

Introduction

This book presents practical techniques to overcome the negatives that rob your inner peace. The wellness system offers powerful solutions whether you suffer mild, moderate, chronic or severe emotional problems, or you simply want to enjoy life at a higher level. It will teach you how to grow beyond old thinking and behaviors, even if those emotional habits are well-established. No matter how you feel, your feelings and difficulties are not unique.

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I have lived the techniques in this book for more than a decade. They have lifted me from a life of crises to a life of calm; from inner chaos to confidence, courage and composure. The techniques have taken me from illness to high-level wellness; from an inner-being racked with fear and frustration to a person with poise and power. They have liberated me from a life of stress and pain, to a peaceful existence.

Part One – Introduction to Mental Fitness

Chapter 1 – Who Needs Lessons in Mental Fitness?

It isn't only the traumas of major life events such as accidents, divorce or death that cause an aftermath of stress. Everyday stress builds up and causes the same damage as high-intensity incidents.

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We need to be aware that optimum health is the combination of good mental and physical health.

Chapter 2 – Where There Is Hope There Can Be Healing

You do not have to "learn to live with" what you are going through. During my illness, I had no expectation of a "normal" life. There was a time when I viewed death as a comfortable alternative to my suffering.

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The short but powerful message, "No hopeless cases," supplied my first spark of hope. The simple statement was the catalyst that fueled my will to live and grow. It was there when I needed it most.

Chapter 3 – Why Me?

This book is not about the "why." It will not help you delve into your past or understand the subconscious reasons behind your difficulty. It will teach you "HOW" to deal with life's issues, the everyday stresses that build on each other and sometimes immobilize you.

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Unfortunately, many of us become caught up in the "why." Being obsessed with the "why" isn't healthy. Constant focus on the "why" prolongs the wellness process. Ask yourself if you are gaining ground by exploring the past and living in regret. Some of us will never know the real "why." Accept it and move forward.

Chapter 4 – Blame Versus Responsibility

The true meaning of responsibility means taking care of yourself *now, in the present - today!* Continuing to condemn yourself for a past act, a past decision, keeps you trapped in the past. In order to create a new life, you must stop clinging to the past.

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If you are rooted in self-blame because of a past decision, you can choose to stay inside those barriers, or choose to use the same energy and same strong conviction to move forward. You can re-channel the responsibility for what *did* happen, to what *can* happen.

Part Two – Facts for Mental Fitness

Chapter 5 – Common Threads

Being human means having feelings, sensations, thoughts and impulses. This book was written with two audiences in mind: those of you who have suffered from a diagnosed emotional, nervous or mental problem, and the millions of you who have no label, but live with some degree of nervousness or in some degree of personal pain.

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I believe whatever the outward manifestations, the root of ALL emotional problems is lack of self-esteem. Some call it self-worth, others call it self-confidence. Many factors contribute to the feeling (or lack of it). We compare ourselves to society's standards or to our own. The bottom line is that, in our own minds, we don't measure up. We feel deficient and different.

Chapter 6 – Myths Surrounding Self-Help

Self-help information is how-to information ...life skills you take for granted now, talking, dressing, writing, riding a bike, driving a car, were learned the same way. Each skill required instruction from people or books, and practical application on your part. Sometimes you were alone when you received instructions and information, sometimes you were in a group.

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Learning is not just for children. If you truly want to grow beyond who you are today, in any area of your life, you must be able to say, "I am *willing* to learn."

Chapter 7 – Trusting and Accepting the System

...[this] system contains common sense philosophies. Anyone can learn to incorporate the approach into daily life.

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You can learn authentic comfort and be proud of yourself when you accomplish your goals by yourself. Unfortunately you can't just want results, you must work for them. Make your actions match your words. Change, "I want to get well," to "I WILL get well." Modify one word and add conviction to your desire.

Chapter 8 – A Framework For Wellness

These principles work in all areas, in any kind of relationship. They are people principles, life principles.

The method is

- A training and guidance system that teaches you how to identify and transform confused, faulty thinking, to sound thinking; alter harmful attitudes; change unhealthy actions into beneficial behavior.
- A blueprint of purposeful, powerful, healthy, positive, secure thinking for life training.
- A complete strategy of non-judgmental, self-evaluation tools for better living.

Chapter 9 – Thoughts - The Power Of Life

Thoughts are the basic elements which control human beings. It is not someone else's thoughts that control you. They may influence you, but they cannot control you. Your thoughts are your own, as individual and as unique as you are.

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Negative thoughts make us feel depressed, angry, bitter, jealous, temperamental. They make us feel hurt, abandoned, and self-conscious. Negative thoughts turn concern to worry, fear to panic, disgust to anger, anger to resentment, and resentment to hate.

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The message is plain and clear: If our thoughts can work against us, they can also work for us. If our thinking contributes to a dejected feeling, it can also contribute to an uplifted feeling. Healthy thoughts curb negativity and produce inner calm for body, mind and soul.

