

EMOTIONAL STATES

'All our emotions are rudimentary organs of "something higher"'
G.I. Gurdjieff

Subjectivity and Imagination

Most people's assessment of situations, events and other people are highly subjective and very dependent upon suggestions and assumptions. Many individuals make up their minds and come to decisions on the basis of insufficient information and unreliable beliefs. The same individual, situation or idea may be perceived completely differently by two or more people due to the operation of imagination and subjectivity. People may imagine that they understand a situation through direct and factual observation, when they have actually only formed an *opinion* as to the nature of the event.

Subjective impressions and conditioned judgements are generally unreliable. The majority of people judge by superficial social criteria and not deeper spiritual insight. *'In the distorting mirror of your mind, an angel can seem to have a devil's face.'* Subjective states are different for different people and cannot be directly entered into by another:

Man cannot stay long in one subjective state. Very many things can arise from a subjective state. Never can you know the subjective state of another; the subjective state of two people is never the same, for subjective states are like fingerprints, different for each person. And no one can explain his own subjective state to another. A man does not really know why he is angry with you. You can say, *"He is not angry with me – his state is angry with me."* Remember this, and never reply with your interior, which is inner considering, and don't harbor associations of revenge and resentment. Good wishing can be effective over great distances – bad wishing also. (1)

Many spiritual traditions teach that human beings create their own suffering and unhappiness through their subjective, one-sided interpretation of life events. Subjective imaginings and conditioning block higher perceptions and the actualization of full human potential:

Creation is neither good nor bad; it is as it is. It is the human mind which puts all sorts of constructions on it, as it sees things from its own angle and as it suits its own interests. Men love women, hate snakes, and are indifferent to the grass and stones by the road side. These connections are the causes of all the misery in the world. Creation is like a peepul tree: birds come to eat its fruit, or take shelter under its branches, men cool themselves in its shade, but some may hang themselves on it. Yet the tree continues to lead its quiet life, unconcerned with, and unaware of, all the uses it is put to. It is the human mind that creates

its own difficulties and then cries for help . . . In creation there is room for every thing, but man refuses to see the good, the healthy and the beautiful, and goes on whining, like the hungry man who sits beside a tasty dish and, instead of stretching out his hand to satisfy his hunger, he goes on lamenting. (2)

Dogmas and deeply enmeshed beliefs have a powerful emotional valence that sustains their persistent endurance and gives them a great power and impact:

Dogmas – religious, political, scientific – arise out of the erroneous belief that thought can encapsulate reality or the truth. Dogmas are collective conceptual prisons. And the strange thing is that people love their prison cells because they give them a sense of security and a false sense of “I know.” Nothing has inflicted more suffering on humanity than its dogmas. It is true that every dogma crumbles sooner or later, because reality will eventually disclose its falseness; however, unless the basic delusion of it is seen for what it is, it will be replaced by others. What is the basic delusion? Identification with thought. (3)

There is a symbiotic relationship between emotions and thoughts in which one reinforces the other in a type of feedback loop:

An emotion usually represents an amplified and energized thought pattern, and because of its often overpowering energetic charge, it is not easy initially to stay present enough to be able to watch it. It wants to take you over, and it usually succeeds – unless there is enough presence in you. If you are pulled into unconscious identification with the emotion through lack of presence, which is normal, the emotion temporarily becomes “you.” Often a vicious circle builds up between your thinking and the emotion: they feed each other. The thought pattern creates a magnified reflection of itself in the form of an emotion, and the vibrational frequency of the emotion keeps feeding the original thought pattern. By dwelling mentally on the situation, event, or person that is the perceived cause of the emotion, the thought feeds energy to the emotion, which in turn energizes the thought pattern, and so on. (4)

People tend to respond to stimuli in predictable ways. As a result they can easily be manipulated to react in a stereotyped manner to something which is perceived to be “new” or “unusual.” Human beings frequently look for what they have been trained or conditioned to look for and consequently ignore what may actually be there.

