

YOU ARE NOT YOUR MIND

THE GREATEST OBSTACLE TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Enlightenment — what is that?

A beggar had been sitting by the side of a road for over thirty years. One day a stranger walked by. "Spare some change?" mumbled the beggar, mechanically holding out his old baseball cap. "I have nothing to give you," said the stranger. Then he asked: "What's that you are sitting on?" "Nothing," replied the beggar. "Just an old box. I have been sitting on it for as long as I can remember." "Ever looked inside?" asked the stranger. "No," said the beggar. "What's the point? There's nothing in there." "Have a look inside," insisted the stranger. The beggar managed to pry open the lid. With astonishment, disbelief, and elation, he saw that the box was filled with gold.

I am that stranger who has nothing to give you and who is telling you to look inside. Not inside any box, as in the parable, but somewhere even closer: inside yourself.

"But I am not a beggar," I can hear you say.

Those who have not found their true wealth, which is the radiant joy of Being and the deep, unshakable peace that comes with it, are beggars, even if they have great material wealth. They are looking outside for scraps of pleasure or fulfillment, for validation, security, or love, while they have a treasure within that not only includes all those things but is infinitely greater than anything the world can offer.

The word enlightenment conjures up the idea of some superhuman accomplishment, and the ego likes to keep it that way, but it is simply your natural state of *felt* oneness with Being. It is a state of connectedness with something immeasurable and indestructible, something that, almost paradoxically, is essentially you and yet is much greater than you. It is finding your true nature beyond name and form. The inability to feel this connectedness gives rise to the illusion of separation, from yourself and from the world around you. You then perceive yourself, consciously or unconsciously, as an isolated fragment. Fear arises, and conflict within and without becomes the norm.

I love the Buddha's simple definition of enlightenment as "the end of suffering." There is nothing superhuman in that, is there? Of course, as a definition, it is incomplete. It only tells you what enlightenment is not: no suffering. But what's left when there is no more suffering? The Buddha is silent on that, and his silence implies that you'll have to find out for yourself. He uses a negative definition so that the mind cannot make it into something to believe in or into a superhuman accomplishment, a goal that is impossible for you to attain. Despite this precaution, the majority of Buddhists still believe that enlightenment is for the Buddha, not for them, at least not in this lifetime.

You used the word Being. Can you explain what you mean by that?

Being is the eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death. However, Being is not only beyond but also deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence. This means that it is accessible to you now as your own deepest self, your true nature. But don't seek to grasp it with your mind. Don't try to understand it. You can know it only when the mind is still. When you are present, when your attention is fully and intensely in the Now, Being can be felt, but it can never be understood mentally. To regain awareness of Being and to abide in that state of "feeling-realization" is enlightenment.



When you say Being, are you talking about God? If you are, then why don't you say it?

The word *God* has become empty of meaning through thousands of years of misuse. I use it sometimes, but I do so sparingly. By misuse, I mean that people who have never even glimpsed the realm of the sacred, the infinite vastness behind that word, use it with great conviction, as if they knew what they are talking about. Or they argue against it, as if they knew what it is that they are denying. This misuse gives rise to absurd beliefs, assertions, and egoic delusions, such as "My or our God is the only true God, and your God is false," or Nietzsche's famous statement "God is dead."

The word *God* has become a closed concept. The moment the word is uttered, a mental image is created, no longer, perhaps, of an old man with a white beard, but still a mental representation of someone or something outside you, and, yes, almost inevitably a *male* someone or something.

Neither *God* nor *Being* nor any other word can define or explain the ineffable reality behind the word, so the only important question is whether the word is a help or a hindrance in enabling you to experience That toward which it points. Does it point beyond itself to that transcendental reality, or does it lend itself too easily to becoming no more than an idea in your head that you believe in, a mental idol?

The word *Being* explains nothing, but nor does *God*. *Being*, however, has the advantage that it is an open concept. It does not reduce the infinite invisible to a finite entity. It is impossible to form a mental image of it. Nobody can claim exclusive possession of *Being*. It is your very essence, and it is immediately accessible to you as the feeling of your own presence, the realization *I am* that is prior to I am this or I am that. So it is only a small step from the word *Being* to the experience of *Being*.



What is the greatest obstacle to experiencing this reality?