Part Three – Overcoming Panic

Chapter 10 – Dark Night – A Life Of Panic

My panic attacks were frequent, but unpredictable. They hit out of nowhere - at church, the grocery store, the mall, the library, while visiting a friend. I was sure the doctors had missed something. Maybe I had a brain tumor or a rare form of heart disease. Surely this torture had some kind of physical cause. I bounced back and forth thinking it was a physical problem, but somewhere deep inside myself I knew there was something else wrong. But, I had no idea what to do about it. No one could put a label on what was happening to me.

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...free floating anxiety had turned to high level anxiety. It was an ugly, constant companion. It lived inside me every minute of every waking hour. I was afraid to be alone and, at the same time, I was afraid to be with people. I went through spells of sleeplessness. Sometimes I slept all day. No matter how much I rested, I felt fatigued. There were times when I thought my head would explode.

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During the course of my illness I developed other fears and symptoms. When a friend and I walked along a downtown street, I often felt the sensation the sidewalk was coming up, and the buildings were going to topple down on me. For more than a year, I felt dizzy and nauseated every day. I went through a phase when I cried every day. Another phase when I cleaned. Everything in sight was dusted, cleaned, scrubbed and polished. Over and over, and over again.

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At the height of my inner chaos, the physical symptoms were so fierce I was afraid to walk out of my house to the mailbox, a distance of 35 feet. I thought, "I'll die. I'll just die."

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There were times I was afraid of myself. I worried that I might totally lose control and harm myself without even knowing it. I felt worthless because I couldn't work, scared and humiliated because I was sick. Depression set in and I lost interest in life. I was puzzled. I was angry, at myself, at God, at anyone who had touched my life and may have contributed to my suffering. Confusion, pain and terror dominated my days and nights. I wondered, "How close am I to stepping off the edge?" I wondered if and when I would lose my sanity. Or if I had already "lost it."

Chapter 11 – Four Little Words Stop A Crisis

Every human being experiences body sensations. A person with no nervous sensitivity experiences a sensation and does not give it another thought. A headache is recognized as simply a pain in the head. Anxious people on the other hand, look at the worst possible scenario. A headache can trigger the fear of a brain tumor. One thought of danger (brain tumor), locks the fear in place. Fear and the belief in danger are two factors which pool nervous, mental and emotional conditions together.

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By repeating the phrase, "distressing but not dangerous," you terminate the cycle of paralyzing fear and take the emergency out of a situation. "Distressing but not dangerous," stops a "fight or flight" response dead in its tracks.

Chapter 12 – Shaking The Fear Factor

It took many real-life endeavors before dread and discouragement were replaced by determination. Facing reality and setting reasonable goals, knowing my limitations, was part of the process. In the beginning, I knew it would be useless to attempt a 20-mile trip or to try to drive on a freeway. I would have surrendered to the fear, because I was too scared. I set my sights on small victories, stretching my boundaries one mile at a time. Even though my ambitions were high, I learned to pace myself and not let up.

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When you think you're faced with more than you think you can handle, divide it. Fear and anxiety don't have to rule your life. You can reduce your stress level by reducing the big picture into separate frames. Rather than allow yourself to become overwhelmed and discouraged, you can accomplish "one act at a time."

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Nervous fear is the fear of discomfort. It wasn't any specific activity or particular place that caused my fear. It wasn't being behind the wheel in a moving automobile. It wasn't the checkout line at the grocery store. It was the traumatic sensations that seized my body, that frightened me.

Part Four – Fitness Tools

Chapter 13 – Behind The Scenes

...we are at different states of mental health throughout our lives. There are times when nerve resistance is high and we feel at peace. There are times when our nerve resistance is low and we feel unrest. If you want to test whether your nerve resistance is high or low, look at how you react to the stress of your everyday life. It is quite simple. If you *are* reacting, your nerve resistance is down. If your nerve resistance was high, you wouldn't have all those spontaneous reactions to the events outside of you. If your nerve resistance is very low, you may feel as if you are about to explode, "blow a gasket" or "come apart at the seams."

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Thoughts and impulses control feelings and sensations. And YOU, only you, have control and power over your thoughts and impulses.

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The process of changing behavior is two-fold. First, you must form new thoughts to take control of present thoughts. Second, you must command your muscles to take control of your impulses. There is more: you only have to re-direct the thoughts or the impulses. Managing either (thoughts or impulses) will refresh feelings and sensations back to a healthy, less stressful state.

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When you want to push yourself to do something and find yourself cringing, *command* your muscles to move. If you develop a lump in your throat when you want to speak, tell your face muscles to relax, then your speech muscles to speak. You will prove to yourself that the act of speaking is merely uncomfortable: distressing, not dangerous.

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You can put a halt to any behavior you detest. If you hate the fact that you yell at the kids when you're stressed, control the impulse to shriek at them. Control your speech muscles. At first you may find yourself clenching your back teeth to keep from speaking, but in time you will become more comfortable with checking your impulses.

