

Foreword by Dawson Church, Ph.D.

MARGARET LYNCH RANIERE
AND DAVID RANIERE, Ph.D.

CHAPTER SAMPLE



UNBLOCKED

A REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO
Tapping into Your Chakra Empowerment Energy
to Reclaim Your Passion, Joy, and Confidence

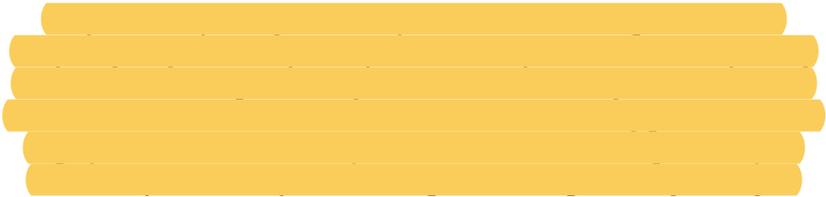
Praise for
UNBLOCKED

“Clear and compelling, this book’s systematic approach will help you find the obstacles that have been holding you back and release them. As your wise and compassionate guides, Margaret and David will take you on a transformational journey to your full potential. The adventure beckons!”

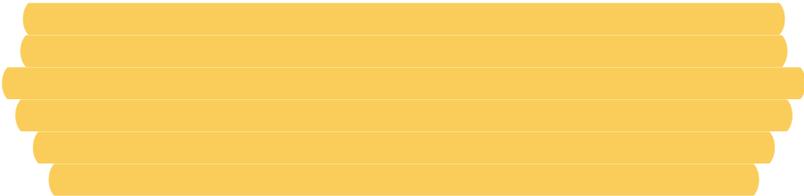
— **Dawson Church**, award-winning author of *Bliss Brain: The Neuroscience of Remodeling Your Brain for Resilience, Creativity, and Joy* (from the Foreword)

“A book for the “unfulfilled super achievers” trying to understand why they can’t let themselves thrive and FEEL good—like they’ve finally arrived. If you want to stop torturing yourself, this is the book for you.”

— **Jeff Walker**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Launch*



— **Nick Ortner**, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Tapping Solution*



— **Sage Lavine**, best-selling author of *Women Rocking Business*

“We all deeply desire to live in our power and to own our true worth, yet most of us go through life feeling like we’re not enough. We try to fill the void with self-sabotaging behaviors like perfectionism, control, and over-work. The brilliance of *Unblocked* is that it goes beyond the surface and gives you foolproof tools to break the bonds that are holding you back so you can not only fill that empty space inside but you can make the contribution you were born to make in the world.”

— **Debra Poneman**, best-selling author and founder of
Yes to Success Seminars

“*Unblocked* is a no-nonsense approach for people who want to release deep emotional blocks that prevent them from living an exceptional life. Margaret and David’s unique method focuses on the developmental issues associated with the lower chakras that hollow out the energy a person has to meet life’s challenges. The book is methodical, thorough, and thought provoking, and includes very powerful visualizations.

While the book is very easy to read, it is not meant for people who are compromised or emotionally faint of heart. *Unblocked* is for people who are willing and able to deal with potentially strong emotional reactions on their journey to improve themselves. A person who dives into the ideas of the book and does the visualizations offered should be largely rewarded. Finally, even though the book is geared to the public, coaches and mental health professionals will find a rich treasure chest of ideas for helping others.”

— **Robert Schwarz, PsyD, DCEP**, executive director, Association
for Comprehensive Energy Psychology, author of
Tools for Transforming Trauma



UNBLOCKED

Also by Margaret Lynch Ranieri

*Tapping into Wealth: How Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT)
Can Help You Clear the Path to Making More Money*



UNBLOCKED

A REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO
Tapping into Your Chakra Empowerment Energy
to Reclaim Your Passion, Joy, and Confidence

MARGARET LYNCH RANIERE
AND DAVID RANIERE, Ph.D.



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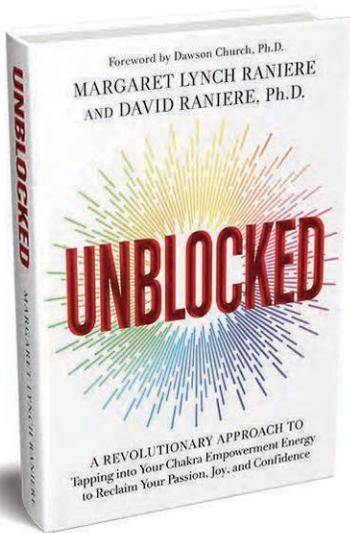
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For our daughters

This book demonstrates a personal growth technique called tapping. It is not a substitute for psychiatric care or psychotherapy. Nothing contained herein is meant to replace qualified medical advice or mental health care. The authors urge the reader to use these techniques under the supervision of a qualified therapist or physician. The author and publisher do not assume responsibility for how the reader chooses to apply the techniques herein.

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ROOT CHAKRA



SACRAL CHAKRA



SOLAR PLEXUS
CHAKRA



HEART CHAKRA

FOREWORD

An almost-lived life is the greatest of tragedies. We've all known people who have fabulous potential, yet never turn it into reality.

I've talked to many people as they were near the ends of their lives. One, my former neighbor Janice, was in her late eighties. She lived with her husband, Bill, who was just hitting ninety and in declining health. Conversations with Janice were peppered with her regrets over missed opportunities, carelessly discarded chances to live life fully, visions of what might have been, and the bitter realization that she and Bill would never be able to make up for lost time.

You don't want to end up like Janice and Bill. Seize every opportunity to release your blocks and claim your potential. Tomorrow will not be a better day to start growing. Fulfillment is not going to be easier down the road. There's never going to be a better time than now to reach for transformation. The day we start taking action is the day we start maximizing our potential.

Margaret and David's book is a marvelous guide to finding and releasing the blocks to that potential. Margaret, as one of today's leading coaches, and David, as a deeply discerning psychologist, provide insights, tools, and a systematic approach to clearing your blocks and realizing your full potential.

Margaret has found that her coaching clients have in common a lack of self-belief, even though many are high achievers. They use a microscope to enlarge their flaws, while shrinking their strengths and gifts. In *Unblocked*, she and David provide a step-by-step map to seeing yourself clearly and releasing the arguments—often buried deep in the subconscious—that stifle your potential.

The central transformational practice used in the book is Emotional Freedom Techniques or EFT, which is often called “tapping” because it uses fingertip tapping on acupuncture points to balance the body’s energy system. It also includes elements of two well-researched psychological methods, cognitive therapy and exposure therapy. Over 100 clinical trials demonstrating EFT’s efficacy for everything from pain to depression to fibromyalgia can be found at Research.EFTuniverse.com. EFT is particularly effective in treating conditions arising from traumatic memories, such as PTSD.

In one EFT workshop, I tapped with “Colonel Chuck,” a veteran who had served as a marine pilot during the Vietnam war. Chuck’s worst memory was of his first solo flight off the deck of an aircraft carrier. Just as his Super Sabre jet became airborne, the control tower operator yelled, “Engine fire! Get out!” Chuck was just high enough above the waves to eject safely. But this and other combat traumas led him to develop PTSD. On a scale of 0 to 10, Chuck’s emotion around the event was a 10—and that was more than forty years after the accident.

Chuck and I tapped on the operator’s words, on the flames he saw when he looked behind him, and other aspects of the event. Chuck’s numbers began to drop. Eventually, he was at a 0. He took a very deep breath and said, “I’m grateful I survived.” In psychology that’s called a “cognitive shift,” because it indicates a major change in mental perspective. Chuck went from trembling with fear as he told the story to gratitude for having survived the threat.

A meta-analysis of six studies of EFT for PTSD found it had astoundingly large treatment effects. On the most common scale used to measure the effect of a psychological treatment, 2 indicates a measurable effect. Five represents a moderate effect, while a score of 8 means that the treatment produces large effects. The analysts found that the effect size for EFT was 29. That’s completely off the charts. And it didn’t take long to treat those PTSD patients effectively: between 4 and 10 treatment sessions. That’s how quickly and effectively tapping can turn the fears that block our potential into the strengths that propel us forward.

With focus, effort, and practice, we can change dysfunctional thoughts and behaviors that lie at the level of conscious awareness. If you're habitually late, you can train yourself to be on time. If you have a habit of throwing your dirty socks on the sofa, the objections of your partner might lead you to discipline yourself to toss them in the laundry instead. But that's the level of personal change that most of us can accomplish without outside help.

Subconscious patterns are a much greater challenge. We can't access them directly. We often need outside help—whether this book, an online course, or a practitioner—to even identify them. Unless we get that help, these patterns can block us from fulfilling our dreams our whole life long, and we wind up like Janice and Bill.

Margaret describes the pain she feels as she witnesses people repeating such patterns of suffering year after year. David reminds us that our bodies remember early childhood insults that our minds do not. These subconscious somatic instructions can keep us rooted in maladaptive behaviors at odds with our conscious goals. We can't do things that are clearly good for us, and we can't understand why.

That's because the source of these impulses is deep below the surface. *Unblocked* helps bring them to consciousness, where we can recognize and work on them. Unless we do so, they may surface involuntarily—as compulsions, addictions, chronic self-sabotage, or uncomfortable emotions. Margaret and David remind us that while these patterns may show up in our marriages, workplaces, and social interactions, they are rooted in early childhood.

Surprisingly, many of them were adaptive when we were little. Dissociation, for instance, can serve as an essential coping mechanism for a child. Trapped in a dysfunctional family, dissociation allows a child to “forget” bad events. This allows her to continue to function in a situation from which there is no escape.

Though behaviors like dissociation are adaptive at the time, they have an expiration date. When we're still using dissociation as adults, that date is long past. We've failed to claim our present-day power. The essential work of adulthood is healing our childhood wounds so that we can reclaim the full range of our potential.

Margaret shows how tapping gives us a safe way to approach the traumatic events of our past as empowered adults.

Healing the chakra system through EFT helps energy move through our bodies in a healthy rather than distorted way. We might feel uncomfortable energy surges when this first happens, but Margaret reassures us that these internal upheavals are simply the result of energy that's been locked in our bodies since childhood moving freely at last.

Margaret and David emphasize the importance of starting at the root chakra, which has to do with safety and security. They note that many self-help addicts start at the top chakras, those in the head. They seek to change their mind-set, use positive affirmations, or pursue spiritual enlightenment.

Margaret and David help us realize that unless our foundation is solid, it will continue to undermine these lofty aspirations. That's why they start by addressing the survival fears and self-doubt that lurk in the lower energy centers.

Case histories drawn from Margaret's extensive work with a wide variety of clients vividly illustrate the obstacles and potentials of this approach. One example is a professional woman climbing the corporate ladder but racked with internal self-doubt. Margaret traced the adult symptoms to childhood experiences of being unsupported.

