



CONSCIOUS TRANSITIONS

Interview with Brent Alexander on
Breaking Through Relationship Anxiety

Sheryl Paul, M.A.

BRENT ALEXANDER

When Brent posted [a comment on this blog post](#), I knew I needed to reach out to hear his full story. I had never met him in any capacity, but when I read his comment I felt compelled to learn more. Below is our email interview, where he graciously, compassionately, and generously shares his story.

Brent bravely goes into detail about his painful descent into the hell-realm of intrusive thoughts, from the attraction spike (I'm not attracted enough to my partner), to the gay spike, then into the pedophile, mass murderer and suicide spike. All of these spikes are addressed in the [Break Free From Relationship Anxiety Course](#), and through his dedicated inner work and devotion to the course material, Brent was able to break through them and commit fully not only to his loving, available partner but to his own lifelong path of loving himself.

Please share your age, marital/dating status, and geographic location. I'm a 39-year old male, married for 2 years on October 11, 2017 and I met my wife in our home town of Sydney, Australia in February of 2013.

How soon into the relationship did your anxiety begin?

My anxiety began almost immediately, let's say after about 2 weeks. We first met at a rock gig. On my way there I was telling myself, "I'm soooo looking forward to falling in love." I felt ready. We met and the energy between us was instant. We talked and had a fun couple of hours getting to know one another before heading our separate ways. The following week we did somewhat the same with the end of the night walking hand in hand for the first time and discovering how truly aligned we were on a spiritual level.

The week following, so just over 2 weeks after initially meeting, my anxiety began to creep in.

What were your symptoms?

It started with me picking at the way she ate, how fast she ate and whether she made too much noise while eating. Then it moved to me having issues with what she was wearing. There was one occasion where I simply could not get past how much I disliked one of her dresses. It obsessed my mind so much and caused me to enter a dark and heavy place. I would make these little comments like "have you thought about wearing this or that?" or "do you like what she's wearing over there, perhaps you could think about wearing something like that?"

We would talk on the phone and have such wonderful conversations, yet as soon as we were together my judgement of her would begin again. It wasn't like it felt good to me to think this way either, it was killing me on the inside. It made me feel dark and heavy and completely outside of myself. On one occasion we went to one of her friend's place for dinner and drinks. She was feeling relaxed and wore tracksuit

pants. To me this was not acceptable. The whole night was ruined because of my mood and how I was judging her for what she was wearing. On the way home, we had a massive fight and I felt like throwing myself out of the moving car door. I was so sick to death of myself and feeling this way.

What was your main spike/hook?

I guess my spike was the need for perfection, which led to judgements on my part. I judged her for almost everything. I didn't understand what was happening. I'd been down this road so many times before with at least 3 other women. I just wanted it to stop! I felt miserable. I hated myself for the thoughts I was having about her looks, her clothes, her sense of humour, pretty much everything. How had I gone from only days before being on the phone for 4 hours knowing deep within myself that I had met the love of my life, to the next picking her to pieces with my cruel judgements. Most of these I might add were kept to myself. I would make the odd comment here or there, but most of the heavy stuff I kept to myself and sank lower and lower into something close to madness or psychosis.

What was most helpful in terms of working through these spikes?

One evening I was sitting in my room thinking about things, thinking about my ongoing story in regards to relationships and I could clearly see that I was the common denominator. Every time this happened to me in the past I would keep it to myself until I would end it and walk away. Each and every time the anxiety left with me! Taking me months or years to get rid of. It was time to do something different and to tell her what I had been thinking. I hoped this would work based on my history.

I'll digress a little now to share that so that you have some perspective.

In my early 20's I began to have what I now know were intrusive thoughts. It began with a fear that I was gay. I became petrified that what if I am gay, what would this mean for my life, will I have to start going to gay bars and meeting a whole bunch of new people. The first time this thought came to me I was smoking marijuana with some mates. I was paranoid, I was freaked out and then once this thought came to me it got stuck. I'd never thought this before, but all of a sudden, I started to wonder and fear that maybe I was gay, even though I was still very much attracted to woman!

