held back (for example, by fear) for so long that many unhelpful behaviours have become habits.

Another self-treatment method is **Thought Replacement Therapy**. This technique helps a person who operates mostly out of fear or sadness, for example, to catch those thoughts as frequently as they come up and deliberately restate them in a neutral manner as facts (without adding any interpretation). An encouraging tip to remember at this point is this: **Thoughts determine our actions, and they can heal!** (Explained in Chapter 8). At first, selecting one distressing idea to be replaced with a neutral one may be difficult. For example, if you have a fear-focused personality, you are always operating somewhere between fear, terror, and panic in your actions, words or thoughts, and you may not always be able to tell what is wrong or negative about your way of responding to life, since everything you do is controlled (to some degree) by fear. If you are very depressed, you may not have enough motivation or desire to criticize yourself and

may find it easier to accept yourself as you are. Even without being in either of these conditions, you just may not know where to start since the troubled behaviours are practically routine. This could mean that much of your thinking and behaving would seem all right in your view and, therefore, not need replacing.

In that type of a situation, an alternative plan of action that may work for you is to match your reactions with those of someone close to you (preferably a person you admire or respect, especially a close friend or spouse) whose characteristics are different and whose reactions seem much less unsettling than yours. Hopefully, this will help you get better at identifying your harmful reactions. You may even ask that person to help you shape your changing behaviours. This action is probably not much different from passing along a letter or resume to someone to look over and make suggestions or corrections. In this case, you are working on a better version of your very life!



After reading Chapter 5

1. Describe the strongest belief that is impossible to come true—and that you have held on to the longest—regarding your troubling emotional situation.

2. Using information in the book, consider how this long-held belief has affected your life. Why does it makes sense to give it up?

3. Based on the information provided under the heading, “Remedies for Changing Self-Defeating Behaviour,” describe a daily plan for increasing peace of mind in your life. (Because the book contains many other suggestions to achieve this desired state, you will be able to expand on this plan as you read further).

CHAPTER 6

BARRIERS TO HEALING

Negative Influences That Block Progress

Note to Reader: This chapter focuses on the barriers to healing and includes a discussion of such things as negative attitudes, resistance, ego, insight, and self-awareness (or lack thereof). This section also talks about how self-talk can provide much assistance in the healing process.

Negative Attitudes and Resistance

Negative Attitudes

There are different forms of negative attitudes:

- Sometimes people insist that a proposed solution that has proven effective will not work. They may have no clear reason for their opposition; they are simply opposed.
- Sometimes people who believe a treatment plan will not succeed (even without trying it), will refuse to entertain the possibility that they may be wrong or will refuse to participate by simply saying, “That’s not me.”



- Others may look for why a suggested solution will *not* work instead of why it could.

Often, a fear of the unknown effects or results causes people to worry, have negative attitudes toward a plan, or reject a suggestion outright.

Resistance

One type of resistance (which is a refusal to change) may be seen in people who habitually respond to some life situations in a certain way and have come to use the reaction as if it is automatic or out of their control. By way of an example, if I reach for my purse behind a door every time I go out, I will on occasion reach for my purse when I am near the door but not going out. The purse was picked up in error. Another example is taking a jacket every time I go out. It's not that taking a jacket is an error (unless it is very hot outside), it's that the choice of that behaviour is mainly based on habit. If, on the other hand, I were told that a hat is more important or fashionable than a coat, I could learn to switch from taking a coat to taking a hat. These kinds of reactions occur in other situations in which the sole basis of the reaction is habit (how we are used to reacting).

Old habits die hard—Because of a habitual way of responding (a response we know, trust, are comfortable with, or believe we must display), a different way of reacting may not register, interest us, or seem appropriate. Even more significantly, we may not even be aware that we can choose to change how we react. When a habitual way of behaving runs contrary to expectation in treatment, it may sometimes be referred to as resistance.

Based on the above examples, it is not true that resistance is always an instance of refusal or, worse, rebellion or stubbornness. Nonetheless, it would count as a barrier to healing because a habitual behaviour could interfere with the treatment process. For this reason, you need to be attentive to your behaviours in order to prevent resistance, habit, or a negative attitude from hindering your self-healing.

The Influence of Others on the Decision to Follow Treatment

People influence each other in many ways. Sometimes, however, power over others obstructs discoveries that could benefit your physical or mental health. The strong ties or high opinion and respect you have for someone could lead you to base a decision on that person's opinion or to accept or reject something that would be advantageous to you. In some instances, you might be persuaded to avoid treatment by the other person's negative report of her or his experience, without taking into account individual differences and biases or without getting a testimonial from other sources. One person's reported experience of treatment failure may form a barrier to another person using that treatment. Obviously, this means that unless you completely trust your single source, you need to get other opinions or try to find out for yourself before rejecting or accepting a new treatment idea.

Error-Related Negativity

You may be surprised to learn that your brain is apparently able to detect when you've made an error even before you

are aware of it. This ability is called Error-Related Negativity (ERN), and it is believed to make us much more alert or ready to react to unpleasant and threatening experiences than to positive ones. In other words, it seems the brain has a natural, negative bias towards discovering and registering information about potentially hurtful or unpleasant experiences, regardless of whether or not we are about to act or have already acted in the direction of the threat. ERN probably explains how a person comes to “feel” the need to avoid certain situations (like a gut feeling), and the frequent action of ERN probably teaches us to sense and react to the probability of errors and problems. **As such, it is understandable that acting against a sense that error is close at hand could produce unexplainable anxiety or nervousness**

Faulty ERN—But what if someone’s ERN process is operationally faulty and increases the importance of the negative well beyond natural expectation? Probably, with respect to its ERN function, the brain of such a person would be predisposed to devalue positive information. This would cause her or him to focus almost exclusively on the negative aspect of an event or experience. It is tempting, isn’t it, to wonder whether this kind of ERN over-activity might explain someone’s continually negative attitude? And what about the case of SOPS? Indeed, in addition to the specific brain functioning already explained, the person with a safety-oriented personality might not be able to observe or focus on the positive aspects of an event in the way that someone with normal brain functioning would because of faulty ERN.

You could expect a person under the power of a malfunctioning ERN to be highly sensitive to potential error and to anticipate negative events almost routinely. She or he would likely be resistant to shifting to a positive stance—probably to the same degree as seen in clinical delusion, when non-supporting or non-affirming evidence usually fails to convince a person that her or his perception is wrong. When ERN is at work in this way, a person may tend to criticize, deny or reject treatment ideas. This does not mean that a person whose brain is overly active in a specific area cannot perceive when change is needed; it may not be easy for a person in this state to understand that it's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. Who knows how many of us are prone to ERN to varying degrees? If you find that you tend to be more easily frustrated than most others around you, it would be necessary to make a point of objectively reviewing both the negative and positive sides of matters, particularly those dealing with treatment decisions, to try to defeat a possible ERN bias. If you observe that it is difficult to keep negative perceptions off your mind and to come up with positive ones (though it's more likely that others will point this out to you), you may do better with a second and even a third opinion from a trusted observer in the same situation.

Misconceptions about Hypnotherapy and Counselling

Because of misunderstandings about what hypnotherapy entails, myths have developed around this treatment technique. And those myths have become barriers that have

stood in the way of people who might have otherwise used hypnotherapy as a treatment but chose instead to dismiss it and the benefits it could have provided. Here are some of the misconceptions:

- Many evangelical Christians appear to believe that while they are engaged in hypnosis, evil spirits can enter their minds and take hold—even though such an incident has never been reported in relation to hypnotherapy. To be clear, saying there is no evidence of demonic possession during hypnotherapy is not meant to say that evil spirits do not exist. However, it is a wonder that people who profess strong faith in a good and powerful God do not more easily believe that a good or godly spirit will want to take possession **to heal the believer** or defeat any devil wanting to evict and replace Him (moreover, against their will). Ascribing unproven negative attributes to clinical hypnosis can wrongly influence someone to rule out self-hypnosis as a way to help deal with stress and other anxiety-related concerns.
- Some people are turned off clinical hypnosis because they believe that if “something” (an unidentified problem) goes wrong during hypnosis, a person could be stuck in a hypnotized, mindless state, indefinitely. This also has never been reported; from clinical experience, it is next to impossible. The fact is that the person undergoing hypnotherapy always has complete control if she or he chooses to use it. If you’ve read ahead, you’ll know more about this method of healing, which is described in Chapter 10. In that chapter, I explain that a person is able to come

out of self-hypnotherapy at any point. You can do the same even if a therapist is conducting a session with you. If you have done the basic run described in Chapter 10, you most probably know that it gets you into a state of peaceful rest, which makes you (or perhaps did make you) want to fall asleep. Many people use it for that very reason. And guess what? They wake up very refreshed and feel like their normal selves.

- An apparently widely held misconception is that in a counselling session, you must delve into childhood life. Yes, sometimes early life experiences are important for understanding and causing change for the better in the adult years. Many psychological issues, however, arise in adulthood and do not necessarily require examination of the events of any period of time before then. On the other hand, if in applying self-help techniques you believe that your problem has something to do with your childhood and you are unable to get at it, please be sure to call on a professional therapist for an opinion.

Even though I've cautioned you about assuming that you can properly interpret the connection between your present-day problem and childhood events, you may have problems that you know *are* related to events from your youth. If you can determine a clear link, you probably now have some self-treatment tools to tackle both your present and past hurts. However, you may need to let go of the troubled feelings from your past and deal with the more recent ones. Look to your chapter review assignments to help you determine the best self-treatment approach.

Cautions about Counselling

The following section presents reported problems and what you need to know to deal with them.

- It is always good to find out about the treatment methods that are suggested to you or that you've heard about and think could work for you. But those answers need to come from people who are experts about the form of treatment you are researching. This is important because those seeking help are sometimes unknowingly exposed to ineffective strategies or treatments. For example, it appears that some therapists still suggest that a person with an anger problem should give full expression to anger outbursts. "Let it all out," they tell the person, even though this method has been found to be counter-productive.
- Occasionally, it has been reported that a professional has mistakenly applied the wrong treatment or procedure. This has happened often enough from the earliest days of medical care. In fact, a word was invented for cases that result in avoidable problems: *iatrogenic*, from classical Greek, which roughly translates to "caused by a doctor." If you believe a treatment procedure is wrong, you can choose to refuse it or complain about it to the treating individual. And if you are not satisfied with that person's response, you may report the matter to her or his governing professional body. This is a reasonable resolution approach. It is better to formally address the issue than to make the problem a barrier to future professional or self-help treatment.

- Even if a particular treatment is accepted by qualified practitioners, it might be unsuitable for you if you have not received the correct diagnosis. Hopefully, you will not find any such problems with the material in this book. “To err is human,” but rather than erecting a barrier to using psychological treatment, you, as a consumer, need to be aware of the sources from which you are getting advice. By doing so, you can be confident that you will have a good chance of achieving wellness.

Insight and Self-Awareness

People who are unable to understand how they have changed, how they may be contributing to a problem, or how they can change their behaviour to avoid a problem are often described as lacking insight or self-awareness. It is important to understand how the information that follows would apply to someone who suffers from a serious emotional condition—or to anyone, for that matter, who seeks greater self-awareness or insight.

Are you able to recognize what has happened?—While you are going through a serious emotional ordeal, it helps your recovery when you can tell how much the ordeal has changed you. Unfortunately, some ordeals do cause very drastic changes, especially (though not only) when they are related to a serious brain injury or to significant deficiencies in brain biochemistry. If you suffer from either of these conditions, you might not be able to recognize all the physical or mental changes that have taken place, and the damage to your functioning might have produced negative

consequences to your self-awareness. Also, for example, through emotional turmoil, you might have lost some of your ability to recognize how you have changed or are changing and how difficult it has become for the people around you to deal with your (sometimes inappropriate) behaviour. Or perhaps your lack of insight may involve an inability to recognize your mistakes and how you approach situations or your performance of certain tasks. Your day-by-day ability to cope may also have become a source of frustration and conflict.

Signs of a lack of self-awareness—In addition to a lack of self-awareness of your own behaviour, you might also react unfavourably when others do not react as you expect them to. People who lack self-awareness can quickly become involved in conflict with those close to them, particularly with spouses and family members who are perceived as wrongly criticizing their behaviour. Disturbances in self-awareness may show themselves, for example, in a person's unawareness of how easily she or he becomes angry, how immature her or his actions can be, or how unreasonable or impulsive she or he has become. Even if people are aware that their behaviour is unacceptable, their indifference and insensitivity towards and lack of respect for others indicate that they have lost more insight than their confessions might indicate. The result of these family and social conflicts is usually isolation of the unaware person whose emotional condition may have already led to the building of walls. If you are in this position—that is, if you feel others aren't acknowledging your progress in self-healing and,

therefore, you are hostile towards them—there is a chance you won't have faithful people around to advise you. Your absence of insight could cause you to make poor choices with respect to selecting techniques or even continuing self-treatment for your emotional problems. It could also cause you to make poor decisions in other areas because you have misjudged your abilities.

Find a helper or confidant—To a large extent, damaged self-awareness is really an inability to accurately self-check and analyze oneself. People with very disturbed feelings, who show a lack of insight, need others to help them gain a better understanding of their own behaviours. To make this happen, ask someone (other than a person with a safety-oriented personality) whom you trust and respect to tell you frankly which of your qualities are acceptable and which are not. This is an act of courage—it can be difficult to hear such things about yourself—but it can help you backpedal from possible conflict. The person you choose needs your full permission to be honest. This would call for you, the sufferer, to sincerely accept that your altered self-awareness needs improvement in order for your recovery to progress.

Before starting, you and your helper should have a frank discussion about your goals, expectations, or wishes. Without a common understanding, you cannot assume that you and this helper (even if she or he is a professional therapist) will be able or willing to address all areas and influence each other in a direction in which either of you may be unwilling or scared to go. It would also be helpful to determine if either you or your helper has a tendency to minimize or deny.

Here is another problem. Self-awareness may be clouded by certain routine ways of reacting. Put yourself in the position of someone who lacks insight and is also frequently fearful. Unless you are satisfied that nothing important is at risk, you would very likely not admit to failures. Would your self-description reflect a true picture? Perhaps this matter will easily become a non-issue with an understanding, patient, and benevolent confidant.

Testing your self-awareness—Here are some ways that you can examine your level of self-awareness:

- Install a video camera in strategic places where you interact with others. **IMPORTANT:** All involved must give consent to being recorded, although a security surveillance system, if you have it, might serve to monitor interactions as well.
- Watch videos of faulty interpersonal exchanges between others.
- Use simple, straightforward questioning or questionnaires to reveal the extent and frequency of your lack of self-awareness.

Honesty is the best policy—In view of these possible drawbacks in using a close friend as a “co-therapist,” I suggest this: You and the helper should agree beforehand that if this system of helping is interfering with your previously good relationship, that relationship should come first, and you should find someone else who could take on the helper role. Remember that you asked your helper for honest feedback, so don’t get angry with that person for telling the

truth, and don't take her or his words out of context or as putdowns.

Any of the barriers discussed so far can stop you from obtaining proper treatment and prevent satisfactory healing. It is important to always find out as much as you can about yourself and the treatment so that you can knowledgeably commit to a treatment process, whether offered by a professional or through self-healing.

Thinking Inside a Closed Box

Your way of thinking can help or hinder progress in many areas of healing. Sometimes we have expectations or beliefs that prevent us from pursuing a reasonable course of action or accepting a reasonable point of view. We need to correct these thinking errors, as they are sometimes called, whenever they occur. If we don't, we restrict creative thinking and limit interaction with those who are more emotionally mature and/or intellectually intact. For you, this means that instead of thinking flexibly—"thinking outside the box"—your style of responding to life events leaves you with the less desired choice: "thinking inside the box."

The following are probably **the most frequent errors in thinking**:

- 1. All-or-nothing thinking:** A mode of thinking in which there is no in-between. In this mode, an individual sees the result of most activities as either bad or good; black or white; worthless or valuable. Usually, a person chooses one end of these extremes and cannot see the shades of difference in the position she or he has chosen. For example,

one may think, “I’m a total loser for trusting him,” even though things turned out well when trust was previously placed in this person. Or one may say, “He must have hit my car out of spite; there’s no other possibility.”

2. **Overgeneralization:** Applying a conclusion from a single example or a few instances to a wider range or to a different set of circumstances. “If a man invites you to lunch, he is only after one thing; I learned that from my boss’ behaviour.” “That fast-talking salesperson, who must have sold me a lemon, is dishonest. You see them all the time on TV.”
3. **Jumping to conclusions:** You learn that a friend and his wife have separated, and you think, “He must have cheated on her. How can he be such a jerk?” Someone does not call as expected, and you conclude that something dreadful has happened. The problem here is that even when your conclusions might be reasonable, you arrived at them without conclusive evidence and held on to them as if no other evidence were needed. It is best to make conclusions only when you have enough information.
4. **Catastrophic thinking (a.k.a. the-sky-is-falling reaction):** Describing situations with exaggeration, making relatively small errors or minor issues seem like disasters, and making even ordinary matters seem like terrible threats. You present problems as being beyond salvation. For example, you accuse a friend of ruining your life because she attended a party at the house of a person with whom you had a falling out.

5. **Minimizing:** Reducing the importance of a serious event, often to avoid unpleasant consequences or to make a point. “This time, too, he was only a little tipsy when he slapped me. He really didn’t mean to be abusive.” “Kids will be kids. There’s no need for you to overreact because my child broke your windshield.”
6. **Qualifying/disqualifying the positive:** Making light of a positive quality or accomplishment or putting a negative spin on it. For example, someone compliments you for a task well done, and you reply as if the result were a fluke or does not merit praise (qualify). Or you get upset that the compliment was not more encompassing, thereby disqualifying the favourable comment from being accepted as a compliment.
7. **Mental filter:** Focusing on one aspect of something, usually a negative one, and ignoring the positive aspects. For example, you see a nail head sticking out of an otherwise flawless patio floor. To you, this means the workmanship on the patio is completely shoddy, and this gives you grounds to be very angry or sad.
8. **Mind reading:** Assuming that you know why someone did or said something without asking the person her- or himself. “I know why you did it; it was to make me look stupid.”
9. **Perceptual-emotional reasoning:** Using your feelings as evidence of a fact. *Feelings*, however, may be interpreted also as how you “feel about” something—your belief, judgement, or impression about information that you tend to consider as reality. In other words, the feelings

that accompany your thoughts or observations usually become the basis for understanding your reality. For example, someone walks by you who has a shifty look and is dressed shabbily. His appearance makes you nervous and apprehensive, and you use these feelings as evidence that the man is a criminal. This is a perception-(through)-emotion way of reasoning. It is based solely on the information that the scene presents to you emotionally, not necessarily on the facts about this particular event. The error in this form of reasoning is that you are applying an assumption that may not be true of this man, since you have no other “facts” to go by. It could be that the man is homeless or that he was the victim of a crime. Or maybe he’s simply a sloppy dresser who worries that others might be judging him. Of course, this does not mean you are always wrong in thinking this way. The point is that the emotion pushed you in the direction of the assumption. And emotions, being what they are, pushed you in that direction so that you could act quickly and protect yourself. The analytical-thinking manner of reasoning, by comparison, takes longer (neurologically speaking), and your brain may not know how to go that long way or is not strongly wired for it.

Or consider another example: You feel frustrated because the mailperson did not come when expected, and you are sure that the rest of the day will go badly. This emotional reaction will tend to guide your thinking until different emotions are triggered. In keeping with this perceptual-emotional reasoning, whatever your strong

A feeling that arises from an event does not necessarily describe the event itself.

feeling leads you to believe about a person or situation becomes the truth. And those “facts” come from the feelings that are produced by what you see, hear, smell, touch, and feel, and your emotional reactions tell you what to think about them. In short, the perceptual information you receive from your inner and outer environment influences the way you believe it to be.

There will be some situations, however, when you will be able to distinguish a true fact (an actual occurrence, beyond question or doubt) from your interpretation of it. Very likely, the only way you will know for sure that it's not your emotions speaking is when others confirm your point of view. That said, there is always the outside chance that the others sharing your viewpoint are also reacting emotionally. On the other hand, you cannot exclude the possibility that you may be the one with the non-emotional response. There is just no hard-and-fast rule to go by. Just recognize that your tendency is to interpret events as either good or bad based on your emotional response. This means that for you, an agreeable feeling generally suggests a positive incident, and an unpleasant feeling suggests an unwelcome one. In actuality, you need to be aware that a feeling that arises from an event does not necessarily describe the event itself.

10. Personalization: Sometimes people personalize problems by assuming responsibility for a matter for which they are not responsible. In these circumstances, some people might interpret a negative situation as connected to some action or non-action on their part. In doing so, they blame themselves for its occurrence or consequence. Another form of this error in thinking is to blame yourself for a problem someone else caused, simply because you were involved in a related situation. For example, after a heated argument between a couple, one of them angrily drives away and causes an accident. The other takes the blame for the accident although she or he had advised the angry spouse not to go out in that mood but was ignored. Or perhaps a company loses a lot of money in a poorly conducted business transaction, and the manager blames her- or himself for hiring the employee involved in the loss, even though the employee's credentials were perfect. In this case, the manager could go so far as to reject any other factor that might have contributed to the loss. Another way some people personalize is to make themselves the focus of other people's stories. For example, to a friend's report that his wife left him, you say, "I know what you mean. The same thing happened to me when Maggie threatened to leave me."

Self-talk as an aid rather than a barrier to healing

The talking, or in some cases, the chattering, that goes on in our heads raises an interesting question. Why do we need

to talk to ourselves? The answer is probably that everything the body does in response to instructions from the brain must be filtered through our conscious minds to provide the information we need to survive. Brought down to smaller units of perception, this filtering process likely constitutes our awareness/understanding of our thoughts and feelings before and after an experience. Through self-talk, we are likely able to communicate an appropriate reaction to ourselves—that is, what we need to do, what we are going to do, what we have done or could have done, as well as the hows and whys of what we did. In other words, it is likely that self-talk offers us continuous commentary from which we will consciously choose—of our own “free will”—the path of our moment-to-moment life.

But is there such a thing as free will? Would it surprise you to learn that our will is not all that free? I say this because our self-information has been stamped with priorities and perspectives that we obtained from our parents (or guardians) and from the environment (inside and outside of us). For example, much of what you have in your subconscious mind (one of the members of your internal environment) came from childhood. That information consists of rules that include rewards and punishments for certain behaviours, some of which are no longer relevant to adult lives.

As an example, let's say that when you were a child, you had a terrible experience when a pharmacist gave the wrong prescription to a close family member, who died as a result. Now that you are an adult, that memory and the message

it imparted—that pharmacists cannot be trusted—has remained to the degree that whenever a pharmacist fills a prescription for you, you have a strong urge not to take it. You might think you have control over this urge because you freely and independently produced it. In reality, the urge (together with the response it caused you to make) is not a result of free will. It is the result of your subconscious mind providing a response (from parental sources earlier in your life) for your conscious mind to adopt. It is believed, however, that when we become aware of these unconscious suggestions (such as unexplainable fears), we can deliberately use self-talk to overcome them. In this case, you can convince yourself to ask questions of the pharmacist that will calm your fears. Because you are trying to heal from disturbing emotions, you need to be aware that “information” about your troubles comes from both minds—conscious and subconscious—but the self-talk in your conscious mind can override subconscious “threats.”

Let self-talk work for you

It is relatively easy to turn your self-talk around so that it can be used to support yourself (rather than fight yourself) and to replace the judge in your head with a friendly, more accepting voice. This is achievable through a technique called Thought Replacement Therapy (Chapter 14). To use it, you need to learn to capture what you say to yourself during the internal dialogue that leads to your attitude of self-condemnation. This task requires practice because self-talk can be very fast-paced and brief—it can pass by you very quickly.

Repeated attempts at recalling short clips of the mental discussion will likely improve your ability to recall more of your self-talk. Once you know the nature of your self-talk, you may proceed to challenge the kind that is self-defeating. The truth is, you are not obliged to agree with or even respond to your subconscious judges every time they speak. If you don't agree with the judges, you can put up a challenge by asking yourself the following types of questions:

Is that really true? Why must I believe it?

Is there another way to think about this?

What is the worst thing that could happen, and would that really be awful?

What results do I expect from my present way of thinking about the issue?

There are times when you can find the answers to the above questions on your own, but sometimes you may need a coach or an unbiased third party to help you.

Another way to get rid of negative self-talk is to say things to yourself, such:

“Stop. I don't want to continue thinking these shameful thoughts about myself anymore.”

“I don't wish to be reminded of that incident anymore.”

“I just need to prepare for the interview more carefully, and I will get a job.”

“The worst that can happen is I will not get selected, and although I will be sorry, it is not the end of the world.”

“I always think I am no good, but look at how well I handled that rude salesperson.”

“That is not true.”

“I tend to have so much self-doubt, but look how well I handled that new client. He increased his order! I’ve done it once. I can do it again.”

And each time you denounce your self-talk, you can use Thought Replacement to move your thinking into agreeable territory.

*Remember: How you think about yourself
is what you will become!*

Self-talk must be positive—The more positive messages you learn to give yourself, the more hopeful and self-respecting you will become. Therefore, what you need is positive self-talk that empowers you and makes you feel good so that you can progress with self-healing. What you don’t need is negative self-talk that belittles you, takes away your joy, and stops or reverses your healing.

Not only is negative self-talk a barrier to self-healing, it also drains energy from many other places where you could gain self-confidence. By the same reasoning, try to escape the negative talk of others—it eats away at your positive intentions and sows seeds of negativity where there were none. Seek the company of people who put courageous and self-complimentary thoughts into your mind that enrich your self-talk. Remember: How you think about yourself is what you will become!

Other ways to use self-talk—Yet another way to use positive (or neutral) self-talk is in planning your immediate future. For example, you could decide on what you want to accomplish the next day. To do this, try giving yourself a message just before falling asleep at night about something you need to do the next day. For example, say to yourself, “Tomorrow I will not get angry. Instead, I will smile at and have patience with everyone I meet.” This plan is likely to work better if you repeat your intention several times and have it on your mind when you fall asleep. You will be surprised at how easy it is to keep that self-talk wish the next day. You may just find yourself smiling and being patient more. And if it doesn’t work quite as effectively, you can always use the memory of the message to remind yourself of what you need to do.

Sometimes, this technique works in overcoming the common human tendency to procrastinate. There appears to be some emotional reasoning supporting procrastination, whereby a person relies on the feeling of the moment to decide whether or not to act. For example, someone might say, “I don’t feel like attending tomorrow’s meeting,” by which she or he means, “Based on the way I am feeling right now, I will find it boring (uncomfortable, too stressful, etc.) to go to tomorrow’s meeting.” If there are important reasons for that person to attend, however, she or he could make time just before falling asleep and right after waking up to strengthen the determination to attend the meeting and, hopefully, override the previously wrong thinking. Of course, the thoughts that fed the original, emotionally based

reasons for not attending could also be disputed, replaced, or stopped in self-talk, as described above.

When the feelings that create such limiting ideas and inappropriate behaviours are very strong, the thoughts used to counter them need to bring forth equal or more powerful feelings in order to produce the required appropriate behaviour. So your best bet in such a situation is to search for a strong positive memory of when you performed the type of appropriate behaviour you need at this point (e.g. attending the meeting) so you can use it to convince yourself that you did it once (or more times) so you can do it again.

You can even make self-talk work for you after a bad experience, such as when you failed at a task or were unable to meet a goal. At such times, self-talk can become self-punishing because you may be unable or unwilling to accept the feelings of disappointment or deficiency from the lack of success. That leads to self-rejection. As a result, you might resort to calling yourself degrading names or trying to do some form of harm to yourself, such as relapsing, falling deeper into an addiction, or increasing your distress. These actions can cause a significant setback in your healing process. Therefore you need to know that self-talk aimed at self-condemnation, shaming, and guilt is opposed to self-improvement and emotional healing.

Scientific research shows that in response to this negativity, the brain shifts into a pattern of activity, producing the behaviours that are in line with the failure you do not want. In other words, criticizing ourselves too hard for not succeeding at something ends up causing biological changes

in our brains that make us fail even more. So how should you use self-talk to manage failure? Research indicates that when we accept how we feel about failing, forgive our mistakes, and use words of compassion or self-encouragement on ourselves, we succeed far more. In putting the idea of self-compassion into action, your goal is not self-indulgence or denial; your goal is to liberate yourself from guilt and shame so that you can continue to make a better person of yourself.



Chapter 7

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE CONSCIOUS AND SUBCONSCIOUS MINDS TO PROVIDE US WITH PEACE OF MIND

Mysterious Forces You Can Employ

The Strength of the Subconscious Mind—The Programs in the Background

It is believed that the strength of the subconscious mind can prevent healing. Like computer programs working in the background, the subconscious mind can affect your current conscious thoughts.

The workings of the subconscious mind—Although the word “*subconscious*” suggests something that we are not conscious of sometimes our behaviour reveals the workings of the subconscious mind. You may find yourself automatically responding to a given situation in a certain way and,



Let who is in charge
take the first step.

to you, the behaviour feels natural. However, as you explain such behaviours to yourself, you may realize that the explanation does not fully account for a behaviour. This tells you that the reasons for the behaviour are not in the present.

Another way the subconscious mind manifests itself is when the conscious mind has struggled unsuccessfully with a problem, yet a solution seems to come from nowhere. This kind of problem-solving often occurs when we wake up after sleeping on a problem. Or take the instances when we have a nagging fear that something will go awry. Our conscious mind denies it, yet sometimes the feared event occurs (even if the ERN factor could also be present). There are other times however when the recurring thought is not about caution and it turns out that reacting as mentally prompted leads to a favourable outcome

Apparently, the subconscious mind's ability to influence our conscious life comes from a mutual relationship between the two that is believed to have developed over many millennia predisposing our brains to scout out potential life needs that require our conscious attention. These "on-demand" and "knowledgeable" reactions (believed to originate in our subconscious mind), however, are not as mysterious as they may seem.

How our Subconscious Behaviours Are Formed

Suppose that when you were young, your father slapped you in public for stealing, and you felt great shame. The memory of that event is likely to haunt you for a long time

and to continue to disturb you every time you think about it. The more ashamed you felt about that event, the stronger and longer you would experience the disturbance. As is usually the case, every time thereafter that you felt ashamed, the memory of that initial shame would be added to it. Soon you would feel a need to avoid the shame memory itself because of the mental pain it produces, and every ensuing shame experience would increase this desire. By this point, all the elements that connect you to shame (from the original crushing event to each new occurrence, emotion, and memory) may each trigger the pain of shame, which becomes more and more difficult to tolerate and, therefore, must be put away.

This pain avoidance is like trying to hide the shame event “underground” so that you don’t have to face it. But you cannot hide the shame feeling. The hiding starts with the original event (the slapping), which is what you try to “forget.” And now, every time you think you might be shamed, you try to find ways (learned through practice) to prevent a new event from registering as a shame event. After practising covering up the pain, you develop, over time, thought patterns and behavioural tactics to help you avoid experiencing the total pain of shame. By this method, the “hidden” experience operating in the background begins to influence your foreground reactions. And, indeed, the memory of that original event may have been blocked or manipulated in so many ways, for so long, that it is actually accepted or coded as forgotten, though not deleted (and therapy or other emotionally demanding situation can sometimes uncover it).

Because you are avoiding the shame reaction and never purposefully recalling it, you can be caught off guard. Presumably this would happen when your conscious mind is “off-line” and not providing you with “customized” reactions that would make the shame less punishing. If, however, a shame event similar to the original one were to occur at this point, the hidden or subconscious programming would take over and you would likely react as you did when that original experience took place. This would happen because your conscious mind was not blocking access to the similar experience in your subconscious mind. Otherwise, with the conscious mind in charge, you’d continue to avoid acknowledging shame-based events in your life that are likely to trigger the shame-pain you wish to suppress.

Thus far, you have read my view of how an emotional reaction (in this case, shame) comes to be stored in the subconscious mind. Accordingly, I also apply this explanation to any emotion, in the sense that to get into the subconscious mind, something compelling must happen (typically in early development) that becomes connected to other similar events, feelings, or memories. By the end of early childhood, new, strong negative events and connections between unpleasant experiences have made their impression. The power of all later occurrences is measured by these impressions. A stronger link between similar contents in both minds (conscious and subconscious) may form when a more intense emotional reaction takes place that is powerful enough to almost completely replace the original. Such strong links make current troubling experiences more painful.

One or more qualities of a new, powerful event becomes the new standard for entry into the subconscious mind. Even when the emotion is positive, you may want to put it away because it is too distracting and is interfering with the normal flow of moment-to-moment reacting. In effect, each very strong feeling triggers this automatic process of moving material into the subconscious mind, based on the extreme characteristics of that emotional reaction. Otherwise, those feelings would stay in the memory of the conscious mind and would later be transferred to long-term memory storage, which is different from the information that is under the management of the subconscious mind. An important difference is that long-term memory may be directly retrieved at a conscious level whereas the material in the subconscious mind can be reached only when the conscious mind is not active. This is presumably the reason why hypnosis can be used to bring forward information that a person cannot recall in the conscious state.

When you were an infant, experiences came and went with their attached emotions. That is, when shame, anger, joy, sadness, and other emotional states arose and then left, they no longer had meaning. As you grew older, however, events began to acquire meaning, and so did the linked emotions and your reflections, especially on the unpleasant events. The memory of those events and their accompanying, interpretation-based feelings began to accumulate and last longer. They soon needed to be collected together, based on their similar meanings or other characteristics that gave power to their effect on you. Using shame, once again, as an

example, your sense of disturbance became more noticeable because of the many humiliating experiences and memories that occurred in your life as you grew older. It came to a point that your system of cataloguing, “hiding,” or putting away (either underground or in the background) needed to keep pace with the increasing number of life’s activities. As a result, the system had to become more sophisticated.

As such, it began to take much less time to determine that an experience needed to be hidden, and the mechanism responsible for hiding unwanted stuff began to operate almost independently. To block awareness of the overwhelming, unpleasant emotions that a full exposure would have caused, it would whisk away a pain-causing experience quickly, before you could give much conscious thought to the meaning of the event or experience. And here began the apparently self-activating collection system that later became the reservoir of “forgotten-hidden-put-away events” in the background. This reservoir controls how we react to new experiences and events before they are pulled away to join the ranks of the “subconscious.”

Subconscious and Conscious Minds

Although this topic has come up a few times before, I would like to present a larger picture from a different angle.

As you have gathered by now, it seems that your conscious and subconscious minds represent at least two levels of awareness. The subconscious mind reacts to the information in it as if it is happening in the present, whereas, at the level of the conscious mind, you can lose awareness of the

present, as this mind has the ability to actively ponder past, present, and future events. The subconscious seems to consist of “programs,” (like those working behind the scenes in computers) that respond automatically to environmental and mental signals. Apparently, these are hardwired programs that operate by making stimulus-response comparisons. That is, when the conscious mind loses awareness, the subconscious reacts to an event (the stimulus) that requires a reaction by producing all the responses that have been previously linked to that stimulus. Furthermore, the most powerful response(s) grab the most attention. For example, when you respond to humiliation, the subconscious mind releases all the humiliation responses, including those that were specially “hidden” due to their “forbidden-to-come-back-to-awareness” characteristics. This latter group grabs the most attention and is most likely to attract and include the current shame experience that triggered it, provided this new event is significant enough. The previous occupants of the subconscious mind represented information learned through direct parental instruction or direct personal exposure to intensely meaningful experiences, many which occurred at a very early age (as explained under the topic “Self-Talk”).

It is believed that stimuli from the conscious mind can activate the subconscious response system, which provides a response, unless prevented by the conscious mind. By contrast, the conscious mind’s response style is not automatic. The conscious mind is deliberate, logical, creative, and capable of designing a response that best suits what it knows

about your needs. The subconscious simply applies the known or “programmed” response that matches the stimulus that triggers it. There does not appear to be any other selection rule. The only way its automatic, uncensored way of responding is altered is by the activity of the choice-based, protective, conscious mind, the only passage through which it appears possible for additional information to enter the subconscious mind. But the conscious mind also seems capable of changing, distorting, “lying,” and being accurate in order to make your life liveable. It is this flexible characteristic of the conscious mind that gives it the ability to help you heal from emotional illness. In other words, at the conscious level of awareness, you can actually stop the automatic response pattern of the subconscious mind that can produce great distress. You do so by using the knowledge or desire that supports a need you have at any one instant. I hope the point is not missed that for the conscious mind to conquer the subconscious, we must choose to consciously exercise a strong desire to override the mechanical action of the subconscious mind.

The more you practise or strongly desire using your consciously chosen responses or awareness to change the programmed reaction produced by your subconscious mind, the less often the subconscious will need to step in. The truth is that **your conscious mind consists of only your thoughts**. That is to say, **you have only your thoughts with which to voluntarily influence your subconscious mind**. The determination you have to change unwanted information in your subconscious is really only an aid to how

the conscious mind does its work to produce change in that other mind. It seems that subconscious content is altered by the sheer volume or weight of information from the conscious mind. In effect the information in the subconscious “under attack” becomes heavily diluted by counteracting information from the conscious mind. Given this, you need to frequently engage in the kind of self-talk that will implant the new learning intended to cancel (or drown) out the automatic, negative, subconscious reaction. So then, each time you want to remove negative messages that minimize your healing, you need only keep repeating and agreeing with the new, favourable (will-make-you-better) messages you are creating in your self-talk. Practise them consciously and consistently.

Again, because of the mind–body connection, it appears that your thoughts have the power to change anything in you, whether it be physical, behavioural or mental-emotional. And though the conscious mind is much slower in reacting than the subconscious mind, it is very powerful indeed. Apparently, this distribution of power in favour of the conscious mind developed in the course of human evolution when pathways were laid between the different areas of the brain—capable of specialized functions—and other parts of the body, through the central nervous system (CNS). So now the conscious mind (which became our channel of self-awareness) can “talk” to the rest of the body and be “heard” through the CNS. This is why, with practice and clear focus, you can engage in the self-healing of your physical states and of disturbances to your emotional peace.

Touching one another's minds—As I discuss in Chapter 12, there is no real separation between mind and body. Moreover, as we know from different fields, such as Eastern medicine and quantum physics, even the distinction between physical objects is not permanent, because matter is, in fact, energy. Therefore, everything we perceive as matter is, in reality, energy-based. As Lipton (2009) noted, “[...] the Quantum perspective reveals that the Universe is an integration of inter-dependent energy fields that are tangled in a meshwork of interactions.” (p. xxx) From this viewpoint, we may suppose that because of our connected energy fields, which are in touch with universal energy, we can reach out and touch one another, not only physically but also mentally and spiritually. Ideally, you may expect that my thoughts can enter your mind, and we can mutually influence each other's thinking and behaviour, even when there is a considerable distance between us. Perhaps this is why it seems possible to “attract” people and events we need for self-healing or, for that matter, to accomplish any goals we have set. May I point out that on one level, right now, as you read this book, I am mentally “reaching out and touching” your mind!

The power to change your life is within you—The upshot of the above discussion is that the power you have (again, on more than one level) to change the course of your life is both within and outside yourself to a degree that is probably much beyond what you have ever imagined. It was my experience throughout the writing of this book that people showed up with information regarding needs I had

not expressed to them but had strongly in mind. Hopefully, in the same way, your unwavering desire to get better will spiritually link you with others who will show up with just what you need for self-healing. You can channel your thoughts through methods provided by your belief system to produce even more powerful results.

At the same time, I must also point out there are forces both inside and outside of us that can leave a negative stamp on our self-healing efforts and make them less satisfying, if not ineffective. But, please, do not allow thoughts about failure or defeat to take root in your mind as you try to improve the quality of your mental life. Focus your thoughts on the healing you desire, and attract positive influences to aid your recovery.

The Ego

Our ego is our strong attachment to who we think we ought to be, but who we are not. It is the false self, the mask we tend to present first in the critical areas of functioning when we interact with others or assess our abilities. It is the lie we tell ourselves about our put-on qualities and tell others about how great we think we are. Our ego is the defensive attitude or technique we use to protect our ideal image, particularly from shame. Ego is what feeds our vanity and inflates our self-esteem beyond its true boundaries.

When there is a large gap between our ideal image of ourselves and reality, we usually experience shame and fear. Shame is a contaminating and toxic emotion that shows up in very many life situations. We need to address it and

neutralize it with all the power of self-honesty and insight we can muster. If we fail to do this, there is the possibility that shame and other “hidden” emotions could foul up or obstruct the healing progress.

The ego and shame—We expect the ego we build to appear as a genuine part of who we are. When a person suspects or is aware that somehow the characteristics of his or her ego have become obvious, he or she is likely to feel distressed and fearful. On top of this, there is confusion due to a dilemma. On the one hand, the falseness of the self will be exposed, but on the other—in the “absence” of the ego—the real self will seem inadequate or deficient. In that person’s mental state, this will be seen as causing him or her to become a target for harm and to feel shame, either way. In this regard, the more shame- or fear-driven a person is, the stronger that person’s need to keep the ego firmly rooted. However, when a person’s ego is in the forefront, the person may become ashamed of this false self, try to present it with unnecessary force, or cover his or her deficiency with excessive defensiveness. Sometimes this is done with a cleverly constructed approach. Since shame seems to call our attention to our vulnerability, especially during times when good situations turn bad, it usually makes people believe they are flawed, deficient, or worthless. As such, no action can change them—only their thinking can. A healthy response to shame is to accept imperfection or deficiency and willingly learn from it. In other words, replacing or changing the thinking about being deficient allows you to see that you can actually make a better person of yourself, rather than just pretending to be one.

Ego disorders—If you have an ego disorder, it may relate to only one area of your life (such as, your job, level of schooling, income, ethnic heritage, amount of authority or influence, and so on). Or, as is sometimes the case, the disorder can relate to several areas of your life. In some of these areas in which you make false claims, you may also have either an intense or limited attachment to the desired or ideal self. Since, to some degree, we all have an ideal picture in our minds of who we want to be as we participate in various situations, the difference among us in the expression of our ego is in the amount of gap between our real self and our desired self. A small gap occurs when we tend to think about ourselves and/or act in a way to boost our image beyond its true qualities, but only in the fewest areas of our life and/or with the lowest degree of intensity. The gap widens as more aspects of life are seen as deficient and, therefore, needing more cover-up and a fiercer emotional reaction against detection or exposure of the true self. One may say that the greater the intensity of attachment to ego presence, the more disordered the pattern of ego expression will be—especially when multiple areas of life are impacted.

In other words, the farther you move away from your true self, the more serious your ego problem becomes. And, accordingly, the more serious your ego problem becomes, the more fiercely you try to defend against shame and fear of exposure, which is what the ego lives to avoid. This double self, comprising who you are (actually) and who you want to be (ideally), shows up as a misalignment when you sense that your deficient self (that is, who you are but want to

hide) is being exposed. This produces emotional pain that you strive to get rid of by shifting the forces that you recognize as being responsible for maintaining or magnifying the mismatch.

Mind the gap—Another way of putting it is to say that your ego is your protected, self-invested desire to keep the gap between your actual and ideal selves secret. It is the possibility of the exposure of that gap that triggers fear and/or shame. For example, we may want to be wealthy, famous, artistic, physically attractive, young, and strong. In reality, though, we are none of these. Our deep need for the qualities we desire but perceive we do not have usually prevents us from facing life rationally. Therefore, we live artificially, as if the gap between who we want to be and who we are does not exist. We want to ensure that others don't see through the mask that hides our shame and recognize the gap between our desire and our reality, so we react negatively when someone (knowingly or innocently) discovers or comments on the gap, thereby exposing our feeling of deficiency and triggering fear/shame. This, in turn, immediately produces a defensive reaction, usually involving annoyance or deception. In effect, wearing a false self wars against our self-esteem and diminishes all our successes, which, in the first place, were never sufficient enough to remove our sense of being deficient.

Some people can't accept that they cannot be all they want to be or have all they want to have. Sometimes their idealized goals are at odds with one another. There are more than a few people who never learn to be comfortable with

their attributes and achievements and, instead, are sometimes ashamed of them. Not only do some people reject who and what they are, they even would deny the specific reasons for their inadequacies (though there is, of course, a range of such self-dissatisfaction). When we accept who we are (both our good and bad qualities), the gap between our ideal and real selves is minimized. This reduces feelings of fear/shame and, in turn, gives us a “small” ego that does not display a disorder.

Types of false images—I think I should point out the difference between a false image demanded by the ego and a false image resulting from a simple lie. In the case of lying, a person does not buy into a deception permanently (for example, someone exaggerates his or her qualifications for a job or makes false claims to impress future in-laws). Such lies are meant for a specific circumstance. Furthermore, most people in these situations are uncomfortable with their lie and, in some cases, either confess or are relieved when they are found out. It is still an indication of the ego at work but at a low level.

The false image of the ego—The job of the ego is to prevent the deception in a person’s image from ever being found out and to guard against the person having to face the full extent of the shame and fear from his or her inadequacy. The person with the ego can tolerate the deceit, along with the accompanying fear or shame, to a degree, whenever the ego is “in use” (though he or she may only barely be conscious of it, and only from time to time). When the conscious

mind's logical system cannot provide sufficient protection against blows to the individual's self-esteem and goes "off-line," more elements of the "submerged" ego (contents of the subconscious mind) show themselves to its owner, who becomes irrationally uncomfortable with this much exposure of the true self. In a sense, the lie of the ego blends into the character of the person and is not easy to disown. This is because, in contrast to what a person feels with a simple ordinary lie, the fear and shame that arise upon revealing an ego-protected falsehood are unbearable.

How we behave in the shame hot seat or in a state of fear—Usually, when we are on the hot seat of shame (or expect to be), we berate ourselves; withdraw or escape as fast as we can from the shame limelight; find ways to avoid the emotional hurt altogether; or attack others we perceive to be guilty of exposing our shame over not measuring up to who we want to be.

Fear arises at the possibility of exposing the degree of misalignment or mismatch between the real self and false self. When we are fearful, we tend to hide by disguising those things we don't want exposed to attack or ridicule (using humour, strategy, or pretence). At other times, we hide by withdrawing. We may use feeble or last-ditch aggression or become defensively paralyzed to save ourselves when we are faced with the overwhelming odds of exposing our true selves.

