

## Fear and Anxiety

by Eugene Halliday – an excerpt from The Conquest of Anxiety Ch 1

We are going to examine a way of approach to the problem of fear and anxiety...

Some thinkers distinguish between these two mental states by defining **fear** as a condition in which a living being anticipates a possibility of some rationally definable harm or damage to itself, or to something in which it has an interest. For example, a mother driving her child to school may become involved in a situation in which an accident may occur, and in this situation might experience fear for her own safety, but also for the safety of her child, for whom she is naturally concerned. In contrast with a rationally defined fear, a state of **anxiety** is then defined as one in which a living being anticipates harm or damage but without being able to define rationally the nature of this possibility.

Other thinkers distinguish two kinds of anxiety, a **specific** anxiety in which one anticipates some known definable damage, and a **general** anxiety in which a feeling of apprehension or anticipation of harm is not accompanied by any clear idea of the source or nature of the harm.

It is useful to distinguish between **two kinds of anticipation of harm**, one the nature of which is clearly definable, the other whose nature is not. An example of the clearly definable kind of harm can be seen when one perhaps drops a heavy object upon one's foot. An example of the indefinable is when a person is moving in the dark in an unfamiliar territory in which no idea of the particular kind of harm one might suffer is present.

Some psychologists believe that if an anxiety remains undefined in its form, then it is very difficult or even impossible to eliminate it. But if the cause of the anxiety can be located and defined, it is converted into what is called an **objective** fear, that is, a fear of some known defined object or event or situation. The location and definition of the anxiety cause is then viewed as part of the process of psychotherapy, of whatever kind this may be.

If we observe carefully the behaviour of living beings, animal or human, we are soon led to believe that anxiety of some kind is always in some degree present. Everywhere we see animals and human beings ready to take avoiding action when presented with any possibility of damage, harm, or impedance. This readiness demonstrates the presence at some level of the anticipation of possible harm, that is, of anxiety.

If we were to view the human being as merely an animal, though of great complexity, and an animal as merely a certain kind of material organism, with no spiritual significance, then we would have to say that an anxiety state is nothing but a manifestation of certain reactions of the material

organism to certain kinds of material conditions or stimuli. This is the usual view of materialists.

But we are not all materialists. Even in the twentieth century, with its great emphasis on the successes of materialistic science, there are still millions of human beings who do not think of themselves as merely **material organisms**, but as **spiritual beings**, although incarnate in physical bodies.

For those who believe themselves to be essentially spiritual beings, the problem of fear and anxiety takes on a different aspect. No longer are these states viewed as merely the reactions of material organisms to material situational stimuli. Rather they are seen as spiritual and psychological problems.

A materialist who does not believe that he is anything other than a particular grouping of material particles, atoms, molecules and so on, has no psychological or spiritual problems because, according to his own position, he has no soul or spirit. Thus a materialist cannot logically be worried or anxious about his relationship to infinity, to eternity, to soul, spirit or God. A materialist, from his own viewpoint, is a merely temporal being, a group of material particles, assembled at conception and due for disintegration at death. He is like a senseless puppet manipulated by merely material forces, for a while to "strut his hour or two upon the stage" of this world, only finally to fall apart and his particles to be scattered throughout space, to mix or not mix at some time with others. His coming to be, and his disintegration, have no ultimate significance. On his own view the materialist might just as well never have come into existence.

But the human being who sees himself as a spiritual being ensouled in a physical body has a very good reason for his anxiety: he has his relationship to God to consider. His existence in time is not his only existence. He is also a **dweller in eternity**. He has not merely his physical, material welfare to consider; he has also the problem of the relation of his soul to the divine Spirit, a problem of infinite importance.

Let us now leave the naive materialist to experience the results of his chosen viewpoint and confine ourselves to the consideration of the position of those of us who believe that we are not mere aggregations of material particles, but spiritual beings required for a time to experience the hazards of life in a physical body for a definite developmental reason.

A human being is a special kind of being, a being distinguished from other living beings by **his power to consider the problem of his own origin**. We do not find other living beings studying

and writing books about the source of the universe, about the origins of life.

Animals live their lives struggling for survival, seeking food, striving to reproduce themselves, and always conditioned by pleasures and pains to act in certain well defined ways. They do not show any evidence of anxiety about their origin, but show concern only about how to continue their lives as long as possible on earth, or within their natural material environment.