Following this thought I then began to fear that I was a paedophile. I began fearing children; I couldn't stand to see them just in case I had an impure thought. It wasn't like I fantasised about them, I was afraid I had the potential to do it, or that I could somehow hurt them. This was so terrifying to me that I would cry myself to sleep, all the while asking why me?! How could I ever become a father if this is the type of person I am?

The thoughts continued. I then began to believe that I could be a serial killer, that I could be a predator of some sort. The idea of killing someone became something that I thought I may be able to do, which then led me to think about killing myself. I

never really wanted to do it, more so I was afraid that I had no control over myself, that I couldn't stop myself from doing it.

I then moved on to a fear of hurting and molesting animals. I thought that if I could do it to a human then I could do it to an animal too. I felt so disgusted with myself I didn't know what to do. How could I share any of this with anyone? I never told anyone what was going inside my crazy head. I eventually became convinced that I was in fact crazy, that I was possibly schizophrenic.

All of these thoughts came and went each and every day for about 3 years. During this time, I was so moody. I sought solace in drugs and alcohol where I only made things much worse, I'm sure. I was working with my dad at the time and so often I would talk to him in a demeaning way. He would ask what the hell was wrong with me and I'd say nothing. It wasn't until a final day where on my way to work the pain I felt was so bad I began to punch the wall of a bus stop until my knuckles bled. I got to work and lied that I had been in a fight. Then I collapsed and couldn't walk. My body gave out on me and I cried uncontrollably for a long time. My dad was beside himself and didn't know what was going on... so I told him. I told him EVERYTHING.

Dad didn't know what to do, so I went to a doctor. The doctor then sent me to a psychologist. Each time I told them what was going on in my mind I felt a weight lift. I felt detached from it rather than feeling that it was me. I was prescribed a high dose of Zoloft (an anti-depressant) and was diagnosed as having obsessive-compulsive disorder. Mine was obsessive thoughts, of course.

Fast forward a year or two and I felt happy and free of these thoughts for the very first time. All until I met someone. Then the thoughts came back to a degree and shifted to them as the object of my obsession.

I won't go into those relationships now, but bringing it back to my relationship now, here I was in my room and I had made the decision to tell her what was in my mind as I knew from past experience that this would give me relief, or at least I hoped that it would.

I framed it in such a way so as to say "I know I've been a real bastard of late and that's because I've been thinking terrible thoughts that make me feel bad. Let me stress that these thoughts don't really have anything to do with you, they are just my fucked-up mind." I told her my past, everything that I mentioned above. I told her then some of the things I had been thinking about her. I really hurt her by saying these things. Yet doing so opened up a dialogue between us that enabled us to move forward and enabled me to move past my anxiety for the first time. We had a few good months from there where life became much better. I was still having intrusive thoughts, but I was doing my best not to attach to them and my partner and I had tried to make a joke of them when they came up, like when she had her hair up and I didn't like it, and would say, "I really like your hair down", she would say "Are you judging me again?" And I would say... ahhh yeah... and we would have a little laugh about it.

Fast forward a few years now and our relationship was not good. I just wanted to be away from her. I had started thinking about other woman and how perhaps there

could be someone more perfect, more beautiful, more this or that for me. In a way there were moments where I felt disgust. I hated myself for all of it. I was dark and stormy and not a fun person to be around. We started to sleep in separate beds, me on the floor and her in the main bed. We then went a little further and I was sleeping in another room altogether. Our relationship was truly at a breaking point. She was sick of the way I was treating her (never physically, just by me being distant, negative and depressed) and she basically said that if things don't change that she wouldn't put up with it for much longer, that life was too short. I just had no idea how to stop my thoughts, how to dig myself out of the hole. That night I Googled some topics of relationships and the results came back, doubt means don't. Here I was yet again in a relationship with a beautiful woman, an incredible human, and I was having enormous doubts and crippling anxiety. So based on my research I figured that wow, I guess I'm in the wrong relationship after all.

