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The Art of Worrying

By Ieuan Dolby

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by: **Ieuan Dolby**

I am worried. I have been biting my nails for weeks and now there is not much left (skin doesn't taste very good) on my hands and feet to chew on. I have been bent over the sink retching, I am constantly nauseated with pounding headaches beating out a death march in my skull and yet, life goes on. To say I am worried is placing the situation into a category far above its position - I am sick with worry. I am worried to death and I am sick of being worried about nothing. I am even tired of being worried about being worried about nothing – and I worry about that as well!

Worry comes in many forms and under many guises - call it what you may. Angst, apprehension concern, distress, foreboding, tension, unease, misgivings, fretfulness and nervousness to name but a few of the Uncles, Cousins and Sisters of the large family called Worry. Whatever you call it, all can and will eventually lead to the same result called stress. Stress is a major problem for everyone and is a serious health hazard. Worry gnaws away at the heart and soul: chomps away at skin and bone until it is inside your body and controlling all that you are made of. Worry climbs inside a person's body and takes over in every way imaginable. Worry is a killer - a slow and painful one!

Once worry sets in mental well being is no longer assured and the body physique goes one way only - down hill all the way. All those suffering from worry go through an unhappy period in life, one were the clock stops and the pain takes over, one filled with lack of sleep and restless nights, upset stomachs and brain overload. It gnaws away like a mouse at a piece of cheese, eats away through the heart and soul till it seems as if there is nothing to look forwards to anymore in life. Suicide is an option?

Family and loved ones try to comfort you but even that wears thin after a while, friends stop coming around and those at work offer solicitude to begin with but then shun you. A person that worries is just not fun to be with. A worrier finds he/she spends a lot of time alone or with others who also have their own problems to think about. Those with problems to solve tend to live with their thoughts rather than the world at large!

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What causes worry? Worry is caused by a problem – imaginary or otherwise! The problem may be non-existent or minute in nature but it has produced worry. In one person the problem may have been discarded with a blink of the eye yet in another soul the problem may result in a build up of thought - resulting in serious angst.

The peculiar quirk about the average problem is that there is never a feasible answer to it. If there was then what was the point of worrying about it in the first place? Naturally if there is an answer to a problem then it is no longer a problem. Problems that arise and then are quickly solved are not really under discussion at the moment. Here and now we look at problems that are unsolvable in the short term (if at all), problems that have no answer; that are serious in nature (imaginary or otherwise) and are for the long term.

What we have here are problems (again real or imaginary) that cause worry and where no immediate answer is forthcoming, is possible, is financially viable, is suitable, is morally acceptable or whatever.

The answer is just not there but the problem is - so we have worry. Anyway, if there is an answer nine times out of ten it will always be the one that was not thought about or the one deemed impossible to implement.

Problems in life that are worth worrying about can be divided into two groups. First comes the problems that are similar to a dull and nagging pain, like that of financial income or rather from a serious lack of it. The lack of money has always been and always will be a dull and nagging pain to many and one that will just not go away. Those that do not have enough money to pay the bills and feed the children, those that struggle every day to carve out a living from the measly income that they generate find their lives constantly restricted and their freedom to do what they would like to do is minimal. Another type of worry is the sharp, striking pain that typically results from loved ones, the pain rising and falling as family and those close provide or take away as if on queue. Other types of worry exist but in general they are a result of either an over active imagination or self generated and fed. Other types of problems from the two basic types above typically have to be taken onboard and accepted and in this way can they be understood or solved and not dissected and built up into a drama.

Worry takes over every moment of every day, ruins happy moments and restricts the capability for one to enjoy life for what it is worth. Not worth much, one could say for the worrier and that is something that has to be sorted out. What causes worry is the problem. The problem enters the mind and a thousand results and outcomes of this problem scramble for priority in the mind. All else is pushed away to the rear whilst these avenues open up, all else becomes trivial and unimportant whilst the brain scrambles to make sense and understand what it has been given. The brain works around the clock whilst millions of branches of the problem vie for attention, those that keep on giving outcomes if the problem is not solved, those that make untenable or impossible suggestions for a possible solution and others that keep on retreating to the past. "Why did this happen, what caused this to happen and why did it happen to me"?

