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**DEFEATING OBSESSIVE THOUGHTS
(ON YOUR OWN TERMS)**

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Some thoughts on obsessive thoughts (sometimes termed "pure O"):

They are *self-generated*. Since they come from within *your mind*, you are well advised to develop an "internal fire extinguisher". Fight "fire" with "fire"—become very active in managing, reducing, and perhaps eliminating unbidden thoughts which disturb you with their startling "discoveries" and conclusions.

First, we may ask, whose "voice" is it who speaks the obsessive, or automatic thoughts? Such a persistent and unwelcome "voice" seems to make bold, frightening, or other ridiculous statements. Although there is most often little or no evidence to suggest the calamity which the "voice" foretells, we can too often accept its "correctness", and accept our fate with passive complicity.

Perhaps such "voices" influenced the young girls who made horrible accusations against "witches"—in an historical tragedy known as the Salem Witch Trials.

Obsessive thoughts seem to be often provoked by preceding states of emerging depression or accumulating anxiety—but can just as well "come out of nowhere" to "rain on your parade"—that is, to ruin a perfectly good time which you were just enjoying.

Obsessions depend on :

- ◆ repetition of "automatic thoughts"
- ◆ unquestioning faith that the "voice" speaks the truth, or has absolute authority
- ◆ seriousness and physical/mental tension
- ◆ submission to the degradation or subservience imposed by the "truth" of the obsession

Dr. Kiel—March 9, 2002 (cont'd.)

How to rob the obsessive thoughts of their power over and imposition on your conscious mind:

- 1) Stop allowing the repetition of thoughts. Come up with a strategy (use your creativity!) to “snuff” the obsession before it gains a “toe hold”. (This strategy is the cognitive [thought] form of the behavioral technique known as ‘response prevention’). It is essential to snuff the obsessive thought *early*, just as it is beginning to deliver its propaganda message. Be consistent in immediately dismissing the “voice”. (We’ll talk about some ways to do this).
- 2) Question the “voice’s *authority*” or truth. Use cognitive therapy to reveal the “voice’s” lack of evidence or consistency, and its false and baseless conclusions. (Wouldn’t you do this with someone whom you knew to be a rumor-monger?)
- 3) Develop your own authority over the obsession. Change the rules! Perhaps, make the thought “go sit in the corner”, like a misbehaving child. Speak to these obsessions (silently, please!) and say, “Sorry, but I have no time for your silliness. You’re interrupting my train of thought, and I won’t tolerate it—so *get lost!*” Then, quickly re-establish a non-obsessive thought sequence—best to find one that has pleasant feelings attached.
- 4) Find the humor in the obsessive thoughts. By all means, *be sarcastic* with them. Laugh them “out of town”. Visualize yourself, loved ones, and friends standing in a circle and ridiculing and laughing at the obsessive thought—all assure you about how ludicrous the thought is, and you agree! Minimize and parody the “seriousness” of the obsession. Move from thinking in the “black-and-white” to more of a “gray area”—so what if *some* of what the obsession tells you comes to be true? You can often live with it, or modify the circumstances.
- 5) Learn and practice reliable relaxation and/or meditation techniques, and take yourself “somewhere else” for awhile. When you return, be ready to fill the “vacuum” created by the banished obsession by supplying a positive thought sequence that replaces it. This is known as a “competing response”.
- 6) Refuse to submit to the thought or command. Purposely violate the command, and allow yourself to see that no harms comes of this. Be consistent in doing this—and do it quickly! Don’t allow the obsession to take you into a “tunnel”, where you can’t hear anything else. Develop a “fairy godmother” voice to challenge, refute, and dismiss the obsessive voice.
- 7) Make yourself the only “evaluator” who counts. Don’t allow yourself to focus on presumed “judgments” of others. Always give yourself a positive “rating” where the situation merits it, and never perform a character assassination on yourself.