

CHAPTER 31

Our Emotional Life

From the moment we are born we go through many emotional experiences. The cry of a newborn baby is the expression of discontent at the change of surroundings, and at the same time the pledge of his existence as a human being: Inhaling air, he begins to live. At two months, a baby begins to smile, expressing the pleasure of communicating with his parents. Gradually he acquires new emotional experiences. Individual differences begin to show: Some children are very emotional and express their emotions violently; others are emotionally quite reserved. This provokes corresponding reactions in the people around them, which further influence the child. A child who comes from an emotionally difficult background is usually less inclined to study than a child who has had positive emotional experiences. Hence, our character and even our intellectual activities depend greatly upon our emotional experiences in childhood. The more the personality is developed, the richer is the spectrum of its emotional states.

Most scientists distinguish three basic innate emotions: pleasure, fear and anger. Based on these, the variety of human emotions and feelings appear and are expressed. Although the whole human brain takes part in the appearance of emotional states, some leading centers of emotions have been discovered. The most important of these brain structures is the hypothalamus.

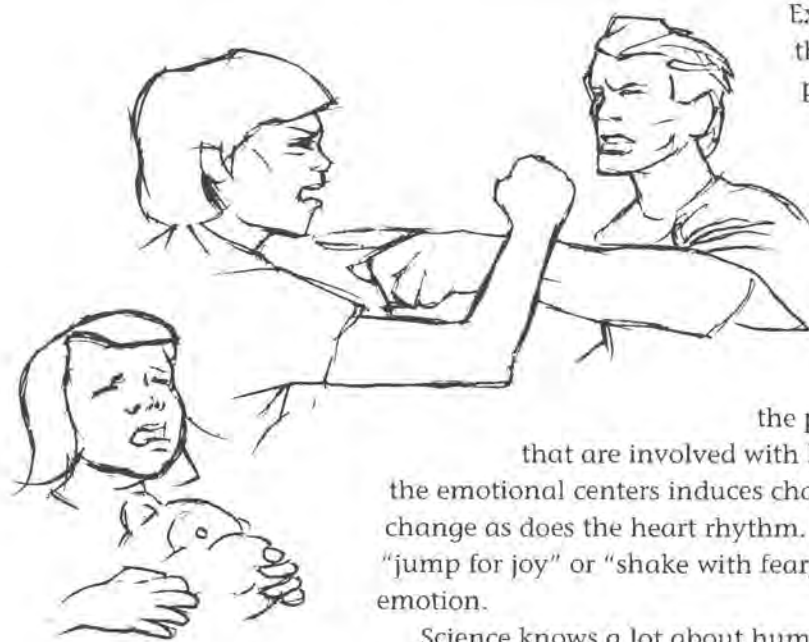
Experiments have shown that by stimulating the hypothalamus with the help of implanted electrodes, it is possible to artificially induce the states of pleasure, fear and anger.

The hypothalamus is closely connected to the cortex of the brain, so the impact of the surroundings on the cortex influences the physiological centers of emotions in the same way as their direct stimulation. The hypothalamus is also closely connected to

the pituitary gland and other parts of the brain

that are involved with hormone secretion. This is why stimulating the emotional centers induces change in the whole organism: Our emotions change as does the heart rhythm. We may grow red or pale. Our body may "jump for joy" or "shake with fear," and our face expresses the relevant emotion.

Science knows a lot about human emotions and the mechanism of their appearance and development. But science studies only the effects of a person's





environment on his emotional state at the level of his psyche and psychophysiology. In the first volume of "My Journey in Life" we discussed the existence of not only the physical but also the spiritual aspect of human beings and introduced the notion of Heart. We can postulate that the psychophysiological mechanisms of the emotions are intermediaries between our physical and spiritual bodies. If this is true, we should consider anew the role of emotions in our bodily and spiritual life.