On the other hand, a misalignment at the conscious level can motivate us to achieve success in deficient areas or help us develop other essential or admirable skills after we have accepted ourselves "as is." But alas, when the bar is too high

to reach, emotional turmoil results from our perceived inadequacy, and we can go through a whole lifetime unable to see our true selves as worthy.

Learn to accept who you are—You need to understand that the more you learn to accept who or the way you are, the greater the agreement between different areas of your life and the less artificial and more realistic your self-image will be. This means that you will experience little or no ongoing fear of shame (or any other negative feelings) related to your self-image, a reality that will bring you more peace, both alone and when interacting with others. In displaying this emotional pattern, you will be demonstrating characteristics of a properly developed ego rather than struggling to hide deficiencies.

The difference between healthy and unhealthy selfhood—There is a difference between someone with a deficient or unhealthy self or ego and someone who is genuine and self-confident. The former would tend to imitate what he or she believes a self-confident person should be, while hiding the true self and displaying phoney self-confidence. The truly self-assured person, however, expresses a sincere self-image and knows and accepts her or his good and bad qualities (probably as a result of self-aware and encouraging parenting). This person knows what his or her personal standards, skills, and knowledge consist of and is comfortable with them or realizes which parts of his or her development need to be improved. A poorly developed personality (self or ego), on the other hand, may have difficulty accommodating feelings of inadequacy and would, instead,

tend to hide his or her inability to achieve standards, be they set by others or by the person him- or herself. This urge to hide a deficiency may also be expressed as an equally strong desire to show off a strength that will emphasize competence and make the inadequacy less noticeable. As a general rule, whenever the ego action is provoked, even in seemingly trivial cases, a person who is vulnerable to fear and/or shame will tend to react by covering up or showing off.

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We are all human, with varying levels of false selves—I do not mean to suggest that people with apparent ego deficiency have no saving graces or that those with a mature or balanced sense of self have no flaws. We all have varying levels of false selves. People with acceptable self-esteem (acceptable to self and others), who have no need to present a false self-image most of the time, will very likely suffer much less shame, anger, and self-disgust than their opposites. And when it comes to self-healing, people who have a less troubled life with respect to their ego will probably deal more successfully with emotional disturbances.

Perfection is impossible to reach, and we cannot be better than or even as good as everyone that comes our way. But the faulty ego does not know this.

Perfection is impossible to reach—People with a larger gap between the desired, ideal self and the true self, however, would likely have difficulty in many areas of self-healing. They would be unable to acknowledge their problem(s) and accept their inability to achieve fast healing success. They would also be likely to have problems asking for help or submitting to realistic or truthful self-analysis. **The secret need of a person with a defective ego seems to be to achieve perfection. Such an unrealizable goal causes a person to see life in a distorted way.** Perfection is impossible to reach, and we cannot be better than or even as good as everyone that comes our way. But the faulty ego does not know this.

Someone reading this section might say: “I take pride in how I do things, making sure I do them exactly right and do not fall short of the highest standard that can be achieved. What is wrong with that?” First, it is OK to want to do a perfect job. That’s different from wanting to be a perfect person and being unhappy and ashamed whenever you fail to be one. Secondly, whether it is pride or ego would depend on the type or degree of your reaction, especially when you fail to display the level of correctness or perfection you expected of yourself. The quicker you move from accepting

or agreeing that the result is less-than-perfect to being comfortable with your failure or level of success (or to setting a new standard or making a new plan), the healthier the response. Thirdly, the longer it takes or the more difficult it is for you to let go of the failure, the less healthy your response will be. It then becomes more of a problem if your lost or unachieved pride leads you to pretend there really was no failure and you continue to think and behave as if you are actually better or perfect, rather than admitting you have a flaw or deficiency. The fourth problem is that, at this stage, you are putting forward a false picture of yourself, and the more you do this, the stronger that self-image becomes. If the false image is carried long enough, it will become your adopted false self.

Becoming a better version of yourself—It is not necessary to use a false self to correct what you perceive as inadequate in your functioning. I believe it is possible to face up to areas of weakness at the tip of the iceberg (that is, the one we are aware of) over and over again, using all the methods of behaviour change we know. If your ego needs a makeover, it is perfectly legitimate to use the socially accepted admirable qualities of others to guide you to become a better version of yourself when you find yourself falling short. In other words, behave like your chosen hero(s), and focus on acquiring what you are lacking. For example, if you've been trying to reduce your angry reactions with little success, ask yourself how that person (the hero) would behave in a situation that would make (or is currently making) you angry. Then imitate the behaviour,

and keep using it as inspiration to practise calmer reactions. This is not a false self, because there is no deception. It is the dishonest approach to expressing an ideal self that you need to avoid. Along with this method of self-improvement, try to stop yourself from saying or doing something to cover up or show off. Instead, convince yourself to speak or act genuinely as a way of giving your real self a chance to grow. Again, no pretence is involved. The more often you succeed in fighting the urge to show superiority that you do not have, the less shame and/or fear you will feel, and the greater the chance of improving the odds of getting better faster through self-healing.

Now you know the truth. Will you use it to free yourself from emotional turmoil? I hope so. Otherwise, you might continue seeking perfection, perhaps for your entire lifetime, all the while hiding behind a false self. Your life will be so much easier if you learn to fight off this tendency.



Let who is in charge
take the first step.

After reading Chapter 7

1. Describe how you will go about bringing the power of your subconscious mind under your conscious control.

2. Write out a plan to gradually reduce your need for a false self. Set the plan out step-by-step with one step leading to the next. Or select separate areas of your life and—for each area—map out a plan for reducing the mismatch or closing the gap between true self and desired self.

CHAPTER 8

TAKING CHARGE OF WORRY AND ANGER

Know What You Really Want by Controlling Your Thinking

Part 1: Applying Thinking Strategies

Push Bad Thoughts Out of Mind to Keep Unwanted Feelings Out of Sight

*Except our own thoughts, there is nothing
absolutely in our power.*

—Rene Descartes

Ridding yourself of troubling emotional feelings is not always as difficult as you might think. For starters, it seems undeniable that our emotional reactions are, most often, the result of our thoughts. Even when emotions arise unconsciously, they cause thoughts that give the emotions



more life. For example, when fear arises from a harmless object, it's most likely an unconscious fear brought to our consciousness (triggered) by the object. Without an obvious explanation for feeling frightened, we are likely to either engage our thoughts in proposing reasons why the object would cause fear, or we may simply continue to focus unhappily on the fear experience, thus keeping the fear in constant view. It is also possible, however, to turn our attention to an unrelated matter or object to replace the fear and, in doing so, put ourselves on a new path of thinking—one that's free of fear. This should not be hard to do, as I'm pretty sure you change your thoughts several times a day. In fact, it probably occurs so often that you don't even notice it. You do realize, of course, that this suggestion is not about hiding true feelings in favour of fake ones—it's about learning to control your feelings with your thoughts.

The simple act of changing your thinking allows you to refocus your attention and cause the triggered fear to leave you. Although you might not describe it as such, you are employing a conscious strategy for removing unpleasant feelings. The principle is straightforward: by changing your thoughts, you also change the emotional reactions that those thoughts were causing.

Switching thoughts—Before you make emotional change, you may need to identify the emotions disturbing you, though not necessarily by name. For example, if you replace thoughts about an event that caused anger or sadness with thoughts unrelated to that event, you will create a new thinking environment free of anger or sadness. Here is

a guide to help you apply this technique:

1. Identify how you are feeling in the moment. (“What am I really feeling right now?”)
2. Only acknowledge this mental state; do not explain it. At this point, the feeling, alone, counts. (“I’m sad.” “I feel shame.” “I’m disappointed.” etc.)
3. Accept its effect on you. (“This sadness makes me want to lash out.”)
4. Proceed to exit that mental space. (“But, wait a minute! The idea of lashing out just makes things worse in my head. I must put my mind on something happy, different, calm, or positive right now. That will be better for me.”)

As you can see, this approach involves consciously and deliberately putting the distress-producing problem out of your mind. It is not an attempt to deny the existence of the emotion or to hide it from your view. On the contrary, in this process, you start with confirming the emotional problem, then proceed to stating the type of feelings you desire instead. It is not an attempt to make light of the problem that caused your unhappiness, either. The matter you are seriously addressing is about getting rid of a disturbing emotion. Here is another version of this process:

1. **“I don’t feel good.”** Recognize the absence of whatever you want. *Good* is a general term describing any emotion or situation. Wanting to feel good is natural and flows from your awareness that your current emotional state is unacceptable. Positive change requires that you state what you want—your goal—not what

you do not want.

2. **“I want to feel good.”** Each time you want to discontinue a certain bad emotion, you need to state the actual good emotion you want instead. “Good” can be replaced by “calm,” “happier,” “more understanding,” “relaxed,” “braver,” and so on. This goal can be applied to many other areas of life. For example, rather than repeating “I hate being poor,” or “I hate my job,” you will be better able to change these circumstances if you state what you really want: “I want to make \$100,000 (or any amount you believe will eliminate or reduce your feelings of poverty within a certain timeframe),” or “I want to be more accepting of my co-workers.” When we are not clear about what we want, the current feeling or condition sticks around, because nothing has been selected to replace it.
3. **“Which thoughts will make me feel good right now?”** Quickly reject any thought that does not help you achieve your goal, and search for a helpful one. Do not allow anything to block your view or lead you to stray from the goal. You need to continually keep the goal in view.
4. **“Which non-harmful actions will make me feel good right now?”** Some examples of non-harmful actions are listening to music, going for a walk, exercising, sharing intimate time with a loved one, surfing the Net, talking to friends, and reading a book.

How to Achieve Your Goal

You stand a better chance of achieving a goal if it is

1. specific;
2. necessary;
3. realistic and achievable;
4. in line with your normal behaviour (involves a familiar set of actions); and
5. measurable.

1. Specific Goals

A specific goal clearly identifies a desired result. Saying that you want to achieve A or B or even C (three different things without picking one) is not exact or fixed enough for you to know which actions to take to achieve which goal. That type of goal-setting is vague and not helpful in giving you direction. Making your goal as specific as possible will help you decide on the best actions to take to reach that goal. It may be that you want to pursue more than one goal to increase your good feelings. That's good. In fact, the more the merrier! The person who wanted A, B or C in the above example would have needed to set three separate goals if all three choices were equally appealing to her or him.

2. Necessary Goals

If you want to relieve yourself of a painful state, you must have a goal of wanting to feel better. Any desired goal needs to have a good reason behind it. For example, wanting to go into business but not being sure why indicates that you

don't have a need that the activity will fulfil. It is important to know the need for engaging in that project, as this will affect the level of your motivation and/or effort when you are working towards the goal.

3. Realistic and Achievable Goals

Suppose that you faced the difficult situation of wanting to feel good soon after the death of a close friend or loved one, possibly before the reality of the loss has set in. How realistic is the goal of feeling good at this point? Is there an important reason why you need to interrupt something as natural and necessary as mourning the death of someone you cared for? Indeed, even if this task is doable, does it make sense to try to feel good at this stage? If this state of mind is important to achieve (for example, because you are doing what the departed would have wanted), then it is reasonable to consider how you would go about achieving a state of feeling good under those circumstances. As always, **a goal-achievement process requires setting up a plan to help you succeed.** The plan needs to be complete, with step-by-step guidelines for reaching the desired goal successfully, and should include a timetable. Note: Recognizing how tight or loose the timeframe is (or whether to set one at all) will definitely affect how practical it will be to reach your objective. While this entire exercise of goal-setting may appear an unnecessary complication of a simple desire to feel better, a planning process will help you track your progress, even if at a mental level only. A more involved desire like going into business, however, would definitely require that

you tackle such realistic issues as these: “What do I know about running a business?” “What kind of business could I start?” Here, a written goal-setting plan is essential.

4. Goals That Line Up with Your Actual or Natural Way of Behaving

Although you may see a given goal as genuine and not just a dream, you need to be able to acknowledge whether or not what you wish for is within your comfort zone. If it is not, you need to develop the thinking style and purposefulness to perform a task that is not usual for you. In the case of reaching the goal of feeling good, most people will likely use the steps in the “I Want to Feel Good” approach described earlier in this chapter. A problem arises, though, if your goal is poorly chosen. For example, let’s say you are in your fifties and decide that your goal is to go to a bar to meet new people, even though you haven’t spent much time in bars in many years. You know almost nothing about the bar you’ve chosen, except that it is popular. Still, you consider your choice a non-harmful activity. Unfortunately, this could end up being a mistake, and you could find yourself in a situation you cannot handle or that makes you miserable—especially if the bar is a hangout where the twenty-something crowd is boisterous, drinks too much, and is uninhibited with sexual language and expressions of intimacy. At fifty-something, you might fail in your attempt at feeling good here because trying to fit into this scene is not your accustomed way of behaving. So the goal of going to a bar, any bar, to feel good was not a good one.

Achieving peace of mind in certain situations may be more difficult and require more detailed planning. In other words, the road that leads to feeling good may involve more steps than may be apparent, depending on your current mental state and life circumstances. Of course, you can do it. It just requires thinking about it, doing advanced planning, and committing to the goal of being happier. Similarly, the goal of starting a business will require trustworthy advice, proper research, and an unyielding determination, especially if you do not have the skills or previous experience.

5. Measurable Goals

The goal of improving your mood is not a once-and-for-all activity. No doubt you will feel a need to feel better on numerous occasions. When that happens, you will not need to go through a goal-setting process each time. You may just go ahead and repeat the actions, expecting the same results as when your previous goal-setting worked out for you. If your goal to improve your mood is to succeed on subsequent occasions, it may be important to know how much of an activity—practiced how often and with how many repetitions—was needed to provide enough consolation or cheerfulness, for example, to get you out of the depth of your depression. Perhaps you can see that measuring could help you understand why an approach is not working for you. You may have just needed to do more work to bring about the results you expected. But how do you actually measure a goal? Here's an example:

Say you set the goal of calling a friend and talking for five

minutes (the treatment) to take your mind off an upset. To measure the success of this treatment goal, you need to make note of the start and end times of the conversation in order to keep it to five minutes. It might turn out that the troubling thoughts left you for about one or two minutes and then returned. Your conclusion? You should have spent more time on the phone. So you call another friend and double the talking time to 10 minutes. At the end you feel good, and the unwanted thoughts didn't push their way back for quite some time. Having a good feeling for that long led you into topics far from those horrible ones. Now your self-treatment objective has been accomplished, and you know why.

The next time you wish to use this method for replacing your thoughts, you will no doubt make a point of staying on the phone for at least 10 minutes, because you have proved that measuring your objective by number of minutes definitely helped. The measurement criteria for getting a business successfully off the ground will be much more complex. For this you will need to consult reliable people and/or books.

The rules for setting and achieving a goal are the same, regardless of the nature of the goal, although the details will depend on the goal's complexity.

A Real Life Example of Identifying a Problem and Finding a Solution

Sometimes it will not be necessary to make goals for dealing with a particular misery. If you clearly know why you

don't feel good, the options for dealing with the problem are easy to apply and follow. To illustrate, I would like to tell you a true story about someone I knew (we'll call him George), a sensitive man who found himself in a troubling situation. George's friend Penny started phoning him too often, sometimes waking him up in the middle of the night. George became angry with Penny's behaviour and reported her to the phone company. Deep down, he was uncomfortable about doing this because even though he realized that Penny was troubled, his patience had worn thin. This situation nagged at George for quite some time, and his goal of feeling good bypassed him. After further discussion with the phone company, George decided on a call-screen feature for his phone to identify Penny's calls, which he could then choose to reject. This worked well for George, and he was comfortable with the arrangement.

George's first reaction to Penny's behaviour was anger, which drove him to be vindictive. After further exploring the issues however, he was able to understand why it had to happen to him. Essentially, Penny could not help the way she was. This caused George to realize that his anger was inappropriate. He was then able to approach the phone company without a spiteful intention and adopt another course of action. Without the driving force of anger, which initially arose partly because of his refusal to accept his situation, he found a practical solution for reducing intrusions into his privacy and peace. This gave him a positive sense of himself as someone who was considerate.

In the end, George acknowledged he was feeling good

When you get things out of your mind, they will be out of your sight.

and decided to increase his pleasure by celebrating the achievement of his goal—the realistic one he was helped to identify: protecting his privacy while not damaging his relationship with Penny. Incidentally, at the end of this whole episode, George was in the most positive spirits I had seen him in a long time. The resolution of the problem seemed to boost his self-esteem, as well as his outlook.

The value of celebrating—Trivial as it may seem, there is more than symbolic value to celebrating a final stage of self-release. This ritual serves as a conscious act of putting closure to an important phase of life, much like the ceremonial burning of one's mortgage papers when the amount is fully paid.

Considering how unpleasantly the matter could have unfolded for George had he not reached an agreeable solution to restore his peace, arriving at a properly thought-out goal (with help) was a great advantage to him. This story demonstrates the potential complexity of saying, “I want to feel good”. George wanted to feel good, so he pursued that goal. He pushed the inappropriate thoughts (the vindictive ones) out of his mind and kept only the ones that made him happy.

Together with showing the value of considering, choosing, and applying proper goals, a very good lesson from this story is that when you get things out of your mind, they will be out of your sight. Do you agree?

Take the Pressure Off

Self-analysis—Another method for letting go of distressing feelings involves toning down or neutralizing certain emotions (your resentment, shame, sadness, etc.) by examining the cost of keeping such troubling feelings and realizing that negative emotions work against your efforts to get better. Perhaps you are aware that people sometimes hold on to anger, sadness, worry, or other distress in a desire to display the seriousness of their suffering. And one way they prolong the misery is by justifying it with complaining. The value of such an attitude is difficult to understand. If you react to emotional pain by allowing more of it, a question worth asking yourself is, “How awful do I have to feel in order to get better?” (See *The Power of Intention*, by the venerable thinker and motivator, Dr. Wayne Dyer.) **If you do not want to suffer, are you willing to change how you are thinking about a problem, or do you just want to go on complaining about it?** I hope you answer, “Yes, I am willing to change my way of thinking,” and “No, I do not want to continue complaining.” So, dear sufferer, it is very important to look closely at how you are reacting to your suffering. Are you somehow agreeing with it? Do you in a way accept that your troubled condition is okay? Analyze your thoughts by keeping these questions in mind. The answer is all in the way you are thinking about your mental problems. You will make faster progress when you refuse to allow misery-causing thoughts to hold your attention. Remember: out of mind, out of sight.

Applying this self-analyzing technique a few times a day will help reduce your deep-rooted anxiety, sadness, anger, disgust etc. and, perhaps, also eliminate some superficial bad feelings that have been on your mind. If you are suffering, you need to change your mental pain from chronic to less chronic, from severe to moderate, and from moderate to mild. Some lessening of the emotional load is always preferred to no respite at all. And relief that comes through planned, informed choice rather than from a position of despair is more meaningful, because such change takes courage and perceptiveness. As a result, it is empowering.

Some people cling to certain thoughts that are emotionally significant and find it hard to disengage. I refer to those individuals as having “sticky minds.” For them, these suggestions that I have made may pose a special challenge and, therefore, frequent or continuous self-talk is needed to keep practising new ideas (You’ll find self-talk examples in Chapters 6 and 18).

Examine your interpretations—Another pressure-relieving strategy requires you to examine your thoughts to discover if your interpretation of upsetting events is illogical or unreasonable. For example, say that a trusted friend has hurt you by betraying your confidence. Although you realize that the person did not disclose your secret because of spite, you, nevertheless, were hurt. As you review your reaction to the hurt, you conclude that you expected far too much of this person. Lesson learned! You might then ask yourself, “Is there another way to perceive this event?” “Why do I think that what my friend did to me is very wrong?” “What

if my friend was not in a normal state of mind when she or he did this?” In giving this advice, I need to follow it with a caution that it is a common error to rule out certain possibilities, suggestions, or conclusions as untrue, even though you have no evidence. If you are in a frame of mind to stay miserable, understand that assumptions that either deny the positive or accept the negative may be wrong and were likely designed to support your unhappy thoughts. Avoid doing this.

You might even become aware that some aspect of your response to the problem has not been worthwhile. For example, you might realize that constantly thinking about the problem keeps it fresh, thereby achieving the opposite of what you wanted. You will be further ahead if you assess how useful your current approach to the problem is, reconsider your expectations, and examine your response. If you do this, you weaken what previously gave life to your suffering. Different parts of your pain may include, for example, your sense of injustice, helplessness, or frustration, some of which you may decide to drop after this kind of analysis.

NOTE: It is important to know you are not required to share your attempts at softening your attitude to a troubling event with anyone, though you may choose to share that information with a therapist or a trustworthy friend.

Using Expressive Writing to Cope with Distress

As supported by research, expressive writing is a useful way to reduce or eliminate distressing emotions. Here is

one description of this technique:

Using the following questions to guide you, recall a negative event (or aspects of it), and write about it in the way the words come to your mind. Just allow them to flow. Do not worry about spelling or grammar. Do the writing over four or five days, taking at least fifteen minutes, but not much more:

- What happened?
- How did you feel about that experience? How are you feeling about it now?
- Why did you feel that way? Why are you feeling this way now?
- How do you want to think about the event now to reduce or get rid of your suffering?

This exercise is for your eyes only, so be careful to keep it secure and to dispose of the pages or electronic documents after completion, if necessary. When you're done with that, proceed with both of the following activities.

Follow-Up Exercises after Writing

1. Do one of the following immediately after each writing session:
 - Take a series of three or four deep breaths (inhale normally, unless a deep inhalation occurs automatically, and exhale slowly). After that, repeat the following statement twice: "I release this suffering." Do this exercise a couple of times.
 - Do progressive muscle relaxation (See Appendix 4).

- Listen to a guided imagery relaxation topic (if you do not have one, select another exercise).
 - Do a mindfulness meditation exercise.
2. Within a week of the final writing session and the destruction of the document(s), decide on a goal related to the negative experience you wrote about that involves either engaging in or avoiding something that was not possible before you undertook the writing activity. For example, if you have been avoiding crowds, you might decide to go to a mall during light shopping hours, participate in a park event, join in the fringe where there are lighter crowds in a downtown area, or attend a small to medium sized sporting event. Maybe you will decide to stop isolating yourself and to purposefully spend more time with people in increasing amounts of time. A good goal would be to stay an extra 10 minutes longer than you normally would and to increase that by about 10 minutes each time until you are up to a half-hour. Please be sure to write down each goal.
 3. You could write a promissory note to yourself, first expressing your gratitude for the specific things you have achieved at the time of writing, then expressing a promise to achieve greater expertise in a specific area(s) or acquire certain or better skills by a due date when the envelope with the note will be opened. Please make sure you add strong self-appreciation and self-affirmative messages in the note to your future self.

Part 2: Understanding and Managing Major Sources of Distress

Analyzing Distress

This is another strategy for structuring thinking to disallow upsetting emotions:

1. Identify the feelings that arise when you think about a trauma or unwanted experience, and use those feelings to recall the thoughts that might have caused you to keep the bad emotion. Ask yourself this question: “What event(s) usually led to my distressing behaviour or state, and what do I usually say to myself about the event(s)?”
2. Ask yourself if the distressing emotional experience results from one of your important needs being denied. What is it about this need that is causing the emotion(s) in question? What thoughts do you have about the need? What aspects of this need made the emotions necessary? You might come up with answers like these, which I have grouped together: “The disturbing feelings seem to hit me every time I sit down to eat. If I could recall the thoughts I had the last time I sat down to eat, it might help me understand why this is happening. If I can’t, I can expect the same feelings will return the next time I sit down to eat.” You’d then observe your thoughts the next time you had a meal. It could be that sitting down to eat reminds you of childhood mealtimes with your family when your parents were always fighting, and it made you feel that your presence didn’t matter. If that were the

case, you'd have probably developed a strong need to be acknowledged.

By using this method of tracking the occasions when the troubling emotions seem to occur, you may discover that the emotions are associated with your thoughts during particular activities. When you identify those thoughts (such as a need for acknowledgement), you can then try to change them or explain them differently now, so as to eliminate the emotions they bring. In other words, use agreeable thinking and memories at meal-times in an attempt to remove or reduce the chances of triggering unpleasant feelings.

3. Take stock of your feelings. Is there an unpleasant emotion you particularly dislike? What is it? Are you able to state why you have that specific emotion? **Remember that you do not have to suffer, so ask yourself why you have chosen to suffer with the distressing feelings.** Is there no other way to satisfy the need(s) underlying your present emotional style? Can you find ways to be more confident in your ability to satisfy the unfulfilled need, without the help of an unwanted emotion? By searching within yourself or by being helped in this process, you can probably come up with examples that, in the past, brought the solution you needed.
4. Apart from the Thought Replacement technique, you could attempt to find your own method to rid yourself of that hangover-like feeling of misery. It is possible to do so by going over the emotions that cause you to suffer and finding the weaker, unwanted ones. You may then

decide to continually imagine a way of getting release from them. For example, you could repeatedly visualize the emotion leaving, like a kite breaking loose from its string and taking off in the wind. Or you could write a letter or poem to or about the emotion and then burn it.

Bring Worry Under Control: Confront It and Stop It

In coming to the same realization as Mark Twain I can say: I am an old man and I have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened.

Worry is fearing that the worst will happen. And fearing that the worst will happen tends to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, we start to behave as if the worst has actually happened. Worry can turn fears into reality, take over our minds, and make us sick. There are some cases, however, in which research tells us that some worry can be beneficial. For example, mild worry can help improve performance in such activities as taking tests or can motivate people to behave more sensibly. For example, worrying about one's health can lead one to stop engaging in promiscuous sex, to change unhealthy eating patterns, and to quit drinking or smoking.

The power of worry is undeniable. But that power is no greater than any thought to which we give undivided or disproportionate attention. Worry does become a problem, though, when it's all-consuming, solves nothing and improves nothing, or when it destroys hope and creates distress. As distressing as that sounds, you have the power to

confront worry and stop it dead in its tracks.

How do you do that, you ask? See the steps below for the answer.

Three Steps to Stop Worry in Its Tracks

Step 1—First recognize that your worry consists of things you are afraid will happen. Examples could be that your son will fail Grade 12 and won't be able to go to college or that your spouse will leave you because of your negative reactions.

Step 2—Identify and itemize what you would like to happen. For example, you would like your son to pass Grade 12 and to get into college. You would also like your spouse to stay with you. By stating your wishes this way, you immediately jump tracks from worrying to problem-solving.

Step 3—Describe what you will do to address the problem identified in Step 2. You may say to yourself, "Scolding or shaming my son will not help anything. Maybe I should talk to him about how I have handled the threat of failure in my life." Alternatively, you could suggest getting him a tutor. With regard to your spouse, you need to immediately open the channels of communication, or perhaps seek counselling.

For both situations, you could ask friends for help. If you cannot come up with a suitable action plan, at the very least, you should realize that thinking about the worst that could happen would not change the situation. At this point, you are functioning outside the zone of worry, which allows you

to keep looking ahead and to continue to search for workable solutions.

What you choose to think about is critical. To change how you feel, you must change the contents of your thoughts. If you are feeling awful about an event, you probably first stated to yourself that the event was awful. I have known people who would swear they had no negative thoughts before a bad feeling set in, but I think that often they just did not realize that they had. It is easy to miss “hearing” our thoughts because thinking is very fast, and we frequently use mental shorthand codes to describe events to ourselves. As such, some details pass by before we have time to recognize them. The fact is that, normally, we feel what we think. When you worry, you are telling yourself there is a reason to worry. And worry makes people behave as if their thoughts have magical powers. Once they think a disaster can occur, the possibility becomes very real. For worriers, it appears that “What if...?” quickly becomes, “So it shall be!”

The truth is that you can escape the worry hamster wheel by analyzing your thoughts and assessing the potential for any of them coming true. For example, are you thinking about something that requires a solution? If so, concentrate on possible solutions, following the three steps I mentioned a moment ago. If you cannot come up with a workable solution, or it is clear that the problem is here to stay, you are left with changing either your emotional reaction (“I want to feel good”) or how you view the situation. Remember this lesson from earlier: **In order to change our perceptions, we must also change our thoughts. We must deliberately**

find other ways of describing the event that will replace what we once thought. You need to truly cast aside former points of view if you are serious about getting rid of feelings that hurt, annoy, distress, etc. If another way of looking at a situation is difficult to find, don't give up. Use a for-now approach that consists of simply introducing another topic of thinking or way of behaving that will push out the previous worrying thoughts. The new thoughts will produce their own emotional climate. In doing this, you will experience a desired shift in mood. Often, this is all that's necessary to put yourself in a state of mind to welcome or select a new direction of thinking. This way of approaching life is all-important to practise in order to control your emotional responses.

About Anger: Stop Using It All the Time

Many ancient writings comment on psychological problems that exist today. It is interesting that in ancient wisdom literature, many of those who are regularly praised as wise constantly advise against the uncontrolled expression of anger. For example, the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Christian Bible is in tune with writings that go as far back as the third or second millennium BCE. Chapter 7, Verse 9 of Ecclesiastes advises people that it is unwise to allow themselves to be easily provoked to anger, even if they have been unjustly treated.

What makes you angry?—It is important to know what makes you angry. In most instances, you are likely to know the specific event that triggered an episode of anger. Beyond

this, you need to understand the reason why that specific event caused anger. For human beings, the most usual explanation seems to be that anger tends to show itself when we experience injustice—either towards ourselves or others. As discussed in Chapter 4, all emotional reactions, especially fear, are similar to anger in that we usually cannot stop them when they first arise. But in a flash, what was just an annoyed or irate feeling can quickly turn into feelings of fullblown anger and, “This is not right, I won’t stand for this...” or “Who do they think they are? They are going to owe me big time.” This however is when the automatic feeling of anger becomes a controllable angry reaction.

What goes on in the body when we are angry?—It appears that anger arises when certain stimuli register the required neurological pattern that causes the brain to respond as if a switch has been turned on. This alerts the brain to set a series of bodily activities in action, just like a computer program. These activities include the release of hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, which are also released in response to fear. These substances are required to ready the body to react appropriately to the immediate threat that caused their release, and they use channels that are under the control of the sympathetic nervous system.

When the problem is being solved or has been solved, the brain begins to exit the emergency and fight-flight alert mode, and activates the calm-down mode. At this stage, the parasympathetic nervous system begins to take over and open its channels for other substances to be released, which will calm the body down and bring it back to normal. If we continue

in a state of anger, however, the parasympathetic nervous system will not be activated, which means that the first batch of hormones will remain longer in the bloodstream and continue to do what they were required to when first activated: Keep the body revved up in a state of readiness, in case there's a need to fight, flee, or hide. During this "Stay alert!" process that's prompted by the fight-flight emergency response system, the heart has to continue beating faster to pump more blood to provide energy. And this extra blood is taken from other organs, which will not be working efficiently during the period of this overtime emergency mode. Not only do some organs suffer reduced function, many are under great strain due to wide-ranging tension in the body. The more intense or long-lasting an angry reaction, the worse the damaging results on the cardio-vascular and other systems from too much cortisol and adrenaline.

Although Nature has arranged for us to have no control over the bodily feelings that start an angry reaction, after the initial stage, we do become aware of our angry state and can identify the offending object. At that point, all within milliseconds or seconds, we can consciously change our reaction and allow the health-supporting calm-down mode to kick in. One very effective method we can use to stop the progression of the angry emotion is to introduce a new label or interpretation of the circumstances that aroused the anger. This is the chance we have to save ourselves from the serious consequences of heavy wear and tear on the heart and coronary arteries (major vessels and their branches that supply the heart with blood), as detailed in the next section.

The Negative Health Effects of Anger

Many research studies have shown a strong link between anger and serious heart problems, including heart attacks and other problems related to stiffening or hardening of the arteries. Being in a hostile mood or being angry most of the time may lead to the following:

- Frequent increases in heart rate and blood pressure. This puts undue strain on the muscles involved, resulting in a very high risk of coronary heart diseases, which seems to advance faster in people with chronic anger (based on hostility tests).
- Slower healing from wounds
- Shallow breathing which over-stresses certain organs, including the brain (due to insufficient oxygen), especially at a time when these organs are experiencing heavy demand for blood as the body gets ready to fight
- Increased perspiration due to higher body temperature from anger, which can cause a loss of life-sustaining electrolytes
- Depression, which by itself has been linked with heart-related illnesses
- Alcohol problems—and since alcohol is known to lower inhibitions, it may increase the likelihood of more uncontrolled expressions of anger, resulting in even more problems associated with anger
- Frequent headaches and sleep disorders, sometimes along with recurring fatigue, all of which tend to become chronic with chronic anger

One outward sign of anger is tension: in the face, hands, arms, neck, and feet. In the same way, anger can create tension in other parts of the body, some of which have very delicate functions. These include the digestive, circulatory, and urinary-genital systems. Many organs in these and other systems may react with tension when we are angry. Some of these systems include muscles in the intestines, the bowel, blood vessels, prostate gland, fallopian tubes, kidneys, heart, and various sphincter muscles. Tension, as a result of being frequently angry, would tend to disrupt the functioning of these organs. Possible consequences include constipation, indigestion, diarrhoea, acid peptic disease, and, in some people, irritable bowel syndrome. Some people may also experience urinary frequency or infrequency, increased fatigue, hair loss, headaches, or loss of appetite. Meanwhile, every time you encounter or are reminded of the stressful event, the body goes into fight-flight mode. In the case of anger, though, the tendency to fight seems much stronger than the tendency to flee or freeze. It has been found that holding on to negative emotions, including anger, puts you at risk for other physical problems, such as hypertension, some types of skin diseases (psoriasis and eczema), and sexual dysfunction. Furthermore, anger, (and, for that matter, deep sadness or self-rejection) may result in such conditions as alcoholism, depression, anxiety disorder, and a very low frustration tolerance—which may have been the basis of the anger problem in the first place. To prevent these problems, you must rid yourself of frequent or excessive anger.

Remember: Anger is not about whether you are right or

be addressed. For it appears that the goal of an emotion is not to keep itself going, but rather to prepare a person to take survival-prolonging action. Clearly, more anger in and of itself does not necessarily solve a problem. It can, of course, be used to intimidate the source of threat and empower an angry person to feel capable of defeating the threat. All too often, however, anger reactions are directed at people and situations inappropriately (for example, yelling at an infant for urinating on the floor). When deliberately used, to cause fear (although observers may not perceive this intent and/or the angry behaviour is not expressed in a socially acceptable manner), anger serves as a self-protective and survival function, nonetheless, sometimes with devastating social consequences.

The idea that anger must be allowed expression is not the same as believing that it's best to have no control over it. Indeed, giving total permission for anger or any other emotion to have control over one's life can kill oneself or others. **Anger can cause regrettable destruction or anguish, and it must be kept in check.** When it is not, you are doing yourself or humankind great disservice. Like me, you may have heard others say that they realized later, after the damage was done or a dangerous and destructive consequence was averted, that their wild anger was uncalled for. Allowing anger to be expressed without limitation does not reduce or cure it, even when the angry person believes that her or his anger is justified. Ridding yourself of anger-producing thoughts is much more effective. This fact was recognized long ago by Epictetus, an ancient Roman

philosopher, who said, “If you would cure anger, do not feed it. Say to yourself, ‘I used to be angry every day, then every other day, now only every third or fourth day.’ When you reach thirty days offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the gods.” This means you are to practise gradually starving the expression of anger, and then celebrate your success when you reach your goal.

IMPORTANT: The sooner we interrupt a developing emotion, the faster we bring that emotional reaction under our control.

So there you have it! Thought control is also anger control. To get out of the grip of anger, you have only to change the labels or explanation you give to the events that produce anger. For example, instead of assuming (even if it is true) that someone’s rude behaviour was intended to mistreat you, take the high road, and refuse to allow yourself to feel humiliated. Do this by telling yourself, for example, that you will not be “dragged to that level” and that being rude in return could increase your and your opponent’s anger. Also, rather than taking offence or becoming hostile because you decide someone is intending to appear superior by putting you down, choose to mentally describe the behaviour as a sign of immaturity, and ignore her or him. In fact, there are many occasions when you can easily replace your angry thoughts with ones that do not prolong an apparent or actual conflict. I encourage you to start doing this immediately and to keep on doing it.

Anger and shame—Anger also tends to arise when a person feels ashamed in front of others or feels that she or he is

being wilfully shamed. In either situation, the one who feels the attack of shame and wishes to cover up this exposure may strike out in anger. If you intend to keep a healthy social profile, you must learn to back away from aggression or retaliation and resolve the anger issues in your own mind. To do this in a conflict situation, you may need to call a time out (even if on your side only), change the topic, or physically leave the situation. When you do, it is best not to dwell on the hurtful feeling. Instead, take a few deep breaths, and try to relax and calm yourself. Next, honestly re-evaluate your reactions, attitudes, expectations, prejudices, and options to enable you to continue reducing the intensity of your anger.

It is important to remember that assertiveness need not be anger-driven, nor do you have to react with anger to every provocation. It may be enough to acknowledge the emotion and then respond without anger. This approach will help you get out of the anger-shame cycle—that is when shame causes you to be angry, and the anger causes shame, or vice versa—usually in increasing stages.

Don't let anger define you—A further explanation about anger (which also applies to all emotions) is that the more frequently and the more intensely someone reacts in anger, the more the anger will be seen as that person's defining characteristic. The people you keep company with will begin to expect you to be angry, even when you are not, and will approach you defensively or offensively, as if you have attacked them. Or will avoid you. Indeed, when emotions are out of control, they can become disorders. Such a worsening of

our emotional state is sometimes due to biochemical conditions in the brain and, therefore, we may find it extremely difficult or impossible to apply Thought Replacement or other thinking-type strategies. So if you have found yourself held in the grip of persistent, anger-provoking or troubled thoughts against which you feel helpless, it is understandable that you might consider self-healing all but useless. Indeed, sometimes (and especially) when the inability to fight off the disturbance is due to a brain condition, the customary use of medication may be the best option. Otherwise, it is practical to deal with anger by changing the thoughts that make your anger emotion worse. In this way, you can demonstrate your ability to take charge of an emotion that can be socially and personally damaging. This form of emotional management, as I have pointed out, works well for many types unpleasant feelings.

Your thoughts can and do rewire your brain—If you know or suspect that your emotional problem is due to a brain-based condition and, therefore, feel helpless, please don't be. Hundreds of research studies show that thoughts, words, and behaviours (for example, learning things) actually change the physical form or structure of our brains. The various parts of our brains have distinctive forms or shapes. And the mental activities that put the cells in a brain regions to work apparently cause them to multiply, thereby changing the brain organ's form. When these cells multiply, they work even better!

Brain researchers have observed that some areas in the brain are smaller in people who lack certain skills or qualities

than in normal brains. They've also noted that learning to think or do something over and over increases the number of nerve cells (neurons) and the cell connections in the areas responsible for the learning through a process called plasticity. This means that when proven treatments, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), meditation, and other research-based programs and energy-based treatments are practiced repeatedly, they can change the structure of your brain and keep it free from continuing anger, rage, fear, anxiety, impatience, shyness, addiction, hate, etc. Unfortunately, this is also all true when we spend time occupied with emotionally unhealthy or damaging activities. Those, too, can change your brain, but for the worse. Nonetheless, this knowledge should bring great hope for your self-healing efforts. By practising to improve your emotional condition, you not only preserve your own wellbeing but also make yourself a part of the solution for human misery (fewer angry people). That will be a worthy example that will go down in the silent history book, perhaps to be discovered by someone who will notice and to whom that observation will be helpful.

Using anger in a beneficial way—Disorder speaks to one side of the emotionally regulated scale. The other side is what most people experience most of the time: normal, sound, pleasant, or balanced moods. Such people may show a kind of anger that is positive, in the sense that it is under control or channelled into constructive actions. For example, Judy Graves became an advocate for homeless people in Vancouver, Canada, out of anger when she first encountered

the problem of homelessness. At that time, she felt it was not right that the available public services were not reaching homeless people. Useful expression of anger over social injustice toward the homeless drove this wonderful woman's passion for several years. Out of this, she provided a variety of direct social-work and advocacy services to those people. This is an individual with a commendable and, I dare say, enviable display of righteous anger.

People with balanced moods feel positive or neutral more frequently and for longer durations. In other words, the more we express negative moods, the less room there is for us to display positive moods. So it would be unreasonable to expect someone with a disordered brain to be capable of achieving the same level of emotional management and engagement as a person like Judy Graves. I would not want someone with an emotional disorder, however, to feel that she or he could never be able to make a positive mark on society because of that condition. Where there's a will, there's a way.

This is why I have written this book—to help you become more and more problem free. Therefore, take charge and learn to stop yourself from being angry all the time—or for that matter, to stop showing extremes of any emotion! Promise?



CHAPTER 9

FORGIVENESS LEADS TO PEACE OF MIND Life Changing Lessons Along the Way

A Note to the Reader: In this section, my focus is on victims who may or may not have sought legal or social methods of correcting an injustice, who continue to feel upset by an unwanted experience, and who need to be helped to overcome their feelings of distress.

Learning to Forgive

“Forgiveness liberates the soul; it removes fear; that is why it is such a powerful weapon.”

—Nelson Mandela, 1st black President of the previously white-ruled Republic of South Africa

I would like to start by asking a question of those who are opposed to the idea of forgiving: Why do you find the idea of forgiving a wrongdoing so objectionable? Is it a matter of justice, a desire to punish, or, perhaps, the need to make

who cares?

I'm sorry

I'm not sorry

I don't care

forgive me



a point? My guess is that a lot of it has to do with all of the longstanding and misleading information that's given forgiveness a bad rap.

I am not going to suggest that bullies or thoughtless, wicked people should be allowed to run around out of control, causing grief to everyone who crosses their paths and then be entitled to forgiveness. You bet I'm not. But what I will ask you to consider is this: Forgiveness is not about letting a perpetrator off the hook, restoring a relationship, or forgetting an experience—it is about neutralizing a hurtful experience by removing the sting of the pain it caused in you. This is why it is important to learn to forgive.

Forgiveness is a legitimate free pass out of the jail of mental turmoil. Take hold of it as your winning strategy in the battle against an emotional enemy and as a shock absorber for mental health. Only you can do this!

Forgive and forget do not always go together—One unfortunate problem with a common interpretation of forgiveness comes from its link with forgetting. We often hear the phrase “Forgive and forget,” as if both actions must go together. The act of forgetting, however, does not appear to be under the spontaneous control of people. In fact, even when the forgiver wishes to forget, he or she must take specific steps to push out the memory of the wrongdoing (perhaps by using Thought Replacement) or that person will likely remember the troubling incident for quite some time. If forgiving is separated from forgetting, and each stands on its own, then the idea of forgiveness may become easier to accept.

Reconciliation—Another provocative and false expectation is that forgiveness has to go with reconciliation, which is generally interpreted as the reuniting of a victim and perpetrator in an amicable relationship. I cannot imagine, for example, that a victim of a sexual assault or of a huge, financial swindle by a once-trusted family friend would easily forgive and reconcile with that wrongdoer. Nor would the parent of a murdered child be expected to quickly forgive and reconcile with the murderer. Though these are terrible crimes, offering forgiveness for them however, is not an impossible scenario (though it is probably rare). Therefore, if a person who has suffered a severe emotional attack does not have to consider reconciliation, he or she may find it possible to deal with the forgiveness part more readily, even if with difficulty. Indeed, **reconciliation is not part of forgiveness, nor must it follow.** The two acts, when they occur together with sincerity, demonstrate an extraordinary level of goodwill. Not many people are capable of this.

Does the one who is forgiven need to know that he or she is forgiven?—Yet another obstacle to embracing the notion of forgiving a serious error in judgment is the mistaken belief that the person who is forgiven must know that he or she has been forgiven in order for the forgiveness to be valid. There are a number of reasons why this belief is unreasonable: the transgressor might be unknown, does not know he or she committed an offence, continues to be in denial, cannot be reached, or has to be contacted by the victim.

It is important to realize that the act of forgiveness is sufficient in itself to produce peace for the victim who alone has the complete entitlement to make the decision to forgive, without involving anyone else, not even the perpetrator.

What exactly is forgiveness?—Let's review the usual understanding of forgiveness. It appears that most people consider forgiveness as intended mainly for the benefit of the wrongdoer. In other words, the victim is the one who must release the perpetrator from guilt. In some cases, this means setting aside the notion of punishment or seeking compensation from the wrongdoer.

In some situations, problematic as it can be, it appears that forgiveness is given to restore normal relationships, making the act of forgiving beneficial to all parties.

The idea of forgiveness, which puts a victim in the position of making a benevolent offer to the perpetrator, usually indicates that mature kindness is at work. For this reason, it is considered highly commendable.

What if a forgiver changes his or her mind?—If you were a victim who forgave an offender because you thought he or she deserved it but later found out something that suggests otherwise, what then? Do you take back your forgiveness? Hopefully not. One reason is that, presumably, it was firstly the crime against you that you forgave. And your forgiveness was likely prompted by your desire to prevent any bitterness from taking root or doing worse in your life.

It seems to me that to decide to pardon a crime against you or to cease feeling resentment over it is always right-minded. Forgiving the perpetrator or the crime is a powerful way of progressing beyond the hurt and leaving behind the strong negative emotions that could harm. As such, forgiveness is a self-healing commitment.

Criticizing those who forgive—What about when a victim sincerely forgives someone and then is criticized (rightly or wrongly) by people, including those from high places, who think forgiveness means enabling or excusing the wrongdoer? No doubt, there are places and circumstances in which such disapproval could influence a victim. A person who can recognize that granting forgiveness means letting go of the harmful emotions linked to the desire to condemn or punish a wrongdoer shows wisdom and maturity. It would seem unfair to accuse such a wronged person of being naive, ignorant, gullible, weak, or self-demeaning. The victim's genuineness alone should be enough to give the forgiveness validity.

In fact, forgiving a wrong can be seen as using a non-violent approach to counter wrongdoing or evil. Furthermore, forgiveness is perhaps akin to other noble acts of compassion and loving in response to personal attacks, for which people such as Mahatma Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King, Jr., are famous. I believe there is a direct parallel between the non-violent behaviour of these icons and that of victims who forgive, particularly in cases of brutal attacks, unrelenting persecution, or shocking betrayal. The victim who uses the act of

forgiveness in this way releases powerful, positive emotions that will strengthen that person and increase his or her resilience to other negative experiences.

