



ANTOINETTA
VOGELS

The Secret
Cure for
INSOMNIA

*A Healthy Sense of Self Guide
to Getting a Good Night's Sleep*

CHAPTER ONE

Not Sleeping—a Curse or a Blessing?

How insomnia woke me up to find myself.

If you're reading this, then you most likely know firsthand what it feels like when you can't sleep at night. Like me, you've spent hours lying awake in bed, wishing you could sleep, and then forcing yourself to function as well as you possibly can the next day. You too must have experienced those feelings of exhaustion and lethargy.

The same resulting frustration, loneliness, stress, and hopelessness, as well as that helpless sense of slowly losing control. Perhaps you've changed since insomnia became a regular part of your life and you have become more sensitive than you used to be, or you experience the opposite and find yourself feeling emotionally numb.

Insomnia wreaks havoc on your quality of life and it's bad for your overall health, so it is no wonder that sleeping aids are a twenty-nine billion dollar market. People need to sleep.

And you want to get rid of this problem, but you don't know how. No clear solution has yet been found and nothing you've tried so far has worked.

As an ex-insomniac, I wrote this book to share with you how I managed to get rid of my chronic sleeping problems and share the tools that helped me heal myself. It's my deepest wish they ensure that you will have fewer restless nights, and perhaps even free you from insomnia forever.

Let's first agree on how to look at insomnia.

If there's no medical explanation for your insomnia, please make the effort to understand the reason behind it. Doing so will allow you to make adjustments to your life so you can eliminate the issue. I've found that the best way to get started with that is to see insomnia as a type of *self-sabotage*.

But note that I don't use this term with the same negative implications that are commonly attributed to it. What I mean to say here is actually the opposite: What if insomnia is serving an important natural purpose for you?

The root cause of insomnia can either be of a psychological nature or a medical nature. In this book, we address sleeping problems that are caused by psychological stress, which is often due to a *lack of sense of Self* and the resulting compensation: Dependence on approval. In other words, it can happen when you don't have a strong sense of being your own independent, unique person.

That unfortunate situation usually starts when you're still a child. During those early years, it is easiest to aim for getting other people's approval so you can experience some sense of satisfaction with yourself, or as I call it, "*feel good about self.*"

To get that approval, you may unknowingly force yourself to live up to certain conditions and expectations. This is a core concept of the SoS Method, which, I believe, is going to help you free yourself from your insomnia.

One of the most important discoveries I made is that this state of approval-based "feeling good about self" acts as a kind of artificial, substitute self. This is where the concept of self-sabotage that I referred to earlier comes back in. This self-sabotage can actually be considered to be nature's way of helping you reject this substitute self so you can find your way back to your *real Self*.

I know these viewpoints are quite different from other explanations of what may be causing your sleep disorder. But familiarizing yourself with them and with the role they play in understanding what truly lies behind your inability to sleep will provide the tools you need to tackle your insomnia.

While going through my own experience with insomnia, I discovered many truths that were not so obvious to me at first glance:

- When not feeling so strong in your *sense of Self*, you often do not feel a real connection with who you are as your own person. Instead, you experience "feeling good about self" as a somewhat satisfying substitute for your real Self.
- It's easy to confuse that "feel good about self" state with your own personhood. And having a hard time relating to your real Self is what causes this mix-up.
- In order to "feel good about self," it's necessary to earn other people's approval.
- In the long run, living that way makes you a slave to approval, which causes you to waste all of your energy finding ways to obtain it.

- Your real Self is subsequently struggling to get free and, as a result, natural instinct makes you sabotage whatever you were doing to get approval.
- With your sleep cycle sabotaged, everything you do to reach the “feel good about self” state is doomed to fail. This situation forces you to question what’s going on with you, which has the potential to help you discover the truth about *why* you do *what* you do.

Because that’s the big question! If you want to put an end to your sleeping problems, then ask yourself:

“*Why do I do what I do?*”

“What’s my motivation for trying to achieve certain things? Why is it so important for me to fulfill those conditions?” If you can find that out, you’re well on your way to freeing yourself from this paralyzing inability to sleep.

