

Tapping

Self-Healing with the
Transformative Power of
Energy Psychology

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Introduction

We can soothe and eliminate the suffering of so many people.¹

—**Roger Callahan, PhD**

Founder of Thought Field Therapy

IMAGINE THIS: YOU ARE sleeping peacefully in your home when you are abruptly awakened by the bullhorn of a fire officer blaring two words: “Evacuate! Now!” You and your partner groggily register the words and look out the window. You are jolted into full alert when you see the red glow of a wildfire filling the width of your window as it rapidly heads toward your semirural neighborhood. You quickly put on some clothes and rush outside to assess the situation. Other neighbors are already driving away from the direction of the approaching flames. You can’t find your beloved cat but feel the urgency to get into your car. As you speed away, the fire is following you.

You escape its path and head into safety. But by the next morning, you learn that many of your neighbors didn’t. Your home is in ashes. Your cat is never found again. You can’t fall asleep the first night, ruminating about the experience. Or on the second night. Or the third.

A month later, you are still unable to get a good night’s rest. In your brain, new neural pathways have been formed. Simply being in bed activates the experience of terror when you woke up to a living nightmare. Other neural pathways have also formed, leaving you dwelling in guilt about having left your cat behind, grieving the horrible deaths of your neighbors, and suffering from the loss of your family photos, treasured pieces of art, literally everything you own. Worry centers are also activated. Where will you live? How will you deal with the financial loss?

How do we survive such a psychological assault that may befall any of us without notice? Your brain is able to meet dire circumstances with resilience, but it can also be overwhelmed. It may need assistance. What if you could send signals to your brain that disrupt the extreme emotional aftermath of a trauma? You would still know the impact of the fire, but you would be able to sleep at night. You would

still cherish the memories of your cat and feel the loss without being plunged into unreasonable guilt. You would still need to address the problems of where to live and the unanticipated financial difficulties but without being mired in excessive worry. And what if you could also send signals to your brain that help you think more clearly and creatively as you confront these challenges? All of this was the experience of two of our dearest friends who sought our help following a fire in Northern California that almost claimed their lives.

Energy psychology is a relatively new development within psychology that can show you how to accomplish all of this. It generates signals that directly impact your brain's reactions to the trying events of daily life as well as memories of past difficulties that haven't been adequately processed. It is not confined to dealing with traumas such as escaping a wildfire, though it is very effective even in horrendous situations. Stimulating acupuncture points (acupoints) by tapping on them while activating pertinent thoughts and feelings puts you at the keyboard as you reprogram the neural pathways that impact the quality of your life.

Acupoint tapping, combined with well-chosen words and images, can eliminate unfounded fears, reduce irrational anger, and counter jealousy. It can be the catalyst for creating positive changes in the beliefs that guide your actions. It can

help you overcome self-defeating patterns of behavior. It can keep you calm as you face triggers that had previously produced distress. It can be a force in healing an illness. It can help you overcome emotional obstacles that were preventing you from reaching a desired goal and bring clarity at times of overwhelm or confusion. It can support you in new and more life-affirming directions and connect you with intuitive sources of wisdom that transcend your usual day-to-day awareness.

NEW METHODS, NEW POSSIBILITIES

Tapping: Self-Healing with the Transformative Power of Energy Psychology provides an authoritative overview of one of the most effective and increasingly well-researched approaches for supporting your personal evolution.² The combination of contemporary therapeutic methods, ancient healing practices such as acupressure, and contemplative techniques such as mindfulness and guided imagery has produced a remarkably accessible and potent procedure that can be applied to virtually any area of your life. The approach allows you to gently rearrange your psychological makeup in ways that will help you bring out the best version of yourself. It has many applications. You can use it for:

- Addressing emotional wounds you may carry from the past
- Changing patterns of behavior that get in your way
- Navigating more freely through the challenges life presents
- Meeting with greater peace and dexterity the worries, angers, jealousies, losses, and irritations provoked by the situations you encounter
- Improving your relationships with friends, colleagues, and intimates
- Building skills that will increase your success in whatever matters to you

We know this is a bold list of promises. Rather than them being *our* promises, however, we are merely emissaries of recent advances within the behavioral sciences that demonstrate how each possibility can be accomplished on a self-help basis. And these developments come at a time when we all need such abilities as we move through a world whose challenges have become ever more dangerous and demanding.