On the same night I came across an article by Sheryl Paul, I wish I could remember which one it was, but it's safe to say that this was the moment that changed my life forever.

I began to read about this thing called relationship anxiety. It was such a relief to read another way of looking at things, and being very intuitive, I immediately knew I was reading a deep truth. I delved into more of her articles and was BLOWN away when I came upon articles that spoke of my previous intrusive thoughts from so many years before. I cried tears of joy 😊 I hadn't felt so happy in a very long time. A weight lifted from me instantly and for the first time I didn't feel like there was something wrong with me. It is so hard living life constantly feeling like there's something wrong with you.

I very quickly made the decision with my now wife's full support to purchase the course "Break Free from Relationship Anxiety" and dove head and feet in. I did all the reading, all the writing, everything I possibly could. The more I did, the more my relationship improved. I shared every piece of the puzzle with my wife along the way, too. She could see the change in me and was just so happy that the man she fell in love with was coming back!

During this period, I decided to do a 90-day alcohol free challenge too. You see during all of this I was still drinking alcohol almost daily. It was always my elixir of choice, yet I knew it wasn't helping matters. So yes, I took 90 days off it and felt great! I felt so good that I was more than happy to only go back to it in moderation after that, but that didn't last long. Pretty soon I was back to old tricks and back to feeling dark and anxious. We went away on a holiday to sunny Queensland and I was miserable. I had been back drinking for 6 months and it was like I had never taken any time off it. On that trip I made the decision to stop for a full year. I got to 120 days and was then so happy without it that I decided once again that I would only drink again very occasionally. That only lasted a couple of months.

On 17/07/2017 I went on a bender. I got so drunk that the next day something snapped in my mind. For the first time I made a true decision to never drink again. That was 74 days ago as I write this. I don't fear not drinking any longer; in fact I'm looking forward to the rest of my life as a sober man! You'd think that being sober would be all I needed to do to stay anxiety free right? Think again.

How would you describe yourself and your relationship now?

So here I was just under 2 months ago, sober. I was eating well. I was exercising 5 to 6 days a week. I was doing well in my job. Yet I was still a miserable bastard and once again my relationship was taking a dive. We had done so well and been through so much, but here we were again at another point where it seemed like it could be over. What was I to do?

I quit coffee. That was a start. I felt the effects pretty quickly actually. I was only having 1 or 2 per day, but it was adding fuel to my anxious body and mind all the time. I was constantly on edge and wasn't really aware of it until I stopped. I plateaued and my energy levels started to feel normal again. Yet, I still wasn't happy.

I'm a creative person, I write and play music, I was doing lots of music, yet I still wasn't happy. What the hell was the missing link?

I said to my wife one afternoon that I felt I had no space. She took it the wrong way and asked if I wanted her to leave, I said no! No, the space I think I'm talking about is in my head. I would work all day, listen to music or podcasts on my way home and then watch TV at night. I never had any moments of peace in my mind and my head was feeling like it was going to explode! So I suggested that we could start meditating. My wife agreed and she also suggested that we could write in a daily journal answering the following questions: How do I feel today and why? What am I grateful for? What do I want?

That afternoon we went shopping and purchased a leather-bound book for writing in. We then go home and put some relaxing music on and answered the questions. It felt so good to write these things out, to acknowledge how I was feeling, to take stock of what I was grateful for and to consider what I wanted for myself. I wrote things like "I want to feel calm, confident, content and happy"

We then meditated untimed for over 20 minutes. A calm came upon me like I had not experienced in a very long time. I was in my body. I felt the pain I had been feeling that had been pent up for such a long time and I cried. I released so much through this simple practice. We both spoke afterward and truly counted our blessings and felt more connected than ever. We decided that this needed to be a daily practice for us, and we have now been doing this daily for over 30 days.

