

## **Overcoming Anxiety & Depression** **by Mel Schwartz**

A newly referred client came into my office some months ago and shared with me that she had struggled with anxiety her entire adult life. She had been in therapy with the same person for well over six years and had made little progress. I inquired as to what she had learned from their work together. If I actually had hair on the back of my neck, it no doubt would have stood straight up upon hearing her response. "He told me the best that we could do we be to try and manage my anxiety," she offered. So many mental health professionals are literally trained to believe that matters of anxiety and depression can at best be managed, and often with the associated medication to achieve the lessening of symptoms. This speaks to their mindset of pathology and the absence of a deeper understanding of the relationship between thought and anxiety or depression. The limitations of such a worldview are limiting and produce a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure.

Our bio-medical culture would have us believe that we're hard wired or genetically inclined to suffer from these ailments, and disappointingly induces us into a disempowered condition of victimization. Too often we become the diagnosis. Rather than stating "I often feel depressed," or "I'm given to feeling anxious," we wear the label handed down to us. So we become the depression as in "I'm a depressed person." This state of victimization ironically leads us to an even deeper depression or anxiety, for we lose hope of healing.

I believe that very often the struggle with anxiety or depression really speaks to our relationship with our thoughts. I have learned that very often the intrinsic difficulty is in the nature and quality of our thoughts. The difference between one who suffers and one who is free to enjoy life is in their quality of thought. Neuroscience is beginning to confirm what quantum physicists and Buddhists have suggested for quite some time. The continued repetition of negative thought literally alters our brain chemistry. This is a fascinating discovery. In other words, if we learn to witness and observe our quality of thought, and ultimately improve the nature and context of our thinking, there is every opportunity for relief. This is a radically different way of looking at the problem. We live in our minds and the thoughts we choose paint the canvas of our lives. Rather than seeing the problem as a result of our chemistry, we might look at the phenomenon of our thinking as an active participant in scripting how we experience life. As knowledge progresses and old paradigms begin to fade, new approaches permit an evolution of thinking that create new opportunities for healing.

A person who suffers from anxiety is often stuck in the groove of thoughts that habitually seek out problems and create stressful states. Having focused in such a way, they become the thought and the thought summons up the associated emotion, namely anxiety. Learning to free ourselves from the enslavement to our thoughts is the key to not only moving beyond the diagnosis, but ultimately toward a gratifying and happy life. I've enjoyed considerable success with many individuals in assisting them in "not becoming their thoughts," but in identifying how the thought is leading and tricking them. This is at the core of my work in what I call emergent thinking. I'm not suggesting that the relief comes from suppressing or pushing away negative thoughts, but more subtly from

learning how to witness what thought is telling us. The ultimate goal is to turn your mind into your ally. This is both achievable and liberating.

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