There is considerable evidence that pleasure is much stronger than fear, anger and other emotions that usually are called negative (in the sense of their being opposite to the emotion of pleasure). This conclusion

explains the power of love—the feeling based on the emotions of joy and pleasure. Writers often portray negative emotions—fear, hatred, resentment, aggressiveness, shame, guilt, grief and suffering. Historical materials are also more eloquent in reflecting people's aggressive behavior compared with their life's experience of positive emotions. In everyday life we also pay much more attention to the manifestation of negative emotions. That is why we get the impression that negative emotions have a more important role in human life than positive emotions. This is a delusion. Everything human appears only on the basis of positive emotions, most distinctly expressed by the feeling of love, and only these emotions make up the foundation for human progress.

All our life is full of feelings. Feelings are the result of strong emotional experiences. Let us consider the kinds of feelings that are based on the experience of positive emotions. Such feelings form the basis for the progress of human relationships and human society in general.

- ✗ Religious feelings, which express the joy of coming closer to God or the achievement of spiritual perfection.
- ✗ Altruistic feelings, which appear when one helps others.
- ✗ Communicative feelings, which reflect an emotional attitude toward those who are important to a person, such as parents, children, friends, etc.
- ✗ Feelings of desire for glory, which come from the need to develop self-esteem.
- ✗ Feelings expressing satisfaction as the result of one's successful work.
- ✗ Feelings caused by the successful overcoming of barriers, dangers or difficulties.
- ✗ Romantic feelings, reflecting the desire for something mysterious or unusual.
- ✗ Intellectual feelings coming from studying something new, discovery of the unknown or solving complicated intellectual puzzles.
- ✗ Aesthetic feelings caused by communication with beauty or nature.
- ✗ Feelings of ownership of things with no immediate practical need.
- ✗ Feelings of satisfaction of physical and spiritual comfort.
- ✗ Sexual feelings, expressing itself in relationships of intimacy.

Obviously, pure feelings of any one type are rarely experienced. Normally they are interconnected and form something new, which we perceive as happiness. The

cause of happiness can be a variety of things: love, marrying, success in studies, work, sports, etc. A person can be happy due to the fullness of life, health, good relationships or overcoming difficulties. People always search for happiness because they are born to be happy, and positive feelings are the basis of happiness.

That makes it clear why the only really valuable family relationships are those permeated by positive experiences and why manifestations of anger or fear are destructive for family life. Research has shown that marriages are strongest when the husband's and wife's emotional experience, and the manifestations of this emotional experience, are similar or complementary. In the relationship between parents and children much depends on parents' reaction to their children's emotional experience and on the children's reaction to the parents' behavior.

Sexual relations are based on emotions, and people seek pleasure in these relationships. Of course, negative emotions also play an important part in sexual behavior. For example, the emotion of embarrassment leads to the restriction of sexual desire. The emotion of fear holds a person back from promiscuity; the emotion of guilt prevents premarital sex and adultery. Still, the most fulfilling love between a man and a woman is based on the mutual emotion of pleasure. Love is first of all joy. Joy is characterized by the feeling of confidence and significance, by the feeling of loving and being loved. The confidence and personal significance that are acquired through joy give a person the capacity to overcome difficulties and enjoy life. Joy is not an emotion that one can pursue and catch. It is a byproduct of a loving relationship.

Nevertheless, the human capacity for feeling joy develops in many aspects. If parents are active and joyful, the child's life can be joyful as well. The joyful experience of first love is the most distinct manifestation of human emotions. In the past, the idea of "platonic love," i.e., the love between man and woman without sexual contact, was common. For people capable of enjoying a pure relationship with the loved one, such love induces even stronger emotions than does one involving sexual relations.

Physical sexuality is incompatible with such emotions as fear. Fear experienced by a girl or a boy in a first sexual encounter at an immature age may result in later sexual impotence or resentment of any sexual relations. Rape not only inflicts an incurable psychological trauma on the victim, but also deadens the perpetrator's ability to feel joy.