CAN TAPPING DO ALL THAT?

As innocuous as it may look, tapping on selected acupuncture points sends tiny but potent electrical signals to your brain that can change the way you think, feel, and act. The emergence of psychoanalysis

in the West, along with enormous refinements over the past century in showing people how to take charge of their inner lives in empowering ways, has been a soul-enriching development. Combining it with ancient systems for healing and spiritual evolution, as presented in this book, is a step into a richer future built on a new embrace of the past.

WHY WE HAVE WRITTEN TAPPING

Because energy psychology is proving beneficial with such a wide range of situations, its practice has been expanding exponentially in the past few years. In addition to striking increases in its use in mainstream treatment settings,³ a recent paper in the prestigious journal *Frontiers in Psychology* estimated that acupoint tapping is “used as self-help by tens of millions of people each year,” noting that one tapping app alone has more than two million documented subscribers.⁴

However, since tapping just a few acupuncture points can be at least somewhat helpful in reducing anxiety, sadness, and other difficult emotions, and can be learned in minutes, it’s a reasonable guess that most of these millions of people have only a superficial understanding of the method. They likely have little idea of how to use it to reap benefits far beyond what they imagine is possible for a self-help approach. Providing a comprehensive and

up-to-date resource for acquiring deeper understanding and expanded skills with this trailblazing method is a primary purpose for this book.

Tapping is a tutorial for learning or deepening your knowledge about energy psychology, designed for both newcomers and experienced practitioners. It won't make you a therapist if you aren't one already, but it will put powerful self-help tools into your hands. If you are a therapist, it will increase your effectiveness. This book integrates essential concepts, how-to instructions, and scientific understanding in applying energy psychology to a range of issues, including worry, sadness, anxiety, depression, stress, trauma, habits, addictions, and relationships.

Psychotherapists have identified "best practices" for helping people in each of these areas. Illustrating ways of integrating tapping protocols with these best practices has been a major objective for us in writing *Tapping*. Beyond working with everyday concerns such as worry, sadness, and relationships, all the way up to clinical issues such as anxiety, depression, and addictions, the book also shows you how to use tapping to reach goals that have been eluding you; improve your performance in sports, on the stage, or at work; and unfold your finest potentials.

INTRODUCING OURSELVES

The two of us enjoy the immense privilege of being a couple whose professional

aspirations converge into a single, shared, passionate purpose. Whether it is David in his role as a psychologist or Donna serving as an energy medicine practitioner, our deepest motivations are to reduce suffering and empower each person we work with so that their lives become happier and more fulfilling. For as long as you stay with this book, *you* are the person on whom these intentions are focused!

Donna has brought an energy perspective into David's understanding of the human psyche. David has brought a more coherent scientific framework into Donna's energy healing system. An offspring of this merger is our passion for this book's topic, the rapidly growing field of *energy psychology*. Energy psychology is the application of energy healing tools for overcoming emotional wounds and promoting psychological and spiritual growth. This development has provided us a rich arena for expanding one another's horizons, and we believe it to be one of the most exciting and significant advances ever in the art of guiding people toward more fulfilling lives.

David's Reflections

I received my doctorate in clinical psychology in 1972, and I have worked as a licensed psychologist in a variety of contexts for five decades. When I first heard about tapping, in the late 1990s, I was as skeptical as anyone. One of the therapists in a clinical consultation group I was

leading had stumbled onto the technique, began to study it, and was describing it to the group. I was dismissive, if not derisive, on first hearing about the approach.