Imagination and fantasy are not bad in themselves, but the desire for too much fantasy at the expense of reality gives an unbalanced intake and evaluation of impressions. There is a limit to the usefulness and efficient working of imagination and fancy, beyond which reality is distorted. “What some people take to be ‘hunches’ are often really the product of neurosis and imagination.”

Aesthetic appreciation is frequently based on subjective emotions, social pressure and conditioned beliefs and attitudes:

You look at an object, and judge it by the associations which it conjures up. You may like it or not. The reasons for liking it are seldom reasonable at all. A person may, legitimately, like a flower. He likes the colour, shape, total impact, smell and so on. But he has no conception of any deeper meaning of the flower. By this I do not mean the airy-fairy feeling 'that this must really mean something.' Such an idea is far too imprecise and primitive. The flower has a meaning and a value which I call the deeper meaning . . . From this way of thinking, from what we call the perception of what, say, a flower really signifies, those who are absorbed in the aesthetics of the flower are 'barbarians,' confined to sensory impacts and their mental processing. (5)

The Sufis assert that what is generally thought of as artistic appreciation is superficial and dependent on unreliable feelings, implanted belief and social pressure. They hold that "what most people take to be art is not art at all, but emotional and conditioned sources of stimuli. This does not mean there is no real art. It does mean that even accepted aesthetic people have confused learnt and automatic responses with perception." There is abundant evidence that many art experts are superficial and subjective in their assessments:

If you want an example, there is the one of 'Sunset over the Adriatic,' exhibited in 1910 at the Salon des Independents, painted by Boronali. An Austrian collector bought the canvas, after it had received acclaim by the experts as an outstanding example of the Excessive School. It was then revealed, by Roland Dorgeles and a group of artists, that the picture had been "painted" by a donkey, to whose tail a brush had been tied. 'Boronali' was formed by a rearrangement of the letters in the name of Aliboron, the donkey of La Fontaine. Matisse's painting 'Le Bateau' was hung for 47 days at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961, when almost 120,000 people saw it without realizing that it was upside down. (6)

Emotionality and Excitement

Our emotional states are constantly changing in response to external impacts and impressions. This continual flux "steals" valuable energy which could be used for higher developmental purposes:

The records of our feelings revolve in the same way – pleasant and unpleasant, joy and sorrow, laughter and irritation, pleasure and pain, sympathy and anti-path. You hear yourself praised and you are pleased; someone reproves you and your mood is spoiled. Something new captures your interest and instantly makes you forget what interested you just as much the moment before. Gradu-

ally your interest attaches you to the new thing to such an extent that you sink into it from head to foot; suddenly you do not possess it anymore, you have disappeared, you are bound to and dissolved in this thing; in fact it possesses you, it has captivated you, and this infatuation, this capacity for being captivated is, under many different guises, a property of each one of us. This binds us and prevents us from being free. By the same token it takes away our strength and our time, leaving us no possibility of being objective and free – two essential qualities for anyone who decides to follow the way of self-knowledge. (7)

Indiscriminate emotion clouds judgement and forms a barrier to higher perception and understanding. Many people feel that anything which amazes or entertains them must be important, forgetting the difference between the unusual and the significant.

In any learning situation people need to be sensitive to the relationship between study, boredom and entertainment. “When people are frustrated in their search for entertainment, they will seek it everywhere, trying even to turn serious and non-entertainment study into diversion. When they do this, they often prevent any real study in that subject taking place at all.”

When emotions and strong feelings are linked with certain situations, groups or individuals, a strong bond may form between them which may operate on a completely unconscious level. For example, “if a primitive person, or a child at a similar stage of mental development, experiences a pain, or a sense of joy, in accidental synchronicity with some other event, he or she will often link the two, producing a sense of importance for what might well have been a trivial or irrelevant event.”