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To stop an activity or action which is already in progress, command the muscles involved in the activity to stop. If you find yourself tailgating the car in front of you and becoming more tense because traffic is snarled, command the muscles of your right foot to let up on the pressure you're putting on the accelerator pedal. You can't make rush hour traffic move faster by upsetting yourself. Would you rather be calm? Of course you would! So work at being calm. When you're weaving in and out of traffic with a scowl on your face, the only thing you are accelerating is your tension.

Chapter 14 – Watch Your Words

One crucial ingredient of mental fitness is to stop thinking and speaking in extremes. Adjectives only add to agony. Change the expression "horrible headache" to simply a "headache." Adverbs also overstate and maximize. You can say you cry "all" the time or replace the word "all" and say, you cry "some" or "most" of the time. Why is it so important to drop the extremes? Because they make you believe it is impossible to get well.

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In the process of learning how to stop overstating how I felt, I became aware of what a negative slant I had on life in general. I was shocked at the pattern of negative thinking I had developed. In my mind, a half-full glass was half-empty, a partly sunny day was partly cloudy. My thoughts focused on what was missing or negative. Today when I have a 4:00 p.m. deadline and it is 2:00 p.m., I *still* have two hours left instead of *only* two hours left. I have found that you can't have peace and comfort if you rarely see the positive.

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Learning to drop extremes is the first step in realistic thinking. When you omit exaggerating words, you think in a rational manner rather than an emotional one. And, when you are less emotional, you are more calm and in control.

Chapter 15 – Stretch And Grow

Doing something objective cuts into runaway thoughts. The purpose: to shift from thinking subjectively about what is going on inside, (the feelings and sensations), to thinking objectively of something outside of you.

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Objectivity is not just a means of distraction. The technique will not work if you merely change your thinking to something pleasant - because there is emotion involved with recalling memories. Thinking about Christmas holidays, vacation or your favorite activity may provide a diversion, but thoughts will invariably drift from pleasant occasions to not-so-pleasant ones. Because we have been trained in opposites, you are bound to think about something or someone that "spoiled" an event for you. Then, negative thoughts roll into your thinking pattern.

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Using objectivity as a means of stopping panicky thoughts means thinking of a material object in terms you can verify or measure. For me, it was good to have the same object to go back to and "see" in my mind. I chose my car. It was a Ford, grey, with four doors, four black-wall tires, full hubcaps and eight windows (front, back, side and vent). I used to remember what model it was, details about the dashboard and interior, but those memories are long gone. The point is, my objective thoughts were indeed measurable and verifiable.

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It is average to feel uncomfortable when you are in unfamiliar territory. You are confronted with discomfort when doing virtually anything "new," in any life situation. When you accept the fact that it is okay to be uncomfortable, you are not startled and frightened by your thoughts and body sensations. Facing discomfort is a normal part of stretching out of the old and growing into the new. Once you learn to handle your discomfort, you can handle anything.

Chapter 16 – Knowledge Versus Skill

In a single class you may acquire knowledge, but skill and knowledge are not synonymous. Skill comes from taking knowledge and putting it to use. Having a skill means being proficient.

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You can play handyman and switch out the drain in your sink or fix a leaky faucet, but that does not make you a plumber. You can learn a computer word-processing application, but you will not remember how to access all the features unless you use the program on a regular basis. Knowledge teaches you what to do, but practice shows you how to do it. There is on-the-job (OTJ) practice required to turn knowledge into skill.

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There were times when I felt silly repeating, "distressing but not dangerous" to myself dozens of times per day. Nevertheless, it worked. It made me feel comfortable, secure and at peace. Full understanding and belief came only after many months of miniature successes. When you consciously work at thinking secure/safe thoughts, there is no room for the insecure/negative ones.

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The repetition was part of my comprehensive wellness program. I had a lot of core thinking to cancel out, and wasn't going to accomplish creating a new "me" overnight. I have yet to see a catalogue advertising replacement brain cells. We have to re-imprint our own and it takes time.

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You know the printout from a computer program will not change unless you replace the data in the file. It is the same with life. Your personal life will not change unless your thoughts change. You can't just wish things to change.

Chapter 17 – A Pause In Progress

After you have made some headway, there are going to be times when you step sideways. There will be times when your symptoms are stronger than they have been in a while, times when you think you are going to lose all the ground you have gained. Even though setbacks are average, they are frightening because they produce fear and doubt. A setback, or lull in progress, is the reason why so many people quit so many self-improvement projects and resume the search for the "right" path.

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During a setback it is typical to fall back into comparing yourself to others and feel as though you failed. It is a time when vision is clouded... During a setback, you may think that you are back to "square one." But, we never go back as far as we were. The very fact you have new knowledge, insight, and practice in dealing with a disorder, does not allow you to go back to the beginning in managing that disorder. Also, the return of the symptoms does not mean return of the illness.