How in the world was tapping on the skin going to impact serious psychological conditions? Worse than that, wordings used in its practice, such as *“Even though I get furious at my son for no good reason, I deeply love and accept myself,”* seemed to affirm rather than challenge the very responses and behaviors the person was trying to overcome. “If ever there was a bogus therapy based on frivolous procedures,” I thought, “this has to be it!” In retrospect, I was probably more flippant and closed-minded about this new approach than I’d been about any other clinical innovation I had ever encountered. I had no inkling that within a few years I would become a spokesperson for the method! Life has a way of bringing us face to face with our arrogance.

At the time, no credible peer-reviewed research had been published about tapping therapies. There were only passionate claims from a small number of therapists enthusiastically championing it. I doubted that this tapping technique could have anything to do with personal evolution and wondered why anyone would be claiming that it is more effective than established therapies, which even with their limitations, enjoy both acceptance and empirical support.

What I never anticipated is that a series of circumstances would lead me into a

training program for clinicians learning to incorporate energy psychology into their practices. Despite my strong skepticism, I kept hearing about energy psychology in workshops I was coleading for therapists and other healers. Then I received an invitation to attend, as a guest, a meeting of psychologists in a city where I was teaching a workshop. A demonstration of acupoint tapping was to be the theme of the meeting that evening. Because there seemed to be a growing buzz about the method, I attended, skepticism in hand.

One of the psychologists who had recently introduced energy psychology into his practice was going to demonstrate the method with a woman being treated for severe claustrophobia by another of the group’s therapists. Having done research on “new psychotherapies” while on the faculty of the Johns Hopkins Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences early in my career, I was keenly attuned to influences on therapeutic outcomes that have nothing to do with the therapy’s distinctive techniques. Called “nonspecific therapeutic factors,” these include placebo effects expectation, suggestion, and the healing power of a therapist’s caring. My suspicions only mounted as I watched the treatment unfold.

What occurred during the first few minutes was actually familiar and comfortable for me—taking a brief history of the problem (which had not responded to treatments from several therapists) and having the client imagine being in an

elevator and giving her discomfort a rating on a standard 0-to-10 Subjective Units of Distress (SUD) scale. She said it was a 10. The next part, however, seemed implausible. The client mimicked the therapist's lead in tapping on about a dozen points on the skin while saying out loud, "*Fear of elevators.*" This was followed by a brief "Integration Procedure" that included a set of odd physical incantations and then another round of tapping. When the client next rated her discomfort being in an elevator, her SUD had diminished from 10 to 7. She said her heart wasn't pounding as fast.

I was surprised to see any decrease in her sense of distress. I was at the time using systematic desensitization, a behavioral therapy method for calming the nervous system. Systematic desensitization can be effective, but not so rapidly. This new procedure had required only a couple of minutes from the first rating to the second. I wondered if the woman had developed some affection or loyalty to the therapist and didn't want to embarrass him in front of his colleagues. Another round of the procedure brought the SUD down to 5. After another round, however, it was back up to 7. I was thinking, "See, just superficial fluctuations caused by the set and setting. I knew it wouldn't work!"

When the therapist inquired about the increase in her sense of distress, the woman reported that a long-forgotten memory had come to her of being about eight and playing with her brother and

some of his friends. They had created a fort out of a cardboard appliance box. When she was in it, the boys pushed the open end of the box against a wall so she was trapped. They then left her there amid derision and laughter. She didn't know how long it was until she was found and freed, but it seemed to her to be a very long time, and she screamed until she was exhausted. She had not recalled this incident for years, and as she focused on it, she now rated her discomfort related to the memory as a 10.

