

Morning Anxiety

Introduction

Some people in the Thursday group have been reporting about having anxiety in the morning. The anxiety is there after waking and before getting out of bed. It's a feeling of anxiety unrelated to some specific story or situation.

Obvious Suffering

The Buddha began his teaching with four truths. The first truth is often misstated. The Buddha's first truth is that life has suffering (not that life is suffering). No one gets through life without suffering; therefore life has suffering.¹

We know the obvious suffering that comes with life – when circumstances or other people or ourselves cause difficult and/or unwanted conditions in our life. We don't suffer in the easy and pleasant times of life.

Ubiquitous Nervousness

Pema Chödrön's teacher talked of ubiquitous nervousness. Ubiquitous means all pervading and can indicate being subtle. He said that ubiquitous nervousness is a layer of feeling that each person has. When we quiet down, this layer of all pervading nervousness, of feeling emotionally and mentally uncomfortable, can show up.

As humans, and especially as Americans, we're enculturated to go away from pain and to go toward pleasure. What right-minded American wants to stay in what feels/is uncomfortable?

Getting Away From Our Feelings Of Anxiety

The feelings of anxiety, ubiquitous nervousness or just not feeling good drives so many people to get away from this feeling. Then the person goes to drugs, alcohol, getting busy, talking to a friend, distracting with T.V., internet or texting. *The command inside is do something different; don't stay in this uncomfortable feeling! Do something to not feel the anxiety/ubiquitous nervousness.*

The Dark Night Of The Soul

Christians talk of 'the dark night of the soul;' when a person is deeply troubled. If it was only for one night, it'd be fairly easy to get through. The dark night of the soul can be night after night, day after day. The dark night of the soul can be there for hours, days, weeks. It can be gone for weeks or years, and then return strongly for some new undetermined period of time.

It's said in Christianity that every person has to go through the dark night of the soul. The dark night of the soul is very internal. The dark night of the soul often has nothing to do with the current circumstances in a person's life.

Jesus experienced forty days and forty nights in the desert. Jesus experienced his dark night of the soul while in the desert. Jesus got through his entire dark night of the soul experience in forty days. That's not the usual way it works for us more regular-type people.

My Morning Anxiety

Some years ago there were about three months when strong morning anxiety was there almost every morning. Along with having the feeling of anxiety, I was also physically very uncomfortable primarily in my chest. The uncomfortableness in my body often could extend into my belly, sometimes into my legs and arms, and sometimes into my neck and head.

Physically it could feel like thousands of ants were crawling all around on my skin and inside my body. It was 'an antsy' feeling more than pain. This antsy feeling 'could drive me up a wall.' During my morning anxiety there was no story going on in my mind. There was no story from my past or from my present. A feeling of dread was frequently there.

My mind wasn't engaged in anything except how very uncomfortable (not great pain) I was in both physically and emotionally. My mind didn't run away with thought. I was very present with what was happening with my body and with what I was emotionally feeling.

I knew that 'this too shall pass;' that the feeling of strong anxiety was not forever. This didn't change how I felt in the present moment except that my mind didn't take me into certain hopelessness. As the morning anxiety continued, almost daily, I did wonder how long it would continue for. I remembered Byron Katie's words: "It'll last for exactly how long it lasts for; not one second longer and not one second shorter."

I would also wake up in the middle of the night and have the strong anxiety that could last for minutes or a short number of hours. I also knew that I was going to get as much sleep (I didn't know how much sleep) as I was going to get; not one second longer or one second shorter. Anxiety still comes; again without a story. The anxiety usually is not as strong and doesn't last as long.

First In The Morning Anxiety and Middle Of The Night Anxiety

It's when we're at our quietest that anxiety or the feeling of ubiquitous nervousness appears. My experience indicates that this feeling of anxiety first in the morning and in the middle of the night is old anxiety that has been inside us; that it's not new anxiety. The anxiety is coming up to the surface to be released.

Cutting Off The Release Of Anxiety

Most people want to 'cut off' the release of anxiety. They often become busier. *When you shift into a higher amount of activity, the anxiety can again be covered over and not be released.* So a person will take alcohol, drugs, food, or any activity to again become busier and prevent the anxiety from staying at the surface.