In other case histories, people feel they have to earn their right to feel safe, every day, by vigilantly following the rules of being perfect or successful. Old childhood scripts can also show up as overwork, poor boundaries, low self-esteem, poor body image, perfectionism, procrastination, being an unfulfilled super-achiever, and other maladies.

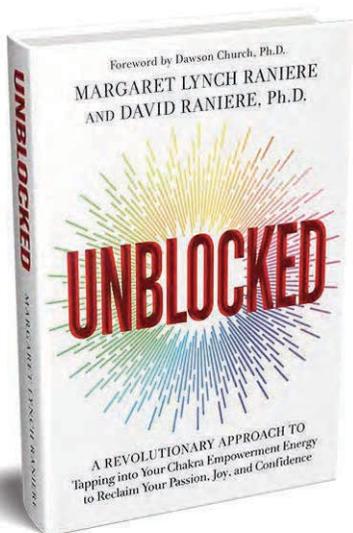
Unblocked contains a whole series of practical "Healing Experiences." These chapters will have you tapping, as well as uncovering all the possible psychological and childhood obstacles that hold you back. They combine Margaret's chakra framework with David's psychoanalytic approach in a complementary synthesis. Both are entry points into the hidden world that lies below the conscious mind.

The weekly homework gives structure to your transformational journey. Vivid visualizations provide the words to reshape your experience, layer after layer. You'll journal, listen intently to your body, feel your emotions, install new habits, tap away stress, and unfold a new vision of yourself at your own perfect pace.

Powerful and detailed tapping scripts approach healing from many angles. The Healing Experiences also contain links to additional video content to support and accelerate your progress from healing to empowerment.

Unblocked is a unique combination of Eastern energy work and the insights of Western psychology. Clear and compelling, this book's systematic approach will help you find the obstacles that have been holding you back, and clear them. As your wise and compassionate guides, Margaret and David will take you on a transformational journey to your full potential. The adventure beckons!

— Dawson Church, award-winning author of *Bliss Brain: The Neuroscience of Remodeling Your Brain for Resilience, Creativity, and Joy*



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ROOT CHAKRA



SACRAL CHAKRA



SOLAR PLEXUS
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HEART CHAKRA

INTRODUCTION

THE FUN-HOUSE MIRROR

Imagine a friend comes to stay at your house for the first time. All is going well until you show her where the bathroom is, and she freaks out. “Is this a joke? What the hell kind of mirror is this?”

You quickly check your reflection and see exactly what you always see every day. “It looks completely fine to me,” you say, bewildered. “Same as always!”

But your friend is unconvinced. She rifles through her bag, pulls out her hand mirror, and holds it up to your face. What you see in her mirror takes your breath away. You see a face you barely recognize. A face with beautiful, smart, kind eyes; lovely skin; and a beaming smile full of life.

What is this magic? you wonder. *Surely it's a trick.* But it is no trick. It is just the first time you are seeing *you*, beholding yourself as you truly are. And you are incredibly, almost unimaginably, beautiful.

Your surge of joy at seeing this truth suddenly mixes with shock as you look back at your lifelong mirror. Another truth emerges—the truth about your old mirror. You see it now for the damaged, fun-house mirror it has always been. With newly awakened eyes, you clearly see the distortions that make some of your features appear grossly huge and others weirdly tiny. You can't help but notice the huge black flecks hiding entire sections of your face.

Comparing your reflection in the two mirrors is overwhelming. Tears flow as you take stock of the lifetime of pain this mirror has needlessly caused you, from the shame of believing you are somehow flawed to all the ways those beliefs have stopped you from living fearlessly with full-on joy and passion.

“All this time I thought I was ugly, not good enough, broken,” you whisper. “But it was never true. I have always been beautiful—inside and out.”

A WORLD FULL OF NEEDLESS PAIN

One of the most difficult experiences for me (Margaret) is to see people walking around with so much needless pain on every level: emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. Even those who, from the outside looking in, have successful lives struggle with emotional pain, whether in the form of self-doubt and anxiety or powerlessness and regret. Many people play it small, feel invisible, isolate, or are afraid to show up in life for fear of making a mistake or not being “good enough.” Others take big steps toward their goals and dreams only to sabotage their efforts when on the cusp of success. A common theme for many people is working tremendously hard to prove they are worthy of taking up space on this planet. Yet somehow, despite all they accomplish, they never feel good enough on the inside.

Even as a child, I wanted to “fix” my classmates as we all began to struggle with insecurities, which usually revolved around feeling ugly or embarrassed about hair, clothes, and acne. Much like in the fun-house mirror story, it was as if they were seeing an exaggerated version of their imperfections and none of their beauty.

But no matter how hard I tried to convince my friends of what I could see—that they were beautiful, smart, funny, amazing, and had nothing to worry about—I couldn’t change what they saw. I tried passion. I tried logic. I tried humor. And I tried tears. Their inner beliefs always won, and over the years, I watched how those insecurities showed up in their body language, confidence,

choices, and actions. By high school I had decided that you can't change people on the inside, so I followed the family footsteps and became an engineer.

For 18 years I worked as a chemical engineer at several Fortune 500 companies. I was promoted many times because I seemed to have a gift for mentoring and managing people, and I brought home a nice paycheck. From the outside looking in, I was secure and successful. But I never really felt passionate about my career or the work itself.

With the birth of my daughter at age 30, I moved into less stressful roles, taking technical sales positions that paid well and let me work from a home office. Cushy, yes, but I was bored, uninspired, and mailing it in. *Aren't I meant to do something more?* I would ask myself often. *Something bigger?*

Then one day I saw the great author and speaker Wayne Dyer on TV talking about the power of intention. Suddenly everything changed. He seemed to be speaking directly to me: "Yes, Margaret, you are meant to do something more—find it!"

After arguing with Wayne in my head for a week, I took the leap and set off to completely change my career path. I found myself leaning back into my childhood calling to help others change and heal. I got certified in hypnotherapy and Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), a clinically proven energy-psychology intervention also known as tapping. I was convinced that if I could just help people clear out their erroneous thinking—the distortions in their mirror—they would see what I could see: their beauty, gifts, and worthiness.

NAVIGATING MY NEW PATH

In my early 40s, I started seeing clients, and I was eager to help them with my new techniques. Most of my first clients were curious about tapping for specific issues. They wanted help eliminating fears over public speaking, alleviating physical issues that started as emotional issues, and reducing food cravings so

they could lose weight. But as I started to market myself more and more to entrepreneurs and career-driven people, the work got more complex.

On the surface they wanted help reaching their goals, and I promised to help them clear away whatever was holding them back. Their complaints were common enough. Most came under the heading of anxiety over doing something, such as dreading a confrontation with their boss or subordinates, panic over giving a self-promoting presentation, or apprehension about a court case or negotiation. Or they felt stuck in a dead-end job or at a level of earning potential. Many clients suffered from procrastination and had trouble taking important steps toward their goals and dreams, which often meant they were self-limiting their success and income.

All of these people came to work with me because they recognized that they were the source of their problems, usually saying some version of “It’s me! I sabotage myself.” The more clients I worked with, the more I saw that underneath all the anxiety, procrastination, and “stuckness” were bigger issues. When it came down to it, we always got to a familiar and similar place: Secretly, they questioned whether they were good enough to take their next steps. These folks lacked the courage and confidence that come with believing in yourself.

Tapping positively and immediately impacted stress and anxiety levels. For some clients it was like an instant miracle. But for those who felt the most stuck, the standard use of tapping wasn’t getting to the heart of their issues. There was a deeper side to their self-doubt that seemed truer and more certain to them than the gifts, talents, and potential that I could clearly see. Here I was again, standing in front of a mirror with incredibly smart, talented, and big-hearted people who saw clear evidence of their flaws and only glimmers of their light. No wonder they were procrastinating!

The truth is I was keenly aware of struggling with the exact same doubts as I tried to grow my coaching business, so I knew what they were going through. This was a crossroads for me. I realized that escaping this stuckness was bigger than what any

technique could offer and that helping people move past this was exactly what I had always felt called to do. I became determined to find a way to create a major shift in how my clients felt about and believed in themselves. I wanted them (as well as myself) to have the confidence, passion, and courage to take action. I had to figure this out!

I put on my engineer thinking cap and doubled down on my working theory: every outer problem, struggle, or complaint has an inner root cause. I had great tools, but I needed to shape what I was doing into a system of getting consistent and more far-reaching results. I focused all my studies and client work on figuring out *how* I could get people to change. I became obsessed with the *how*.

Stacks of books on the subject focused on using willpower or affirmations or on the “mental gymnastics” of trying not to think negative thoughts. They all boiled down to the one message I was trying to get to the bottom of: “You have to stop doubting yourself! Believe in yourself!” But their *hows* seemed to scratch the surface of change. I needed something that went much deeper.

It wasn’t until I started learning about the chakra system (the body’s seven energy centers) that I felt the start of something big. As far as I was concerned, I had suddenly found a treasure map to healing.

FROM *HOW* TO *WHERE*

Through studying the chakras and using what I learned experimentally in client sessions, I gathered that the roots of self-doubt were in secret, guarded, long-forgotten places. These were places that clients either could not show me or were consciously or unconsciously leading me away from with lots of distracting details. But in understanding the chakras, I now had a map guiding me to *where* I had to go to get to the root of an issue.

All along I had been asking the wrong question. Instead of asking *how* to help people shift, I needed to focus on the *where*. *Where* do I need to go to solve these inner problems? *Where* are

they rooted? By changing the question, I began to crack the code to getting bigger changes and bigger results.

I learned where to dig deep to get to the inner root causes of self-doubt and fear that lie beneath procrastination, perfectionism, and self-sabotage. I crafted methods to safely and compassionately take clients to these places where we could introduce tapping to heal in unexpected ways. I watched as, step by step, healing those places in my clients was like removing blocks to their natural self-belief and self-love and allowing confidence, joy, and passion to rise through their system.

After these sessions clients were happier, bolder, more enthusiastic, and in action. They felt empowered!

A remarkable number of client e-mails, phone calls, and sessions started with the giddy words, “Margaret, you are never going to believe what I did. . . .” These words were usually followed by tales of moments when they surprised themselves (and often those around them) by doing something big with a new level of ease and enthusiasm. Those clients honored me with their trust by allowing me to lead them to their innermost spaces of pain and fear. They challenged me to better navigate where to go to get meaningful change.

Like any good engineer, I then put my methods and discoveries into a systematic, step-by-step approach that anyone can learn and get seemingly impossible results from even when using it on their own. And all it takes is two fingertips, a commitment to go through the program, and a desire to feel more empowered than ever.

All this talk about tapping and chakras might be sounding a bit too woo-woo for some of you. If you’re feeling skeptical, stick with me anyway, because you don’t need to buy into this for it to work. You only need to try it and feel what happens.

WHAT EXACTLY ARE THE CHAKRAS?

The energetic system of the chakras stems from ancient Hindu yogic tradition. Centuries ago yogis compartmentalized the body’s

functioning into seven major energy centers that are known today in the West as the Root, Sacral, Solar Plexus, Heart, Throat, Third Eye, and Crown Chakras.

