

FEARLESS

A man with curly brown hair is smiling broadly while holding a black microphone. He is wearing a dark t-shirt with a light-colored, intricate pattern. The background is a red brick wall. The word "FEARLESS" is written in large, bold, yellow capital letters across the top of the image.

“MENTAL SCARES AREN'T A BIG DEAL, BECAUSE THEY LEAD TO GREAT COMEDY.”

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Generous thanks to our contributors, each of whom took the time to share their story with our readers with honesty, willingness, and wisdom.

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To subscribe to Fear.less for free, sign up at www.fearlessmagazine.org.

The most important thing we can undertake toward the reduction of fear is to make it easier for people to accept themselves, to like themselves.

Bonaro W. Overstreet

“There’s no plan but to realize you can’t do it the way others have done it.”

PO & STEADY WINS THE RACE

PO BRONSON

A

s a child, I got bad grades in all my English classes, and didn’t read a lot of books, but I dreamed of being a writer. I never really thought, though, that writing and money went together. Growing up, my mom had a boyfriend who wanted to be a writer. He was charming, and intellectual, and went through times where he’d sell suits at the department

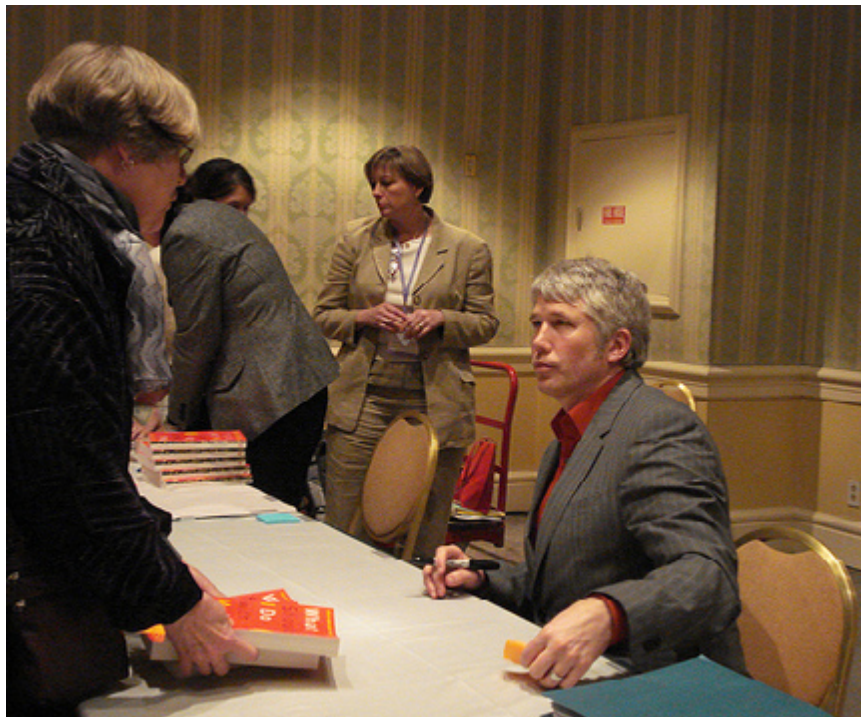


“ I FELT A TREMENDOUS WEIGHT WHEN I REALIZED I HAD TO TELL MY MOM I WAS QUITTING MY JOB TO WRITE. ”

store to make money, and then periods of time where he felt he needed to write and wouldn't have much money at all. Sometimes my mom would get so frustrated with it because she was

a secretary, divorced, had three growing boys to take care of; so she needed every penny. She couldn't handle having someone around who couldn't pay their own way. So I grew up with

the notion that writers were people that my mom loved, but who broke her heart because they were penniless. So, at 24, after working at an investment bank, I felt a tremendous weight when



I realized I had to tell my mom I was quitting my job to write - I thought I would let her down enormously.

KEEPING IT REAL

The way a writer prepares for this fear mentally is to say, “I’m not going to be super successful right away. I’m not going to make money for ten years. It’s going to be a diligent, industrious hobby on the side. I’m going to hold down on jobs during the day and I can get in three to four hours of writing a night. I’ll sleep less.” So that’s what I did. I didn’t see my friends as much as I would’ve liked during this time, but I made new friends who

were writers doing the same thing. I became a bookkeeper at a small publishing company and attended the evening writing program at San Francisco State University. I didn't have a vision of

“I PREPARED MYSELF TO NOT EXPECT GLORY.”

making great money, and I prepared myself to not expect glory. I knew I had to work on my writing, and thought of getting maybe one book out and just living as a writer, but I was still working fulltime. The writing program took

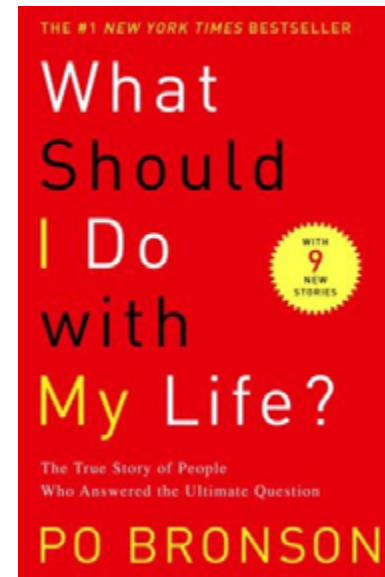
me seven years to finish, and in that time I had a writers group, and we wrote together and hung out together. It was great to be working hard on



polishing our craft as a group, without knowing where it would lead.

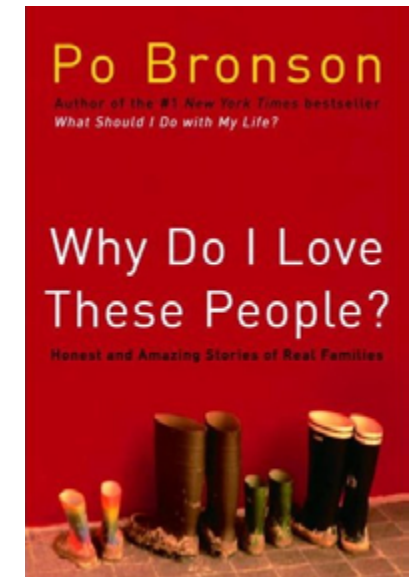
My favorite lesson is that you need to surround yourself with like-minded

people, and that putting yourself in the right circumstances can protect you. To some extent, it pushed me away from my family for about ten years.



It was hard for them to watch me do that, and it was hard for me to be around them because I'd say, "I'm a writer," but not have a lot to show for it but a few short un-

published stories. I think they felt, "Why is he holding himself back from doing something else, something better for the world?"



All the while I kept writing I thought, "This is what the life of a writer is." Truthfully, for the vast majority of writers, this is what life is, and it's a pretty good life. It's creative

and productive— you're not just a consumer — you're observing society and you're producing things. You're serving your art form and you believe in your art form, and that's an incredibly great orientation. So, that's all I ever thought was going to happen. Every writer, though, harbors a small pipe dream on the side. 2% of me thought, "Sure, I'll write a book that may actually get published, which people will actually read." I did save a little hope for that.

THE KINGMAKER EDITOR

From my job at the publishing house, I realized that book editors didn't want more of the same

stuff that they'd already published. They have walls of manuscripts that are perfectly accomplished writing, but that aren't genuinely exciting or unique. That's what editors are desperate for.

