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The Fear & Anxiety Solution

A Breakthrough Process
for Healing and Empowerment
with Your Subconscious Mind



sounds true
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The names and details of clients' identities have been changed to protect their privacy.

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Introduction

WHILE I WAS finishing this book, both my parents passed away—my mother less than four months after my father. One night, a few days after my mom’s funeral, I woke up drenched in a cold sweat, gasping for air, and completely overwhelmed by a flood of emotions. My mind was spinning, and it took me a while to comprehend that I was having a panic attack. Although the loss of my parents had certainly taken an emotional toll on me, I hadn’t expected to tumble into a state of uncontrollable anxiety. As I gradually slowed my breathing, I noticed from deep within a small but undeniable voice asking, “What am I going to do? Who will take care of me? Who will make sure I’m safe?”

I knew these fearful thoughts didn’t come from my conscious adult mind. Logically, there was no reason for me to be worried. I’d been independent of my parents’ support for the past twenty years. But I also knew that logic and reasoning weren’t nearly enough to address this panic attack, because the source of this fearful voice came from a deeper place: my subconscious mind. So I applied some of the principles and methods of this book to consciously work with my subconscious mind, and within a matter of minutes, I felt much calmer and more at ease. Although I miss my parents and still grieve the loss, the panic I felt that night never returned.

THE POWER OF THE MIND

You may wonder what this conscious-subconscious approach to working through fear and anxiety is all about and why or how I developed it. Well, it

actually *did* start with my parents. Both were family doctors in the small town of Lauterbach, located in the middle of the beautiful Black Forest in Germany. I always admired my parents' dedication to their patients, many of whom they'd known since birth. They took the time to listen to their patients and then carefully considered their entire story—including their living situations, mental and emotional states, and histories—when evaluating the diagnosis and treatment plans. My parents taught me to view every person as a whole human being and not just as his or her symptoms or illness.

Of all my parents' routine treatments, one fascinated me the most. Whenever children came to their practice with multiple warts on their hands or feet, my mother or father would pull out a massive bottle that contained some mysterious, colorful fluid. With great care, they'd fill a small vial with that potion and give it to the children, telling them to use a little brush to apply this medicine to their warts three times a day. "If you do this every day," they said, "at exactly the same time, your warts will disappear in a few weeks." The success rate of this treatment was astonishing.

However, when it was my turn to have my warts treated, my father didn't pull out the magic bottle. Instead he revealed to me that the liquid was only water with food coloring. "All you need is to believe that the warts will disappear, and they will," he explained. And so they did. The fact that we can make warts, which are caused by a virus, quickly disappear by simply believing they will, was for me the first compelling and influential demonstration of the power of the mind.

Yet it was a completely different demonstration of the power of our minds that motivated me years later to develop the breakthrough process for fear and anxiety described in this book. During a practicum in the local hospital, which was a part of my first year in medical school, I met an elderly farmer who'd been admitted with a broken leg. Despite a lifetime of hard physical labor, he had the constitution and vigor of a much younger man and was proud that this was the first time he had seen a hospital from the inside. One afternoon he confided to me that he was extremely worried about the upcoming surgery to set his leg. "Somehow I just know that if the doctors operate on me, I will die," he said. I reassured him that this was a simple routine procedure, that there was nothing to worry about, and that everything would go as planned, without any complications. And it did.

The next morning the farmer was found dead in his hospital bed. Since there was no autopsy done, it remains unclear what caused his death. I often

wondered whether his anxiety played a part in his unexpected death. Could his system have shut down because the physical stress of the operation and the emotional stress of his fears were too much for him to bear?

THE WISDOM OF THE CELLS

After I became a physician, I worked in a huge cardiology unit at the University of Munich, Germany. Most of the patients I dealt with were suffering from strokes or heart attacks. Although an increasing number of studies have demonstrated how stress and anxiety could promote cardiovascular diseases, the emotional challenges of our patients were neither investigated nor addressed in the treatment plans. The focus was on treating the physical symptoms and controlling the common risk factors, such as high blood pressure, nicotine consumption, excessive weight, and elevated cholesterol levels—all of which can result from chronic stress. I often wanted to sit down with my patients and talk about their lives and how their illnesses were impacting them both mentally and emotionally. However, as is common in big hospitals, we could spend only ten to fifteen minutes per day with each patient—obviously not enough time to really get to know the people who faithfully put their lives in our hands.