Joy brought about by love is the greatest gift to humans. It is an essential part of our personality. It also helps our personality to grow, because the meaning of any feeling is not in itself but in our attitude towards that which it is connected and towards the actions it causes. What is truly important for those who surround us is that our feelings lead to actions, thus not only giving us experiences of joy, but through this, bringing benefit to the community.

Individual Exercises



- Look at a picture that expresses a strong emotional experience and try to describe the emotions felt by the depicted characters.
- Think of the brightest emotional experience of your childhood. What was its cause? How did it express itself? What do you feel today when thinking about it?
- Observe the people around you and try to guess what kind of feelings they are experiencing—positive or negative. Which ones did you see more often?

For Your Journal



During the week write down in your journal all the situations in which you experienced strong emotional feelings. Find words that most accurately characterize these feelings. At the end of the week look through your notes and define the emotions that were most dominant. Are you satisfied, or would you like to change something?

Experiences in a Concentration Camp

from Man's Search for Meaning, by Viktor Frankl

In spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of the life in a concentration camp, it was possible for spiritual life to deepen. Sensitive people who were used to rich intellectual life may have suffered much pain (they were often of a delicate constitution) but the damage to their inner selves was less. They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom.

Only in this way can one explain the apparent paradox that some prisoners of a less hardy make-up often seemed to survive camp life better than did those of a robust nature. In order to make myself clear, I am forced to fall back on personal experience. Let me tell what happened on those early mornings when we had to march to our work site.

There were shouted commands: "Detachment, forward march! Left-2-3-4! Left-2-3-4! First man about, left and left and left and left! Caps off! These words sound in my ears even now. At the order "Caps off!" we passed the gate of the camp, and searchlights were trained upon us. Whoever did not march smartly got a kick. And worse off the man who, because of the cold, had pulled his cap back over his ears before permission was given.

We stumbled on in the darkness over big stones and through large puddles, along the road leading from the camp. The accompanying guards kept shouting at us and driving us with the butts of their rifles. Anyone with very sore feet supported himself on his neighbor's arm. Hardly a word was spoken; the icy wind did not encourage talk. Hiding his mouth behind his upturned collar, the man marching next to me whispered suddenly: "If our wives could see us now!" I do hope they are better off in their camps and don't know what is happening to us."

That brought thoughts of my own wife to mind. And as we stumbled on for miles, slipping in icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another up and onward, nothing was said, but we both



knew; each of us was thinking of his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise.

A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth — that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way — an honorable way — in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words, "The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory".

In front of me a man stumbled and those following him fell on top of him. The guard rushed over and used his whip on them all. Thus my thoughts were interrupted for a few minutes. But soon my soul found its way back from the prisoner's existence to another world, and I resumed talk with my loved one: I asked her questions, and she answered; she questioned me in return, and I answered.

"Stop!" We had arrived at our work site. Everybody rushed into the dark hut in the hope of getting a fairly decent tool. Each prisoner got a spade or a pickaxe.



“Can’t you hurry up, you pigs?” Soon we had resumed the previous day’s positions in the ditch. The frozen ground cracked under the point of the pickaxes and sparks flew. The men were silent, their brains numb.

My mind still clung to the image of my wife. A thought crossed my mind: I didn’t even know if she were still alive. I knew only one thing — which I have learned well by now: Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self. Whether or not he is actually present, whether or not he is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importance.

I didn’t know whether my wife was alive, and I had no means of finding out (during all my prison life there was no outgoing or incoming mail); but at that moment it ceased to matter. There was no need for me to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, my thoughts, and the image of my beloved. Had I known then that my wife was dead, I think that I would still have given myself, undisturbed by that knowledge, to the contemplation of her image, and that my mental conversation with her would have been just as vivid and just as satisfying. “Set me like a seal upon my heart, love is as strong as death”.