“ IF YOU HAVE A JEALOUS PERSPECTIVE, THEN YOU'RE MISSING THE CHANCE TO LEARN A SERIOUS LESSON. ”

We think of book editors as these kingmakers, people who pull out a book and declare, "I'm going to give this writer a lot of money and tell everybody it's great and watch it become a self-fulfilling

phenomenon!" Editors and book publishers and people in the industry, they're not king-makers. They're simply people who have chosen a life path, aware that they could have probably been

the real mentality of editors.

If you have a jealous perspective, that you're envious of the best-sellers because you think, "They've just won the lottery, not me," and you're resentful towards them, then you're missing the chance to learn a serious lesson. Competitive and jealous writers suffer blocks to their ability to learn from other people's success; "What about that book made it work?" "What about that book made people like it?"

more financially secure somewhere else, but who dream of the day when a manuscript comes to their desk, and they'll help with the discovery of something genuinely interesting and fresh. That's

You have to write something different and innovative. Once I began to understand that, it wasn't a nod to making something commercial. It was a nod to taking greater risks in what I wrote. It

meant getting more interesting material, writing about subjects people hadn't covered before, creating new genres every time I put pen to paper.

I began doing oral storytelling, and writing in a black comedy way, exploring humor. I began dealing with absurdism, and tried to give my writing more voice, and stepped outside of my comfort zone. Then one day I finally finished my novel, got an agent, and he sold it. I began to see that the world was rewarding me for taking more risks in my novel, not less. I felt that the publishers, the business, were saying to me, "Don't turn down your creativity – turn it up! Be more ingenious. Go for



“I BEGAN TO SEE THAT THE WORLD WAS REWARDING ME FOR TAKING MORE RISKS.”

it! Trust yourself! Take creative risks!” That’s how I’ve continued to operate since then, even when I started writing journalism, non-fiction, and social documentary. I looked for where I could push myself creatively.

YOU CAN'T DO IT THEIR WAY

Many people, especially writers, think the way to become something is to brown-nose or imitate the people above you. That’s not accurate. You’ve got to deliver something fresh and new. Be of value. We need to innovate ourselves out of this economic hole we’ve dug, and realize that if we keep on doing the same thing, the economy’s going to

keep going down. We all need to elevate the risks we take, be more fearless, and realize that we will be rewarded if we do so. This will help us overcome our natural tendency to be clogged with fear.

There’s no plan but to realize that you can’t do it the way other people have done it. You have to do it your own way, challenge yourself to do something new. There’s still fear of rejection and bad reviews, but listening to them won’t get you far. Writers who send their stories off to literary journals and are always submitting, they’re the ones who get really good at handling rejection, who are balanced when they do have success.

I spent years moving step

“THEY STOPPED CONSTANTLY TRYING TO LEARN, STOPPED SAYING, “I’M GOING TO KEEP WRITING AND KEEP SUBMITTING AND GETTING THROWN AGAINST THE WALL.”

by step, just learning and then moving on. You’re bummed for a day, but you don’t just stop. When I first started getting rejection letters, I realized philosophically, “This is a way of life.” It’s a habit, one that a writer has to ingrain in their life. Now, I have a lifestyle where I don’t completely throw myself into my work. I’m with my wife and kids everyday. I play soccer,

see my friends, and live a well-rounded life that restores me, makes me happy. I know it brings me back to normal, especially when I get criticism, or people say negative things about me that I can’t do anything about.

MULTIPLE PATHS

I have acquaintances

who’ve had early success, or what looked to be fast successes without a period of constant rejection. Once that hit, they began to imitate their own work, asking how publishers will like them again, trying to trigger that release of dopamine in the brain that comes from praise, rather than trying to stretch themselves creatively. They stopped constantly trying to learn, stopped saying, “I’m going to keep writing and keep submitting and getting thrown against the wall. Not all of it’s going to work, and I’m going to realize when it’s working and not working, and when it works I’m going to run with it and concentrate.”

Part of what we need to do is not have a plan

where X happens overnight. Whether you’re an entrepreneur or an artist or a scientist or working for a cause that matters. You might end up taking the fast track, but most people go the slow track, and that’s statistically what we’re more likely to take. And if you happen to get on the fast track, that’s great, but people have the idea, “I’m going to take a year off and write a novel, and then I’ll go back to being an engineer.” I think, “Really? Then you don’t want to be a novelist.” I had a friend who was a doctor, and when he was doing his internship, wrote an amazing amount. Then he quit being a doctor to become a writer, and he wrote only an hour a day and worked on his house. When writing was forbid-

den, and people told him, “No writing when you’re here,” it made it tempting and fun. But when he was told, “You have to write your novel, now, you’re on contract,” it was an entirely different thing. I see writers sabotage themselves all the time. Long pieces of writing require a kind of sustained effort that short ones won’t prepare you for. Some people can really knuckle down and other people can’t.

You should have multiple paths to the same destination, all of which take different times. The fast might get you there quickly, but the slow and medium roads teach you different things that will help you when you get there. At some point in time, everyone has to



“THE BIGGEST PRIORITY IS THAT YOU DON’T INTENTIONALLY SABOTAGE YOURSELF BY BUILDING IN DISTRACTIONS.”

learn those lessons, and learning them in public is embarrassing. Better to learn before you get there.

THE FANTASY BUBBLE

My way of doing it, of actually writing, is to go into a closet. I drop off the kids, come to work from 9 to 5 and write, then I pick them up and do the same thing day after day after day. I live my regular life outside of work. The biggest priority is that you don’t intentionally sabotage yourself by building in distractions, which is so common. Right at the moment when you’re about to touch the thing you want – there’s a distraction that keeps you from it. Psychologi-

cally, one recognizes that when things are dreams of yours, they're like an angel on your shoulder. When you begin to make them a reality, there's no more fantasy bubble that you've thought of as your imaginary friend, your trusted companion for so long. Most people don't want to give that up because it's a very comforting fantasy to have. To pursue your dream and make it a reality is basically saying your imaginary friend is going to become a real thing, and generally you see it as fake, or foolish, or silly. That's incredibly risky.

And a lot of people, right on that verge, turn back, because they like it better to have their imaginary friend than a real friend. It's like a nine year old kid,

who plays at home in an imaginary world, maybe with swords, or G.I. Joes or baby dolls, and they're playing out a real scenario in their minds, but if you were watching, you'd realize it was imaginary play. Now, the kid would be embarrassed to do that in front of his friends, but at home, he can let go. The ironic thing is, is that all his friends are doing the same thing in their homes, too.

It's a shame to feel self conscious about an audience seeing inside your interior world. That same process of letting go, of imaginary play, is what creative people and inspired people and entrepreneurs go through when they turn their dreams into reality. It's gradual, not instant, and

it's not an easy psychological journey at all. So culture is so important, to surround yourself with your friends and likeminded people. You can do a tech startup in Silicon Valley, but do it somewhere else, and people will laugh. You need to be around people who think it's okay. Just like a nine year old needs to be around parents who say, "Yes, go play with your GI Joe! Pretend it's a football battalion!" and encourage that, feel comfortable with that.