Spiritually minded human beings, however, are concerned about their origin and their ultimate goal, the Alpha and Omega of their being. This concern is a kind of anxiety, and an anticipation of possible failure to attain the goal. Let us look a little at the present condition of most human beings as reflected in the general state of affairs in the world. Every news bulletin brings us new information of new acts of violence, new military actions, new political take-overs. The daily news does not give us examples of new harmonies in an unimpeded, universally welcoming world. It appears from the evidence that the human race is sick.

For a materialist this sickness is merely a disarray of material particles, but for the spiritually-minded human being there is another explanation of the plight of the world's population. Mankind has misused its most valuable gift, the gift of freedom, conferred upon it by the divine Spirit.

This misuse is the source of most human anxiety. Human freedom implies human responsibility. A materialist can disclaim responsibility on the grounds that he is only an aggregate of material particles patterned and driven by accidental collisions with other aggregates over which he has no control. This disclaiming of personal responsibility is the reason most materialists **are** materialists. The pure materialist, on his own view, **cannot** be responsible for actions, for freedom is not a part of his view of himself; thus he has no moral or ethical nature to be called to account. But it is otherwise with the spiritually-minded man.

Spirit implies freedom of choice, and freedom of choice implies self-responsibility. But for the man who has this gift of choice there is danger, for he lives in a world in which not everyone has respect for freedom. When Herod heard that the King of Freedom was to be born, he at once ordered the slaughter of all male children in the territory where the King was to appear. The first experience of this world given to Jesus was an attempt on His life. And not only Herod was a hater of human freedom.

Today we see everywhere in the world a battle being fought. One army uses physical force wherever it can to suppress freedom. The other uses the "sword of the mouth", spoken truth, to defend itself. The weapons of this world are weapons of violence; the weapons of the world of the spirit are simple truths, simply spoken. Here is occasion for human concern, a situation in which anxiety is inevitable **unless we climb to the highest reaches of the divine Spirit.**

The spiritual man is in danger in many ways, but most of all he is today in danger of losing his belief in his own freedom of choice. He is surrounded by organisations which aim to suppress the very idea of freedom. And not least among these enemies of freedom are those groups of thinkers who believe that freedom is a myth, that human beings are only complex machines, that choice is an illusion produced by a brain that itself is but a machine that cannot help throwing up, amongst its other products, errors of thought, amongst which the idea of freedom is declared to be one.

But it is not only external organisations and groups that are the enemies of freedom. There are also inner enemies, of which two are chief; preference for pleasure over pain, and inertia.

Inertia is defined as the tendency for any kind of action to continue unless acted upon by some external force which can change the mode of action. All fixed habit-patterns come under the heading of inertia, and we all know how hard to break are long standing habits.

Preference for pleasure over pain seems at first glance to be a good thing, but if we look at it a little more closely we can see that this preference can, under certain circumstances, lead to trouble. Any fish caught on the hook by the bait that concealed it can serve as a lesson for us. The world is full of "hook situations" carefully concealed by bait of various kinds. Here is another occasion for anxiety. We are offered things in attractive wrappers, which, when the wrapper is off, prove themselves of no use to us, and sometimes might do us harm.

And pain itself, or the threat of it, may be merely a way of intimidating the unthinking person. In the ancient world figures of great monsters were carved and set up at the city gates, or at the entrances to tombs filled with precious things, with gold and jewels. These monsters inspired fear in the minds of unenlightened beholders, and so kept safe the tombs' treasures. Some of these monsters, witnessed by our ancestors, have left traces or imprints of themselves in our minds, still strong enough to charge some of our dreams with anxiety and fear.

Somehow, if we are to conquer anxiety, we must re-evaluate our ideas about pleasure and pain and what they may mean in any given situation. We must teach ourselves to distinguish between "hook" situations covered with pleasure-giving bait, and the situations in which real happiness is possible. And we must learn to distinguish false "monsters" of stone or fabricated frightening ideas, from really dangerous beings who might have power to do us real harm. "Fear not those who can harm the body, but after that have no more that they can do; but fear those who can harm the soul."

We know how the physical body can be harmed; by breaking its bones, cutting, crushing or bruising its tissues and organs, or by poisoning it, etc. How can we harm the soul?

... to be continued .