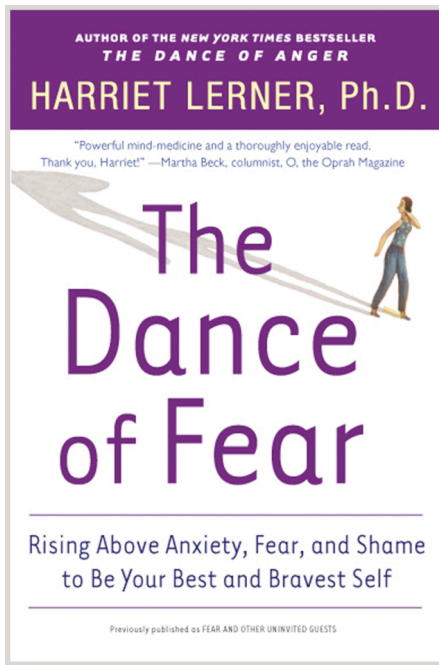


The Dance of Fear

BY HARRIET LERNER, Ph. D.



AN INTRODUCTION TO HARRIET LERNER

Harriet Lerner, Ph.D. is one of our nation's most loved and respected relationship experts. Best known for her work on the psychology of women and family relationships, she served as a staff psychologist at the Menninger Clinic for more than two decades. A distinguished lecturer, workshop leader, and psychotherapist, she is the author of *The Dance of Anger* and other bestselling books. She is also, with her sister, an award-winning children's book writer. She and her husband are therapists in Lawrence, Kansas, and have two sons. Harriet claims to be an undefeated champion at the game of jacks.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Often unrecognized, fear and shame drive our choices and attitudes in ways that most of us never figure out. As Lerner explains in *The Dance of Fear*, fear is not an amorphous unknown to be transcended or overcome but an emotion to be recognized, explored, decoded and embraced. Once we befriend fear, it can actually help us achieve calm, clarity and fundamental peace.

Lerner teaches us the best ways to deal with fear: to expect, allow and accept its presence in our lives, to mindfully observe and attend to how it feels in our bodies and, ultimately to own it. We can become experts on our personal triggers of anxiety, learning when fear signals real danger and when it's best to plow through it because it comes with the territory of making necessary changes.

Using her wonderfully rich and inviting therapeutic voice along with personal memories and examples drawn from her practice, Lerner gives fear its due. We needn't let anxiety, fear, and shame silence our authentic voice, close our hearts to the different voices of others, or stop us from acting with dignity, integrity and brio. We need to harness fear and put it in service to our best selves.

PRAISE FOR *THE DANCE OF FEAR*

"Brilliant, completely authentic and **utterly original**".

—Joan Borysenko, Ph.D. Author of *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind*

"Witty prose ...a mindful and highly readable meditation

—*Publishers Weekly*

"This spirit-lifting book leaves the reader braver, wiser and laughing ... **[Lerner's] advice is the best you will find.**"

—Edward M. Hallowell, M.D. Author of *Driven to Distraction*

"**Powerful mind-medicine and a thoroughly enjoyable read.** Thank you Harriet!"

—Martha Beck Author of *The Joy Diet*, Columnist *O Magazine*

"Shot through with freshness and **life-affirming humor.**"

—Betty Carter, M.S.W. Director Emerita, Family Institute of Westchester

"**Lerner has a genius** for teaching us what we need to face and conquer. Her advice is gripping, enlightening, liberating and immediately applicable."

—Pepper Schwartz, Ph.D. Author of *Everything You Know About Love and Sex is Wrong*

Visit Harriet Lerner's website at www.harrietlerner.com

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you think of Lerner's use of humor in her book? Do you think it trivializes a serious subject, or helps us to learn about difficult issues with a light heart?.
2. What did you find the most helpful in this book? What did you find most thought provoking? What bothered you?
3. Lerner reminds us that anxiety and fear can help keep us alert, attuned, intuitive, wise, and safe. Can you think of times in your own life, when anxiety or fear was a wise guide or teacher?
4. When you are anxious or afraid do you grow closer to the people you care about or do you tend to grow more distant? Do you see one response to anxiety as better than the other? Or can both distance and connection be helpful ways of managing anxiety?
5. One of the key lessons in Lerner's book is to "avoid avoidance" The story of Frank (Chapter 2) and Lerner's experience with public speaking illustrate the "feel the fear and do it anyway" philosophy. Are there important exceptions to this rule?
6. We often focus on the "fear" of something, such as planes, illness, or failure. Lerner writes that the more daunting challenge is how we conduct ourselves in the dailyness of love and work when anxiety is chronically high and shame kicks in. This is the human condition, she writes, whether we are aware of it or not. Do you agree that the fear and shame we deny, avoid, and pass along to others, gets the world and us into the most trouble?
7. The book teaches us that anxiety is the "on switch" for every negative judgment and picture we have about ourselves (and others). Discuss the difference between discernment (seeing people clearly) and anxiety-driven judgementalness.
8. Lerner writes that underground anxiety, by it's nature, leads you to lose objectivity and balance about the complex, wonderful, flawed, ever-changing person you are. She also writes that judging others is simply the flip side of judging the self. Can you relate personally to these ideas?
9. What ideas caught your attention in the chapter about the anxious workplace? (Chapter 7). What can you apply to your own work relationships—or to any system you belong to?
10. Do you agree with Lerner that shame is the key emotion that holds us back, isolates us, and locks us into lies and silence? Give examples from your own life or the lives of others.
11. Can you think of an example from your family, school, workplace or neighborhood when somebody shamed you? What ideas about shame—or stories about shame—struck a chord with you? Have you unwittingly shamed another person or group when you've felt badly about yourself, or anxious about where your life was heading?
12. Can you think of an example from your own life where you were shamed as a child and responded by transforming shame into a particular talent or gift? (For example, a person who was shamed as a student might become a particularly creative, empowering teacher).
13. Lerner writes that things get worse when we shame the shamer— or blame the blamer. Discuss this idea, drawing upon specific examples, both personal and political.
14. *When Things Fall Apart* (Chapter 10) deals with the most difficult lessons in fear, anxiety and grief that the Universe sends us. Which of the three women (Barbara, Rhoda and Evelyn) do you most identify with? What was your personal response to reading the ideas in this chapter and to Rhonda's story?
15. Do you agree with Lerner's statement that our society shames people for their honest fear and suffering? How do you think the matter of shaming-and being shamed-is influenced by class, race, gender, ethnic and cultural group?
16. Lerner talks about the many faces of courage in chapter 11, and throughout the book. Do you agree that we are all brave in some ways and not in others, and that we can't judge another person's courage when we're not in their shoes? After reaching chapter 11, did your conception of what it means to be courageous change?
17. Remember a time when you were brave and share it with the group, even if it might seem small and insignificant to others. What kinds of courage (e.g. the courage to listen with an open heart, the courage to climb a mountain, the courage to risk your job for a principle?) do you most value in yourself and others?
18. Lerner states that when we are stuck in chronic fear, we get the courage to act from acknowledging our pain and also from realizing our capacity for joy. Do you think it takes courage to invite unhappiness in and honor it? Do you think it takes courage to allow yourself to feel the joy you are capable of feeling? Why do you think some people are afraid of feeling joy?
19. When you are feeling the miserable effects of anxiety and fear—whether mild agitation or a full-blown panic attack—what do you do to try to get a bit calmer.
20. It is Lerner's belief that if all humans could be magically free from anxiety, fear and shame, we would all be kind to each other. Do you agree?