The fact is that emotion sensitizes the brain of the individual. If no true explanation of what is happening is forthcoming, a strong sense of dependency towards the source (or even a supposed source) of the stimulus will take its place. Instead of explanation the brain will resort to quasi-explanation. Such a quasi-explanation may become so powerful that it can assume a dominant position in the mental picture of the individual. It is the conscious or unconscious policy of many religious, political, social, tribal, psychological, scholastic and other dogmatic bodies to create this situation in the expectation that at the moment of greatest emotion the commanding idea which is to take possession of the individual’s mind will be the one which the system itself desires to propagate. This pattern may be seen repeated somewhere in virtually every system in the world. It also occurs, repeatedly, randomly and accidentally. When a person acquires a fixation upon some bizarre and unacceptable idea, the condition attracts the attention of psychological therapists. When it is ‘harmless,’ it may not be perceived at all. When it is socially acceptable, the individual may even be rewarded, and the conditioning reinforced by each reward. (8)

What is generally called love is frequently “attachment giving pleasure” in which the person is incapable of any other possible behaviour. “If one loves someone because it gives pleasure, one should not be regarded as loving that person at all. The love is, in reality, though this is not perceived, directed towards the pleasure. The source of the pleasure is the secondary object of attention.”

Enthusiasm and emotionally-laden responses to causes, ideas or situations is fuelled by a type of energy which seeks, at root, stimulation and excitement. “Enthusiasm to convert or to spread one’s beliefs is self-sustaining. That is to say, it feeds off the action and reaction connected with it . . . It has often been noticed that enthusiasm wilts if left for a time unnoticed.”

Most groups and organizations provide pleasure and satisfaction for their adherents. This principle works almost like a magnet or a force of attraction in meeting the emotional needs of individual members:

If a person is desirous of achieving [some personal goal] he or she will often pursue this end in a manner which corresponds not with the way in which it can be done, but which gives him (or her) satisfactions. This is the mainspring of all human movements, whether political, national, economic or other. First there is the objective, then the mechanism for attaining it. And the object must always be one which will please the aspirant; after that, the method must be one which gives him satisfactions. No other pattern, no other formula, is needed to explain why people believe things, of such a diversity of organizations and systems. And the pattern is perfect; the system delivers results, subject to a single caveat. This may be stated in the phrase: ‘An attractive objective and a satisfying procedure will always produce results, providing that the objective is possible and the methodology is effective.’ (9)

People need to discern their own emotional cycles, their “ebb and flow.” This enables an individual to understand and eventually regulate them so that “they operate it, and not it them.” The ability to regulate our emotional needs and expression allows for further ranges of human fulfilment and autonomy. “Modern man has not yet learned that he has certain emotional needs, has a minimum emotion-intake need. If this is fulfilled, it leaves him free to do other things.”

Every feeling is qualitative and there is a range or spectrum of feeling and emotion, ranging from the relatively crude to the refined. “If you feel love, joy, excitement, interest, focused attention, confusion, disinterest, as the result of sitting down on a pin or hearing a bird sing – these and other feelings *all* contain some negative functions, some self-indulgent ones, and some constructive ones.”

People have been trained to respond only to relatively intense stimuli and to ignore the more subtle, refined impulses which may have much greater developmental value. “People who are accustomed to being stimulated by coarse or tense impacts feel odd when approached

by an often more valuable, but generally more sensitive impact. They tend to avoid contact with this, by the simple pretext of calling it 'banal' or 'uninteresting'."