I was able to heal myself because I finally came to understand what lay at the root of my insomnia, which ultimately showed me the reasons why I did everything in my life. It was all about getting acknowledgment. I needed to feel like I mattered.

To feel that I was of value instead of a source of problems, instability, and worries. I hope my story releases something inside you that empowers you to reclaim own life too. I hope that by understanding how things worked for me, you’ll be willing to work toward getting to know yourself better. Eventually, it will lead you to go to bed with peace of mind, secure in the knowledge that you will sleep well.

While everyone has a vastly different life story, the process of healing is the same. My path to healing began with the realization that, above all else, I wanted to feel that my parents were happy with me. Instead, I had the strong sense that they thought I was a nuisance.

When I was growing up, there always seemed to be something wrong with me and I continuously felt pressured because I never seemed to be able to be on time. I felt as though they thought of me as a self-centered brat who had to study relentlessly in order to become a good musician. Because yes, they liked it when I was at the conservatory, but studying was not really allowed. Listening to me practice at home was too much for them.

The piano was inconveniently placed in the living room, and they really didn’t appreciate it if I had to play the same piece repeatedly to get it down. They preferred to enjoy their happy hour drinks undisturbed. “That’s much more relaxing! Why do you always have to do things differently?”

Wasn't that message telling me that I was not good enough as myself? Ironically, they always would add: "Just be yourself!" It took me quite some time to figure out that *just be yourself* actually meant *do as we do*.

I never knew the inner feeling of peace, or that I was okay. I had to spend most of my life struggling to acquire that sense and to finally enjoy a good night's sleep.

Figuring out why I wasn't able to sleep ended up helping me tremendously. It took me a very long time; nearly thirty years, I believe. Because my first baby was born a little over thirty years ago. When that happened, I should have been on top of the world.

I enjoyed my position as a bassoonist in the Amsterdam Philharmonic Orchestra. I was leading a successful life. I had a loving husband, a good income, and people who respected me for my skill and dedication. I adored my child and I was thrilled about becoming a mother. I should have been shouting my joy from the rooftops, but I didn't feel that way.

When I returned to work after my maternity leave was over, I wasn't able to sleep from one day to the next. Insomnia was affecting every aspect of my life and I became determined to solve this problem, not only for myself but for my family as well. Although, despite my best efforts, it would last well over twenty-five years . . .

With this book, it is my goal to help you achieve your healing much faster than that. I went through this healing process all on my own. I had no mentor, no one who had already been through it to guide me. It is my hope that, with the help I'm offering here, you may be less resistant than I was to accept some of the things your body is trying to tell you.

So, how is it for you? Do you ever feel lost? Like there's something wrong with you?

I had these feelings. And I wanted to get rid of the negative view of myself with all my heart, so I tried to compensate for it by working very hard and doing things perfectly. I desperately wanted my parents to feel that big YES of acceptance for me in their hearts. Only then would I have finally felt that they were proud of me and maybe even really loved me.

Maybe then, I thought, my parents would be able to put aside their own interests once in a while and delve into the world of their child rather than attaching so much importance to whether they received their drinks on time or making sure they had time for their hobbies. But instead, everything had to be done exactly in accordance with the rules of the adults. That's how things were in those days.

It felt like the house rules were much more important than I was. I was like a blank slate, and having to obey their numerous rules restricted my development of a healthy feeling that I was okay as the person I was, that simply *being me* was enough. Feeling supported for who I was would have been so much more effective than being continuously criticized.

I vividly remember how my father regularly said to my brother, "You are a nail in my coffin." To me, my parents often said: "Oh Antoinetta, you always have something wrong. You always mess things up." Perhaps these are only words, but they are not things that a parent can say to their children. For a child, everything is more intense, and they believe what they are told about themselves.

The messages I internalized about myself were: *You create too many problems. Everyone walks away from you. No one can stand to be around you.* And as the sweet little girl in need of parental acknowledgment that I was then, how could I put those judgments about my character aside and lead my own life?