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It was difficult to emerge from early setbacks because I became angry at myself and questioned "what" I was doing wrong. I became even more enraged because I had struggled so hard. ...it is typical to have an angry, "why me" attitude. It is common to think, "What did I do to deserve this," and "I'm angry because I feel this way." Everyone goes through it. It is tough not to adopt this

viewpoint when you cannot function at your former levels as easily as everyone else. As much as I suffered, I did not want to accept that I had any kind of mental disability.

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You can have the same kind of "why me" attitude lurking inside without a diagnosed disorder. It surfaces after you acknowledge that you have any problem which requires intervention and effort on your part. You can recognize the temper at your condition, by the mere fact that you question "why" you are more prone to anger, weight problems or any of the other outer manifestations of lowered self-esteem. The temper is evident when you ask "why" you have to work so hard to correct your personal difficulty.

Chapter 18 – Create A New Self-Image

Part of the human thinking pattern is to compare ourselves to others. When you are in a less than healthy mental state, you don't believe you measure up to anyone's standards. You need a specific tactic to make you start believing in yourself when your self-confidence and esteem are ground to dust. Affirmations such as, "I'm doing great!," are not going to work, because you are not doing great and you know it. Just because you feel down and distraught, doesn't mean you can lie to yourself and believe it.

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... give yourself credit for the energy you put forth, not any outside results. *Endorse for effort, not the outcome.* *Self-endorsement* is a mental "pat on the back" from you, to you. As much as we think we need appreciation and approval from those around us, it is absolutely necessary to fill most of the void ourselves.

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Endorsing for effort provides motivation when you think you are not making improvement. When I learned to endorse for effort, there were tremendous benefits. Self-endorsement changed the tide from helplessness, to self-respect. I no longer looked for other people to reassure me that I was a valid, worthy human being.

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Self-endorsement taught me to step back and be an observer, to redirect my thoughts from what I was unable to achieve, to what I was accomplishing. When you don't feel like hopping out of bed in the morning, but resist the impulse to stay under the covers, you can endorse for the effort of moving your muscles and proceeding with your day. When you go to a birthday celebration and don't enjoy any aspect of it, endorse for the effort of going to the event. When you drag yourself through a workday and you would rather be home, you can endorse for the effort. You can even endorse for effort when you are writing and your thoughts don't read clearly when you see them on paper. Self-endorsement provides encouragement no matter what the task.

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Self-endorsement is not a form of flattery, but gentle, loving praise and encouragement. It is a sincere compliment for you, from you, to enhance your self-respect.

Part Five – Eliminating Core Stressors

Chapter 19 – Post Panic

Depression, with or without high anxiety, is thought oriented. And I believe, infinitely more difficult to identify. The depression that accompanies agoraphobia is often ignored. Because the panic symptoms are so explicit and consuming, most people don't even think to look for symptoms of a secondary disorder.

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Once my severe panic was under control, I began to open my eyes to my life-long, neurotic thinking patterns. I recognized how much of my life was lived in fear and drifting in and out of

depression. For those of you who haven't stopped functioning because of a problem, this is where you may be - shifting up and down emotionally, having trouble securing a handle on what is wrong, and how to fix it.

Chapter 20 – Many Faces, Many Names

Basic emotions are not complex, but they are often disguised. During my wellness process, I worked on them separately, but simultaneously. In the process of reducing fear, I uncovered a lot of hidden anger.

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The body and mind reactions to anger and fear are the same. The management techniques to combat anger and fear are also the same.

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Fear is a very private, internal process. We are taught at a very young age to be tough and hide our fear. When you feel fearful, you don't feel strong, you feel weak. Feeling you are weak or incompetent feeds the vicious cycle of fear.

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Fear isn't only horror, panic and alarm. In more subtle forms it shows its face as worry, self-blame, feeling embarrassed or ashamed, wondering what other people think of you. In simple terms, fearful temper is being angry at yourself. Judging yourself wrong for something you said or thought, did or did not do. Or thinking you are not up to par with the rest of humanity.

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The opposite of judging yourself wrong is angry temper. Placing the blame on someone else for something they said, did, or did not do. The explosive variety of anger is easy to identify. We have all seen at least one example of someone vibrating with rage and taking it out on a waitperson, ticket agent, salesclerk or bank teller. There is the person who honks the horn and screams at the driver ahead because he hasn't decided to turn right when the traffic light is red. This irritated person believes the law reads right on red is "required," when in fact, it reads that a right turn is "allowed" on red. The person first in line at the intersection makes the judgement call.

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Anger too, has many faces and many names. You can feel annoyed, irritated, insulted or humiliated. A private affair with angry emotions is more difficult to distinguish. Those of us who were taught not to be angry, learned to say "our feelings were hurt."

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Fearful temper and angry temper, standing side by side or alone, are what cause our tension and stress. The tension, in turn, generates the symptoms - the unrest in our bodies and our minds. Temper causes tension and tension causes symptoms.