Responsible for the quality of our physical bodies, feelings and emotions, agency, ability to love, creativity, spirituality, and mind, the chakras sum up the human experience. They are pure energy assets designed to bring us vibrancy, joy, confidence, passion, worthiness, and empowerment.

A Rainbow of Energy

Each chakra is responsible for powering a different level of human existence and is associated with a color of the rainbow.

1. The Root Chakra is red and represents safety and security.
2. The Sacral Chakra is orange and represents creativity.
3. The Solar Plexus Chakra is yellow and represents self-esteem and willpower.
4. The Heart Chakra is green and represents wisdom, love, and compassion.
5. The Throat Chakra is blue and represents communication.
6. The Third Eye Chakra is indigo and represents intuition and imagination.
7. The Crown Chakra is violet and represents higher consciousness.

In *Anatomy of the Spirit*, author Caroline Myss writes about the seven chakras as stages of personal and spiritual power. At each chakra level, we gain more energy—more power—and become conscious about how to use it.

Each chakra carries a unique gift of energy—a unique level of consciousness that develops at specific ages. The Root Chakra, for instance, begins to form as soon as we are born. It’s designed to help us feel solid and grounded in the physical world. By the time we reach adolescence, we’re opening up to our imagination and self-reflection at the sixth chakra, or the Third Eye Chakra. In adulthood we’re finally able to open our Crown Chakra of enlightenment and see possibilities for ourselves far beyond our family paradigm.

How we experience life during these developmental periods when our chakras are unfolding will either nurture our chakras’ natural rising energy that is so core to being an empowered, happy adult—or block it.

In the foreword to *Anatomy of the Spirit*, author C. Norman Shealy, M.D., Ph.D., calls the chakras regulators of life-energy flow: “The major biological batteries of your emotional biography.” If even one chakra is blocked, some of our power is blocked, and life will feel less joyful. We will feel as if we have been denied certain natural, inalienable birthrights. Fulfilling our purpose becomes a struggle.

In this context I see chakras as a brilliant map of the whole of human consciousness.

BLOCKED CHAKRAS

As energy rises from chakra to chakra, it influences the other chakras. The strength of the fourth chakra (the Heart Chakra) is dependent upon the strength of the first, second, and third chakras. Enlightenment (the seventh chakra) requires the energy of all the lower six chakras. Although they are interconnected and interdependent, each chakra has a unique mission to fulfill, and it all starts at the foundation, or the Root Chakra.

In a perfect world, the chakras develop fully and freely, their energy allowed to course throughout the body uninterrupted. In an imperfect world that at times teaches us we’re unworthy, unimportant, powerless, or unlovable, those wounds and beliefs act to block and misdirect chakra energy and therefore our personal

power. If we truly believe, for instance, that we are undeserving of earning more money, we hold back on the rising energy that would compel us to confidently ask for a raise. We work hard and wonder why we can't seem to get ahead, much less make ends meet. This type of struggle is a symptom of a blocked chakra.

Technically, the chakras are always opening and closing depending on what's happening in any given moment and what kind of energy we allow to flow through that space. So a blocked chakra doesn't necessarily mean a closed chakra. When imagining a blocked chakra, think in terms of how big the channel of energy is. Some of us have a sliver of energy running up through the chakras. What we're going for is more volume—the stuff of fire-hose energy.

The cost of blocked chakra energy is enormous. Blocked chakras can limit us to a life of pain, disappointment, unfulfilled dreams, depression, anxiety, addiction, disease, and other woes. Some of my clients avoided relationships for many years because they didn't trust themselves to set boundaries. Others were stuck in jobs they felt no passion for because they followed what was expected of them instead of listening to their inner voice. Still others left a job or relationship only to feel lost and unsure of who they were or what they really wanted.

Free-flowing chakras empower us. Chakras blocked by fear, guilt, shame, and a host of other barriers, render us powerless. The bulk of this pain resides in the lower chakras.

THE MESSY LOWER CHAKRAS

The chakras are divided into upper and lower halves, with the Heart Chakra—the seat of wisdom—in the middle. The upper chakras (Crown, Third Eye, and Throat) are our sources of creativity, inspiration, and enlightenment. Because they are spiritual in nature, they have always been somewhat glorified in the pursuit of higher consciousness. The lower chakras (Solar Plexus, Sacral, and Root) are the bases of our power and responsible for how safe we feel to express our authentic selves in this world. They offer what I call empowerment energy.

Empowerment energy is the surge that lifts us into acting on inspired thoughts and following through. It's full of courage, deservedness, worthiness, and certainty, and we know it when we feel it. It is internal and a birthright. Using it feels good and right and meant to be because when we exercise empowerment energy, we do it the spirit of everyone's highest good. Empowerment energy is capable of effecting momentous change. It's hard, even painful, not to act on this energy. Denying it leads to suffering.

Empowerment energy is different than power, which is usually an energy we use over others—such as a parent's power over their young children or a boss's power over an employee. This kind of power comes from position and so depends on external circumstances. The “good” parent or boss uses their power wisely, but many people abuse this type of power. It's impossible to abuse empowerment energy, which comes not from ego or position but from our very core.



Figure 1

Empowerment energy (see figure 1) starts at the Root Chakra and flows upward. Manifestation (having an idea and turning it into a reality) starts at the Crown and works its way down. Struggling to manifest our dreams is a sign that lower chakra energy is blocked, because most of the practical work involved in making dreams come true happens in the lower chakras. For example, we may have a great idea to open a bakery but never come up with the down payment necessary to buy or rent the building. Releasing blocked empowerment energy is our focus in this book.

The lower chakras are messier than the upper chakras. They harbor the roots of complicated emotions of such as fear, guilt, and shame. They involve long-forgotten memories and distant events that shaped us as children. When they are blocked, it means we are filled with fear, pain, trauma, and all the things we don't like about ourselves. This blockage is compounded in the powerful Heart Chakra. When we lean into these four chakras, each lights the way to secret, guarded, forgotten spaces that hold the roots to our biggest struggles. These are sacred spaces *where* the real healing takes place, and where big transformation happens. And it's where we're going to spend most of our time.

HEALING THE CHAKRAS

You might be well versed in chakraspeak. If you're not, no worries. You don't technically need to know much about them to heal them. It's kind of like recovering from a cold. You don't have to understand how the body suddenly turns on its healing mechanism. You just need to know you've got a virus and then understand how to take care of the symptoms: drink plenty of clear fluids, get plenty of rest, and maybe take some extra vitamin C, and before you know it you feel better.

Likewise, with the chakras, you just need to know that something is off and then take care of the symptoms, which often include behaviors such as procrastination and self-sabotage, by following the process in this book. I will guide you through the

lower chakras as you tap while reading a script, visualize, cry or yawn a bit every now and then (that's how you know you're unblocking energy), tap some more, and you will feel better and then stronger and more empowered than ever.

Still, it's good to have some understanding of the powers that lie within each of your chakras. Plenty of books on the market describe the intricacies of the chakras in detail. (One of my favorites is *Eastern Body, Western Mind* by Anodea Judith.) In *Unblocked* I give you enough information to get to know your chakras as I have interpreted them through my many years of working with clients. Throughout most of this book, however, you'll be focused on a process of healing them—on opening up the natural flow of energy that's been blocked over the years.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS: DAVID'S STORY

Like Margaret, from an early age I also wanted to help people. By the time I was 17, I was a certified emergency medical technician and the youngest member of my local first aid squad. "Beyond my years" at that still-tender age, I was skilled at intervening at the scene of motor vehicle accidents, providing life support to people in cardiac arrest, and attending to physical injuries from the minor to the severe. But what made the most profound impression on me were the things I saw that I could do nothing about: the victims of the car accident who died before I got there; the terrified and grief-stricken faces of parents, partners, and children who watched helplessly as I carried their loved ones out on a stretcher; or that teenager (around my age) with whom I sat quietly in the back of the ambulance on the way to the hospital following his overdose.

What took hold of me then were two of the most basic existential questions: *Why did these things happen? How do you live in a world where such horrible things happen?* It turned out that this was not a passing phase of teenage angst but a defining moment—a turning-inward that took root in me and has since guided my

journey into the present day. This exposure to external, bodily trauma forced my attention toward the inner world; to what traumatic experiences of various shapes and sizes do to our insides; and to how our outer experiences shape and sometimes shatter our sense of self, others, and the world. At the time I was not sure why, but I needed to make sense of that for myself and others.

So I set upon a course to study the invisible wounds for which there weren't words—the hidden fractures and heartbreaks that lived silently in the shadows. I could sense these wounds in the people around me and was dimly aware of them in myself, but they called to me as a mysterious presence that I felt close to and needed to understand.

My doctoral training in clinical psychology was all about this, as was my formal training in psychoanalysis that followed. I studied when, where, and how the mind and heart bend and break. And I examined closely those forces that shape us into who we are, along with the many forms of psychotherapy that attempt to heal internal wounds, promote growth, and free us up to live a fuller life.

By the time I met my wife and co-author, it had been 20 years since I sat with my first patient, a survivor of trauma whose parting gift of a framed photograph of a street in Rome remains perched on my office desk as I write these words. When I met Margaret, I was well established in private practice and held teaching roles in academic institutions and leadership positions in clinical settings. I had trained at one of Harvard's prestigious teaching hospitals and had been supervised by some of the best and brightest minds on the planet. And with all of that under my belt, I had come to the same humble conclusion that the psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan sounded out decades earlier: "We are all much more simply human than otherwise."

The human predicament is something we all share, and the workings of the mind warrant humble reverence from whatever angle we approach them. In other words I didn't have all the answers, and the established traditions in which I was schooled didn't have a monopoly on anything. Anchored and disciplined in

them as I was, I knew intuitively that other models of the human experience and treatment modalities also had much to offer. But when Margaret and I met, she knew only that I was a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst—and she was scared.

Though Margaret couldn't help but speak passionately about her work and her involvement with tapping, chakras, and energy psychology, she also braced herself. As I listened quietly, she anticipated judgment and dismissal by this academically trained Ph.D., only to find that I embraced it all. She was surprised to learn that I was no stranger to alternative healing modalities and had done some of my own healing work in the human-energy field with a student of Barbara Brennan (author of *Hands of Light*). Professionally, my clinical work with trauma of various kinds had also required me to reach beyond traditional psychotherapy so I could better accompany my patients through their healing process. So by the time Margaret and I met, I had already experimented with and critically examined many alternative healing modalities—some of which I rejected completely on scientific grounds (for lacking conceptual coherence and empirical validity), whereas others I remained quite open to because of their demonstrated efficacy.

Margaret's systematic approach to integrating the chakra system (a grounding and guiding conceptual framework) with tapping (a clinically proven technique) and guided exposure through visualization (another clinically proven technique) felt like a breath of fresh air for this practicing therapist. For me, Margaret's creative and integrative blend of several elements fills a gap in traditional forms of psychotherapy and gets at some of the places where we are blocked internally that we might otherwise have no other way of accessing.