ART VS. MONEY

One thing I know for sure is that the audience out there, in my case, it was book editors, don't want you to take less risk. They want you to be more daring - more than you think. It's the worst mistake to think there's a tradeoff between creativity and commercialism. Under the old, stereotypical rules, people thought that doing the same thing over and over again made you a million bucks, but

“CULTURE IS SO IMPORTANT, TO SURROUND YOURSELF WITH YOUR FRIENDS AND LIKEMINDED PEOPLE.”

if you were creative, you died penniless.

I know this because I know the entrepreneurs that take companies public, the book editors, television producers and agents, and these are all my friends, people I've

worked with. I've been doing this for twenty years, and I can tell you, for certain, that it's a false tradeoff between risk and lack of success at one end of the spectrum, and safety and commercial success at the other end. Sure, there are projects

like that, but that's not the world I live in or anyone else I know lives in. Sure, there are blockbusters like that and thriller writers who write like that, but for the vast majority of people, it's the other way around. The system wants you to push

yourself, be risky, master your craft and give the world your gift. I find it totally wrong to imagine an economic consequence to being daring and creative.

PO

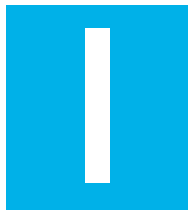
PO BRONSON is a successful novelist and writer of narrative nonfiction. He's published five books, and has written for television, magazines, and newspapers, including *Time*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. He writes regularly for *New York Magazine* and *The Guardian* in the UK. Po's book of social documentary, *What Should I Do With My Life?* was a #1 New York Times bestseller. He's been on Oprah, and founded The San Francisco Writer's Grotto, a cooperative workspace for writers and filmmakers. His recent book *NurtureShock*, is a collaboration with Ashley Merriman looking at the backfiring of modern society's nurturing of children due to overlooked science.



“ I think if someone is motivated enough, they’ll achieve what they want. ”

NO LAUGHING MATTER

AN INTERVIEW WITH
BEN ROSENFELD



(Ishita) met Ben at an event where he asked a question about the energy it takes to commit to something you’re passionate about. He didn’t seem to have trouble talking in front of a crowd,



so I wasn't surprised to learn he was a practicing comedian. I asked Ben to talk to me about his fears as a performer and his choice to veer from the "traditional" professional track to pursue his passion. Here's Ben, straight from the heart.

HAVE YOU HAD MORE FEARFUL PHASES OF YOUR LIFE THAN OTHERS? DURING THAT TIME, WHAT HELPED OR HINDERED YOU IN YOUR DEVELOPMENT?

I feel I've had fearful experiences and events, but I've been lucky enough not to have a phase of my life where I'd wake up and go to sleep in fear. When an event causes fear (like a large crowd, or some-



one important watching my performance) I remind myself that this is what I want to do with my life, and that I'll be fine once I get up there. In my line of work, it's important to be in the moment. Sometimes I get nerves before I get on stage, but I'm usually fine as soon as I get on stage. The weirdest thing that happens, is I'll feel fine, my voice and facial expressions will be fine, but my hand will be a little shaky from adrenaline. I've learned to turn that weakness into a strength; if it's really visible, I'll make a joke of "Wow, my hand is shaking. I'm not nervous, I just forgot to have my whiskey this morning."

DO YOU EVER FEEL THE FEAR OF JUST STARTING, WHICH

IS ALSO COMMONLY ACCOMPANIED BY THE FEAR OF FAILURE?

Every job I've ever had, I've had first day nerves. The first day of football practice in high school I had nerves, same with my first day of college, same with my first day in the "real world" as a consultant, and with my first time on stage. I wouldn't call it fear. I'd call it nervous energy and adrenaline. To me fear involves the chance of being physically hurt. Mental scars aren't a big deal because they lead to great comedy. (Someone much better at comedy than me once said, "comedy = pain + time".) I used to be afraid to collide with someone running at me at full speed



“MENTAL SCARS AREN'T A BIG DEAL BECAUSE THEY LEAD TO GREAT COMEDY.”

during football, but after it happened by accident a few times, I started to like

it. I think this is a good analogy for mental fears. Lean into it, let it hit you a few times, you'll get knocked down, get back up and realize you're fine. When I did kickboxing, I learned a technique of stepping into someone's kicks and punches. This softens the blows because you absorb them before they gain full momentum. I try treating fear the same way, I step into it. The famous improviser Del Close had a saying, "Follow the Fear." If you're afraid of doing something, do it as soon as possible. The more you think about it, the more you'll talk yourself out of doing it. And then you'll regret it.

I think fear of failure can be good, as long as it's

“LEAN INTO IT, LET IT HIT YOU A FEW TIMES, YOU'LL GET KNOCKED DOWN, GET BACK UP AND REALIZE YOU'RE FINE.”

not a paralyzing fear. I never want to bomb on stage, but I find that every once in a while, I enjoy "bombing" or not getting laughs. It makes me hungrier and want to get right back up there. This

is a small failure though, I only fail in front of 20 to 60 people at a time. It'd be different if my whole career fails. But I know it won't fail, it's more of how long it'll take. I enjoy the process though, so I'm not in a rush. Besides, if you learn from your mistakes, it's not really failing, it's getting an education. It's about how you look at things. I'm working on not caring about how I do. I try to say what I find funny and not worry too much about the audience. If I'm having fun and enjoying it, they start enjoying it. That's not to say I completely ignore their reaction, but I don't think about it before or during the show. Only when I analyze my performance afterwards.

I haven't had any big suc-

cesses to be fearful of, but I like to think that I won't have this. I'm so involved in the day to day process, which is the only thing I can control, that the suc-



cess thing doesn't bother me. I've been going to lots of auditions lately, not because I'm ready for the auditions, but so that I'm already prepared and used to auditioning

for when people actually want to see me. I'm trying to build all the instincts I need to build in advance, so that when push comes to shove, I no longer need

to think. I think fear of success comes from a place of insecurity and believing that you don't deserve something. That's one reason I work my ass off. Even if I have some

negative voice trying to convince me I don't deserve it, I'll have tangible evidence to tell myself differently. "Of course I deserve this, I've been putting in 18 hour days for the past five years to get to this point."

WE DISTRACT OURSELVES WHEN WE FEEL FEAR, WHICH CAN BECOME HABITUAL. DO YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF DISTRACTING YOURSELF FROM SOMETHING OVERWHELMING OR SCARY?

I have a weekly comedy sketch writing group, and I spend all week thinking how long and how hard it's gonna be to write something, and then the morning of the group, I sit down and write five or

seven sketches in under two hours. The hardest part is starting. Just telling yourself, “okay, it’s time. I gotta do this. I’m not doing anything else until this is done.” I still fight this distraction tendency every day, but I’m getting better. Now I try to make my distractions productive. I was afraid or writing this article, but instead of watching TV I spent my “distraction” time creating advertising and event invites for my weekly comedy show. I would prefer that I just wrote this, but at least my distraction led to me doing something else that’s useful.

You feel worse if you let the guilt get to you. You can get in a terrible cycle. It’s about accepting what’s done and is done



“SAMURAI WARRIORS USED TO MEDIATE ABOUT THEIR IMPENDING DEATH EVERY DAY FOR AN HOUR.”

and just getting on with your life. It’s like, “Okay, I threw yesterday away, but that doesn’t mean I need to do it today. Let’s do two days worth of work today.”