Identification with your mind, which causes thought to become compulsive. Not to be able to stop thinking is a dreadful affliction, but we don't realize this because almost everybody is suffering from it, so it is considered normal.

This incessant mental noise prevents you from finding that realm of inner stillness that is inseparable from Being. It also creates a false mind-made self that casts a shadow of fear and suffering. We will look at all that in more detail later.

The philosopher Descartes believed that he had found the most fundamental truth when he made his famous statement: "I think, therefore I am." He had, in fact, given expression to the most basic error: to equate thinking with Being and identity with thinking. The compulsive thinker, which means almost everyone, lives in a state of apparent separateness, in an insanely complex world of continuous problems and conflict, a world that reflects the ever-increasing fragmentation of the mind. Enlightenment is a state of wholeness, of being "at one" and therefore at peace. At one with life in its manifested aspect, the world, as well as with your deepest self and life unmanifested — at one with Being. Enlightenment is not only the end of suffering and of continuous conflict within and without, but also the end of the dreadful enslavement to incessant thinking. What an incredible liberation this is!

Identification with your mind creates an opaque screen of concepts, labels, images, words, judgments, and definitions that blocks all true relationship. It comes between you and yourself, between you and your fellow man and woman, between you and nature, between you and God. It is this screen of thought that creates the illusion of separateness, the illusion that there is you *and* a totally separate "other." You then forget the essential fact that, underneath the level of physical appearances and separate forms, you are one with all that is. By "forget," I mean that you can no longer *feel* this oneness as self-evident reality.

You may *believe* it to be true, but you no longer *know* it to be true. A belief may be comforting. Only through your own experience, however, does it become liberating.

Thinking has become a disease. Disease happens when things get out of balance. For example, there is nothing wrong with cells dividing and multiplying in the body, but when this process continues in disregard of the total organism, cells proliferate and we have disease.

The mind is a superb instrument if used rightly. Used wrongly, however, it becomes very destructive. To put it more accurately, it is not so much that you use your mind wrongly — you usually don't use it at all. It uses *you*. This is the disease. You believe that you *are* your mind. This is the delusion. The instrument has taken you over.

I don't quite agree. It is true that I do a lot of aimless thinking, like most people, but I can still choose to use my mind to get and accomplish things, and I do that all the time.

Just because you can solve a crossword puzzle or build an atom bomb doesn't mean that you use your mind. Just as dogs love to chew bones, the mind loves to get its teeth into problems. That's why it does crossword puzzles and builds atom bombs. You have no interest in either. Let me ask you this: can you be free of your mind whenever you want to? Have you found the "off" button?

You mean stop thinking altogether? No, I can't, except maybe for a moment or two.

Then the mind is using you. You are unconsciously identified

with it, so you don't even know that you are its slave. It's almost as if you were possessed without knowing it, and so you take the possessing entity to be yourself. The beginning of freedom is the realization that you are not the possessing entity — the thinker. Knowing this enables you to observe the entity. The moment you start *watching the thinker*, a higher level of consciousness becomes activated. You then begin to realize that there is a vast realm of intelligence beyond thought, that thought is only a tiny aspect of that intelligence. You also realize that all the things that truly matter — beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace — arise from beyond the mind. You begin to awaken.



FREEING YOURSELF FROM YOUR MIND

What exactly do you mean by "watching the thinker"?

When someone goes to the doctor and says, "I hear a voice in my head," he or she will most likely be sent to a psychiatrist. The fact is that, in a very similar way, virtually everyone hears a voice, or several voices, in their head all the time: the involuntary thought processes that you don't realize you have the power to stop. Continuous monologues or dialogues.

You have probably come across "mad" people in the street incessantly talking or muttering to themselves. Well, that's not much different from what you and all other "normal" people do, except that you don't do it out loud. The voice comments, speculates, judges, compares, complains, likes,

dislikes, and so on. The voice isn't necessarily relevant to the situation you find yourself in at the time; it may be reviving the recent or distant past or rehearsing or imagining possible future situations. Here it often imagines things going wrong and negative outcomes; this is called worry. Sometimes this soundtrack is accompanied by visual images or "mental movies." Even if the voice is relevant to the situation at hand, it will interpret it in terms of the past. This is because the voice belongs to your conditioned mind, which is the result of all your past history as well as of the collective cultural mind-set you inherited. So you see and judge the present through the eyes of the past and get a totally distorted view of it. It is not uncommon for the voice to be a person's own worst enemy. Many people live with a tormentor in their head that continuously attacks and punishes them and drains them of vital energy. It is the cause of untold misery and unhappiness, as well as of disease.