I thought, "Okay, so something was accomplished! A formative childhood event has been identified that some good talk therapy will be able to resolve over the next month or so. However strange the method, it has led to an important discovery that will give the treating therapist a new direction. It has been a useful case consultation." I did, however, wonder why her previous therapists hadn't worked with this memory. Only after I was studying the method did I come to realize that reducing the emotional charge on an issue through tapping often unearths long-buried memories into awareness, as I had just witnessed.

Anyway, recovering this memory is not where it ended. The therapist doing the demonstration started having the woman tap using phrases related to the childhood experience that focused on her shock, terror, sense of betrayal, and resentment. Within 15 minutes, she was able to recall the incident with no subjective sense of

distress (SUD at 0). They then returned to elevators and quickly had that down to 0 as well. I looked on with my skepticism, fighting what my eyes and ears were registering. One of the group members suggested that it would be easy to test this (psychologists like to test things), and the woman agreed to step into a coat closet and shut the door.

The therapist was careful to make it clear to the woman that she was to open the door at any point she felt even slightly uncomfortable. The door closed. We waited. And waited. And waited. After about three long minutes—imagine a dozen psychologists quietly peering at a closet door—the therapist knocked and asked if she was okay. She opened the door and triumphantly announced that for the first time she could remember, she was comfortable in a small, enclosed space. Meanwhile I was thinking, “Okay, I’m onto them now! This is a social psychology experiment. We are about to be informed that we have been subjects in a study of how gullible therapists can be!” But that announcement never came, and my career was about to shift forever.

Even after that demonstration, however, I was still doubtful that it would work for me. Because procedures like tapping on your body while repeating short phrases look so strange, and it seems so counter-intuitive that they would have a therapeutic effect, I’m not sure that anyone *really*

believes tapping is going to do much before they experience it. However, the demonstration was convincing enough that I enrolled in the psychologist Fred Gallo’s four-weekend training program for mental health professionals wanting to learn the approach. The training involved, in part, applying the method to our own issues. I found and have continued to find over the past two decades that whatever the emotional challenge I would focus on—whether my own or a client’s—its intensity would be reduced after a bit of tapping, and this would open a path to rapid progress on the challenges being addressed.

By 2023, the number of published clinical trials demonstrating the effectiveness of the method had gone from zero to some 250, including 90 in non-English-speaking journals. As a tech geek, I love being able to demonstrate to conference audiences how a person’s brain wave patterns become disturbed when the person focuses on stressful thoughts. Sometimes I work with EEG specialists Gary Groesbeck and Donna Bach. They are able to describe how, as the session progresses, the changes on the screen correspond with reduced distress, improved left-right brain hemisphere synchronization, and an overall optimization of brain wave ratios (see Figure I.1).



Figure I.1. A demonstration subject (left) wearing EEG sensors as David (right) conducts a tapping session with real-time EEG changes projected for a conference audience.

While I'm now devoting most of my professional time to teaching, research, and helping run Donna's and my organization, I still work with a limited number of clients. I recently finished treating a woman who had just been diagnosed with cancer. She arranged for a series of energy psychology sessions with me, concurrent with scheduled radiation for malignant masses in her lymph nodes and at the base of her tongue, just above

her vocal cords. The diagnosis was a rude surprise as she had no history of smoking or other exposures that are known to contribute to this type of cancer.

Focusing at first on her fears and the physical discomfort caused by the radiation treatments, it soon emerged that she was blaming herself for having gotten cancer. On questioning, she didn't believe that this was a particularly rational belief, but she nonetheless felt it

strongly. I asked if she could remember other times that she felt unfairly blamed. A powerful incident from her childhood immediately came to her mind. At age 10 she was held responsible for something terrible, but she was unable to defend herself because it would implicate others in her family. She was the active target of this unfounded blame for years, and she felt she had to swallow the truth.

Once the tapping eliminated the emotional charge carried about these experiences, we explored a lifelong pattern of her not being able to tell her truths and linked them to these formative experiences. The therapy then examined possible connections between her suppressed verbal expression (“shoving my truths down my throat”; “keeping what I need to say under my tongue”) and the subsequent cancer in the area of her throat, tongue, and vocal cords.

