

## DEALING WITH EMOTIONS

*There are emotions present, there is no problem with that. I don't have to change them. I don't have to make them go away, I can meet them as they are without judgment, and in that there is a discovery of the natural fluidity of all phenomena. Then emotions are just more phenomena, like weather, they can be huge or calm, but they are moving in the fields of what is always here. Then emotions no longer have the power to tyrannize us. They can make us very uncomfortable, but they are no longer in charge. They are still in charge if we are fighting them and denying them and dissociating from them, but if they are just the fluid movement, sometimes dramatic, sometimes ecstatic, sometimes horrific, then it is part of the mystery and wonder of our lives as incarnate beings. - Gangaji*

Pesky things, these emotions. They just keep showing up despite our best efforts to control them, make them go away, or bend them to our will. If only they would obey us and behave as we think they should, then of course we would be happy. But there they are again, hurt, anger, grief, fear...

Let's back up a bit. What are emotions really, these seeming hindrances to our otherwise rational lives? Quite simply, emotions are a form of intelligence. They exist for one reason - to be experienced and integrated, and in so doing, to make us more conscious and aware of who we are and how we operate.

Our culture esteems the analytical (masculine) over the emotional (feminine) and tends to value the mind over the heart. Emotions are seen as frivolous, vulnerability as weak - our national motto could be "No Fear". When school budgets are cut, art and music are threatened while math and science are inviolate.

Our parents, likewise, will often emulate this prevailing disparagement of the feeling nature, with admonitions such as, "if you're angry your face will stay that way" or "you're too sensitive." We risk punishment or disapproval if we present ourselves as other than happy all the time. And so the battle against authenticity begins.

In myriad ways we become uncomfortable with emotional experience. We learn to see it as something to be managed, controlled, judged. Hiding our fears, hurts and shame seems like the healthy response.



*Feelings are for many people a locked box; an experience that overwhelms and is difficult to express. We are taught in a variety of circumstances and for a variety of reasons to suppress our feelings. We learn to silence our feelings so well that the messages in our bodies are not even discernible. Suppressed feelings are not as invisible as you might think. They take on a life in our dreams and eventually become diseases in our bodies. Our inability to express our feelings cuts us off not only from our own experience but limits the connection we feel with the people we love most. - Wendy Stgar*

This becomes problematic in a number of ways. First, we cut off a valuable sense of wisdom. If we have become acclimated to shutting down our awareness of fear, we will not be able to respond appropriately when real danger is present. There are situations in which the most intelligent survival strategy is to fight or flee - if we think we need to ignore fear when it is present, we lose the valuable resource it can provide us.

And then there is the fact that ignoring, repressing, judging or avoiding feelings inside us doesn't make them go away, it just drives them into the unconscious where they continue to shape our perceptions and experience, only now beyond the realm of our conscious awareness. So we are less able to effectively interact with them. And in so doing, they will now have to seek expression by creating circumstances that cannot be ignored - illness, injury, relationship stress, depression.



And finally, it takes a lot of energy to oppose the natural flow of emotion inside ourselves. It's like trying to hold back the tides. As a result, when they do break through anyway, they often express themselves in a way that is distorted, self sabotaging, and ineffective. We find ourselves recreating unsatisfying conditions again and again and wonder "what is wrong with me"?

Try as we might, we cannot dissociate from feelings selectively - losing our connectedness with any of them inhibits our abilities to access all of them. As expressed by Kahlil Gibran,

*Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.  
And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was  
oftentimes filled with your tears. And how else can it be?  
The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you  
can contain.  
Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in  
the potter's oven?  
And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was  
hollowed with knives?*

### **An alternative...**

What we are talking about here is “unfinished business” Some things got activated in you a long time ago and were not allowed to complete themselves, and so they remain operative, unhealed, seeking expression so they can be integrated and bring you closer to wholeness.

They don't always feel good...true. But that's the case whether you are present to the pain or not. It's like having a serious wound - we can put a band aid on it and declare it healed - until it becomes so acute we are forced to deal with it. Or we can go to a health professional and have it properly cleaned and treated. This might involve some temporary discomfort, but will allow the wound to heal itself. You might look at them as weather patterns. Sometimes stormy, sometimes sunny and warm, they bring a dimension to human experience that would otherwise leave us robotic. Our ability to experience and share our feelings is one of the most amazing aspects of our humanity, and our collective avoidance of them leads to untold damage to ourselves, others, and the planet.

Completing the unfinished business of the past by experiencing now what could not be integrated then frees us from the power they have over us. Consigning them to locked dungeons and pretending we have dealt with them leads to all sorts of mischief. Bring attention to feelings when they are present. Meet the residual anger/grief/fear in you without repressing or acting out, without judging or trying to fix. It is this act of being present that opens emotional intelligence and allows integration. In this endeavor it is often wise to avail ourselves of the help available from those who understand how to navigate the deep waters of the inner world.

***If we begin to get in touch with whatever we feel with some kind of kindness, our protective shells will melt, and we'll find that more areas of our lives are workable. - Pema Chödrön***