The good news is that you *can* free yourself from your mind. This is the only true liberation. You can take the first step right now. Start listening to the voice in your head as often as you can. Pay particular attention to any repetitive thought patterns, those old gramophone records that have been playing in your head perhaps for many years. This is what I mean by "watching the thinker," which is another way of saying: listen to the voice in your head, *be* there as the witnessing presence.

When you listen to that voice, listen to it impartially. That is to say, do not judge. Do not judge or condemn what you hear, for doing so would mean that the same voice has come in again through the back door. You'll soon realize: *there* is the voice, and here *I am* listening to it, watching it. This *I am*

realization, this sense of your own presence, is not a thought. It arises from beyond the mind.



So when you listen to a thought, you are aware not only of the thought but also of yourself as the witness of the thought. A new dimension of consciousness has come in. As you listen to the thought, you feel a conscious presence — your deeper self — behind or underneath the thought, as it were. The thought then loses its power over you and quickly subsides, because you are no longer energizing the mind through identification with it. This is the beginning of the end of involuntary and compulsive thinking.

When a thought subsides, you experience a discontinuity in the mental stream — a gap of “no-mind.” At first, the gaps will be short, a few seconds perhaps, but gradually they will become longer. When these gaps occur, you feel a certain stillness and peace inside you. This is the beginning of your natural state of felt oneness with Being, which is usually obscured by the mind. With practice, the sense of stillness and peace will deepen. In fact, there is no end to its depth. You will also feel a subtle emanation of joy arising from deep within: the joy of Being.

It is not a trancelike state. Not at all. There is no loss of consciousness here. The opposite is the case. If the price of peace were a lowering of your consciousness, and the price of stillness a lack of vitality and alertness, then they would not be worth having. In this state of inner connectedness, you are

much more alert, more awake than in the mind-identified state. You are fully present. It also raises the vibrational frequency of the energy field that gives life to the physical body.

As you go more deeply into this realm of no-mind, as it is sometimes called in the East, you realize the state of pure consciousness. In that state, you feel your own presence with such intensity and such joy that all thinking, all emotions, your physical body, as well as the whole external world become relatively insignificant in comparison to it. And yet this is not a selfish but a selfless state. It takes you beyond what you previously thought of as "your self." That presence is essentially you and at the same time inconceivably greater than you. What I am trying to convey here may sound paradoxical or even contradictory, but there is no other way that I can express it.



Instead of "watching the thinker," you can also create a gap in the mind stream simply by directing the focus of your attention into the Now. Just become intensely conscious of the present moment. This is a deeply satisfying thing to do. In this way, you draw consciousness away from mind activity and create a gap of no-mind in which you are highly alert and aware but not thinking. This is the essence of meditation.

In your everyday life, you can practice this by taking any routine activity that normally is only a means to an end and giving it your fullest attention, so that it becomes an end in

itself. For example, every time you walk up and down the stairs in your house or place of work, pay close attention to every step, every movement, even your breathing. Be totally present. Or when you wash your hands, pay attention to all the sense perceptions associated with the activity: the sound and feel of the water, the movement of your hands, the scent of the soap, and so on. Or when you get into your car, after you close the door, pause for a few seconds and observe the flow of your breath. Become aware of a silent but powerful sense of presence. There is one certain criterion by which you can measure your success in this practice: the degree of peace that you feel within.



So the single most vital step on your journey toward enlightenment is this: learn to disidentify from your mind. Every time you create a gap in the stream of mind, the light of your consciousness grows stronger.

One day you may catch yourself smiling at the voice in your head, as you would smile at the antics of a child. This means that you no longer take the content of your mind all that seriously, as your sense of self does not depend on it.

ENLIGHTENMENT: RISING ABOVE THOUGHT

Isn't thinking essential in order to survive in this world?

Your mind is an instrument, a tool. It is there to be used for a specific task, and when the task is completed, you lay it

down. As it is, I would say about 80 to 90 percent of most people's thinking is not only repetitive and useless, but because of its dysfunctional and often negative nature, much of it is also harmful. Observe your mind and you will find this to be true. It causes a serious leakage of vital energy.