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The most common immediate responses to thinking you have made a mistake are blushing, a body reaction, and a feeling of embarrassment, a fearful thought response. The most common immediate responses to anger are an overall feeling of tenseness, clenched fists, or tight shoulder muscles. If you keep up the pattern of angry or fearful thoughts, more of your body becomes tense.

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Tension causes jittery hands and wobbly knees, upset stomachs, neck pain, optical migraines, and colitis, lack of concentration and racing thoughts - the mind chatter, the internal dialogue, the tape entitled, "What If," running wild in your mind. Yes, those racing thoughts are a symptom. They keep us re-living the past and dreading the future. Most of all, the racing thoughts keep us from living life to the fullest in the present.

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In my view, the absolute worst feeling a human being can have is to "feel out of control." Body sensations or obsessive thoughts, when you feel they have taken over, you are alarmed, anxious, fearful and frightened. That is one of the reasons fear of public speaking is at the top of the social phobia list. Standing in front of a group of people is the trigger for the fear. The real fear is of not being in control of those body sensations - the trembling hands and rubbery legs, the twitch in your neck and face muscles, the inability to smile a broad relaxed smile. Uncomfortable body sensations seem to take on a life of their own.

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Skeptical, pessimistic fear thoughts do not have to rule your life. You regulate your thoughts.

Chapter 21 – Camouflaged Temper

Comparing is temper because it is a judgement of right and wrong. When people with low self-esteem compare, they usually conclude that they are "not as good as." A fear which translates to: "I am wrong because I am lacking." There is subtle anger involved because other persons are perceived to be better looking, better educated, better off financially, more socially adept. It is a game where you go from thinking you are superior, to fearing you are not as good as the next person.

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There is no real need to dominate or be better than anyone else. If you can look at others, aspire to be like them, and work toward a goal, that is healthy. It is comparing plus reaching for an outcome. To compare for the sake of comparing, is an unhealthy habit...

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All the time management courses which have evolved are proof we all feel as if we are rushing through life without enough time. Moving and acting rapidly are caused by feeling anxious and impatient. These feelings, as any others, are provoked by thoughts. We rush because we think we don't have enough time to do all that needs to be done. But, both fear and anger are behind the rapid pace. You can blame yourself for taking on too much, a fear thought. Or you think someone else is responsible for the fact that you are facing more than you are capable of handling in a given time frame, an angry thought.

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When you find yourself rushing to take the children to gymnastics class and wonder why you agreed to add this task to your already busy schedule, there is a fear thought behind your fast pace. The judgement that you are wrong for taking on the responsibility. If you are upset because your mate never has time to help taxi the youngsters around, that is an angry thought, a judgement that he is wrong for his lack of involvement. If you are rushing to meet a deadline at work, you're either angry that the manager gave you a next-to-impossible deadline (an angry thought). Or you're afraid that you won't complete the assignment within the allotted time even though you agreed to it (a fear thought).

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We are impatient when we judge that someone isn't doing their job correctly. We have all stood in lines thinking the person at the front could take tickets or ring up a grocery order and count out change a little faster. Your body shows you are eager when you start to rock from foot to foot, cross and uncross your arms. Waiting in line is part of life. You cannot rush when you are forced to stand in one place. When I am delayed I try to remember it is my chance to relax, one of few in a hectic day. It is a secure thought which changes my attitude. I view the few moments as a gift, rather than an opportunity to become irritated. Inner peace - that is my goal. Change your attitude about having to wait and you will see it make a positive difference in your days.

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Rushing always creates tenseness. You will not feel calm, relaxed and peaceful in your mind and in your heart if your body is in hurry mode. If you trot instead of walk, slow down those leg muscles. I guarantee you will feel more calm on the inside.

Chapter22 – The Cycle

Whatever upsets you and causes stress can be classified as an irritation, frustration or disappointment. As humans, we are going to have responses to real life stresses and frustrations. That is a fact. We do not live in Heaven, and we are not angels.

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...separate stages that turn a response into a seemingly unending reaction. The original response, the first trigger, often comes from outside of us - the outer environment. First responses are perfectly normal. You cannot control their arrival because they plant themselves in a fraction of a second.

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What follows are more thoughts, the culprits that cause stress and tension. The first response plus the thoughts that follow make up the immediate-effect, a time when you are probably not thinking too clearly.

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Then comes stage three, a time when we can reflect on what is going on. After-effect is the stage that we can control and change. Recognizing your thinking in the after-effect stage is extremely important. If there were no after-effect stage, we would have no stress-management programs, no anger workshops...

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All stress and tension are caused by two factors and two factors only - Fear and Anger. That statement is a very important piece of information. It is the simple law of cause and effect. The cause is fear and anger; the effect is unrest - no matter what label you give it or how severe it is. The only way to change the effect is to eliminate the cause.