In addition to this we began eating our meals together in silence, not in front of the TV. At first this was very uncomfortable and my judgements began simmering to the surface, but the longer we ate like this, the more we engaged in conversation about our day and our feelings, the more this experience became something we actually look forward to. I feel comfortable in my skin (most days) and so does she. I love her for who she is, just as she is and rarely consider the previous perceived imperfections.

The last thing that we did was change the type of programs we were watching. Previously we would watch whatever, many of which were violent or filled with sex, drugs, and the extreme. For the first 20 days we watched nothing but documentaries on nature and animals. We then moved onto watching comedies. Input that helps us

feel good and inspires us and doesn't leave us feeling anxious or scared is now what we crave more so than the old dose of typical over the top TV.

What would you say to someone who's on the fence about purchasing the course and thinking things like, "I'm the worst-case scenario" or "This work doesn't apply to me; I'm just in the wrong relationship" or "What if I do the work and I find out that my truth is that I'm with the wrong person?"

Through Sheryl's teachings I have come to understand that a relationship takes work. It's not all roses and full of lustful moments; it is far more like warm oatmeal. Both my wife and I now totally get it and understand that the most important thing is that you are with someone whom you can work on love with. Love is an action, not a feeling you get. It's something that you need to strive for by constantly growing as individuals. By being willing to compromise. By being compassionate to yourselves and each other.

Sheryl's course told me that my anxiety was in fact my friend telling me that there was something that needed my attention. In my life, that was getting off alcohol and coffee and including a daily practice of meditation and reflection. Being very much on the sensitive side of the spectrum I could not be like so many other people I know who can get away with floating on the hustle and bustle. No, I needed to strip back to the bare necessities as too much stimulus overloads me and leaves me disconnected from my true and wonderful self.

If you are like me then you will no doubt have the thought that this course may have helped others, but I'm different, I can't be helped because I'm too messed up, or I'm just with the wrong person and that this is the reason it's not working the way it "should". But let me set you straight. You are just like the rest of us. You are just like me in that you are stopping yourself from finding happiness because you are protecting yourself. You don't need to continue with that as the universe has your back. Sheryl has your back and so does everyone else who has already completed and succeeded through this course.

It won't be easy. It's not like you can just read a few articles and everything will be okay. No. You are going to have to feel some pain. You are going to have to make some changes to how you operate in life, because if you don't then you are only going to end up with the same results. Do you get that? The time for change is right now.

There is no other source that I know of for this information and for this method of awakening. Sheryl is the master and her course is worth 10 times what you pay for it.

If the person you are with is someone who you can work on love with. If they are someone who supports you on your quest here, or even if they aren't! You will become a better version of yourself. Your relationship with them will improve I guarantee. If mine can, anyone's can! You will discover that it isn't that you are with the wrong person; it is that you are not the person you are meant to be. It's time to wake up and become aware of you! You are amazing. Yet you are sensitive and thus you need to perceive the world through a different lens and take it easy on yourself. Give yourself more love and affection. Give yourself more quiet time to feel and

reflect. You will never regret doing this course, but I think you'd definitely regret *not* doing it.

Any last words of reassurance, comfort, or inspiration.

I completed the course over a year ago and since that time my anxiety has risen and fallen depending on how I am treating myself. I've learned as a result of taking this course that this is who I am, and if I want to feel happier and more in love with my wife and life, then I need to do those things which support this. My journey will be lifelong, and yet it need not be a battle. My anxieties have shown me the path to peace. By hearing their silent call, I have been drawn closer and closer to who I truly am, and I have no doubt that this will continue until I am old and grey.

Anxiety is only frightening when we don't understand its purpose for being. Now that I know it is my friend, rather than shrinking away from it, I stop to say thank you and lean in to hear what it whispers. Create some space in your life to do the same and you'll be amazed at how simple the changes are that need to be made. So simple in fact that anyone can do it, even you.

I wish you all well on your journey, trust me in that with Sheryl Paul, you are in the safest most divine hands you could ever imagine.

Lots of love.

Brent