Fast-forwarding several years, here we are, and my contribution as co-author and commentator of this book represents another embrace of Margaret and her work. My commentaries in the chapters ahead will provide support to Margaret's ideas and guided tapping processes by drawing upon scientific disciplines whose accumulated wisdom and empirically validated research have anchored me during the past 20 years of my clinical practice.

Margaret's approach may engage the inner skeptic in some readers. I have much respect and appreciation for this part of any of us. Who we are and where we come from are matters too important to get wrong, and speculation about them runs counter to our project of establishing a more empowered foundation on which to stand within ourselves. So, from my inner skeptic to yours, I hope that the robust research findings in the fields of childhood development, attachment, and treatment outcome research help to establish trust that Margaret's approach stands on solid ground.

Finally, my commentaries are intended to speak to readers like me who are also practicing psychotherapists or mental health counselors. My words are intended to serve as a bridge between frames of reference familiar to a psychotherapist and Margaret's work. I continue to discover and marvel at the many points of contact between these two cultures of healing, and I hope that some of the ideas I put forth are useful to you as you transition into and traverse between Margaret's model and those more familiar to you.

MARGARET'S ADVICE FOR HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM

Unblocked is divided into four parts, each with four chapters. Each part focuses on one of the four lower chakras—the empowerment energy chakras. The first chapter in each part is the setup chapter. It introduces the basics of a chakra—what it's responsible for, how it gets blocked, how much this blockage has cost us, and what you can look forward to when its energy is flowing once again.

Each of the remaining three chapters in each part are devoted to a Healing Experience. This is where you get your hands dirty and even start rolling in the mud, so to speak.

My co-author, David Ranieri, Ph.D., is my husband. He's also a brilliant psychologist and psychoanalyst who has been trained to use tapping in his clinical practice. He has been a sounding board, guiding presence, and major influence in my work. At the end of each setup chapter, he explains why and how the Healing

Experiences work, validating not only the tapping process but also the importance of chakra work.

In the Healing Experience chapters, you'll always start with a visualization that takes you to the *where*—the specific places and times in your life that you need to visit to make real and lasting change. I sometimes ask you to “feel into” the experience. This is simply my way of asking you to be fully present for at least a few seconds. Each visualization is followed with a tapping script that guides you through voicing, releasing, and calming intense emotions and even old, unquestioned beliefs while you tap on acupressure points (see figure 2). The intention is to open, engage, and release unconscious thoughts and beliefs that are holding you down.

Each Healing Experience chapter ends with a Next Steps section. These include exercises to free up even more energy as well as suggestions for how to practice your new skills. They will help you to keep tapping and chakra work in the forefront of your daily existence.

TIMELINE: HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

How quickly you get through the book is up to you—sort of. Some of you might find it tempting to dash through all the Healing Experiences in the interest of, well, healing quickly. But I recommend going at a pace that *feels* right to you.

I offer some guidance about when you might want to keep going through a script before moving on, but you will want to listen to your inner guidance as well. It's not uncommon to spend days or weeks tapping on one script—or returning to it multiple times—while breezing through other scripts.

Likewise, the Next Steps sections can be done at your own pace. I suggest doing each Next Step for a week, but that's just a guideline. For some people a week is enough time to dig deep and realize how many opportunities there are to tap and unblock empowerment energy.

Although you get to decide how much time to spend on a Next Step, script, or chakra, be aware that procrastination and self-sabotage (two common signs of blocked empowerment energy) may be at play. If you find yourself making excuses for why you can't get to the work or putting it off for weeks or months, you might want to map out a schedule for yourself or tell yourself you will just do one script today. Be kind to yourself and plow through it if you must. I promise you will not regret it.

VISUALIZATION: A DOOR TO THE UNCONSCIOUS

Throughout the Healing Experiences, I will ask you to close your eyes and picture different times in your life—some from the past and some in the future. You will use your imagination to visit that time by simply allowing an image to form in your mind. Guided visualization is not meant to calm but instead to uncover and activate chakra-specific blocks. We are looking to intentionally trigger strong emotions and the negative beliefs that accompany them.

Visualization allows us to get impressions from our unconscious instead of from what we consciously think or remember. We will do this before, during, and after tapping, as if peeling an onion layer by layer. The visualizations I guide you through are important because they are an effective means of hearing from the emotional, illogical, and primitive unconscious mind—a storehouse of first (and second) chakra information that is beyond our conscious awareness and even memory. We may not be cognizant of what's in the storehouse, but it holds the invisible roots to what we need to heal.

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, viewed the unconscious as a part of the mind that holds impulses, wishes, desires (including those that are learned to be socially unacceptable), traumatic memories, and emotions we actively try not to feel. Sometimes, unbeknownst to us, a battle erupts between a conscious desire or goal and our unconscious that registers the

goal as threatening, dangerous, or something that, if achieved, will be somehow painful. We struggle to act or follow through with a plan, but we don't know why. We are unaware of the pain, trauma, or danger that our unconscious associates with our exciting new plans. We're acting based on a hidden agenda of which we are unaware.

Whether good, bad, right, wrong, true, or false, this lifetime of data remains in our unconscious mind to this day but is difficult to access directly. We might get a glimpse of them in dreams or unexpectedly voice one in a "Freudian slip." (But we can—and will—use tapping to get to them.) It's as if we collected this data, put it in our storage box, and threw away the key.

Closing the eyes and visiting these important places by allowing the mind to imagine a picture full of details, feelings, and impressions can result in stunning amounts of information that illuminate the healing we need to do. This is true even for those who feel initially skeptical about what their imagination is conjuring up. So as you follow the instructions to visualize a person or event taking shape, resist the temptation to overthink it. Because the unconscious is not ruled by logic or the linear progression of time—but instead seems to operate in strong emotions, metaphors, and pictures—we must trust that what appears in our mind's eye means something important to us.

The historical accuracy of what we may picture is of little importance. We're going for the powerful emotions and meanings that reveal how the past has created the present.

Visualization also allows us to do something I find incredibly powerful as a practitioner and results-oriented person: After going through a round of tapping, we can check in and get an instant measure on the impact and progress of the healing work by comparing our pre- and post-tapping visualizations. Each time the picture in our mind's eye will have shifted. This new picture with new information shows us where we are in the process and the next important set of emotions and meanings to work on.

For example, if the imagined picture has become more intense emotionally, that tells us we have hit on something that needs more attention. Has the emotion shifted from intense fear to sadness or anger? That tells us which emotion to shift to voicing and honoring with the next tapping round. Does the child we are imagining now seem happy and content and to know we are there instead of terrified and alone? That's a sign of healing.

Healing takes place when we are ready to move into being with the entirety of a given experience and hold a new space of compassion and understanding for ourselves. Believe me when I say that you will know it when you get there.

TAPPING: A CLINICALLY PROVEN MIND-BODY TECHNIQUE

Throughout the Healing Experiences, you'll be using Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), commonly known as tapping. This evidence-based, clinically proven intervention effectively reduces anxiety and the stress response in a measurable physiological way even within minutes of use. Developed in the 1980s by Gary Craig, it is often used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) safely, and it's currently taking the nation by storm.

The technique involves light tapping with the fingertips on certain acupuncture points (see figure 2) while recalling specific experiences that trigger fears, anxiety, or stress. The tapping acts like a physical switch, turning down the nervous system's fight-flight-freeze response within minutes of use. Because all intense, reactionary, and painful emotions have fear as a major element, tapping is a perfect mind-body tool to use with chakras, which are linked to the nervous system.

UNBLOCKED

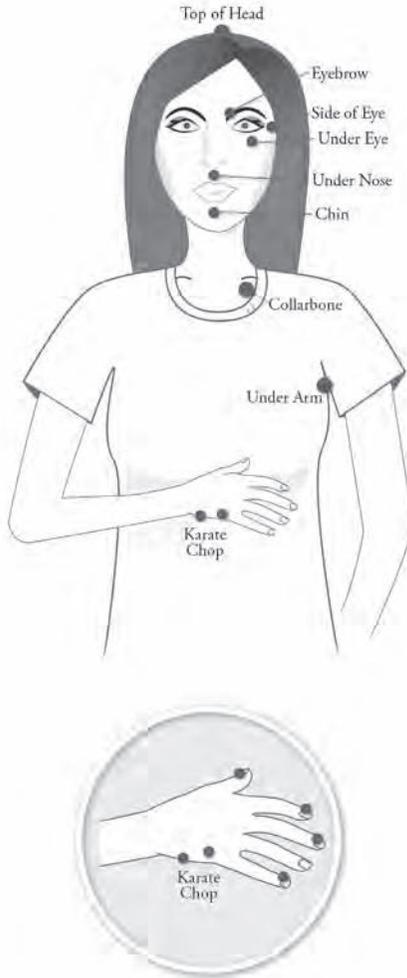


Figure 2

At the same time, tapping has been proven to stimulate, or switch on, the relaxation response, which is associated with many positive benefits from boosting the immune system to improving mental clarity and decision making. When used expertly EFT can produce *lasting* change, especially when paired with the tapping scripts provided in the Healing Experience chapters in this book.

I usually start tapping at the eyebrow points (see figure 2) and work my way down to the temples, below the eyes, below the nose, on the chin, on the collarbone, under the arms, on the hands, and then back up to the crown of the head. Tapping on any given point is optional. If you prefer not to tap under the arms or on the hands, for instance, so be it!

You can also begin and end your tapping on any point you want. Early practitioners of EFT followed a certain tapping order, but we've since learned that the order doesn't matter. It won't affect your outcome. Do whatever is most comfortable. You can use one hand and two fingers (index and middle) or two hands and four fingers so you are tapping on both sides of the body simultaneously. (You only need two fingers when tapping under the nose and on the chin—and one hand when tapping the opposite hand.)

Since the mid-1980s millions of people have used tapping safely at home by turning to videos, books, or experts featured on radio, television, or telesummits. One of the most popular online events, the Tapping World Summit, has been held annually since 2008 and attracts more than 2 million listeners.

Tapping has been proven overwhelmingly to be safe for self-use by everyday people with everyday problems, even when experiencing strong emotions, because of the consistent calming effect it has on the nervous system. However, the *Unblocked* approach involves visualizations and tapping phrases that are meant to honestly voice strong emotions like fear, anger, and grief. There are times when intense emotions can come up quickly and/or unexpectedly as you tap through the process. If at any time, it begins to feel like too much or overwhelming during any of the visualizations or tapping contained in the Healing Experiences immediately pause and follow this protocol.

Protocol for Intense Emotional Reactions

Stop visualizing the scene that has triggered the intense emotions and stop using the words of the tapping script. Instead

continue to tap silently as you breathe deeply and focus on your own breath as it flows in and out. For some people it's best to focus your attention on the sensation of your feet touching the floor and the chair supporting you as you breathe deeply. This will help you feel calm and grounded. For others it will feel better to physically get up and walk away from the process while you continue to tap silently and take full deep breaths. In that case, move your body, take a walk, shake it out, and swing your arms and intermittently stamp your feet to feel more grounded.

