

Enrich
ANXIETY

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Words
CYNTHIA MORTON



*Anxiety is the dizziness
of freedom*



Cynthia Morton is a bestselling Australian author, painter, public speaker, mother of two teenage sons and CEO and founder of the Emotional Fitness Foundation. Having worked with over 7,000 Australians facing emotionally challenging life issues such as addiction, abuse, self sabotaging cycles, and depression, Cynthia is in high demand as an Emotional Fitness expert. www.emotionalfitness.com.

Creating anxiety about anxiety is about as helpful as getting angry at angry people. When we become the very thing that we are so fearful of, and self-righteous about judging, the cycle continues, from one relationship to another. As Gandhi so wisely put it, “We must become the change we wish to see in the world.”

One day I was wandering peacefully through a shopping centre in Bris Vegas that I have been frequenting since my teens when I needed to make my routine visit to the ladies room. As I shut the toilet door, the face of a terrified woman in an advertisement stared back at me. The message promoted a service specialising in anxiety treatments and the slogan inferred that you could never escape it, that it would be like a boogie monster, always waiting to get you, any time, anywhere.

I stood transfixed, ignoring my full bladder, looking at the desperation on this woman’s face and remembering those black chapters in my life - as a suicidal teen, a single divorced mother, and an addict in early recovery - when anxiety was a constant state of being. I would wander aimlessly around this very shopping centre, emotionally crippled by the fear-based belief that I was, and always would be, a hopeless, incompetent mess. I felt relieved that, during those phases of my life, advertisements like these were not posted on the toilet doors.

We all hear the new age mantras that tell us to ‘let go’ or ‘hold on’, but these generalisations

only feed our anxiety if we don’t know how to apply them. Do you ‘hold on’ to an abusive relationship? Do you ‘let go’ of the right to visit children? They say that “wisdom is knowledge applied”, but if you don’t have healthy guidance for applying the knowledge, how can you act wisely, face your fears and overcome anxiety?

I was visiting a rehab recently to conduct a group when I noticed on a whiteboard in the group room the following words: “Knowledge is knowing that tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.” So the obvious question is: when and how do we creatively use that bloody tomato called ‘anxiety’ that we all have in our emotional garden?

I can offer a suggestion that always works for me, which is to view anxiety as a healthy, inbuilt human alarm, like an internal amber traffic light, indicating the simple need to be cautious and listen to our truth. Constructive outcomes result when we honour anxiety without shame. Freedom from our fears is how we master inner peace.

So anxiety can be used as a useful key to unlock that heavy door of fear. Waiting for us on the other side is a rare and beautiful freedom and self-respect that we only discover when we are brave enough to face our anxiety, rather than feed it with fear.

Anxiety is a normal and healthy component of being human. In the wise words of Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, “Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom.” ❀

Enrich
SLOW DOWN

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Words
MARIE ROWLAND



The harmless clutch of obscure lyrics below - written in the 60s by folk duo Simon and Garfunkel - sound somewhat dated or even kitsch today. But on closer inspection, this song is rendered prophetic as we now live in an age when we are always in a hurry and life is just a blur, whizzing past us. This deceptively simple song is a timely reminder for us to stop and smell the roses.

Speed dating, tweeting, sound bites, multi-tasking – we can’t even write a text without abbreviating it. R we OK? No, not gr8. Everything is so sped up and for what? Where are we all heading to in such a hurry? The only thing we’re trying to slow down is the ageing process. Yet we all still reach that unavoidable and final destination no matter how taut our skin is.

To look at it another way, is all this time-efficient behaviour actually improving our quality of life? Are we enjoying it any more? Are we any closer to happiness? If we measure it against the meteoric rise in antidepressant prescription drugs, the answer is a resounding no. In our unquenchable search for gratification in all aspects of our lives, we end up running like hamsters on a treadmill, going absolutely nowhere. And yet we greedily press on. As Carrie Fisher famously said, “Instant gratification takes too long.” No wonder we’re all completely knackered.

By busily making new friends, never catching up with our old ones and reading only the headlines, we frantically avoid introspection. We dodge having to deal with ourselves by being constantly distracted. This may be a good thing for some of us who prefer to ditch contemplation for action. We don’t want to lead meaningful lives, yet we are exasperated by a feeling of emptiness. So we fill it by acquiring things. We even fill in our face and any other part that disappoints. We are instantly gratified, yet we crave the next hit. And fast. We are so busy trying to keep up and outdo each other

and ourselves, we don’t stop to think what this actually achieves in terms of our happiness or wellbeing.

Happiness is elusive and ephemeral. That’s the nature of it. Too much is expected of it. If we slow things down to enjoy the unobtrusive moments of joy that happen around us every day, we can dispense with the pills and the polyfiller. The sound of your child giggling, feeling the first rays of sun warming your face on a summer’s day, or the dog nuzzling its way onto your lap. This is happiness. In these moments we find meaning. We learn to appreciate what we have. We want what we have, rather than being fixated on not having what we want.

To appreciate and be present in life, we have to give ourselves permission to slow down. The Buddhists call it mindfulness. The hippies called it groovy. As the boys in the turtlenecks sang in sublime harmony: “Life, I love you. All is groovy.” ❀

*Slow down, you move too fast,
You gotta make the morning last,
Just kicking down the cobblestones,
Looking for fun and feelin’ groovy...*