

Anxiety and Depression: A Different Look

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It is a safe assertion that anxiety and depression are the two most common conditions that human beings experience in the world today. The statistics available are based on diagnosed cases using the criteria outlined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, (DSM-IV). The statistics are clearly inaccurate since many if not most people who experience these conditions are never clinically diagnosed. The common means of managing these conditions is “self-medicating.” The suppression of symptoms and the alteration of mood is a way of life for a large majority of our populations. The use of medications prescribed by primary care physicians, and the use of alcohol, and illegal drugs has become so common that when we see it on TV or in movies, it shows up as just part of the socially acceptable way of functioning. Even with the grossly inaccurate official statistics, the National Institute of Mental Health states that mental disorders are the leading cause of disability in the U.S. and Canada. It is a safe supposition that this is the case around the world base on the reports and observations I have made.

For the sake of getting to heart of the matter, I am going to call anxiety and all of its manifestations “fear.” While it may be a particular form of fear, it is nonetheless fear.

Depression is a condition that is usually characterized as involving a sense of hopelessness that manifests in excessive behaviors such as over or under eating, sleeplessness or excessive sleeping, disinterest in life, and often a desire to escape suffering resulting in suicidal thoughts or actions.

It has been my experience over the course of thirty years of treating these two conditions that they typically co-exist. The consistent experience of fear and the behaviors that express it result in an overall experience of life that includes hopelessness, which is a kind of giving up or resigning. Life occurs as disappointing and coping appears to be what is left to do.

Short-lived experiences provided by spiritual endeavors, self-help trips, getting more money and material possessions, accomplishing a goal, falling in love, or the other forms of mood alteration, perpetuate the idea that one ought not to expect life to deliver happiness, satisfaction, or fulfillment. Many manufacturers have used the awareness of the common condition that people experience to sell their products. The current slogan of one of the most popular soft drinks is “Coke: open happiness.”

A Different Look

I offer a different look at these conditions that has proven to provide a final cure for those who have taken this pathway. This

pathway involves the recognition of an aspect of our relationship to life that typically goes unnoticed – in many cases for a lifetime.

The Condition

It has long been recognized that the experience of birth is traumatic. The expulsion from the security and comfort of the womb into the wild and intense energetic vibrations and movements of life is a profound shock. Even so, in most cases, the infant appears to adapt to being in the world with the support and protection provided by parents and caretakers. What goes undetected is the context of fear that automatically arises in the infant organism as it contracts in reaction to the impact of this sudden exposure to human life. This context of fear, which is the fear of the experience of life itself, is not an ongoing outward expression of fearful emotions, but rather that which shapes our perceptions and behaviors as our relationships to others evolve and our involvement in life moves forward. In time, we develop a character structure that compensates for the experience of life as a dangerous proposition that cannot be trusted and is full of threat, and learn to assess ourselves privately as inadequate to managing life. The passages of life from infancy to early childhood, from childhood to adolescence, and from adolescence to adulthood further perpetuate the context of fear and our attempts to control, avoid, manage, and hide it. For those who succeed, this fear resides as a subtle background of anxiety that at times explodes into outright fear when circumstances trigger it. This is

commonly called anxiety attacks. This is not natural fear for survival as an organism, such as the fear one experiences in the face of an actual threat such as being in front of a bus bearing down on you after thoughtlessly stepping off a curb. This is neurotic fear. This is the fear of life in general; apprehension.

When this context of fear is considered fully in terms of its implications, it explains all of human behavior, and it provides an obvious explanation for the experience of depression.

The Cure

The application of a simple act that dissolves the root cause of all human neurotic behavior – the context of fear, which shapes all of our perceptions and subsequent behaviors – will be presented and discussed in this article.

The simple act is called “looking at yourself.” Before describing this act it, it is appropriate, given our tendency to consider cures to be complicated, especially when talking about a cure for something as seemingly comprehensive as all forms of neurotic thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, to consider the following.

Often, in the course of major discoveries that have solved universal problems, the key has been the misperception or oversight of a seemingly simple and insignificant factor. A case in point was the conclusion that the earth was flat. The factor unrecognized at the time was that the earth

was considered flat from a point view in which the appearance of a flat horizon was sufficient evidence on which to base this conclusion. That point of view turned out to be the factor that determined and, in the end, corrected this misperception. From an expanded point of view, the earth occurred round in relationship to the appearance and behaviors of other heavenly bodies. In the same way, all of the perceptions of the existence of fear, anxiety, and depression have been the result of perceptions that occurred within the context of fear, perceptions shaped by the context of fear, which resulted in symptoms of the context of fear to appear as the causes of fear. For example, the erratic, irrational, or aggressive behavior of human beings appears to be a cause of fear to other human beings. However, when considered as a symptom of the universal context of fear that all human beings experience, it becomes evident that these behaviors are all symptoms of a context of fear. The implications of this are profound when the cost of human life involved is considered. It would be accurate to recognize this condition to be one of "insanity."

A second consideration in accepting the efficacy of the simple act about to be described is that it seems "unbelievable," given the more than 5,000-year history of philosophical, psychological, and spiritual teachings and practices, that such a simple act would not have been recognized. Yet, the evidence is clear that with all that has come before, human life continues to be a problem, and those who claim to be free of suffering and able to act in the interest of humanity are among the very few.

Based on the considerations discussed, one suggestion to incorporate when doing this simple act is this: rather than being concerned about whether the act works prior to taking the action, give your energy to making a sincere effort to do the act, and then pay attention to the outcome that occurs over time. At this point, thousands have heard of this act and have reported the result to be a gradual transformation of their experience of life into one that is free of neurotic anxiety and depression. In addition, what continues to be reported is an ongoing expansion of the ability to effectively navigate through life, and an ongoing experience of life as a fulfilling adventure.

The Act

The act of looking at yourself is to do the following:

Become aware of the experience of your attention. Notice that, as you read this text, your attention is fixed on the text. Now, notice that you have the ability to direct your attention. Direct your attention to your breath. Notice that there is a difference when you do this. Notice that you are more aware of your breath.

Now, direct your attention to the experience of what you call "me." Make a sincere and heartfelt effort to experience, just for a moment, what it feels like to be "me." The "me" that has never changed, and is the same now as it was when you were five years old. Experience the sense of "me," just for a moment; no longer than a moment is necessary.

Repeat this action whenever it occurs to you to do so.

Do not concern yourself with whether you did it or not. Do not concern yourself with how you'll know whether you did it or not. Do not concern yourself with understanding it, or expecting something to happen or to change when you do it.

That is all there is to it.

As you continue to look at yourself as a spontaneous act, not as a practice, give attention to your experiences.

You may notice an increase in uncomfortable experiences as the process of a direct experience of life appears. This phase will be temporary, and appears to be unique to each person's character structure.

A method that has been found to work to expedite this process is this: if some experience occurs as uncomfortable or difficult to tolerate, direct your attention to the thoughts that about it, and notice if the thoughts are negative and useless; if they are, move your attention to your breath, or to a useful point of focus like a pleasant site or naturally beautiful image.

It also has been found to be useful to be in communication with others who have done the act to give and receive support and exchange ideas about the experiences involved in this process.

The community of those who have performed this act is constantly growing. They post their reports, comments, questions, and supportive responses daily on a forum designed to foster their work together.

The person who discovered this simple act is named John Sherman, and the website where further information about participating in the community, and actively learning and sharing the revolutionary outcome of this act is <http://www.justonelook.org>.

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