Next, listen to your body and reactions because they may be telling you this is too much to handle on your own and you don't need to do this alone or all at once. Reach out for support and discuss your reactions with a licensed mental health provider.

Contraindications for the Use of Tapping

There are emotional conditions and life circumstances for which tapping and/or tapping focused on activating strong emotions is either contraindicated or to be used only under the direct care of a mental health professional trained in this technique. A variety of psychological conditions involve significant difficulties regulating emotional states such that exposure to emotionally intense material can be overwhelming and have significantly adverse effects. In particular, individuals who suffer from dissociative disorders, impulse-control disorders, and panic disorder are advised to consult a mental health provider prior to utilizing this technique on their own. Tapping is also contraindicated for individuals suffering from borderline personality disorder, acute substance abuse, or for those who continue to be exposed to the traumatic experiences they wish to process, such that they are not in a sufficiently safe environment to process that trauma. Such conditions are best treated by licensed mental health providers. In addition, some psychological trauma can be too intense and emotionally painful to deal with on your own. If you have long-lasting or intense emotional or physical and/or sexual trauma it is

essential that you consult your physician or a licensed mental health practitioner before using the Healing Experiences or tapping scripts in this book. Tapping is not a substitute for medical or mental health treatment.

TAPPING SCRIPTS: ENGAGING THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Each Healing Experience chapter includes several tapping scripts designed to lead you to voice, hear, and honor all the pain, fear, and emotions triggered by each visualization. The words in these scripts invite you to dig deep, release the intensity of painful emotions, and charge up your empowerment energy.

The number of tapping scripts within each chapter varies, but you can repeat them as many times as you want if you feel you need more work. Text in the script is separated by dashes. This is your cue to move to the next tapping point (see figure 2). It's not essential that you move to the next point at that time. It's my way of ensuring you go through the tapping points at least once, and usually multiple times, during each script.

You'll want to read the scripts out loud as you tap. Sometimes I ask you to read them very loudly or even rant!

Every Healing Experience chapter includes a link to bonus content and discussion not contained in the book. Also, if you decide to purchase the audiobook, you'll have the added benefit of hearing me guide you through the tapping scripts and visualizations.

The content of the tapping scripts is based on years of working with clients. Many of the word choices are from the mouths of my clients and reflect common experiences. At times the words in the scripts might sound harsh and over-the-top and even feel wrong to say. Sometimes the only way to voice an injustice is to use the charged words of protest and outrage. So that's what we're going to do. (Whenever you read or listen to a script, make sure you tap at the same time. Reading these scripts without tapping might make you feel bad.) The idea is to voice, honor, and move stuck energy. I

say that a lot in this book because it's a key process to unblocking chakra energy: voice, honor, and move.

Even though I sometimes ask you to say things to your parents, for instance, that you'd never dare utter, even in private, I promise you that no one gets hurt—not your loved ones, not your enemies, and certainly not you. You may go through some intense moments, but tapping ensures that you will always feel a sense of calm emotionally and physically. The longer you tap—even if you do so without saying a word—the greater the calm.

But getting calm is only part of the process. We will use tapping chakra by chakra to reclaim *you* and what you deserve to be, do, and have for your next chapter in life. I will guide you through the process, charging you up with the empowerment energy you need to create the life you want.

And please know that throughout the Healing Experiences, I'll be holding a space for you in my Heart Chakra—the chakra in which all healing takes place. Through my words and my belief in this process, I will, like a loving friend, hold your hand as you move forward into this uncharted, exciting, and *empowering* territory—and offer you a new mirror so you can behold your own incredible beauty and power.

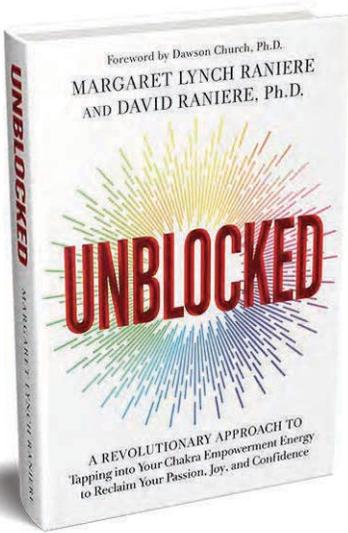
This process of blending tapping with a systematic focus on the lower chakras to safely guide you to places you would never go on your own takes you directly to the hidden roots of your issues, expertly revealing blind spots, even to veteran tappers. The result is meaningful change that you can feel inside and see in your new words, actions, and enthusiasm. The promise is not just healing but *profound transformation in your personal power that changes the way you show up, speak, and act!*

Let's get started.



THE POWER OF PRESENCE—HEALING THE ROOT CHAKRA

Imagine . . . that your automatic,
unquestioned truth—
“Of course I have the right”—
calmed every whisper of self-doubt.



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ROOT CHAKRA



SACRAL CHAKRA



SOLAR PLEXUS
CHAKRA



HEART CHAKRA

CHAPTER 1

RECLAIMING A GROUNDED, POWERFUL PRESENCE

In my many years of meeting with clients who want to make big changes in their lives but feel stuck, I've noticed a common denominator: Even without thinking about it in chakra terms, people tend to ignore the Root, or first, Chakra and go straight to the top—the upper chakras of mindset, positive affirmations, and enlightenment. If they are into personal growth, they meditate or practice yoga to clear the mind and become present and open. If they are more business focused, they set sizable goals, read mindset books, and try to think big and stay positive. But going to the top without doing the foundational work is like putting frosting on a moldy brownie—it looks good at first, but what's underneath eventually makes its way to the surface.

The gifts of the upper chakras are many, but they are very different from the lower-chakra empowerment energy gifts, which are required for real, underlying change. To own our power and rise to new challenges, we need to be present and grounded in a strong foundation of resiliency and self-belief. We need to address directly the not-so-positive sides of us instead of pretending they are not there. These tend to be the core, fear-based ways of operating that appear to work against us—the ones backed by thoughts such as *What if I am not good enough?*

These deep inner thoughts can fill us with anxiety and dread about doing the big things in life we dream about or even just taking the next step. We will experience scattered thinking, procrastination, and paralyzing perfectionism instead of the bold courage we need. Without a strong first chakra, our dreams and wishes can float untethered for years, as if in zero gravity, unable to gain traction. As one client said about the time she had lost: “And then a year became ten years, and I am running out of time.”

Unblocking empowerment energy requires leaning into the difficult work of uncovering and transforming what stops us from boldly and confidently making our dreams happen. We need to find and clear the mold—the false beliefs and fears—that have been wired into our core since birth and are still running the show. We need to start at the bottom because the roots of our problems are in the Root Chakra.

Characteristics of the Root Chakra

Located at the bundle of nerves at the base of the spinal cord, the Root Chakra is where everything starts. The first chakra develops during infancy and childhood as part of the nervous system, which controls the physiological survival response known generally as *fight, flight, or freeze*. It also represents the body's first level of consciousness, which is a specialized awareness of ourselves as physical beings with safety and survival as the first order of importance. Because of the Root Chakra's connection to the physical, it is also known as the chakra of manifestation.

With a strong first chakra, we are standing on solid ground. Everything we do and everything we are feels supported. We have a powerful presence because we are comfortable in our skin. We generally feel safe, worthy, and self-empowered, knowing we can go for what we want with courage and resiliency. We are good at managing physical resources, opportunities, and wealth and rising up to meet challenges. People describe us as grounded and magnets for money, success, and luck.

The Root Chakra develops as we absorb and internalize our first tribe's (family's or caregiver's) beliefs and behaviors as our foundation of reality—the unquestioned “truths” about ourselves, our worthiness, the world, God, abundance, scarcity, and people. These early experiences form the foundation upon which the other six chakras (levels of consciousness) are built. The Root Chakra influences every other chakra and therefore everything we do.

FILLING THE FIRST CHAKRA CUP: SAFETY FIRST

Newborns may not look like they're thinking about life's big, heavy questions. But you might be surprised how much is going on in those cute little bodies. Already wired for safety and survival, an infant's nervous system has some pretty serious concerns, including: *Do I matter enough to be cared for and protected, to be loved? Am I important enough that my discomfort, pain, or hunger is noticed and attended to until it is soothed away?*

These are valid questions, given that infancy is a time when we are most vulnerable and completely dependent on our first tribe—our parents or other caregivers. It is as if our immature nervous system were asking the most basic of survival questions and our tribe were answering them.

Tribe

During infancy our tribe is our parents or other primary caregivers. Mom and Dad are God, responsible for ensuring we are nourished, kept warm and safe, and physically soothed when we feel anxious or agitated. Though eventually we will step into new tribes of people in schools, communities, and workplaces, we are born to trust and depend on our primary caregivers to teach us how to feel and act and what to expect from other people. They are either our safety net or the void inside where a securely felt safety net should be.

The infant nervous system constantly stands on alert for the answers to these survival questions. The consistent messages it receives are the raw biofeedback that influences the developing first chakra. Being lovingly held, soothed, and nourished in infancy is the biofeedback we yearn for. It's what fills our first chakra cup and teaches our nervous system how to move between agitation and calm. The safer we feel, the stronger our first chakra energy.

At a first chakra consciousness level, we also encode our tribe's beliefs as our rules, their fears as our dangers, and their treatment of us as a reflection of who we are and what we intrinsically deserve. It is as though we forever internalize our caregivers inside our first chakra, where they can keep reminding us of "the way things are."

As we grow, if our parents actively keep us safe and attend to our fears, we get the message that we are important and worthy of being cared for. We grow up with a built-in and regularly reinforced reality that *of course we matter!* By watching our parents intervene for us, advocate for us, actively keep us safe and happy, we learn that we have the right to be safe and supported no matter what. We also learn that not feeling safe is wrong and should be remedied.

Our first chakra develops mirroring this consciousness of well-being as the way things should be. We feel intrinsically safe because we belong and are loved and supported by a tribe that has our back. It won't occur to us to question whether we have the right to take up space, be who we are, and have the things we want. We matter.

Kids who grow up getting basic needs met and knowing without a doubt that they matter will stand up for themselves when something feels unfair. They feel grounded in their body and solid in their self-value. They carry a sense of well-being, lightness, and tolerance of modern-day risks such as making mistakes. They feel that the world in general is safe, and when life does get scary, they more easily reach out for the solid supportive tribe who will be there for them. Think of the child who, just before running into the playground, looks back to his mother for reassurance. When

she returns his gaze with a warm, encouraging look of *It's okay and I am right here watching*, he's free to run into the unknown with abandon.

A strong Root Chakra in adulthood means the world is our oyster. We're confident enough to apply for that dream job, ask for more money, start a business, or just be ourselves. We can be highly creative and have fun while still being focused, practical, and balanced. We are bold, enthusiastic, and willing to risk the unknown. When we fail (as we all do), we know we will get over it because we have before. Because we expect to be supported, we easily ask for help when we need it. We are resilient when we venture off on our own, as if our first chakra has within it our solid support team standing with us, holding us, telling us it will be okay, and cheering us on—our tribe.