The idea here cannot be that this victim used psychological self-manipulation to offer such benevolence. Since self-manipulation involves deception, it is not a good basis for forgiveness. A person who deceives her- or himself to do good to others must really want to be a “good person,” at least in that moment. So the motive becomes wanting to be “good,” instead of wanting to forgive. However, when the false premise of this need wears off, that person will have to face the original pain (of the crime that has not been forgiven), plus a new pain of guilt (from the wrongful act of deceiving) and shame (from recognizing the failure of the self-deception). Therefore, this approach is faulty. Sometimes, though, people use forgiveness this way probably because of emotional confusion. Nonetheless, a person who uses insincere forgiveness is not likely to find peace. The kind of forgiveness that heals, which has been described as a non-violent approach, comes from a personal, honest, committed choice to pardon.

Victims Need to Learn to Forgive

It seems best that the act of forgiving be performed by the victim for the victim’s sake. If you are a victim of psychological injury, it may help to try forgiveness as a way to move away from the damage that someone or something caused you or that you may have caused yourself by holding on to resentment. You will find that the act of forgiveness will

give you a sense of self-empowerment that's derived from a sense of goodwill.

Forgiveness can take time—Depending on the nature or amount of resentment, anger, debt, etc., that you perceive needs to be forgiven, it's understandable if it takes time to completely let go of the distressing feelings that the wrong has produced. In such circumstances, forgiveness may be done in stages or piecemeal, with final closure occurring after a period that feels comfortable to you. There will be different durations for different people. In the end, the power of forgiveness will still weave its magic of ending the distress that goes with lingering blame or loss of peace of mind, both of which can be disabling. Therefore, for the sake of your peace of mind, unconditionally forgiving the wrong and offering forgiveness as a gift to both you and the wrongdoer (whether he or she knows about it or not) seems to be the best goal for achieving victory over your emotional disturbance.

If you find yourself with your heels dug in firmly against letting go, mainly because you cannot forgive something, someone, or even yourself, learn this truth—**your life will get better as a result of trying to forgive and letting go of the need to retaliate or blame. When forgiveness is a gift of joy (and of love and compassion, if you can reach this lofty height) to you or to another person, it is a powerful emotional healer.**

Why does forgiveness sometimes get a bad rap?—So how is it that the importance of forgiveness is not universally welcomed, you wonder? Consider that in almost every

case in which forgiveness is an issue, someone has offended or hurt another person. In most of these cases, people want to get even, gain power over the offender, or counter their suffering in some way. When a victim does not show this need in a strong way, the offence may be misinterpreted as trivial or this attitude be seen to imply that the person accepts or even deserves the crime. The victim's behaviour may even be seen as inappropriate and not genuine. In this kind of situation, the offended person would likely feel a need to put on a clear display of anger or resentment toward the offender. This is probably why people tend to shy away from the suggestion or act of forgiveness.

About Revenge

It is very difficult to deal with a hurt (even if it took place in the past) when the result of that painful event is still there. For example, you are faced with the present effect of a financial loss someone else caused; you find out about the child from your spouse's affair; the message your work-mate maliciously posted online cost you your job; one of your friends stole your spouse or the person you were going to marry. For each example, the principle still stands. You learn to accept the incident or event; it cannot un-happen. And believe me, you can learn.

If you do not learn to accept, you sentence yourself to an indefinite period of emotional pain—for as long as you hold on to the stubborn attitude. You will not be correct to tell yourself someone else is causing your suffering, because you made a choice to refuse to accept what happened. You

may need help to be able to accept; but that is a different matter though a step in the right direction.

To reach out to get peace of mind, you have to come to terms with the fact that you cannot undo the offensive event. The only really effective next step to take is to deal with the current emotion(s) that the bad experience is bringing out of you. Again, the sooner you do both (accept what happened and bring the unpleasant emotion under control), the faster you will begin to rid yourself of the turmoil that is tormenting you and make it less of a big deal.

If you find yourself unable to keep the matter out of your mind, and the urge to retaliate or take revenge is getting stronger, then it's time to talk to another person about it. Unless you are sure you will not return like for like, such extreme thinking is a sign that your brain is not working right. Please get help to talk about what's bothering you.

Sometimes people want to relieve their suffering by seeing the person who offended or hurt them also suffer. They think that if only they could retaliate against the one who hurt them, all would be well. It is mostly unlikely, however, that such individuals will be able to see a wrongdoer of a terrible crime punished to the degree they'd consider fair—that is, wicked punishment for a wicked crime.

In some cases, an incident that ends up in court will lead to a verdict that's satisfactory to the sufferer, but this may still not remove the pain. Furthermore, when a wrongdoer does not receive what the victim considers an adequate sentence, the verdict will likely produce more suffering. So then, trying to return suffering for suffering is not a sure

way of removing the distress caused by wrongdoing. And what about the victim who blames him- or herself for part of a wrongdoing? In such situations, a method other than revenge or retaliation is definitely needed for relieving suffering.

It is easy for someone to get bitter, angry, or depressed because an experience took away his or her peace of mind. You need to know, though, that these negative reactions are a natural consequence of being deprived of emotional balance. So it is understandable that victims want to return to the state of mind they were in before the hurt occurred. You seek this goal, don't you?

Look to the bard—I have always wondered whether people who hold grudges and a desire for revenge hate having those feelings. We tend to assume that retaliation comes from a desire to see offenders get their just desserts; to show these people that they cannot hurt others and get away with it. But perhaps a wronged person savours the idea of future vengeance. And what about the notion of a “pound of flesh?” To explain, I have taken the indulgent liberty of lightening my rendition of the story behind the “pound of flesh.”

As Willie the Bard (William Shakespeare, that is), described it in *The Merchant of Venice*, a man named Antonio borrowed money from a loan shark named Shylock and agreed that if he were unable to pay the debt back by the agreed-upon deadline, he would forfeit a pound of his flesh. It came to pass that when the loan came due, and Shylock asked for his money, Antonio was unable to pay it. Shylock

presented the terms of the agreement to the court, and it turned into a nightmare...for him! The high point of the case occurs when Portia, a resourceful “lawyer,” appeals to Shylock’s sense of forgiveness (mercy). Her speech begins with this famous line from Act 4, Scene 1: “The quality of mercy is not strained.” The essence of her speech unfolds as follows:

No one shows mercy because he has to. It just happens, the way gentle rain drops on the ground. Mercy is a double blessing. It blesses the one who gives it and the one who receives it. It’s strongest in the strongest people. It looks better in a king than his own crown looks on him. The king’s sceptre represents his earthly power, the symbol of majesty, the focus of royal authority. But mercy is higher than the sceptre. It’s enthroned in the hearts of kings, a quality of God himself. Kingly power seems most like God’s power when the king mixes mercy with justice. So although justice is your plea, Jew, consider this.

Justice won’t save our souls. We pray for mercy, and this same prayer teaches us to show mercy to others as well. I’ve told you this to make you give up this case [...] (Spark Notes)

Shylock, the loan shark, wanted the justice he devised and ignored the pleas to show forgiveness; but his plan backfired on him. Very likely, showing mercy would have worked much better for him.

When confronted with the idea of forgiveness, many victims (and their supporters) ask, “Why should I forgive?”

Forgiveness seems to suggest to them that they have lost a battle or are seen as too weak to win. They interpret the underlying meaning of *forgiveness* as “lay no blame, require no remorse, compensation, or apology. Just let bygones be bygones, and reconcile.”

As discussed earlier, these beliefs about forgiveness are not necessary because the main reason for a victim to forgive is to release the pain of feeling wronged. In other words, you forgive mainly to make your own life peaceful. Shylock, our man in Shakespeare’s Venice, did not get peace. Instead, he tried to intensify Antonio’s suffering. In the end, Portia, as judge, allowed Shylock to take his pound of flesh but specified that he was not allowed to spill any blood to get it. This was not possible, so Antonio went free and, based on Venetian law, Shylock forfeited his wealth.

One of the themes of *the Merchant of Venice* is that when a person strives exclusively for justice without consideration of forgiveness (mercy), a greater injustice can occur. If you can overlook the underlying social tension believed to be implied in Portia’s speech, cited above, her words are a powerful commentary on forgiveness. I believe this speech is the best tribute to forgiveness, which is one of the highest virtues we need to practice, especially in the course of self-healing.

You now have good information about potentially injurious emotions and the unhealthy consequences of hanging on to hatred, bitterness, sadness, anger and other strong negative emotions. In view of this, the act of offering forgiveness as a way (usually guaranteed) of releasing yourself

from suffering and achieving peace of mind seems clearly preferable, if not desirable. Indeed, to be willing to keep suffering rather than forgive would be the sign of an emotionally immature or confused person. Choosing to forgive, though, is not like saying, “Abracadabra! You are forgiven, and everything will be fine for me from now on.” Hardly. You need to learn how to forgive to make it meaningful so that your life can proceed without emotional turmoil.

The Process of Forgiving

Learning to forgive is a process. Consider the following tips to help you along:

1. **Learn to let bygones be bygones**—Healing starts when you begin to see a wrongdoer or wrongdoing in a different light (which is possible after the strength of your original emotional pain has lessened). Once it does, you can probably learn to let bygones be bygones, and in doing so, you will be able to pull back from hate and bitterness. Reframing the problem, that is, rethinking and restating it, sometimes helps because it allows you to be less accusatory.
2. **Don’t take offence too easily or quickly**—In life in general, it’s best to try not to take offence in most situations and to refrain from blaming. This will help you reframe the offensive attributes of a person and make it easier to forgive.
3. **Learn about forgiveness and why it is better than suffering**—If you grew up with conflict and suffering to the extent that compromise is unfamiliar, using

forgiveness to reduce distress may be difficult. However, it is never too late to learn. Start by learning why or how forgiveness is more favourable than suffering. Hint: A re-read of this chapter will go a long way.

4. **Try to walk in others' shoes now and then**—To reduce anger (which is usually an automatic response to injustice), view the problem from the wrongdoer's point of view; try to figure out that person's psychological need. Remember, it is human to have some bad thoughts or to do wrong. Limit the period of your negative emotional reaction by picking a date on the calendar and promising yourself to cease any negative reactions by that date.
5. **Commit to whatever you think will help you feel better.** It must, of course, be socially permissible and positive. And remember that reconciliation is not necessary after forgiveness.
6. **Learn to relax and manage stress**—Use stress-management, relaxation and/or meditation techniques, and other self-healing ideas, such as Thought Replacement, to calm down whenever negative feelings related to the hurt arise. Hopefully, when the angry or unhappy feelings lessen, you will be ready to start enjoying the pleasures of life again.
7. **Don't seek revenge**—Live as if a hurt never happened by avoiding an eye for an eye. In other words, put that experience in an imaginary folder, close it, and resist any temptation to reopen it. Use any technique you may have learned (such as Thought Replacement, mindfulness meditation, or self-hypnosis) to help you escape the

damaging effects of self-punishing thoughts. This will lead to peace of mind and allow you to establish a forgiving attitude more easily.

By this time, you have learned how harmful it can be to your mental health to keep negative emotions and how important it is to remove them so they don't get in your way of reacting to life. **When you hang on to negative emotions, you mainly hurt yourself. So allow yourself to realize this, and stop suffering from the pain you are causing.** You have a choice, despite what you may have learned from your family, the media, or other people who influence you. Self-harm is destructive, and you need to recognize that mental self-harm (like self-mutilation) does not improve or empower your self-esteem—it shows lack of self-love and exposes irrational behaviour. The choice is yours to greatly limit your negative reactions. When you bear a grudge and seek retaliation, you are increasing the harmful power of the negative feelings it causes. If you have been thinking this way, right now and right here is the time to start changing it. Do not allow this opportunity to slip away—free yourself from the unnecessary shackles of non-forgiveness. Heal yourself, and free yourself and, maybe, for the first time, begin to enjoy real peace of mind.

We Are All Interdependent

As you continue to acquire information about human psychology from this book, you will come to see the connection between our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours and how we are linked to each other, as well as to the entire

universe. If this is so, and we are all influenced by or dependent on one another's thinking, then it is no longer an absolute truth that we all have independent minds. Furthermore, you will learn that we all, apparently, share in the same consciousness and that it dictates the workings of our minds, thoughts, and emotions to the extent that wilfully causing the happiness of an enemy increases your own happiness. Research has shown that the act of forgiving in therapy sessions resulted in improvement in people with depression, chronic pain, cardiovascular problems, and in overall quality of health after middle age. Non-forgivers seem to show opposite results. When a person forgives, he or she produces a positive emotional energy that changes the mental (or spiritual) state of both the forgiver and the forgiven for the better, even when the forgiven is absent. This complex process is becoming clearer as new information is made available through quantum mechanics, neuroscience, and the wisdom of ancient teachers (See Chapter 17).

The mystery of forgiveness lies in its power to transform negative into positive, emotional chaos into calm, turmoil into peace of mind. This is a gift of nature that we cannot foolishly snub. When you forgive others, you share a gift that benefits you and all humankind. Wow! You also participate in a mystery of human nature—one that produces agreeable and beneficial reactions. Albert Einstein put it well when he said this:

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.

Use Forgiveness to Achieve Peace of Mind

Why would vengeance and hate or their anticipation bring joy to someone? Is a person naturally this way, or is it the result of being emotionally wounded (or mentally damaged) that brings a person to a desperate state in which he or she is willing to hurt another when there is a choice not to? The reality is that people do not normally strike out with ill will for no reason. We must separate the person, who may be good, from an act that is bad. Through forgiveness, you make it possible to separate the (forgivable) person from the crime (the injustice to be accepted or rejected).

And could extreme revenge even bring peace of mind? It is not evident that a drastic action against your offender would ease your suffering. Yes, it may (but no more certain than *may*) prevent further crimes from being carried out by that person, but in the present, I believe it is the effect of the emotional injury itself (the punishing feelings caused by the offence) that first needs to be managed. With due respect to you, the sufferer, I suggest that you leave the perpetrator out of the picture at this beginning stage in dealing with your distress, and concentrate on bringing your emotional reactions under control. In doing so, you'll become more reasonable in the way you choose to deal with the problem.

To help you come to the point of forgiving (if you are finding it difficult to do so), I suggest you make use of mindfulness meditation exercises described in Appendix 9. You may also try self-hypnosis, as suggested earlier (if that appeals to you more), or both. In this case, to do with

reducing distress, more is better. Even short periods of mental rest from the problem can begin to release you from being tightly attached to your anguish. Perhaps it can happen enough to allow consideration of forgiveness for yourself or another person (See the last exercise in Appendix 10).

Through forgiveness, you create a distance between yourself and emotional pain. And in doing so, the pain loses its power to generate hateful thoughts. Once the malice is gone, there is little motivation to injure or harm a wrongdoer.

As you come to terms with your situation and learn to overcome the desire to retaliate or to enjoy the thought of harm coming to the wrongdoer, you will, hopefully, be motivated to proceed with your self-healing in other needed areas. Cut off from the desire to pay back harm with harm, you can begin to enjoy a little peace of mind.

A Lasting Example of Forgiveness

*As I walked out the door toward the gate that
would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't
leave my bitterness and hatred behind,
I'd still be in prison.*

— *Nelson Mandela*

I believe this quote represents the foundation of what brought Nelson Mandela worldwide recognition, success, respect, affection, and adulation. Without this way of thinking, very likely his life would not have become an inspiration to his country and the world. To me, these words

announced that he would take the path of forgiveness from the moment he was freed from, undoubtedly, a most horrifying and undeserving punishment.

To the sufferer who will not forgive, I say, consider what 27 years of imprisonment for wanting justice might have meant to you (were you in Nelson Mandela's shoes). Then the true meaning and depth of significance in this quote might resonate with you and help you realize how powerful an attitude of forgiveness is, in enriching the life of a sufferer of injustice and of everyone who observes the forger.



CHAPTER 10

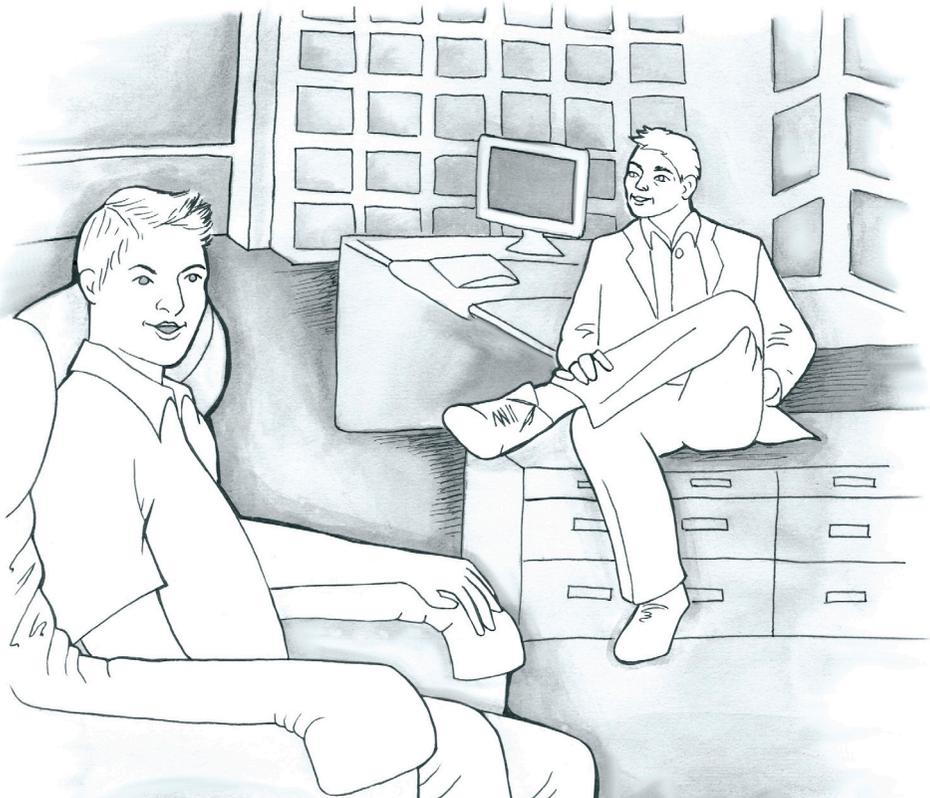
FORMAL INTERVENTIONS REQUIRING A PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED PRACTITIONER **More Than One Way to Get There**

Formal Interventions Requiring a Professionally Trained Practitioner

A Note to the Reader: Although the emphasis of this book is on self-healing, sometimes involving trained professionals in a self-healing process is preferred. The treatments described in this chapter all require the involvement of properly trained and professionally accredited professionals.

Using Medication to Heal

It would not be proper to discuss the topic of healing without acknowledging that prescribed medication can play an essential role. Not much has been said thus far about taking drugs to regain peace of mind because the focus of this book is on the conscious, self-directed, non-medical method of self-healing. All the same, it is not my intent to leave



I have a strong feeling
things will be better **NOW.**

the impression that the methods of healing I have spoken about so far are exclusively effective. Considering that the mind and the body work together to create our emotional reactions, it's important to recognize that if the biological or physiological side of an emotion is functionally unsettled, it may need to be stabilized so that the mental or cognitive side can make sense of what is happening in the person.

In other words, there are times when the problem is not just emotional, and you find yourself almost totally unable to bring your thinking under your control. You may find your thoughts are running wild, jumping around, or latching on to topics that are completely—or almost completely—out of your control and from which you cannot shake loose. In such a situation, it's probably next to impossible to talk yourself out of a feeling or follow a thought-based exercise, such as from a book or talk-therapy.

The usual explanation is that this kind of mental state is produced by faulty biochemical activity, especially in the brain. If you find yourself in this condition, it is best that you obtain medical advice. Medication would, likely, be required to help bring you back to a more normal level of brain functioning. Your family physician is usually the person to provide this treatment, and she or he will probably refer you to a psychiatrist who is a specialist in this area. Such treatment can not only bring relief at a physical level but also make you more self-confident and more capable of using mental self-control.

The use of pharmacological treatment has proven successful in treating a variety of emotional problems—not just extreme cases of mental dysfunction. Nowadays, the use of

medication and psychotherapy (talk-therapy) tend to go together in the treatment of emotional conditions that are not responding to talk-therapy alone. As soon as you can, however, it would be in your best interest to try to take control of your thoughts so that you can direct your own life (sometimes with the help of a psychologist or social worker) without dependence on chemical means.

Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT)

Electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) is a procedure in which a controlled amount of electric current is intentionally passed through the brain to cause a response similar to a brief epileptic convulsion. As a rule, the patient is under general anaesthesia during the procedure, which is usually carried out by a psychiatrist and an anaesthetist. It appears that this seizure activity causes changes in the brain that relieve the severe symptoms of specific mental problems.

According to the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)³, electro-convulsive therapy is recommended “[...] only to achieve rapid and short-term improvement of severe symptoms after an adequate trial of other treatment options has proven ineffective and/or when the condition is considered to be potentially life-threatening, in individuals with severe depressive illness; catatonia; a prolonged or severe manic episode.” Although ECT is somewhat controversial, its methods have improved much over the years, and ECT has been reported to be effective in helping some people regain control over their mental state, particularly with respect to depression.

Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy, which is also known as clinical hypnosis, is a method of treatment and self-treatment that allows a person to enter a state of relaxation in which she or he feels peaceful and safe. This state of relaxation is a natural condition and is perhaps best compared to a state between sleeping and waking (the way we are just before we are fully awake in the morning or as we ease into sleep at night). Undoubtedly, you have had this experience at some point in your life. A perfect example is when you're watching TV and begin to doze off to a point where you are not sure whether the sounds you are hearing are from the television, a dream, or the environment around you.

Sometimes the path to healing is blocked by wrong information. When you know no better, you can fall victim to faulty information about a treatment process or effect. For years (and maybe still now) the use of clinical hypnosis was hampered by a common belief that its purpose was to make a hypnotized person look or act silly in order to provide humour and entertainment (like you see in the movies or on TV). This, of course, is incorrect. Clinical hypnosis can be a very useful form of therapy if done correctly. For example, hypnotherapy is used to deal with a large variety of problems affecting a number of human behaviours, such as smoking, dieting, and acquiring or improving several types of behaviours and skills. Typically, this type of hypnosis is used to help a person reduce or get rid of agitation, feelings of stress, and anxiety. Hypnotherapy is also used to help sufferers of severe emotional pain revisit circumstances

connected with a problem that's in the past, present, or expected in the future. The result of this treatment is often remarkable and sometimes sustains change in thinking, emotional reaction, and/or behaviour.

How therapist-directed hypnotherapy works—To begin, the hypnotherapist coaches the patient into a state of relaxation (described below). The therapist then further coaches the person into an even deeper state of rest. While in that deep state of physical and mental relaxation, the patient remains completely capable of communicating with the therapist. When the patient reaches a deep enough level of trance or hypnotic condition, the therapist suggests that the sufferer examine or review the problem that is troubling her or him. At certain points during the hypnotherapeutic experience, the therapist encourages the patient to take deep breaths in order to go deeper and to become more relaxed. This helps the person concentrate on the problem she or he is addressing. At the end of the session, the therapist instructs the client to return to normal awareness and may count down for a gradual return to an awake and alert state.

Self-hypnotherapy

Although your hypnotherapy is best provided by a competent, qualified individual, you can use it yourself, as described below. A major difference with the professional version is that there is a therapist to guide you into deeper states and to help you deal with complex problems.

Until you learn when and how to use your “safe place,” I do not advise that you extend the self-hypnotherapy to

address a serious or more involved problem during the imagination portion. It is best, while dealing with such problems, that a professional watches your reactions. Expertise at this point in the hypnotherapy process is very important, for **it is in trusting the power of your safety that the healing occurs.** I believe the basic run (described below) is sufficient for self-calming and relaxation but not for complex self-treatment.

Basic procedures for entering self-hypnotherapy—Although getting into a hypnotic state is something that can happen naturally (as described above), you can learn how to reach this state at will. To enter the state of hypnotherapy, or trance, follow these suggestions, but remember this: **You may choose not to try this exercise. If you do choose to try it, you may stop the activity at any point you wish for any reason at all. Please read through the steps at least once before trying them out.**

The Basic Run of Self-hypnotherapy

- Make yourself comfortable in a place where you will not be disturbed for about 20 minutes.
- When you are comfortable, focus on a physical object, such as a doorknob, a lamp, or even a filled-in zero drawn on a vertical surface to help keep your concentration on the task at hand.
- Begin by slowly taking breaths in and slowly exhaling.
- After you do this three or four times, hold the in-breath for a few seconds (counting 1-2-3 in your head) before

exhaling. Do this three or four times, and return to breathing normally. As you do, allow your eyes to close, and begin to focus on different parts of your body, one by one, mentally telling (influencing or willingly allowing) each of them to relax.

- As you continue to breathe in and out with your eyes closed, invite all the major parts of your body to relax—your feet, legs, abdomen, chest, back, neck, face, and head. When you are finished, take a deep breath, and breathe out slowly.
- With your eyes still closed, imagine yourself in a peaceful and safe place or doing something pleasant. Allow yourself to enjoy the imagined experience for a few minutes or longer, if you wish.
- Then, tell yourself it is time to begin to come back to full awareness of your current environment.
- Do this by counting slowly from five, four, or three down to one to bring yourself back gradually to your previous state.
- As you do this, listen for familiar sounds. Feel what you are resting on. Then slowly open your eyes.
- PLEASE NOTE: Stay in that position for a brief amount of time, until you are fully alert, before attempting to get up. If you feel wobbly, steady yourself before moving, or sit down again. You may feel heavy with your first few steps. These are all normal reactions some people experience after deep relaxation.

Some common experiences related to hypnotherapy include:

- Basic relaxation, as described above
- Visualization, which occurs during the imaginative part of the process. Visualization involves a person mentally examining a goal in detail over and over to learn the steps to achieve it. Strictly speaking, visualization consists of only the imagination part of the basic run and uses one of the following:
 - Guided imagery, in which another person's voice presents all phases of the basic method (in contrast to listening mentally to oneself)
 - Autosuggestion and positive affirmations, which are suggestions made to oneself regarding qualities and attributes one wishes to acquire or master

Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR)

Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) is a psychotherapy that emphasizes disturbing memories as the cause of emotional distress. It is used (though not exclusively) with people who have experienced severe unresolved trauma. The goal of EMDR therapy is to process distressing memories and reduce their effect.

EMDR frequently involves the presentation of visual stimuli (for example, fingers or a metronome-like gadget) that the therapist moves from side to side, probably about a foot from the patient's face. The therapist instructs patients to use only their eyes (not their heads) to follow the object

as it moves to and fro. Other ways that EMDR is performed involve the use of auditory stimulus (such as tones sounding alternately in the right and left ear) or tactile stimulus (such as tapping the patient's hands or causing a tingling or buzzing sensation in sequence from one side to the other). Regardless of the means, while the stimulus is being administered, patients are asked to keep the trauma experience in mind. Their distress levels are measured by the therapist using standard methods before, during, and after each treatment segment. The measurement reveals the degree of change in the disturbing emotions. In the majority of cases, patients are freed from the emotional pain they used to suffer when they encountered reminders of the troubling experience.

Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE)

No doubt, one of the reasons trauma fits so well under the category of complex anxiety reactions is that trauma sufferers are extremely fearful of facing their disturbing experiences again. Also, because images of the original exposure keep recurring in their minds, they try to protect themselves by employing a variety of defence mechanisms, such as masks, dissociation, and traumatic amnesia. If the appropriate treatment for their distress involves confrontation with the trauma, suffering is unavoidable. Unfortunately, covering up or avoiding the trauma is the opposite of what they need to do to get better. The treatment approaches described thus far are intended to provide a safe environment in which a sufferer is helped or supervised in facing the horror, shock, or helplessness of her or his trauma.

Prolonged exposure (PE), which is therapist-administered, is another form of controlled encounter with a frightening or distressful experience. With PE, individuals are given the chance to confront their problems, both in real life situations and in the imagination. However, exposure is a gradual process, carried out in stages, and the original protocol for administering PE does include activities to reduce the distress of revisiting the traumatic event.

It is reported that some people who have experienced trauma were unable to tolerate a direct encounter with the traumatic events required by PE therapy. Other research, however, has indicated that some sufferers were not affected by the distress of revisiting the original trauma. Nonetheless, this treatment method appears to allow people to assemble and narrate a smoothly flowing version of their terrifying story, which was previously related in a fragmentary fashion (probably representative of their earlier mental state and manner of addressing the problem). Apparently, this repeated telling of a trauma story also marks improvement in the sufferer's emotional reprocessing. In association with other factors, this approach leads to healing.

Mindfulness Meditation

Since being introduced into North American mainstream medicine in the mid-eighties, mindfulness meditation has grown in use and popularity among almost all of the medical and healthcare professions. Several universities have also engaged in research to prove its effectiveness, and some now have a formal program of study that includes mindfulness

meditation. It is also used in the business world by senior executives and employees to improve decision-making skills and general functioning in everyday life.

Mindfulness meditation involves focusing one's total attention on something—a target. This can be something going on in your body (such as your breathing) or in the surrounding environment. Your target of observation may be a natural object (such as a fruit, your foot, a flower, an animal, people, the sky, a rock, etc.) or a man-made object (such as a ball, an item of furniture, a carved object, a picture, etc.). One may also pay full attention to an activity, for example, when completing a task or domestic chore (bathing, walking, eating), performing special movements (tai chi, yoga, exercise), or viewing a scene (a game, people talking, children playing). Just about any event that comes into our experience can be an object of mindfulness meditation.

We look at, listen to, touch, smell, feel, taste, or think about things all the time. But to do so mindfully means that we purposefully attend to specific things or specific aspects of those things for a reason. That reason is to learn as much as we can about the target of observation in one undivided time span. In doing so, we give our moment-to-moment attention to it. While we are doing this, we cannot—at the same time—be thinking about things that make us feel anxious, depressed, angry, ashamed, neglected, put down, unimportant, worthless, and so on. In addition, while in meditation mode, our learning is to be unconditional—that is, we are to accept what we observe “as is” and without judgment. As such, we are able to totally free our

minds from any negative, unpleasant, or unwanted emotions, since the troubling thoughts we usually have and the ones those thoughts instigate are blocked from our minds because our attention is on something else (the meditation object). This enables us to accept our experiences without unhealthy reactions and leaves us in a calm and positive mental state.

Mindfulness meditation, then, is a way of deliberately bringing our awareness and close attention to an object so that we can, as accurately as possible, take note of its characteristics with curiosity, in an accepting and non-judgmental manner, moment-to-moment, and without interruption.

The fact that we are always thinking means that during any activity (including a mindfulness exercise) our minds will bring up thoughts, and some of them will not be about the activity in which we are engaged. In that sense, it is quite understandable that different thoughts will interrupt during a period when we are trying to focus on doing a specific task, such as a mindfulness thinking activity. This is called *distraction* (although in ordinary, everyday life, we may not consider our wandering thoughts a distraction). And combating distracted thinking is the very reason for doing a mindfulness exercise. In other words, the goal is to keep the unwelcome thoughts from getting in at a time when we would rather be having pleasant or harmless thoughts. To do that, we need to learn how to return from those interrupting ideas so that we can do an activity mindfully.

This form of meditation has been taught within a formal setting, under the guidance of a teacher, or in a formal group.

Usually, a trained leader is available to answer questions or pose challenges. Most likely, through the years, the majority of north american individuals who have learned mindfulness meditation skills appear to have done so (at least initially) in a formal setting.

Mindfulness meditation has been recognized as an effective treatment approach for a wide range of physical, emotional, and spiritual problems (including chronic pain, heart disease, insomnia, gastrointestinal difficulties, anxiety, and depression). It is also used for controlling a variety of emotional reactions and improving day-by-day coping. Mindfulness meditation has proved useful in treating people who have substance abuse problems or traumatic stress. Additionally, it is effective in improving relationship deficiencies between individuals and enriching peoples' faith practices. Research has shown that mindfulness meditation can also improve performance skills and contribute to resolving PTSD symptoms (especially due to sexual abuse or combat exposure). As a treatment process, mindfulness meditation offers the advantage of not requiring the sufferer to confront the trauma scene or its memories.

In research studies using functional Magnetic Resonance Imagery (f-MRI), researchers are able to see inside the areas of the brain responsible for an activity a person is performing. They have reportedly shown that regular use of mindfulness methods (or any of the activities that were previously mentioned) results in learning that becomes "wired" into the brain, actually changing its form and function in line with that mental activity.

The formally recommended amount of time to be devoted to doing mindfulness meditation each day varies from no less than one hour to about 20 minutes. Despite these varying prescriptions, it is accepted that mindfulness meditation occurs any time one can give complete, purposeful, undivided, accepting attention to anything, whether for a few seconds or an hour or more.

The healing power of mindfulness meditation has earned it a firm position of respect among diverse groups, such as university professors, medical professionals (including all those who work in the healing sciences and arts), and leaders reportedly of large companies, such as Google, Apple, and Proctor & Gamble. Although mindfulness meditation is only now beginning to spread among many in the general population in the West, it has been widely practiced in everyday life in all levels of society in the East, particularly among monks and nuns, who have been using it for a few thousand years. To keep the respectability of this method of healing, if you wish to use a teacher, I recommend you engage a well-trained and credentialed individual when you seek this intervention for a problem. Otherwise because it is a relatively straightforward method, however, you can learn to use mindfulness meditation to achieve self-healing at a basic level by reading the information presented in this book or any other book or digital source of your choice—provided you are assured the person presenting it has proper qualifications. In using this method to gain peace of mind, you will need to manage the interference caused by distractions. Here's an example of how you might talk yourself

through distracting thoughts during a mindfulness exercise that you are doing by yourself:

“Okay. I am breathing in, and, yes, it feels cool around my nostrils. Now I breathe out—hey, it’s warmer going out. In again...and, wow, it goes so fast down my windpipe...but I felt my chest heave...and how about my stomach...okay, breathe deeply this time. Yes, I saw it rise, barely... I wonder if I should be lying down to do this. But then I might fall asleep...that’s no good...oops, I have to come back to the exercise.... Breathing in... cool...out warm...in...stomach rises...out...stomach goes down. In...rushing air in my chest...out.... I forgot to mail that letter again, and now I’ll get kicked out.... I’m a failure alright.... Okay, okay, I need to stick with this breathing for just one minute. Now let me do this right.... What’s the time? Breathe in...out ...slowly in and slowly out.... I’m doing fine...in...rising stomach... out...stomach going down...in...air rushed past chest... breathe out...slowly in...slowly out...in...rushing feeling in back of nostrils...it feels like floating air coming out...in...no floating air...stretching feeling in abdomen...out...press air out...spontaneous stomach muscle recovery...it’s past the minute already. That wasn’t bad for a first try. I need to do this a lot more.... Wow, it does feel....(Describe to yourself how you feel—maybe refreshed, a little tired, good, etc.).”

The promise or expectation of mindfulness meditation is that with regular practice it will become an effortless habit,

like any other repeated activity or behaviour (after 21 days, as it is popularly believed). Repeatedly returning to this technique, as a breathing exercise, can be a highly effective training for letting go of frequently disturbing thoughts. In that regard, you may use a mindfulness attitude in many ordinary, everyday activities. For example, you may look at the sky and turn that experience into a mindful activity. As you breathe in, you'd say, "I am looking at the sky," smiling all the while, and then you'd breathe out, keeping the happy expression. In this way, you may use the energy of your joyful attitude to support your mindful awareness.

To be mindful is to be in touch with the beauty of each experience as it is happening. With practice, mindfulness meditation further promises to become pleasurable, enhancing your enjoyment—even of just noticing your breath. Beyond that, this regular sense of joy, day after day, will make you a truly happy person.



Chapter 11

WHY ME?—A SERIOUS BARRIER **Theories & Solutions to Go With**

“Why Me?”

This is a common complaint, undoubtedly, of a large number of people when something unwelcome happens to them. Sufferers of trauma or other severe emotional conditions are no exception. They often express this almost universal feeling of unfairness or mystery regarding the circumstances they have faced through their trauma or unpleasant experience. For some people, “Why me?” is a real question to which they expect to receive a real answer, and that desire can stand in the way of getting better. “Why me?” or “Why did it have to happen?” can turn into another version of pursuing a non-existent answer and become a huge blockage to healing. It would take a miracle to find an answer that would satisfy everyone.

Some people decide that their exposure to trauma is wrong, unfair, and unacceptable—and that’s all there is to



it. They reject all attempts to influence their thinking in any other direction. As such, they remain buried in self-harming thoughts and beliefs and are neither willing to move from there nor open to considering any other point of view. This is sad. Sad because misery is unnecessarily worsened and prolonged by hopelessness. For these people, nothing short of an alteration in their brain cells would be needed to promote healthy thinking and change their condition. For them, change will not come through learning, as is characteristic of almost all conscious life forms. These people, reluctant or incapable as they are of accepting the fact that they can release themselves from needless distress and grief have, unfortunately, chosen suffering as a lifelong undertaking, whether they realize it or not.

There are, however, a large number of sufferers who are looking for an answer to which they can relate. You may be one of them and expect to come upon information that will provide an understanding of your existence—one that doesn't make you feel doomed to suffering one misfortune after another in life. Hopefully, you will find peace in one of the explanations I will offer. You will see from my selected examples that there is a variety of ways to understand how you relate to suffering. As such, the choice of any one explanation or a combination of them is, primarily, dependent on your level of comfort with that viewpoint. These explanations are not presented to excuse or condemn any action or to overlook versus lay blame on anyone's behaviour—sufferer or perpetrator. The hope in exploring explanations of suffering is that you will find a way of accepting your

situation that will make positive change and forward movement easier. Human beings down through the ages have individually tried to answer the question, “Why is this pain in my life?” Indeed, the teachings of many religious faiths and philosophies have set forth this question in their scriptures. Sages and great teachers or scholars also address this issue of suffering, although sometimes you may have to draw out the question and answer. Suffering of any kind is not pleasant, so encouragement from any legitimate source is welcome. Your strong belief will definitely help you deal with not only the emotional problem itself but also with difficulties related to why you are in this state of suffering. I know it all too well, as I am in total body pain and discomfort as I write this section—the result of central cord damage from a motor vehicle accident I did not cause.

If you find inspiration in one or more of the points of view I have provided below, then you will have confirmed my hope, that these ideas will help put to rest the concern that your suffering may be a coded, unfair, or cruel message indicating doom, probably for the rest of your life. It is not! Stand firm, and accept the boost from the explanations below or from any other place of hope that may be specific to you. By such means, your self-healing methods will gain power.

“That’s Life—Why Not Me?” **[The Law of Natural Logic]**

Some sufferers (of serious illnesses, adversities, tragedies, etc.) have been known to respond with, “That’s life—Why *not* me?” There is nobility and finality in this statement.

These sufferers realize they are not superior to or more special than anyone else, and are not to be exempted from the problems of this world. Nor, moreover, can they accept another person being “chosen” for the problem so that they will be spared. For them, the attitude is, “The buck stops here.” Therefore, if no other person is to be the target, then they can understand why it had to be them. With that interpretation of the reason for their suffering, they need to find ways of reaching into their personal resources to draw strength and find ways of calling upon the experiences, love, and wisdom of others to help them move on, rather than remain stuck.

Cosmic Operation Theory

A less lofty interpretation of “Why me?” may lie in appreciating the blindness of the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (a nifty little expression from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*). By that I mean those blows in the dark, landed on you by chance. Life does not pick and choose those who are presented with special circumstances. Events occur in a place and at a certain time. The person or people in that time and place encounter or become a part of that event. Some would say that a person’s time-event line intersects with that of the emotionally painful circumstance, and so he or she experiences that event. Or there may be multiple crossing lines of destinies, including your own time-place-event line. Some might describe this as *Fate*—an unavoidable match to the time and place of that event. As such, you might consider the experience of trauma or the cause

of an emotional problem from the point of view that we are all individually matched to a time and place in the time-place-event continuum. In effect, the trauma or unwelcome experience did not happen to another person because you were the only match. If you adopt this explanation of your pain, then there is no reason for distress over the unfairness of life; what needs to be done is to use available methods to heal, recognizing that you have received benefits from the meeting or crossing of these time-place continuums at other times.

Relative Awareness Response

From another point of view, your suffering may be described as the result of your awareness of imperfection (for example, deficiency or injury). When you are aware of it in your physical body, it is physical pain. When it involves perception of yourself being imperfect in another way, such as while interacting with others, it becomes emotional suffering. To take this idea a step further, your pain belongs to a universal method of indicating contrasts, whereby you are able to distinguish between things. For example, people would not know short if they had no notion of long or tall. Without knowledge of soft, hard would not be recognized. Nothing would be big if it could not be compared with small or little. In that sense, you would not perceive pain if there was no absence of pain.

Physical pain in the whole body is noticeable because the pain is unevenly distributed, at least with respect to type or intensity. These differences make you aware of the pain and

(due to the unequal distribution) lead you to realize a state of imperfect physical health. Extremes in any range of perceived difference apparently have increased in significance, probably because they tend to command attention. This means that more or the most pain is likely to be contrasted with the least or no pain. As a result, the discomfort of pain becomes more overriding than the ease of no pain.

Based on this explanation, perception or awareness of pain or of harm (a.k.a. *nociception*) requires that you understand its message or meaning in order to pursue or promote at least a certain degree of recovery of health by removing or reducing the wellness-illness mismatch or imperfection. Let's say, for example, you suffered emotional pain that feels new or different from anything you have ever felt. You would tend to consider it relatively intense because you have nothing with which to compare it. Otherwise, previous experience would have provided you with a basis for comparison.

If you buy into the Relative Awareness Response theory in the former case, you are likely to reduce your misery by telling yourself that the pain, as you are feeling it, is severe because you are comparing it with no pain, and it needs to really hurt to toughen you so that all such future pain will have little or no effect. Whatever rating you give to the current hurt, you would recognize that it is relative, and once you get used to it, the assigned value will be less because you will then be able to compare it with the greater discomfort you felt when the pain first showed up. If you could learn to see pain in this light, your attitude to every new sting would be something like, "Been there, done that. I can handle this

It seems that those who complain, “Why me?” are putting a higher value on what they believe to be their disproportionate share of suffering.

one just fine—thank you very much!” There would be no need for a “Why me?” reaction. This is a brave, bold, and confrontational approach to pain. It’s a “You can’t scare me” type of tactic.

Because there is common understanding of the different patterns of emotional pain, in a general sense, people tend to apply varying types and levels of pain to themselves in a specific sense. It seems that those who complain, “Why me?” are putting a higher value on what they believe to be their disproportionate share of suffering. Indeed, the “Why me?” reaction does not necessarily come from those with the relatively severest misfortune (physical or emotional) but from those who perceive their problems as such. Those who believe their suffering represents an unfair burden need to be aware that their lack of understanding of nociception (as opposed to their belief in how their pain should feel) is the barrier. Sufferers who are not able to immediately grasp that they are putting an unusual amount of weight on what they see as their share of emotional pain may be helped by such techniques as perception-checking, challenging beliefs, Thought Replacement, and other forms of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) that assist in changing

beliefs. These people might come to learn they are as vulnerable as anyone else. So, if you are someone who needs this realization in order to help your self-healing, consider this saying: “I complained about not having shoes till I saw someone without feet!” You may then be more inclined to choose one of the suggested self-treatment ideas.

Basic-Needs Fulfillment Response

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (arranged in order, from most to least necessary for living life), well-known in many circles, describes human basic needs as follows:

1. **Biological and Physiological Needs**—air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sleep, sex, etc.
2. **Safety Needs**—protection from the elements, physical, social and financial security, order, law, limits, stability, etc.
3. **Belongingness and Love Needs**—family, work group, affection, relationships, etc.
4. **Esteem Needs**—achievement, mastery, self-esteem, independence, status, dominance, prestige, managerial responsibility, etc.
5. **Self-Actualization Needs**—realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences.
6. **Self-Transcendence Needs**—true actualization that comes from the selfless or spiritual pursuit of a goal(s) higher than or outside oneself.

Based on the assumption that these needs are inborn and motivate us to achieve them, one may reason that conflicts

will arise within the individual and between the person and the external environment, in the attempt to satisfy our needs. Such conflicts may include roadblocks, dissatisfactions, and inadequacies (perceived or actual). A person's suffering may arise from the belief that life has been especially cruel and has not allowed certain needs of his or hers to be fulfilled—and the trauma or other emotional distress is continuing that pattern. As such, whether it is obvious or not, the inability to achieve needed satisfaction that is taken for granted or to which a person feels entitled (at any level or time of life) is likely to register as pain or suffering. The sufferer's response to this could be a realization that his or her suffering is because certain basic needs have been denied or disrupted by the trauma or unwanted mood.

If this is a comfortable explanation for your emotional condition; if you see your turmoil as mainly due to your failure in feeling motivated to function at a higher stage in certain basic need areas, your major task may be to discover which one(s) you may be able to relearn how to fulfil, using all available public and private help. When you are able to enjoy the benefits of a lower level of motivational development, you will naturally feel a need to proceed higher on the Maslow hierarchy. If this gap in your inner needs was only one area of distress, by moving it out of the way, you will be ready to tackle whatever is underlying that requires your healing attention. The main point, however, is that by adopting the Basic Needs Explanation to your unhappiness, you gave yourself a chance to move on with your healing.

The Christian View

In the Christian biblical belief system, one finds an explanation of “Why me?” in the view that pain and suffering in the world is part of God’s plan or purpose. It is not a bad thing intended necessarily as punishment. Mostly, it is a consequence of a disruption in the master plan of the Creator. Not intending to undo history, going forward, God made Himself suffer as a way of demonstrating His love and need for His human creatures, and as such, He understands suffering. No one person is singled out to suffer unnecessary pain.

Some Christians will ask, “Why is there suffering, anyway?” even before they ask, “Why me?” It is worth noting that only Christian believers are expected to consider the answer to these questions from the point of view of their faith, because those who take their scriptures seriously would be willing to use the bible as the basis for an answer. If you do not share in this belief, you are welcome to read out of curiosity. Perhaps you’ll want to save your questions, critiques, pleasant surprises, or neutral comments for a well-informed practitioner or pastor. For now, perhaps the explanation in one of the other sections may be more acceptable to you.

