Anatomy of an anxiety attack

(this is not the real me)

Today I had an anxiety attack. It was about as bad as it gets for me. Gut churning, can’t get my breath, mind on fire with my object of anxiety—mind presenting catastrophe, mind flat out making stuff up.

I tell you this because meditation doesn’t cure me from being subject to anxiety.

But I tell you this because meditation does show me how to bear witness, how to use the tools of my breath, and also how to work with my runaway train of a mind.

Anxiety does not come from the “logical” part of the brain. It doesn’t really care if I say “calm down” or “that’s not true.” In the middle of an attack, might as well drain the ocean with a spoon by throwing platitudes.

What does work:

Witnessing. Realizing this is happening, looking at what my mind is doing, almost as if I’m sitting on the sideline watching it. This is a form of detachment I learned it in meditation.

The shame that often accompanies anxiety, as in: I have anxiety and it’s not okay, even childhood memories, traumatic events from the past, etc. may accompany.

I’ve learned to treat this shame more tenderly because I learned to in meditation. Perhaps it visits, I can let it arise and pass, because it will if I don’t entertain it too much.

The formula: acknowledge, feel, let go

The let go part has to do with the visceral letting go/ breath in the body

My gut churns, I intentionally breathe into it, which actually does not feel that good because it means I have to acknowledge it and how tight and yucky it feels.

I exhale, and that feels really great, like I’m almost able to understand what it would feel like to be back in control. Catastrophic thinking (or whatever brand of undesirable thinking) can be slowed but I might have to feel it first.

I say this is not the real me. The real me isn’t completely tsunamied by panic and anxiety over certain things. The real me has some logic and some sense.

Part of the brain anxiety comes from doesn’t have logic or sense except for one thing: fight or flight. Survival.

Remembering that during an anxiety attack my body gets flooded with stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline.

Meditation floods the body with feel good hormones.

I remember that I can do that.

Your anxiety attack may not look like mine. Perhaps your is different.

But it still works to witness, acknowledge, allow it to be felt, knowing that you are going to apply the tool, breathing directly into it (whether it’s found in your head, throat, chest, belly, etc.) and exhaling deeply from that restriction.

The more we take this on as a life practice, we can begin to notice a reduction of frequency and severity of symptoms. I did.

Anxiety may trick your brain into thinking it’s the only game it town, but it isn’t.

There is the profound ease, calm, and grounding available to us as well. We can intentionally add it to our lives in a simple, daily practice.