A FOUNDATION OF FEAR

If our first chakra cup has not been filled enough—if we generally don't feel safe and valued—our first chakra is more like an empty space where anxiety swirls and floats. With nothing to hold on to, fear, anxiety, panic, failure, and disappointment are ours to deal with alone. Where we're meant to feel solid inside feels shaky instead because it's built on a foundation of fear. This is not the healthy fear that alerts us to real danger and spurs us to respond but a gnawing feeling that somehow we just aren't safe, even during times when all is well.

Without an inner solid ground, anxiety can feel like falling backward into a terrifying nothingness, a black hole, and it is rarely soothed. We either don't go into the playground at all or we go but do our best not to be noticed. We're much more comfortable being invisible.

When *not* being lovingly attended to as a child is a daily consistent reality, the built-in messages are cemented into our chakra consciousness and nervous system. These are the deep roots of our beliefs that we are not important enough to be noticed, kept

safe, reassured, and soothed. For some it's much worse. Abusive childhoods put the nervous system on high alert. We are always bracing for danger, as if we were in a war zone. Our first chakra is built around a devastating series of painful experiences that have taught us which actions or desires will be ignored, criticized, attacked, and punished. This becomes the seed of unworthiness that can underlie a lifetime of struggle.

This foundation of fear creates a lifelong hidden agenda: We will do whatever it takes to avoid feeling that awful space of inner anxiousness. Most of our actions, achievements, and ways of relating to others will center on trying to avoid feeling unsafe no matter what the cost. On the surface this can look like procrastination that seems frustratingly illogical but is secretly playing a key role in avoiding risk. Or we will work hard and overachieve to prove we are good enough to chase feeling safe, while inside always doubting our worth.

With a weak first chakra, we aren't fully present and grounded in our bodies but instead have excess energy up in our heads—racing, spinning, worrying, and overthinking. That frenetic energy leaves us with less energy down in our body, and other chakras suffer. Instead of our true brilliance, deeply felt passions, and wise heart guiding our actions, our mind and nervous system, wired for anxiety and derailed with safety and survival fears, are running the show.

UNQUESTIONED TRUTHS

Our early experiences of safety and survival form the foundational set point of how calm or anxious we feel in our body *as a way being*. They are also the beginning of what we understand to be true about ourselves, shaping our beliefs about our intrinsic worthiness and what we feel we have the right to ask for and expect. Our consistent experiences become the *unquestioned truths* we carry with us throughout life, and they are very powerful, forever influencing how we show up in the world.

People are surprised when they take stock of how many of their actions—including pursuits, successes, and mistakes—are driven in large part by trying to finally feel safe and belong.

Early Root Chakra programming affects the following:

- Whether our nervous system gets wired to feel generally safe or anxious
- How we experience our basic worthiness and right to be who we are
- How we feel about, notice, and take care of our physical body's needs
- Whether we easily get overstimulated and stressed out and how sensitive we are to our environments
- How much stress and anxiety we carry daily as we go about life

How do we carry the unquestioned truths we garnered as an infant and young child into adulthood? They get hardwired into our nervous system.

The Cost of a Weak First Chakra

- Difficulty getting into action
- Frenetic thoughts
- Anxious energy from mild to full-blown panic attacks
- Rejection of or disappointment in your physical body
- Difficulty being aware of your body's signals of stress, hunger, exhaustion
- "Leaving" your body and zoning out
- Dreaming of big goals that never manifest

- Difficulty creating the time or habit for nutrition and self-care
- Difficulty dealing with concrete tasks such as money management, organization, or finishing projects

Benefits of a Strong First Chakra

- Quantum leap in feeling grounded, safe, and powerfully embodied at the physical nervous-system level
- Experiencing the centered oneness and energy of deep self-love and acceptance of your physical body
- Feeling at ease in your body and being able to truly let go and relax (not be stuck in your head)
- Feeling the actual energy in your body of physical manifestation and magnetic attraction, heart energy, and embodied core energy that brings action
- Exuding a presence, energy, and “glow” that is noticeable and unforgettable to other people
- Being able to consciously catch, identify, and address habitual thoughts based on family paradigms and your first-chakra belief system so you can shift into the new reality you are creating

FEAR AND THE STRESS RESPONSE

Most of us have heard about the fight-or-flight response—also known as the stress response. The nervous system is naturally wired to sense and respond to fear and pain, and it’s a pretty important aspect of what’s known as the primitive, or reptilian,

part of the brain. When faced with a stressor or frightening foe, stress hormones (adrenaline, noradrenaline, and cortisol) start pumping into our muscles, mobilizing us to act. Our heart pounds and rate of breathing accelerates. Designed to keep us alive in truly scary situations, the stress response gives the body enough of a jolt to effectively respond to real danger.

Responding appropriately to fear and pain can save our lives. When we're scared, we're given the strength to fight an enemy or run away—fast. If we are powerless to do either or shocked with fear, we might freeze instead, as if our conscious mind had left our body. As a survival mechanism, the freeze response is a way to stay unnoticed so our enemy, say an animal whose sight best detects motion, won't see us—or at least won't see us as a threat.

The fight-flight-freeze stress response seldom helps us in modern-day situations, where the dangers are more often about psychological or emotional pain than physical attack. The stress response is meant for short periods of real danger—in kill-or-be-killed situations. It was never intended to stay “on” during everyday life, yet many of us live in a state of chronic stress and anxiety because our weakened Root Chakra has been overwhelmed by external stressors. This state is incredibly taxing on the body and has a massive negative impact on our health and ability to think clearly and act decisively.

With a strong, intact Root Chakra, our nervous system is more resilient and less reactive. We trigger the stress response less often and are able to turn it off when the danger is gone. Our mind-body systems easily and regularly return to a relaxed rest-and-digest state. In this state our mind becomes calmer and more centered, and our thinking is clearer, inspired, and creative.

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM REMEMBERS

A weak first chakra means our nervous system is always on guard. Throughout life our nervous system will always remind us when it associates a particular situation or action as being unsafe

by triggering the stress response automatically—even if we are only thinking about or imagining things from the past or future! This is great when we're in real danger. But when learned first-chakra fears get triggered, we're stressed out for no logical reason—and we have no control over this built-in primal mechanism. This is why willpower and logic are so ineffective in turning off anxiety about things such as public speaking, flying, elevators, and bugs, for instance.

Compounding matters is that the nervous system doesn't know the difference between true and false or past and present. It only knows the “charge” of past experiences that were shocking, painful, or dangerous and alerts us when anything that feels similar is happening again.

So, what happens when the childhood experiences we absorbed when our Root Chakra was developing lead us to believe something about ourselves or the world that isn't true? What happens when our perceptions, for whatever reason, are off base or distorted? What if many of our unquestioned truths about ourselves, what we deserve, and other people are completely false, as if we were looking in a faulty, fun-house mirror? We walk around feeling unsafe and on guard for no real reason.

Without a key to unlock these hardwired first-chakra associations about what is safe and not safe, we're basically at the mercy of our nervous system. Although we will have long forgotten about the beliefs and experiences that are driving these automatic reactions, the nervous system remembers.

Healing and rebuilding the Root Chakra starts with finding the source of these false fears and beliefs and letting them go. We must recognize when our nervous system is responding to what it considers to be a threat to survival based on how it's been wired at the Root Chakra level.

“BUT I HAD A GOOD CHILDHOOD!”

Life did not have to be demonstrably unsafe for us to carry excess anxiety or want to hide in the shadows instead of risking failure or criticism. The completely unguarded nervous system of an infant can absorb unintended traumas such as spending the first weeks of life with very little loving touch in the sterile environment of an incubator.

Loving parents who carry a lot of anxiety themselves sometimes aren't able to bring the calm energy needed to soothe a child. I have met many clients whose loving parents endured some tragedy, such as serious illness or the loss of a child, and were just unable to be fully attentive and present with them as children.

No one's childhood is perfect, and any stressful period in a family's life can create varying degrees of underlying feelings of unsafety and anxiousness. Financial strain, family strife, illness, and unemployment are some of the more subtle culprits. More obvious are growing up in a war zone or living through a natural disaster. Even watching these stressful situations on the news can elevate parental anxiety.

Many clients insist they had safe, loving childhoods and are unsure of the source of their constant need to stay busy and in control as a way to keep anxiety at bay. It often turns out that as soon as they were four or five, they picked up a different kind of unsafe feeling. For some, one or both parents were not sufficiently responsible or in charge. These kids learned early that they had to become the “parentified child” who puts childlike needs and fun aside to be the sacrificing caregiver.

Finally, many of my clients learned over time that it was more important to achieve than to be a child. Being a straight-A student, the best athlete on the team, or a perfectly behaved child was the standard. Anything less than perfect was ignored, criticized, or “a disappointment.”

In all these cases, we will find it very hard to let go, ask others for support, or roll with our mistakes. Even trying to take our foot off the gas pedal can trigger anxiety because we're letting our guard down. "It's not worth it," we'll say, because it is just easier to always be in control and in motion.

UNSPOKEN AND PREVERBAL TRIBAL RULES: SURVIVAL = BELONGING = BONDING

As we grow, the Root Chakra grows and develops with us, and our collection of unquestioned truths expands. Even as toddlers we start to take in more sophisticated information and unquestioned truths from our parents, as feeling safe takes on a new social dimension: belonging.

A primitive survival reality is that doing something that upsets our tribe can lead to judgment, rejection, and consequently being outcast—a sure threat to survival. The best way to ensure we belong and are therefore safe within our tribe is to figure out and follow the rules, which often means acting agreeable and accommodating while forgoing our unique desires.

Because our parents are in charge, their rules and norms are of utmost importance. We quickly take note of them, even at the tender age of toddlerhood. The actual rules as well as the way we learn them matter to our developing Root Chakra. Do the rules teach us how to be happy and successful and expand at each stage of development, or do they damage our growing sense of self and empowerment? Are we learning them through consistent directions, reminders, and thoughtful consequences or through consistent fear, shame, and punishments? This process is the next critical piece of how we experience the Root Chakra.

As we become more and more developmentally independent, the second chakra energy of needs, wants, and impulses starts to emerge. How our tribe reacts to these natural desires impacts us at the first chakra—and this is when life starts to get complicated! We can't wait to express ourselves, but, inevitably, our tribe is not

excited about everything we feel compelled to do. Some of our new actions are encouraged and applauded—such as when we're good to a younger sibling. But some actions are met with displeasure, and that's how we know we have broken a rule.

We don't judge the norms but accept them, even if they are painful, random, or unhealthy. Our survival depends upon it. We viscerally (not logically) expect some sort of punishment if we break a rule—rejection, criticism, attack, abandonment—and the sinking feeling that goes with it.