FEAR OFTEN LEAVES US WITH A SCARCITY MENTALITY. HOW DO YOU HANDLE THIS FEELING OF LACK OR “LESS THAN” WHEN YOU FEEL FEAR?

It’s so easy to get into a scarcity mentality. This definitely happens with jokes. I get afraid someone might take my jokes, or they’ll stop being funny, or I’ll realize that only 20 seconds of a 3 minute joke work, but I’m afraid to get rid of the other 2 minutes 40 seconds because that’s a lot of time

of material I just lost. That’s scarcity. I’ve been working on convincing myself that I’ll always come up with more material. Samurai warriors used to meditate about their impending death every day for an hour. I try to meditate about not being able to do any of my current jokes. When I imagine this, I instantly think that I’ll write new jokes, so that calms the anxiety engines. Imagining the worst case scenario and then thinking up solutions to the scenario can keep your fears at bay. Just don’t spend too much time doing this!

I walked away from a high paying job to a low paying PhD program and my friend said “I don’t know if I could have ever walked away from that much

money,” and I was like “I can always find another high paying job” and he said “It’s great that you’re coming from a place of abundance.” Now I’m getting paid \$30 a night on a good night and know I’ll find a way to pay bills before my savings run out. If you give more than you get, you always receive more.

WHERE DO YOU THINK THE LINE IS BETWEEN GETTING SUPPORT FROM OTHERS AND BUILDING UP YOUR OWN INNER STRENGTH?”

When I needed support the most, I got it from the place I least expected it. Last year, I decided to drop out of graduate school to fully focus on comedy. I was miser-



able in graduate school and the only time I’d feel good was on stage. Both my parents and my dad’s parents were very upset. It especially hurt how upset and unsupportive my dad was. (He’s come around since, but my mom and grandparents haven’t.) My mom’s father from Germany called me two days after my decision, and he’d just had double bypass surgery, and he said “You know, I probably shouldn’t say this, but I think you’re making the right decision.” That really meant so much to me. I knew I’d be okay even if nobody supported my decision, but even now I tear up thinking about how much those words meant to me at that point. Support is important. It’s not necessary to do something, but

it certainly helps make things easier.

WHAT'S THE MOST EFFECTIVE THING SOMEONE CAN DO WHEN THEY FEEL FEAR?

Start with deep breaths. Then treat the fearful thoughts as impartial and interesting stuff that's floating in and out of your brain and not as part of your inner being. I think it's a Buddhist technique. Comedy is about honesty. If you're really nervous, you can acknowledge it, as long as you make a joke after. A good friend of mine starts her routine with, "I'm really nervous being here, I'm not used to being on stage without a pole." She gets nervous, but she turns it into an advantage. I got so much

from reading *The 50th Law* and one of the biggest lessons was, "There's no good or bad, there's just things that happen and you can choose how you let it affect you."

You can turn anything into a positive. When you're starting in comedy, you need to bring friends to shows to get on stage. I didn't have many friends in New York because I had just moved so it got me to be more creative. I passed out fliers in Times Square for stage time, which helped me get over my fear of talking to strangers. When you're getting rejected 2,000 times an hour, it stops being a big deal. That's another thing with fear, if you do an activity enough, you stop being afraid of it. Or you're at least able to



manage it and not let it become overwhelming. Fear only occurs when you don't know what a situation will be like.

**HOW DO YOU RE-
LATE TO FEAR
NOW VS. BEFORE?
HAVE YOUR FEARS
CHANGED?**

I used to be afraid of being alone, now I'm afraid of being with someone. I've seen how much work it takes to become successful in my industry and I'm afraid if I get a significant other I care about, and sacrifice for, it will impede my career, and then I'll resent them for it. There's plenty of successful comedians who are married or in steady relationships, so this is probably me trying to justify my current lifestyle and

“ I TRULY BELIEVE THE BEST ME IS AT A MUCH HIGHER LEVEL THAN THE CATEGORIES SCHOOL OR LARGE WORK-PLACES HAVE SET UP FOR US. ”

will change with time.

**WHAT WOULD YOU
SAY YOUR GREATEST
FEAR IS?**

My greatest fear is not putting in all the effort I could possibly put in. For the first 24 years of my life I half-assed my way through everything. I'd always do the bare minimum to get an A in school, bare minimum to make it look like I was a great worker, etc. Some would say, "You were still shooting for the best." But I wasn't trying to be the best me, I was just trying to get into the top category that someone else had set. I truly believe the best me is at a much higher level than the categories school or large workplaces have set up for us.

Now I want to do everything possible to be as funny a comedian as I can be every day. At the same time I'm afraid my half-assing habits will come back. I fight it every day. The past three months I've been writing 3 notebook pages every morning when I wake up. I feel this helps keep the laziness at bay. If I've written three pages before brushing my teeth, I've already got the momentum against laziness for that day.

**WHAT SINGLE HABIT
HELPS YOU STAY IN
A POSITIVE CON-
SCIOUSNESS?**

Writing every morning. My job is to observe, write, perform and promote what I do. By writing every morning I start

the rest of the process. Also, for the past 6 weeks I've been taking an amazing improv comedy class with Ali Farahnakian. His whole focus is on always being positive in your response to anything your scene partners throw at you. He'll have us redo the scene where we are positive about a negative event that just happened and everyone sees how this makes the scene much funnier and more effective. This has really been influencing my life outside of comedy.

HOW HAVE YOU DEALT WITH A GREAT CHALLENGE OR FEAR IN YOUR LIFE?

Dropping out of graduate school was my biggest fear. For 24 years of my

life I was an immaculate resume builder and getting a full ride to Caltech to get a PhD was the cherry on that resume. The middle class path to

have even gone to grad school. I think it was just an excuse to quit a well paying job I couldn't stand doing anymore. In the summer before

“KNOWING THAT EVEN IF EVERYONE IN THE WORLD THOUGHT I WAS BEING A COMPLETE IDIOT BY THROWING AWAY THIS GREAT OPPORTUNITY, THAT I WOULD STILL DO IT, THAT WAS THE ULTIMATE LIGHTNESS.”

success was mine to be had if I just stuck through five years of graduate school.

But I knew I shouldn't

school started, I was telling my family that as soon as I was getting paid the same amount of money to do comedy as graduate school was

paying me, I was quitting. You shouldn't go into a profession when you already have your terms for quitting, and those terms don't involve that profession in the least. You can offer me a hundred million dollars and I'll still be getting on stage every night. I'll still pass out fliers for stage time. I don't care.

I overcame my fear by realizing, there's nobody who could tell me, "I think you made the wrong decision" or "I disapprove" that would get me to change my mind. That's when I knew I had to do it. Knowing that even if everyone in the world thought I was being a complete idiot by throwing away this great opportunity, that I would still do it, that was

“YOU GOTTA DO WHAT YOU LOVE, BUT YOU HAVE TO REALIZE THINGS TAKE TIME, AND THERE’S GONNA BE OBSTACLES IN THE WAY.”

the ultimate lightness. Right then, I knew I’d be strong enough to make it through the criticism and tough patches. It’s so easy to be negative and shoot down someone else’s dreams. Anytime someone tells me their dreams, I try to be supportive, even if I’m not sure they should do it. I think if someone is motivated enough, they’ll achieve what they want. And maybe you encouraging them when they’re not motivated will help

them on their path.

