



Soul Cycles

Personal & Collective Evolvment
Alternative Healing
Social Artistry

The Reptilian Brain

The reptilian brain or the brainstem is located on top of the spinal cord, in appearance not unlike a frog crouching on a lily pad. It's the oldest part of our brain, the one we have in common with the reptiles. It acts, responds, and keeps us alive from the very beginning. Here one can find ancient control centres for vital body functions (heart-beat, breath, digestion etc.), including the primordial seeds of emotional responsiveness. Part of our emotionality comes hardwired.

From the first day out of the womb some babies cry, while others lie placid, some are easy to soothe and some inconsolable; some reach for a new rattle, while others shrink away. Our very basic survival instincts, like fight, flight or freeze originate here as well. Some people are risk averse by nature; they hold back rather than let go. Those have a temperament that tends toward worry, an aspect of emotional tone. R. Cloning, M.D., thinks it's controlled by the raphe nucleus in the reptilian brain. Worry is an inborn proneness to fear- an inclination to imagine future harm, and to activate the body's flight response system in case escape proves expedient.

The reptilian brain usually comes outfitted with a worry setting near the middle of the scale, a compromise that maximises "survival". Too much fear is globally inhibiting, while too little promotes recklessness. Most people have a moderate amount of inbred worry, although our popular culture is fond of idealizing individuals whose worry is nonexistent.

Children born today with a diminutive level of worry, those whose emotional physiology under reacts to stress, novelty and threat, grow up to become criminals much more often than average. Anxiety deters people from high-risk acts.

While the locus of danger in our lives has changed, the underlying neural mechanisms remain. When the neural alarm apparatus goes off with a bang, the result is a panic attack- paroxysm of terror, an explosion of somatic sensations and reactions (chest tightness, racing heart, and sweaty palms, churning stomach) and an outpouring of fear soaked with expectations and plans.

When I am born my reptile brain is the one that is fully functioning, the limbic brain still keeps growing and the nerves of the fore-brain, of the neo cortex, still need to develop. The brainstem is very much responsible for the physical functions and I am in the beginning very much a sensory body being. . . . What an impact a "not good enough" or an "unbearable anxiety around mother not coming" must have? It affects the physical of that little system on a cellular level. When we go back to very early trauma we might not find words, we might not even find emotions, mostly somatic reactions.

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