After several years, the stress of my high-powered job and my growing dissatisfaction with the rather “mechanical” healing approach of allopathic medicine started to drain me. I decided to take a break and accepted a scholarship for a postdoctoral research position at the University of Washington in Seattle, which, after four years, gave me a PhD in molecular biology. My research focused on *apoptosis*, or programmed cell death, which describes the phenomenon in which cells sacrifice themselves for the greater good of the whole organism. This is not a rare event. Every day, about 50 billion cells in our body “decide” to terminate their existence so that the balance of the system remains stable.^{1, 2}

Being immersed in the world of basic research significantly changed my perspective on human potential. As a physician, I was trained to view the body as rather fragile and prone to failure. Science, however, illuminated a simple fact that I hadn’t fully realized until then: each and every cell of our bodies has an intelligence and sheer unlimited potential to grow, adapt, and heal in ways that are still far too complex for us to fully comprehend. The ability of our body to maintain trillions of cells in a delicate equilibrium of growth, healing, and death is truly ingenious and suggests that there is a regulating consciousness that connects and directs all of our cells. For me, the next logical questions were

what is this regulating consciousness, and how can we access and work with it to utilize our innate healing potential as effectively as possible?

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON HEALTH AND HEALING

By then, I knew I wouldn't find the answers to these questions in test tubes or the red-eyed Fischer rats that had been my research patients. At the same time, two occurrences significantly influenced my life.

First, I stumbled into a yoga and meditation class, which focused on the subconscious mind. Soon I noticed how the meditations and exercises relaxed and recharged my mind and my body more quickly than anything I had done before. As I deepened my yoga practice, I realized that during the classes I was able to somehow avert oncoming colds or hay-fever outbreaks by simply focusing my mind on the meaning of yoga—the union of mind, body, and spirit.

Second, I discovered Dr. Paul Tournier's book *Zu Hoeren Koennen* (*A Listening Ear*) on my bookshelf, where it had been collecting dust since it had been given to me by a close friend fifteen years earlier. As early as the 1940s, Tournier, a Swiss physician, claimed that allopathic medicine failed to consider the wholeness of the human being, which, he said, consists of body, mind, and spirit. Much ahead of his time, Tournier combined medicine and counseling in his practice and frequently invited his patients to his home to sit with him by the fireplace. In this book, he described how his patients, when given the time and space to share the thoughts, feelings, and stories behind their physical challenges, started to relax, open up, and enter into a healing state. Tournier found that these conversations often seemed to accomplish more than the medicine he had prescribed to them.

Having had the privilege of witnessing many similar healing openings in my own practice over the years, I believe that when people have the opportunity to realize and speak their truths, their minds, bodies, and spirits start to realign, enabling them to access their true healing potential.

The longer I studied the mind-body-spirit connection, the more I realized my traditional perspective on health and healing was undergoing a serious transformation. Healing isn't supposed to be a battle between good and evil or health and disease, where we doctors sweep in like knights in shining armor equipped with powerful and often deadly weapons, determined to "win" at any cost. And the patient isn't meant to be the battlefield, staying passive and "patient," still until the war is over.

I certainly appreciate how medicine has benefitted and improved our lives in so many ways. And I have gratefully taken my share of pain medication or antibiotics and will continue to do so when necessary. However, the current paradigm of allopathic medicine doesn't encourage us to trust or utilize our own innate wisdom and healing potential. Instead it fosters a sense of dependency, disempowerment, and fear of illness. In new mind-body-spirit healing perspectives, illness is not the enemy of health, but an integral component of a powerful organic system, which has evolved throughout hundreds of thousands of years. The primary purpose of illness is to alert us that we are, on some level, distressed and out of balance. To heal and regain our natural state of wholeness—the alignment of mind, body, and spirit—we need to identify and address the deeper root causes of this stress and imbalance. Even more important, we must learn how to take advantage of our innate healing powers.