The human mind has capacities of 'taste' which in contemporary societies are not satisfied at all. The lack of this stimulus is because it is not realized that, in this area, a stimulus need not be intense in order to operate. The result of this ignorance is that people will not give a 'gentle' stimulus a chance to operate, and reach forward to whatever seems most likely to afford them instant or deep stimuli. Such people have almost completely put themselves outside the range of the less-crude stimulus. It is only when they are prepared to entertain the possibility of its existence, and prepared, too, to test its workings, that they can be communicated with. You can make no progress with a demand like this: 'Give me chillie-powder, but let it taste like rose-water.' (10)

The desire to seek pleasure is a basic human need, but when it becomes an obsession it can block inner growth and development. Human beings commonly mistake strong emotions and intense feelings with 'spirituality' and elevated states of consciousness:

According to the Sufis, you cannot be paid twice for the same thing. This means that if you desire something and take pleasure in feeling that desire, you have been paid. Even if you are deeply emotionally stirred, you are still being 'paid' by the emotional stimulus. The Sufis hold that desire of this kind holds people back: they obtain satisfactions or feed their desire until they are either satisfied or chronically dissatisfied. But, they continue, beyond this there is a way of progress, understanding, perception, which is 'veiled' (obscured) by desire. Mundane things, and this includes emotional stimuli which are often imagined by very devout people to be religious, are pursued by means of this desire, this coveting. It is evidenced by the fact that the thing desired acquires a great importance in the mind of the victim, rather as one desires possessions, importance, recognition, honours, successes. To distinguish real objectives from secondary ones the Sufis have said: 'The importance of something is in inverse proportion to its attractiveness.' This is the parallel of the negligence with which people often fail, in the ordinary world, to recognize important events, inventions or discoveries. (11)

Attention Needs

One of the important ingredients in most human interactions is the exchange of attention. It is important to recognize the role and quality of attention (attraction, reception and interchange) in everyday human life. It is a factor which is frequently ignored or mis-categorized due to a lack of awareness of its nature and operation. "People demand attention. The right kind of attention at suitable times leads to the maintenance of a thriving individual. Ignorance of attention-needs leads to too much or too little intake of attention."

Human beings, and animals too, seek attention much as a plant seeks light – because it is a basic need as much as hunger or thirst. A child can be deprived of attention to the point where it begins to feel unreal and invisible. A young woman will go to self-destructive lengths, playing an unreal role, to command attention. A man will invite arrest if he can find attention in no other fashion. Human beings may espouse causes, do ‘good’ or do ‘bad,’ set themselves up as devoted servants or imperious masters, declare themselves deeply in love, all in order to get a feed of sufficient attention. Public generosity, for example, is often more a matter of attention-getting than generosity only. There is nothing wrong in seeking attention. We need it as we need our daily bread. It is a psychological nutrition. What is counter-productive, however, is to allow the need to masquerade as something else. Or not to acknowledge the need at all. (12)

People often attribute social, psychological or ritualistic motivations, rather than the need for attention, to various human contacts and interchanges. “What is rarely recognized is that the giving and receiving of attention is generally the disguised motive in a great majority of social interactions. When attention is the fundamental motive, the people involved often believe this interaction to be for some other reason. This can include telephone calls, the writing of letters, business meetings, luncheons, parties, as well as the usual everyday contacts.”

Anyone can verify that many instances, generally supposed to be important or useful human transactions on any subject (social, commercial, etc.) are in fact disguised attention-situations. It is contended that if a person does not know what he is doing (in this case that he is basically demanding, extending or exchanging attention) and as a consequence thinks that he is doing something else (contributing to human knowledge, learning, buying, selling, informing, etc.) he will (a) be more inefficient at both the overt and covert activity; (b) have less capacity of planning his behaviour and will make mistakes of emotion and intellect because he considers attention to be other than it is. (13)

The compulsive desire to give or receive attention can act as a self-created impediment, blocking higher perceptions and developmental growth. “Those people who give and take the necessary quality, quantity and variety of attention are incomparably more effective and free than those whose lives are dominated by attention-craving, but have no clear picture of the situation.”

The ability to control and manage the need for attention is analogous to learning to regulate basic physiological needs such as nourishment and nutrition. “The attention-activity, like any other demand for food, warmth, etc., when placed under volitional control, must result in increased scope for the human being who would then not be at the mercy of random sources of attention, or even more confused than usual if things do not pan out as they expect.”