I acknowledge fear but I don’t think it’s a controlling force of my life. Although as I started typing this sentence, something told me “you don’t feel like typing anymore” so I guess that means I was afraid of answering this fully. I was on the standard path to success from elementary school up through getting a “top” job coming out as an undergraduate and getting paid to get a PhD from

a “top” graduate school. Then I got off the resume and credential train, and am now focused on doing what I love. I don’t give a shit if nobody is impressed by it. I know in the grand scheme of things telling jokes doesn’t make a huge difference in people’s lives, but I feel I’m making a small difference every time I’m on stage. Not that all my jokes are super high brow, I need to learn how to be consistently funny first, then I’ll work on being smart and funny. I want to be known as a smart comedian, but not pretentious smart - where you have to know obscure references to get my jokes. I want to be smart for regular people.

WHAT’S SOMETHING YOU’VE LEARNED

ALONG YOUR PATH THAT YOU KNOW IS TRUE - A FACT?

You have to do what you love. Passion, patience, perseverance. That’s my motto. It’s by my computer. You gotta do what you love, but you have to realize things take time, and there’s gonna be obstacles in the way. If you can enjoy moving the obstacles and enjoy the path, the success will be there eventually. I always knew I’d be successful in whatever it was I choose to do, but it took me a long time to figure out what I actually wanted to do. Once I started doing it, I loved it. And now it’s where all my energy is going. This is why I wrote an ebook on “How To Find Your Passion.” I’ve met hundreds of talented people who

have little idea what they want to do with their lives. I want them to unleash their potential, and I hope my experiences can help them.

The other thing I've learned is to stop trying to impress other people. Figure out what your inner being wants to do

and focus on that. That's how you really impress others.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2011?

Waking up every day and wanting to get out of bed to do the creative things I want to do, and

not because I have to get up to be somewhere at a certain hour. Don't get me wrong, I still free lance some non-comedy work to pay bills, but it's under my control and I don't need to sit in a cubicle for 12 hours a day pretending to be busy.

For example, I was shoot-

ing a video a few nights ago until three in the morning and I woke up at 8am without an alarm clock because I was so excited to start editing the video. I never had this kind of energy and excitement before I made my major life change.

BEN

Ben Rosenfeld is a New York City based comedian and motivational speaker. His passion is stand up comedy. He performs improv, writes and performs sketch comedy and runs a **comedy blog** that includes helpful hints for new comedians, video critiques of his performances and interviews with other comics. Ben is also the author of a free eBook called "How To Find Your Passion." Before realizing his passion for comedy, Ben was on the middle class path to "success". He worked as a management consultant for a Fortune 500 company, Accenture, and attended a PhD program in Neuroeconomics at Caltech on a full scholarship.



“ We can train our minds so when adversity arises, we aren’t immersed in it. ”

THE BUDDHA WITHIN US

SHARON SALZBERG

I I first heard about Buddhist teachings while I was a sophomore at the State University of New York. I took an Asian philosophy course that taught me two extremely important lessons. First, when I saw a Buddha image in its sacred context - not in a souvenir shop in New York - it seemed that he was a completely integrated human being, and that I was very fragmented.



At this point, I had already suffered a great deal in my life. I had lived with my parents until they got divorced when I was four, then I lived with my mother until she died when I was nine, and then

of me. I felt extremely isolated. So to have Buddha be completely unafraid and unashamed to acknowledge the suffering in life, to have him say out loud, "There is suffering in life," liberated me.

“TO HAVE BUDDHA BE COMPLETELY UNAFRAID AND UNASHAMED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SUFFERING IN LIFE LIBERATED ME.”

I lived in five completely different family configurations by the time I went to college. None of this was ever really spoken about, so my feelings of fear and anger and sorrow were just kept inside

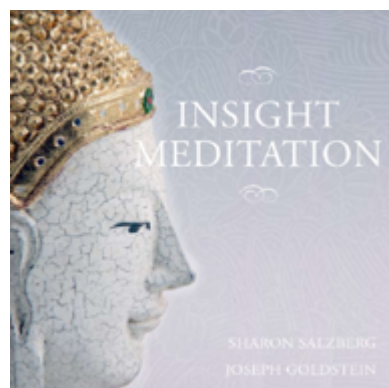
The other pivotal lesson was that he sent an open invitation to do something about suffering—that while circumstances couldn't be erased, there are ways that we identify with those circumstances



“ANYBODY CAN DO IT, NOT JUST SPECIAL OR LUCKY PEOPLE.”

and harden around them with an image of ourselves; And we believe this image is capable of very little. This painful mental construction is then inevitably followed up by many more awful thoughts and feelings.

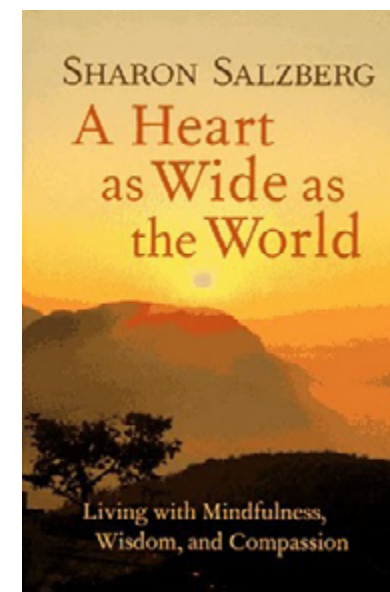
The Buddha said stop, wait: there are tools, like meditation, that we can really do something with. Anybody can do it, not just special or lucky people, or people of a certain background. In my junior



year of college I went through an independent study program at the university, and went to India to learn how to meditate. I ended up going back after the original trip because I wanted to spend the rest of my life there! But shortly before coming back to the States for a short visit, I saw one of my teachers in Calcutta, an extraordinary woman who had endured great suffering. She had lost her two children and her husband very suddenly and she was so grief-stricken



that a doctor told her she would actually die of a broken heart unless she did something about her mind and learned to meditate. So she literally crawled out of bed and up the temple stairs to meditate, and reached a profound level of realization and openness. I always considered her an enormously compassionate person. She was so aware of our vulnerability and the fragility of



any given moment that she radiated love and kindness toward everyone she encountered. She inspired me to use my suffering as a source of strength instead of shame.

When I visited her to say goodbye, she said, “When you go back to the States, you’re going to be teaching.” I said, “No I won’t”

because I couldn't imagine I had the qualities necessary to teach. But she said, "Yes you will". I kept saying no, but she kept saying yes. She said, "You really understand suffering. That's why you should teach." That was a tremendous blessing for me. Ultimately, it's how I came back to the States to start teaching.

TUNNEL VISION

Meditative qualities need to be cultivated like an education. We can train our minds so that when adversity arises, we understand it, but we aren't immersed in it. That gives us some space. It's a big thing to know what we're feeling as we're feeling it, not 15 consequential

“OUR SOCIETY IS STRANGE - DEATH IS SEEN LIKE A HUMILIATING PERSONAL FAILURE.”



actions later. Our ordinary tendency is to be subsumed by fear, and hate both our feelings and ourselves for having them, which is a very destructive cycle. Treating yourself with more for-

giveness and kindness to keep yourself from being overwhelmed by negative feelings is critical to the meditative process.