HEALING EMOTIONS

What is the connecting force—the nexus where mind, body, and spirit meet? And how can we consciously access and leverage this force to promote health and accelerate the healing process?

The key is our subconscious mind—and in particular our emotions, which have the potential to reach every cell of our bodies. How? Emotions prompt the release of neurotransmitters, small peptides that flow through our bodies until they land and dock on the surface of a cell. Like keys opening locks, they can activate certain genes, trigger protein production, stimulate the release of endocrines and hormones, and much more. Studies have shown that positive emotions can boost the immune system, decrease the symptoms of diabetes, and improve heart conditions.^{3, 4} On the other hand, negative emotions, such as stress, anxiety, and depression, have the opposite effects and can cause serious health problems.^{5, 6}

So to promote health and healing, we need to work with our subconscious minds and stay in charge of our emotions, right? Well, here lies the issue. How many of us have felt overwhelmed by our emotions, especially by fear and anxiety, which can make us feel anything else but in charge? How many of us would rather avoid our emotions than become all worked up by them? And truthfully, how many of us trust our subconscious mind or know how to better understand it?

On the one hand, our subconscious minds are the keys to accessing our innate healing potential. On the other hand, that same subconscious creates emotions,

such as fear and anxiety, that damage our health and well-being. Is there a disconnect within the subconscious? No, but there is a disconnect between our conscious and subconscious minds. We usually interpret emotions, especially those such as fear and anxiety that we deem “negative,” as flaws and weaknesses that need to be overcome, managed, or suppressed rather than understanding them to be the subconscious mind’s means of communicating with us. Consequently “negative” emotions don’t get adequately addressed; instead, they accumulate in our subconscious and eventually cause greater emotional and physical challenges. In other words, the real problem is that we don’t know how to listen or relate to our subconscious, let alone consciously guide and work with it.

Realizing the powerful healing opportunities a conscious-subconscious collaboration could provide, I extensively studied mind-activating modalities such as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), Time Line Therapy®, and clinical hypnotherapy. In my practice, I developed a “breakthrough and empowerment program” that blends these methods with my knowledge of medicine and science to help people learn to understand, overcome, and utilize the most challenging of all emotions—fear and anxiety.

This book, which is based on my program, approaches fear and anxiety not as problems or disorders, but as symptoms of and information from your subconscious mind when you’re out of balance and alignment with yourself. As you embark on this journey of healing, empowerment, and self-awareness, the processes and tools of each chapter will show you how to bridge the gap between your conscious and your subconscious mind. They allow you to pinpoint and understand the root causes and deeper meanings of your fear and anxiety, provide you with the leverage needed to release emotional blocks from the past, and help you turn up your inner light, so that you can shine more of who you truly are out into the world.

Even more important than the processes and tools you will learn to use is what you discover about yourself and your untapped potential. Harnessing this potential is not about suppressing strong forces such as fear and anxiety, but transforming them into powerful allies, messengers, and healing catalysts that lead to greater confidence, self-worth, and wholeness. The true healer is within you.

CHAPTER I

An Overview of Fear and Anxiety

I'M SITTING AT the desk, and my heart is pounding. My chest is tight, and I have a hard time breathing. My mind races so fast that my thoughts appear as a blur. I know if I don't calm down now, I'll look terrible at our weekly work meeting. What if I freeze again in front of my peers? Why do I feel so stressed about that? Why do I care so much what others think of me? Nobody else seems to have this problem. What's wrong with me?" Finally Steve, my client, takes a breath and says, "I think I have an anxiety problem. How can I get rid of it and be my normal self again?"

Anxiety is the epidemic of the twenty-first century. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, about 20 percent of American adults eighteen years and older are diagnosed with anxiety disorder, which translates to more than fifty million adults.¹

In this book, I use the terms *fear* and *anxiety* interchangeably and often simultaneously, even though these terms have slightly different meanings. Fear is commonly associated with specific situations and concrete known (or, often, imagined) threats, whereas anxiety is a vague sense that something dangerous might occur in the future. In my experience, people are often more comfortable with calling themselves anxious rather than fearful and vice versa, largely due to the personal associations they have with one word or the other. Because of the similarities in the ways fear and anxiety are created, the responses they produce, and the principles they follow, it seems appropriate to address them together.