A great deal of human behaviour can be usefully explained when the role of attention is identified and properly understood. "In understanding yourself, realize you probably don't require as much attention as you attempt to attract. In dealing with others realize this is a possible motive in almost any transaction, regardless of the input or formal reason." Insight into the human need for attention allows one to respond appropriately and skilfully to situations in which the attention-factor is present. When we understand the mechanism of attention, we become freer in our actions and our choices.

Sufi author and teacher Idries Shah has extensively studied the phenomenon of attention and has identified and enunciated certain basic principles (14):

- Too much attention can be bad (inefficient).
- Too little attention can be bad.
- Attention may be 'hostile' or 'friendly' and still fulfil the appetite for attention.
- When people need a great deal of attention they are vulnerable to the message which too often accompanies the exercise of attention towards them. For example, someone wanting attention might be able to get it only from some person or organization which might thereafter exercise (as its 'price') an undue influence upon the attention-starved individual's mind.
- Present beliefs have often been inculcated at a time and under circumstances connected with attention demand, and not arrived at by the method attributed to them.
- Many paradoxical reversals of opinion, or of associates and commitments may be seen as due to the change in a source of attention.
- People are almost always stimulated by an offer of attention since most people are frequently attention-deprived. This is one reason why new friends, or circumstances, for instance, may be preferred to old ones.
- If people could learn to assuage attention-hunger, they would be in a better position than most present cultures allow them, to attend to other things. They could extend the effectiveness of their learning capacity.
- Among the things which unstarved people (in the sense of attention) could investigate, is the comparative attraction of ideas, individuals, etc., apart from their purely attention-supplying function.
- The desire for attention starts at an early stage of infancy. It is, of course, at that point linked with feeding and protection. This is not to say that this desire has no further or future development value – it can be adapted beyond its ordinary adult usage of mere satisfaction.
- Observations show that people's desires for attention ebb and flow. When in an ebb or flow of attention-desire, the human being not realizing that this is his condition, attributes his actions and feelings to other factors, e.g. the hostility or pleasantness of others. He may even say that this is a 'lucky day,' when his attention-needs have been quickly and adequately met. Re-examination of such situations has shown that such experiences are best accounted for by the attention-theory.

- Situations which seem different when viewed from an over-simplified perspective (which is the usual one) are seen to be the same by the application of attention-theory. For example, people following an authority-figure may be exercising the desire for attention or the desire to give it. The interchange between people and their authority-figure may be explained by mutual-attention behaviour.
- Another confusion is caused by the fact that the object of attention may be a person, a cult, an object, an idea, interest, etc. Because the foci of attention can be so diverse, people in general have not identified the common factor – the desire for attention.
- The inability to feel when attention is extended, and also to encourage or prevent its being called forth, makes people almost uniquely vulnerable to being influenced, especially in having ideas implanted in the brain, and being indoctrinated.
- Raising the emotional pitch is the most primitive method of increasing attention towards the instrument which increased the emotion. It is the prelude to, or the accompaniment of, almost every form of indoctrination.

Negative Emotions

Negative emotions are pervasive in human life. “In grown-up people negative emotions are supported by the constant justification and glorification of them in literature and art, and by personal self-justification and self-indulgence.”

What is a negative emotion? An emotion that is toxic to the body and interferes with its balance and harmonious functioning. Fear, anxiety, anger, bearing a grudge, sadness, hatred or intense dislike, jealousy, envy – all disrupt the energy flow through the body, affect the heart, the immune system, digestion, production of hormones, and so on. Even mainstream medicine, although it knows very little how the ego operates yet, is beginning to recognize the connection between negative emotional states and physical disease. An emotion that does harm to the body also infects the people you come into contact with and indirectly, through a process of chain reaction, countless others you never meet. There is a generic term for all negative emotions: unhappiness. (15)