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Fear and anger are the number-one obstacles to emotional, physical and spiritual health. Ancient and popular theories espouse the belief. Healers and religious leaders across the world have been preaching it for centuries. If you want to live a truly healthy, peaceful, and successful life, freeing yourself from fear and anger is more than a practical aspect, it is fundamental.

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You can change your sour, cranky mood by slowing down your muscles, and taking the time to unveil your concealed temper. If it is fear you recognize, excuse yourself. If it is anger you recognize, excuse the other person(s).

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Resolve your unrest as soon as possible. When you choose to cultivate the feeling of calm, you will be calm.

Chapter 23 – Identifying The Cycle

You can overshadow all the enjoyment of any activity with fear thoughts, whether it is a party or a church service. It is difficult to live a happy, successful life when you feel insecure and threatened.

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We are afraid of the "discomfort" of our inner experiences. We fear what we feel inside when we are faced with a new situation and we don't know all the rules. The one and only reason we are

apprehensive and afraid to do anything in life, is because it might make us feel uncomfortable. It is not elaborate or complicated. We are afraid of feeling afraid.

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If you insist you have no fear, look closely at what you speak and what you think. Every time you think or say "I can't...", "I wish I could...", or "I could never do that," in effect you are saying, "I am afraid." You are setting limits on your growth and eroding your self-image, by voicing fear.

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Simply change the "I wish..." or, "I can't..." statements to "I can..." or, "Someday I will..." Drop the "never," and you immediately remove the danger, the insecurity that is holding you back. In a very small way you will begin to believe, that what was once unattainable, is at least possible. It is a process of tossing out one thought for another - changing insecure, fear thoughts, to secure, safe thoughts.

Chapter 24 – Breaking The Cycle

My first lesson in the process of eliminating temper (fear and anger) was to look at the irritations, frustrations and disappointments in my everyday life as trivialities instead of emergencies. Believe me, a leaf falling from tree was about the only thing I could view as trivial. Anything that happened, which even indirectly involved me, was significant and serious.

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Why the focus on ordinary everyday stuff? To put it very simply, there are more little irritating life lessons than there are big ones. The major events such as loss of a job, death of a loved one, divorce and serious physical illness do not occur on a daily basis.

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You cannot turn knowledge into skill when you work at a task every now and then. If you are going to become good at anything, whether it is word-processing or taping drywall, you have to do it more than once a year.

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One of the first steps in becoming a realist, is to change your attitude. The transformation can only take place when you begin to change your thoughts. The only sure way to reduce your reaction to any irritating event, to look at it as a triviality, is to view its' effects in relation to your sense of inner peace. I learned to view events as trivialities only after I started using the word "triviality" in my thinking vocabulary. I cemented the lesson with these words: "This is a triviality compared to my mental health." With that one phrase, the distinction is easy. As a realist, NOTHING outweighs the importance of my mental health. It comes first, foremost and always.

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Compare the significance of what is happening around you, to the importance of the peace you are striving to attain. Consider anything and everything that upsets you, in the perspective that your inner harmony is of prime importance. When you do, you will be on the path to becoming a calm, strong and centered realist.

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Many times I found I couldn't concentrate on the task at hand because I was caught up, obsessing about something that already had happened or something I was anticipating. Whether it involved the past or present, I did not view it in a positive way. If it was the past, I wished I could change it. If it was in the future, I wanted it to turn out perfectly. The truth is, the only way to create a new life is to cling to the present.

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When you think you are wrong, be gentle with yourself by excusing yourself. Repeat the phrase, "I am not wrong, I am average," a few times and feel its magical effects.

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I finally accepted being average. I figured out that being average is not "less than good," or "below par." Average is not at the top or bottom, but someplace in the middle. I am talented in some areas, maybe not in others. Some people have more formal education, some less; some are more articulate, some less. I have some shortcomings, some abilities, like millions of other souls. I am an average human being. I fit somewhere between the two extremes of inferior and superior. When I realized I was not better or worse than the majority of people who walk the earth, I stopped trying to be perfect. Today, I recognize who I am and appreciate my uniqueness. I am average, not perfect. And that is acceptable to me. It is pleasant and comfortable to be in a world without better and best, big and small, inferior and superior.

Chapter 25 – Release The Tension, Not the Reaction

Responses of anger and fear are closely related. The first or original response always contains a judgement - someone is wrong. If it is not me, it must be them. If it is not them, it must be me. Attitude is formed during after-effect. It is the thoughts, at this point, that fuel how you feel and where things are apt to be blown out of proportion. And there is only one way to change your attitude-change your thinking.

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There is great power and danger in your thoughts. Learn to listen to them. They can jeopardize your health or enhance it. When you think someone is wrong, replace the thought with, "he is not wrong he is average." When you think you are wrong, change the thought to, "I am not wrong, I am average." It is the only valid way to neutralize your temper, eradicate mind/body discomforts, and gain peace and harmony. The more you try to control your outer environment, the more "out of control" you will feel on the inside, in your inner environment.