If you are a believer, you probably understand the Christian bible’s teaching that the relationship we have with God is based on love. In fact, the Bible itself is the story of God’s love for the special creatures called humans. Therefore, you may find it difficult to make sense of why this “loving God” would pick on any one of us who acknowledges Him, as father, to suffer at all. Although suffering results from different causes, in general, it has an important function in our relationship

with Christ and God. For one thing, it is a means of testing our faith, as the Book of James explains it. Please note that all the Bible quotations are from the King James Version (KJV), which is sometimes difficult to follow. For that reason, I provide a paraphrase of the passage each time:

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. (James 1:2-4 KJV)

[Paraphrase: My dear fellow believers, take it as something to be happy about whenever you find yourself in various trying circumstances because you know that by your faith being tested in these situations, your ability to endure hardship will increase. So allow that patient attitude to help complete the job of bringing you to the highest possible level of maturity at which nothing is lacking.]

Suffering exists also because we follow after Christ's footsteps. Just as He suffered, we, too, would expect and desire to endure our own share. Because He loves us, He would view any suffering we experience as significant and deserving of reward. Listen to this:

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Romans 8:16-17 KJV)

[Paraphrase: Together with our human spirit the Holy Spirit offers testimony that we are the children of God. Therefore being His children we are heirs and indeed joint-heirs with Christ, which means that like Christ we have a share of God's glory. But if because of this family relationship we share His glory we also have to share His suffering.]

In effect, for believers, the attitude to suffering is to consider it as a “badge of honour.” Moreover, even if we see our suffering as coming directly from God, we are still not expected to complain because, in that case, we are questioning God's will. Instead, we receive the following advice: “So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, and place your trust in the God who made you—your Saviour—Who will never fail you” (1 Peter 4:19, paraphrased).

The problem with statements of dissatisfaction with our lot is that (whether you realize it or not) we are calling on God with questions like “Why me?” to explain and alter what looks like His unreasonable or unfair allotment of fate (in this case, of pain) to each sufferer. In effect, God is supposed to withdraw suffering from our lives because such behaviour is unbecoming of Him, unless, of course, He is really a monster in disguise instead of being “loving” or “caring.” It goes without saying that this line of thinking expresses complete ignorance of the nature of our Creator, as well as misinformation about how much He values us and what He wants for us. Let us review some passages about God's attributes as they relate to us, with respect to who is

in a position to recognize God in action:

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.
(1 John 4:8 KJV)

[Paraphrase: If it is not in your nature to love you will not be able to fully appreciate God's nature because He is essentially love.]

Reflect on these words about how valuable we are to Him:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:16-17, KJV)

[Paraphrase: God loved us so much that He sent the only Son He had as a gift to rescue and offer eternal life to anyone who believed in Him. God's plan was not to give His Son to blame and punish the world; He offered His Son to save the world from destruction.]

About what He wishes for us:

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (Jeremiah 29:11, KJV)

[Paraphrase: "I have made up my mind about you," says the Lord; "My thoughts are to give you prosperity with peace of mind. My intention towards you is not of evil; it is to bring you a desirable future."]

The fact is that God knows what emotional pain or suffering is. He felt and expressed it:

And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. (Gen. 6:6, KJV)

[Paraphrase: The Lord regretted that He had created mankind on the earth and it caused Him agony.]

And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. (Mark 14:34 KJV)

[Paraphrase: He (Jesus) told them, I am in deep sorrow that feels like it could kill me; wait here for me and stay alert.]

It is remarkable that the Creator of the Universe did not just snap His fingers to correct our misdeed and move on. Instead He chose to suffer the consequence of giving the human race free will because being His children, we were still loved and treasured. Despite our causing Him grief, He took additional suffering on Himself (on the cross), even knowing that except for a few (disciples) around Him, those who were His contemporaries would not care, would reject Him, and would even be eager to put Him to a cruel death. The following passage sums it up:

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5, KJV)

[Paraphrase: God/Christ was wounded on the cross

because we rebelled against His expectations of us and we crushed His spirits because of our many sins; the punishment He received on our behalf brought us peace, and the whipping that cut through His skin was for our healing.]

He did not use “Why me?” to get out of the suffering that awaited Him on earth and on the cross. He did not ask “Why me?” before or after His ordeal. His anguish of body and mind on the cross for our sake was real, and His familiarity with human suffering is testimony to the fact that He will never make us suffer for no reason.

These are the thoughts, words and actions of our Creator. Do they sound like a torturer or a mean ogre speaking? To me, they do not. It is, of course, understandable that being human, you will not always understand what is going on in your life; you will forget and doubt God’s words or become very overwhelmed or frustrated by your sufferings and fail to appreciate the sincerity and power of His words. God understands all of this. He expects us, however, to keep coming back to these passages to give us the opportunity to bounce back and continue to believe and trust Him. My friend, you need to grasp this wonderful message!

The issue of trusting God, even when we are experiencing awful circumstances, is an important one in the Christian faith. The Christian Bible says this:

We walk by faith and not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7, KJV)

[Paraphrase: We use faith to guide us when it comes to

our Christian life; we do not rely on how things look.]

One story that represents this viewpoint is about Jesus in a boat with his disciples during a sudden, violent storm. Jesus was apparently sleeping while the storm raged, and his disciples' attitude when they woke him up in a state of extreme fear was this: "How can you sleep when we are about to perish?" Jesus' response was to show them that he had more power than it appeared, even over storms. He verbally ordered this one to calm down, and it did. Jesus' message, in His words and actions, was to tell them that faith in Him (in all circumstances), if they had it, would have helped to calm their fears" (Mark 4:35-41, summarized and paraphrased).

Another story is about a man named Job, who trusted God completely and lived a happy, extremely prosperous, influential, and satisfied life. He suddenly lost everything that was apparently responsible for this contented and self-sufficient life (children, business, and wealth). In his discussion with God—as he tried to find the answer to "Why me?"—he received an answer in which God, in effect, told him this: "You need to learn that I am in charge. I choose to give and take away. Your only guide to understanding my undeniable and unchallengeable power is your faith in my love for you. I have the big picture, you don't. I work with whole lifetimes; your view is limited to specific points on the space-time continuum. Your life is up to me, not you" (The Book of Job, summarized and paraphrased).

These stories show that while we may accuse God of not caring about us, of being unfair, or of picking on us specifically, it is our desperation that makes us cynical and our lack

of adequate faith that disposes us to be hopeless in the face of perceived tragedy. At these times, we feel so betrayed that we want to toss in the towel and join the opposition! The chief character in this next drama could certainly have done so.

Consider this report of how God's actions in the lives of His believers can seem punishing and unfair, leaving the impression that He is being, unacceptably cruel. The main character is Joseph. In his story, the plot has as its underlying theme, emotional suffering, with physical pain. Its central message however is that what we see as tragedy is sometimes God's strategy for our good!

Joseph, a young Hebrew man from the land of Canaan, probably in his late adolescence, was the second-to-last of twelve brothers. They, being jealous of Joseph's extraordinary talent for interpreting dreams, were ready to kill him, but one of the older siblings stepped in to rescue him. Unexpectedly, however, the chance came along for them to sell their brother into slavery. By another twist of "fate," Joseph was bought by the chief of the palace guard of Pharaoh (King of Egypt). Joseph distinguished himself in the household of his master, Potiphar by working hard and being trusted well enough to be given complete charge of the Egyptian household. Another turn occurred in Joseph's life when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce the young man who, at this point, was described as "a goodly person, and well favored" (Genesis 39:6, KJV). [Paraphrase: Joseph was "physically well-built and attractive."] When he refused, she faked a scream and accused Joseph of attempting to sexually attack her. Her husband's response, to whom she later reported the false

incident, was to throw Joseph in jail. Again, he was soon noted for his honesty and excellent work habits in prison, which earned him a position next to the jailer. Yet another turn of events brought him out of jail and into the Pharaoh's employment, mainly, because of his ability to explain the meaning of dreams. Guess what happened once more? Yes, Joseph excelled in the palace, to the point of being promoted to the position of second-in-command to Pharaoh, with authority over the entire kingdom of Egypt. So God brought Joseph out of the dungeon into the upper echelon! The account goes on to describe how Joseph later revealed his true identity. He had hidden it from his family, who had come from their homeland in Canaan where a famine was very severe. Egypt, on the other hand, under Joseph's management, had more than enough food for the country and a surplus to sell to surrounding cities (Genesis Chapters 37–50, summarized and paraphrased).

This story contains important lessons. I picked the following for brief comments:

1. God's Plan was in progress from Joseph's birth in Israel's old age and a predicted rise to fame over his brothers, with his gift for interpreting dreams. From the time Joseph was nearly murdered by his brothers in their home country to his appointment as the highest-ranking palace official in the foreign country of Egypt, God was acting for Joseph's good, showing His pre-planned purpose even when it did not appear to be the case (as He took Joseph from a dungeon to the upper echelon).

2. Although Joseph knew that God had power over everything, not once did he blame Him for the troubles in his life. So trusting was Joseph of God's goodness that he easily forgave the people who wanted to destroy him. He was convinced that God was in charge, not his brothers. Therefore, his attitude to his would-be killers was as described in the following words:

And Joseph said unto them, 'Fear not: for am I in the place of God? ... Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones.' And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them. (Genesis 50:19, 21, KJV)

[Paraphrase: "Do not be afraid that I am going to punish you for what you did to me. Do you see me as being in God's position to do that? So do not worry... Actually, rest assured, my brothers, I will look after you all, very well, including your families." Thus, he put their minds at ease, by his caring words.]

You see, Joseph clearly understood the truth, that God was, is, and always will be in control over all the affairs in His universe, and so he did not ask, "Why me, God?" when life was not going well for him. This admirable young man did not even have the slightest bitter attitude towards his brothers for their spiteful and wicked actions towards him. On the contrary, this is how he revealed his true identity to them:

And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now

therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. (Genesis 45:4-5, KJV)

[Paraphrase: Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come closer, and take a good look!” When they did so, he exclaimed, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold to be a slave, in Egypt! Now, I do not want you to feel terrible or become angry because of your own actions. The fact is, God Himself brought me to this place and to this position, in advance of your coming, for me to be able both to safeguard your wellbeing and save the lives of others.”]

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. (Genesis 50:20, KJV)

[Paraphrase: From your point of view, you were putting a wicked plan against me into action; but God took control of your plan to achieve His benevolent objective, which, as we see it today, was to put me in a position to add years to the lives of many.]

As a believer in Jesus, the Christ, understand this truth: God is in control of every situation you experience (including very distressing ones, as Joseph went through), and you will be in a position to further learn that there is a purpose and ultimate benefit for each experience of suffering, especially when believed to be undeserved. The Bible states this:

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight

of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18, KJV)

[Paraphrase: The hardships we are going through now will pass in a flash and are really not worth mentioning. They, however, yield huge benefits, as reward, in the afterlife with God. This explains why we are able to look past our current, seemingly awful circumstance so that we can focus on that much more profitable future, which right now is not visible but which will bring everlasting prosperity.]

It goes on to say this:

And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope [...]. (Romans 5:3-4, KJV)

[“Paraphrase: Furthermore, with joy, we proudly and loudly call attention to show off whenever we face our many problems because we are fully aware of how God’s teaching works. Learning to deal with problems takes patience, and over time, that is proof of a well-formed character. With success in achieving good character, through this process, we have hope that our future will be successful.]

The Bible also explains this:

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by

the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him [...]. (Hebrews 5:8-9, KJV)

[Paraphrase: Although Jesus is God's Son, He endured suffering as a way of showing He accepted the discipline of obedience from His Father. And by that suffering, He qualified as One perfectly suited to be a Saviour, for all time, to all those who follow His example and, in turn, learn to be obedient to Jesus Christ, Himself.]

The God you believe in as your Creator, the Father of Jesus, your Saviour, who by nature is Love has, out of love made it possible for you and all other believers to live to eternity with Him in heaven. On that basis, you cannot avoid the truth that when things happen to you that you cannot comprehend (regarding God's actions), your only and best choice is to trust Him. Why? Because He is God! We, on the other hand, are His human creation (in other words, He is the pot-maker and we are the pots) with limited capacity. We can know only so much, hold only so many truths, and be able to do only so much about our circumstances.

Undoubtedly, at various points in our Christian growth, especially during our infancy in the faith, we may question, debate the logic, or probe the fairness of God's intentions. We may find our footing in the faith this way, as long as our aim is not to devalue or challenge God, but to gain better insight and better understand the relationship in which (we thankfully learn later) we are a forgivable part. When

our understanding matures, we grasp what is central: that our primary role within this love relationship with God is not one of being “understanders,” inquirers, or assessors. In fact, we are told in Proverbs 3:5: Regardless of your understanding (knowledge or intelligence), trust God completely for guidance in life [paraphrase]. We are grateful believers! Faith is the foundation of Christian life. Standing on this platform, believers are able to understand everything about God (without seeing contradiction), inquire about anything concerning Him from His Word and through prayer; and soberly assess how solid their connection with Him is—all towards becoming more like Him. Faith in God is the essential ingredient in the spiritual life of Christians. Remember this quotation: “We walk by faith not by sight.”

Linked by faith with Divine Love, everything is possible for you through this connection. I sincerely hope that you know that when there is true love between two people, they show they have complete trust in each other, do everything to please each other, and do nothing to hurt each other. Each feels the hurts and joys of the other; they can't wait to be together. Such an ideal relationship cannot be maintained 100 percent of the time by us, as humans, because we are not perfect; we are limited and make mistakes. Only God's Love can produce and sustain such a relationship. He loves us. He was the first to love us. And we live on this planet to carry out God's purpose. For that role, we are told this:

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness [...]. (2 Peter 1:3, KJV)

[Paraphrase: True to His creative, divine power, He has put into us everything we need, for living life in a godly manner.]

Indeed, He has given us various, though unequal, resources that are equally important and sufficient to keep us together, enjoying each other's company in this earthly relationship with Him. We are required to make the best and wholesome use of all our talents, whatever they are, which pleases God. Therefore, in your present condition, you cannot allow your special gifts to go to waste, doing nothing for yourself or others. There are many self-help steps you can take in both your healing work and your walk with God.

So then, the best answer I can offer to "Why Me?" from the Christian point of view is this: The God you believe in, who is the Architect of the blueprint containing **everything** that is in the makeup of your life, chose, for your benefit, to expose you to what, for now, appears to be suffering, to make a loving God's purpose come alive in your life.

This is how I came to see my quadriplegic condition that brought a drastic turn of events in my life. Most of my life was going very well when the road "accident" occurred, due to a very poorly maintained, rented motor vehicle. It has been almost five years now, and at no point did I feel the need to ask "Why me?" This is because I recognize two truths: first, that the encounter that caused my central cord injury was not accidental in the ordinary way most people would perceive it. It could not be, since my God is always in control of all the events in my life. Secondly, I know that somewhere in the incident there was something that would

be to my benefit, whether I could find it or not. It had to be so because God is good. Indeed, I can say with great certainty that I have recognized opportunities that would not have been there without my physical disability. Well, for one, I have been allowed to write this book; I have been given the privilege to say these words, in testimony to the Lord's all-surpassing love. I know that without the injury experience (definitely a testing of my faith), I would not have had this chance to join in, genuinely, proclaiming the kind of God with Whom we Christians are connected and to describe His qualities that may give you strength in any circumstance, though especially during your time of pain. Here is The Good News that I bring to you (and others), which is a prayer for me, too:

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19, KJV)

[Paraphrase: My prayer is that God will bestow on you the abundant capabilities that flow from His glorious presence and enable you with the powerful strength of His Spirit that dwells in you, to make it possible for Christ to live comfortably in you; that in this way, you

will develop, as have all holy people, the amount of faith and deep-rooted love needed to enlighten you about the immeasurable breadth, length, height, and depth of the love Christ has for us. I pray that this truth, about His love, which is beyond ordinary, human understanding, will be imparted by God, to fully equip you for living the life of holy excellence that only our God can bring about.]

Indeed, for the Christian believer, suffering is not punishment. It is God's love, chiseling, hammering, squashing, and moulding us into the Master's perfect piece that, at the right time, we will understand and appreciate.

Dear sufferer, if you are feeling discouraged about your condition, you need to be patient while you wait to understand how God's will is displayed in the unwanted happening in your life. This is what the Bible says:

For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. (Hebrews 10:36, KJV)

[Paraphrase: It is essential that you exercise constant patience (and do not give up) during the waiting, for this is what God wants you to do, in order for you to enjoy what He has promised.]

In the same sense that hoping is not to be taken as idle time, the advice to wait with patience does not ever mean "Do nothing." Faced with an emotional problem, you pray

(and prayers may be offered on your behalf) for healing. The strength of your belief that God will heal you is a key factor in divine healing. But much more important is your committed action of faith, which gets God's attention for Him to say, "Your faith has cured you!" Bringing your cares to the Lord needs to be accompanied with faith-based action. But after giving the problem to God, we demonstrate our trust in Him by leaving it, completely, under His behind-the-scenes management. It is all right to go on to live normally, doing and responding to the human healing actions that you know. While you wait, continue believing that your healing is going to be revealed ("revealed" because God already knows your troubles and their outcome). Although you are not aware of the big picture right now, the appropriate time is coming when He will show you, as He will all believers, how every scenario ends).

Without meaning to make my condition an issue for you, I would like to point out that I've had ample opportunity to practice unwavering patience during the last four-plus years, but I have not been able to do so 100 percent of the time, nor have I stayed consistently strong, all the time. I do, however, call myself back quickly to greater trust in the Lord's timetable, with a short prayer of confession and a request for forgiveness accompanied with gratitude for the undeniable and huge improvement in my condition and the blessings in my life. While I wait, I follow medical advice very closely, read about my symptoms (for clues to add to my understanding), report any unusual reactions, and agree to participate in treatments and projects that are known to

assist recovery. I can find the time, and I have the willingness and desire—so why wouldn't I?

Even with all these earthly resources and the shortcomings of my human condition, I know my Redeemer is alive and at work on my behalf (Job 19:25). Planted as firmly on this foundation of faith as I profess to be, I still do not, for example, pray for fresh ideas as I write and then leave the computer, expecting the new ideas to appear on the screen by the time I return. No! I continue to think and write, and then the ideas I did not have before show up!

Therefore, at any point in time, using your ability (or that with which God has endowed others) towards your healing or self-healing is a natural way to wait. God also uses human actions to show His miraculous powers. The difference between leaving your illness entirely with God and doing your part by taking sensible action while you wait is what or who you strongly believe is doing the healing. The Christian viewpoint is that, regardless of what else is going on, you have no doubt that your equally suffering Father is the leading Physician Who is firmly in control of your getting better. This is why He tells His believers to be thankful once we have passed the troubling condition over to Him; for in His hands, you can be certain that the course of your healing will be according to His will. Look up where He says this:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

[Paraphrase: Do not hang on to feelings of anxiety over anything. Instead, in every worrying circumstance, use prayer to bring your concerns to God, along with your gratitude; and God, Who can communicate peace of mind directly to your mind, in a way that goes beyond anything you could ever understand, will reveal Christ-centered solutions on your behalf.]

The central principle, however, that will help to guide you through your time of suffering is summed up in these words from a hymn, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

In the meantime, my dear fellow student, while learning about His will in the classroom of emotional pain, remember this encouraging promise He made, “[...] I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Joshua 1:5, KJV). [Paraphrase: I am committed to you: I will be with you, every step of the way, as long as you live; I will not abandon you.] This is your trump card to happiness; always use it. Claim this favour from a benevolent and caring God in your prayers with gratitude, and peace of mind will come into your life as a miracle of your faith.

Buddhist Views about Suffering

My intention in this section is to report a summary of my impression of the main teachings of the Buddhist tradition on suffering. I hope you will forgive my unschooled interpretation of these teachings. Hopefully, my unmistakable goal of giving you hope that’s anchored in your belief

system will make my interpretation worthwhile enough to you. I hope it will help you to keep moving on, while also opening your eyes to an answer as you ask “Why me?” and struggle with the pain of disappointment, helplessness, or frustration.

Understanding suffering from the Buddhist point of view appears to be based on knowledge of the Truth about all life that is aware—a four-fold Truth, known as the Four Noble Truths. A full treatment of this topic, however, is beyond the scope of this book (and my expertise).

Based on the First Noble Truth, Suffering exists in many areas of the life of all human beings. In that sense, Suffering is everywhere and does not discriminate among people. So, too, are Impermanence and Non-Self. This means that although suffering is universally present, like all other events in our experience, it is not a permanent state. Indeed, to take physical pain as an example, we tend to see the suffering from it as constant. With close, moment-to-moment observation, however, it can be seen that the features or qualities of this pain will change, perhaps from sharp to throbbing to dull (or no pain) and back to sharp again. The different types of pain sensations ebb and flow into each other. Moreover, we neither have to identify with nor own the pain. We can and should learn to distance and separate ourselves from our pain and the things that cause it. Because our personhood is not a permanent quality either, we should remember that we are not the same person from even one moment to the next. So we would be wise, or well-advised, to refrain from becoming attached to any one

state of our being (such as suffering), as if that state alone is what defines who we are. If one can learn to have and remain mindful of this non-self approach, suffering will lose its stronghold as a lasting life force that's found a home in the apparently stable life form we each call "me" or "I." With this teaching, the approach to suffering is that no one is selected to be subjected to any kind of suffering. It is how we perceive and misunderstand our true selves that create pain and suffering in our lives. In other words, you have the power to stop your suffering!

The Second Noble Truth points to the origin of suffering, which comes from the desire for pleasurable experiences and physical possessions, all of which are transient. Being attached to or separated from these objects of desire is what allows suffering to occur. According to this Noble Truth, we suffer when we do not get (or fear to lose) what we want (a craving) and also when we get (or worry we will get) what we do not want (aversion). Human beings, however, can learn to have a detached connection with the things that create cravings and aversions, and learn to relate to them as changing means to ends rather than as permanent goals. Because the things that make us suffer are always changing (just like our pain is), the best attitude to every kind of suffering is "this too shall pass." There's much comfort in this Truth.

According to the Third Noble Truth, we come upon the realization that through momentary episodes of detachment from desires, we are able to eventually give up desiring things altogether. We came to be so strongly attached to

these needs through conditioning. As such, we can learn to de-condition and detach ourselves from them, too. Many people learn to detach from their need for smoking; others from certain foods or drinks that are not good for them and that block or slow their progress to a healthy life. In much the same way, the Buddhist believer can learn to recognize that it is necessary to detach from all material and non-material things, including the Self (thus learning to accept Non-Self as an important goal of life), in order to achieve a state of total spiritual purity with complete clarity. This is a state of Nirvana in which Enlightenment is achieved, and you gain the knowledge that ends all suffering.

The Fourth Noble Truth teaches there is a right Path to take to conduct life in a way that will detach us from the need to possess and end our own suffering. This Right (or Middle) Path comprises eight stages, known as the Eight-Fold Noble Path, by which the Buddhist practitioner attains to the Four-Fold Truths.

In summary, the Fourth Noble Truth spells out the cause-and-effect laws of Karma, which propose that right actions can enable good things to happen to people. Therefore, the way out of suffering is to eliminate its cause. As such, the issue of “Why me?” does not seem to even arise in the Buddhist belief system. As a person who practices Buddhism, you likely know—as prescribed by your teaching—what your suffering is all about. In short, to understand and escape from suffering, you need only to learn what your faith teaches.

In that regard, it appears that the answer to “Why me?”

is that you have yet to learn the correct way to be liberated from suffering. This will become clear as you follow the Eight-Fold Path to the Four-Fold Truth. You have not been selected for abuse; you simply need to learn to take the Right Path. This method is taught as an activity that's within the power of every person to carry out.

This Buddhist teaching offers hope to the sufferer, not only by indicating a way to escape from a state of anguish, but also by offering instruction on how to view any period of suffering that will make the question "Why me?" pointless.

The View of Hinduism Regarding Suffering

In many ways, the teachings and concepts about suffering appear to be common to Hinduism and other Eastern religions, including Buddhism. Again, my motivation for dealing with this topic is not to discuss it at length to demonstrate my in-depth knowledge of the faith, which I definitely lack. Instead, I only wish to present a summary of my understanding of those spiritual aspects, which may be used to answer the question "Why me?" for the believer in Hinduism who is dealing with emotional pain. My intention is to provide comfort. Here, as well, I beg the more sophisticated Hindu reader to have patience with my elementary knowledge of the Hindu faith.

The Hindu practitioner would know that foolish, fruitless, or inappropriate desires that lead to strong attachment are the basis of suffering. The logical and most effective path

to freedom from suffering is within the control of all human beings who have learned some rules for living right.

Accordingly, the lack of discipline over one's thoughts would cause a person to become mentally unstable and to move from one kind of dissatisfaction to another, all because of wrong desires. The longer one stays caught in unwise, mental attachment, the longer one stays in emotional pain. As you know, included in the Hindu belief system is the idea that current suffering may have originated from a previous existence or Karma. As such, discipline over one's thoughts is necessary in each lifetime to make up for past errors in living and to escape suffering in present and future lives. The following story, in my opinion, well illustrates a common theme in ancient Hindu literature: An undisciplined mind that hangs on to discontent can bring suffering. As a victim of emotional turmoil, see what you think of this interpretation:

The Fable of the Woodman

Once there was a woodman who went around selling cut wood that families could use to cook their food. He went to the forest every day to cut down the dead branches from the trees that looked just right. He would then cut up the large branches into smaller sizes and make them into small bundles. He had been doing so for many years. When his father, a lifelong woodman, was about to die, he told the woodman, his only his son, "You will soon become the head of this family. See that you keep to all our traditions, and when your time

comes to go to the next life you will say the same words to your son.”

One day the woodman decided that his work was too hard. After cutting up the branches he sat down on the cut wood he had tied into a bundle and started to complain aloud. The animals in the forest listened to him and felt very sorry for him. So they took his message to the Wise Man of the Woods. The Wise Man of the Woods wasted no time coming to meet the woodman. “What would you like me to do for you?” he asked the woodman, kindly. The woodman had heard stories that the Wise Man of the Woods had the power to grant wishes. So he explained that he was tired of getting up very early in the morning to walk a long distance to reach the forest, only to be pricked by thorns, fall over rocks, or step into holes in the ground, trying to find just the right tree; and that after cutting up the branches into firewood, which was very hard to do, he had to walk all the way back to town under the hot sun to sell the wood. Then the woodman asked the Wise Man of the Woods, “Can I become the wood instead? So someone will carry me and I do not have to do so much walking.” The Wise Man of the Woods granted his wish and disappeared.

To the woodman’s delight he immediately found himself sitting on the head of a woodman, who carried him around shouting, “Wood for sale! Wood for sale!” Finally someone bought the wood, and the woodman

carrying the wood that used to be a woodman threw him on the ground. Now the former woodman did not like this at all. But he was soon to be even more miserable; a woman came at him with an axe, chopping him up into smaller pieces. He screamed in pain at each blow from the axe, but the woman did not seem to hear him. Things were going to get even worse for him. He heard the woman say to her son, “Son, tie up the wood, and keep it behind the shed. Tomorrow I will use it to make the fire to cook our food.” The wood, which was once a woodman, became very, very frightened. He yelled out as loud as he could, calling for the Wise Man of the Woods to come to his rescue. A stray dog listened to his complaints and took the message to the Wise Man of the Woods. Again, the Wise Man of the Woods asked what he could do for the wood that used to be a woodman. The woodman said, “I will die if I am put into the fire the woman will use to cook her food. I want to be the axe instead. I will just lie around until someone picks me up to split wood. I’ll be stronger than the wood.” The Wise Man of the Woods granted his wish a second time.

No sooner was he an axe than the woman’s neighbour came over to borrow her axe. She willingly handed the former woodman over, and just before she went back indoors, she told the neighbour, “Oh, I think my axe is now quite dull. Will you sharpen it for me?” The axe, which was once a woodman, was pleased to hear this and he thought, “I will become sharp and cut through

the wood quickly. So it will not be hard work for me.” But again, he was in for a surprise. The neighbour walked down the street to a friend, who happened to be a blacksmith. His friend agreed to sharpen the axe, which he put in a vise and tightened so hard that the former woodman began to cry out in pain. The blacksmith did not appear to hear and instead went to get a grindstone, which he placed very close to the vise that was squeezing the axe. Then the blacksmith started turning the grindstone, which he dragged along the edge of the axe. This was even more painful than the vise grip. The former woodman tried to fight loose from the vise to escape from the grinding but could not move even a little, so he just screamed. The woodman continued screaming just as loud, even after the blacksmith finished sharpening the axe, which he now was. But at this point, he was calling the Wise Man of the Woods to help him. A goat that was eating grass nearby took his message to the Wise Man of the Woods, who came again to listen to the woodman, who was now a very sharp axe. This time, he said he wanted to be a tree deep in the forest where no woodman would be able to reach him. The Wise Man of the Wood asked, “Are you sure? This is the last wish I can grant you.” The former woodman said he was sure, for he only had to stand in one place, enjoying the breeze, and the leaves will shade him from the sun. Instantly, he was a tree deep in the forest.

The next day, he was taken by surprise when a very bright light flashed around him and a very loud noise

startled him practically out of his roots. It was lightning and thunder! He had certainly heard thunder and seen lightning before, when he was a woodman, but never so close and loud. Again, he was frightened, but not as much as when he was wood or an axe. At least there was no pain. The lightning and thunder continued day after day, and just when he was beginning to get used to them, it started raining. It rained hard and long, and he became very wet and cold. He did not like this one bit. But something much more uncomfortable was going to happen. As soon as the rains began to lessen and the lightning and thunder stopped, he heard a heavy rumbling noise in the distance. The tree that was a woodman, who became wood that was changed to an axe and is now a tree, did not know it, but the noise he heard was of bulldozers coming to clear a path through the forest to make a very wide road. The tree was in the middle of where the road would pass.

In a few months, the bulldozers came up to the place where the tree stood and dug it up. The tree that was an axe which was a bundle of wood that was a woodman, fell over with a crashing noise. As he did, he wondered sadly how his son would know what to do with his life, as the woodman had learned this from his father. Then workmen came with chainsaws and hacked the tree into many large pieces, which some woodmen cut into smaller sizes to take to town to sell as firewood. And so ends the tragic tale of the woodman who was not satisfied being a woodman.

Although the woodman tried to find reasons why he should become something else, his strong desire led to faulty thinking. Indeed, an undisciplined mind can bring misery. Sometimes, because of very difficult life circumstances and emotional pain, sufferers like you might neglect to consider faith-based advice which encourages you to examine yourself for unrealistic, pointless, or mistaken thinking. In this way, you can avoid building desires on them and creating further mental turmoil.

According to your Hindu faith, it would seem that every individual is responsible for seeking out and engaging in proper behaviour, since everyone has a share of the universal spirit (an intelligent soul) that aspires to a perfect state. As you can see, it is your duty as a believer to use your well-equipped mind to exercise discipline in thinking, to learn and apply the rules for achieving Karma during the present life, and to attain Moksha (Liberation) as a way of ending all suffering. As with Buddhist believers, the Hindu faith allows the believer to develop the tools for living right as a means to avoid suffering. As the fable illustrates, there is potential for much harm if you are reacting to your mental or physical pain with “Why me?” as an expression of dissatisfaction with your current state. Therefore, as a Hindu believer reading through this book, the self-healing procedures you choose are not likely to be hindered by “Why me?” barriers. Undoubtedly, there is no room in your Hindu faith for a self-pitying, hopeless “Why me?” reaction.

Your religious belief includes the principle that there is a place and a time for every thought, and there are thoughts

you should never put into action. Along with other ideas from Hindu philosophy, this would presumably give guidance to someone who is beginning to slide into deep dissatisfaction while dealing with a distressing experience, as you may be. In other words, **“Why me?” thoughts only lead to more distress.** You, the Hindu sufferer, must take charge of every thought and examine it, allowing only those that heal to remain and provide you with guidance to act.

By studying the approach presented in the Hindu faith and in the teachings of other Eastern philosophies, it becomes clear that importance is given to the idea that each person has a responsibility to shape his or her life to achieve ultimate goals, especially enlightenment. Since thoughts are like the vehicles of their destiny, what Hinduism followers allow themselves to focus on is what their world will reflect. Accordingly, instead of having thoughts that make you sad, angry, or depressed, you could just as well come up with reasons to feel happy, calm, or upbeat. Expecting an outside agent to make your life better does not appear to be morally proper for a serious Hindu disciple, such as you. Instead, your faith demands that you apply intelligence to seek ways to improve your life through mental discipline. Frankly, it is the teaching of this book that everyone would live happier lives with much less distress by following this advice.

Nonetheless, people tend, much more frequently, to focus on unhappiness whenever their circumstances are not acceptable to them. I encourage you, as a believer in Hinduism, to lead the field of self-healers with sensible goals,

points of view, and attitudes aimed at significantly reducing emotional disturbance in your life. As someone practising Hinduism, you need to engage in disciplined, sensible thinking and reject suffering, making it unnecessary for you to be troubled by “Why me?” issues. Not only is it true that you can accomplish this, but it is your duty to do so through the strength of your faith. May sensible thoughts, in an ever-flowing stream, plug all the holes of despair, resentment, or joyless desires in your mind and bring you never-ending peace!



After reading Chapter 11

1. Explain how a “Why me?” attitude can be a barrier to your self-healing.

2. Which “Why me?” explanation works best for you?

3. Select two to four ideas of particular interest from your favourite explanation of “Why me” to guide your self-healing program.

Chapter 12

MIND AND BODY WORKING TOGETHER FOR OUR GOOD

They Are Both Your Teachers, but You Lead

Mind-Body Distinction

One answer to the question of whether or not we can heal ourselves depends on what you believe about the relationship between the mind and the body. We tend to see the mind and the body as separate and different. Are they, though?

Upon considering some of the details, it is probably not difficult to see that, to a great extent, the distinction between mind and body is artificial. The mind is part of the body; the body has the mind running through it in the form of the nervous system. Our nerves and our brains are made of tissue, just like the body. When a hand shoots out to catch a ball, we cannot say there's a separate action of the mind that's different from the action of the body, and vice versa. If the mind and the body developed from one source—a



Let who is in charge
take the first step.

The mind is part of the body; the body has the mind running through it in the form of the nervous system.

fertilized egg—and if they act jointly, reside together, and share many important similarities in their material makeup, very little is left to suggest they are separate. They may be different with respect to the type of tissue they are made of and the functions they perform, but so are many other body parts that are not considered separate and independent (for example, the heart and lungs, or the legs and the eyes). Even a reflex action that occurs—such as when a doctor hits your knee with a mallet and your foot kicks outwards—cannot be seen as purely physical. This activity indicates that signals have been transmitted between the leg muscles and the nervous system.

The interdependence of the mind and the body—The interdependence of mind and body is clearer in cases in which an action is both automatic and purposeful. Let me explain further by using an example from my own life:

One day, I knocked a glass of pomegranate juice off the table by mistake and “instinctively,” or with “reflex action,” I reached out and caught it in mid-air with the same hand that knocked it over. It was a spectacular catch! Instead of ruining the upholstery of a newly purchased dining-room chair, only a few drops of juice fell on the wooden parts of the furniture and were easily wiped up. Obviously, my

amazing catch was not a display of only the body at work, nor was it just quick thinking. Both body and mind had to have exchanged messages in a cooperative fashion within that flash of seconds, and both had to be aware of the purpose of the required behaviour in order for me to be able to make the catch.

The Mind Influences the Body

There is no doubt that our emotions, both positive and negative, affect our physical being.

Positive emotions—In some research and clinical cases, people with serious terminal diseases, such as cancer and AIDS, were able to increase their lifespan far beyond medical prediction by working with their physicians to incorporate positive emotional attitudes into fully conventional medical treatment. Through psychotherapy, patients have been empowered to accept the reality of an extreme illness and, at the same time, be strong in fighting it and improving the state of their health.

The successful medical use of placebo effect has demonstrated that the mind can significantly alter the functioning

The successful medical use of placebo effect has demonstrated that the mind can significantly alter the functioning of various organs of the body.

of various organs of the body. A placebo effect occurs when a treatment, such as a medication or procedure, actually works, even though—from a medical perspective—it should not. For example, a patient takes what she or he thinks is a pill to lower blood pressure, when, in actuality it's a non-medicinal sugar pill. After taking the pills for a week, tests reveal that the person's blood pressure actually decreased.

Cases have been documented in which people show a positive change in their functioning when they took a placebo, such as a sugar pill, or underwent a staged surgery in which nothing was removed or fixed. The common element in all these cases is that the patients believed that their conditions were being treated with medically effective methods. It is important to recognize that their unexpected recovery or improvement was not due to one thing alone—the useless pill, the bogus operation, being in the company of medical people, or listening to the explanation before the supposed treatment. Evidently, it takes a combination of these factors to influence the person's state of mind. It seems hard to believe that taking a sugar pill in any setting offered by anyone (if the ill individual could be persuaded to participate in the first place) would produce the same results you'd expect from medicine. Regardless, the critical issue is the effective role of positive feelings of trust and favourable expectations of healing.

Negative emotions—On the other hand, the mind's mental power over the body has also been known to produce damage or worsen conditions, particularly when the mind is engaged in negative thinking. For example, studies have

shown that negative emotional reactions adversely affected DNA repair work. There is a report of a blindfolded person being told to expect a hot knife on his skin. Yet, when a cold knife was applied, a blister appeared. Other harming effects of the mind on the body include messages of discouragement, such as one perceives in the words or attitude of a doctor or close relative. For example, a doctor gives a devastating diagnosis in an insensitive manner, which demoralizes the patient and decreases the possibility that she or he will take a courageous stand against the illness; or a person remarks to a sick aunt that she looks awful, thus making her feel even more ill and hopeless. It has also been shown that emotions that come from negative thinking, such as anger, fear, and sadness, have reduced the ability of people's immune systems to fend off diseases.

In general, it appears that people who keep thinking the worst about their health produce the worst results in themselves, and having a strong positive expectation can help improve health and wellness. This is not always true, of course. Some reports have pointed out that in many cases of advanced physical worsening or wasting away, psychology has not been found to reverse or halt the bodily disease. That being said, it would seem that, in general, the lives of human beings are controlled by their thoughts, emotions, moods, and attitudes more than by their physical functioning.

The Body Influences the Mind

Research has demonstrated that the body is capable of directing the brain to solve certain problems. Certain physical

activities (described below) have been shown to influence the functioning of the mind, telling it what to think. In turn, the mind helps us to solve a problems.

More generally, the influence of the body over the mind is probably the main basis of the practice of whole-body fitness and postural exercises, such as yoga, tai chi, qigong, and taekwondo. In these physical activities, you place your body in certain positions or assume prescribed poses that can trigger mental states that usually have healing goals, such as the elimination of negative emotions and/or the installation of positive ones. One can take classes in these Eastern exercise methods, which focus on various types of bodywork and can also treat a variety of conditions, including anxiety, depression, insomnia, stress, and other emotional problems—some of which are the result of trauma. Yoga stands as one of the best known methods. Usually the objective of yoga is to reintroduce people to the power in their bodies through which they may develop a sense of safety, predictability, and relaxation, resulting in overall self-empowerment.

The Value of Exercise—Exercise and physical activities (playing sports, aerobics, walking, jogging or running—the list is almost endless) can improve your mood and give you a feeling of wellbeing. So can laughing (and sometimes crying) and pleasurable activities, such as playing an instrument or singing. The fact that our physical state influences our mental state is one reason why the sounds of young children playing and laughing, for example, bring pleasure to most adults.

Because you know there is cooperation between mind and

body, this information provides you with an additional tool to treat distress. Although the body is capable of causing unpleasant moods, such as when a physical illness causes a person to be depressed, it is important to keep in mind that with the mind–body connection, a person can deliberately use physical means to feel better mentally.

Activities for Mental-Emotional Energy

One aspect of mind-body interaction is the field of study and practice that focuses on mental-emotional energy. The following are exercises you can do to use this energy in self-healing.

Energy Muscle Testing

Muscle testing is a technique that can help someone suffering from emotional problems decide whether or how to tackle a particular aspect of a problem.

Muscle Self-Test – Example 1

- Take the thumb and index finger of one hand, put the pads of the two in full contact with each other, and push outwards (sort of in the shape of an eye). Then rub the two pads together lightly to see how they feel.
- Next, bring a problem to your mind and focus on it.
- Ask yourself whether to address that particular problem. “Am I ready to engage in counselling about X?”
- Focus your mind on this thought as you rub the two fingers together. If it will be to your benefit to engage in

counselling for the problem you specified, the fingers will tend to move more smoothly as you rub them together than before you focused on the problem. If counselling will *not* be useful, the fingers will likely feel rough.

Muscle Self-Test – Example 2

- Put the tips of the thumb and index finger of your non-dominant hand firmly together to form an “O,” or push the tips outwards so that the fingers look more like the shape of an eye.
- Do the same with the thumb and index finger of the dominant hand, and interlock it with the “O” or eye shape of the non-dominant hand. Alternatively, you may just hook the index finger of this hand inside the “ring” formed by the non-dominant hand.
- Next, ask yourself whether to address a particular problem. “Am I ready to engage in counselling about X?”
- Try to pull the dominant hand away from the other hand. If you used only the index finger, swipe it past the two fingers. If the answer is *yes*, you will find it difficult to pull the dominant hand apart from the non-dominant one or to swipe the index finger through the contact points of the other two fingers. If the answer is *no*, it will be easier to do either.

For both exercises, try a different finger with the thumb if the answer is not clear. You do not need to use strength at the contact points; it is the difference in the amount of resistance for one answer vs. the opposite one that really matters.

Ask different questions to address various areas of self-healing, such as whether you need to control, eliminate, or engage in a behaviour or habit. Examples of such behaviours and habits include ongoing fearfulness, anger that is easily provoked, frequent sadness, constant feelings of entitlement, a strong need for excitement, and frequent boredom. For these problems, ask questions such as: “Is it okay for me to work on X?” “Is X a problem I should work on?” “Am I ready to start a romantic relationship?” “Am I ready to start a relationship with X?” “Is coffee good for me?” “Are five cups of coffee good for me?” State only one problem at a time. For example, do not ask, “Are four or five cups of coffee good for me?” Ask two questions—one for each number of cups. If the answer is *yes*, it may be useful to ask the same question using a different tool, such as the body sway test or arm muscle-test, described below.

IMPORTANT—Never close your eyes when you are doing any exercise that involves balance (such as the Sway Test).

The Body-Sway Exercise

- When using a self-test with two possible answers, it is important to first discover which answer is *yes* and which is *no*. The sway is a gentle tilt to and fro on one side; not a wide roll from which you could lose your balance. In any case, if you have balance problems I advise that you **DO NOT** do this exercise.
- Take a deep breath, and exhale. Then mentally focus your attention on the soles of your feet.
- As you do so, say audibly, “My name is [state your real

name].” Then observe in which direction your body sways. In order to be sure, repeat the test but give a false name. For example, “My name is Excalibur.” You would expect to sway in the direction opposite from the one in which you swayed when you gave your real name; this clearly shows which direction is *yes* and which is *no*. Alternatively, you could draw a picture of a happy face and say, “This is a happy face.” See if the body answers *yes*. You can then look at the drawing of a sad face and say, “This is a happy face.” The answer should be *no*. (Note: If you sway in the same direction each time or do not feel a sway at all, try a different test).

- Now ask a healing-teaching question you would like answered. “Should I work on my problem of feeling sad all the time?” Observe the direction of your body sway.
- Next, think of something that is really pleasant and, just as you did above, take a deep breath, exhale, and mentally focus on the soles of your feet. Then recall the pleasant memory, using a yes-no question like, “Is this a pleasant memory?” Again, observe how your body sways. In all cases, your body response should be the same. That is, your body should sway in the same direction as for the answers: yes-you-should-see-counseling, to your true name, and the pleasant memory. With a *yes* response, your subconscious mind is agreeing with what is positive for you and doing so at your request. Therefore, when you ask the question, “Should I work on my problem of feeling sad all the time?” you will know how to interpret the answer.

Testing the Test—Sometimes when you ask the same question using more than one type of self-test and receive different answers, you will need to test which self-test (finger link, making the O-shape, or body sway) works best for you by asking during each one, “Does this test work best for my needs at this time?” Then note the positive answers.

Arm-Muscle-Testing Technique

This muscle-testing technique appears to be a popular method even for people who are not familiar with energy psychology. Strictly speaking, however, the methods already described are forms of muscle tests, since they depend on the ability of the muscles of the body (whether in isolation or grouped) to deliver the answer. Here are the steps to take in the arm-muscle-testing technique:

- A friend stands facing one side of your body, places her (or his) hand on your shoulder on the side closest to her, and holds your wrist (the one she is facing) with her other hand.
- The friend then lifts your arm up by the wrist, straight out in front of you, to about shoulder level.
- With your face forward but with your eyes looking down at the floor (to avoid eye contact with each other), you ask a question or make a statement for which you need an answer from your subconscious mind. Ask your friend to apply downward pressure on your arm after the question or statement. If the answer to your question is *yes*, the arm will resist the downward pressure. If the answer is *no*, you will notice a weakening of the arm muscles, which

will result in your arm dropping noticeably, because it is unable to withstand the downward pressure.

- To be sure about the answer, do the same procedure but, this time, ask a question or state something that has a definite, positive answer, such as “My name is [say your real name].” When your friend pushes your arm down with the same pressure as before, you will be able to resist the pressure. Now do the test again, but this time, state a false name. You will observe that your arm will not be able to resist the downward push.
- There is really no definite position to stand; the ones I have described are for convenience and accuracy. Also, it does not really matter whether you say the question or statement aloud or just think it, though speaking the words helps you to focus on one thing and your helper to know when to act.
- You can test whether the answers you get are reliable by using a second muscle test, such as the “O” ring.

Other Reasonable Uses of Self-Testing

Our mental-emotional energy can give an answer to a large number of problems through self-testing. Here are some examples of the ways you could practice self-testing:

- “Is buying a particular kind of food, buying a home, entering into a business venture, or going to university good for me?” You may also ask, “Where did I leave my keys?—Are they in the house, in the X-place or Y-place? (That is, test each of the places you have been.) “Is X what I need right now for my future success?”

- Other methods of self-testing involve simply holding a questionable object close to your body (such as a food item, even if in a can, and you aren't sure it's good for you) and asking your question using body sway.

