

F.E.A.R. - Face Everything and Recover. 10/19/2019 EA teleconference

1. (My emotional life regarding fear and anxiety)

It was only after a spiritual experience that brought an end to over 50 years of living with clinical depression bipolar spectrum that I realized what I had identified as anxieties companion to depression, was actually another disorder of its own. I erroneously thought the depression and anxiety were related so expected when the depression ended, so would the anxiety. Wrong. Relieved of the depression, I still found myself with unmanageable anxiety. While I described myself as someone 'overwhelmed by everything', this was treated only clinically as a depression episode.

Once free of depression, I fully realized what a worrier I was; I could see the fear fed into anxiety, then the anxiety fed the anxiety itself creating a spiraling down effect. Sometimes it would be a sudden panic. I felt just as powerless and helpless with anxiety as I had with depression. I felt worse in a way as depression muffled the tormented feeling of anxiety. Left with anxiety I began again to use Step 11 to manage anxiety just as I had used it to manage depression. At first anxiety improved through meditation and eventually led to freedom after spiritual awakenings as a result of Step 11. I simply needed to be committed daily to work the step. The 12th step promises the Higher Power can do for us what we can't do for ourselves., sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. I found I needed to plod along with step 11 day after day, week after week, year after year before all aligned and a spiritual experience healed the roots of each.

In the meantime, Fear and Anxiety looked like hyper-activity, workaholism, panic, mentally scattered, a grandiose problem solver, little to no tolerance for living with unsolved problems, irritability and impatience, body aches, nausea, joylessness, over-eating, spending and shopping to name a few.

2. (So what happened to bring me to making the EA change in my life?)

I had never heard of Emotions Anonymous nor had I ever attended an EA meeting when I heard my Higher Power, "I want you to bring Emotions Anonymous to Topeka." I had to go online to find out what Emotions Anonymous was all about. This was 6 years ago. I was familiar with how a "healthy" 12 step meeting is run through years in Al-Anon as an Adult

Child - which helped me in relationships to others and to the consequences of alcoholism in my life, but EA was where I needed to be. Through EA I realized only I could observe the activities of my mind and emotions and make different choices. That I needed to concentrate on a relationship with myself; with gentleness, understanding and compassion. Only I could apply the steps specifically toward my thoughts and emotions. Only my HP could help me more deeply than others had been able to even though I availed myself of quality therapists and appropriate medication.

3. How has EA improved my emotional state and life?

- The Steps 1-2-3 dance of *surrendering* was a process of *turning to* the help of my HP over and over. I no longer have to deal with anything alone. I could let go VS hanging onto worry and fear.
- Getting a *sponsor* prompted me to be open and honest about my thoughts and feelings and to avoid their spiraling; having a sponsor also helped me develop humility VS the Pride and shame that kept me silent, isolated, avoiding my feelings, closed mouthed with others; all these self-protective practices contributed to loneliness,
- *Mindfulness* was staying in the now pulling me back from my tendency to be anxious about the future; mindfulness for me is also conscious contact with God in the NOW moment. Living in the now is essential. Awareness of God's presence in all I did made mindfulness a more pleasant and appealing focus.
- *Fellowship in meetings* increased my openness and honesty. I also learned I wasn't different from the rest of the human race; there wasn't *something innately "WRONG!" with me that couldn't be bettered by EA and my HP.*

4. What tools and steps helped me face and change my fears and anxieties?

After hospitalization I had a spiritual experience that emphasized that Step 11's prayer and meditation was essential. I made a decision, empowered by my HP, to make Step 11 a "non-negotiable" step to recovery, and its conscious contact with my HP was critical to my One Day At A Time work toward deepening emotional stabilization and sobriety. Conscious contact grounded me in something higher than my fear and anxiety, my

brokenness and limitations, imperfections and failings; regardless - I was loved.

I was so lost to the habitual workings of my mind that it took 2 years of daily meditation before I had a moment of sanity that turned everything around for me. My method of meditation was to focus my mind on my breathing. Some people focus on a word, but my mind was so active that any word would start my mind thinking about the word and then on to other things. In meditation the mind will wander but a focus on the breath detached my mind from the thoughts. I was so emotionally ill that it took 2 years of meditation before it dawned on me; IF I could allow thoughts and feelings to go by in meditation, like passing on a cloud or boats going by in the river, returning over and over to the focus on my breath alone...then why couldn't I detach from unhealthy and unhappy thoughts throughout the Day????!! Why let thoughts go in prayer, but engage them without detachment during the day to day living? This was a life-changing moment of sanity for me.

For example, it was not uncommon for me to be driving and suddenly be overwhelmed with the panic thoughts that I was near to having a terrible accident where others would be killed! After months of focusing on my breath in meditation, I needed only to say, 'Breathe, Sharon, just breathe' and my mind and body would remember the comfort of the meditation breath and the driving anxiety while would immediately dispel. Gone! Poof like magic.

