Religion has a long and mixed history in the field of psychology. Historically, some leading figures in the field viewed religion as a source of neuroses and poor mental health; others saw a more positive spiritual resource. Recently, empirical data on religion and mental health has proliferated. There is now consensus that religion is associated with lower depression. However, the link between religion and anxiety is less clear-cut. This paper proposes that a) religion can have exacerbating or alleviating effects on anxiety depending on which aspect of religion is being studied and b) the primary religious variable that affects anxiety levels is attachment to G-d. Utilizing the ‘safe haven’ attachment function, people with a secure attachment to G-d seek Him when they are stressed. The anxiolytic benefit of seeking an omnipresent secure attachment figure should lead to lower general levels of anxiety. Hypotheses were explored in a series of three studies. Study one examined which aspects of religion are related to anxiety using correlational self-report methods. Hierarchical multiple regressions supported the hypothesis that attachment to G-d was of primary importance in predicting anxiety levels. In addition, positive and negative aspects of religion were differentially correlated with anxiety, as predicted. The process through which G-d attachment relates to anxiety was experimentally explored in Study two. Participants were exposed to a stressful situation (electric shock threat), and their implicit tendency to seek G-d was measured. Results were surprising: explicitly, those with secure G-d attachment reported a greater tendency to seek G-d when stressed, but those with highly avoidant G-d attachment were the only ones to demonstrate an implicit tendency to seek G-d. Study Three further probed this association by measuring the calming effects of a G-d prime. Stress was
induced in all participants while anxiety was measured (physiologically and via self-report).

ANOVA demonstrated that securely G-d attached participants primed with religious as opposed to neutral sentences experienced greater reductions in anxiety over time. Overall, this research clarified the different ways in which religion might relate to anxiety and elucidated some exact mechanisms through which religion buffers against anxiety.