Here is another way to self-test:

- Make a "C" shape with your thumb and index finger. If they are easy to push together, the answer is *no*; if there is resistance, the answer is *yes*.
- You may also test by bending your elbow and holding your fist against your shoulder. When it's easy to pull down, the answer is *no*; when there's resistance, it is *yes*. Hold your forearm up and push down with the other: easy = *no*; resistance = *yes*.

Cautions about Self-Testing

- The caution to concentrate on only the question for which you need an answer is important for trusting the answer that is given. Equally so, the user of this method needs to trust the process of testing and not engage in doubt or conflicted thinking, which only impairs your concentration and, in turn, likely will produce a prophetic, self-fulfilling result.
- I am providing this information to help your self-healing program. It is about *self*-testing, NOT testing others.
- Trying to get information from people such as family members, employees, or acquaintances by force, trickery, or manipulation using these methods may be ethically questionable, and the validity of the results might be

uncertain. There is no way to know whether the thoughts aroused in the mind of another person are centred on the specific question you are asking or even on a question at all.

- Energy-based self-testing will likely not work when applied to the future, since the collection of your subconscious information cannot logically include future occurrences. Therefore, the answers you receive about the events that have yet to happen are very likely to be misleading.

How Self-Testing Works for Your Good

Our minds and bodies have a way of using energy to inform us of how to proceed with the problems we wish to solve. From a physical perspective, people who work in the field of kinesiology describe this process as a deactivation of the sympathetic nervous system, counter-balanced by the activation of the parasympathetic system, or vice versa. The result is information about whether something you just did, said, or thought stimulated either the sympathetic system (causing muscle resistance) or the parasympathetic system (causing muscle relaxation), and, in that way, answered your questions. Usually, from the energy–psychology standpoint, self-testing methods such as the ones described above are believed to help us tap into this energy to determine if a thought, action, or experience is true or not true of our mental-emotional state. In other words, is it in tune with what we know subconsciously? And in that sense, is it mentally–emotionally welcome for our survival?

Your task is to learn and practise, practise, practise these energy techniques to further your self-healing.



Let who is in charge
take the first step.

After Reading Chapter 12

1. The information that the body gives to some people is much more important in reading their emotions than the explanation that their thinking provides. To others, how they explain what's happening to them emotionally is more convincing than their bodily feelings. Yet others may go either way. Explain which of these three ways of managing your life you use more regularly.

2. As you plan your self-healing program, decide now at what points you will use muscle testing and for which matters. You may do this later if you are not able to do it at this stage.

Type of Muscle Test

To Find Out

Chapter 13

WHY NIGHTMARES MAY SHOW UP DURING TROUBLED TIMES

Planning to Respond to a UTO Is a Door to Peaceful Sleep & Peace of Mind

An Explanation of the Nightmare's Role in Trauma

Nightmares appear to play the important role of mirroring the frightening, disturbing, and confusing state of our minds as we try to make sense of the unmanageable problems we encountered during waking life. It seems the content of a nightmare is information the brain puts together to represent and resolve the problem(s) we need to deal with. A nightmare is like a disordered dream. And like the majority of dreams, it is usually a mixture of both relevant and, apparently, irrelevant material, mostly from events that happen while we are awake that the brain works on. But what is the brain actually doing? I will only touch on some aspects of my proposed answer to lead into the



nature of our nightmares, particularly when we are experiencing emotional difficulties during waking life.

It appears the human brain identifies, reviews and labels all the information it receives, whether that information is obtained from a conscious (awake) source or not or whether it is real or imagined. The brain then files this information with the already existing information it has stored in memory. It is reasonable to believe that the brain uses all of this information, mainly to help us cope with stressors or threats, some of which may be serious enough to completely unravel our emotional stability, and put our very survival at risk. Presumably, when dreaming, the brain reviews this stored information, mostly during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, which occurs during the fifth of the five periods into which our pattern of nighttime sleep is divided. These stages are repeated, with REM sleep time becoming longer with each repetition.

During this process, some types of information will likely not fit in with others if they do not share certain characteristics with previously stored information, which is analyzed in various ways during waking or dreaming. You will recall that we spoke in Chapter 4 about the role of the amygdala in processing emotional memory. Apparently, sometimes the stored memories, which are brought forward to be compared with the new information (probably imported from the hippocampus), may include memories of experiences from a very long time in the past—even from a time before we could speak. The hippocampus is another memory organ of the brain that deals with factual rather than emotional experiences.

According to psychologist *Sylvan S. Tomkins the brain can block access to some of the memories that can stir up extremely negative or bewildering responses. This suggests that some dream content may include information that's unrecognizable to us because either the brain blocked it or the events reflected in those dreams occurred several years in the past. Moreover, during a current dream analysis, such information, now released, will be different from current information, seeing that it has been blocked since an earlier period of life. Additionally, some neuroscience researchers believe that those events that were extremely troubling to us very early in life (before the storage area for factual events developed) would be stored only as the emotional effect of the event, in the emotional storage area (amygdala), which was already formed by then. These explanations of memory creation and storage suggest one probable reason why some nightmares seem very strange and unrelated to any event with which we can associate them. Another reason is that a scene in waking life that caused a dream or nightmare may have passed by too quickly for us to discern or even notice, although our brain would have kept a record of it, nonetheless. An interesting study was undertaken in which geometric shapes were shown in very quick succession to the subjects. Although they reported having no conscious awareness of seeing the figures, the study found that the subjects had actually developed preferences for these figures when shown later along with other pictures they had not been shown. From this, one may conclude that we could dream about events to which we have been exposed in our waking lives without realizing it.

Unacceptable Threatening Object (UTO)

Pleasant or ordinary dream material would have been processed in the regular fashion and, therefore, would not become nightmares. However, dreams about events we do not remember experiencing and that happened a very long time ago, would create problems. I am referring to those scenes that were blocked because they would have been unbearably troubling to the mind of the individual when he or she was much younger. This is because the information from such a dream is almost totally new to the dreamer. More important, the brain's attempts at combining it with existing information that has already been analyzed would be unsuccessful, because this information could not be entirely "matched" with present-day material (stored with the general facts of life). This state of mismatch would now pose a threat by continuing to challenge the information-organizing system in the brain that works to produce a "match" so that the information could be recognized and, consequently, blended with previously stored information. This "foreign" information item then becomes what I will call an unacceptable threatening object (UTO)—similar to what some have described as excess baggage. However, a UTO is not to be seen only as dream content that originates from a previously blocked dream item. Any item that is not easily categorized and merged with existing memory items would qualify as a UTO.

It is my view that UTOs (which include all types of data that are not successfully identified or understood through

When information “fits” somewhere, it can become integrated into existing, utilizable memory. At that point it loses the characteristic of a UTO.

dream analysis or awake experiences) will not “fit” into a functional memory site or be coded as usable memory. According to this explanation, all forms of emotional trauma result from awake UTOs—the emotional effects of which the person is not able to match with previous experience—including previous traumatic events. Presumably, such daytime UTOs are commonly experienced as problems that are intolerable or unresolved and, clearly, anxiety-producing. When information “fits” somewhere, it can become integrated into existing, utilizable memory. At that point it loses the characteristic of a UTO, because it now has a “place” where it fits (in the form of a neurological “address”) and can be reached when needed.

According to Tomkins* the process of incorporating new information into existing memory also involves the assignment of a neurological “name” by which the information is identified. Using these concepts of “name” and “address,” Tomkins* provided a theoretical basis for the brain’s coordination of memory functions. He defined name as “any message, conscious or unconscious, that is capable of activating a particular memory trace at a particular neurological address” (or brain site). Accordingly, a UTO that defies all

analysis would not have an appropriate name to go with a designated address. Nonetheless, such a UTO will become a “faceless”, unrecognizable memory item, since it appears that including an item as a memory is an automatic neurological event. This means that merely adding an item to memory would not necessarily make it useable. And because a UTO of which a nightmare consists is always there, threatening us, it could never be useful as a survival tool, which current research seems to suggest is the function of dreams.

The UTO looks for an address—So without a name and an address by which it can be integrated into a memory family, this neurological hobo, the UTO, will attempt to associate with various existing addresses but will be rejected. Because of its neurologically incomprehensible and emotionally disruptive character, it will continue to be obstructive to the normal memory processes. Each attempt to be incorporated into a possible address or site will likely trigger a “reorganization” or “repositioning” of existing information, as the brain struggles to make a “match.” Repeated unsuccessful attempts to find a match for a UTO are likely to create a continued unsettled mental state and leave these information sites in a state of prolonged alertness, vigilance, or instability that can lead to disturbances in the performance of the amygdala or other related information-processing areas of the brain.

This prolonged unsettled state caused by the UTO probably explains the disruption of restorative rest that normal sleep and dreaming bring (of which troubled individuals usually complain). If this is true, a UTO will be a burden

on the executive functions of the brain—that is, the brain’s ability to do such things as organize, plan, make decisions, solve problems, self-regulate, and direct attention and memory. As the brain attempts to unscramble a UTO, the efficiency (and, therefore, the reliability) of these brain functions may diminish.

This reduced efficiency and reliability will most likely affect the brain’s processing of material from the ongoing events of daily life. In other words, the disturbance created when the brain tries to make sense of a “foreign” experience also affects other aspects of its functioning. For example, sometimes people who endure a traumatic event or overwhelming emotional distress become uncharacteristically forgetful or see or hear things that are not real (a form of perceptual mislabelling, a.k.a. hallucination). At times, such people are also reported to have an angrier disposition and to become more aggressive or weepy (that is, they show behaviours that suggest poor coping ability). Such changes in behaviour and/or emotional reaction may be indicative of the brain’s reduced or impaired competence. In general, nightmares may continue to surface and nag for a period of time following the troubling event, until the UTO aspects have resolved partially or totally. The ability to remove the conditions in which a UTO is formed or persists is typically gained through better acceptance of the troubling experience, acquisition of positive emotional reactions, and/or stabilization with appropriate medication.

Dreaming helps the analysis of a UTO—I suggest that dream analysis offers the brain a great opportunity to identify

and manage a UTO because as we dream, the brain calls upon a vast store of information, such as memories of a time long ago, as well as recent events; information about what is going on in the dreamer's body; and other occurrences in the dreamer's surroundings of which the dreamer may be only vaguely aware (if he or she is aware at all). The dreaming brain then uses these items in ways that may not follow the expected rules of logic and presents different facets of the information— without the restriction of “what makes logical sense” that controls us during our waking hours.

Nightmares may arise as the result of our encountering a UTO, however momentarily, even while we are dreaming.

How UTOs cause nightmares—As already described, a UTO may arise in a dream because of isolated events from our waking experience. The UTO, however, could be created as a story within the dream itself, by connecting pieces of different events (using their similarities, proximity to each other, or any other linking characteristic) to produce a storyline. In short, it means that nightmares may arise as the result of our encountering a UTO, however momentarily, even while we are dreaming and during the time our brains are reviewing information. Our brains are constantly reviewing information and producing items that can be labelled and given a name and address (that is, have a

recognizable identity). For that reason, some types of UTOs may become “understandable” quite readily, whether piecemeal or in total. Others would, ultimately, receive the proper designation but only under certain conditions and likely not before we spend several restless nights with recurring nightmares and days with disordered thinking and unusual behaviour.

The importance of perception—One evening while I was working on this book, the electronic doorbell began to chime, but there was no one at the door when I checked. As I moved in the direction of the console to manually stop the bell from repeatedly ringing (as it occasionally does), it stopped on its own. Almost simultaneously, the microwave beeped to tell me that the food I was warming up was ready. As I popped open the microwave door, I was aware of a faint sound, which, with the right kind of distraction, I could have mistaken for a sigh. Because I knew the mechanism of the doorbell was faulty and caused the bell to go off and stop on its own, and because I could tell it was the metallic sound of the microwave door and not a sigh, I was able to place every sound in context, understand them, and carry on normally. In other words, I perceived the events correctly and, being harmless, they did not bother me. However, if I were, say, a war veteran who was still experiencing the stress of combat warfare or an emotionally damaged parent grieving the loss of a child, and I did not perceive these occurrences accurately, I might have been suspicious or even frightened of the doorbell and microwave incidents. These suspicions or fears would likely have disrupted the normal

flow of life, and I would probably have encountered a UTO in a subsequent dream episode.

The effect of faulty brain biochemistry—Faulty biochemical and neurological functioning may create false perceptions (such as hallucinations) that may then become subject to the dream-review process and could result in a UTO that produces a nightmare. The view that our neuro-biochemistry contributes to dream content may properly apply to exactly repeated dreams (which, because they are not always threatening, may or may not be nightmares). A scientific report detailing how some epileptic patients, who had recurring dreams that were almost exact copies of each other, had developed normal dreaming after their epilepsies were surgically corrected gives some credibility to the idea that dreams can arise from neuro-biochemical activity (whether or not a UTO is involved).

An interesting assumption is that when a neuro-bio-chemically induced UTO arises during dreaming, it should respond more readily to awake analysis than it would to dream analysis. That is because it is not connected to a disturbing emotional event of which we can be reminded. In contrast, the kind of UTO encountered during an awake experience would be more effectively processed in dreams, which would offer protection from serious emotional consequences, just by the causing the person to awaken from the nightmare. Nevertheless, in the course of ordinary waking life, when something bothers us, we seem to deal with it in our dreams, and when a dream bothers us, we try to unravel it during our awake time. Sometimes, when we consciously

attach a disturbing label to a UTO created by the body, it will then need to be analyzed in a dream scenario, and the process becomes circular until the material is understood and becomes integrated.

What to Do if a Nightmare Wakes You

As people suffering from trauma will confirm, a nightmare can be an extremely troubling experience. I know people who are afraid to fall asleep after a nightmare because of its lingering terror. Unfortunately, it appears there are very few easily available or self-administered treatments for nightmares. Nonetheless, I encourage people who regularly have nightmares to do the following after they wake up:

- Wash or wipe off any perspiration the nightmare has caused. Removing perspiration will make you feel better and will also help prevent involuntary shivering that may feel like a symptom of anxiety.
- Smooth the bed covers if they became tangled during the nightmare, or change them if they became a little damp so that everything will feel fresh when you get back into bed.
- Remember that the nightmare, however frightening it was, is in the past; it is now composed only of thoughts. Regardless of the origin of the night terror (whether mind, body or both), you can control it mentally—that is, by the use of thoughts—and you can treat these thoughts using techniques such as Thought Replacement (See the section titled “The Skill of Thought Replacement,” in Chapter 14).

- Focus on the here and now. That is, intentionally attend to whatever you are actually doing at that moment, deliberately describing to yourself in detail the order, stages, importance, effectiveness, and purpose of whatever action you are doing (and any other aspects of that activity). By now, you are into Thought Replacement, and you may broaden the direction of your thinking, either by selecting from your list of thought replacement ideas, or by starting another activity that you will find engaging (as in Appendix 5).
- One of the exercises in Appendix 9 can assist in moving your mind away from any disturbing ideas that may be lingering. I recommend the Body-Scan Mindfulness Exercise.
- Alternately or in addition, going through the steps of a self-hypnotherapy exercise (as explained in the section titled “Entering Self-Hypnotherapy”, in Chapter 10) will help to bring you peace in preparing to return to sleep.



After Reading Chapter 13

1. Decide how you will be able to quickly get to the information under the heading “What to Do if a Nightmare Wakes You,” so that you can find it right after you wake up from one. Write down that plan for now.

2. Recall a recent nightmare, and try to explain it using the information in this chapter.

3. As practice, do one exercise from Appendix 4 and/or the section titled “Entering Self-Hypnotherapy,” in Chapter 10).

Chapter 14

SELF-HEALING: SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Your Little Known Inner Talent

Can Thoughts Really Heal?

The treatment for traumatic or strongly distressing emotions requires the sufferer to commit to ongoing efforts at self-empowerment. This self-power begins with accepting yourself where you are in life right now. It means it is your job, at all points in life, to love yourself better than you can expect anyone else to and to take steps to be someone in whom you could find something to be proud of and respect—mind you, something that will be socially approved. Therefore, in the majority of situations in which you find yourself, you need to see yourself as deserving honour and respect (self-esteem). You need reliable, emotional strength (resilience) to withstand different types of stress in order to develop the inner power that makes you fully capable of achieving success, even in the case of self-healing. Paying attention to the nature of your thoughts and emotional

When you least
expect it.



reactions is a key aspect of developing this emotion-based maturity. Stepping stones in your understanding of the relationship between thinking and healing are described below.

Be aware of the connection between thoughts and emotional behaviours—In your attempt to weaken and eliminate unwanted feelings, you would do well to be aware of the automatic connection that exists between your thoughts (usually expressed in words and images) and your emotional reactions (both negative and positive). Since the affect stage is the launch pad, so to speak, for our feelings and sets in progress the emotional feelings that follow, these feelings would arise pre-stamped with the characteristics of the affect(s) that launched them.

At the next stage of our reaction to external and internal events (whether we fight, flee, or freeze), it seems that a transformation from unconsciously formed affect occurs when we can consciously take over and become aware of the link between the feelings and our perception of the triggering event. At this conscious stage, we label the experience and have the opportunity to determine (use thoughts to plan) what to do next, guided by previous experience. That is to say, the comparison with the other memory items that make up our previous experience helps us identify and label the current emotional experience with the use of cognitive or thinking tools. This labelling includes conscious interpretation, which further refines the label (for example, telling us not only that the event or stimulus is annoying in some way but also how forceful or unconcerned we should feel about the event or stimulus). Thus, the connection between

the contents of our thoughts and how we are feeling about anything is not only inseparable but also the means by which we relate to the occurrences inside and outside of us.

At this cognitive response stage, it is important to note that our interpretation of an event (the meaning we apply to it) is under our control, unlike at the unconscious, automatic, affective response stage. No doubt, this explanation contributes to the idea that a sufferer could certainly influence the later effects of an automatically and unconsciously triggered affect, through purposefully directing the cognitive system. Put simply, sufferers can think their way out of an ongoing strong feeling. With the use of thoughts, the sufferer can activate a “new line” of feeling responses.

So you see that although you do not have control over what’s being registered unconsciously at the earlier affect stage, you have a very good chance at the later feeling stage to choose the thoughts you want to guide your feelings and make a habit of them along constructive and hopeful lines. In this way, the content and direction of your thinking can certainly cause other favourable affects to arise that will lead to positive emotions. By focusing mostly on thoughts that are useful and appropriate for healing, you can expect to

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accumulate strong positive feelings (through making a habit of allowing them in) and, thereby, promote the development of resilience by which you will be able to withstand increased emotional stress.

As We Think, So We Are

Thoughts are what give life to words. Any statement, criticism, praise, profanity, sarcasm, or request has to be thought before it is delivered in speech. In this same way, thoughts give rise to actions, of which speaking is an example. As explained earlier in this chapter, in the majority of situations, when we have an emotional reaction, a thought preceded and determined what that reaction would consist of, based on the interpretation we gave to the information in our thoughts. We respond as if we have been cheated, because we think we have been. We may feel humiliated, flirted with, insulted, or respected because we thought we were. In most cases, we think ourselves into the feelings we experience. In some cases, the subconscious mind also triggers a line of thinking. In rare cases, a brain mechanism may malfunction to produce a false feeling, and we can realize this. For example, if you feel angry but have no knowledge of any event or no thought preceded that could have caused the anger, then in all likelihood, the anger has a neurological origin; it is, in effect, an error message.

Mental marks—Everything that happens to us changes us to some degree by leaving a physical or mental “mark” on our body or mind. The mental mark is a memory. As we all probably know, memories sometimes stay in our minds as

thoughts or pictures (images). The good ones are acceptable to us, and the bad ones disturb us. Frequent or strong memories (in the form of thoughts or mental images) mould the mind into the shapes of what it is fed, usually starting from childhood. That shaped mind becomes the lens through which we view the world. That is, it enables us to “read” the world around us. What we feed our minds represents how the world will look to us and how we will approach life (e.g., life is good, depressing, frustrating, or calm etc.). And through our thoughts, we may see our lives in many different ways—positive, unhappy, rigid, relaxed, etc.

A preceding thought or image can be used to block, neutralize, or improve the one that follows. Therefore, it can also affect the behaviour that follows. For example, you may think, “It would be great to get that scholarship (or job, house, contract, etc.)” If the next thought is, “That won’t happen; forget it,” it can smother the first thought and stop you from taking any action that could produce the winning outcome. In contrast, if the next thought were more hopeful—“There’s got to be a way I can get it,”—you’d be enabled to start the process towards achieving that goal. In other words, you can state (think) what to think in order to achieve a desired goal. A couple of decades ago or more I had this thought: “I should write a book”. My next thought was: “One day I will”. The result: No book or any action towards a book came out of that second thought. A few years ago just before my accident I had the same thought as before (“I should write a book”). This time the next thought I followed with was: “There’s got be something I can write

The thoughts you entertain determine how you act, what you frequently feed your mind makes you act as the person you are.

about my work, for example”. So I sat ack and came up with a few ideas towards this goal. Those ideas were crude isolated thoughts some of which I later abandoned and even changed the direction of the topic. In the end I was on my way with the book you are now reading! I have asked myself: “Why did I not do this 22 years ago?” Well we both know the answer. I did not use the thoughts that would have led to writing a book. Then again, that’s how life goes sometimes. Nonetheless, we need to know that this connection between our thoughts and actions is the reason for why we do or do not do many things.

Feeding your mind—Because the thoughts you entertain determine how you act, what you frequently feed your mind makes you act as the person you are (damaged or healed; positive or negative; disturbed or adjusted etc.). Therefore if you want to get better, you will need to shape your mind with thoughts, images, and attitudes that say, “This will make me get better.” The same is true for any other goal. For example, you need to create thoughts that will help you achieve the goal of being a better husband, wife, teacher, speaker, or minister—or becoming more understanding, more loving, more forgiving, more affluent, and so on

To do this, start by addressing the here and now. For example, after an unpleasant event, ask yourself questions such as these:

1. “What just happened?” State the facts or actual events (no judgment or evaluation).
2. “What am I feeling at this point?” Be truthfully aware of the emotion(s) you are experiencing.
3. Then ask, “What do I need to do to move on with as little additional emotional damage as possible?” That is, “Which this-will-make-me-get-better thoughts should I use to help me move on?” Or you may say to yourself, “Which this-will-make-me-feel-less-stress thoughts should I be entertaining right now?” In other words, ask the question in a way that will reduce (not deny) the stressful or painful effect of a problem or situation. You do not want to allow the pain to grow, because that will damage your mental health even more. Allowing your pain to get bigger does not make you better or stronger—it makes you less capable of dealing with other stressors or problems that come your way.
4. Because you have a built-in system (defence mechanisms) that shields you from extreme, unmanageable emotional pain, you need to consider the question, “Am I sure that I am addressing the matter properly?” That is, “Is my thinking being directed by helpful thoughts, and am I using the appropriate actions to help me achieve a health-promoting goal?” “Do I need to seek advice?” In other words, “Can I rely on myself to see it correctly and to do the right thing on my own?”

If you are having problems deciding, it's time to ask for advice or help.

Remember, however, that you not only receive (listen to) advice but also need to understand it, engage or reflect on it, before you adopt it. Then you put it into action, although you may wish to do trustworthy research of your own before you accept or make modifications, as necessary.

The important message is that our thoughts make us who we are. We can heal ourselves, make ourselves sick, sad, happy, miserable, ecstatic, crazy, or hard-to-take. By our thoughts, we can produce the particular state of mind that supports any kind of behaviour. This notion receives great credibility from its acknowledgement in diverse sources—from ancient times till now.

- In the Buddhist tradition, man is made by his belief. As he believes, so he is.
- The Christian Bible also states that as a person thinks, so he is.
- Hinduism says, “By thinking of That, one becomes That.”

If such teachings from different cultures, nationalities, and religious groups have been accepted as truth from ancient times, on what basis would a person today reject them? We cannot avoid this common knowledge—as we think, so we are!

Desires are thoughts—In addition, thought is believed to be a powerful energy through which things are created or destroyed. Indeed, every act of creation or invention has resulted from someone's thinking. Those who accept

the existence of a Creator believe that the whole universe is the result of the creative energy of thought at work. As discussed above, there is a certain way of thinking that will result in problem-solving and progress and a certain other way of thinking that produces problems, stagnation, or obstruction of progress. In fact, every desire is a thought attempting to become an action, and every non-action is the result of a counter-thought that cancelled out the beginning of a desire to act.

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Useful and helpful thinking make life easier, better, or even happier. Destructive thoughts can be useful, but only when they are directed at preventing evil intentions that cause difficulties or injury. Someone who suffers from emotional complaints must remove the blockage of lack of desire and take steps to get better. This book has already provided many suggestions for ways to achieve self-healing, but you will discover more of my “this-will-make-you-better” ideas as you continue to read, which I hope you will convert to your own this-will-make-me-get-better thoughts.

If you want your thoughts to lead to a happier life, it makes sense that you would wish the same for others. You

will not be happy if those around you are not. This is why it's important to perform such good actions as volunteer service, giving to charities, and showing kindness to others. They will feel good and this, in turn, will leave you feeling good. If you agree with these statements, you will succeed in filling your mind almost entirely with positive thinking about yourself and others. But because you are human, unwanted thoughts have a way of pushing through. You just have to push back with thoughts of gratitude, hope, self-pride, and other noble or good thoughts. It is necessary for you to remind yourself how destructive negative thinking can be. In other words, and with few exceptions, negative thoughts need to be resisted.

We often entertain certain thoughts out of habit. For example, some people routinely say, "I'm too old for that" or "That's not me." About others they say, "They will not get away with that." or use similar statements that show no intention of shifting from an already formed desire to act (or not). Of course, in many instances, these attitudes are uncalled for, arbitrary, or misguided, and they limit one's chances of exploring or accepting a positive approach. These thoughts, too, need to be replaced.

The Skill of Thought Replacement

Thought Replacement is a technique used to alter emotional reactions. To escape from the urges or pressures of an emotion, you must change your thoughts. When you think about something different, the previous thoughts are pushed out with the emotional reactions that accompany

them. Sometimes, however, you may find it difficult to bring up different ideas that are powerful enough to keep the disturbing thoughts away. Therefore, it is probably sensible for you to write down certain topics beforehand on pocket-sized cards or in a small notebook. Better yet, add the information to your cellphone, electronic tablet, or other electronic device, and have it ready to use when you need help getting rid of troubling thoughts.

Diverting Your Attention

The following are some suggestions for activities to help you list topics you may use to divert your attention:

Anytime you use the Thought Replacement technique or self-therapy, remember that your goal is to quickly change your thoughts by replacing any uninvited idea that contains unpleasant or hurtful subject matter with a thought that is positive.

For example, from your prepared list of Thought Replacement activities, you may have included an item requiring you to call to memory, read, or memorize a poem. Or perhaps you've added an activity to draw up or learn a list of procedures or affirmations. Important religious or secular material may also be useful in these situations. Try not to allow your attention (mind) to shift at random to different topics. Dwell on one topic or trend of thought at a time, and finish the various aspects of the chosen topic that you think are logically connected before moving on to another subject. The Thought Replacement approach is deliberate and purposeful—intended to drive out unpleasant thoughts.

Another way to use desirable thoughts to block unwanted ones is to listen to music or a speech or to do a made-up activity. For example, try counting physical objects, which you can do in a straightforward way or in time to a musical rhythm or song. If you are listening to a talk that's not totally important, note the three-syllable words or count the number of laughs from the audience. Stay with this double activity as faithfully as you can (and even add another to make things more interesting) till you are no longer aware of the distress from your previous thinking. In doing this, you will not only exchange your thoughts, but also practise improving your power of concentration, which is a form of mind control. The ability to control your thinking is a great asset that you can develop through practice, along the lines suggested above. It is important to recognize that this kind of practice takes a long time of consistent repetition before you become skilled. This is good news, because along the path to efficient control of the mind, you will have encountered superior results in Thought Replacement.

The technique for replacing ongoing thoughts (with their attached emotional influence) may be extended to a variety of topics and activities—not just to using literary material as a distraction. You may use activities related to your profession, job, or interests to supply ideas that will absorb your attention. For example, if you are an artist or like to draw, you may sketch objects. A bartender or waitress might try to invent a new drink. A teacher could try to recall lesson plans or consider the possible issues in a disciplinary matter in a particular class. A surgeon might review the steps

of an operation. Mentally following or describing the actual steps you perform as you carry out the tasks in each of these jobs (without condemning yourself or anyone else) is also a beneficial Thought Replacement Therapy activity. Other examples of activities to which you may give full attention (approaching a mindfulness level) would include recreational activities, such as fishing, jogging, cooking, solving crossword puzzles, gardening, and doing welding or woodwork activities. The objective will be to engage your thoughts with what you are doing to keep away unwelcome ones.

Other ways to replace disturbing or unwanted thoughts could involve the choice to improve a personal trait and then planning how to do it. For instance, you could occupy your mind with deciding how you would show kindness, forgiveness, or gratitude, and to whom you would show it and when. You might decide to get more regular exercise and then plan how to do this (where, when, and how long you will exercise). All these planning activities may be used for changing the content or direction of your thinking. Developing a strong willpower (one aspect of which is learning how to stick with a plan you started) seems to offer another opportunity for Thought Replacement themes.

Don't give up—This type of learning and the know-how that follows could make you so skilled that you will be proud of yourself, as will those whom you may have asked for input but who couldn't help because of their own weakness in these areas. The practice of Thought Replacement, with its extension to include mind control and willpower, can be

very rigid and even downright boring. But it doesn't have to be, so don't be discouraged! Keep trying. Even if you manage it only once a day, once a week, or once a month, that's still better than never attempting or appreciating that the possibility of replacing your thoughts is within your reach.

Even if you had heard of Thought Replacement Therapy (TRT) before, it's very likely that you've never considered its powerful connection to the way emotional reactions work. The usual method used with this technique is to swop a negative thought with a positive version of the same idea and to learn to do this so that it becomes a habit. It's an excellent idea, and I do suggest the same approach, as you would likely have gathered. In this section, however, I emphasize that due to two factors, TRT is even more effective when an unwanted thought is replaced by a non-critical, encouraging, or pleasing thought—regardless of whether it's related to the subject matter or not. The first reason for that is simple: You can only think of one thing at a time, so you just need to put something different in your mind (that is tolerable) if you wish to get rid of an unpleasant thought. The second reason is that the goal of TRT in self-healing is to replace the unpleasant emotion, not necessarily the content of the thought or idea. So you don't need to struggle at forming the best alternate (opposite) to the thought you wish to replace. And this is the beauty of the TRT technique for self-healing: There is no such thing as a “best” or “wrong” thought; ANY thought that's non-threatening is sufficient. Because I have never come across a TRT approach described quite the way it's spelled out in this book, I

believe (if it's truly an advancement) the current description puts you at a great advantage. This to say, presumably, by discovering this explanation of the Thought Replacement Technique, you now know that the method adds one more item to your collection of self-healing ideas for behavioural and emotional change that will help you make a better person of yourself. To make it happen takes learning and untiring practice. You can do it.

Liberate yourself—Believe me when I say that the more frequently you practise changing thoughts that upset, frighten, or attack you, the more ready and expert you will become at choosing the thoughts you want to think about to improve your psycho-social makeup. What liberation! Every time you succeed in filling your mind with what you prefer to think about, you will feel the pride and peace that positive emotions can provide. The more positive or neutral the feelings you experience through this technique, the more motivated you are likely to become to use Thought Replacement.

You see, if you have had a long-term disturbance of your emotional peace or if a recent experience has created intense, heavy feelings, the negative thoughts that feed these feelings would by now “know their way around” the brain sites, because they have frequently been there. It is because the thoughts often inhabit these brain sites that you maintain the misery or distress that has plagued your life so far. The question that arises is why does this damaging (negative) thinking take priority in your mind? And what sway do these negative thoughts have over you that they can run

around in your head freely, creating havoc? Indeed, very little to none! Now you are learning that you can purposefully give their privileged position to positive, healthy, joyful, and rational thoughts.

More Suggestions for Thought Replacement

- Do not engage in the unpleasant aspects of any topic.
- Listen to music or sing along with a song. Ponder the lyrics, the artist, and the music.
- If you don't already know, consider how hair, fingernails, and toenails grow.
- Look at a picture or painting on the wall. If you happen to be in a gallery when a troubling thought intrudes, analyze a piece of art. Describe what you believe the artist looked like, what state she or he was in when creating it, what kind of a person would buy the piece, and why you would or would not buy it—even if you couldn't afford to do so.
- Count vehicles by make, model, colour, origin of licence plate, etc.
- Count and describe people wearing specific types of clothing.
- Review the best holiday or party you can remember. Anticipate, plan, or dream about your next one.
- Go for a walk, or imagine going for a walk on a familiar or imagined route. Take note of various items of interest, and comment on them as you go.

- Review a particularly interesting or questionable church or temple service, a political rally, a concert, or a romantic encounter. What do you make of it today? Linger on the delightful, uplifting, or puzzling aspects. Do not engage in any unpleasant aspect.
- Consider how specific religions were born and how their different forms originally spread and took root among current followers.

[See Appendix 5: Engaging Ideas for Thought Replacement]

Putting Thoughts, Words and Emotions to Work

If it is agreed that our thoughts produce the words we use and that the nature of our thoughts determine the kind of person we are (with respect to our emotions, behaviours, and language), then it becomes important to use our thoughts to shape our words and actions in a way that will make us positive, helpful, productive, and emotionally healthy people. To achieve this, you need to monitor each factor that contributes to making your everyday presentation what it is. Because your thoughts, linked with the emotions that accompany them, will be reflected in the words you use and the behaviours you show, it is necessary to intentionally choose self-talk and actions or reactions that will inspire self-respect. This advice is supported by scientific research.

Reported research—Researchers using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)¹ appear to have shown that our thoughts and words can change not only the

functioning but also the structure of the brain if they are kept and used for a long enough time. The subjects in these studies included people who had been successful in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT); disciplined long-time users of traditional meditation or a related type of therapy known as Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR); as well as long-time London taxi drivers who've had to master driving the very complicated traffic flows, routes, and gridlocks of that city for several years. The results of those studies suggest that when we accept certain thoughts and frequently use them, we are making mental, as well as physical, changes in our brains that shape who we are. Therefore, when you practice using respectful and uplifting language (just as those who use CBT and traditional meditation do), it is possible to change the function and structure of your brain to make you into the happier, more positive person you want to be. By the same reasoning, frequent use of and exposure to the language of negative thinking could shape someone's brain to function in way that makes that person unpleasant, hopeless, or pessimistic. As you can see, the connection between thought, emotion, language and behaviour can be far more powerful and significant than is obvious.

When your behaviour tells you that your thinking is inappropriate (through the reactions of others or by your own assessment), you need to review the thoughts that led to the behaviour. If you are careful to observe the words you use, with the intention of changing your self-talk to make it non-offensive, you will likely succeed in shaping

your thoughts, self-talk, and outward behaviour to become a person mostly free of unpleasant moods and actions—one who has become a better version of your former self.

Watch how you “should” others—As you will have gathered, self-healing from trauma or other serious emotional problems requires that the sufferer maintain a helpful mental environment. Therefore, you need to practise getting used to words that flow from positive (or neutral) thoughts, which, in most situations, will make you feel good and make others feel unthreatened. There is a belief that it’s best to avoid such words as “should” and “must.” One reason is that words like these suggest an absolute or moral expectation, and when a person (especially someone with an emotional difficulty) believes that she or he has fallen short of this expectation, this individual is left with feelings of inadequacy or incompetence. In effect, words like “should” and “must” are believed to contain a suggestion that the speaker is being judgemental and wants to blame or shame. Such words can also result in feelings of guilt or regret; they can cause someone to feel a sense of pressure or obligation; or they can suggest the need to try to aspire to a difficult standard. Another problem is that the basis for applying “should” or “must” to a particular situation may be subjective, artificial, biased, or untrue. That is to say, in some instances, there is no good reason for forcing anyone (including yourself) to do certain things. Asking the questions “Why?” and “Why is it necessary?” of yourself when “must” or “should” arises may provide answers that will ease the burden of what you “should” or “must” do or have someone else do.

In specific counselling situations, the use of such vocabulary could be associated with a directive style reminiscent of how an authority or parental figure gives instructions to complete tasks. Because this directive style tends to be used more frequently to clarify tasks, some think it implies that the person receiving the instructions is of inferior ability or lacking creativity. Nonetheless, the words in any language all have useful meanings. I am not trying to suggest that it is always necessary to avoid “should” and “must.” But I use them rarely in this book and only when I believe a statement deserves to be made in a direct manner. My encouragement to you is to change them as often as you can to at least reduce the frequent occurrence of the problems associated with them.

On the positive side, words like “could” or “can” seem to suggest hope, positive expectation or capability, and confidence. Words like “may” or “might” imply a neutral or uncommitted attitude. These interpretations, however, may not be true in all situations, because the same words discussed above could also have the opposite meaning, depending on the tone, emphasis or intention of the speaker. Regardless, there will undoubtedly be times when you are unable to find the best words to accurately convey your thoughts in a way that avoids any negative suggestions about the listener, usually because of the emotions she or he already aroused in you. Hopefully, those occasions will be few, and familiarity with the language will enable you to choose your words thoughtfully. Practising this regularly will help you develop the skills to help you direct your

thoughts and emotional reactions towards making yourself emotionally positive and strong.

Perhaps problems with being tactful with words or with sorting out our emotions to convey them accurately is one reason why we all agree that feelings are personal. We all understand the emotional experience, however, of not being able to express something well enough for another person to grasp. Still, words (among other things) count heavily in directing our behaviour, expectations, and self-image. As you read previously, it is hopefully becoming clear that a thought is not the only trigger for an emotional state. Any condition or event coming into our awareness that produces a significant brain pattern, associated with a particular state, will eventually acquire emotional energy once a meaningful label has been found for the feelings or emotion. In the great majority of instances however, a thought will produce the spoken words or behaviour. As such, our thoughts always count.

Even though it is difficult to describe an emotion that is unfolding, when we do find the right words, it becomes clear that the link between the thought and the emotion is not by chance, but necessary. That dependence of emotion on our labelling of the feeling-state (that is, combining it with a meaning) provides the basis whereby we may influence emotion through the wilful switching of thoughts. By now it is clear that thought is required for an emotional reaction to occur, and every thought that leads to achieving or creating something good, bad, or in between is accompanied by a corresponding emotional state. It is up to you to use

your thinking and language to realize goals that will benefit yourself and others, remembering that the more frequently you do this, the more your brain structure will equip you to further improve yourself and possibly the world.

This emphasizes the fact that you have a tool—the content of your thoughts—under your control that you can change to produce the mental ingredients that could ensure self-improvement and happiness. Once you have learned to bring your way of thinking under your conscious control, all your thoughts, particularly of events associated with your traumatic experience, may be used to bring about fewer or lighter accusatory and negative self-descriptions, as well as less disrespect or impoliteness towards others. In other words, you can use your new way of thinking to produce and practice controlled language that you can use for making yourself feel good most of the time (and not only when you are feeling bad) and for building others up rather than belittling or frustrating them, so that you and others can live in harmony, feeling worthy and peaceful.

By adopting a self-and-other enriching attitude, you arm yourself and others against the disempowering effects of degrading self-talk. And instead, you contribute to removing at least some social ills or problems that originate in destructive desires, such as assaults, scams, arsons, severe depression and anxiety, social and cultural prejudice, and—perhaps the biggest of all—war. Therefore, positive self-talk is critical for self-healing and far beyond that, for improving people and societies everywhere.



The Future

Your future life of hours or

years

You cannot guarantee right

now

Engage the present with a

vow

And give less power to wants and

fears

— Pat Bickersteth

After Reading Chapter 14

1. Make three guidelines for how you will use your thoughts to heal from your emotional problem.

1) Guideline #1

2) Guideline #1

3) Guideline #1

2. Describe the two most powerful ideas that convince you that your thoughts can heal your emotional condition.

Chapter 15

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF-HEALING **The Joys of Life That Are Around to Discover**

Reduce Your Exposure to Negative Experiences

I cannot stress enough the importance of refraining from distressing thoughts. For example, when you make an important decision, you may say to yourself something like, “I have to catch that bus, or I will be late for my job interview.” This often means there’s a strong emotion attached to the decision being made. Often you may not consciously label this strong emotion, although doing so would help you understand your reactions. Otherwise, you may simply become aware of the decision and the strength of the emotional trigger word(s).

You would discover great advantage, therefore, in practising, identifying, and labelling the emotions that come with your thoughts, feelings, or actions. Doing this will help you change your reactions and attitudes in a way that will lift



It is here, I know...
But Where?

rather than lower your self-esteem and mood, with respect to the decisions you make. There are, however, other factors that determine how, why and what to include in the process of labelling your thoughts in order to produce a settled rather than a disturbed state of mind.

Sometimes however individuals bring the exposure to unpleasant emotional reactions on themselves, directly. For example, let's go back to the job interview issue. The self-caution not to miss the bus is straightforward and requires action. You may experience mild fear, which will reduce or disappear once you check the time to be sure you are keeping to your schedule of when to leave the house. In this case the emotion is labelled leading to an appropriate behaviour. You could have gone beyond the immediate matter of catching the bus however, to the job interview and even further. Being in this territory is likely to produce changing emotions such as doubt, fear unknown expectations, joy, sadness. You may not have a name for all of these feelings, just a general description of whether they are positive, negative or confused. Some people may spend a lot of time turning over and over in their minds how awful not getting the job will feel and the many ways this outcome will make life unbearable. If you are one of these people, exposing yourself to such misery even before the problems occur (if at all they will) is both unnecessary and ill-advised. With this reaction you are preparing to fail in the interview and also telling yourself how inconsolably to behave if you do not get the job. There is no value in either response. Besides, there is no reason to live in the future other than to

make useful plans. By agreeing with your own assessment of your chances when you applied, staying with gratitude for being invited to the interview and holding on to hope on the basis of that invitation will provide you with relative peace of mind longer as the events unfold. To take the situation one step at a time in the present, responding to only the facts and banishing unnecessary unhappy thoughts (as you have learned from reading to this point) is possible, sensible and protects your peace of mind.

The importance of self-talk—The controlling influence of self-talk on how we relate to ourselves, other people and situations is unquestionable. Therefore, any self-changing effort needs the support of your self-talk. As a rule, it is always worthwhile to counsel yourself to be full of hope by creating pleasant and realistic images about yourself, your circumstances, and future events, in spite of the pull to do the opposite. To succeed in this crucial task, it is necessary to learn to make a regular practice of maintaining a pleasant mood or at least a mood level that you find acceptable. In this regard, it would be beneficial to find tools that can be used to break apart an irritable or sullen mood, piece by piece, if not all at once.

One such tool is the I-want-to-feel-good technique. Other examples include, embracing humour in various ways as a stress-reliever (such as through TV shows, movies, books, comic strips, or by making up funny scenarios in your head), searching for reliable information from various media, reading material about explanations of your problems to discover hope or just to feel motivated, and learning and

applying wise philosophical or psychological advice, such as can be seen in these examples:

“When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.” (Dr. Wayne Dyer)

“I never think of the future—it comes soon enough.”
(Albert Einstein)

“You cannot prevent the birds of sorrow from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair.” (Chinese proverb)

“If anything causes you distress, it is not the thing itself that is the cause of your being troubled; rather it is how you are thinking about it that brings your suffering and this belief you can change at any time.” (Marcus Aurelius, 170–180 A.C.E.)

On the whole, your chance of a faster recovery is greatly improved if you reduce disagreeable dealings and, at the same time, build positive relationships. Doing this will open doors to greater enjoyment in the present, which will ultimately lead to a satisfying and pleasant future. Not allowing yourself to be robbed of an emotionally satisfying life in the present also requires developing tools for decreasing unhealthy self-regard. These would include conscious and appropriate responses or reactions to the various kinds of information that you come across, adopting self-strengthening attitudes, taking time to learn problem-solving and mood-uplifting skills, and training yourself to attend only to events that will help you find the positives amid the negatives.

Limit the use of negative reactions to information—

Sometimes people react to information in ways that are not helpful for maintaining peace of mind. For example, it would be better, emotionally speaking, if you recognize that you need to learn to focus on reducing your exposure to negativity rather than on protecting your self-esteem. That is, you need to learn to display a self-enhancing and non-aggressive attitude, even when you feel a piece of information is disrespectful or damaging to you. Consider the following scenarios in which a non-aggressive stance is the better option:

- You hear someone say something nasty about you or your condition. You reduce the chance of becoming upset, with all of its emotional and behavioural consequences, if you start with admitting that people often express opinions that—as a sufferer—you can do without. So trying to understand the motivation and goal of such statements would guide you to have a more productive reaction. Or you may decide to simply ignore it and move on.
- Something you hear or see from the media is misleading or unsympathetic. Instead of ruining your day obsessing about things you hear on the news, take the approach that media outlets engage in sensational activities in order to attract public attention to increase their sales and ratings; what you just heard was probably one such attempt.

Use mood-lifting skills to counter negativity—You may learn mood-lifting skills as a way to reduce negativity. In the company of another person or other people, you

may change a topic that is offensive or provocative so as to bring in humour or turn the occasion into a calm, teaching moment. Provided you have correct information, you may be able to make yourself feel good about your control over a potentially hurtful or distressing outcome. Here are additional ways to prevent being affected by unacceptable incidents that could deflate your mood:

- Withdrawing to listen to music or to join another conversation (if there is one)
- Talking to a friend
- Working on the computer
- Going for a walk to observe and comment on other events or to appreciate nature

I believe that leaving a place where you get agitated is a sensible way to proceed until you are able to better handle unwelcome situations.

Learn to take it easy—Enjoyment and interest are greatly weakened in the lives of sufferers of emotional trauma or other severe emotional complaints. People with such conditions would be best to confront the barriers to enjoyment and reset their focus to allow opportunities for interest to take root. This cannot happen unless they reduce the chances of becoming involved in emotionally hazardous situations, while at the same time consciously seeking, accepting, and nurturing positive experiences. This includes adopting a pattern of calmer reactions to life circumstances. Let your mantra be: Learn to take it easy every day.