Undoubtedly many problems are life altering; that problems worth worrying about will cause change or upset but it must be noted that whether worry is present or not the problem still exists. Take the worry

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out of a problem and it will continue to follow the same path, inflict the same amount of damage or create the same amount of havoc should one not worry about it all.

Certain people are more prone to worry than others. Certain people have a certain skill for taking the whole world onto their shoulders, of grasping all others problems and building a lovely mountain of others angst in their head. There are those that take the problems of ecology and world peace into their brains, trying to find an answer for the whole globe. They do admirable work and probably do all the worrying for those of us that don't worry about the way the world turns. They do proud work but they suffer from serious "worryitus". Then there are a certain category of people that worry for others personal problems, those that enter others lives and take up on their personal problems, then taking it home to their own family to worry about without sensible reason.

Others have more cause to worry than they who look for it; where the outcome of the problem in question is life altering or the problem is of the utmost sadness, than could possibly be imagined. Often these problems can go on forever whilst the clock stops ticking and the answers never present themselves. Problems where there is no light at the end of the tunnel and were the slope just keeps on getting steeper and the snow like an ice rink. Problems where loved ones and relatives are involved and the future happiness of a family is at stake!

Certain people in this world are often classified as being uncaring about others. Self centered maybe and not the sort of person that you would turn to for comfort. Others are in the middle somewhere, caring yet keeping and reserving individualism. And at the end we have the worriers, those that take problems onto their shoulders, into their minds and try to make sense of it all. The balance is in the middle, to be compassionate, to be caring and understanding but at the same time able to step away from the problem when nothing can be done about it. Life must go on. The problem is not going to go away, leave it until another day and think about something else.

It is very easy to say the above. It only takes a few strokes on the keyboard to type those fancy sentences. Doing it is of course a different story but at least here is the aim behind "how to cope with worry". By considering the fact that the problem is current and ongoing, and by understanding that worry is not going to change anything then it may be possible for the brain to compartmentalize.

To recap: we have decided that worry comes in many forms, that all forms lead to worry and in a reduction in mental and physical health. Worry also comes in many forms and today we discuss those where there is no answer in the short term. I have also talked about the way different people take worry onboard, some easily whilst for others worry does not often come into their lives. And the last bit I wrote whilst trying not to worry about it, was that whether a person worries about something or not the situation is still out there.

When worry sets in those close and the loved ones offer terms of endearment like "don't worry" or "it's okay". These are pathetic in the extreme and can anybody think up anything more idiotic than telling an anxious or nervous person not to worry? Another way is to dissect the problem with a loved one and in this way follow the age-old adage of "a problem shared is a problem halved". This is quite often true and is probably the most efficient method used to reduce worry. Simply by dissecting the problem and listing possible outcomes and solutions the picture grows clearer. And by simply talking about the

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problem with another, the worried parties' angst reduces, now that he/she is not the only one with the problem on their shoulders. Yes, talking about a problem is one of the most effective means to reduce worry and stress. It is not the most efficient of means to rid one of worry as only a solution will do that, but it does alleviate the health hazards somewhat.

Psychiatrists the world over make a living from attempting to help those with worries and fears to overcome them. By sitting their patients down and opening up wounds they delve into the past, bringing to life all that has been shored up and hidden for so long. They even open up wounds that have healed and spread them over the floor, desk and walls - often wounds that have been forgotten about and should have remained so. In this supposed way the patient has his mind laid open in front of his eyes, removed from his brain and laid out in a simple and supposedly logical manner. Laid out on the floor like a load of building blocks and all that the patient has to do now is build them up again into one solid structure. The end result: that through this they can maybe come to understand why they have these fears and then build upon that. It is a long way around to what is hopefully the end result: that the patient comes to accept and understand a problem that makes his brain overwork and over something that doesn't really matter.

Psychiatrists open up the mind and attempt to make their wards understand the sequence of events leading to a problem or why a problem exists. They attempt to open up a mind and lay it bare and clear; to be rebuilt into a working form with all answers to problems either solved or reduced in import. Psychiatrists have their ways of doing it - right or wrong (wrong for me) and I have my way.

