**Starve Your Anxiety**

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Anxiety is as familiar to human beings as water is to fish. The human psyche/mind/body is the natural habitat for anxiety, a term coined by Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. I became familiar with this term when I became a student of psychology, and even until then, it only had a theoretical significance. Entering the field of psychology is when anxiety became the most heard word, and I came to the realization that throughout my life, different thoughts, emotions, and physiological symptoms I used to go through all come under this umbrella term: anxiety.

Nine out of ten clients I work with have the presenting problem: I have anxiety. How do I get rid of it? So, like an archeologist digging for hidden historical treasures, I would start searching for factors in the past and present that were contributing to the client’s anxious crisis. We would resolve one set of issues, so to speak, and something else would come up after some time. The anxiety, I realized, has become an extra body part that cannot be amputated. What now? How do I help my client? After months and months of therapy, anxiety is not dissipating.

As an intervention, I asked one of my clients to rename the ‘anxiety’ with something that he is fond of. He stated ‘football,’ and so I suggested that every time he talks to me about his anxiety, he would say I am feeling ‘football’ rather than ‘anxiety.’ Viola! Something started shifting. Despite external circumstances remaining the same, he started to react differently, and there was a significant shift in his anxious symptoms. We worked through that for the next couple of months, and without medication, he became much more regulated.

I realized that the attachment to the word anxiety was part of the problem and, most importantly, the association with this word, which is negative and understood as a mental health problem that needs a solution. Post that, what he felt in situations was considered normal, the nervous system’s fight/flight response that did not require the label of ‘anxiety.’

Starve your anxiety. Understand that our mind, heart, and body join forces in situations where we experience an external threat or feel unsafe internally, and the response to it is normal. It does not require a label. Starve it by not using that word at all and expressing what you are going through in different words. For example, if there is an important presentation you are worried about, rather than saying I feel anxious, you may say, my mind or my body is preparing for this presentation. Suddenly, the symptoms, be it recurring thoughts, tightening in the chest, or worried feelings, will all feel like allies rather than foes.

What is a healthy mechanism has become a pathological disorder with so many categories that further augment the issue. Starve this monster called anxiety by not recording and repeating what you are going through daily. For example, if you have health anxiety, tell yourself that for one week, you won’t share the symptoms at any time or google the symptoms, but every Friday, let’s say you will talk about it as much as you want to. You will be surprised how the attachment to the health anxious part will dissolve, and you will not have the same energetic tendency to talk about your health anxiety as before.

Anxiety is not a monster. The symptoms of it are similar to excitement. It’s the narratives we have attached to it that make anxiety a negative experience and excitement a positive one. To begin with, change your language and, as mentioned before, express what you are going through without using the word anxiety. Secondly, accept that all the symptoms are an energy that propels you forward. In most cases, I have seen anxiety as the bigger problem to tackle than the problem itself. Trust your inner resource that can make you successfully survive anything in your life. Trust the human resilience and the evidence of which is a dime a dozen in the history of mankind.

Starve the anxiety and start breathing.

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