Pessimism

Pessimists are people who describe a glass filled midway up with water as half-empty rather than as half-full. In other words, pessimists give a discouraging twist to most things. Surprisingly, some pessimists do not necessarily see themselves as negative people. Instead, they believe they are realistic or practical, although most of the time, they preach doom. A pessimistic way of looking at life tends to produce anxiety, anger, sadness, or hopelessness rather than excitement, joy, hope, or peace of mind.

For pessimists, problems beget problems, and they approach those problems with a multitude of complaints to which they add supporting examples of additional problems, as seen from their disheartening interpretations. This is a problem-orientation rather than a problem-solving approach. People who wish to reduce contact with unpleasant incidents will do well to avoid spending much time with pessimists whenever possible and, instead, to seek out the company of more positive people.

Our brains try to protect us—If you are an optimist, it will probably be easy to understand why you would hang on to a favourable view of life, since that tendency makes for a more hopeful, pleasant, and enjoyable outlook. The following explanation may make it easier for you to understand and deal with a negative style of thinking in others. It appears people are hardwired to emphasize disadvantageous or harmful situations more than positive ones. This means our brains have a tendency to pick up clues in the

environment in connection with our safety (an aspect of ERN, discussed earlier), and that is why we are likely to be more attentive for longer to negative experiences than to positive ones. In other words, people who seem more comfortable with a gloomy perception of life probably come by this attitude naturally. This apparently natural bias towards the unfavourable would seem to explain how people, in general, tend to focus on or interpret most events through negative filters, but not how pessimists came to be this way more than most.

Other research seems to suggest that, when asked, people find it easier to come up with more words indicating negative emotions than they do to come up with positive or neutral ones. One conclusion from this could be that, in general, people's thinking produces more negative ideas than positive.

Nonetheless, in everyday life the majority of people seem to display hopeful tendencies. And other research appears to support this in noting that certain English speakers use more positive words in everyday communication than negative ones (in blogs, tweets, books, emails, song lyrics, and newspaper articles). How then can we have an in-built negative bent but display more positive than negative behaviours with one another? If in fact these research results are accurate, it is probably that, in general, this negative tendency is automatically suspended while we are in the mode of trying or wanting to communicate (to allow social bonding to occur), as this is important for our survival. If our positive tendency does override in this way, we could

conclude that, at least in print and social media, there are greater chances to encounter comforting and encouraging styles in our conversations with one another than to encounter sour or bitter social exchanges.

Seek out cheerful companions—If this inclination extends to society at large, a person like you who is suffering from a trauma or significant emotional difficulties will likely have little trouble finding friends or getting acquainted with people who have a brighter outlook on life. Regular contact with people who could boost your emotional energy and help you combat your problems (even for brief periods) would be beneficial, and you would benefit by experiencing some joy, hope, and positive expectations.

The bottom line is that if you wish to strengthen your morale and improve your mood, you are better off focusing your attention away from events and places (in some cases, physically leave places) where pessimistic and emotionally harmful messages are being expressed. This is probably a good way to ensure that the thoughts you allow to occupy your mind are not mainly negative. I would also like to remind you here that as you choose suitable comforting contacts, you also have the power to label experiences as negative or positive by the way *you* choose to perceive them. Just as the negative person sees everything as dark, so, too, can you (an optimistic person or someone trying to be one) choose to brighten life's experiences, wherever you are and whatever you are doing, by deliberately focusing on what is good, encouraging, or uplifting.

Avoid the Habit of Blocking Positive Reactions

It is a common behaviour of some people to refuse to join in laughter or fun. It appears they prefer to fight the natural urge to join other people who are in a good mood. Quite possibly, these cheerless people feel exposed, blocked, or insincere whenever they are about to express happy emotions. When such behaviour is observed in people who have suffered a trauma or are dealing with disturbing emotional experiences, they may be acting consciously or unconsciously. Indeed, if you are one of these people, you probably would not want to display emotions that may seem contradictory to your overall suffering condition. Moreover, in doing so, you are likely wanting to prevent increasing your distress by taking part in activities that remind you of more pleasant times. This tendency of seeming to want to avoid happy socializing may be due to the belief that you live in a different world from the one in which those who show joy or cheerfulness live. If this is so, you would demonstrate a general lack of interest, feel numbed and would likely show a preference for isolation and use other “protective” reactions to escape further stress. Nonetheless, you need to learn to purposefully attend to incidents in daily life that promote a sense of ongoing joy. This could prove a tricky exercise in that you would need to distinguish between things that are seriously threatening and things you don’t particularly care for. The following ways of bringing more fun into your life are recommended:

- If you have a serious case of anxiety or disinterest, you would likely respond favourably to specific forms of treatment (for example, energy techniques, hypnosis, Thought Replacement strategies, and the CBT method, as a means to change the thinking patterns that maintain your misery).
- For mild threats or lack of interest, healing could come by imitating others who react in a socially appropriate manner (for example, with respect to laughing, reacting with humour, and making positive comments).

It is beneficial to keep in mind, however, that as soon as the more seriously distressing emotions begin to weaken, it is time to pay attention to how untroubled people around you are behaving. This is where a helper or coach could assist you in improving your insight. It is important to remember that not all trustworthy acquaintances will be suitable or effective for this task. And in some cases, you may not be able to verbalize why someone may not fit the role. Nonetheless, the choice of a helper or coach is best left in your hands, if you believe you are clear minded enough to make a good decision about it.

The point here is not about using a helper or coach in a formal, rigid process. It is about simply stating the need for another person's ears, eyes, and mind to help you correct decisions with respect to social behaviour. The important message is really recognizing how powerful the exposure to positive events and people can be when you wish to improve your interaction skills.

I suggest that as soon as you feel noticeable relief from your troubling symptoms, you begin to try living like so-called “normal people” do. Now, here is the point. If you do not have a helper or coach to steer you along a reasonably acceptable path of behavioural and social wellbeing, you will need guidelines to help you follow such a trail. So far, I have put a direct emphasis on developing positive thoughts, emotions, and social skills and on avoiding negative tendencies that prevent enjoyment of life. This approach to self-healing has great merit and is not to be overlooked or taken lightly.

When a person begins to improve to a significant degree, research tells us there are other aspects of wellness to which he or she must pay attention. These longer-lasting aspects of an emotionally healthy life leading to happiness are now known to include participating in activities of work and leisure; forming and maintaining relationships (especially family ties); and becoming involved in the community (especially through doing good) in ways that bring out your strengths and highest level of motivation. Consistently, the research has shown that about 50% of our good or happy mood is due to what we have inherited, and may not be able to control. A heavy 40% can come from choosing to live happily through deliberately engaging in activities in the reported areas noted above, forming habits that will bring inner joy rather than cause feelings that are temporary, although short-term joy is definitely better than feeling miserable. In due course, these activities will help you achieve a higher level of psychosocial comfort.

At this stage, what you do and how you live life (including your values of helping others) will make your life meaningful. Probably only a few of those who are now suffering from serious, long-lived emotional disturbance might be able to achieve the highest levels of an emotionally stable life. I encourage those of you who believe you are hopelessly psychologically damaged to reach as high as you can up the ladder of emotional wellness and not just to the first stages of learning to make life pleasant. Keep working as hard as you can to produce a better version of yourself. At that higher level of self-improvement, it will be important to find and fully engage in ways that increase occupational pleasure or that bring joy in any other pursuit that occupies a large part of your life—always with the goal of building a totally satisfying life. As you will undoubtedly agree, to do that you will need to significantly reduce your emotional difficulties through self-healing. At times, you might even need to reach out for additional help. It is time to move forward, so refuse to be slowed down by your own contrary thinking or by your unwillingness to embrace opportunities that will bring about a positive emotional makeover of your attitudes toward life. The opportunity to sidestep blockages to happiness, my dear sufferer, is really only a few deliberate good-natured or very hopeful thoughts away.

Act when you are ready—Throughout the entire treatment (or self-treatment) process, you do not have to feel any pressure or obligation to let go of all your disturbing emotions before you feel comfortable doing so. It is paramount that in this process of healing you act only when

You may find you can suspend your battle with the impossible for a period of time or accept something for a short while.

you feel ready. It is not necessary to force any element of the process into place, but you may need to persuade yourself to examine the wisdom of just treading water, so to speak, instead of making progress (or for that matter, plunging forward) in letting go of unwanted emotions. Premature exposure to situations that may be emotionally loaded and, therefore, beyond your ability to cope is believed to be no less self-damaging than the habit of discouraging yourself from positive emotions.

In some severe cases, a sufferer is not expected to be ready to let go of an entire traumatic or stressful experience immediately. However, if you count yourself among this group, you may find you are able to start by letting go of a small part of your struggle or by accepting that life is not 100% fair or perfect. You may find you can suspend your battle with the impossible for a period of time or accept something for a short while. It is also possible that the nature of your pain may allow you to divide the experience into parts so that you can then select which part(s) to let go of or to accept.

Whether you adopt any one of these approaches or their combinations will largely depend on your “old habits,” your degree of comfort with moving along with your self-analysis, and your inner wisdom or self-honesty.

Help Yourself by Helping Others

I have yet to meet a client (with or without a formal diagnosis of an emotional problem) who has been unfavourably affected by doing volunteer work. Because there are many ways to help others, it is probably appropriate to point out different classes of helping situations.

Regular work—Odd as it might seem, one class of helping is the regular (nine to five) work, or paid work. Sometimes, even when a person is paid to do a job, something comes up that is not part of the job description but that the person agrees to do for a number of reasons: it will help others in the workplace, reduce the supervisor's stress, or be good for the company. An example would be a person on a coffee break helping another set up a room for a meeting. Or a person washing up dishes in the staff lunchroom, even though this is not his or her job. When people willingly do work like this, they go above and beyond, and this qualifies as volunteer work, because the person is not getting paid for it. Another example is when a person accepts a job he or she would not ordinarily take but does so to help out in a capacity that's difficult to recruit, despite the fact that this individual can easily find other work. Nonetheless, regular work can be unpaid.

Non-regular work—This is paid work, but not necessarily the regular nine-to-five type of job. It may be irregular in terms of days or hours, or it could be part-time. This, too, can be a form of helping, in the same way as paid work (described above), when it is done mainly as a favour or out

of consideration for others. But it may be totally unpaid as well.

Both regular and non-regular work situations, in which someone may help out, may be considered structured employment—in the sense that they entail workplace rules or policies—or unstructured—in the sense of lacking strict administrative guidelines, as in the case of an in-home caregiving position. Structured work is not the only form of “self-sacrifice” that appears to help emotionally oppressed people regain self-esteem and self-respect.

Casual work—Helping children, as well as old or needy people, feels good and also seems to enhance a sense of well-being in sufferers of emotional problems, once they have achieved a certain level of wellness. Many types of freelance work may also fit into this category. These may be paid or unpaid situations. Offering this kind of informal help outside of a regular or non-regular work setting may be described as casual work. The only way such casual, paid work may be considered volunteer is when the job demands or responsibilities far exceed the pay, and the individual chooses to do the work as a way of giving a helping hand.

While the forms of paid work described above are not normally seen as volunteer work, they have an element of volunteerism. As such, they are all ways to help others, some of which you may want to participate in as part of your self-healing. To do so, you need to be aware of how ready or capable you are to successfully carry out this healing project, because it would be foolish to undertake working in a

setting or take on a certain job that stirs up anxiety, anger, or other disturbing emotions. The goal of volunteering is to reduce your feelings of distress by exposing yourself to the joy of others when you add value to their lives in the form of their pleasure, satisfaction, security, or happiness.

I must emphasize that offering help of any kind requires you to include the experience of making others feel good as a key component of your desire to help. Feeling joyful by being of service to others seems to be a highly praised path to getting better.

The importance of empathy—Sometimes it helps to understand how the person at the receiving end of the goodwill gesture is feeling. This means that the doer of the act of kindness (in this case, you) needs to understand the difficult circumstances of the receiver. If you, the doer of the act of kindness, are not in tune with the recipient, this receiver could consider your gift of work, effort, or time as hollow or insincere, and you too, will likely have similar feelings about your work. This could increase your emotional problem in that it might add feelings of guilt, shame or even anger, all of which would need to be treated before they get out of control or become overwhelming.

Of course, there are other ways to be helpful beyond doing tasks or activities. For example, you could visit people who are lonely, sick, or shut in; give to charity; or allow your name to stand as a supporter or sponsor of causes to which you wish to contribute in some way.

Therefore, it is important to stress that the main motive for your benevolence is expected to be a desire to make another

person or other people better off or happy—and not to get others to make you happy. If a recipient feels compelled to pay back good for good, that's a bonus! Generally, the basis for helping is a need to give rather than to receive generosity. There is evidence that the amount of time one spends helping others is not a major consideration, because it takes very little time for an act of kindness to produce a positive reaction in the brain of a Good Samaritan. Some of those positive reactions include creating a sense of happiness and activating immune-strengthening feelings.

Usually, people seem to believe that we should acquire all the benefits we can from the opportunities that come our way. Some people with serious emotional problems, however, might be inclined to feel shortchanged by fate and could consider that life (or even other people who have an easier life) somehow owes them. As such, people in dire emotional states may be more inclined to desire that others bring them joy rather than the other way around. In general, then, in this needy state of mind, an emotionally troubled individual would not be expected to go around offering help to give others pleasure. People who pity themselves are generally unlikely to engage in or benefit from such selfless action. But not so for you who are receiving this message of self-healing! On the other hand helping others may, not be a pressing concern during your time of suffering. Still, it is important for you to learn that doing a good turn to others (when it is willingly and sincerely done) is more likely than not to improve your emotional health and wellbeing. In fact, as research has found, the very act of intending

kindness produces physical and emotional benefits, which, no doubt, help to spur on the would-be helper to carry through with the caring act. Benevolent behaviour, then, may arise from a need or desire to feel cheerful, which in turn requires the good deed to be done without strings attached, for the pleasant feelings to continue. In addition, performing acts of kindness that bring pleasure to others—rather than to the doer—imparts a sense of purpose to the giver. It helps to remove the boredom and meaninglessness that can create a state of emotional numbness, hopelessness, or despair in a person suffering serious mental distress. All in all, being sensitive and responsive to the needs of others as the basis from which to offer a service(s) to them is the key ingredient for making your joy complete.

The joy of giving—This higher, selfless sense of purpose sets apart such great people as Mahatma Ghandi, who led India to independence using non-violent civil disobedience; William Wilberforce, a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade; and Nelson Mandela, to whose example of forgiveness I paid tribute but now mention for the reason he went to jail in the first place—opposing the white minority rulers, on behalf of his people. Considering your capability and sphere of influence, your own selfless actions to others around you are no less noble. Who knows? Maybe one of these days you may be in a position to be selfless to the same honourable degree as those heroes. By helping others the way I earlier suggested, you will be helping yourself—but only indirectly. I propose that you undertake this kind of help as if you were sincerely trying to test the

belief that, even in your state of mind, you can bring joy to others. When you prove this belief to be correct, you can get pleasure from the successful results, and then your joy will come alive. The infectious joy that comes from an act of kindness has been known to produce deeper and stronger healing, which goes far beyond the helping occasion. And you can reflect on this giving event later to bring forth more pleasant feelings.

The Connection between Joy and Health

I encourage you not to gloss over times of joy in your life. As some research has reported, when positive emotions add up, they help us fight off depression and increase our ability to deal with turbulent times. Every reaction of happiness or satisfaction connects with some other activity in the brain that may give rise to calmness, peacefulness, better endurance, and, in turn, faster recovery. Positive feelings also improve the functioning of the heart. So, when we feel good because we made others feel good, not only is it an enjoyable, emotional feeling, it also puts our brains and hearts in an improved state of health. When you are the agent of such joy, you can multiply this wonderful outcome by two, because helping another person involves him or her, as well.

From scientific investigations it has been observed that the brains of the two people involved in the exchange of a kind act show an increase in serotonin. And what's even more amazing is that observers of kindness show an increase in serotonin, too. The brain chemical serotonin accounts

for much of our positive mood (when it's in a naturally large amount). Reduced serotonin levels usually lead to an increase in negative mood. So you can see how one sincere act of helping another person can lead to spreading good feelings among at least two people, and even three, four, or more. The more you reflect on your acts of giving joy to others, the better your mood, and the less often you will reflect on unpleasant happenings in your life. Being kind to others will, no doubt, lead to greater life satisfaction. It's a sure way to increase your self-healing and free yourself from emotional disturbance. Beyond the understanding of a link between the joy of helping and improved health is the generally accepted view that maintaining a happy life greatly contributes to an all-around healthy body.

Use Mental Skills to Pursue a Happy and Successful Life

Mental skills associated with Thought Replacement have many applications. For example, since thoughts generally bring about the feelings that are in line with what we are thinking, we can kick-start the process of feeling good by being aware of our thoughts. It's as simple as that.

This attention to awareness is the act of being mindful, and pausing to experience it is mindfulness meditation (described in Chapter 10 and Appendix 9). Mindfulness meditation allows the mind to rest. As you would have gathered, while your attention is on your moment-to-moment thoughts and feelings, and you are just observing or saying what they are, it is not possible to worry, criticize yourself, or become sad, angry, disgusted, or ashamed about anything in your life. In this way, you release your mind from

those stressful emotional demands and give it rest. When the mind is in a restful state, it can generate mental energy that's capable of maintaining greater alertness, efficiency, and productivity. Leading from this state, we can generate thoughts that will result in desired feelings and behaviours. A mind that is full of worries, stress, and negativity is unlikely to either cause or hold on to self-satisfaction or joy. If it is capable at all, the effort is likely to be weak or last only briefly. The rested mind, on the other hand, is not loaded down by unwanted baggage. Instead, it has the energy and capacity for creating and maintaining positive and success-oriented thoughts, feelings, and actions.

The rested mind, on the other hand, is not loaded down by unwanted baggage. Instead, it has the energy and capacity for creating and maintaining positive and success-oriented thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Achieving a relaxed mind through mindful awareness does not happen instantaneously. It takes a lot of practice to learn to pay attention to your thoughts and to realize how calming it is to do so. You can begin right now by asking yourself what your thoughts were a moment ago, and what feelings came with them. Now try to observe them as you raise your head from reading. You are now being mindful of

your thoughts. So every time you catch yourself worrying, being angry, self-blaming, or entertaining other negative ideas, stop yourself right there. Use this method of attending to your thoughts and agreeing with yourself on what you are thinking (being careful not to go beyond noting the immediate thought). Then ask yourself what you are feeling and try to describe the feeling as accurately as possible. Another way to apply mindfulness is to note how your reactions occur. What prompts your self-critical thoughts? Is it someone saying something demeaning about you, someone else, himself or herself, or just any mean-spirited comment? What type of emotions follow those thoughts? Shame, anger, fear, sadness, self-disgust? As you name the feelings, are they of one kind or more? The more often you stop to check on your thoughts and feelings or stop your negative thinking so as to describe it, the better you will get at doing so. The longer you can just maintain neutral thoughts (that is, not allowing yourself to get carried away with the negative emotions of the thoughts), the longer the peaceful state will last. Again, this is a skill that gets better with practice. I call your attention, however, to the fact that your questions, as you attend to your thoughts, are simply to relieve your mind of the burden of heavy or tiring thoughts, which negative thinking entails. Remember that the best purpose of mindful thinking is to educate you, not to provide evidence for you to judge or condemn.

As a mental skill, mindful attention may be seen as a form of Thought Replacement. Both mindful attention and Thought Replacement offer a great transition into each

other to achieve the same goal—peace of mind. Watching and identifying thoughts and feelings, however, naturally slows down their pace in a way that's not necessarily characteristic of Thought Replacement. Nonetheless, after an adequate time of practising (which is different for each person), both techniques improve a person's ability to absorb stress and bounce back. Since both provide freedom from stress and create positive emotions while removing negative ones, they are an undeniable means to achieving a happy mind. A happy, stress-free, and resilient mind is bound to lead to productivity and success in life. Practice as many of the mindfulness meditation exercises in Appendix 9 as you can.

Your master plan would be to try to maintain an extensive variety of pleasant ways of thinking (or positive attitudes) to help defeat most of the hardships that come your way. Of course, no one is ever in a position to know if he or she has enough emotional strength to withstand everything, but you can aim high, and keep making your best effort.

Other Ways to Boost Your Mood

The ability to focus on helpful, constructive, or profitable thoughts and behaviours that bring success and happiness is not necessarily the only result of formal relaxation or meditation. Being present in the moment, observing the direction of your inner dialogue so as to switch to thoughts that promote goodwill, having honourable goals that produce worthwhile results are proven ways to boost your mood. Regular attention (ideally, every moment of the waking day) to creating the feelings and achieving the behaviours you

Every moment that you take a step towards creating happiness, getting rid of stress-filled feelings, or producing satisfying solutions or decisions means that these reactions are transferred to the next moment and, thereby, you build a happier future.

desire is the most likely route to making a successful and happy person (you!). Every moment that you take a step towards creating happiness, getting rid of stress-filled feelings, or producing satisfying solutions or decisions means that these reactions are transferred to the next moment and, thereby, you build a happier future. Does this mean that someone can be successful and happy all the time? Highly unlikely! We are human and cannot practise these skills perfectly every moment, but with these methods, you can make yourself happy, feel successful for a good portion of time, and permit unhappy feelings to stay for only very brief and isolated periods.

Group Experiences Can Help

It seemed as though the laughter in the group would never end. But it did. Almost reluctantly. This is one reason why Janet liked her book club—they had fun together. This time, as the laughter faded, she turned around with a broad smile and gave Jack a high-five. Jack had a bit of dif-

difficulty fitting into the group (which the other members did not suspect) because of his ongoing problem adjusting to a strong feeling of aloneness. But the experience of high-fiving with Janet made him feel warm all over, and, for the first time in years, he felt that this time, finally, he belonged.

The value of being in a group or, preferably, in several groups can increase your chances of improving your mental and physical health. The fictional scene above illustrates why and how groups can be good for a person engaged in self-healing.

Sometimes people don't want to join a group because they would rather deal with their emotional problem in isolation, probably due to shame, but more likely because the close contact with strangers threatens to be more stressful than they can handle.

This fear may be somewhat justified when it comes to group therapy sessions aimed at addressing emotional issues. However, in social groups, the goal is to derive enjoyment from leisure activities. Given this, the risk of additional anxiety from the mere fact of participating is very low. There are other reasons, though, why someone might find it difficult to be part of a group. For example, the individual may suffer from a severe physical disability or geographical isolation. The good news is that technology has made it possible for people to be in touch with one other over great distances, even across the world, through such electronic means as email, social media, and Skype. It is doubtful that chat rooms are still functioning. If there are any that use the original format, please note that chat room sites may be

hazardous to your mental health if the emotional sensitivity level of a chat-room group is not constant or you cannot judge it. So do some research before you choose to join in.

Although fear or distance may present barriers to participating in a group, a person who is practising self-healing could benefit from both virtual and physical groups, though I would recommend physical groups. If you are in a position to choose a physical group, you have the advantage of taking part in physical activities (for example, high-fiving, hugging, eating together). In general, however, by joining a group to assist with self-healing, you can enjoy many opportunities for Thought Replacement (through discussions, changing topics, and the ready availability of humour). Participation in a group allows for constructive thinking and periodic emotional release that will take your mind away from your trauma or emotional disturbance. Groups also allow for the development of both casual and deep friendships and generate valuable by-products, such as Jack's positive emotional discovery.

People who are socially isolated do not appear to fare well with respect to emotional wellbeing. While there might be good reasons why a person who is struggling with the effects of a serious emotional problem would not want to mix with other people, it's been found that keeping to one's self tends to make life more stressful and so, less enjoyable. Therefore, if you've been relatively cut off, a good thing for your emotional healing would be to decide to join more than one group (for example, a sports group, book club, religious group, singing group, band or a learn-how-to group). With

respect to the last, be careful to choose a pursuit that will not increase your frustration, anxiety or shame awareness. That defeats the feel-good purpose of joining in the first place. A group that brings excitement, enjoyment and pride to your outlook would be the best choice.

It is to be expected that some people will initially appear withdrawn from the group or have a superficial connection with the other members. As time passes, most of those people will usually start to feel more comfortable and participate more readily because of a natural human tendency to find group activities more attractive than individual ones. In deciding to join a group or club, you have to ask yourself the following two questions: “Am I ready for a group experience?” and “Is this the right group for me?” It is obvious that readiness would be important, since your behaviours or reactions are influenced by your perceptions, which, in turn, are based on how capable you are of focusing and directing your thinking in the appropriate direction.

Make sure you are ready to join a group—The person who “just knows” that he or she is experiencing an emotional problem but has no clear idea what the problem is and doesn’t know any effective treatments may find him- or herself speaking or behaving in ways that a group might consider inappropriate or incomprehensible. In other words, such a person is not well enough for informal group membership. In this case, it would be best for that person to reach a stable stage of healing before he or she joins a social group. Some people have a bias against certain aspects of group experience (for example, they dislike introducing

themselves and naming their profession or marital status). This kind of sufferer may need the help of someone already in the group to introduce him or her to the others, preferably in advance.

Many factors can influence the decision to join a particular group, and the considerations are often different for different people. You need to reflect on your suitability for a group (and vice versa), and you need to carefully consider the opinions of impartial people before deciding to join. It may be of benefit to explore whether there are other chapters of the group that might be more suitable. **A final word of caution—groups usually look very different from the inside.** That is to say, just as you cannot tell a book by its cover, the way a particular group operates is not usually evident to outsiders. So do not be quick to dismiss the benefits of joining a group but check out as many of them as you can comfortably manage. Join the ones that most appeal to you, and enjoy their advantages to your self-healing.



After Reading Chapter 15

You have noted, no doubt, that the following two methods of promoting emotional wellbeing must go hand-in-hand: (1) specifically making sure to disallow those events (including thinking) that you know cause you emotional damage; and (2) being particularly open-minded and willing to engage in physical and mental activities that are emotionally healthy.

Using this information in the chapter, make a list of three major actions you will definitely take to put the two methods of promoting emotional wellbeing into practice:

Mental and Physical Activities To Avoid	Mental and Physical Activities To Avoid
1.	
2.	
3.	

Chapter 16

SMALL PLEASURES, BIG GAINS

Life Is a Wonderful Affair That Puts Us to the Test, with Possibilities

Drink From the Forest Fountains of Good Health and Enjoy Nature

It may not surprise you that forest areas are like fountains of health. Indeed, the results from numerous research studies continue to show that being in a forested place produces important health benefits. After first coming to light from studies done in Japan, the health-promoting secrets of forests have not only become widely appreciated, but have also led the Japanese to develop the visiting of forests in that country into a type of therapy and to devote many forest areas to the practice of forest medicine (also known as forest bathing). Many other countries have joined in to make use of the beneficial effects of spending time in forests.

Although dramatic results pointing to improved health have come from being in a forest, the advantageous effects



*Quantity & Quality
Count.*



of other green spaces on psychological health have also been observed. What was once only a belief that forests and places with plentiful vegetation make us feel good is now seen as a fact, almost universally. Another important fact is that many of the chemicals in the drugs doctors prescribe come from trees. So forest therapy is like taking medication from trees, straight-up, without additives or organ-damaging side effects. Such benefits are undeniable. They include the following:

Strengthening our immune system—When people spend even one day in a forest instead of in their built-up urban environment, they stand a chance of gaining additional and stronger immune cells known as Natural Killer cells (NK cells). These cells destroy harmful viruses that enter our bodies to cause infections. It seems that breathing the air and/or absorbing the air-borne materials through our skin in places with tall or big trees and shrubberies makes people more capable of warding off diseases that could come from tumours and other virus-damaged cells. Being in forested places can help to produce a strong immune system that protects us from illnesses and diseases, ranging from the common cold to deadly conditions, such as cancer.

Recovery after a stressful experience is faster—As already described earlier, when we face a stressful situation, hormones (such as cortisol) are released to provide us with the physical tools we need to deal with the immediate emergency. The natural products created by the forest are now known to break down these hormones so that accumulated

amounts are not left in the bloodstream longer than needed where they would cause harm, . In addition, it has been observed that the forest environment improves stress recovery by reducing muscle tension, and lowering heart rate and blood pressure—all indicators of stress reduction.

They can improve mood—Walking in forested areas has been shown to produce improvement in mood and feelings of wellbeing, which is confirmation of the experience of most people who walk or hike on trails or camp in forested places. So you can expect to be less prone to being depressed, angry, or anxious when you spend time in the environment of tall trees and green bushes. You can also look forward to being able to concentrate better, although this (as well as improvement in attention-fatigue and control over impulsiveness and other ADHD symptoms) seems to apply to children more than to adults.

More energy, better sleep—With such health-providing effects as reducing stress, improving the immunity of the body, and keeping mood on the positive side, it is not surprising that forest areas and green surroundings also improve sleep and boost energy. Moreover, research suggests that while in forest surroundings, the brain adopts a meditative state reminiscent of the relaxation effects of meditation, which likely explains the feelings of energy (similar to those reported after a relaxation exercise).

A stronger immune system and better mental resilience seem to go together. The strength of your immune system appears to contribute to your ability to maintain mental health and in that sense helps you rebound from stress,

escape the thickening cloud of depression, control anxiety, and therefore reduces the power of your fear-filled way of looking at situations (if you have SOPS). A stronger immune system will also increase your energy, give you better sleep, and help you to achieve an emotional life that's better than average. This state of health can be attained merely by walking, jogging, or looking around in/viewing places with trees or abundant greenery. So powerful is the effect of natural settings made up of plentiful vegetation that we can get similar benefits from looking at pictures of forests (as other research has found).

If you can get to a place with a lot of trees—preferably tall pine, redwood, or cypress, I recommend, on the authority of scientific research, that you spend time there doing exercise, walking, or just looking around (a 40-minute stay being the amount of time reported in one study). If you cannot get to such a place at all or can get there only very infrequently, try to obtain pictures, posters, and room wallpaper or murals of green places, and view them often. And here's a way to enjoy the "forest effect" right in your home: houseplants. An abundance of these is believed to also provide a certain degree of the same health-giving advantages as do forests. And you can profit more from a forest experience or viewing the pictures by using them in visualization during a relaxation exercise. Simply imagine yourself in the picture doing anything pleasant that you wish.

Yet another way to partake of the rich health resource of forests, as further research has revealed, is through the practice of aromatherapy. As you may be aware, this form of

therapy uses natural oils removed from various parts of trees and other plants reportedly to stimulate the brain and the immune system and improve mental and physical health. Oil from the cypress tree seems to be particularly beneficial. Whether physically, pictorially, or through a treatment process, forest therapy will bring you appreciable self-healing rewards. Make sure to drink deep from this inexhaustible fountain of good, all-round health.

Connect with nature in other ways—Pleasant, healthful feelings can be brought on not only by walking in the woods but also by having a pet, looking at flowers and gardens, and being close to lakes, rivers, mountains, waterfalls, and other landforms. Watching or interacting with tame animals, such as horses, would have the same effect, as a number of people have confirmed. For these situations, the front part of your brain (frontal lobe a.k.a. frontal cortex) appears to be the main source of the positive feelings. On the negative side, however, you need to realize that such scenes can sometimes arouse a negative mood if they are associated with painful memories. When that happens, redirect your thinking, or replace the negative thoughts and avoid the situation (if possible) until you are emotionally more equipped for it.

For the purpose of healing the mind, you need to pay attention to situations that improve your mood, and try to incorporate more of what makes you feel good, calm, or happy into your everyday life. That may include playing with children or listening to their voices in the neighbour-

hood, watching animals, spending time at a lake, or visiting a hilly or mountainous place. At the same time, you need to be aware that over-involvement in any of these activities, as uplifting or enjoyable as they are likely to be, could lead to an addiction. This must be avoided. Also, you must be very careful about your safety and that of others, and always ensure that your behaviour in any of these situations or settings is socially appropriate.

Well respected and knowledgeable people across the centuries seem to agree that the mind holds the key to our emotional state.

Song, Music, Poetry

Several sections in this book have commented that our thoughts make us happy or sad, frightened or secure, angry or calm, interested or apathetic. As the Greek philosopher Epictetus is credited with saying in the 2nd century A.D., “Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views they hold of them.” Accordingly, well respected and knowledgeable people across the centuries seem to agree that the mind holds the key to our emotional state. So in attempting to control your emotions, you need to learn as many different ways as possible to change how you view things, especially bothersome things.

Though you might be able to alter your mood by directly swapping a bad thought for a good one, song, music, and poetry might also help—not only through Thought Replacement opportunities but also by triggering an additional level of positive feelings in your body. These three art forms are related in that to write a song, you may first have to write a stanza or two and then put them into music (or the other way around). If you can play a musical instrument, you need only turn to it to change your emotional state by playing or composing a new piece. If you have neglected your musical abilities, now is the time, while you are going through your difficult season, to go back to nurture them. If you can sing, or just wish you could sing, now's the time to sing, anyway!

Songs

Many songs have great emotional effects on people. The ones that make you feel good are very useful for changing your thoughts, so concentrate on the appealing lyrics or the happy experience that a particular song brings to mind. Many radio stations and TV channels play continuous music with popular songs. Some even entertain requests from listeners. And websites, such as CBC (the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Web Radio Stations, iTunes, and YouTube provide on-demand music. Of course, you could also collect CDs and DVDs of music that you enjoy and to which you can direct your thinking. Joining in with sing-along lyrics (accurate or faked) is also an uplifting experience that may be derived from joy-producing songs. If

you are going past a public building and you hear singing that makes you feel good, join in—it is permitted. In many ways, songs are poetry with music, although the combination of words and music produces a whole different effect on people. Moreover, many songs have repeated stanzas, and the repetition emphasizes the song's message, thereby providing special meaning to the listener or singer. Perhaps even more than in poetry, the message in songs can be more easily personalized to the extent that a listener is made to feel as if the song is addressed to her or him. Therefore, people who are suffering from trauma or other emotional problems, as you are, may find that the words of certain songs cheer them up and speak to an aspect of their problem more effectively than poetry.

Otherwise, almost everything that can be said about poetry and, for that matter, music, also applies to the effects of songs on people dealing with emotional issues or other areas of general mental health. The power of songs is such that many people quote lyrics to one another and even use some songs as mottos by which they define their lives. In the same way, you may choose songs that will have a positive impact on your emotional condition. As noted, songs also have value by distracting you from unwanted thoughts.

Music

It has been observed that when someone listens to music, her or his brain impulses change to match the rhythm of the music. This would mean that you could select songs or other types of music with the kind of musical beat that

would train your brain to keep to a faster or slower pattern, depending on the type of mood you require in order to produce a positive mental state (as in upbeat, calm, or sacred). There is evidence that music can improve a person's mood through the release of the brain substance (or neuro-chemical) dopamine, which appeared in an earlier discussion. This is why, when chosen wisely, music can significantly contribute to the healing of an emotional disturbance that has made your life difficult.

Music is useful for many things:

- Music entertains, soothes, challenges our intellect and creativity, and changes our mood. It works wonders for adults and children alike. In fact, this effect of music has shown results through the well-established treatment approach called Music Therapy, which is used in hospitals, especially in children's wards. This is the same reason why music is played in some malls and other places of business—to sooth customers so that they will respond favourably.
- Music is used in some neonatal hospital wards to stabilize the conditions of sick and premature infants. It reportedly improves the outcome of and recovery from surgery.
- Music plays an important role in religious assemblies, at social gatherings, among mourners, and in love relationships.
- Music is attractive, whether it comes from a musical instrument, a human voice, or from animals to which we can relate (for example, songbirds).

It is amazing, isn't it, that this single "invention" can achieve so many goals, speak in every language, and penetrate so many different personalities and temperaments! I would be greatly surprised if anyone argued with my conclusion that the power of music is indisputable.

But wait. Don't strike up the band yet! Instead, allow me to inspire you further:

- Music is known to reduce cholesterol, hypertension, and heart rate.
- Music is believed to bring Alzheimer's patients to their present timeframe and, possibly, to prolong life by strengthening the immune system.
- Music relieves stress and emotional distress. This is perhaps its greatest triumph among our species.

Okay, now you may rush off to start singing, strumming, or even yodelling in the name of emotional wellbeing!

While it is true that music awakens emotions in people, this does not mean the same emotion is stirred up in each person every time. It is reported, however, that in general, classical music can reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia and can arouse positive emotions. The same has been said of other genres (e.g., rap music, gospel music). As we know, however, not everyone likes the same type of music. The refusal or inability to enjoy certain types of music may be illustrated in our experience of those who are devotees of one genre of music but show disdain for another. Obviously, listening to music you dislike would be unlikely to produce positive feelings, but unless accompanied by

intolerable thoughts, it is equally unlikely to cause serious damage to your mental health.

Keep in mind, however, that there are types of music that can be frightening or harmful to emotional health, usually due to what they represent to the listener. They could include the following:

- The music of an aggressive or hostile country
- Music from a radical group or a dangerous neighbour
- Music that reminds you of a troubling experience
- Jarring music suggesting volleys of gunfire or the crashing sound of a large amount of advancing water (although, softer kinds of flowing water sounds may be pleasant)
- Music that is simply too loud

You may be able to cancel out or escape from some kinds of unpleasant music by using music that makes you feel good or safe, but you may have no way of overriding others.

Most of the time, however, people have a positive mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional relationship with music. I hope you have gathered that music can be a strong ally in self-healing. Moreover, since research has reported that a person's mood will match the mood of the music to which he or she is listening, you would expect that a certain kind of music will make you happy or sad, accepting or rejecting, secure or insecure, motivated or unmotivated, etc. because of the negative or positive emotional states it brings forth in you. Nonetheless it may be the case that the effect of music on you does not always necessarily come from your conscious connection between the type of sounds and your

mood state. Of course you will likely be able to use the positive effects to your advantage or convert the detected negative feelings using the appropriate self-talk and thought replacement, or by changing the music or leaving the situation (if possible or necessary). On the other hand as you quite possibly know, you can get into a timeless state that flows smoothly when your mental state is in tune with the rhythm of the loved music being played or sung.

This experience will be familiar to those who enjoy exercising with music. If you are one of them, you have probably noticed how the instructor's choice of music suits the type of exercise in progress. The better the match, the more enjoyable and almost effortless the exercise is likely to be. Likewise, a sufferer like you may collect music that will uplift you when you feel depressed, promote joy in times of sadness, motivate you when you lack enthusiasm, and calm you during times of agitation, depending on the mood that your self-healing requires. I hope I have left no room for misunderstanding the relevant issues surrounding different types of music.

This section is about how different musical forms influence people's emotional reactions. My point is not to show bias for one genre over another. Most people probably know how musical tastes work. As the unknown Roman scholar said, "*De gustibus non est disputandum*— There is no point arguing about taste." A few years back, a pacifist friend of mine translated it as, "Chill out, Dude. Each to his own. Get it?" You get it, too. Right?

Poetry

Some people read poetry for intellectual reasons, others for enjoyment, and yet others for romantic reasons. Many aspects of poetry attract people. There are those who do not care much for this art form and those who enjoy saying their thoughts in poetic form. For any of these reasons, everyone, no doubt, chooses what feels good.

I learned many poems in school, but the one that still puts me in a happy and playful mood is “My Shadow,” by Robert Louis Stevenson, which I learned in elementary school. I used to come home and dramatize parts of that poem, especially the part where I let the sun cast my shadow near my bed so that when I jumped forward, my shadow would seem as though it were jumping into my bed. I would then jump, as if after it, into the bed, too. Now, when I think of my own shadow, I smile, deeply entertained by the memory of my boyhood antics. Please indulge me as I share the poem with you now:

My Shadow

By Robert Louis Stevenson

*I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.*

*The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow—
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;*

*For he sometimes shoots up taller like an India-rubber ball,
And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all.*

*He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.
He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;
I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!*

*One morning, very early, before the sun was up,
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;
But my lazy little shadow, like an errant sleepy-head,
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.*

Write Your Own Poem

If you like this form of expression, look for poems that will improve your mental health rather than those that will side with your anguish. If you are so inclined, you may actually choose to put your solutions or ideas for a better emotional state into a poem, as I have done. This self-treatment exercise is not about demonstrating literary expertise, showing off, or being brave enough to “put it out there,” though a temporary or small amount of unease is not totally out of the question. You can make it a private creation however, for your eyes only. On the other hand, it may be that you feel motivated by some or all of these reasons, and I say: Go for it! The main point is that you are using poetry to feel good. My own effort was precisely for that reason and has been recycled many times since. So, here it is.

There Is Always a Brighter Side

*There is a brighter side to everything that comes our way.
It is sometimes hidden and we need to learn to see it;
Or to examine how much hopefulness we do display,
To see the brighter side when life feels like we're in a pit.*

*Let go, relax, let God and be truly optimistic,
And you will see the brighter side pop up before your eyes.
Life can always be much worse and that is realistic;
So follow a good plan and soon your dreams you'll realize.*

*Never allow a piece of life, which did not turn out right,
To ruin other parts of you that you should celebrate.
Look everywhere for joy, and cling to it with all your might;
Refuse to stand outside, locked out of life as by a gate.*

*Yes, it is up to everyone to see the brighter side;
Life is a wonderful affair that puts us to the test;
If we go with the flow, the bumps will seem an easier ride,
And we will have more joy from knowing
we have done our best.*

Poetry speaks to people in different ways and can arouse or confirm the emotions that match the words (and syllabic rhythm) of the verses. Poems are often passionate about something. In my late teenage years, I became fond of and inspired by Tennyson's *Ulysses*, mainly because of the old king's passion for travelling the seas and his determination

Perhaps it is a poem's message of possibilities, hope, power, courage, and compassion that produces the stirrings of sentimental love, fantasy, longing, innocence lost, or experience gained that lead to the discovery of confidence, encouragement, forgiveness, and self-respect.

never to give up. Some women have been motivated by Helen Reddy's lyrics "I Am Woman" (Hear Me Roar) because of its feminist message. Sometimes, even when a poem or song does not quite fit your overall circumstances, certain attributes may be appealing and, for that reason, the verse resonates with you.

Perhaps it is a poem's message of possibilities, hope, power, courage, and compassion that produces the stirrings of sentimental love, fantasy, longing, innocence lost, or experience gained that lead to the discovery of confidence, encouragement, forgiveness, and self-respect. It does not seem farfetched to believe that the range of poetic themes is equal to the range of human emotions. For someone engaged in self-healing, poetry can provide a rich panorama of achievable emotional goals. So go after it. Look for it. Find it. Or just go back to poems that you already know will excite your passions, caress your senses, and bring their own brand of joy to your life. Cherish them—poetry could add

another dimension to your life and help you feel good when you need to self-soothe and raise your spirits to improve your mental health.

Self-Soothing

If your need for soothing or pampering is fulfilled by another person, you are fortunate, indeed. Sometimes, though, there is no other person (paid or otherwise) who will administer this peaceful comfort and pleasure. Now what? Well, if there is no one else there, you become responsible for your own pampering and soothing. I would not be surprised if you already know about the suggestions I am about to make. All the same, I believe it is helpful to be reminded. If nothing else, my suggestions that follow could trigger other ideas to achieve self-soothing.

Physical activities to bring peace—My wife has been a very good swimmer all her life, and for her, swimming by herself or with her identical twin sister is next to heavenly. I, on the other hand, insist that contemplating nature, whether sitting on a hilly slope or under a large tree, cannot be trumped for bringing peace of mind. Others are known to take long, hot baths or just soak in aromatic and frothy water, using candles, potpourri, and/or aromatherapy oils to add to the pleasurable experience. For some, window-shopping for things they know they cannot afford but love to look at is peaceful— provided that sad, anxious or angry feelings don't emerge from not being able to afford those items. If you like that kind of activity, you may also enjoy browsing through museums and art exhibitions, walking

along a safe secluded path, or listening to the sound of loved animals, children's laughter, gurgling streams, and other pleasing nature sounds (many of which you could listen to right in the comfort of your backyard).

Other physical activities, such as gardening or lying on a hammock or lounge outdoors with or without a book or favourite drink (being careful not to slide into uncontrolled indulgence), can also provide much soothing.

Creative activities to bring peace—Another type of self-pampering you may enjoy is creative hobbies. When you are engaged in an activity you love, to the extent that you become unaware of the passage of time and of happenings around you, you can feel as though you've been transported to another world—a world of total bliss. In this state, deeply satisfying recreation can shut out thoughts or memories that agitate, terrify, disturb, and weigh you down. And you can truly enjoy your life, even for a season.

As you find ways to reduce the burden of your emotional issues, you will select self-soothing activities as a way of

When you are engaged in an activity you love, to the extent that you become unaware of the passage of time and of happenings around you, you can feel as though you've been transported to another world—a world of total bliss.

making yourself feel good, relaxed, mentally secure, and at peace. For example, relaxation, meditation, reading, and activities with calming or irresistible qualities (such as composing or listening to music) may be used as soothers. While some forms of leisure may not properly fit the common understanding of self-soothing, they may have distracting and pleasurable effects that are intensely gratifying.

There are, of course, much simpler self-soothing methods that do not involve giving yourself a treat, such as looking at or touching prized possessions that produce pleasing feelings or memories. You may use these things to calm yourself down in much the same way you use them to return yourself to the here and now with grounding. I know people who use prayer successfully to remove their feelings of agitation or hurt and to bring themselves into a state of peace, even if momentarily.

It is important to remember that you are the best person to soothe yourself. You need to learn to recognize what objects or activities can best give you a real sense of comfort, safety, calmness or joy to shield yourself from the effects of a bad experience, even if for a short period of time. In due course, something else can take over to make you feel good, in much the same way that a plush toy or blanket (no matter how tattered) soothes a child or a pacifier keeps a baby pleasantly occupied (quiet) till feeding time, when the

It is important to remember that you are the best person to soothe yourself.

In fact, since a few events cannot define the entire life of a person, you need this reminder: There is ALWAYS more to life.

comfort of being fed and gently rocked takes over.

In a state of suffering, you, too, need to have a soothing influence (which could be more than one object) that you can count on to take away some of the sting and help you reconnect with self-esteem, self-respect, and self-control—and be less miserable. At such points in life, self-soothing, combined with positive self-talk, is a powerful way to learn there is more to life than putting up with a peace-robbing bad experience that made you dejected, anxious or angry.

