

Fear of Flying at Night

Contributed by Dennis McCarthy

The Panic Attack

The cause of the panic attack is probably the most difficult to identify – a real-life Agatha Christie mystery. The hypnotherapist needs to be like Hercule Poirot to do the investigation and find that red herring that causes the panic attack.

The panic attack is the mind's way of subconsciously protecting itself. It will protect you from experiencing similar earlier traumatic experiences – the subconscious will identify the dangers of a past experience that the conscious mind is not aware of. What is the reason the conscious mind is not aware of the past event? The subconscious repressed the memory when the trauma took place.

The panic attack is caused by an active repressed memory that may have lain dormant for some time or become active immediately, so it is the job of the hypnotherapist to find that original repressed memory to be able to release the emotion and panic caused.

The case history that follows concerns a lady called Helen who attended my therapy centre and then informed me that she suffered from fear of flying, but with a difference, as the fear of flying was only at night. Helen informed me that if she was taking a day-time flight there was no panic or fear whatsoever, but at night what she had experienced was so fearful and panic stricken that she could have opened the door of the aeroplane and jumped out.

Helen wanted to plan a holiday abroad but that meant a transatlantic flight. She knew that a portion of the flight would be during the night, this of course being impossible due to her past experience.

Her next question was, could I help? The answer was simple. Yes. I then went on to explain the procedure, what I would expect of her and the results I wanted to achieve. Helen wanted to book her holiday within the next six months.

Before we went ahead with therapy, there were other details that I needed to gather. Such information is added to my client's details and then analysed to give me a clear picture of my client. When I was happy with the information gathered, we went ahead with the therapy.

THE FEAR OF FLYING AT NIGHT

After the induction of hypnosis, Helen relaxed into a comfortable trance state deep enough for our work to begin. First of all, I wanted Helen to recall the memory of the panic and fear that Helen had experienced some four years earlier; I was hoping to gain vital evidence from those recalls to assist me in my investigation.

Helen recalled being on the aeroplane before take-off. It was about 6.00 pm and she and her husband had been on holiday in Tenerife. The flight time home was estimated by the captain at four hours and ten minutes, arriving in Cardiff at ten minutes past ten that night. It was a calm warm October night when they took off from Tenerife.

After about an hour into the flight, Helen began to feel uneasy but she didn't know why. She began perspiring with feelings of being hot and cold. The in-flight meal had to be returned untouched by Helen, who by now had totally lost her appetite.

Helen describes what happened next.

“About two and a half hours into the flight, my feelings of anxiety began to worsen. My husband had now fallen asleep beside me and other people were also sleeping. The cabin lights had been put out for the comfort of those who wanted to sleep. I was now beginning to feel cold, it was dark, I started to feel very lonely and nervous, I had no one to speak to. My stomach was shaking, I began to cry, I just wanted to run, I wanted to jump out of the aeroplane. I would be safer then.

“Eventually I had to wake my husband to let him know how I felt and the panic I was experiencing, I was now soaking in sweat. We called a flight attendant and when we explained my feelings I was given some medication. This helped but only slightly. The wonderful comfort I can recall was the cold towel on my forehead.

“Eventually, after what seemed a lifetime in that aeroplane, we landed in Cardiff and I swore then to my husband that he would never, ever get me to get on an aeroplane again. Although I had felt so panicky and nervous only an hour ago, by the time I got outside the airport I felt normal.”

When Helen attended for her second session we continued with free association. She went on to recall memories of going on other journeys and feelings of nervousness; even a simple bus trip was becoming too much for her,

Although there were other issues we dealt with during our sessions, the main cause of Helen's problem had not yet been uncovered. We had to discover the cause of those feelings that Helen had experienced on that night flight.

After quite a few therapy sessions and lots of analysis, I was confident that the subconscious mind was getting closer and closer to the actual causal memory, that original memory that caused the panic. I was now preparing to push the

subconscious into releasing these memories and emotions.

It was on the seventh session when Helen was relaxed into hypnosis that I asked the subconscious to compare the emotions that were experienced on that flight with those emotions from another time in Helen's life. The session proceeded as follows.

"Subconscious mind, I want you to go back in time, back to a time when you experienced very similar emotions to the emotions that were experienced during that flight from Tenerife four years ago. Subconscious, the memories that I would like you to recall are of experiencing the feelings of being cold and lonely, frightened and crying, sweating with panic, stomach shaking.

"Subconscious mind, let's go back in time to when Helen was a young girl. Subconscious, in a moment, when I count to three then click my fingers, would you do just that please, return those original feelings, memories and emotions.

"Subconscious, let's go back in time now to when Helen was, let's say, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five or four, back to a time this event took place.

"One, two, three. Click."

Helen then recalled a memory of when she was four years old.

"I'm at home with my mother, father and grandmother. They are arguing. My mother and grandmother are crying, my father is shouting. My sister has just walked into the room — Sue is a lot older than me, she's seventeen years old. My father is now shouting at Sue.

"My father has told me I must go to bed, I'm very upset. I'm crying now, I don't want to go to bed. My father's shouting at me now so I run up the stairs to the bedroom I share with Sue. I'm in bed now crying, there is a lot of shouting going on down stairs, I can hear my father calling Sue terrible names and that he didn't want her in the house any longer and that she is an embarrassment to us all.

"My father is still shouting at Sue, my mother is screaming at my father. I feel very frightened and cold, my stomach is shaking. I want to run away but it's dark outside and I don't want to be alone. "You filthy bitch", my father screamed, "pregnant at seventeen! You have always been a disappointment to us and now you continue to be a disgrace as well as a disappointment."

The abreactions kept on flowing from both Helen's eyes while recalling this very sad and traumatic memory.

I was very confident now that the emotions released were the emotions that caused the fear of flying at night; these memories had lain dormant for forty years, but that night on the aeroplane the subconscious, having the perfect memory of life, released those repressed memories that went on to cause exactly the same feelings Helen had experienced all those years ago. The loneliness, fear of darkness, feeling cold, becoming nervous, wanting to run from where she was, the shaking and sweating, even wanting to jump from the aeroplane. This demonstrates the dangers of the panic attack.

Helen contacted me some three months after her therapy to inform me of the wonderful holiday that she and her family had in Florida and had already booked for a return trip.

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