Most people may think that they've successfully dealt with lessening their anxiety when the anxiety 'goes away' by becoming busy. My opinion is that they've added a bit more interest into their anxiety account; not lessened their internal anxiety by distracting themselves with activity or by numbing themselves with alcohol, food or drugs.

Morning Anxiety and What To Do

Get medical help if anxiety is becoming overwhelming. Too much anxiety may be coming up for you to continue to be functional. For the rest of us, here are some suggestions on what to do when anxiety is active.

Morning Anxiety Can Be A Sign Of Progress

Know that morning anxiety (and the dark night of the soul) coming up often shows that finally there is an opening (through all of our busyness, and through all of our covering over and pushing down of our feelings) for the anxiety to leave. Morning anxiety, middle of the night anxiety, and a feeling of ubiquitous (all pervading and usually lower level) nervousness/anxiety can often be a sign of progress.

Feel Your Body

Feel, get closer to, connect more with, the feeling of anxiety in your body. Find the places that are physically uncomfortable. Be kind and gentle toward yourself as you come more in contact with where your body is most uncomfortable.

Breathe Into Your Belly

A number of previous articles have been written of how abdominal (vs. chest) breathing calms and centers us.² The number one suggestion with breathing is to breathe into your belly. If you're not familiar with breathing deep into your belly, you can put one or two hands on your lower belly above your pubic bones. Can you feel your hand/s rise up on inhalation and fall down on exhalation?

As you breathe into your belly, you can let your breathing rate stay where it is. You can also deepen your breathing and slow your breathing rate. Deeper and slower breaths both help us to be more calm.

In summary, there is no best rate to breathe at, though usually slow is more helpful. Breathing deeper is good. The one sure thing with breathing is to breathe into your belly; not primarily having your chest/ribs move while breathing.

Relax Muscle Tension

As you feel anxiety, your muscles tighten. The longer the feeling of anxiety, the more tension that can develop in your body. Along with breathing well, find if there are any areas in your body where tension is obvious. Find if you can relax those areas. The more that your body can relax, the less you'll be adding to the feeling of anxiety.

Voice and Emotion

You can let sounds come through as you breathe. Sounds can help the anxiety to release. If you cry or scream, that can help the anxiety to release. Frustration, anger, fear and sadness can be emotions that accompany anxiety. These emotions can release more through crying, screaming or just having sounds come through.

Move Your Body

The uncomfortable energy can release more if you move your body. Most often I used primarily breathing and some sounds to help the anxiety to release. There were times when I'd move my body (usually lying down) until I didn't feel the need to move or until my body would be tired and relieved from moving.

Don't Believe The Negative Thoughts In Your Mind

I was fortunate that my mind almost never bothered me with thoughts as I was with the anxiety. My mind didn't start thinking that this is hopeless or endless. My mind didn't come up with stories of what the anxiety was about.

If your mind is hounding you with negative thoughts, I suggest to come back to your breathing and to being more connected to where your body is uncomfortable (where the anxiety is in your body).

Negative thoughts in the mind don't need to be pushed down or fought with. Put your attention to your breathing and to your body, and your mind will become more quiet.

Camaraderie and Support Through The Tough Emotional Times

Camaraderie means good-fellowship; a spirit of familiarity and trust between friends. The people in the Thursday group are very bonded. They have great trust and great good feelings with each other.

The people in the Thursday group support each other through their sharing and through knowing that others are also going through difficult times. They don't feel isolated or (for very long) that something is wrong with them. Having support through difficult times is a very big blessing.

Since there are multiple people having the experience of morning anxiety or an anxiety that can be at any time of the day or night, there is a certain strength that is added to each person. They're not alone. Some of their brothers and sisters are experiencing the same challenge. This shared experience is helping each of them to have more courage to stay with, and not squelch, the uncomfortable anxiety.

May all beings find the happiness that is always already present.

Footnotes:

- 1 [Click here](#) to go to a website to read a very concise explanation of the core teaching of Buddhism – the four noble truths.

- 2 Previous articles have gone into detail about abdominal breathing. These articles, with the specific pages referring to abdominal breathing, are [Processing](#) (pg. 4), [Being Triggered](#) (pg. 5) and [Moving Forward When We're In Reaction](#) (pg. 4).