In fact, since a few events cannot define the entire life of a person, you need this reminder: There is ALWAYS more to life. This is a verbal soother. Use it to escape the immediate grip of emotional turmoil. Please read the emboldened sentence loudly enough to hear yourself. Let it digest, then make a pact with yourself to remember to sincerely tell yourself this whenever you feel emotionally trapped, hopeless, or faced with great discouragement.

Seek Joy and Happiness through Cheerfulness, Humour, Light Heartedness and Laughter

Many notable thinkers and observers of humanity have commented on the value of humour. For example, the 18th-century French writer and philosopher Voltaire wrote,

“The art of medicine consists of amusing the patient while nature cures the disease.” Friedrich Nietzsche, a 19th-century German philosopher, wrote, “And we should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once. And we should call every truth false which was not accompanied by at least one laugh.”

Laughter really is the best medicine—It may be difficult to tell if laughter can cure serious emotional disease, but clearly, it predisposes the body and the psyche to overcome the effects of distress or negative mood. See if you agree with this fact, “The human race has only one really effective weapon, and that is laughter. The moment it arises, all our hardness yields, all our irritations and resentments slip away, and a sunny spirit takes their place”, perhaps best put forward by Mark Twain.

Research and thoughtful observations like Twain’s and Nietzsche’s tell us that laughter has attributes that make it a useful means for counteracting emotional pain. For example, laughter is said to result in a reduction of certain hormones that increase our negative reactions to stress. That is, when we laugh, we are less susceptible to emotional stress. In addition it appears that a good belly laugh causes the surrounding muscles to relax, and those muscles continue to relax even after the laughter ends. These two occurrences go a long way in explaining the effectiveness of laughter in relieving misery.

I have previously pointed out that muscle tension caused by stress would be expected to occur not just in selected areas but all over the body—wherever there are muscles

to which blood flows that contain the harmful stress hormones. Organs that need elasticity or flexibility to function well are not able to do so if the unnatural stiffness that stress has caused remains in their muscles. These include very fine strands, rings, and "wrappings" of muscle found in delicate, internal body parts, such as the cardiovascular system, lungs, bladder, prostate, kidneys, and the digestive system. Such widespread disruption in the body's functioning, no doubt, leads to disease (sometimes, correctly referred to as *dis-ease*).

I wish I could make the picture less alarming, but the fact is that stiffened or hardened organ parts are not the only bad result of stress. Continued or recurring stressful circumstances can also reduce the amount of dopamine in our bodies. Among other functions, dopamine supports our feelings of pleasure and our motivation to both start doing things and keep doing them, as necessary. This effect of stress on substances like dopamine when we are depressed is most likely why we lose interest and energy in activities in which we used to engage. Reduction in dopamine also results in a greater chance of becoming overcome with anxiety or depression, suffering memory loss and/or loss of sustained attention, and experiencing an inability to control many other negative emotional states, such as anger and fear (of which I have spoken earlier). On the other hand, too much of any substance, even the so-called "good ones" like dopamine, can cause physical and/or mental injury. When substances are in their proper balance, the body is able to continue to have physical and mental health.

The feel-good effects of laughter and the feel-bad effects of emotional distress do not go together. Laughter, cheerfulness, and fun can help drive out gloom, whereas, sadness, anxiety, anger, and a host of other negative reactions of distress work hand-in-hand with the blues.

As you can see, there's much to lose if you neglect to manage stress promptly, intentionally, and full-time. So for all the pressures that you face in life, let laughter be your medicine.

Laughter's role in releasing tension encourages the restoration of proper emotional functioning and lessens the strength of the hold that life's problems—the original cause of the tension—have placed on you. I am not aware of any professional recommendation for the duration, frequency, or intensity of laughter required to remove a certain unit of misery. But knowing how unnatural chronic tension can cause a body part to feel and look, I would guess that the longer the period of tension from stress, the more often and the deeper the laughter would need to be to loosen the knots to any significant degree. If you already see the point I am making about laughter how about a quick he-he-he-he (or any other laughter sound) right now? Please try it.

The feel-good effects of laughter and the feel-bad effects of emotional distress do not go together. Laughter,

cheerfulness, and fun can help drive out gloom, whereas, sadness, anxiety, anger, and a host of other negative reactions of distress work hand-in-hand with the blues. If you don't allow yourself to engage in hearty laughter, you deprive yourself of an effective means of improving a bad mood. Indeed, people who do not laugh very often are likely to be prone to emotional and physical health problems. In recognition of this, mental health professionals include structured procedures for laughter and humour to be used as therapy in their practice. Also, many hospitals and health facilities use humour and laughter in the treatment of illnesses. Luckily, even when we do not feel like it, laughter is contagious and has a built-in attractiveness that makes it readily available for our use. It turns out that even the anticipation of laughter has beneficial effects. Try to test how contagious laughter is by watching or listening to the song "I Love to Laugh" from the film *Mary Poppins* (go to www.youtube.com and type in "I love to laugh" and "Mary Poppins").

Laughter involves the whole body—You may have noticed that when you are about to laugh, the laugh begins in more than one place—the face, the torso, the stomach—and then spreads into a full laugh that can involve practically the entire body. You may have done it yourself or seen others doing it: laughing hysterically, as it is commonly described, though I prefer to think of it as "laughing hilariously." When you find something funny, the initial muscle response appears to send a signal that a laugh is about to start. As the brain prepares the body for the laugh, the

Like all medicines, for laughter to do its work, it is necessary to willingly expose yourself to it; that is, it has to be “taken.”

benefits of the laughter already begin to occur as the brain clearly knows what is about to unfold. These are commonplace events with which you and most people are familiar. It is, therefore, not unexpected that research supports this.

If the mirror neurons, believed to be active in the front part of our brains, help us imitate what others are doing (as has been suggested), then it's no wonder that the look of laughter on one person's face would announce to another person that something pleasant is about to happen. In turn, the onlooker's neurotransmitters would initiate a chain of reactions that mimics the smile or laughter the onlooker is observing. Thereby, the full experience of its feel-good effects is shared beyond the person who started to laugh or smile.

A person who shares in another's laughter, whether or not the object of amusement is obvious, at one level chooses to do so. As we all know, however, it is possible to stop a laugh from occurring, although sometimes it can be difficult. The point is that if laughter is to heal your distress, you need to want to heal, and you need to allow the laugh to occur by encouraging it. Like all medicines, for laughter to do its work, it is necessary to willingly expose yourself to it; that is, it has to be “taken.” Laughter (as with other displays of moods) is infectious, and when someone laughs, others

within line of sight or earshot usually feel the urge to laugh, too, or at least to smile. Therefore, one way to bring laughter in all of its forms into your life is to bring yourself into contact with the laughter of others, even to the point of seeking the company of someone who is light-hearted and laughs a lot.

It is true that some people have been so sad, angry, disgusted, or confused for so long, that they have lost the desire to laugh. And if this state of *anhedonia* (which means the inability to experience pleasure) has existed for a long time, a person can actually lose the ability to operate the mechanism of laughter or joy in her or his body. Even when such a person may be able to produce a mechanical smile or laugh, it would be superficial and lack mirth or joy. To a person whose laugh seems empty, the laugh probably acts merely as an acknowledgement that something out of the ordinary happened. Stated differently, that kind of laughter would be in line with other behaviours that show a “normal” pattern of joylessness in that person’s limited emotional life. A person in this state should try to get to the root cause of the joylessness, learn to enjoy life, and laugh.

Fritz Strack, a social psychologist at the University of Würzburg, Germany, and his colleagues published a study in 1988 that described an experiment in which participants were required to hold a pen, either with their teeth or with their lips. Holding the object between the teeth tended to force the face into a smiling countenance. When held with the lips, the pen caused the facial features to form an expression of disappointment. Those with a smiling

countenance reacted more readily to funny cartoons than those whose faces looked downcast, although no actual events had caused the facial expressions of the participants in the first place.

In my opinion, this observation suggests that when a person's face is set in an expression that an emotion usually produces, that kind of emotion is triggered in the person's brain. From personal experience, it does feel like I am smiling when I spread my face in the expression of a smile, and my breathing almost immediately starts to match my beginning-to-laugh rhythm, which consists of a jerky, forced-air, silent "laugh." Therefore, if you want to laugh when there is nothing to laugh about, you may well be able to set the stage by putting on a smiling expression and allowing the urge to laugh to take over until you smile for real or laugh at your own silliness. This advice came directly from Dr. Laffsalot!

Below are a few suggestions of some other ways to bring laughter into your life:

- Read funny books. Perhaps humour biblio-therapy with a therapist or a reading list from an English (or other language) literature graduate would be useful.
- Join a laughter club (e.g., laughter yoga).
- Attend humour therapy.
- Read funny stories, excerpts, jokes, and cartoons.
- Take time to enjoy funny pictures and posters.
- Watch TV shows and channels dedicated to humour.

Although all laughter is beneficial, it's probably best to

make use of deep belly laughter. Like deep breathing, vigorous exercise, or intense crying, strong laughter is probably a good way of releasing neurobiological overload. In doing this, the system resets itself for better or normal processing activity. **When you are smiling or laughing, because you genuinely enjoy what you are looking at, sadness or heaviness of heart is pushed away.** Therefore, the more often you allow yourself to smile and laugh, the more extensive will be your sense of joy.

I am usually sensitive to people's doubts in connection with the everyday events on which they think science has no bearing. These individuals believe certain life conditions unfold naturally and do not require a set of learned responses. Because of this, it is difficult for them to accept advice related to these circumstances. For example, some people may believe that a sad happening makes you sad, and there is no getting around that. If there are many sad incidents, you cannot help but become depressed or show whichever emotion generally goes with a particular event or set of events. So, then, does the "you-can't-teach-me-how-to-live-better" approach mean that even if you have the skills of Thought Replacement available, you are supposed to hang on to the "expected" feelings rather than employ a tool that will free you from misery? The answer is no. But if a route that involves teaching is not possible or completely ineffective, chemical medication may need to be part of the answer.

It may interest you to hear that the standard treatment for depression is chemical medication combined with the talk therapy known as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Moreover, scientific research comparing the two has shown that CBT is as effective as chemical medication. My caution, however, is against rejecting the teaching-learning approach, because you could end up in a situation in which the only reason for maintaining an unpleasant mood is social expectations. If you think that learning laughter and jollity will help your mental health, do your best to get past any obstacle that may prevent you from achieving that goal.

Joy and misery are poor roommates—A joyous, playful, happy, cheerful, humour-filled attitude promises too many benefits for you not to regularly pursue it and let it enrich your life. This life is too short for you not to! You cannot allow habit, sentiment, ego, point of view, or any other obstructive approach prevent you from searching everywhere, applying the results of scientific research (as I have done in this book), practising many techniques (as I have suggested), and putting forth every effort to bring this Holy Grail of a happy disposition into daily life. Here is something you can rely on without help from science—**Joy and misery cannot live together. Let joy move in, and distress will move out.**



After reading Chapter 16

1. Based on your interest and/or skills, plan to spend time exposing yourself to and taking pleasure in the following types of activities:
 - Song—compose, sing, listen to
 - Poetry—compose, read/recite, listen to
 - Music—compose, play, listen to
 - Show—watch, compose, participate

Fill in the Activity section of the table below with your choices.

Day of Week	Activity
Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	

2. Make a plan to engage in recreational activities to uplift your mood using your own ideas and those from the chapter:

Day of Week	Activity
Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	

Remember the goal of this exercise: **Enjoyment comes first.**

Chapter 17

WHERE IS YOUR ENERGY?

Magic Tools for Obtaining Peace of Mind

Discovering Your Energy

Energy psychology is a relatively new field in the Western world, though it has been used for over three thousand years in Eastern medicine (refer back to Chapter 9 for a discussion of the healing and harming aspects of this form of energy).

Many scientists today believe that physical objects are really sub-atomic vibrating particles of non-physical energy that are so small they cannot be seen even through the powerful microscopes scientists use to look at atoms. The leading figures in this field suggest that the whole universe consists of this energy and what we perceive as solid objects—animals, including people; vegetation, and inanimate forms—are merely vibrating arrangements of energy. Although the notion that everything in the universe is energy is new to many of us, scientists have known, practically since the

I WILL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR YOU.



Who, me?

Are you committed,
Connected & Composed?

What the ancient Eastern philosophers knew a few thousand years ago has only relatively recently begun to take hold among a small portion of the Western scientific community.

dawn of modern science, that all objects, including people, are made up of molecules and atoms. This means that every human, every tree, and every rock consists of the same basic components—atoms. Western scientists discovered this by using powerful microscopes and doing experiments to prove the accuracy of their observations. A newer breed of Western scientists employed even more sophisticated electron microscopes (which can magnify objects that are a million times smaller than the older optical microscopes could “see”) that revealed a new picture: The universe is made up of even smaller parts than atoms. This smaller part, known as a quantum, is non-physical. In effect, what the ancient Eastern philosophers knew a few thousand years ago has only relatively recently begun to take hold among a small portion of the Western scientific community.

These are fascinating and complex ideas, to be sure, but the main point is that everything around us—indeed, the entire cosmos—consists of energy. In other words, we are not separate from everything else, nor are we differentiated by our physical attributes. Everything, including us, is energy and, in that sense, connected!

One could extend this argument to say that all mental activities are part of the same energy we are made of, and this is what motivates our behaviours. In other words, our behaviours are energy-produced thoughts and emotions in action. The point of bringing this to your attention in a discussion of self-healing is that this new science of quantum energy, combined with knowledge from Eastern medicine, promises extraordinary results in healing, including self-healing. In fact, a number of methods in energy psychotherapy are producing unbelievable and exciting results.

Positive thoughts attract positive thoughts— The starting point in applying the ideas related to energy (as a life-sustaining source) is in your thinking. In previous sections, I have described how we can use our thoughts to change our emotions and to heal any related disturbance. Now I would like to talk about what gives your thoughts the power to heal.

It is believed that your thoughts, which are themselves made of energy, emit energy. And this influences or creates changes not only in you but also outside of you. And these changes produce other occurrences by linking up with other thoughts that are similar to yours. You've likely heard it said (or perhaps you have even experienced it) that if you think about someone for long enough, at some point, you will unexpectedly run into or hear from or about that person. It seems, then, that certain thoughts acquire creative strength. Because positive thoughts are more desirable than negative ones, fewer of the latter will be around. Therefore, provided that negative and positive thoughts have equal power, the greater the number of positive thoughts people send out

for others to embrace, the less power is available to negative or harmful thoughts, and useful healing intentions become stronger.

The advantages of positive thoughts—If you believe that positive thoughts have the upper hand and want them to be more numerous, put yourself in a position to add your positive thoughts to those coming from other people. At one level, your positive thoughts are likely to gain support (hopefully, open support) from friends, relatives, and acquaintances who are exposed to them. On a different level, positive thoughts receive strength silently from a community of like-minded thinkers. The energy produced from both sources (supporters in your immediate circle and those at large), undoubtedly, enhance your self-healing work. By using energy techniques in an atmosphere of acceptance, you can more easily replace unwanted thoughts and feelings of sadness, anger, disgust, fear, low self-confidence and shame with thoughts that make you cheerful, patient, understanding, accepting, tolerant, trusting, brave, and truly self-aware, all of which will bring you self-pride. With these positive emotions, you are almost guaranteed complete success in improving your emotional state. This great accomplishment, however, is possible only if you practise frequently enough to prevent the negative ideas from creeping back in.

It's also important to recognize that some negative thoughts will resist eviction when harmful images and attitudes have been around the neuro-network of a negatively oriented person long enough to have influential "friends"

(that is, similar ideas) with which they can team up to acquire greater control. A greater number of negative thoughts usually exists in this type of mind. These thoughts attract even more of the same at the slightest sign of an opening, and they seem to stay. In addition, as you may have concluded, the same “spiritual laws” apply here, as well: Negativity blossoms when destructive energy is left unchecked.

So, people who use positive thinking achieve more peace, joy, and mutual love to assist their self-healing and overwhelm destructive energy. This is the power of energy-based healing.

*Negativity blossoms when destructive energy
is left unchecked.*

Putting the Power of Your Thoughts into Action

There are many ways to put the power of your thoughts into action:

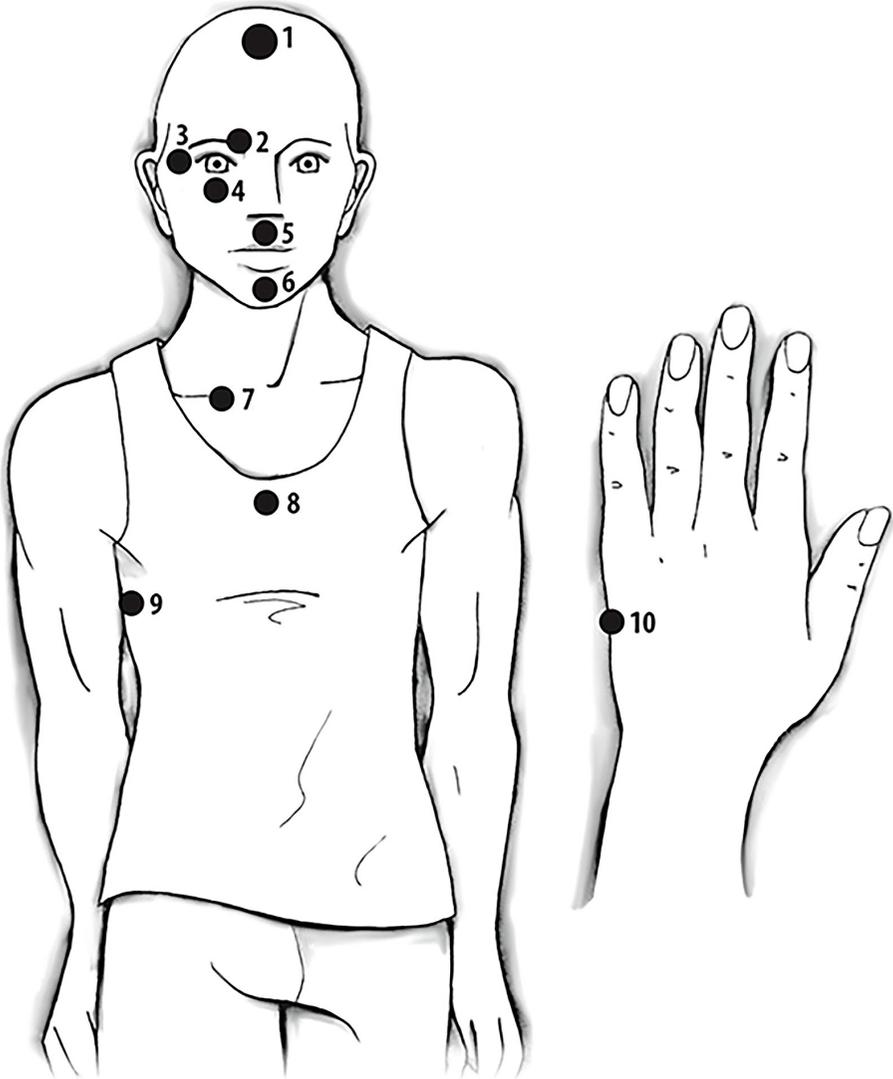
- Consciously monitor your thoughts to ensure they are the ones that will allow healing. Just as you would take steps to keep dangerous animals outside your house, so, too, do you need to keep harmful ways of thinking out of your daily life.
- Employ only helpful or self-improving self-talk. Just imagine the excellent state of your mental health if the vast majority of your thoughts brought peace of mind to you and goodwill to others. This, of course, does not yet include

the mind-blowing picture of the kind of world humankind could have when children and grandchildren learn this way of living from parents! Thinking how to improve your of peace of mind (happiness), encouraging and helping others to do the same guarantees a world in which everyone will enjoy ongoing happiness. Let's work for peace of mind for everyone! Please read "A message to Everyone: Peace of Mind for Everyone" at the end of the book.

- Practise yoga or any other activity that combines movements and changing postures with mental intensions. Yoga is a time-tested method of body posturing that naturally removes negative feelings from the mind and body. The practice of this energy-derived activity is another way to put the vibrating force of positive thinking into action.

Radiant energy—Within the fertile field of energy work, different uses of the power of thought have been described. One is the "newer" technique of applying radiant energy, which is a form of healing that employs the energy in and around people. It is thought that radiant energy produces more successful results because, even though it normally flows in its own channels in our bodies, it can also work in the channels of other types of energy. Its unique quality is reportedly its ability to be a reliable source, even a wellspring, of joyful emotions. Given this, I believe using radiant energy is a worthwhile way to transform a miserable and disordered mood into a desirable one. Nonetheless, the use of traditional channels of energies remains a powerful method of bringing healing. A practitioner in this field is the best source of information on this topic.

DIAGRAM OF EMOTIONAL TAPPING POINTS



Deliberately Applying the Energy In and Around You

Whatever medical system you use—Western, Eastern, or a combination—it is necessary to have some belief in its power to heal. As has been pointed out in earlier chapters, strong faith in what doctors do can lead to healing even when the medicine is only a sugar pill.

The following examples are just the tip of the iceberg of energy-based techniques (Note: If any of these methods help improve your emotional state or, alternatively, if your state does not change at all, but you are interested in energetic healing anyway, I suggest you contact a trained practitioner in energy-based psychotherapy).

Tapping into Energy Channels

It is believed that the universal energy in you moves around along special channels called meridians and that the energy in these meridians can respond to you. One way to make your energy work for you is to tap specific points along the meridian channels (see the diagram Emotional Tapping Points).

Emotional Tapping Points—First Steps

Before tapping, take these steps first:

- Decide which of your troubling feelings to deal with first.
- Deal with one problem at a time.
- Pick a number from one (indicating you have a very small amount of negative feelings arising from the problem at

the moment) to 10 (indicating that at the moment, this negative feeling is the worst it's been in a long time). Later, you will compare this number with the one you will choose at the end of the exercise. You recognize, of course, that if one is higher than what you are feeling a zero rating at the outset means the issue is not a problem and there is no need for self-treatment.

Now, begin tapping. To do this, tap your hands, touching them together on the energy point on the side of each hand, midway between the little finger and wrist (tapping point #1); calmly and quietly, say the following statement:

Even though I am not completely over _____ [State the disturbing problem you'd like to get rid of, for example, feeling very stressed at work; being angry at being swindled; being abused at a young age; being depressed since the death of your mother; or being afraid to fly.] **I accept myself, and I choose to be over this problem and all that it represents and has done to me.**

Repeat these words and the tapping action two more times. Then take a deep breath and relax your body as you breathe out slowly.

Emotional Tapping Points—Next Steps

1. Now tap each of the treatment/energy points listed below four or five times in sequence using only the tips of a few fingers. As you tap, you do not need to say all the words as above. You may say only the important ones (for example, “work stress,” “abuse,” “mother dying,” “afraid to

fly”) depending on the specific problem you are healing. Following the steps below, tap

- a. at the beginning of each eyebrow, near the bridge of the nose (tapping point 2).
- b. beside each eye where the eyebrow ends, to about two fingers’ width beyond (tapping point 3).
- c. beneath the lower eyelashes, midway between the inside corner and outside corner of each eye (tapping point 4).
- d. under the nose, above the upper lip (tapping point 5).
- e. on the chin, under the centre of the lip (tapping point 6).
- f. just below the knobs of the collarbone, about two fingers’ width below the knobs (tapping point 7).
- g. under each arm, about a hand’s width below each armpit (tapping point 9).
- h. at the top of the head, roughly at the centre point between the ears. It is believed that about 100 meridian energy points meet here. Take a deep breath and breathe out slowly (tapping point 10).

Repeat the procedure from a to h.

2. Pick a number between zero and 10 that represents how you are feeling right now—that is, the current level of your unpleasant feelings about the problem you are working on. Zero means you no longer have any unpleasant reactions related to the problem. One means that stressful feelings associated with the problem has almost disappeared, and 10 means they are at their worst.

Compare the number you picked earlier to this number. A good result would be a second number smaller than the first; this would indicate that the previously disturbing problem, at this point, bothers you less. The best result however is a zero.

3. Do this whole exercise two or three times a day, and keep on practising at least once a day till the second number is zero. If you do not notice any change, the next time you say the affirmation words, add “completely” or “unconditionally” after you say, “I accept myself.” The number you assign to your changed feelings at the end of the second scan will be zero when you no longer experience the previous troubling feelings. Even after you hit zero, do the exercise a couple more times to be quite sure you are at zero for that problem.

Using Energy in a Positive Intention Combined with Relaxation

1. Find a comfortable place to sit, recline, or lie down where you will be safe and undisturbed for about 10 to 15 minutes.
2. Once in the position you have chosen, take a deep breath in, and breathe out slowly.
3. Take another deep breath—all the way down into your abdomen (look for your stomach to rise with the inhalation)—then exhale slowly, emptying out all or as much of the air as is comfortable (watching as your stomach slowly goes down). Now, close your eyes, take another

- deep breath, and breathe out.
4. Imagine a situation in which you were very happy at any age—by yourself, with someone else, or with a group of people.
 5. Mentally examine this image in detail, and try to recall each aspect of that joyful experience. Take time to try to see, feel, hear, and smell everything that made that situation happy or pleasant.
 6. Go over this picture again and again, each time attempting to take more pleasure in the happy feelings the image arouses. Intensify your feelings a notch each time you review the picture till you feel almost as if you are there again. Take a few minutes to enjoy these feelings.
 7. While still remembering and enjoying this picture, inhale and exhale deeply. Then say to yourself, “This is how I want to feel every time I want to feel good. Nothing can reduce my joy when I see this picture/recall this experience.” Inhale deeply, then exhale.
 8. Now, with your non-dominant hand (tapping point 1), touch the palm of the dominant hand in a soft chopping action. Keep tapping or gently chopping with the side of the non-dominant hand on the dominant, as you repeat the affirmation above (number 7).
 9. Take a couple of deep breaths, and slowly breathe out each time.
 10. Do this exercise every time you practise, using the energy within and around you to state an intention with the goal of improving your emotional condition.

11. At some point, as you repeat these procedures, exchange the intention in number 7 with the one below in number 12.
12. “From this point on, I release all the hurt and problems I have felt from my difficult situation. I now wish to enjoy the pleasure of my happy picture. Nothing can reduce my joy when I recall this experience.”

It is important to remember that emotions tend to pile up in layers, depending on their kind and strength, and this is also how they are eliminated or reduced—layer by layer. Therefore, an apparent lack of progress from tapping, or from any other form of emotional treatment, may indicate you have hit a very thin layer that may have been released too smoothly to be noticed. Only after a few of these have been removed will you realize that your mood has changed for the better. On the other hand, a subconscious message may be overriding or blocking release.

If you use this method for a few weeks and see no progress, you have three options:

1. Let’s say that after a period of tapping sessions you do not have success getting rid of your fear of flying. You feel afraid every time you face an airplane trip. By believing that a subconscious message is blocking your efforts, you are, in effect, subconsciously stating that you have needed this fear. As such, it would be good to learn whether that was the reason you could not release the fear. Consider the following:
 - a. You may wish to use a muscle self-test (explained in Chapter 12) for an answer to a question such as, “Is

there a subconscious message blocking me from getting rid of the fear of flying?” If there isn’t, it is likely that the emotional layering of this problem is “thick” and needs more relaxed tapping, as in “Using energy in a positive intention combined with relaxation,” described above.

- b. If the answer is *yes*, you can now tap on that problem. Afterwards, you can check the result with a muscle self-test.

Whether or not you know for sure that a message from your subconscious mind is creating a barrier to your healing, you will benefit from planting your own message that will serve you well in your self-healing program. Earlier I described the brain’s ability to rewire itself through repetition (See the section titled “Your Thoughts Can and Do Rewire Your Brain,” in Chapter 8). It appears that activities, words, and thoughts that are repeated often can make a strong enough impression on the brain that filters into the subconscious. This is what happens to a driver who has driven a route so often that, even when preoccupied with something else and not paying attention to the driving, he or she can arrive at the intended destination, but cannot remember using certain streets or passing familiar landmarks. Similarly, by repeating certain messages often and by telling yourself what you wish to learn, you can imprint that idea in your subconscious mind. In the case of your desire to be rid of the fear of flying, you could constantly tell yourself in different ways that you can defeat the fear, using statements such as these:

- a. “I can fly without fear.” “I am brave and I know I can fly safely.” “Flying is safe.” “I have good skills to help me cope with flying.” “I just have to enter the plane and sit down, and I will be able to practice meditation, say my special prayer, read or recite what I wrote to help me cope, listen to my special relaxation message, and/or read a book.”
 - b. You may use another type of positive self-talk (similar to the above example), sometimes called an affirmation, which is simply a clear, strong statement that you believe to be a fact.
2. Find another method in this book.
 3. Contact a trained practitioner for help.

For the suggestions that involve making statements to yourself or listening to special messages, you could make recordings of the statements and then play them back, either to guide you as you do an exercise or to provide a subliminal experience as you listen while doing other things. The word *subliminal* means active below the level of consciousness. This way of learning is believed to help put information into the subconscious mind, since this secondary message may be able to get in during the time your conscious mind

*Take courage and be comforted knowing
that the power within you is greater than
any circumstance or person external to you.*

is engaged with the primary activities with which you are concerned at that point.

Spiritual Faith as a Source of Emotional Strength

Healing emotional wounds can be seen as a spiritual encounter with oneself. As such, you can use your spiritual values (for example, your belief in God, the Creator, the Power of the Universe, the Buddha, Higher Power) to process various aspects of a traumatic or stressful experience and its effects. The stronger your commitment to a belief system, the greater your sense of strength and security from the faith that resides in you. Your faith in that source of power will provide you with the emotional strength you need for self-healing, among other things. Therefore, take courage and be comforted knowing that the power within you is greater than any circumstance or person external to you.

Given all this, it is critical to develop and maintain a connection with that source (God, Higher Power, Nature, the Light, or any other that is the object of your faith). It is important to know that deriving the benefits of spirituality is not like making magic or completing a one-shot business deal. It is based on building a relationship from which flows an understanding of the path to fulfilling your needs in accordance with the wishes, truths, insights, or procedures established by your Higher Power.

The power of love—The question that arises with regard to using spiritual faith to heal yourself from serious

emotional disturbance is this: Are you connected to the object of your faith closely enough to bring you the benefits of that faith when you need them? Perhaps an even more important question is this: How aware are you of the Higher Power (God, Nature, etc.) within you, and how willing are you to nurture a relationship with that Source whose benevolence you seek? As you develop a relationship, trusting in a Higher Power may require learning and understanding the teachings, scriptures, wisdom, views, promises, creed, rules, and other transmitted faith-based statements that your spiritual journey prescribes.

Are you connected to the object of your faith closely enough to bring you the benefits of that faith when you need them?

When the relationship is close, you become aware of these truths:

1. The God of your faith will never harm you.
2. The source of your inner power is based on love.
3. As a consequence of this bond, you will strive to demonstrate in your practise of the faith the same central attribute that defines the Source of your inner power.

As a consequence, does this bond expect of you the same characteristic (love) as the central goal in your personal practice of that faith? In almost every religion, when believers

live life according to the principles of their faith, the spiritual power for self-healing (or for healing others) strengthens as they come closer to the source of that inner power. Desiring and seeking to demonstrate the best of what one's deity or spiritual leader represents is usually the driving force of worshippers or followers. In approaching the ultimate source of their faith, devotees tend to leave behind more and more of their ego (that is, the false self) and expose more of their true self, until they have thoroughly shed the false one. The true self then takes on more and more of the divine nature or special characteristics until nothing else is more attractive or more important. This enables the greatest possible intimacy with the Supreme and is, in fact, the only state of existence in which a complete connection with the object of faith is possible. With such closeness, those who are deeply in the faith are fully protected against any harm from within or outside, a condition that allows the full realization of true (pure) love.

Whether you are part of a faith community or not, there does not appear to be any supernatural force out there with the power to hunt people down just to make them suffer. Yes, everyone endures pain, but people don't have to suffer. Suffering comes from the combination of a painful experience with refusal to accept it. Through a strong conviction in the healing power to which you are loyal, you can accept any painful condition, ignore or refuse to obey (not deny) the message of any unwelcome emotion or circumstance, and take steps to chase it away so as to achieve mental peace.

It seems to me that we are all children of a benevolent

It seems to me that we are all children of a benevolent process, and the Power that guides us on our journey to reach our full potential is an ally with whom we have a love link.

process, and the Power that guides us on our journey to reach our full potential is an ally with whom we have a love link. Based on this view, it does not appear to me that our destiny is to live a life of suffering. This raises an important question: Why do some people choose to suffer when they have the means to be happier? In whatever way you may have answered this question for yourself up until now, I hope you recognize that this book you are reading right now is offering information and techniques to keep you from suffering overwhelming, emotional pain.

The power of faith—The majority of people on this planet have seen things that might lead them to believe that bad things happen to good people, good things happen to bad people, bad things happen to bad people, and good things happen to good people—and there doesn't seem to be a way of predicting any of these results. Our faith in any natural law or supernatural being cannot change this apparently universal truth. The fact that our thoughts and actions are not always good or bad and events are neither good nor bad in themselves makes it impossible for any one

of us to be a permanent member of the good or bad group. Each of us, however, can choose to rely on our belief system to provide us with the knowledge and courage to overcome the bad emotional impact of our experiences.

So far, I have used the concept of a Higher Power to refer to some supernatural being or power that spiritually commands our attention. I am going to extend the concept of a Higher Power to include any non-physical force that gives energy to our thoughts and emotions. This requires that we believe that its effect is real and, sometimes, inexplicably powerful. Such is how I see the work of faith, hope, courage, compassion, forgiveness, or gratitude, and we can make a case for other similar concepts. Faith, therefore, may be seen as a spiritual Higher Power that enables us to proceed with our lives through uncharted waters.

Whatever you believe in that makes life possible, including your natural logic, may be your Higher Power. Any time you feel helpless in the face of a difficulty, it is that higher spiritual agent within you that helps you survive.

Whatever you believe in that makes life possible, including your natural logic, may be your Higher Power. Any time you feel helpless in the face of a difficulty, it is that higher spiritual agent within you that helps you survive.

Some situations in which you tend to need the help of your spiritual power are times of illness, the death of loved ones, serious financial or career setbacks, assault on self or someone close, devastating acts of betrayal, and other such unfortunate events that cause trauma and extremely painful emotions. You will need to strongly believe and consciously engage (usually through the medium of prayer, meditation, or relaxation) the power of your faith, which is a spiritual force that gives you the strength to carry on, battling the unpleasant or destructive forces in your life.

You will know you are improving emotionally by a growth in self-esteem, an increasing capacity to make and maintain friendships (and other social contacts), and an ability to keep your negative reactions under reasonable control. For example, when you feel ready to develop or renew a close or intimate relationship or to resume or start appropriate social activities, your emotions will begin to feel tolerable and even pleasurable. Backed by your increasing spiritual faith or courage, you will find yourself more and more capable of managing your mistrust and powerlessness, for you will feel self-protected or able to protect your special relationships in a level-headed and socially appropriate manner. **Your faith through this self-healing journey will empower hope, as well as peace, acceptance, compassion, and, above all, love.** In other words, the stronger your faith, the firmer the foundation on which your hopes for a calmer life in the future will rest. When you start by bringing thoughts of faith to your mind, you gear up for a successful journey of emotional strengthening, which is the path of self-healing.

You owe it to yourself (and your loved ones) to start this journey of faith and to not stop. Your inborn or acquired spiritual resources will always be at your beck and call, unless you shut them out (which easily happens when you make your false self—the ego—a central feature of your emotional life). The powers that are rooting for you are strong, want the best for you, and are more than able to defeat the enemy. Your part is to know this, believe strongly and move forward with a confidence and a desire to heal, throughout your entire journey.

Be patient with yourself—As you attempt to put any of the above into practice, you need to be aware of the importance of being patient with both yourself and the healing process. I must caution you against engaging in actions that you know may have emotionally charged results before you are ready for that challenge. You need to focus on allowing good things into your life rather than bad things—especially those likely to be damaging. Therefore, it is important to stay within the mainstream, accepted codes of behaviour and groups to reduce the chances of unexpected, unwelcome, or inappropriate exposure.

Seek help when you need it—As a sufferer, your self-responsibility for healing is paramount. And even when you are using a professional's help to deal with a problem, you are encouraged to always be willing to ask for specific help—especially when you believe you are not getting better. No matter how you proceed, however, it will be asking too much of yourself to expect that all aspects of the process

Please be assured that by just starting on the journey towards self-healing as laid out in this book, you have already taken steps toward hope and success.

of releasing from emotional turmoil will be easy, automatic, or immediate. All the same, sufferers like you cannot afford to dwell too long on setbacks. Doing so may serve only to welcome undesired emotions instead of promising ones, which is the precise opposite of what you need for healing.

Please be assured that by just starting on the journey towards self-healing as laid out in this book, you have already taken steps toward hope and success.

Significant healing can only be closer from this point on, even if it might not always feel that way. A variety of emotions (mostly unwanted) are usually involved in traumatic experiences and other mental problems. Their discovery, examination (so you can accept them), and release are essential for recovery. It may take some time to work through the layers of certain emotional conditions. The key is this: At each step towards normalization of life, you must continue to believe that, in the end, you will overcome—and it shall be so! **If you are a believer, the application of harmless methods inspired by the spiritual energy of your faith can only increase the power of your self-healing efforts and bring you closer to satisfactory and enjoyable mental health.**

Give Thanks

Thanking someone expresses appreciation and gratitude. The person who receives thanks feels good, as does the person who gives it. A word of gratitude is a spoken smile. Gratitude causes people to focus on their good fortune. As you may have realized, gratitude also directs one's attention away from displeasing thoughts and feelings and towards agreeable ones. Because of that, you can consciously use gratitude to bring about satisfied feelings and to chase away an unwanted, downcast mood. In fact, research studies

A word of gratitude is a spoken smile.

show us that when we write down the things for which we are grateful or talk about them, the part of the brain responsible for these behaviours reacts by creating happy feelings. By making a list of things you appreciate, you can develop a tool that helps you shift from sad to happy, dull to bright, frustrated to calm, and so on. With the new feelings produced by the change in your thoughts, you put yourself in a position to improve your emotional wellbeing (for example, by focussing on breathing exercises and concentrating on a desired goal at the same time).

You can also learn to be thankful for things, events, and people that otherwise may not seem to qualify for gratitude. For example, you may be grateful for a serious illness that brought your family together in a committed and positive

manner or, as in my case, that opened doors of opportunity for enlightening experiences and gratifying outcomes that I believe would never have happened, were it not for that serious crash. The loss of a job could lead you to explore other areas of your strengths, and you could end up with a better and more fulfilling work situation. Therefore, **learn to express gratitude as often as you smile at others.** You can always find things for which you are grateful that have come from God, the Universe, or any other object of faith or allegiance. Several centuries ago, a very learned and spiritual man reported (from his God) that “in everything we must give thanks.”

Breathe Deeply

Breathing is an automatic act we don't think about very often. The brain tells the lungs to provide the oxygen that the body needs to function, and the lungs comply by inhaling air at a particular pace related to the person's state of calmness or need for air. However, breathing plays an important role in emotional healing as well. This function of breathing has been described earlier in connection with its use in promoting mindful actions that also bring healing (See Chapter 10).

Breathing Exercise

To use breathing as an instrument for inner peace, take these steps:

- Breathe in deeply through your nose.
- Exhale. As you do, say a word or phrase that's associated

with calmness or a specific problem (for example, “calm,” “relax,” “peace,” “forgive,” “understand,” “let it go”). Although the inhalation is equally as important as the exhalation, it is on the latter that you focus your intention to bring about relaxation.

- Pace the breaths a little more slowly than your normal rate of breathing.
- After each breath (in and out), take a brief pause during which you breathe normally.

Do this for between 10 and 20 minutes, depending on how much relaxing you feel you need.

Variation of the Breathing Exercise

This is a variation on the above method:

- Breathe in deeply through your nose.
- Pace the breaths a little more slowly than your normal rate of breathing.
- Exhale. As you do, follow the exhalation, noting where it is in the body.

This breath tracking is a version of mindfulness training that helps you focus in the present. At first, it will be difficult because of the speed of the breath, even though you have slowed it down. It may, therefore, be necessary to follow the breath through several inhalations and exhalations. In some cases, concentrating on different points that the breath will pass through, either mentally or by placing a hand on the targeted spot will allow you to recognize various positions of rushing air. If you discover that your

attention is drifting, it is important to bring it back immediately to the task of following your breathing. You can also use this style of breathing to do away with unwanted negative thoughts. Remember not to criticize yourself while engaged in the breathing exercise if you think you are not doing it right. Just do it the best way you can.

During the normal breathing process, the lungs take in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide. This process parallels emotional stability—you want to take in positive elements and release negative ones. When stress develops, the exhalation gets rid of it during a relaxation exercise, as lungs expel carbon dioxide, which is harmful to our bodies. Exhalation is followed by inhalation, which brings in positive energy and life-giving oxygen. For either purpose, the breathing activity is not to be hurried.

In the case of breathing to promote healing, the energy comes from focusing on the desired goal of changing your current unwanted emotional state. The key to starting is to briefly and sincerely acknowledge (using the least amount of time and energy possible only to acknowledge) that you need to change from a troubled mental state to an untroubled one. You will spend the most time and expend the most energy directing your attention to what you want to be, emotionally speaking. Focussing time and energy on your healing is important because it takes all the positive attention you can harness, while making it the least possible for opposing and negative self-talk to occur. You do not want to pit your negative power against your positive because doing so wastes energy and is self-defeating. Since

Focussing time and energy on your healing is important because it takes all the positive attention you can harness, while making it the least possible for opposing and negative self-talk to occur.

you cannot lose sight of the fact that deep breathing is the instrument by which you channel your internal energy towards self-healing, you need to learn deep breathing in order to kick-start, as well as maintain, your healing.

A major use of deep breathing for self-healing is when you prefer a deeper calm with mental focus. At such times, you will need to use relaxation methods that are more elaborate, such as guided imagery.

Breathing and Muscle Relaxation

Deep breathing is useful not only for serious emotional disturbance but also to centre your thinking in a variety of situations requiring self-calming. You can increase its effectiveness by adding the power of muscle relaxation. Here's how:

- Sit or recline in a comfortable place.
- Close your eyes.
- Take a few deep breaths.
- Be aware of various parts of your body. Starting from the feet and working your way up to the head, say quietly or

in your head, “I want my left foot to relax.” Or just say, “Left foot relax.” And with that, allow that foot to relax by releasing all feelings of muscular tension in that foot.

- Then repeat this activity with your right foot
- Next, place your attention on each calf and each knee, addressing those parts in the same way.
- Move up your body, and send the message for each selected body part to relax.
- Inhale and exhale slowly and deeply after each message to relax while, letting go of all tension.
- At the end of these relaxation procedures, repeat the process, moving from the head back down to the left foot where you started. Use the same instruction for each body part. Alternatively, you may address the legs, arms, and ears, etc., on both sides, instead of concentrating on one side at a time. Twenty minutes is a reasonable amount of time for this exercise (See Appendix 2).

Deep breathing combined with muscle relaxation (following a treatment technique) can release positive energy to counter the destructiveness of stress and physical tension, producing more complete healing and rejuvenation.

Grounding Techniques

Grounding is using a physical object or thinking process to help a person anchor him- or herself in the present moment. As you probably know, a mental-emotional problem can cause some people to lose contact with the present and to feel as if they are physically (not just mentally) in

When you feel adrift from the present, sensory (body-based) and/or cognitive (thinking-based) grounding may help you to come back.

another place and time or not in their own body (such as during a dissociation). Grounding procedures can help to restore awareness of the present. When you feel adrift from the present, sensory (body-based) and/or cognitive (thinking-based) grounding may help you to come back.

Grounding using your physical ability—This is a way of bringing back your awareness of the present by deliberately making your physical senses react to familiar objects. Depending on the items you or your helper may choose, the feel, smell, sight, sound, or taste of them will assure you that you're still in your body and present in the natural world to which the articles belong. For example, you may hold a familiar object (such as a comb, a wallet, a baseball, a pillow, a special coin, or any other convenient object) to satisfy yourself that you are in the present, just as the familiar object is. Splashing your face with cold water and drinking some of it; pulling on a rubber band around your wrist and letting it go; and stamping your feet are other ways to “wake up” from your dream world. Grounding may also be done by reading a message or passage from your phone, tablet, book, or newspaper; looking at photographs of family and

friends (especially loved ones) and recognizing them; trying to spot landmarks or scenery you know; listening to music or for familiar sounds and noises; eating or drinking something you like—even smelling an object, such as a leather wallet or an apple or banana, to prove to yourself that it smells as it should. In fact, you can check how aware you are of being in the present by using almost anything that can provide evidence to any of your senses.

Grounding using thinking and awareness—This type of grounding applies mainly to mental activities that give you information about the present. One way to use grounding to test your awareness of the here and now is to ask questions about who you are and to write down your answer to see whether you recognize your name, the day's date, and current month and year (comparing your notes with a calendar). Add a description of where you are, including a street name or number that you can easily confirm (by going to look or asking someone who can give you the correct information to compare with your own).

Another method is to use sensory grounding to help yourself affirm certain attitudes in the present. For example, while doing a grounding exercise to overcome anxiety or cope with severe pressure or stress, you could include statements like these: "I am capable." "I can do this." "I am ready for any fallout." "I will be brave." "It's time to step forward." In this way, you can get yourself into a state of commitment for following through with a social task or taking care of a relationship problem. After making one of these statements, take a short pause and then inhale deeply

to feel relaxed and in control. A so-called “lucky charm” may be seen as an object that promotes physical grounding. However, to be effective in this way, an affirmation is needed to accompany its use.

Have Hope

It is believed that hope draws a line between life and death, opening the door to more life. Opening that door allows us to expect an acceptable or happier life, to make goals and desire achievement, and to react better to difficult circumstances. **In general, hope shows us a brighter future than our present; in doing this, hope points to joy.** The absence of hope kills both expectations of success and optimism. These characteristics of hope are seen when a person has reached a limit, and the only remaining choice is life or death. A person who believes there is hope will choose to live; one without hope will not.

In effect, hope empowers optimism and life. It is this optimism that enables people who fail at something to try, try again, with an expectation of eventual success. In practising the use of tools for self-healing, it is important—no, it is mandatory—to keep hope alive until you succeed.