Maybe there are children who can. I couldn't. I was adamant in my determination to refute all those criticisms and prove that I was better than what my parents thought of me. And that's exactly what I've been working toward my entire adult life as well.

If you're faced with a sleep disorder later in life, this often still has something to do with the messages you received about yourself during childhood. It's likely that there have been moments in your life that did not seem all that important at the time, but that still form the foundation of how you feel about yourself now.

When I was in grade school, I always tried to come up with excuses for why I had to stop playing with my neighborhood friends in the late afternoons because I was expected at home earlier than they were.

I was never allowed to wear the "right" clothes and I had an unfashionable hairstyle because my father preferred it that way, which only added to my sense that I didn't belong, a sense that has stayed with me for a long time

In childhood, those feelings of self-doubt accompany you when you interact with other children, they affect your ability to establish relationships, and ultimately contaminate whatever sense you have of yourself.

After all, if your parents hold such a mirror in front of you, then that's how you come to see yourself; you don't know any better. The mirror says: "I'm not okay!" So you feel that you're not okay!

When you're a child, your parents are like God to you. What they say, certainly at the beginning of your life, is the absolute truth.

I felt insecure because of my parents' attitude toward me. I never developed the feeling of being myself, let alone of being proud of who I was. I thought that my "self" wasn't good enough and started compensating for that by trying to make self-improvements.

I was constantly looking at others to see how they did things. How they behaved. I had no sense that it was okay for *me* to be *me* so I tried to change my behavior and live up to the conditions I thought would lead to approval.

Living this way never allows you to develop a feeling that *you* are *you* and that you have the right to be true to yourself.

In other words, it prevents you from developing a *sense of Self* because you're constantly working to ensure that you're included, that you count because you're scared as hell of not being seen or heard.

Further, you're totally preoccupied with doing things that make you feel a little bit better about yourself and you're constantly on the lookout for appreciation from your parents, peers, or authority figures. You want to see that smile of approval on their faces, because it makes you feel like you can escape their criticism, at least in this one instance.

In this way, without consciously realizing it, you're building the foundation for a *substitute sense of self*. Because the path to your natural Self is blocked, this artificial way of sensing yourself through the approval of others gradually replaces your true sense of Self.

One clearly recognizable symptom of a substitute sense of self is having a very strong urge to "feel good about self" at the end of the day. The urge is often so strong that you would do anything to get it.

Sleeping disorders can be the consequence of dependence on approval and needing that "feel good about self" state.

Being able to attain your substitute sense of self, in fact, depends on your ability to fulfill a large number of conditions, which can make you very restless and nervous. But you *have to* meet those conditions to get the approval you need.

When we're not in contact with ourselves, we don't have an inner support system in place. That's why it becomes so very important to meet those conditions. Because the "feel good about self" state creates a temporary psychological backbone, and we cannot function without that backbone.

You may wonder where insomnia comes in to play in this situation. Insomnia is something that demands your attention. It's a force of nature that is asking you to stop what you're doing and look at your life.

Try to see insomnia as the knight who wants to save you from the clutches of this unhealthy way of living. Sleeping disorders are generated by your subconscious, and their task is to keep you from submitting to these self-destructive habits.

If your sole purpose is to meet conditions that you hope will lead to approval, you're not being present in your own life. You're not aware of who you're, or even of your presence in your own body.

You never learned to give yourself attention—with the exception of harshly criticizing yourself for not being good enough in one way or another—because you're possessed by the need for the outside approval and attention of others.

Sleeping issues can be a symptom of self-sabotage, or rather of *substitute self-sabotage*.

You can look at self-sabotage as something you subconsciously, yet purposely do (whether through action or inaction) that causes you to fail. At least, so it seems. Contrary to what you may think, this is, in essence, nature's way of trying to help you.

It's a law of nature that every being in existence needs to be itself. And when you're unable to sleep, nature is saying to you: *Pay attention! You're not being yourself when you're chasing after approval.*

Insomnia prevents you from following the fictional script you're creating in your head when you imagine how things could (should!) work out differently for you if only you could manage to do this or that perfectly. It wants to show you that you're approaching things from the wrong motivation.