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When you excuse someone else, you are NOT condoning their inappropriate actions. You are letting go of what is making you upset. Sometimes you do have to release someone else's unacceptable behavior, for your own mental well-being. The negative words and crass behavior of others provoke original responses of hurt and anger. But, it is your negative thinking, the anger and fear processed in an after-effect, which hurt you even more.

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No one enjoys being treated in a less than caring way, or being on the receiving end of an abusive verbal assault. It is normal and average to have a response, even a strong one. The after-effect which follows is full of: "How could he or she have..., I just don't understand..." These thoughts frequently keep an after-effect thrashing through your mind for hours or days. Often longer. When my angry thoughts whirl out of control, I say to myself, "he is not wrong, he is average." Invariably the next thoughts run along the lines of "But I expect..., But I deserve..., But I would never do that, But he *is* wrong."

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Every "but..." thought keeps a vicious cycle alive and manifests symptoms. And every "but..." has to be counteracted with another "he is not wrong, he is average." I finally put a big mental exclamation point after, "he is not wrong, he is average!" For me, it creates a solid definitive end. It is my stop sign to keep the whispers of angry thinking from returning.

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You can reject the truth of "no right or wrong," or debate it. Or, you can make use of it to reduce your stress and perhaps eventually accept the fact. You can dilute the words by saying: "She didn't know what she was doing" or " He really didn't mean it." Or think, "They are only acting as they know how." But, why bother. Attack your anger at the core, stop judging right and wrong. Don't you wish there were little alarm lights to alert you when you are judging someone. There are-the negative body and mind sensations you experience and label as stress.

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I also found it helpful to repeat this anger-neutralizing phrase several times in a row, not necessarily rapidly, but methodically. At times I picture the words in my mind as if they were on a TelePrompTer. When I repeat the excusing thought, it simply doesn't leave time or room for the angry thoughts. It does calm me down. Feeling calm and being in control of myself are my ultimate goals.

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When I find myself in a volatile, unstable or emotional situation, I tell myself: calm begets calm. If I work at remaining calm and in control, chances are I will stay that way. If I have the opportunity, I physically remove myself from the place of conflict, and take a cooling-off period. If I can't leave, I close my mind off for a few seconds and do something not quite so noticeable, glance out a window or in another direction. ...turn a cool and chilly shoulder toward the situation, I do a mental about-face. In my mind, I "see" myself turning around and ignoring what is going on.

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On occasion, when my goal is peace in my inner environment, I might see the bonus of peace in the outer environment. If I don't add anger and negative energy to a situation, what is happening around me may be less stormy. This isn't always the case. The added bonus isn't always a reality. To me, however, it is worth the effort. Because the process consistently nourishes my inner peace.

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There is a very simple formula for stopping a dispute, debate or disagreement, one that is on your lips or in your mind, along with all the turmoil it is causing you -stop trying to prove you are right. Is your churning stomach, the tightness in your chest and the pain in your neck worth the momentary pleasure of thinking you are right? Believe me, it is not. The nasty physical feelings and mental discomforts last much longer than the one "sweet moment" you enjoy as the thrill of victory. The ultimate technique for erasing anger is to take out the right and wrong, and look at the facts.

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In my world, if someone else needs to be right, it is okay with me. I can make a statement, by not making a statement. I can give up my "right" to be right, but I will not give up my "right" to be healthy.

Chapter 26 – Run-on Fear

Unchecked fear expands to worry-same book different title. Worry is another level of fear. It is a case of after-effect stuck in high gear, running wild. In truth, it is a preoccupation with a danger theme. We often express worry and concern (fear) to mask anger. Many of us were raised to believe that it is not polite to be angry, but it is okay to worry. This twisted logic causes us to deny being angry. Without awareness of the true meaning of our thoughts, there is not much chance of correcting the problem.

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When you catch yourself fearful or worrying, know the preoccupation is caused by your thoughts. You can change your thoughts by spotting the possibilities and probabilities. How likely is it that what you are dreading will come true? The ultimate tool to eliminate worry is a simple realistic fact: the only thing you really know, is that you don't know what is going to happen. Socrates, the Greek philosopher, said it this way: "I know, that I know not."

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So many people believe they can't stop worrying, especially if there is a major life event on their horizon. Perhaps the actual act of selling or buying a house is not in the realm of a triviality, but there are certainly hundreds of average irritations, frustrations and disappointments to work on during the process; many chances to seek out the fear and anger that are perpetuating an elevated stress level. The outstanding drawback of worry (fear) is that it hampers our ability to recognize we have

choices. Worry is useless because it does not change results. Remember, you are in charge of your mind games, and you decide who wins.

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It is the same with all life events which some people choose to label traumatic or high on the stress-scale. You can decide whether you stay inclined to react with temper (fear and anger), and let most events bother you in one way or another. Or you can carry on and view life's challenges as exercises to improve your mental fitness. You either see the events as chances to practice what you know, or wallow in misery. You *can* replace the insecure thought, "I won't make it through," to "*I can* make it through." You do not have to believe it, think it. The belief is the last to come.