In Buddhist psychology, fear and anger are two

forms of the same state of mind - anger being expressive and energized, and fear being withdrawn and frozen. They both collapse into a tunnel vision that limits one's sense of possibility and creates a sensation of powerlessness. When you acknowledge possibility and say "I don't know what's going to happen," you escape from that tunnel of seemingly terrible certainty.

This applies to the hugely dominant fear of death. Our society is strange - death is seen like a humiliating personal failure. We identify so much with our bodies that the thought of letting go of all we're familiar with is quite scary. But in many spiritual traditions, the reflection on death is a move towards kindness

and perspective. If we remained conscious of the truth that we are all going to die, it would perhaps be a better world.

HANDLING THE MOMENT

We move through adverse transitions step-by-step. Once, I was teaching

“IT’S A BIG THING TO KNOW WHAT WE’RE FEELING AS WE’RE FEELING IT.”

with a friend of mine at the Insight Meditation Society and it was her evening to give a talk. She talked about how twenty years before she had come to her first retreat there and she had been insanely restless. She came to see me and asked, “Has anyone ever died of restlessness?” I said, “Not from just one moment of it.” I thought, that’s a good answer! We can handle most things in the moment. The trouble is when we start consolidating our worries and imagining how terrible it will feel tomorrow and that there’s no way out. When we don’t do this we can handle even very strong and terrible things. Remembering that is not easy, and it helps to have inspiring figures and a community and support-

ive people around that can remind us.

CHILL OUT, LUCY

Once, when a friend rented a house for us for a retreat, I walked into my room and someone had left a Peanuts comic strip on the desk. In the first frame Lucy is talking to Charlie Brown and she says, “Oh Charlie Brown, the problem with you is that you’re you.” Charlie Brown says, “Well what in the world can I do about that?” In the final frame Lucy says, “Well, I don’t pretend to be able to give advice, I can merely point out the problem.”

Somehow, whenever I did walking meditation by that desk, my eye would

“I DIDN’T FREAK OUT ABOUT IT. I JUST NEEDED TO RECOGNIZE IT, AND BE AMUSED.”

fall on that very line: “The problem with you is that you’re you.” That has been such a dominant voice in my life. Not long after that I was in a yoga retreat and I did a pose that I hadn’t been able to do before, and I noticed that the first thought that came into

mind was: “You’ll never be able to do this again.” Upon thinking this, I just said: “Chill out, Lucy.” That Lucy voice came into my head, and it certainly

wasn’t welcome, but I didn’t freak out about it. I didn’t have to believe her or say “Yes! you’re right! I’m truly incapable and this is a wild fluke and it

will never happen again.” I just needed to recognize it, and be amused. Chill out, Lucy. That’s the kind of practice that I still do. So I when I start thinking,

“Oh, it’s all your fault, you chose the wrong flight and that’s why you’re stuck in this airport and on and on and on...” I just say “Hi, Lucy!”

SHARON

Sharon Salzberg is one of America’s leading spiritual teachers of Asian meditation practices, particularly insight and loving-kindness methods. She has played a crucial role in bringing Buddhist meditation practices to the West. Together with Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein, she founded the **Insight Meditation Society** in 1974 in Barre, Massachusetts. Sharon is the bestselling author of numerous books, including *The Force of Kindness: Change Your Life with Love and Compassion*, *Heart as Wide as the World*, and *Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience*.



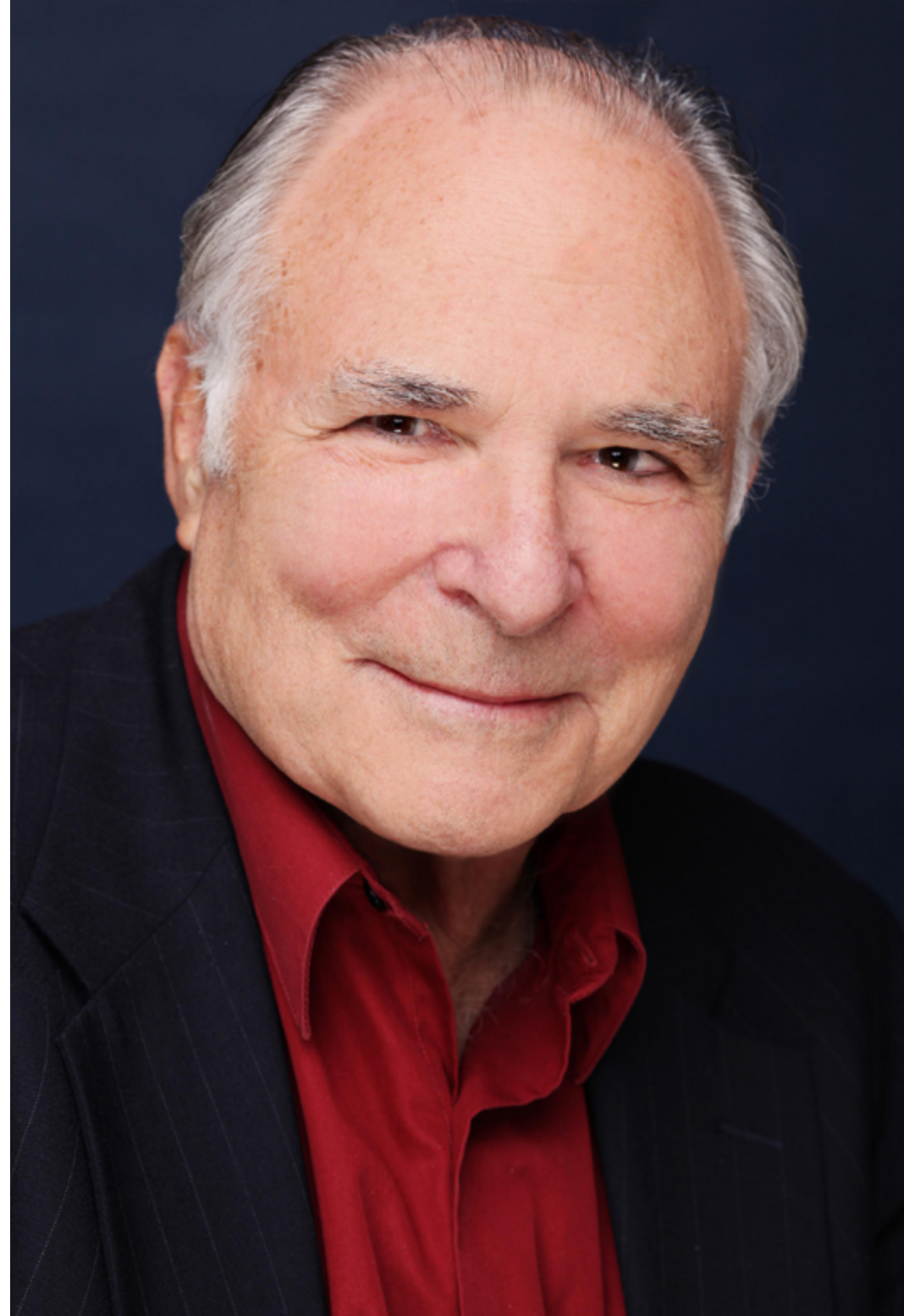
“ Our emotions color how we see the world. ”

(E)MOTION OF FEAR

PAUL ECKMAN

WHAT IS THE EMOTIONAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENERALIZED ANXIETY AND ACUTE FEAR?