I would prefer to attack the problem of worry cope-ability or acceptance from a different angle. Through

being able to accept a problem as being present and acknowledging the fact that not much can be done about it. In a way this would be like dividing the brain into two parts. One section for worries and the other part for ongoing happy things in life - external and separate from the problem that is out there. Open the compartment for problems, when comforting those in pain or when a solution maybe possible and the problem needs thinking about. At all other times to shut up this compartment and bring the everyday and 'happy locker' into the forefront.

If there is no immediate answer to a problem then no-amount of 'thinking' is going to solve it. No amount of thinking is going to make the problem any easier to cope with or simpler in its complexity. No amount of thinking is going to reduce the worry and stress present. Thinking about a problem causes the worry! So there we have it. We have a problem but there is no answer. So why not just stuff the problem and the associated worry into the dustbin and get on with life? Throw it away like a piece of garbage and get on with what is important - happiness and enjoyment. So what if the roof is leaking and they have cut off the electricity in the middle of winter, you can't do anything about it. Get out the bottle of whisky, wrap yourself in a blanket and sing a song or two to keep warm. Half a bottle later and you won't even remember what the problem was about in the first instance.

Your husband has run off with his hairdresser and your mother the Milkman? So what and good luck to them I say. Why don't you run away with the Postman or go out and party. Always look on the bright side of life: keep on good terms with your husband, as you will get your haircut for free. And your mother if you want extra milk!

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And you with the thoughts of nuclear war and doomsday just around the corner! Oh dear me, what a to do! Don't stress out about it, do your little bit for charity and go on a couple of anti-war marches but don't pull your hair out and bore everybody in the pub with stories of chemical poisoning and holes in the ozone layer. Do your bit for world peace but at all other times go to the fair ground and throw yourself around a bit - kiss the wife and make love! It maybe the only chance you will get as the end of the world might be tomorrow.

It is quite a selfish way of looking at this but in all honestly there is only one number one. And that is the individual - meaning you. To cope with life and to be happy each individual has to have a streak of self-preservation: to promote their own welfare by switching off from the outside world. Whether the problem is causing direct pain and adjustment directly or through others it has to be pushed to the back of the mind because no amount of worrying is going to make that pain go away. No amount of worry and thoughts about "what if" and "how could it have happen" and "what can I do about it" are going to change the way that the problem will unfold. No amount of dissection or analysis will in any way whatsoever alter or change the impact or the outcome of the problem and so simply "why worry"?

In actuality if there is an answer or solution to the problem it will typically come when you are totally involved with something else, whilst sleeping or talking about something far removed from the subject of worry. It will sneak up unawares, hit you in the face and jolt you into action regardless of the fact of whether you are worrying about it or not. Become selfish and look after yourself, become compartmentalized and open up the problem area only when it is required for compassion or understanding. In all other cases it is most suitable to lock the worry away and open up to things that are within the sphere of happiness and useful for bringing a smile to the face. In short why worry when it is not going to solve the problem?

Oh dear! Is the article okay, maybe I should rewrite it as it is too long, or is it too boring or too short? Oh what shall I do?

Who cares!

Ieuan Dolby, from Scotland is an Engineering Officer in the Merchant Navy. He has been travelling the world for 15yrs on an endless tour of cultural diversification. Currently based in Singapore he writes various articles for magazines and newspapers and is working on a marine glossary.

Many Troubles in My Time

By Catherine Pulsifer

"I've seen many troubles in my time,
only half of which ever came true."

Mark Twain

Worrying about issues unnecessarily can cause both psychological and physical distress. A lot of times, what we worry about never comes true.

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When you find yourself worrying, ask yourself, "Can I do anything about it?" If you can, then take the required action to eliminate the worry. If you can't do anything about it, or if it is beyond your control, then don't waste your time worrying!

When you worry, you are not focused on solutions. You are allowing unproductive negative thinking to overrule your positive thinking. Worrying never leads to any productive results, it only reinforces the negative.

The only thing you will ever accomplish by worrying is to elevate your stress level.

Catherine Pulsifer is one of the authors of Stress Less Country – a lifestyle change! A journey to a simplified lifestyle – visit the site for a collection of articles, thoughts, quotes, and stories on: simplicity, stress, gardening, recycle & reuse, country crafts, saving money tips, and Atlantic Canada.

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