

Exploring Anxiety Series, Part 1: A Volcano Within

by Kathleen Y. Rattigan

Underneath our skin is a seething cauldron of emotions. Good days, bad days, the weather, our neighbours or the news – we react and respond to external and internal events through our thoughts.

Our thoughts then create the emotional ocean within. Each and every one of us experiences stress, even— or perhaps especially—as do our children. Does that surprise you? Are you aware that our children are anxious? Just by replacing the word stress with “anxiety” brings it home to a new awareness level.

This realization all began because I am deeply involved with a new study program about stress, anxiety and depression. I have always considered myself a very relaxed individual because I meditate and have a rich and rewarding profession that has me bounding out of bed in the morning eager to take on this new day. My marriage and family life are warm and loving and, to all apparent eyes, I have no stress in my life, nor did I ever consider that I do.

Yet, as I began this in-depth probe into the causes of this epidemic of stress in our society, I was stunned to discover that — yes, indeed — I do feel anxiety at times! “How can this be?” I whispered to myself. I find it fascinating to discover that even though I started this program to help my clients deal effectively with stress, it is also helping me. I discovered that the feeling of “anxiety” is the basis of almost all our negative emotions and self-talk. It is impossible to escape the feeling of anxiety because it is programmed into our psyche and is essentially a human experience – no exceptions!

It was just that little nugget of a word change, from stress to anxiety, which made me realize how common anxiety is to all of us as an every-day reality. Please read this definition from Merriam Webster’s Deluxe Dictionary:

Anxiety:

1a: painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill

1b: fearful concern or interest.

2: an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs (as sweating, tension, and increased pulse),

by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one’s ability to cope with it.

In the old days, anxiety was perhaps easier to cope with because we had basically two responses to it: fight or flight! In today’s society, fighting is illegal in most cases, and we have nowhere to run because our anxieties are caused by benign norms such as money, relationships, school and work. We can run away from everything except ourselves. And it is within our body-self that we experience the emotions of anxiety: a burning in the solar plexus, a tight throat, headaches, cold sweats and so on – all manner of physical symptoms which I call a volcano within.

Anxiety is a common foe; we all have to learn to deal with it. How do we do that? Our first instinct is to do anything we can to stop the unpleasant feelings, so we drink, take medication, eat too much or too little, look to relationships to make us feel better or try and keep ourselves so busy that we have no time for inner reflection. You can run, but there is nowhere to hide from yourself, so how about exploring with me some different ways of both looking at and dealing with yourself in a healthy, natural, and wholesome way?

The next few articles in this series will focus on this epidemic in our society. Please feel free to write in with your comments and suggestions, or your personal stories about how stress and anxiety have impacted your life.

Perhaps just knowing that this is a problem we all face might show you that you are not alone, that everyone has had panic attacks, that many, many, of us do suffer physically from the anxiety and stress of every day life, and that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Anxiety can be faced and handled, there is always a solution. Because we are the creator of our emotions, we can learn to have the strength to change the way we feel. I will be sharing tips, tools and some tasks you can do to start taming your inner volcano in the next series of articles.

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MIRACLES & MYSTERIES

A Hindu legend says we were all once gods. But eventually we abused our powers. Brahma, the chief god, decided to punish us by taking away our divinity. Brahma called a meeting of the other chief gods to figure out where to hide our holiness. One god suggested hiding it deep beneath the earth. "No," Brahma said, "man will just figure out a way to tunnel miles below the surface." Another god suggested hiding our holiness at the bottom of the ocean. "No," Brahma responded, "man will just learn how to dive to the seabed." A third god came up with

the idea of placing our divinity on top of a towering mountain. "No," Brahma said, "man will just climb every tall mountain on the planet until he finds it." Stumped, the other gods told Brahma they gave up- there didn't seem to be any place to hide our holiness and keep it out of our reach. "Wait," Brahma said with a smile. "I've got it. We'll hide man's holiness deep within himself-he'll never think to look for it there."

Since then, we've spent ages digging below the earth, diving to the sea floor, and climbing tall mountains, looking for something that's already within us.



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