WHAT DO FEAR AND ANXIETY FEEL LIKE?

Fear and anxiety are primarily perceived as unpleasant internal sensations that signal potential danger: your heart beats faster, your breath shortens, your muscles tighten, your hands sweat, the hairs on your body may stand up, and you might start shaking from head to toe. Reactions can range from apprehension to a full-blown panic attack. Fear and anxiety can appear very abruptly and are often overwhelming.

For example, you may be feeling perfectly peaceful on your way to work, when suddenly you wonder whether you've forgotten to turn off the iron at home. The fear hits when you start thinking of all the awful consequences this situation might create. Or, one week before a big presentation at work, the vague undercurrent of anxiety you've been feeling noticeably increases. Or, you wake in the morning and anxiety immediately appears, seemingly out of nowhere, ready to take control of your day. It's as if these emotions happen *to* you, leaving you feeling powerless and out of control.

Commonly, it is not the direct, immediate threat most people worry about, but instead it is the possibility that something awful might happen in the future. You may ask yourself, "What if the iron sets my home on fire and I lose all of my possessions?" What if you draw a blank and forget your lines during your speech? Or, in regard to the free-floating anxiety that appears seemingly out of the blue, what if you fall prey to something that you aren't even able to foresee right now?

When you stop and think about it, you may be able to rationally address the reasons for your anxiety. If you've left the iron on, it's highly unlikely that it will set anything on fire—and you can always call your neighbors to check that your house isn't ablaze. If you're afraid of forgetting your lines while delivering your presentation, you know you can consult your notes as you're speaking. In the case of the unknown fear, you can tell yourself that, logically, there's nothing you can do if you don't know what the fear is about. However, for most people this analytical approach provides only brief relief; soon the next wave of anxiety "attacks," which shows that anxiety isn't a rational problem.

WHEN DO FEAR AND ANXIETY BECOME A PROBLEM?

The point where fear and anxiety start to interfere with our abilities to function in our lives certainly varies from person to person; however, there are clear indications when these emotions are becoming serious challenges and need to be addressed. Some of these are:

- Frequently feeling overwhelmed and worried
- Obsessive thinking, overanalyzing, and ruminating about the worst-case scenario
- Overplanning and trying to control others and/or outside circumstances
- Growing difficulties with work and relationships due to insecurity, doubt, and self-sabotaging behavior
- Feeling paralyzed and stuck because of an inability to make decisions or move forward
- Seeking distraction and instant gratification in addictive behaviors such as gambling, eating, sex, or work
- Obsessive-compulsive behavior
- Self-medication with alcohol, nicotine, or other drugs
- Physical symptoms such as insomnia, high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, chronic pain, and weight fluctuation

What can you do? You've all seen the commercials. The setting: a lively party with many happy, good-looking people. The problem: a young man standing alone—his face tense, his expression worried—and isolated from all the others, who are having such a good time. A narrator's comforting voice says that you've probably felt that way before, too. And you think, "Of course I have—whenever I'm about to meet new people, or when I need to talk to my in-laws, or when I try to make a good impression at my boss's party." The soothing voice then says that a newly developed antianxiety medication can take care of your fear, depression, and isolation. The change is clearly demonstrated by the young man, who is now engaging in conversations, laughing, and seems very comfortable with himself. If a little pill can so easily solve your anxiety problem, doesn't it make sense to take it?

Designed to relieve the symptoms of fear and anxiety, antianxiety medications are some of the most prescribed drugs in the United States.² Every year people spend billions of dollars to escape these "unproductive and unacceptable" feelings with the help of pharmaceutical products. These drugs are so widely used that residues have even been detected in our drinking water.³

On our path through life, fear and anxiety can appear as a wall, and all our efforts to overcome these emotions can feel as though we're trying to tear down that wall with a toothpick. Antianxiety drugs can then feel like the sledgehammer that is able to break down the wall. But are we treating the cause or the symptoms? In other words, is anxiety a physiological/biochemical problem that

needs to be resolved medically, or does it have deeper root causes and meanings that need to be addressed and understood in order for us to heal and grow?

