

Anxiety and Exhilaration



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Anxiety and exhilaration are practically identical. The only difference is in how we feel about the object of our attention and how we think things are likely to turn out for us. What we actually *feel* in both cases is the activation of our sympathetic nervous system, more commonly known as the fight-or-flight response. In both cases we are attentive, energetic, and creative but in anxiety we usually haven't committed ourselves to action where in exhilaration we have. In anxiety we are afraid things might turn out badly but we are not sure. If we were sure we would be depressed, which is a very different condition. Anxiety is much easier to harness than depression.

Think of how you felt staring down that black diamond ski run you didn't really mean to take. Was that anxiety or exhilaration? How about the moment right before attempting your first kiss and the moment right after? How about before and after you accepted or quit that job, married or divorced that spouse, or took the leap that changed your life? The transition from anxiety to exhilaration can be like flipping a switch. This is one of my favorite sensations and I pursue it vigorously, although I try not to be reckless. I love to watch it in my clients, too!

The fact that there is so short a distance between anxiety and exhilaration can present some surprising opportunities, not only for the relief of suffering but for constructive personal development. Since the difference is only a matter of perspective, insight can transform anxiety into exhilaration, which should be called something better than therapy. I am convinced that every normal human brain manufactures a quota of anxiety that is determined by temperament and circumstance. Harness your personal anxiety as a source of energy, motivation, and exhilaration. Trust me. Call me.

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