Chapter 27 – The Primary Formula

The primary strategy of the Method is to identify and neutralize fear and anger by replacing insecure thoughts with secure thoughts, and commanding muscles. You can custom design your own list of "Things to Remember" by adding any of the other pertinent phrases from the glossary...

Part Six – Unlocking Limits

Chapter 28 – Beyond Basic Training

I have been grounded in reality training for many years and it is easier for me to accept the facts of living in this world.

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As far as human relationships, I know none are permanent. Individuals drift in and out of my life all the time. Some remain friends and acquaintances for years, some for only months. I only spend a few moments with some special people. What happens here on earth is not forever. When I no longer have close or frequent contact with someone I enjoy and appreciate, I am sad-a small and normal response. If it is a more permanent loss and someone I love, I am sad and grieve-the original response plus an after-effect.

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I work hard at not becoming overwhelmed and distraught, at not allowing the after-effect to *consume* me. What good would it do me? None. The only purpose it would serve is to make me frantic and sick, in body and mind. I cannot afford to stay in a vicious cycle of sadness and second guessing. I have come to recognize I will never fully understand "why" certain things happen.

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There are times when I have contact with people I do not particularly enjoy. As a realist I know it is acceptable for me not to like everyone I come in contact with, and some people I meet will dislike me.

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There are no mysteries to successful relationships. Neutralize fear and anger and all that remain are love and respect. And, you cannot lose your identity in a relationship when you attend to your own self-respect and inner peace.

My training has also helped me become realistic about the days of the year that society has taught us are special: Valentine's day, my birthday, Thanksgiving, Christmas holidays, etc. I used to have very high standards about how each one of those days "should" be celebrated. I became melodramatic if the outcome was not as I expected. Now I treat everyday of my life as special and unique.

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Accepting reality and seeing the positives in your life will bring you peace.

Chapter 29 – A Spiritual Perspective

In my own experience, the spiritual side of me could not start growing until my mental side was aligned and in balance.

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At a seminar Gary Zukav, author of *Seat of the Soul*, remarked that "Spiritual, psychological and emotional growth are ALL tied together." I know he is right. I would not be as far on my spiritual road to peace without the solid understanding of *how to* relinquish the habit of judging myself and others.

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Criticizing, condemning and complaining are barriers to love. You can only give love when you liberate yourself from anger and fear. Unconditional love means accepting people for who they are, allowing them to be their own average.

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Although I have a personal relationship with my God, the Spirit, the Universe, I know that trust in a supreme being does not exempt me from responsibility. My relationship with my Creator is a partnership-we are co-creators. Each and every one of us has choices, to hold on to the thoughts and actions that limit us, or to change, heal and grow.

Chapter 30 – Stigma – The Roadblock To Freedom And Health

Shame and guilt about mental health issues are less of a barrier today than in earlier times, but are still too prevalent around the world. I speak from experience when I say that lack of education on the subject causes feelings of failure and loss of self-esteem. Humiliation may cause you to overlook your depression, anxiety, fears and anger. Stigma makes you think that perhaps your problem will just "go away." The reality is, these feelings will not disappear. When the next bout occurs, it will be worse. It is not because you are weak-minded. It is because you don't know what to do to help yourself. If you are in pain, please do not ignore it. Don't let a false sense of pride get in the way of healing.

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If you know you are troubled, it is likely you will try to hide it. I encourage you to reach out. The difficulties you are facing are not rare. They are common and treatable. Don't forgo the support that is available.

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Seeking help is a sign of maturity and emotional strength.

Chapter 31- Mind And Body

I believe that the more the public accepts and understands self-help, the more enlightened and educated they will become about mind/body healing. The knowledge is sure to ignite more interest in self-directed care.

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What we need in the mental health world is a forward thinking "Bernie Siegel." Bernie S. Siegel, M.D., revolutionized the treatment of cancer patients. He is a surgeon who turned his curiosity about cancer survivors into a method. He researched the "survivors," the ones who beat the odds. He found that patients can consciously contribute to their wellness process and make major life improvements.

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In the last decade we have seen tremendous acceptance in the area of mind/body medicine. Being human means having a body and a mind. Body and mind are not self-contained material objects and are no longer being studied as separate entities. The stress we feel in today's world is not the result of physical, but of mental exertion. More and more practitioners are accepting the reality that the mind and body are integrally connected.

Chapter 32 – In-Power

Our lives are full of change. We never know what challenges we will have to face in "Life School." ... [this]fitness system works in all areas and at all stages of life. Practice the methods when your body and mind are upset. Taking charge of your thoughts will cause *you* to gain power and your symptoms lose power. You will create a personal aura filled with freedom and confidence.

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Fill your life with experiences, not excuses!

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