THE PURPOSE OF EMOTIONS

You may have experienced your emotions, in particular fear and anxiety, as random, overwhelming, even paralyzing and utterly uncontrollable. Maybe you've felt stuck, discouraged, or frustrated with yourself, because, unlike you, all the people around you seem to have it together. Wouldn't your life be much better if you could run it by logic and reason? And wouldn't it be best if you could just turn your emotions off?

Generally speaking, our modern society has little room and patience for feelings. Reason and logic are far more accepted and valued than sensitivity and emotions. However, we need emotions for guidance and to bring meaning to our lives. They provide us with important information about our likes and dislikes, our strengths and weaknesses, and the value of our actions and choices. Every day, emotions have a significantly larger impact than facts and reasoning on the choices we make and how we experience our world. Isn't it true that the moments we remember and cherish the most are those we associate with the strongest feelings?

Filmmaker Rick Ray noticed a paradox while traveling through India and other parts of the world to produce his documentary *10 Questions for the Dalai Lama*. The poorest people were frequently happier than those who seemed to be very prosperous. Ray encountered more smiles from those living in the slums than from the people who were privileged with a rather lavish lifestyle. Logically, it would seem that those suffering from poverty face the immediate danger of being without food and shelter; therefore, they have more reason to be anxious and fearful. But in reality, having very little can also mean that someone has very little to lose and more appreciation for the small joys in life.

Conversely, people who have spent most of their time and energy accumulating wealth or reaching certain external goals might identify too much with these aspects of their lives. As a result, their attachment to these possessions and achievements increases—as does the fear of losing them, which would also mean losing themselves. I am not suggesting that disposing of your goods and practicing an ascetic lifestyle will resolve your fear and anxiety and bring everlasting happiness. These observations simply underline that emotions, not facts or outer circumstances, determine our life experience.

The natural reaction to so-called negative emotions such as fear and anxiety is to try to get rid of them quickly because they feel uncomfortable and disempowering. But true healing is not about fixing or getting rid of a problem. Healing is about remembering and reinstating our wholeness. In this sense, negative emotions provide us with the opportunity to find and regain our wholeness. When we discover and understand their deeper meaning, they become powerful catalysts that lead us to our greater, self-empowered, authentic selves. After all, if fear and anxiety didn't have an important function, wouldn't evolution have eliminated them by now?

HOW DO YOU GET STUCK IN THE FIRST PLACE?

As you probably know firsthand, fear and anxiety can easily make you feel trapped and disempowered. However, it is not really the emotions that keep us stuck, but the ways we respond to them. Usually we don't know what to do, we resist change, or we identify with the problem. Let's look at these three issues further.

We don't know what to do. When we feel hungry, we know it's time to eat. When we feel thirsty, we know it's time to drink. When we feel tired, we know it's time to rest. We understand the meaning of these sensations, and we know how to address them so they disappear. But what do we do when we feel anxious? We look for potential danger or go into the "what if" mind-set, preparing to fight, flee, or hide. We switch to fight-flight-or-freeze mode, because we often interpret anxiety as a sign that there is either something threatening outside of us or something wrong with us internally. By interpreting anxiety this way, we give greater validation to the feeling and freak ourselves out, which further fuels the emotion rather than helping us to understand its real meaning and address it appropriately.

We resist change. One of the most common fears is the fear of change, which makes *changing* fear and anxiety appear even more challenging. Change usually entails leaving our comfort zone, which is why we perceive it as a somewhat uncomfortable risk. Comfort zones are created by our mind so that we can experience and engage with different aspects of our lives from a place of safety, familiarity, and control. The internal boundaries of a comfort zone are established by mental, emotional, and behavioral patterns and can be defined by the radius of our personal space, the emotional distance we keep, or by the degree to which we interact with our environment.

Our comfort zones differ greatly. Each one depends on how we feel about ourselves within the context of each aspect of our lives. For example, our