

*If you bring forth that which is within you,
Then that which is within you
Will be your salvation.
If you do not bring forth that which is within you,
Then that which is within you
Will destroy you.*

— THE Gnostic GOSPELS

INTRODUCTION | A Tiger Shows the Way

FOR THE LAST 35 YEARS, I have been studying stress and trauma, as well as helping people heal from its effects. I am often asked how I can work with a subject as morbid as trauma without becoming burned out or depressed. My answer to this question is that witnessing the transformation that takes place in people when they master their traumas has proven to be a deeply sustaining and uplifting experience in my life. How can that be?

Let me begin by telling you a little about myself. I began my career as a scientist in the radical environment of Berkeley, California, in the mid-1960s. While studying the effects of accumulated stress on the nervous system, I began to suspect that most organisms have an innate capacity to rebound from threatening and stressful events. At that time, I had no

knowledge of psychological trauma — the term would not be defined in its modern form for another 15 years. I was experimenting with different stress reduction techniques that employed the “new” idea of a mind/body connection.

During this early research, a singular event occurred that would forever change the direction of my work. A psychiatrist who was familiar with my stress research asked me to see a patient of his who was suffering from various “psychosomatic” symptoms, such as migraines, PMS, chronic pain, and fatigue, as well as severe panic attacks. The psychiatrist thought that this patient would benefit from learning how to relax her body.

As I began working with this patient (let’s call her “Nancy”), she began to relax. Suddenly, without warning, she panicked. Terrified, and with no notion of what to do, I saw in my mind’s eye the fleeting image of a tiger poised for attack. It appeared dreamlike, and, at that time, I had no idea where it had come from.

“There’s a tiger coming after you, Nancy,” I blurted out without thinking. *“Run and escape to those rocks. Run for your life!”* To my amazement, Nancy’s body began to shake and tremble. Her cheeks flushed red as she started to sweat profusely. After several minutes, she took a few spontaneous deep breaths. This response, which was scary for both of us, washed over her in waves for almost an hour. At the end she experienced a profound calm, saying she felt “held in warm tingly waves.”

Nancy reported to me that during this hour she saw mental pictures of herself at age four being held down and given ether anesthesia for a tonsillectomy. The fear of suffocation she experienced as a child — and that she remembered and revisited during her session with me — was terrifying. As a child she had felt overwhelmed and helpless. After this

one session with me, her whole host of debilitating symptoms improved dramatically, and she was able to get on with her life.

That experience with Nancy changed the course of my life. Ultimately, it opened new avenues in my ongoing research into the nature of stress and trauma, deepened my understanding of how trauma affects the body, and led to a whole new way of treating the debilitating after-effects that can take so many negative and destructive forms.

The effects of unresolved trauma can be devastating. It can affect our habits and outlook on life, leading to addictions and poor decision-making. It can take a toll on our family life and interpersonal relationships. It can trigger real physical pain, symptoms, and disease. And it can lead to a range of self-destructive behaviors. But trauma doesn't have to be a life sentence.

As a result of my years of research and clinical work, I've developed an approach using physical and mental exercises that can help cleanse the body and mind of the debilitating effects of trauma. Over the last 30 years, I have witnessed transformation in the lives of literally thousands of people as they healed from traumatic events.

This is the Twelve-Phase Healing Trauma Program that I will be sharing with you in the rest of this book and in the accompanying CD. Using this program, you begin the healing process on Day One. And as you continue using the program in the weeks and months to come, you should experience a gradual healing process that helps you free your body and mind from the debilitating long-term symptoms of trauma.

Before we get to the details of how the program works, however, it will be helpful for you to know a little more about what trauma is and exactly how it gets into the body and causes such a wide variety of symptoms. In the brief overview presented in the opening chapters of this book, I give

you what you need to know in order to understand this program — how and why it works.

Before beginning the exercises, it's important that you read all the preceding material in the book. If you're familiar with what trauma is and how it can affect you, the exercises are much more likely to have a powerfully positive effect on your unresolved trauma.

I go into a great deal more detail about my research and the physiology of trauma in my bestselling book *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* (North Atlantic Books, 1997). If you would like to read more about theory and personal case examples, if you want to know more about the science of why this program works, I refer you to that book. That book also features a number of inspiring stories about people who have experienced significant healing from their own past traumas. I'd like to reassure you, however, that you'll find right here in this book all that you'll need to know to make the Twelve-Phase Healing Trauma Program work for you.

THERE'S ONE MORE THING I'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU BEFORE WE BEGIN

In virtually every spiritual tradition, suffering is seen as a doorway to awakening. In the West, this connection can be seen in the biblical story of Job, as well as the dark night of the soul in medieval mysticism. The transformative power of suffering finds perhaps its clearest expression in the Four Noble Truths espoused by the Buddha. Though suffering and trauma are not identical, the Buddha's insight into the nature of suffering can provide a powerful mirror for examining the effects of trauma in your life. The Buddha's basic teaching offers guidance for healing our trauma and recovering a sense of wholeness.

The first truth, Buddha taught his disciples, is that suffering is part of the human condition. If we simply try to avoid confronting painful experiences, there is no way to begin the healing process. In fact, this denial creates the very conditions that promote and prolong *unnecessary* suffering.

The second noble truth states that we must discover *why* we are suffering. We must cultivate the courage to look deeply, with clarity and courage, into our own suffering. We often hold the tacit assumption that all of our suffering stems from events in the past. But, whatever the initial seed of trauma, the deeper truth is that our suffering is more closely a result of how we deal with the effect these past events have on us *in the present*.

The third noble truth holds that suffering can be transformed and healed. For those of us who have been traumatized, this can be a monumental leap of faith, but we can recover from trauma; indeed, my experience assisting others to heal from trauma has shown me this recovery is innate.

The fourth noble truth states that, once you have identified the cause of your suffering, you must find an appropriate path. I believe that the exercises I've developed and that you'll be learning in the Twelve-Phase Healing Trauma Program can serve as the path to lead you out of suffering and help you recapture the simple wonders of life.