There's not a large difference, except that fear is a momentary emotional response to a perceived threat of harm. Usually people are able to do something to



get out of the situation in which they're feeling threatened, but there are cases like waiting to hear the outcome of a biopsy, for example, where there isn't any other way out but to wait. Generally, people in that situation are not experiencing continuous fear - it comes and goes, and the times when it is gone from our minds can leave us unprepared for the times when it returns. Anxiety differs from fear in that it describes a state of being afraid without knowing what you're afraid of. It's a more enduring state, and if it's persistent, you enter back into the realm of psychopathology.

WHAT CAN SOMEONE CAN DO WHEN THEY'RE OVERWHELMED BY FEAR?

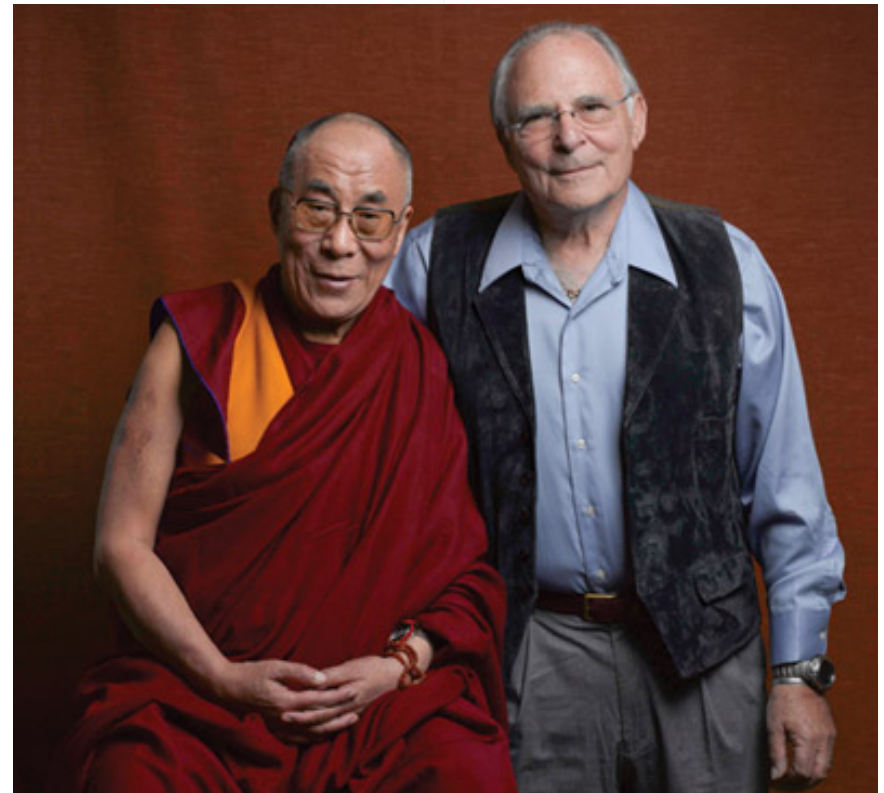
When people get overwhelmed by an emotion, you enter the area of psychopathology. It's

“OFTEN IT HAS TO DO WITH UNRESOLVED INCIDENTS FROM EARLIER LIFE, ESPECIALLY CHILDHOOD.”

what I call a “flood” of emotion, which interferes with one's ability to carry on normal life functions like cohabiting, working

and sleeping. There are a variety of treatment options, and different ones work better for different

you can each day about each time you feel that emotion. Then when you read it over after a week



people. I recommend that people keep a diary as an emotional exercise. If fear is a problem, you should write as much as

or two, you're looking for the common underlying theme. There's usually a script for each emotion that to some extent we're

following, and often it has to do with unresolved incidents from earlier life, especially childhood. Recognizing it itself can help resolve the fear and help one be less vulnerable,

THOUGHT SAY THAT AVOIDING YOUR FEAR MAKES IT WORSE.

I spoke with the Dalai Lama about how he



or one can recognize and avoid the circumstances of where the fear is appearing.

MOST SCHOOLS OF

handles difficult emotions, and he said, "If I can avoid a situation, I will." Now, that's the Dalai Lama; that doesn't work for everyone, and I don't

think we should have a general rule that applies to everyone. But to use an example from Buddhist thinking; you see a long slender shape in the dark; is that a coiled rope or a

snake, that's pretty harmless really. What's the cost? You avoid it and you didn't lose anything. We are more biased to see threats when they aren't there rather than

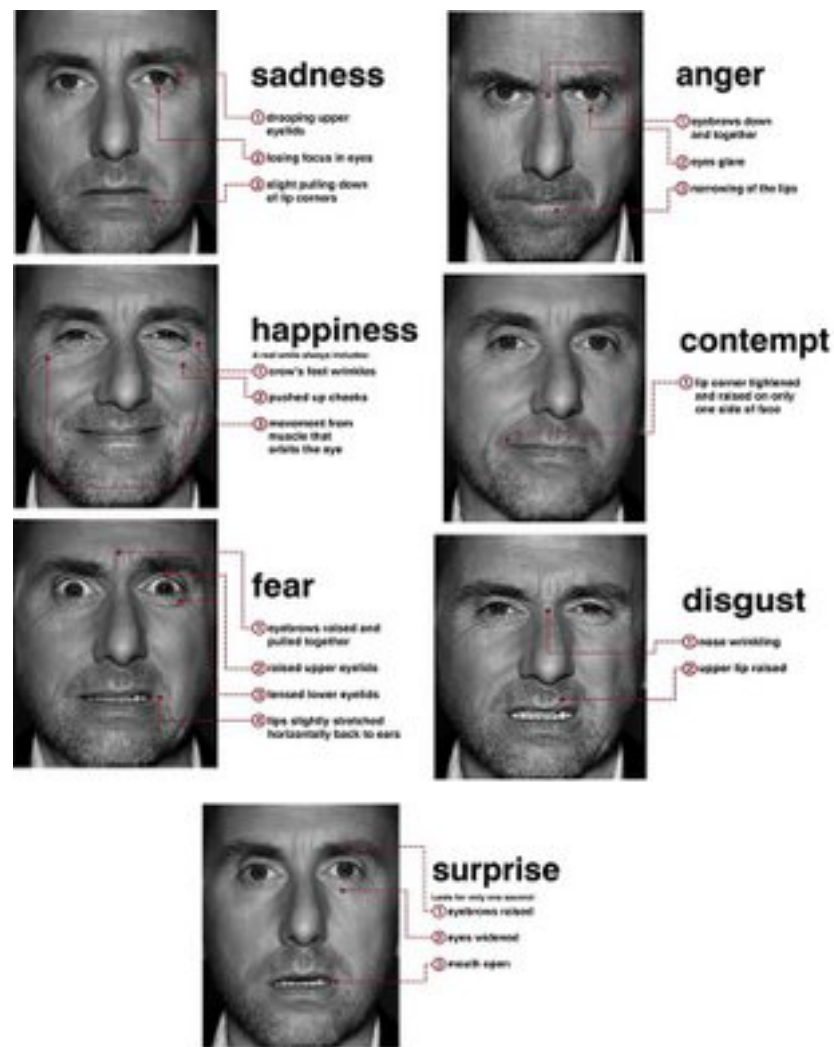


snake? Our ancestors who responded to snakes as if they were coiled ropes may have been bitten and not reproduced. But if you treat a rope like a

to ignore threats that are there. Furthermore, in fearful states we become more perceptive of sensations that illuminate the threat rather than actually

confirming that it is an actual threat. Some people are more biased in this direction than others, and you have to know where you lean in order to correct for it in yourself.