Hope empowers optimism and life. It is this optimism that enables people who fail at something to try, try again, with an expectation of eventual success.

This does not mean you should blindly pursue a treatment process that no qualified professional or informed advocate would recommend. Hope provides a motivating energy you can use to move on from an unwanted present and make yourself emotionally sound.

As with all emotions, of which hope is arguably one (though hope can present in the form of a disposition or attitude), hope can be called upon to serve any purpose for which you need it. In that sense, there is an unending supply of hopefulness, but you must bring it to your awareness each time by planting your thoughts on the desire for hope. In other words, when you need hope, you get it by thinking about it. For example, if I am ill and want to use hope to motivate me to get better, I have to tell myself positive things about hope that makes it seem desirable. In that way, I make hope acceptable to myself, and this gives me a patient expectation that my illness will be cured—as opposed to believing that it will not. Such hopelessness would predict a downward spiral. I can say—with hope—that I will be cured from my illness, and the feeling of hopefulness will coexist with faith, which, in turn, will nourish my strong belief in getting well. Seemingly impossible situations have been known to turn around for the better, sometimes without explanation.

This is why, when it looks as though we will never achieve a reasonable goal, we need hope to make us continue pursuing it. **Hope helps to get you where you want to be through positive persuasion.** When you find yourself blocked from succeeding, you likely respond with disappointment and

When you have hope, it removes total despair and allows courage, perseverance, and resilience to be born again. For every human activity, we need hope.

despair. If you want to change your mental environment to create a new way of responding, you need to get rid of the failure attitude and use hope to introduce a success outlook. As hope begins to die, you approach a standstill. When you have hope, it removes total despair and allows courage, perseverance, and resilience to be born again. For every human activity, we need hope. Clearly, in your journey to heal yourself, you need to bring hope along with your efforts. Without it, you cannot reach the goal of wellness.

To hope is to be connected to a Higher Power, the source of your emotional strength, who always means the best for you. Even those who do not believe in hope usually have some desire to progress that keeps them going. That is hope. This discussion is to encourage you to purposefully stir up hope for any desire you may have. You do remember that when you don't want something to happen, you need to hope for what you do want instead, don't you? At this point I call your attention to evidence from research studies showing that the more frequently a person repeats a meaningful or important thought, the more likely that idea will re-wire the person's brain and enter the subconscious. Yes, you can implant hope in your mind to give you the

emotional energy needed to move forward. The statement that someone in such-and-such a situation or at some time or another “abandoned all hope” simply means that the person stopped looking for reasons to keep going. **But there is always a reason to expect better, to anticipate success, to look forward to achieving goals, to hope, or even to dream for something!** Consider these inspiring words of Martin Luther King, Jr.:

If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And so today I still have a dream.

I believe these words are important for everyone to note, especially those who have a demon to defeat or a mountain to conquer.

A profound lesson is that hope is not to be seen as a passive state (and neither is its cousin, faith). When you entertain hope, it means your thoughts are directed at a goal. The time between launching hopeful thinking, so to speak, and realizing that your hope is being fulfilled is not to be treated as simply wait-and-do-nothing time. This period is best filled with figuring out how your needs can be met and what actions you can take to achieve your hoped-for outcomes. A farmer who hopes for a great harvest does not laze around doing nothing. A student who hopes for good grades does not spend all of his or her time socializing or sleeping. Hope provides the energy for forward movement, and it can supply that sense of a promised future at every stage or

moment during the waiting. Sufferers like you, however, need to have hope and to acquire the skills, the tools, or the raw materials required for your self-healing. The best kind of hope is action-supported hoping. And that's the kind I encourage you to use.



After Reading Chapter 17

1. Note that various forms of activities that could roughly be called Energy Arts—including meditation, yoga, tai chi, qigong, tai chi qigong (shibashi), and tapping—all use the vehicle of energy as a means of providing healing power. If you want to leave no stone unturned in getting rid of your turmoil and in becoming a better version of yourself, plan or learn to do these exercises.
2. Research the “Energy Arts” to decide which of them, in addition to tapping, will be suitable for you.
3. Create a plan to take one day each week or month to intentionally acknowledge your spiritual Higher Power by doing specific activities that will help to keep you committed and connected. Describe your plan, below.

Chapter 18

EPILOGUE: “ARE YOU HERE YET?”

How the End of the Road Ahead Will Strengthen Your Peace of Mind

Where Do We Go from Here?

Hopefully, you have now finished reading this book or the sections that appeal to you. My hope is that the parts you have read have given you useful information that will point the way out of your emotional difficulties. So now what? For my part, my main goal is to make this information available to as many people as possible rather than only to professionals who work in mental health. I do acknowledge that the mystique attached to psychology and psychiatry makes it difficult to easily embrace messages from that field. In knowing this, I've tried very hard to avoid using psychological jargon and hope I have succeeded.

My intention was to write a book that could be easily read in a relatively short period of time. I thought of the work in this way because I believe that almost the entire content

What's stopping you?



*I have tremendous respect for your abilities
and for the power of the human spirit to
bounce back from suffering.*

could be grasped by the end of a first or second reading so that putting the ideas and suggestions for self-healing into practice could occupy as much time as needed. Again, I hope I have succeeded at this.

If I were reading this book as a member of the general population, I would be intrigued by certain explanations, particularly if I saw myself in one or more of them. In that case, I would either use the book to start self-healing or decide to contact a mental-health professional. If I weren't sure to what extent any of the sections applied to me, I would want to get an opinion from a close or respected acquaintance about those statements. In other words, in the spirit of self-honesty and the egoless approach suggested in the book, I would definitely take steps to address problems of my own that my reading has pointed out.

Another task I would assign myself would involve underlining or highlighting helpful suggestions and examples in my copy of the book. After looking at the review exercise at the end of each chapter, I would read the chapter again (if necessary), making notes to use the sections already underlined to create a plan for my self-healing. But, of course, I wouldn't include an idea in my final plan until I fully understood the steps of each suggestion that I was going to put into practice.

If you read this book only to put it and its ideas aside, your problem will remain unaffected. You need to put the written words into thoughtful action.

I have tremendous respect for your abilities and for the power of the human spirit to bounce back from suffering. It has been said by some writers that our body is biologically designed to heal itself. Why not the psyche, too, which is inseparable from the body? Actually, this is the claim of leading advocates of energy psychology. If we feed the mind and body proper physical food (nutrients) and the right mental food (thoughts) and keep them fit (with regular mental and physical exercise), this marvellous hybrid machine *can* heal itself. The key is effort and, of course, hope.

Now that you have read the book almost to the very end, I hope you have found it to be an informative and helpful guide to self-healing. I believe it bears repeating (respectfully) that just reading the book is not enough. If you read this book only to put it and its ideas aside, your problem will remain unaffected. You need to put the written words into thoughtful action. The sooner you start practising any of the techniques suggested, the sooner you will be able to rid yourself of serious emotional problems and the opportunity to live a happier life.

Try not to look too far into the future. It is true that you need to keep the goal in sight. But the way to reach it is to

go one step at a time and one day at a time. Know your goal. Stamp it on your mind as you progress. You cannot keep looking at your destination, however, at the risk of neglecting to fully appreciate each step of the walk to get there. I am very confident that you have it in you to be in charge of your own emotional renovation project, whether by yourself or with help.

I am sure you have heard the saying “Fake it till you make it.” I assure you, this phrase is not meant to promote deception. Rather, it indirectly suggests that when you are learning something, you need a lot of practice before you feel natural and at ease with it. Until then, it

*Your ego is not really a protector; it is,
instead, a deceiver.*

helps that you continue to apply the skills with a confidence and an attitude that does not seem forced or unnatural, although you are not quite yet at an expert stage. Be patient. You will get there.

My dream is that this book will either show you how to repair your damaged mental health yourself or help you seek assistance from the appropriate source. Remember: You will do better the more you learn to talk to yourself with insight (self-understanding), but please refrain from putting yourself down. Your ego is not really a protector; it is, instead, a deceiver. Work hard to accept who you are and the way you are. Strongly affirm your intention to become

a better person, if there is evidence you need to be. You can win the battle to gain peace of mind. I know you can do it! Press on, and don't stop till the job is done. I wish you every ounce of inner strength you will need to rescue yourself from emotional turmoil.

I leave you with some ideas for self-talk to motivate yourself to get the most out of life. You are not obligated to practise what you do not believe, but it is right and proper to turn over every rock, so to speak, until you find comfort for yourself, whether you are by yourself or with others.

You can do it!

Motivating Self-Talk

1. Today, right now, I have a chance to achieve something good for myself or another person.
2. I feel helpless today because I have not stopped to value my special strengths or skills. Right now, right here, I will list some of my strengths and skills and begin to value them with gratitude.
3. Since I believe that when nothing's ventured, nothing's gained, I intend, right now and right here, to take the first step, however small, to change my life for the better. I don't need to know any other step at this point, just the first. Once I do it, I will know what to do next.
4. I will make it my job to do or say things that will create feelings of self-respect and to show my respect for others so that others will respect me.
5. I am a part of the Creator—what can I not achieve!

6. Every day is a new beginning; every day I am a new creation.
7. There is more to life than self-pity. I will start making my life more enjoyable and useful.
8. I am more capable than some people, and I sometimes underestimate my own capabilities. Today, right now and right here, I will plan how to show my competence with humility, not arrogance.
9. I am aware that a relationship needs to be cared for, like a garden. As such, starting today, right now and right here, I intend to plan how I will nurture my important relationships, starting with my closest. They may doubt my sincerity, but I will keep trying.
10. I will organize my financial life, starting today, right now and right here, or get advice so that my stress in that area will be less. My ego will not stop me.
11. What is it about coping with stress that I don't understand? I will take the necessary steps to learn and apply the skills of stress management (one at a time), starting today, right now and right here.
12. I am willing to make today a day of joy, starting right now and right here. I will show gratitude for the big and small gifts I have received in life.
13. My promise to myself, today, right now and right here, is to accept who I am and to start planning how to shape my life into what I want it to be.
14. What items or experiences do I deserve? It can be anything that the universe or God [You may supply the

name of your Higher Power] can provide. There is a part of my Creator in me, and so I am connected to the ultimate divine and creative power. Therefore, I can confidently and gratefully accept everything I ask of the Creator, right now and right here. Today I will set my attention and intention on how to request what I truly need and want.

15. The present is where the magic of healing takes place. I need to pull myself together to do healing activities starting today, right now and right here.
16. I am stronger than the “demons” in my life, not weaker. To defeat me they need to take over my mind. I won’t let them! I will fill my thoughts with descriptions of the kind of emotions I want to have or with stories that will summon up these desired feelings, and I will practice feeling good.
17. I do not need to engage in unusual behaviour or create make-believe mental images in order to cope with disturbing feelings. I need only to learn how to accept difficult emotional problems so that I can move on as quickly as possible. So right now and right here, I am starting to work on one of my issues; and I am determined to get rid of it.
18. I know I can change my reactions using my thoughts, so why do I keep waiting for some event or some person to heal my emotional wounds? Right now and right here, I will begin to focus on the feelings that come with my problems and will replace the thoughts

I know I can change my reactions using my thoughts, so why do I keep waiting for some event or some person to heal my emotional wounds?

that feed these hurtful feelings with problem-solving ones. I know I can!

19. Whenever I meet a setback, instead of becoming discouraged or angry, I will try to see the “failure” as an opportunity to solve the problem a different way—by being creative and thinking outside the box.
20. Although it seems that this life is unfair and that some people, including me, have been selected to suffer bad experiences, my reading on this topic has taught me that this is not so. Therefore, starting right now and right here, I will stop looking for the answer to “Why me?” Instead, I will start with a plan to help me apply workable solutions to my problems.
21. My old attitude of putting down those who ask for help is uncalled for. No one has all the answers. So what is wrong with asking for help from those who know better? **I promise myself that from now on, I will seek others who can help me when I face difficult circumstances.** So starting right now, I will take my first step to get help from a person [State name], from this book [State section or topic] and/or another book [State

- title, section or topic], or from a place [State name, appointment date and whom you will see].
22. If I cannot deny that thoughts make things happen, then everything I can achieve or make happen comes from my thoughts. Therefore, it makes sense for me to keep only those thoughts that will bring good things and to get rid of the ones that hold me back. I will begin to practise doing this every day (with thought replacement), beginning right here and right now.
 23. As frequently as I can, I will practice including songs, music, other forms of entertainment, and self-soothing in my daily activities to make sure I will maintain joyful spirits. Yes! I! Will!
 24. I am not my problem(s); these problems are in my life only at this time. They will not last forever. I am bigger and better than they are, and I must start to see myself as the hopeful, worthwhile, and confident person I am or can become—starting right here and right now.
 25. Laughter is contagious. I will make it my goal, from today onwards, to catch and pass around as much genuine merriment as I can but never to cover up my shortcomings. I can learn to be good at this.
 26. Maybe I will never be seen publically as a hero or heroine, but I can always find time to see myself privately as one, whenever I have helped someone who needed it. Today is a day to do so.

27. A lack of success does not define me or take away my self-worth. It is another opportunity to try to do better at [State what you wish to succeed at doing, this time around]. I will not give up or waste time on self-pity. I will start today, right here and right now, to achieve my next goal.



After Reading Chapter 18

Work on the Motivational Self-Talk section as follows:

1. Go back and reflect on each self-talk promise, and select the ones that most appeal to you.
2. Of these, select one to three items to start with, and do the same every day.
3. Keep adding more items to your selection as you comfortably handle one to three a day till you have addressed every item.
4. Go over the whole list several times, and practice each item as often as you can. Keep in mind that frequently repeating these self-talk statement will lead to imprinting them firmly in both your conscious and subconscious minds. Keep up the good work, friend!!

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

The Bickersteth Emotional Wellness Scale (The BEWS)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Attempt _____

When you think about the important problem(s) you face, answer the questionnaire by assigning a score of zero (not at all/very little) to 10 (very much so/to a great extent) to each item.

1. How confident are you in yourself?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. How serious or persistent are your angry feelings?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. On the whole, how scared or anxious do you feel about facing life or your problems?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. How ashamed do you feel about your situation, in general?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. To what extent are you disgusted with yourself or the problems you are trying to solve?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Days or Sessions

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. To what extent were you disgusted with yourself or the problems you were trying to solve?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Did you have feelings of distress or sadness?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Per Session Total:

Per Session Average:

Hardly at All

All the Time

7. How often did you feel upbeat or excited?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Did you have fun or enjoy yourself?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Per Session/day Total: (#7 & #8) =

Per Session/day Average: (#7 & #8) =

APPENDIX 3

The Bickersteth Emotional Health Recovery Plan

Name: _____

Date: _____

My Pledge for This Week

Things I am grateful for this week:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The opposite of my most unwanted thoughts/mental images that I want to keep:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Goals to achieve this week (small or big):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Go to these places to improve my mood:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Other ideas for improving my mood:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Do the three-stage breathing technique

1. As you take many breaths, try to locate each breath's position along the way in and out.
2. Then say, "I am breathing in... I am breathing out."
3. Repeat the process until the unwanted thought is distant or discarded.

Repeat 1 and 2. Then say, one at a time, the thoughts you want to keep.

List the most worrying problems to look up and learn about regarding my situation or my reaction to it.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Do these activities to improve my mood:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Write out the things I wish to always remember:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

APPENDIX 4

Remember that for this, or any other exercise in this book, you are encouraged to consult with your physician about any adverse effect the exercise could cause.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

This exercise can be done in two or three ways, depending which muscles are being targeted. The goal of PMR is to provide a feeling of relaxation all through the body and enable a feeling of calmness, security, and/or self-confidence.

For all versions of PMR, you are required to select and focus on a body part(s) as the target of relaxation to which you will apply strong tension that is not self-harming in any way. In other words, you will be asked to tense the selected part by itself, as strongly and safely as you can, while at the same time breathing deeply and then relaxing. Hold the tension as you inhale to the count of four or five (or for four to five seconds). As you slowly exhale to the same count or number of seconds used when you inhaled, release the tension or stiffening of the body part(s). By the end of the count, all tension or stiffening will have been completely released or softened.

Individual Body Part (Version 1)

In this version, start from a foot or leg, and progress to your head, one body part at a time. For example, start on your right foot. As you focus on it, try to stiffen or tense

that foot as you inhale deeply to the count of four or five (or for four to five seconds). Next, do the same with your left foot. If you are not able to do the foot, start with the whole leg. Then progress to the right thigh, followed by the left thigh, the buttocks, the stomach area, the back, each hand or arm, each shoulder, the chest, the neck, the face, the ears, and the scalp.

Do not be disappointed if you cannot isolate only the muscles you choose (for example, only one foot or the ears). You will likely become more precise as you practise any of these versions over a period of time.

The next stage of this version is to progress downwards from the scalp to the right (or left) foot, each time applying tension and counting to four or five (or for four to five seconds) while focusing on each targeted body part and inhaling deeply. Exhale as you release the tension.

Grouped Muscles (Version 2)

In this version, focus on a group of muscles in more than one body part. For example, you may place your awareness on and apply tension to both legs, your torso (including your stomach, back, and chest), and your upper body (shoulders, arms, neck, and head), one group at a time, as you inhale. Each time, apply tension and count to four or five (or for four to five seconds), exhale, and release the tension while counting to four or five (or for four to five seconds). The group of muscles you target is entirely up to you. This is the same method as described in Version 1.

Whole Body Tension (Version 3)

Strictly speaking, this version is not a progression up or down the body but a variation of PMR, nonetheless. There are occasions when you may have very little time to do Version 1 or 2—this is when you will need this third version. As suggested in the heading, focus on your whole body. Start with a full-body scan and then stiffen the entire body (the best you can) to the count of four or five (or for four to five seconds). As in the other versions, inhale deeply while holding the tension and then release as you exhale to the count of four or five (or for four to five seconds). Repeat this total-body muscle relaxation between three and five times, as you are able or as time allows.

APPENDIX 5

Engaging Ideas for Thought Replacement

1. What makes a sound beautiful?
2. What rules can you or anyone use to judge that any sound is beautiful?
3. Are there sounds you can think of that have no beauty—no matter how hard you try to look for it? Why do you think that is so?
4. Why do people say, “Happy Birthday!”? What is happy about a birthday?
5. Try to remember everything that happened on your birthday last year.
6. Recall the events of your happiest day before the age of 12 and between ages 12 and 17. Compare them. Which was happier? Do the same for any two five-year age periods up until 10 years before your current age.
7. Consider what it is about love or loving that is pleasant?
8. Think of an explanation of the word *love* that makes you and another person look good.
9. How has your practice of love or loving made you a better person?
10. How many kinds of love do you know? Who are all the people with whom you have shared each kind?
11. Can you come up with reasons why you need to practise love, regardless of whether you're in love or not?

12. Try to create an animal story that ends with, “This is how charities started.”
13. Which of these activities is your strongest? Helping people who are not your friends; thinking about actual problems and solutions; or being a role model. Remind yourself of the times you have been most involved in each of these.
14. Can you come up with a plan to make one of the activities in item 13 happen this week so that you can report your efforts and results to someone?
15. Start counting by the highest number you think you can handle (that does not end with a zero), and if you make a mistake, reduce this number by one. If you succeed, add one number. After you get to 100, start saying the entire number, even if you have to slow down your speed. Keep going until the next hundred. Do this without writing down any number.
16. Think of a movie you watched some time ago, and try to recall it in sequence and in detail. You may do one or the other.
17. Do the exercise in item 16 with TV shows.
18. Add ideas of your own that come to mind right now and later.

APPENDIX 6

Anger Management Worksheet

By knowing how a habit, attitude, anger style, or behaviour developed, you are more likely to understand it or know how to stop the one that is causing problems in your life. Here is a plan you can apply to anger:

List examples of times when you reacted with anger when growing up. Then think of recent incidents or one that just happened. What did each angry thought or behaviour do for you (its value) then and now? In other words, why do you think showing anger worked for you then, and why do you think it works today? This has to be true in some way, otherwise you would have dropped it, unless you are still trying to do so. Identify which behaviours/thoughts/attitudes were reactions (R), learned (L), or the result of a mood problem (M) as illustrated in the examples below.

Examples: Event or Incident	Value (What it does or did for you)
1. At age 13, I lipped off at a store clerk. (R)	I felt, "Who cares? She yelled at me first, so she deserved it."
2. In an argument with my dad, I called him "stupid." (L)	It did not feel good.

<p>Examples: Event or Incident</p>	<p>Value (What it does or did for you)</p>
<p>3. Yesterday, I kept screaming at one of my workmates—the one who always tries to behave holier than thou. (M or R)</p>	<p>It made me feel powerful, especially in the eyes of others.</p>
<p>4. I stormed out of a bus and gave the driver the finger. (M)</p>	<p>I felt out of control; that I had to do it.</p>
<p>Start your list below.</p>	
<p>Event or Incident</p>	<p>Value (What it does or did for you)</p>

APPENDIX 7

Switching from Anger's Harmful Path

Often when we are in “freaking out” mode, we find reasons to justify the behaviour and keep going. After that point, we convince ourselves that we couldn't have stopped, which is not always true.

Tip: Whenever there is an interruption in an anger episode, grab on to it (listen to the perhaps distant or weak “voice” of awareness, caution, or shock from the ongoing behaviour), and try to exit the outburst.

To improve your social image and help prevent yourself from “losing it” in social situations, try to implement the following strategies, whether you are able to stop your angry feelings or not:

1. Apologize and explain to those affected that you did not mean to be out of control (for, surely, you cannot ever truly want to be out of control).
2. Admit that you were not able to stop yourself; that you tried to do so but failed (or that you controlled it the best you could).
3. Explain that it is not the other person's fault (Why? Because you are responsible to control yourself).

4. Promise that they have your permission to politely tell you to stop being angry, and you will try to go along with them. (Accordingly, you need to commit yourself to accepting the reminder to stop when you hear it.) This is about the most definite way to attract forgiveness, respect, and healing—all at once!

APPENDIX 8

Changing Emotional Reaction Exercise

Description of the essential details of the event that caused my emotional problem(s), followed by my reactions:

Self-Healing Question

If you woke up tomorrow and the awful feelings arising from your problem(s) were miraculously gone, what would be significantly different in your behaviour?

List the most important things you would be doing if you were not reacting the same way as you are now?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Though it is okay to consider what is *not* happening that would allow you to behave as you have described, it is better to look at what *should* happen. Please take note: Your better reaction (the one that makes for a happier life) depends on at least two things: good thoughts and good feelings—that

is, how you were thinking as you were making the list.

To better understand how this works, let's look at a scenario in which, due to an incident, you were discouraged because you didn't feel like going out to the movies on a weekend. In this scenario, your lack of motivation to go out triggered the feeling of discouragement, or it could have been the other way around. This tag team of misery was followed by the thoughts you had about your situation. Obviously, if you were thinking that it's all right to be home because it will be restful or enjoyable, there would have been no unhappiness about not going out. This does happen to people at times. However, when your thoughts focused on the unfairness or distress of staying home on a weekend, bad feelings followed. In other words, when an event occurs, you feel bad or good because of what thoughts came first.

In the same way, happy events cause good feelings because the tag team of thoughts and reactions is made up of happy amigos. What causes the behaviours to be pleasant are the pleasant thoughts that made them happen. So, most of the time, the thoughts about how we think we will feel when an event happens come first. If that event does occur, we feel exactly as our thoughts said we would.

Take the items on the above list, one at a time, and allow yourself to focus only on what's great about each of them. Then note the good feelings that follow.

Now ask yourself this: "What stopped me from behaving this way before now?" State the reason(s). Which solution in the book can you apply to help you maintain the new behaviours?

APPENDIX 9

Mindfulness Meditation Exercises

Mindfulness exercises are not made up of only thinking-type activities with no actions. The exercises below include action-type examples. The goal of each exercise is to keep you in the present moment, and this happens when you are curious about and learn from what you notice. When you first start doing this kind of exercise, your mind will tend to wander, but after frequent practice, this will happen less. Right from the beginning, learn to catch yourself when you start thinking other thoughts, and each time, simply bring your attention back to the activity.

Do not pass judgment on the object of your focus or on yourself. If thoughts that condemn or complain about something sneak in, as tempting or inviting as it may be to continue with those thoughts, immediately stop yourself from following them, and deliberately turn your attention back to only observing and accepting the information you are getting from your body, “as is.” There is nothing to expect or to watch for—you’re just following through a sequence of purposeful observations. I believe it is ok to reject a description as not quite fitting and to think of another and to do this as often or repeatedly as you wish, in order to be accurate. This is different from being judgmental and stirring up unpleasant emotions, which you have to avoid.

Always make sure your body is in a comfortable position or posture, and you can give full uninterrupted attention

to each exercise. Even when you feel ill at ease, you may proceed to observe the features of the discomfort. The following are some exercises that require physical effort:

1. One Minute Mindfulness Exercise:

- This is a popular breath exercise that will help to ease you into doing mindfulness activities. You may need to have a watch or clock within easy view.
- After you get the hang of it, you can do this exercise in any non-harming posture or safe place; but for the first few times, do it while sitting.
- Give your total attention to your breathing. Observe the in-breath and out-breath for one minute, as you breathe normally. That's all there is to it! The important thing is that your thoughts are to be focused only on your breathing. As other thoughts come up (which they will), you have to quickly bring your full attention back to the breathing exercise.
- Practice this exercise several times in the day, and add more observation time as you become more used to doing it.

2. Visual Mindfulness Exercise

- Pick a small target: an area on the floor or the wall; an item of clothing; a utensil; a picture; a piece of furniture; a flowerbed; or a tree (to name a few). Look carefully at it to see how many features of the object you can identify. Look over the same thing a few more times to find more qualities (for example, colour, pattern, size, texture, dimensions, proximity to other things, or angles).
- Do this exercise for one to two minutes.

3. While eating or drinking something, concentrate on one aspect of the experience at a time: the way the food or drink looks, smells, and tastes.

- As you slowly bring the food or drink to your lips, notice the sensations and feelings that arise before you engage your lips and after the utensil touches your lips. Notice whether there is salivation or a pre-taste sensation. What other sensations can you identify? What feelings arise?
- As the food or drink enters your mouth, pay close attention to the amount, the consistency or texture, and the temperature of the food or liquid.
- As you slowly chew the food or slush the drink around, focus your awareness on the movement of the drink or food in your mouth and the way your mouth pushes the food or drink in various directions in readiness to swallow.
- It will take more than one mouthful to recognize what each activity in this eating and/or drinking exercise has to tell you. Your starting point, however, is just one mouthful in one meal. Reflect only factually (non-judgmentally) on whether you completely carried out all the steps.

4. Walking Mindfulness

- Select a private place where you can take a few steps without being disturbed or feeling self-conscious while doing this exercise.
- As you stand to begin to walk, notice where each foot makes contact with your footwear, the floor, or

ground. Pay attention to any sensations from your feet and where you feel them: on the toes, sole, heel, arch, or sides of each foot.

- Walk very slowly, paying close attention (back and forth) to the sensations in each of these parts as you go.
- After much practice to get familiar with the exercise, consider trying it in another location where you can take more steps. Later, you can safely include it any time in many other selected places.

5. Being-At-Large Mindfulness

Please Note: This exercise is not recommended to be done while operating any vehicle or machine.

- As you walk or stop anywhere, notice as many people, objects, and events around you as you can, doing so safely without obstructing others or missing opportunities (such as your bus or the walk light).
- For example, you could pay attention to the people approaching until they are almost abreast of you, being careful not to make them or others feel uncomfortable, but doing so with a smile.
- Notice the colour, patterns, styles of each person's clothes. Observe (without judgment) their height, body size, hair color, facial features, footwear, and anything else of interest. You may shift your gaze as often as you want.
- If you are stationary and waiting for a walk light, you could examine different aspects of the red hand.

Count how long it takes to change, how many people are on the other side, and how many are on your side waiting to go across.

- Notice how someone in front of you is walking. Observe the length of the strides the person takes. Are they hurried, steady, dignified, precise, coordinated, etc.?
- You may be in a position to observe a stationary vehicle and notice its make, colour, and its different parts (tires, rims, door handles and windows). Describe who is with vehicle, as you described the people who were approaching you while you were walking. Look carefully for other features that will make your observation complete.
- While stationary, closely observe adults, children, or animals doing things with one other.
- Watch the kinds of movements each person or animal (for example, a dog) makes with arms, legs, face, tongue, tail, ear, or whole body. Name the emotional behaviours you can identify—without forming an opinion—and describe their clothes or fur.

6. Body Scan Mindfulness

- In a quiet place, focus on each part of your body. Scan your whole body, starting from each foot. Allow yourself about 10 to 20 minutes to do the entire exercise—or less time if you wish to scan only certain parts.
- Focus your attention on the right foot, and make yourself aware of the feelings and sensations from that

foot. When you think you are familiar with them, move your attention to the left foot.

- Do the same with the left foot. Take careful notice of the feelings and sensations. Again, shift your attention only when you are sure you have made a mental note of all the feelings and sensations in that foot.
- Now focus your attention on the right leg to discover all the feelings and sensations in that leg.
- Turn your attention to the right thigh, and repeat the exercise.
- Give the same careful attention to the left thigh; repeat the exercise.
- Focus on your buttocks; repeat the same exercise.
- Scan the stomach area to notice the sensations and feelings.
- Attend to your back, and repeat the exercise.
- Shift attention to each hand.
- Mentally note the sensations and feelings in each arm.
- Shift attention to each shoulder.
- Put your full attention on your chest and then on your neck.
- Focus your attention on your face and ears.
- Finally, take careful notice of the feelings and sensations in your scalp.
- You can do this exercise by starting from your scalp and ending at one of your feet. You don't have to scan the entire body each time you carry out the steps. Feel free to choose as many body areas as you want, depending

on the amount of uninterrupted time available to you. If you have to quit prematurely, that's okay, too.

7. Awareness of Surroundings Mindfulness Exercise

- With your eyes closed or open, listen for all the sounds you can detect. You may pick one and identify its characteristics. If you are indoors and need more variety, go outside where you can hear more sounds.
- With your eyes closed or open, try to identify all the smells you can. Linger a bit, giving yourself time to be certain of them. If you are indoors and cannot smell anything in particular, go outside to do this exercise.
- Look at everything around you, naming each thing you look at and describing its characteristics.

8. Counting Mindfulness Exercise

- Sitting or lying down, eyes open or closed (as is comfortable for you), start to count your in-breaths and out-breaths. One in-breath is one; and the out-breath is one. The next in-breath is two; and the out-breath is two, and so on, up to any number that feels comfortable. It will be necessary to slow down the breathing pace to a relaxed count of two or three while taking or releasing the breath.
- A variation of this exercise is to count only in-breaths or only out-breaths.
- Add words instead of silently counting the pace of breathing: "This is one, and I'm going to two. Now it's two, and I'm going to three," and so on.

- If the one style feels monotonous or boring, you may vary the words to something like, “I’m at three, and I’ll go next to four. Now I’m at four, and it’s next to five.”
- You could also describe the numbers as you say (or think) them, as follows: “One is a stick, and two is curved. Three is like backward E, and four is a side-ways V with a one. Five is a backward C with a handle on top. Six is a zero with a bracket beside it.” Be as creative as you can.
- The number of words you use to describe a number will be limited by how long you can keep the breath before the next. If you are forced to exhale or inhale before the description is given, just go to the next number, or start again at one with the next breath, and shorten the next description or use a funny, made-up description.
- Forgetting what the next number should be is probably a sign that you stopped being in the present moment and that other thoughts came through to distract you. Start again from where you think you left off or from the beginning.
- You may vary this exercise by counting backwards (or count down). In a sense, this is a more compelling exercise, requiring that you pay closer attention.

9. Unfamiliar Activity Mindfulness Exercise

Doing an activity in a different way from how you are accustomed will force you to pay closer attention to it. As

such, your thoughts will be taken over by observing the progress of the activity. Here are some examples:

- Performing important actions using your non-dominant hand (using your computer mouse, writing a note, brushing your teeth, or ironing)
- Slowly and safely walking up stairs backwards
- Walking around with your dominant eye covered (perhaps with an eye patch). *Remember that your safety and that of others is always paramount.*

10. A Breathing Mindfulness Activity (this three-stage Breathing Technique) is described in Appendix 3.

APPENDIX 10

Learning to Shape Your Life

Can you make your life what you want, whether you have a serious emotional condition or not? At this point, based on all the information I've provided about self-healing, the answer has to be yes! It does seem quite possible that you can shape your life, including your physical health, into what you desire it to be. Many sacred books from ancient times to the present-day talk about this, and experts and scholars agree. Here is some of the advice they give (in no particular order):

- Always state your desire. State it as a goal, and continue pursuing it until you get there; don't look back, except to learn. Simply keeping the desire in your view is a powerful step towards achieving it. Be careful, however, to allow for enjoying the journey. Every sensible step you take towards it will bring you closer to the goal, even without first knowing how you will get there in the end. **Your task is to start doing something about getting to your goal.**
- Continue to state, "I want to feel good," as your all-encompassing goal (the word good itself standing for many different needs). Without acknowledging this, you cannot expect to put an achievable plan into action. Then take steps to make it happen each time you feel dissatisfied or in low spirits.
- When your goal is to avoid something, state the opposite

of that negative goal. You can never achieve something that is unknown or that does not or will not exist.

- Visualize yourself and your circumstances as if you have already achieved the goal towards which you are working. This is where you may have to apply the advice to “fake it till you make it.”
- “Obstacles” and “setbacks” are opportunities for applying creativity and problem solving to reach the goal (which is always stated in positive terms). Mindfully look into each disadvantage for the lesson it holds, and try to use it to help you make progress.
- In shaping your life, be aware of the damaging effects of (1) pleasing or protecting your ego; (2) being overwhelmed by the negativity of others; and (3) listening to your own self-defeating thoughts or self-talk. Do not allow any of these to take over!
- Make a definite effort to change a behaviour—something you wilfully do or do not do—that you know is wrong, uncalled for, or inappropriate. A strong need to repeat a known wrong action is your ego misleading you. This only makes you a worse person than you were when you first made the mistake.
- Always be willing to change the way you look at the things that upset you or cause you stress. It will be your choice to view them as either lessons of what to manage or avoid or as added baggage to which to hang on.
- For every really bad experience you have, give yourself the opportunity for at least three good ones to balance

out the negative effects (a ratio established by relatively recent research).

- Take good care of each of your relationships, and do what you can to allow others to enjoy peace of mind, especially those close to you.
- Learn to place your attention on the positive side of life events (to do this you may sometimes need to spin it, or reframe it).
- Learn how to identify and be grateful for the things and circumstances you already have or enjoy, and set goals to achieve what you desire. If you place your full attention on what you don't have, all you will continue to see is what is lacking in your life.
- You cannot always make others do the things you request or expect, unless there is a special relationship that gives you that power or privilege. If so, use this position fairly.
- Treat others as you would like to be treated. Your goal is to teach by example, not to manipulate the situation to get something for yourself. Doing that is a harmful ego game that damages wellbeing and relationships.
- When you expect a stressful event, believe strongly that you can make the feel-good bio-chemicals in the brain (serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, and endorphins) flow just as well as you can make urine flow when you need to (as in, "I'd better use the washroom now, rather than later when I am in my job interview or taking the test"). It has a lot to do with how intently you focus on your goal. There is no magic formula.

- Do your very best in everything you do and, sometimes, recognition will follow. But do not expect it always.
- If you are confused about your direction in life, continue to ask yourself the following questions, until an answer comes to you—sort of from nowhere: “What do I want? ” “What do I want my purpose in life to be?” The best times are just before falling asleep or right as you are waking up. When you have an answer to either question that feels right, write it down, and look at it every day for a few days. If you are still satisfied with the answer, set out a plan for how you will achieve what you want and the steps that will show you are living according to your purpose in life.
- Do a mini-meditation a few times every day. Say quietly or mentally, “I am here. I am here.” Next, say, “I am breathing in (as you breathe in). I am breathing out (as you breathe out).” Do this for a minute or so. If your mind strays, just come right back to doing the exercise.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to happiness is an absence of contentment. If a person always wants more that person will never be happy. Time, energy and thinking will be used up trying to get more and such activity will lead to other unhappy feelings along the way. Moreover the more frequently a person thinks about acquisition (and not only of financial power or material possessions) the more those thoughts will mould that person into a creature of acquisition (wanting more), which will create the urge to go after more and so goes the vicious cycle of unhappiness. Of course this is not

the only way unhappiness comes; but it accounts for much misery. On the other hand gratitude for what you have is a sure way to pause from wanting more and can be used to shift attention from being without to having enough of this or for now. Practicing contentment along with gratitude will change your life for the best and bring you happiness in a big way!

APPENDIX 11

Suggestions for Reaching Services for Emergency Mental Health Problems

In looking for ways to help people get help for emergency mental health services, I realized that the telephone emergency helpline is probably the most common means to get immediate help for emotional crisis cases.

So if you have a serious emotional problem or have considered suicide, I encourage you to check right now, yes, RIGHT NOW, for the emergency helpline in your area. Write it down where you can easily find it so you can talk to someone when you are feeling desperate. Please write it in the space below, also.

If you have access to a computer, check out helpline numbers for other places, in the event you may be travelling.

LOCAL EMERGENCY HELPLINE NUMBER:

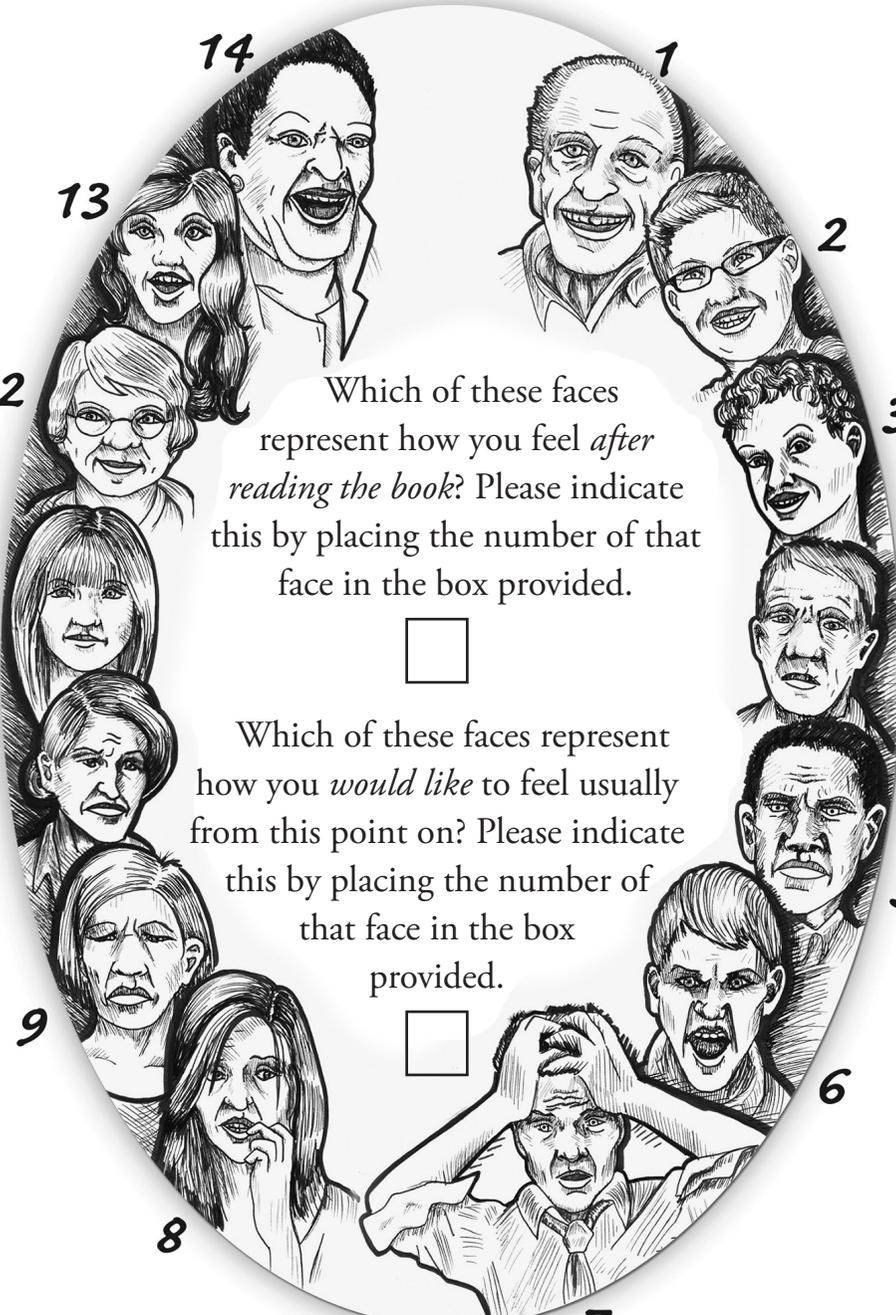
PHONE NUMBER OF OTHER PLACES

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Congratulations for hanging in to the end! Thank you for considering my ideas worthy of your attention. My strong wish is that some part of this book will change some part of you for the better to bring you happiness



This one's for you, Reader!



Which of these faces represent how you feel *after reading the book*? Please indicate this by placing the number of that face in the box provided.

Which of these faces represent how you *would like* to feel usually from this point on? Please indicate this by placing the number of that face in the box provided.

Footnotes

- ¹ I am including a section on disassociation and traumatic amnesia with some reluctance, because even well-trained professionals find the serious forms of these conditions difficult to treat. However, I would not like to presume to downplay or discourage the persistent willpower, often a strong quality of the human spirit, of those who are determined to overcome their adversity, so I have included this section, believing that there are likely some afflicted people who can make good use of this information to reduce suffering.
- ² However, if you have much milder forms of dissociative behaviour, hopefully, you can find ways to break the automatic link between the painful (mental or physical) reminders and the events of everyday life by mentally taking charge (the sooner the better) and faithfully practising the appropriate thinking skills outlined in Chapter 11.
- ³ The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is an organization based in the U.K. that provides guidance and advice to improve health and social care.

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A MESSAGE TO EVERYONE: PEACE OF MIND FOR EVERYONE

The time is now to use our ideas, energy, generosity, and commitment to help everyone have peace of mind or inner peace, including yourself unconditionally. With the capabilities and tools we have today, we can achieve the goal of emotional wellbeing for *EVERYONE* in our lifetime. Mental peace is more desirable and much cheaper than economic prosperity, which almost everyone, especially political leaders everywhere, pursues. Our emotional state directs almost everything we think, say, or do. If this is not healthy, everything that depends on it will be faulty. For the sake of humankind, please use what you have or can to make this planet a happier place for you and everyone else.

Can you see that by each of us improving our emotional condition by acquiring inner peace or peace of mind, none of us will want or encourage conflict and violence? This means that individuals, groups, and nations will stop fighting, killing people, and destroying property. With a peaceful mental state we will feel good about ourselves and about one another. As a result, we will be accepting of one another and this will wipe out discrimination of all kinds. People everywhere will value one another, feel content with what they have, be willing to share everything, and, in doing so, end scarcity and poverty for individuals and governments.

Let us all learn what to do about healing our fear, anger, sadness, shame, guilt, discontent, and the many feelings that take away mental peace. We will then know how to

go with the flow, be ourselves without any falseness, give forgiveness, show compassion, and be more trusting of one another. With these qualities in everyone, oppression, corruption, abuse of all kinds, and many other disagreeable behaviours and activities that rob us of joy in life will end. WOW! So please, join in to make our world a very pleasant and satisfying place for all. Contribute. Do something wonderful by learning how to claim your own peace of mind so that you can teach others who want it, too.

We need action on all fronts and at all levels. We also need a central organization—The Unity of Nations for Peace of Mind—to find, assemble, and distribute accurate information to teach, maintain, and support mental and emotional wellbeing that will reach everyone in the same way that The United Nations addresses economic, political, medical, and humanitarian matters.

Using individual and collective (or group) action all at the same time, we can change our world. Take these words seriously, and we WILL make it happen.

Yes, my dear friend, you reading or hearing this message right now need to start doing your part. Please pass this message along, and let us encourage one another to work on this project—rich and poor, high and low. Make living with peace of mind for yourself and others *your project* and lasting legacy. Start now to do your part cheerfully.

Kindly translate this message into another language so that *everyone* will be able to join in this global effort to make our world a better and happier place.

“TO YOUR HAPPINESS: A Self-Healing Guide to Peace of Mind”

“*TO YOUR HAPPINESS...*” deals with a variety of distressing emotional issues from which many people may be unable to escape. Sufferers who cannot or do not want to see a therapist will find psychological techniques in this book that will help them bring about their own healing, all offered by someone with 40 years of clinical experience in the field of psychology.

The book contains several self-treatment methods, presented mostly in the form of recipes and step-by-step choices and designed to help readers privately gain relief from mild or moderate, to traumatic and serious, emotional difficulties. Among the pages that brim with jargon-free coaching, readers will find familiar ideas such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT); newer strategies, including the use of spiritual, energy-based applications for self-healing; research-supported ideas; and chapter review projects. Readers can explore the length and breadth of innovative suggestions that can bring peace of mind to sufferers.

Those struggling with emotional issues will also discover how learning about hoping, showing gratitude, abiding by spiritual beliefs, helping others, as well as using the power of breathing and self-soothing (among other scientifically-proven therapy tools) is hugely important to mental wellbeing.

The book makes a modest claim to the introduction of a category or behavioural style termed Safety-Oriented

Personality Style (SOPS); to an expansion of the structured self-treatment approach, called Thought Replacement; and to a brand new theory of dreaming. SOPS is a way of behaving that may account for much emotional suffering and relationship problems. Thought Replacement is a technique by which the creative power of thought is actively used to remove emotional discomfort. I believe this book is the first to use the idea of an unacceptable threatening object (UTO) to explain how dreams and nightmares occur.

Additionally, readers will encounter fascinating artwork at the beginning of each chapter that provides an added level of understanding and illustrates the main teaching point or “ah-ha” moment in each chapter. **Unexpectedly, a treasury of technique guides and life-changing tips await readers in the Appendices as they finish reading this information-filled book.**

Whether you are on a journey of letting go and leaving behind your inner turmoil or are in search of self-improvement and a measure of happiness, be assured that with this book as your guide, there is an excellent chance your life will change for the better.

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