



SURVIVAL MODE

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When we experience a stressful or traumatic event, whether it is emotional or physical, our nervous system automatically goes into a response. The most recognized reactions are fight or flight. In the fight or flight response the body prepares itself for what it believes to be a life-threatening event by directly facing or running away from a challenge. If neither fight nor flight can be successfully engaged, as can be the case for example in traumatic events, a freezing response occurs. All threatening and traumatic events, if not resolved, trap energy in the body. This trapped energy can lead to all sorts of physical and emotional disease and suffering. The good news is that we have an innate system in our bodies that is designed to re-balance us following a traumatic or stressful event.

“Post traumatic symptoms are fundamentally incomplete physiological responses suspended in fear. These symptoms will not go away until the responses are discharged and completed. Energy held in immobilization can be transformed.”

–Peter Levine, PhD, Waking the Tiger

The Autonomic Nervous System, or ANS, will automatically try to discharge this frozen energy by trembling, shaking, emotional release, and temperature changes. This release in turn will be followed by rest and deep states of peace and healing. However, when any part of the fear process is thwarted, as is so often the case in our stressful and unconscious lives, we can become stuck in “Survival Mode.” Survival Mode is what often happens to a soldier returning from war. The war may be over for them on the outside, but on the inside their bodies and minds are acting as if the war is still going on. This state can happen in everyday life experience to any one at any time. Anxiety and panic attacks are prime examples of this phenomenon. What this means is that our



nervous systems are essentially arrested in a physiological state of fear. This frozen state of trapped energy in the body can wreak havoc on our bodies and minds, without us being aware of what is happening to us. It can be exactly like having your foot on the car's accelerator and brake at the same time. Working against ourselves without knowing it, we can burn out the balancing mechanisms of our Autonomic Nervous System, and develop numerous and varied emotional and physical symptoms.

“Anxiety and despair can become a creative wellspring. When we allow ourselves to experience bodily sensations such as trembling that stem from traumatic symptoms. Held within the symptoms of trauma, are the very energies, potentials and resources necessary for a constructive transformation.”

–Peter Levine, PhD, Waking the Tiger

“Living in Survival Mode is not living. There are varying degrees of severity. It is unconscious to us, and we accept that this is the way life is. Survival Mode shuts down self-awareness; it causes loss of body communication and feedback. This loss opens the door for all kinds of disease and suffering to creep up on us while we are numb and unaware of what is going on...”

This condition creates a loss of joy, increased anxiety, and a fear-based physiology — a defensive self. We become unable to receive deep pleasure and love. This state is responsible for an incredible amount of suffering which negatively impacts humanity as a whole as our minds can find no peace, and we become lost in an endless stream of thought fears and worries...

However, our bodies have the capability to turn off this condition. The system for re~balancing is already built in and waiting to be activated. It simply needs help from a skilled therapist who knows the language.”

–Dr. Paul Canali, 2006