That you're *not* doing things because you want to, but because you depend on the approval you may get when you do them. You become so afraid that you will fail to perform perfectly that your whole body reacts, even if you may not really notice it. Except that you cannot sleep . . .

You would think that every time you did something right, you would sleep well, but the opposite is actually true. Inside you is a system that wants to help you become your Self. That system—I simply call it nature—wants you to understand that you're on the wrong track.

Ultimately, every human being has the right to their own life, to developing their own personality and their own character. Every person has the right to enjoy their own talents and even their shortcomings.

Parents who lack a strong sense of Self often place a lot of importance on their children presenting themselves in certain ways. In order to “feel good about self,” these parents tend to either live vicariously through their children or use them as a means of gaining approval. At least, that is how I explained what happened to me during my childhood.

Neither my father nor my mother had a strong sense of Self, and they did everything they could to achieve the social status they had decided was necessary for them to “feel good about self.”

They felt they were too good for the neighborhood we lived in, which meant that I was not allowed to play with the other children because “we were really much better than they were.” This attitude, in hindsight, does not make sense at all, but it was not as strange in the 1950s and early '60s as it seems now.

Being brought up this way left me with the feeling that I did not belong. I remember that intense desire to belong to a group. As a child and young adult, I wished I was part of a working-class family because they seemed to be devoted to each other.

I also imagined belonging to the Catholic Church, which I thought was very interesting: All these people coming together, connecting with each other through rituals and shared belief. Our family did not have close ties to anybody around us, which only served to feed my feelings of not-belonging.

Childhood experiences and the conclusions you draw from them shape the way you see yourself and the world around you, which can have a dramatic impact on your ability to sleep.

You take it all with you when you go to bed at night.

What happens at night has everything to do with what you're chasing during the day and how dependent you are on the results you get.

If you're satisfied with who and what you are, you're more likely to develop a natural sleeping pattern.

From this point of view, insomnia isn't the problem; it's a symptom of a deeper issue. Instead of trying to change how you sleep, you have to change how you feel about yourself. You have to dig into your past to understand why you're suffering now: Were you able to develop a healthy sense of Self early on in life, but some trauma or event interfered with that natural ability? Or were you like me and never developed a sense of Self during childhood?

In the first case, it's time to find your way back to sensing yourself as you did before. In the second case—whether it happened through neglect, being forced to live up to unrealistic expectations, or being used as a pawn so your parents could live out their unfulfilled dreams through you—it's time to learn how to get in touch with your real Self.

No matter how you came to this point in your life, the resulting need is the same, and learning (or relearning) to be your authentic Self is the best medicine for helping you sleep.

Insomnia is nature's cue for you to find out what is going wrong in your life. It's an opportunity to correct the things that are working against your best interests and turn them around.

It would be better if nature's intention was clearer because being unable to sleep is upsetting and it's not easy to understand why this is happening to you. But if you try to see things as I've described, it will help you to look at your sleeping problems from a different angle.

If you can't sleep and you have no idea why, then you have to find the courage to look inside and ask yourself, "What is going wrong in my life?"

Here, your insomnia can be exactly the blessing you need to help you solve the underlying problems that are preventing you from living your life to the fullest. Eventually, you may even be grateful for your experience with insomnia, because it ended up bringing you closer to yourself. Once you have gotten in touch with your real Self, then you will sleep a lot better.

Tonight, before going to bed, stand in front of the mirror and look yourself in the eye. Ask yourself:

- *What am I actually doing?*
- *What do I hope to gain?*
- *Who am I really doing this for?*

It's okay if you don't have the answers right away; it's okay if you're not even sure what part of your life these questions are aimed at. The point is to begin your inner quest for the truth behind your sleeplessness.

In the next chapter, we'll look at what the root cause of your insomnia might be. We'll also take the first step toward getting rid of it.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Thanks for reading the first chapter! The book and ebook will be published this spring. Be on the lookout for it, and we'll keep you posted. Also, please feel free to reach out with your feedback, reflections, suggestions, or questions.)

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