The expression of negative emotions such as anger, jealousy, self-pity, mistrust, boredom and so on constitute one of the major obstacles to harmonious human development:

Negative emotions are a terrible phenomenon. They occupy an enormous place in our life. Of many people it is possible to say that all their lives are regulated and controlled, and in the end ruined, by *negative emotions*. At the same time negative emotions do not play any useful part at all in our lives. They do not help our orientation, they do not give us any knowledge, they do not guide us in any sensible manner. On the contrary, they spoil all our pleasures, they make life a burden to us, and they very effectively prevent our possible development *because there is*

nothing more mechanical in our life than negative emotions. The strangest and most fantastic fact about negative emotions is that people actually worship them. I think that, for an ordinary mechanical man, the most difficult thing to realize is that his own and other people's negative emotions have no value whatsoever and *do not contain anything noble, anything beautiful, or anything strong.* (16)

Children imbibe negative attitudes and emotions from their parents. Negativity can easily be absorbed from those around us, almost like an infection:

In watching children we can see how they are *taught negative emotions* and how they learn them themselves through imitation of grownups and older children. If, from the earliest days of his life, a child could be put among people who have no negative emotions, he would probably have none, or so very few that they could be easily conquered by right education. But in actual life things happen quite differently, and with the help of all the examples he can see and hear, with the help of reading, the cinema, and so on, a child of about ten already knows the whole scale of negative emotions and can imagine them, reproduce them, and identify with them as well as any grown-up man or woman. (17)

Anger and resentment are typical highly-charged negative emotions. "These powerful emotions strengthen the ego enormously by increasing the sense of separateness, emphasizing the otherness of others and creating a seemingly fortress-like mental position of 'rightness'."

A long-standing resentment is called a grievance. To carry a grievance is to be in a permanent state of "against," and that is why grievances constitute a significant part of many people's ego. Collective grievances can survive for centuries in the psyche of a nation or tribe and find a never-ending cycle of violence. A grievance is a strong negative emotion connected to an event in the sometimes distant past that is being kept alive by compulsive thinking, by retelling the story in the head or out loud of "what someone did to me" or "what someone did to us." A grievance will also contaminate other areas of your life. For example, while you think about and feel your grievance, its negative emotional energy can distort your perception of an event that is happening in the present or influence the way in which you speak or behave toward someone in the present. One strong grievance is enough to contaminate large areas of your life and keep you in the grip of the ego. (18)

Fears of all kinds, both conscious and unconscious, play a pervasive role in the everyday life of human beings:

Sometimes a man is lost in revolving thoughts which return again and again to the same thing, the same unpleasantness, which he anticipates and which not only will not but cannot happen in reality. These forebodings of future unpleasantness, illnesses, losses, awkward situations often get hold of a man to such an

extent that they become waking dreams. People cease to hear and see what actually happens, and if someone succeeds in proving to them that their forebodings and fears were unfounded in some particular instance, they even feel a certain disappointment, as though they were thus deprived of a pleasant expectation . . . Unconscious fear is a very characteristic feature of sleep. Man is possessed by all that surrounds him because he can never look sufficiently objectively on his relationship to his surroundings. He can never stand aside and look at himself together with whatever attracts or repels him at the moment. And because of this inability he is identified with everything. (19)

Pessimism and negative attitudes can permeate both individuals and cultures, preventing progress and achievement in many areas of life:

There are many individuals who achieve very substantially and efficiently in commerce, in industry, in politics, in religion, in almost anything; and they manage to do so because they no longer have the inhibitions, the fear that they might lose, lose out – the fear that they might not succeed. And, as you know, all societies have always suffered from some sort of thrombosis – sooner or later people get pessimistic. I fear that our society, which is the modern Western one, is tending to become pessimistic, and because of that, people who could achieve more are not doing so. (20)

Many of those who try to solve the problems of the world are ill-equipped to do so because their strong emotional commitment and sense of “rightness” precludes objective appraisal and truly effective action:

Q: If one feels something very strongly, is it not right to pass this on to others, to get them “concerned,” and to form bodies of people who have similar interests?