After each round of tapping, I asked her to imagine what was happening in her throat area as a quick gauge of the effects of that round. Then she would do another round of tapping, focusing on the images she was seeing in her throat at that point. She continued this tapping and imagery as homework. At first she saw heavy black tar and cobwebs. I noticed during the sessions that her self-blame about having “given” herself cancer was transforming into self-compassion as she recognized the possible connections between her childhood situation and her current illness.

As the emotional charges on various aspects of the associated issues were lifted

during the next two therapy sessions, the imagery changed until she had a sense of spaciousness and light moving through the area. The tar and cobwebs were gone. This corresponded with improvements in her CT scans that far exceeded her oncologist’s expectations, particularly since she had discontinued radiation against his advice due to the grueling side effects of the first couple of radiation sessions, and she also refused a recommended course of chemotherapy. Rather than increasing in size, all the masses had shrunk, some up to 50 percent.

Three months later, she went in for another round of CT scans. When her oncologist told her she was completely cancer-free, she enthusiastically went to high-five him, but he uncomfortably said, “I didn’t do anything . . . I don’t know what happened!” But she felt she knew. She believed the tapping work was instrumental. Along with her enhanced ability to express difficult truths rather than “shoving them down my throat,” her biochemistry had shifted dramatically, as reflected in the cancer-free diagnosis. Her most recent CT scan as of this writing, two years later, still showed her to be cancer free.⁵ While you should never assume that tapping alone can cure a serious physical illness, tapping has often been a powerful adjunct to other treatments.

Now more than 20 years into using acupoint tapping, I am still amazed yet somehow no longer surprised by the results that can be produced. While I’ve always found it deeply satisfying to

provide psychotherapy services, tapping adds jet fuel to the process. It heightens the ability to reduce emotional intensity, heal childhood wounds, and change guiding models that keep people stuck in self-defeating life patterns. And it opens new vistas for creative choices and spiritual attunement.

Donna's Reflections

I've never defined myself as a psychotherapist, yet over the decades I've worked intimately with more than ten thousand people, in 90-minute sessions, on their personal problems and emotional challenges. While I am always happy to share my thoughts about their situation, what has been most helpful was working with their *energies*, which told me at least as much about their story as did their words.

I've always been able to see the body's energies. It was as normal for me and my mother, brother, and sister as seeing the color of the sky. The energies surrounding a person—known in many traditions as the “aura”—may have many colors and shades. By talking about what she saw, Mama kept this ability alive in us, which I believe is a potential for all children.

These colors may be relatively stable or quickly shifting, and I see such colors not only in the energies surrounding a person but also in the energies that flow *within* each of us. Energies moving through your liver look different from the energies moving through your kidneys. I can also see a conflict when a

person's energies don't match what their words are saying or when the energies are revealing information that isn't even known to the person. And I can work with those energies using various methods to help resolve inner turmoil that may be compromising the person's health and playing havoc with their emotional life.

If I, for instance, hold points on the forehead (called “neurovasculars”) of someone who is in distress, blood will return to their brain in a way that interrupts the fight-or-flight response and helps them think more clearly. Even when a physical threat isn't occurring, many people live almost constantly within at least a low level of fight or flight. I can hold these points until the person's energy systems are no longer in distress. The physical intervention changes the emotional response.

Each emotion interacts with a different energy pathway, known as a meridian; ongoing work might shift to another meridian, to the aura, or to the chakras. The chakras are energy pools that hold information about people's past as well as themes that shape their perceptions and choices. Each chakra tells a story. Clearing blockages in these pools and flows of energy and bringing them into better harmony helps the person on a physical level, but it can also bring greater clarity and balance to their thoughts and emotions. This often leads to new insights and shifts in their habits and behaviors in addition to improving their mood and promoting their physical healing.