Our emotions color how we see the world. If you're in a fearful state then you're more likely to be hypersensitive to things that are potentially threatening, and more likely to ignore those things that might reduce your fear. You're filtering everything that doesn't fit with your fearful emotion because your senses are heightened to what fits your perceived threat, not the confirmed threat. The main idea is to do something so you don't feel helpless against the threat you face - because you're mostly a victim

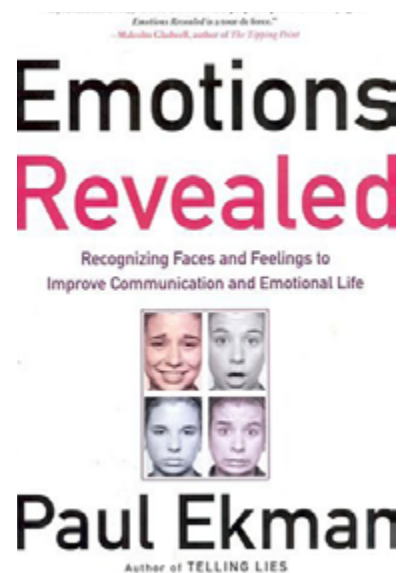


of fear and feel paralysis when you feel helpless, that there's nothing you can do. If there's something we can do to defend ourselves, to reduce the threat of harm, even if we're not certain it's going to work, then that will reduce one's fear. Even just actively accepting that a situation is out of your hands can help. I once underwent a surgical procedure where 1 in 1000 patients who have the same condition, die. It was technically out of my control, but I focused on the fact that I was probably going to be one of the 999 survivors. How well you can do something like that depends on your personality.

HAVE YOU HAD A FEARFUL EXPERIENCE WHERE YOU

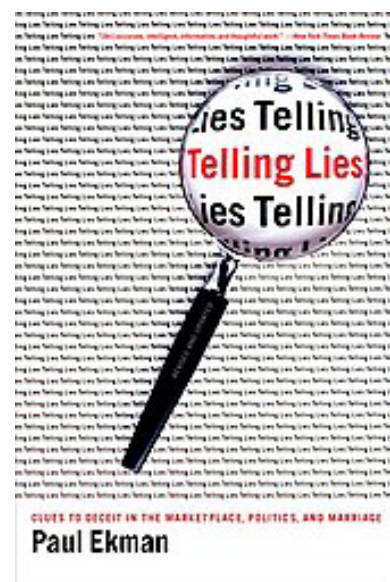
HAD TO COMBAT YOUR HELPLESSNESS?

The most frightening experience I've ever had was in 1967 when I chartered a small plane to get into a remote landing area in New Guinea. When we took off, the wheels fell off the airplane. They radioed us from the ground and said we better come back because they had an emergency fire truck waiting for us. We crash landed. I thought I would have been terrified out of my mind, but I was able to maintain some composure because I had something to do, which was to keep the door slightly ajar so it wouldn't jam and trap me in. That distraction reduced my fear and showed me the power of

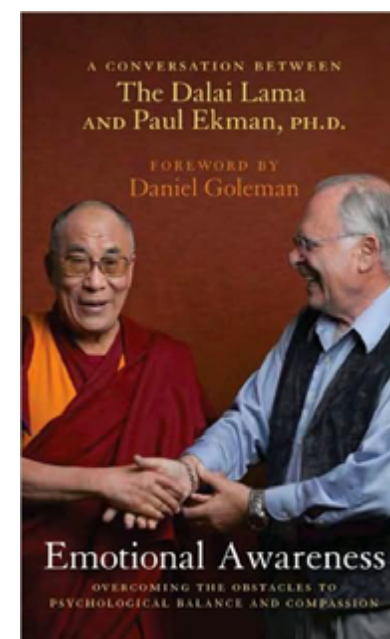


taking action as opposed to running around the cabin, arms flailing, doing nothing to help the situation, feeling more scared and panicked.

HAVE TEACHINGS FROM HIS HOLINESS DALAI LAMA CHANGED YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON OUR EMOTIONS?



My conversations with His Holiness Dalai Lama have led me to believe that most people are really not aware of being emotional until after the episode is over, or until after it's been going on for some time. We don't have much choice as to how to engage or be aware of impulses before we act on them. Our nature hardwires us to just



react, so it's not easy. But there are exercises that you can do that I've described in my *Emotions Revealed* book that help you subvert this. When you can do this, you have more choices as to how to manage your impulses.

Emotional evaluations are essentially done in milliseconds. Sometimes

they're correct and sometimes not. The problem becomes when that same mechanism operates at the kitchen table, because there's no im-

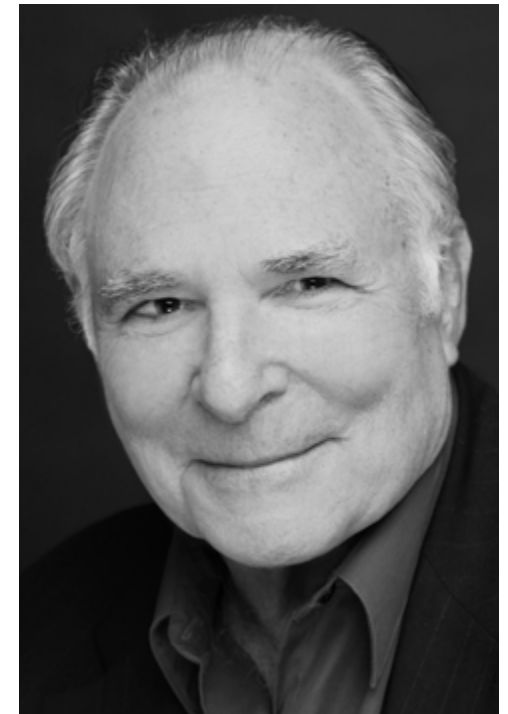
mediate threat at home or work, but our emotions are fast, automatic mechanisms we originally evolved for survival. The key to a better emo-

tional life is to develop awareness of how you are feeling at the moment you're feeling it, and if possible, before you feel it. Catch the impulse be-

fore the actions or words, the spark before the flame.

PAUL

Dr. Paul Ekman is a renowned psychologist and pioneer in the study of emotions and their relation to facial expressions. He is considered one of the 100 most eminent psychologists of our time, and an authority on deceit and emotion. Dr. Ekman is author of numerous **books**, including *Emotional Awareness: In conversation with Dalai Lama*, *Minding emotions (Highlighting conversations with the Dalai Lama)*, *Telling lies*, and *What the Face Reveals*. He has appeared on numerous television shows as Oprah, Larry King, Johnny Carson, and Bill Moyers. He is initiating new research related to national security and law enforcement, and the character Cal lightman of the Tv series Lie to Me is based on Dr. Ekman and his work.



**A single kind word will keep
one warm for many years.**

Unknown