Just as I learned in meditation to be aware when my thoughts wandered away from my breath focus, I learned to be a "thought watcher" throughout the day. I determinedly studied anxiety, as I had depression, so I would be aware when characteristic thoughts and feelings of fear and anxiety surfaced and I *immediately* turned from *the mind's functioning* by making a decision to make conscious contact with my HP and to focus on my breath instead. It was like making a U-turn as a choice and heading toward personal management, nipping the thoughts in the bud - this is essential! With the first thought we are a victim, but the second thought I'm a volunteer.

"Conscious contact" for me is to surrender whatever I'm dealing with with Step 1 or a Step 3 prayer. I might use a slogan to focus on instead of the unhealthy or negative habit thinking. Reading the wisdom of EA literature

is another way to shift the mind's focus. Instead of becoming more anxious with anxious thinking, I would do the opposite; I would add another meditation time of 10- 20 minutes or intentionally read something spiritual which changed my thinking. The mind really does focus on one thing at a time...recovery means I can make a choice as to just what I chose to focus upon, what I want to give attention to.

Step 11 as a tool has become a little dance for me; Aware - Detach - and Center on my HP. Eventually, as my doctor reinforced, to detach from giving the thoughts and feelings engagement and attention, while recognizing it's there...that the inattention or indifference would eventually heal the mind's way of habitual thinking or panic. Detachment and focus is like a mother dog pinning a misbehaving puppy down with her paw; the puppy will eventually get it that it's futile to struggle, it will quit wiggling and just give up. The "mother" in my mind is using my reason, my will, my intellect and my ability to make a decision to do the right quieting practice.

Another way to think of fear and anxious thoughts that are allowed full reign to their functioning, is like have a tender bruise. If you keep hitting the bruise, like engaging in fearful thinking over and over, the bruise will never heal - in fact, may very well get worse.

Now I am the governor of my mind; my mind does not dominate me thanks to my HP impressing upon me to do Step 11. Step 11 is a non-negotiable for me; by that I mean I know it is a First Things First in my emotional sobriety.

What has changed? I'm no longer attached to my old habitual way of thinking...I've come to appreciate the ability to quiet my mind and that the quiet mind experienced is a comfortable place to live in; I prefer the serene mind to the company of the chaotic mind. I'm more apt with a still mind to hear the helpful promptings of my HP; I have grown in awareness of my HP's sweet presence, attentiveness, and care. This relationship has deepened my experience of attachment to my HP and ever deepening my realization of my HP's attachment to me; I'm growing in self-esteem, confidence, safety and trust instead of fear and anxiety; I'm assured of help and hope toward continuing improvement in recovery and managing my response to life on its terms.

In a problem or crisis, I've learned to stop, slow down, pray and wait for guidance instead of reacting impulsively, and sometimes insanely, through anxiety and panic.

A major turn has been to transform unmanageable fear of life with its overwhelming burdens and misery TO a realization my HP uses *everything* in life toward my recovery and good. I no longer reluctantly resign in "surrender" to pain and suffering, but I "surrender" with courage and with hope's optimism to the good my HP can make of adversity and challenges. These have all created more and more trust in the presence and help of my HP which proportionally has decreased fear and anxiety to very low manageable normal emotions where thoughts and feelings of fear and anxiety used to seem actually REAL facts to me before.

Step 11's prayer and meditation and improving my conscious contact with God is a daily commitment, a "non-negotiable" determination step to ongoing recovery. One prayer at a time, one meditation at a time, One Day At A Time; in the face of of fear and anxiety, I have a choice, as in the practice of meditation, to detach from thought engagement or entertainment, to turn from what once was a torment and great unhappiness.

I encourage all listeners to make Step 11's prayer and the practice of meditation a First Things First tool committed towards optimal recovery and eventual freedom from Fear and Anxiety.

We assuredly can find that we can face everything, with conscious contact with our HP and so find recovery.

I've discovered incredible spiritual depth in Step 11 through saying, 'Yes' to my HP's "do that", through daily commitment and guarding of my morning quiet time and then applying the spiritual practice of the same detachment to negative or unhealthy thoughts throughout the day. I've been committed to improving my conscious contact with my HP as attachment to my HP as a greater value than all else - detaching from all else as the higher value.

I've lived Step 11 discovering its hidden perseverance, hope and promises of hope.

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of Step 11, as 12th step, I teach prayer and medication, and take opportunities to encourage others toward Step 11 practices.

Thank-you for your time and attention and good graces to you as you practice Step 11 in all your affairs. My heart is full of gratitude for the healing and freedom Step 11 has given me through the work of my HP. Thank-you.

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