Year by year, as we continue to figure out and experience our family's rules and punishments, we learn how to survive them instead of how to thrive in life. We will adapt by acting meek, scared, or small to exude the *I know I am not good enough or special* demeanor that will preempt attack and keep the peace. We will shame ourselves out of doing something before our caregivers have a chance to do so and therefore we don't arouse the scariest and most shocking type of retribution—shaming and/or physical attack.

The “bond to survive in the tribe” response is really the root of shame, or the notion that we (not what we did but our innate impulses) are bad. As we get older and our other chakras start to develop, we will feel shame or guilt whenever we feel compelled to follow a previously shamed impulse—to do something that will have the tribe acting aghast or angry.

We'll talk more about shame in Chapter 5, but it's important to see shame for what it really is: survival fear designed to stop us before we break family rules that are contrary to our natural, built-in human needs, desires, and wants. Being shamed always turns into self-shame. It invites us not to follow through with our natural desires, which are meant to drive us in the direction of our expansion, growth, dreams, and ultimately our life's purpose. Fear, anxiety, shame, and the survival instinct, now firmly embedded in our first-chakra foundation, move with us into adulthood, affecting every aspect of how we function in life.

EARNING THE RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE: HIGH ACHIEVERS, PERFECTIONISM, AND SELF-DOUBT

In adulthood self-shame as a survival mechanism evolves into smart-sounding self-doubt. Many driven and successful super-achievers will say they don't think they struggle with fear or anxiety and certainly not the low self-esteem of shame. However, if they drop a ball or don't know how to do something right the first time or make a mistake—if they are exposed in any way—they admit to being overcome with massive amounts of anxiety. The first-chakra fear equating failure or imperfection with life-or-death unsafety takes over. These folks have a solid enough first chakra to be successful in business but must always *earn their right to feel safe* by vigilantly following the rules of being perfect or successful.

As adults high achievers have to adapt how they earn the right to feel safe. They are constantly working, doing, exercising, and achieving, balancing ten things at once so they never have to feel that anxiety. Feeling anxiety is confusing to them because they are so successful in some ways—they're not frozen and hiding at home. But in other ways, they are plagued with self-doubt. They feel incredibly insecure, one mistake away from being judged a failure or a fraud. One mistake away from being overcome with shame.

In successful circles self-shame is associated with unworthiness and low self-esteem, neither of which fits the identity of a high achiever. However, self-doubt can live loud and large in our head as a “frenemy,” seemingly pushing us to try harder, make sure everything is right, and do better next time by smartly reminding us of all of our failures.

For example, high-achieving professional women may want nothing more than to climb the ladder. But when increasingly under the spotlight, they can be overwhelmed and paralyzed with a sudden onslaught of self-doubt. This can be infuriating, as they don't understand why they can't step up with confidence, own

their value, or market themselves boldly. This is the conundrum of procrastinating when we consciously really want and need to act.

It takes a great deal of time to convince 90 percent of my clients that fear is at the root of why they procrastinate instead of show up, spin with self-doubt instead of take action, or overwork themselves instead of set boundaries. Most of them have been racking their brains to figure out why they behave this way and to find the next magic-bullet strategy. But we can't trust the mind when it comes to this. It's directly related to the nervous system's fight-flight-freeze-*bond* wiring, or how we've been conditioned to respond automatically to a threat to our safety—our survival.

TRIBALISM BEYOND FAMILY

When it comes to the first chakra, family is our first tribe but not our last. All groups and institutions are tribe-like, with spoken and unspoken rules, norms, and consequences. The bond response is a common automatic survival tool that can baffle and disempower us in any modern-day tribal setting. To ensure we are always in the protective bubble of belonging, our instinct can make us act agreeable and accommodating at the expense of our unique desires. Our bonding behavior is not based on true shared interests or beliefs but is an automatic self-censorship done out of fear. We don't want to rock the boat.

As adults in the workplace, for instance, we step into many new tribes—co-workers, management, the boardroom, clients—and unconsciously carry with us our deeply rooted childhood life-or-death rules. Some of these new tribes reinforce those rules. Reacting negatively to confidence and assertiveness is a big one. Other tribes are overtly abusive, conveying the message that *You don't matter, you are powerless, and if you say anything, you will be punished/fired*. The specter of being punished becomes the adult fear of being fired, which, of course, is a legitimate survival fear!

In the workplace people can be physically, emotionally, sexually, and verbally abused. Or they might be systematically undervalued and underpaid as part of a long-standing culture of discrimination based on gender, race, religion, or sexual orientation. This picture has been painted many times over in other settings as well.

The many Me Too revelations, even in trusted organizations, including the church, emphasize the power of the tribe and the will to bond. These traumatizing sexual abuse events have not only damaged people's lives but left the survivors to wonder why they froze, did not speak up, and "let it happen." They look back with confusion about why they submitted, played along, or apologized and made excuses for bad actors when they were so egregiously being wronged. What looks so clear in retrospect makes it all the harder for them to understand how they acted. Time and time again, they ask themselves, *Why didn't I have the courage or presence of mind to stand up for myself?* They blame themselves and, heartbreakingly, fear being blamed by others.

If only they understood the overriding power of a tribe to trigger first-chakra survival fear—activating the nervous system and kicking us into automatic reactions. This is what makes us freeze and resort to the bonding behaviors of shrinking down, giving in, laughing along, or even acting compassionate and understanding. If only they understood that at that moment, they had no presence of mind because their mind, outrage, and courage were being hijacked by deeply entrenched tribal fears and survival behaviors.

My driving passion and fury is to help those who have been wronged and then silenced to finally understand this dynamic so they can give themselves (and ask for) the love and compassion they truly deserve as someone who was wronged and traumatized. The Heart Chakra chapter will address this specifically as a continuation of our healing journey in this book.

HEALING THE FIRST CHAKRA

Of all the chakras, the Root Chakra is the one we're most unaware of, which is why I believe it is typically the least explored in personal growth. It's highly connected to our primitive survival adaptations—fight, flight, freeze, or bond—and involves delving into and tolerating uncomfortable feelings. These feelings produce the illogical life-or-death sweat responses that do not serve us.

It's hard to imagine that our fear of public speaking is linked to a *Don't act like you're so special* rule that got secretly coded into our nervous system 20, 40, or 60 years ago. It's even harder to accept that it's wired into the part of the brain responsible for our survival. Public speaking, for instance, is generally a safe proposition. It won't kill us. Yet that's how it can feel to anyone who learned early in life that it is safer to stay in your lane, and your lane is *Don't look too confident—or else*.

A good way to understand how your first chakra is filled is by imagining that your parents or other significant tribe members (as they looked when you were growing up) are standing inside your first chakra, actively reacting to everything you are doing. Much like the child who looks back to a parent for support, encouragement, assurance, safety, and unconditional love when unsure or in need of soothing, you check in with them for their reaction.

All of us need to heal and rebuild the first chakra to some degree. Tapping is the perfect modality for addressing first-chakra pain because it's a direct line to the nervous system, capable of swiftly turning off the stress response when it comes to anxiety and shame. We can effectively dull the impact of childhood traumas, soothe our anxiety, and turn down the power and volume of childhood rules and unquestioned truths, even those that started in utero. We can reduce or eliminate ungrounding fearful thinking, own our presence, and set a powerful foundation upon which our other chakras can rely.

Healing usually produces an unexpected byproduct: Miraculously, unsupportive people from our first-chakra-internalized tribe

not only lose their hold on us but either change for the better or are no longer prominent figures in our lives. This usually opens up an opportunity to intentionally add new tribal members—people of our own choosing.

As adults we can consciously choose a new group of trusted people who are there for us, have our back, encourage us, and act as our safety net—people we know will reinforce our worth, gifts, and courage while accepting us for our fears, insecurities, and flaws. As we form a new tribe with people we trust, they become the people standing in our first chakra whom we can look back to for our internal check-in.

COMMENTARY BY DAVID RANIERE, PH.D.

We need to know where we come from. Ultimately, there is incredible power in such knowing. Our ability to plant our feet firmly on the ground and stand strong, claim a life for ourselves that fully expresses who we are, and recover from those moments when we are completely thrown off balance depends on having a solid foundation.

Some of us are fortunate to have had that solid foundation from the beginning and are quite proud of our roots, whereas others carry burdens and scars of deep and abiding shame, doubt, fear, and inhibition. These are the sorrowful legacies of a painful childhood. All of us—whether we identify with either, neither, or some blend of these two groups—carry into our adult lives a complex imprint that is unique to our distinct life story. I have never met anyone for whom this has not been true.

Our roots are where our layered lives began. I say “layered” because there are (at least) three interconnected realms of human experience in which we are rooted. On the concrete (physiological) level, our body self is rooted in constitutional predispositions, such as our temperament, and includes aspects of our wiring and genetic code that shape the expression of our physical selves. These ingredients or building materials were not of our own choosing

but nonetheless exert an enormous influence in shaping our sense of who we are.

On the interpersonal (relationship) level, our earliest roots are anchored in our primary attachment bonds. These are the bonds we formed with the most important of relationships—our parents and early caregivers on whom our very lives depended.

And on the intrapsychic (mental/psychological) level, our mind creates from patterns of interaction with others and the outside world a set of organizing blueprints (sometimes referred to as internal working models) that direct our attention and inform how we perceive and understand ourselves and our environment.

To grasp how important and formative our early experiences are—and how they shape who we think we are (and just as importantly, who we think we're not)—we need to keep all three of these realms in mind as we reach back to a time before we can remember.

Reaching this far back into our personal history feels like a stretch because it is, and the idea of it awakens the skeptic in many of us. It is important to strive to remain grounded solidly in truth whenever we construct a story about forces that have shaped who we are. At the same time, however, our earliest life experiences—from being in the womb through infancy and the first several years of early childhood—are chapters of our lives that cannot be remembered in the conventional sense no matter how hard we try. The vast majority of what happened then was encoded in our nervous system and cannot be “fact-checked”; consequently, we can assert only a limited set of claims about “what really happened” back then.

This inherent limitation is something we cannot overcome because it derives from an inescapable truth about brain development: Our brains need to develop enough to be capable of various cognitive abilities. For example, the ability to use language to represent experience and communicate takes time to develop (and one of the joys of parenthood is having front-row seats, watching in awe as this process unfolds in the developing child). Similarly, the brain's memory center, especially the hippocampus, takes time to develop.

We cannot simply recall events from early childhood because our brains were not developed enough to encode and store our experience in memory. As a result, when we try to retrieve information about our earliest experiences directly, we are inevitably at a loss.

So how are we to make contact with early-childhood experiences given this limitation? First we need to keep in mind that even though we did not encode experiences in memory like we do now, we absorbed everything. Our body's developing nervous system took it all in and, like a sponge, absorbed the countless sensory experiences from inside and outside to which it was exposed.

One of the world's foremost experts on trauma, Bessel van der Kolk, M.D., has put it plainly in his seminal work by the same title: "The body keeps the score." Our bodies remember. And one of the ways we have access to how the body remembers is through what we feel.