A: Any of these things might be right, or might be wrong, entirely depending upon what the subject in question is, and who the people involved are. I would have thought this inherent in the question. You have only to look about you to see the confusion and unhappiness caused by people indulging themselves by rushing about worrying other people and making them worriers – and hence inefficient – when concern and propaganda are no substitute for knowledge and action. However, one of the great advantages of the fact that this “wet-hen” behaviour is so widespread is that it provides almost daily illustrations of its ugliness and often destructive role, enabling us to avoid it when it is functioning in that way. (21)

Negative emotional states arise when there is a turning away from the reality of the present moment to a fixation on past or future events:

All negativity is caused by an accumulation of psychological time and denial of the present. Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry – all forms of fear – are

caused by too much future – and not enough presence. Guilt, regret, resentment, grievance, sadness, bitterness, and all forms of non-forgiveness are caused by too much past – and not enough presence. Most people find it difficult to believe that a state of consciousness totally free of all negativity is possible. And yet this is the liberated state to which all spiritual teachings point. It is the promise of salvation, not in an illusory future but right here and now. You may find it hard to recognize that time is the cause of your suffering or your problems. You believe that they are caused by specific situations in your life, and seen from a conventional viewpoint, this is true. But until you have dealt with the basic problem-making dysfunction of the mind – its attachment to the past and future and denial of the Now – problems are actually interchangeable. (22)

Negative emotional states can be transformed through non-judgemental observation and choiceless awareness:

If in the midst of negativity you are able to realize “At this moment I am creating suffering for myself” it will be enough to raise you above the limitation of conditioned egoic states and reactions. It will open up infinite possibilities which comes to you when there is awareness – other vastly more intelligent ways of dealing with any situation. You will be free to let go of your unhappiness the moment you recognize it as unintelligent. Negativity is not intelligent. It is always of the ego. The ego may be clever, but it is not intelligent. Cleverness pursues its own little aims. Intelligence sees the larger whole in which all things are connected. Cleverness is motivated by self-interest, and it is extremely short-sighted . . . Whatever is attained through cleverness is short-lived and always turns out to be eventually self-defeating. Cleverness divides, intelligence includes. (23)

The Nature of Happiness

Pleasure and pain, happiness and unhappiness, are transient, relative and alternate with each other in life. Pleasure and pain have been likened to the two sides of a coin – you cannot have one without the other. The cycle of pleasure and pain is driven by mental and emotional states of the mind and often has no relation to objective reality. Ramana Maharshi relates a traditional Hindu story to illustrate this contention:

There were two young friends in a village in South India. They were learned and wanted to earn something with which they might afford relief to their respective families. They took leave of their parents and went to Benares on a pilgrimage. On the way one of them died. The other was left alone. He wandered for a time, and in the course of a few months he made a good name and earned some money. He wanted to earn more before he returned to his home. In the meantime he met a pilgrim who was going south and would pass

through the native village of the young pandit. He requested the new acquaintance to tell his parents that he would return after a few months with some funds and also that his companion had died on the way. The man came to the village and found the parents. He gave them the news, but inadvertently changed the names of the two men. Consequently the parents of the living man bemoaned his supposed loss and the parents of the dead man were happy expecting the return of their son bringing rich funds as well. You see therefore that pleasure and pain have no relation to actualities but are mere mental modes. (24)

There is a fundamental difference between pain and suffering, which needs to be recognized and understood for true happiness to emerge. Whereas physical pain is an inevitable part of life, human suffering is largely self-created. “Our inability to see all the elements of a situation as simply facts, in other words to accept the situation, is due to the choices made by the illusory personality. We suffer but suffering and pain are strong pointers, inviting us to inquire just who is suffering.”

Q: The universe does not seem a happy place to live in. Why is there so much suffering?