Please take a moment here to pause and really take that in. Here's another pass at it: *the body tells us what it remembers through what we feel.*

This simple principle is an extremely powerful one that I draw upon in both my clinical work and my personal life in ways that extend far beyond matters we typically think of as involving trauma. For example, whenever I am sitting with a patient who is feeling anxious or afraid of something that might happen, I relate to their experience in two ways. I listen first to exactly what they are saying about what they are scared of, and I attend to it as a completely real and legitimate concern. At the same time, I am also hearing what they are saying as a statement about something that has already happened.

As you read this, you may be saying to yourself, *Wait a second! How could something that hasn't happened yet have happened already?* But before you put the book down, take a moment to consider the possibility that if you are scared of something happening, it already has.

To be afraid of something, we must already know that there is something to be afraid of, even if we aren't consciously thinking about anything in particular from the past or don't have any

memory of an experience that might be relevant to the present or future concern. In the simplest of terms, this is how the body keeps the score, or how our nervous system holds within it a history we don't even remember and remains poised to make us aware of it again by representing it to us as a feeling state.

If we begin to relate to what we are feeling now in this way, something profound happens. Our relationship to our internal experience expands as we are no longer limited to thinking in linear, concrete, and rational or logical terms. Our field of consciousness opens up to include where we are rooted in our nervous system. Instead of only locating something as ahead of us that we are bracing for, we begin to consider that something may be coming in from “the beyond”—from a past we cannot remember that is presencing (i.e., re-present-ing) itself in the feeling we are having.

The feeling *is* the memory—a memory without words, a visual image, or the narrative structure of a remembered story. In the moment, a strong emotion can feel like a lightning bolt striking down on us from the sky. In fact it is a charge rising up from the ground—a charge rooted in a nervous-system activation—that is rising up to the body's surface.

Margaret's guided tapping and visualization processes are designed to invite this nervous-system activation. The idea is to reach back into the beyond and bring into the present that which is there but may not be remembered, something akin to what the psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas (1987) calls the “unthought known.”

But before we get there, there is something else we can do to address the question I posed earlier about the challenge of making contact with early-childhood experience given the constraints imposed by the developmental process itself. We can also draw upon the study of human development as a guide and make informed inferences based on rigorous empirical research. We can hold those findings up against the light of our personal sensibility and see if it fits.

Yes, we bring normative data to our felt sense of our experience and use our best judgment. A useful guide as we do this is to

notice what our bodies tell us as we read this book and participate in the guided processes. I encourage you to have in the back of your mind questions such as: *Is this resonating with me? Does my response to this process bring up a feeling, a thought, a memory from another time in my life, or an image that offers confirmation or disconfirmation of its validity?*

The Still-Face Effect: Developmental Research and the First Chakra

During the 1975 meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, psychologist Edward Tronick, Ph.D., and his colleagues first presented their findings on the Still-Face Experiment, which today remains one of the most replicated research findings in developmental psychology (Tronick, Als, and Adamson 1978; Adamson and Frick 2003; Mesman, van IJzendoorn, and Bakermans-Kranenburg 2009).¹

In this powerful experiment, a mother (or other primary caregiver) and infant (ranging in age from 1 to 12 months) are filmed while they sit a few feet apart from each other in a video laboratory. The mother and infant's natural interactions are observed. Typically, a lovely exchange familiar to us all then unfolds. The mother takes the lead in engaging the baby and his current emotional state, matching facial expressions and vocal tones as the pair begins to synchronize in a shared experience of the moment, locking into each other's gaze. Within 30 seconds they are having the time of their lives, cooing and cawing, smiling and taking each other in as they connect playfully in this improvisational dance. Then the mother is instructed via an earpiece to "go still." She is to simply wipe any expression from her face, assume a neutral gaze, and sit still in front of her baby.

The profound change that consistently occurs in the infant in response to the mother's still face is the most important (and

¹ Dr. Tronick is director of the Infant-Parent Mental Health program at the University of Massachusetts Boston, where he conducts research on maternal depression and other stressors that affect the emotional development and health of infants and children. His work overlaps with that of the Boston Change Process Study Group, a group of psychoanalysts and developmentalists who study infant and child development and its application to the psychotherapeutic change process.

very-upsetting-to-watch) part of this experiment. Immediately aware of this abrupt change, the baby first stares back at the mother as if looking for her. He then offers a brief smile or some other behavioral bid to reengage and revive the shared state they were in just moments ago. When the mother's nonresponsiveness continues, the baby turns away only to look back at her again, periodically monitoring her state and repeating this cycle of attempting to solicit his mother's attention.

Within the next couple of minutes, the baby becomes increasingly distressed as these efforts fail repeatedly, and his efforts to reestablish connection with his mother grow increasingly desperate. Vocalizations become high-pitched screeches and screams, he thrusts his entire body toward the mother with outstretched arms, and his entire muscular system becomes rigid with tension. All efforts at self-soothing then fail, and this gives way to a loss of postural control and the infant literally droops down and slumps over. Accompanying this physical collapse, the baby's face flushes red, his gaze is cast down and to the right, and he enters a profoundly disengaged state of withdrawal and remains there until his mother is instructed to emerge from the still-face condition.

Important inferences about infants' experiences during the still-face experiment have been drawn, and prominent theories have been advanced based on these inferences (for a review, see Adamson and Frick, 2003). For our purposes, I want to anchor us in a couple of core ideas related to the first chakra and the nervous system assaults that are encoded in the body at the first chakra level.

First the study powerfully demonstrates the reality of social interaction and social embeddedness that exists at the very beginning of life. We all exist as part of a larger social unit—what Margaret refers to as a tribe—from the start. The smallest and most important tribal unit with which we are embedded and have the most direct contact is the parent-child dyad.

For the infant and developing child, the other person with whom we connect becomes the first mirror in which we see ourselves. What is reflected (and not reflected) back to us from that

other person has a profound impact on our physical and emotional experience of ourselves. Tronick and colleagues (1998) refer to this as “dyadic states of consciousness,” the shared states inhabited by both mother and infant when they are engaged in an interconnected (i.e., intersubjective) experience of meaningful interaction.

The still-face moment represents a break in this vital connected state, and what we see in the infant is a profoundly distressing nervous system assault involving a spiraling out of a relationship and into a painfully withdrawn state of aloneness.

Along with underscoring the fact of our embeddedness within a relationship, the still-face effect also draws attention to the importance of what is shared within that dyad. The mother’s still face represents one form of sudden withdrawal and nonengagement. But there are many other forms of an almost still face, when the face looking back at the infant isn’t exactly still but may be depressed or somewhat withdrawn, anxious or intrusive, absent or preoccupied, or disparaging or critical. These kinds of reflections back to the infant are encoded into its implicit experience of relating, as part of the shared consciousness we invisibly inhabit long before there are words or thoughts to separate ourselves from them.

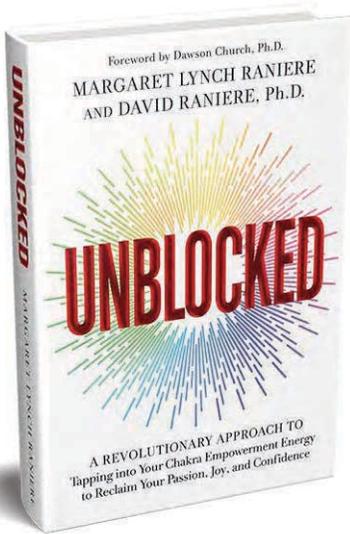
Remember Margaret’s story of the old, damaged fun-house mirror at the start of the Introduction? That kind of mirror is often rooted in patterned exchanges in which what was reflected back to us in the eyes of a parent left us seeing ourselves in some warped or distorted way.

I will address the vital role of affect in Chapter 13, when we discuss the Heart Chakra, but as Margaret points out in this chapter, the roots of shame begin at the first chakra. From the beginning of life, infants are keyed into their parents’ shifting states and register changes in them that are far less dramatic than a still face. To stay alive and continue to feel ourselves in relationships with those who keep us alive, as babies and children, we adjust accordingly to the states of those around us without even thinking about it. This simple form of nonverbal learning is what all animals figure

out: *When I do this, that happens; when I don't do this, something else happens.* It's when we first begin to learn who to be and who not to be in order to keep other people around so we can get our basic needs met enough to survive.

The still-face experiments give us insight about a time before we had words or thoughts for our experiences, to the realm of the beyond that predates cognitive memory. In fact one of the most compelling formulations of the still-face effect is that it is the earliest form of what becomes the emotional state we call shame.

I will elaborate on this further when we return to the discussion of shame at the second chakra level, but for now I want to emphasize the direct nervous system (parent) to nervous system (infant) contact that is made at the first chakra level during early life and how that is absorbed into the being of the developing child. We experienced these states during a time before we could tell time—one that we cannot remember directly and for which there weren't words. And it is here that tapping offers us hope as a vehicle to access that realm. Engaging the nervous system directly provides us a method by which we can make contact with and ultimately bring comfort and calm to what remains held in the body.



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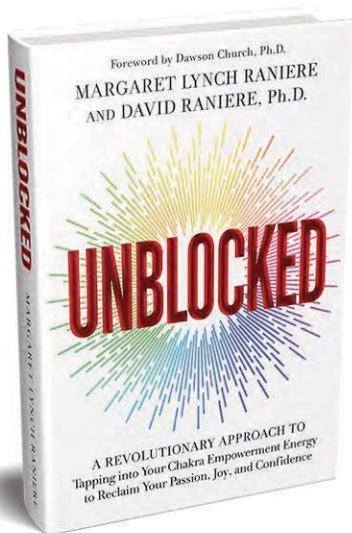
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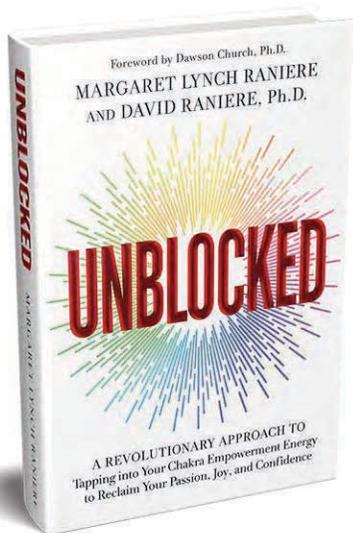
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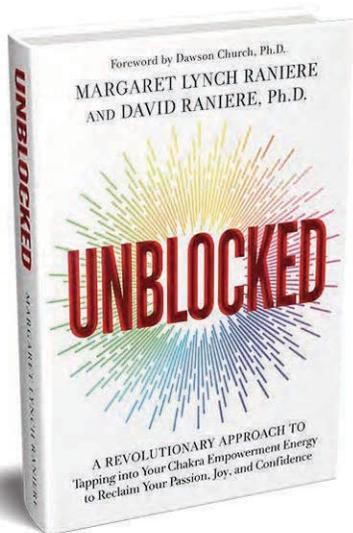
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