A: Pain is physical, suffering is mental. Beyond the mind there is no suffering. Pain is merely a signal that the body is in danger and requires attention. Similarly, suffering warns us that the structure of memories and habits, which we call the person, is threatened by loss or change. Pain is essential for the survival of the body, but none compels you to suffer. Suffering is due entirely to clinging or resisting; it is a sign of our unwillingness to move on, to flow with life. As a sane life is free of pain, so is a saintly life free from suffering . . . the essence of saintliness is total acceptance of the present moment, harmony with things as they happen. A saint does not want things to be different from what they are; he knows that, considering all factors, they are unavoidable. He is friendly with them and, therefore, does not suffer. Pain he may know, but it does not shatter him. If he can, he does the needful to restore the lost balance – or he lets things take their course. (25)

Suffering is due to non-acceptance of a situation or event. Conversely, “acceptance of pain (including physical pain), non-resistance, courage and endurance – these open deep and perennial sources of real happiness.” Conscious acceptance of the nature and inevitability of some degree of pain and suffering in one’s life is a prerequisite to conscious spiritual transformation and evolution. The recognition that life is a seamless whole and “life is *just* life” is the antidote to self-imposed pain and suffering. It removes the personal, subjective element.

Positive emotions arise from a source entirely different from ego-centered feelings and emotions. “Short-lived pleasure is always derived from something outside you, whereas joy arises from within.”

Q: What about positive emotions such as love and joy?

A: They are inseparable from your natural state of inner connectedness with Being. Glimpses of love and joy or brief moments of deep peace are possible whenever a gap occurs in the stream of thought. For most people, such gaps happen rarely and only accidentally, in moments when the mind is rendered "speechless," sometimes triggered by great beauty, extreme physical exertion, or even great danger. Suddenly, there is inner stillness. And within that stillness there is a subtle but intense joy, there is love, there is peace. Usually such moments are short-lived, as the mind quickly resumes its noise-making activity that we call thinking. Love, joy and peace cannot flourish until you have freed yourself from mind dominance. But they are not what I would call emotions. They lie beyond the emotions, on a much deeper level. So you need to become fully conscious of your emotions and be able to *feel* them before you can feel that which lies beyond them. Love, joy and peace are deep states of Being or rather three aspects of the state of inner connectedness with Being. As such they have no opposite. (26)

In reality, happiness is inherent in human beings and is not due to external conditions or causes. True happiness cannot be found in things that change and pass away. "To believe that you depend on things and people for happiness is due to ignorance of your true nature; to know that you need nothing to be happy, except self-knowledge, is wisdom."

Between the banks of pain and pleasure the river of life flows. It is only when the mind refuses to flow with life, and gets stuck at the banks, that it becomes a problem. By flowing with life I mean acceptance – letting come what comes and go what goes. Desire not, fear not, observe the actual, as and when it happens, for you are not what happens, you are to whom it happens. Ultimately even the observer you are not. You are the ultimate potentiality of which the all-embracing consciousness is the manifestation and expression. (27)

Suffering can be transformed through awareness, understanding and acceptance. "In the mirror of your mind all kinds of pictures appear and disappear. Knowing that they are entirely your own creations, watch them silently come and go, be alert, but not perturbed. The attitude of silent observation is the very foundation of self-realization."

To reach the deeper layers of suffering you must go to its roots and uncover their vast underground network, where fear and desire are closely interwoven and the current of life's energy oppose, obstruct and destroy each other.

Q: How can I set right a tangle which is entirely below the level of my consciousness?

A: By being with yourself, the 'I am'; by watching yourself in your daily life with alert interest, with the intention to understand rather than to judge, in full acceptance of whatever may emerge. Because it is there, you encourage the deep to come

to the surface and enrich your life and consciousness with its captive energies. This is the great work of awareness; it removes obstacles and releases energies by understanding the nature of life and mind. Intelligence is the door to freedom and alert attention is the mother of intelligence. (28)

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