This kind of compulsive thinking is actually an addiction. What characterizes an addiction? Quite simply this: you no longer feel that you have the choice to stop. It seems stronger than you. It also gives you a false sense of pleasure, pleasure that invariably turns into pain.

Why should we be addicted to thinking?

Because you are identified with it, which means that you derive your sense of self from the content and activity of your mind. Because you believe that you would cease to be if you stopped thinking. As you grow up, you form a mental image of who you are, based on your personal and cultural conditioning. We may call this phantom self the ego. It consists of mind activity and can only be kept going through constant thinking. The term *ego* means different things to different people, but when I use it here it means a false self, created by unconscious identification with the mind.

To the ego, the present moment hardly exists. Only past and future are considered important. This total reversal of the truth accounts for the fact that in the ego mode the mind is so dysfunctional. It is always concerned with keeping the past alive, because without it — who are you? It constantly projects itself into the future to ensure its continued survival and to seek some kind of release or fulfillment there. It says: "One day, when this, that, or the other happens, I am going

to be okay, happy, at peace." Even when the ego seems to be concerned with the present, it is not the present that it sees: It misperceives it completely because it looks at it through the eyes of the past. Or it reduces the present to a means to an end, an end that always lies in the mind-projected future. Observe your mind and you'll see that this is how it works.

The present moment holds the key to liberation. But you cannot find the present moment as long as you *are* your mind.

I don't want to lose my ability to analyze and discriminate. I wouldn't mind learning to think more clearly, in a more focused way, but I don't want to lose my mind. The gift of thought is the most precious thing we have. Without it, we would just be another species of animal.

The predominance of mind is no more than a stage in the evolution of consciousness. We need to go on to the next stage now as a matter of urgency; otherwise, we will be destroyed by the mind, which has grown into a monster. I will talk about this in more detail later. Thinking and consciousness are not synonymous. Thinking is only a small aspect of consciousness. Thought cannot exist without consciousness, but consciousness does not need thought.

Enlightenment means rising above thought, not falling back to a level below thought, the level of an animal or a plant. In the enlightened state, you still use your thinking mind when needed, but in a much more focused and effective way than before. You use it mostly for practical purposes, but you are free of the involuntary internal dialogue, and there is inner stillness. When you do use your mind, and particularly when

a creative solution is needed, you oscillate every few minutes or so between thought and stillness, between mind and no-mind. No-mind is consciousness without thought. Only in that way is it possible to think creatively, because only in that way does thought have any real power. Thought alone, when it is no longer connected with the much vaster realm of consciousness, quickly becomes barren, insane, destructive.

The mind is essentially a survival machine. Attack and defense against other minds, gathering, storing, and analyzing information — this is what it is good at, but it is not at all creative. All true artists, whether they know it or not, create from a place of no-mind, from inner stillness. The mind then gives form to the creative impulse or insight. Even the great scientists have reported that their creative breakthroughs came at a time of mental quietude. The surprising result of a nationwide inquiry among America's most eminent mathematicians, including Einstein, to find out their working methods, was that thinking "plays only a subordinate part in the brief, decisive phase of the creative act itself."¹ So I would say that the simple reason why the majority of scientists are *not* creative is not because they don't know how to think but because they don't know how to stop thinking!

It wasn't through the mind, through thinking, that the miracle that is life on earth or your body was created and is being sustained. There is clearly an intelligence at work that is far greater than the mind. How can a single human cell measuring 1/1,000 of an inch in diameter contain instructions within its DNA that would fill 1,000 books of 600 pages each? The more we learn about the workings of the body, the more we realize just how vast is the intelligence at work within it and how little we know. When the mind reconnects

with that, it becomes a most wonderful tool. It then serves something greater than itself.

EMOTION: THE BODY'S REACTION TO YOUR MIND

What about emotions? I get caught up in my emotions more than I do in my mind.

Mind, in the way I use the word, is not just thought. It includes your emotions as well as all unconscious mental-emotional reactive patterns. Emotion arises at the place where mind and body meet. It is the body's reaction to your mind — or you might say, a reflection of your mind in the body. For example, an attack thought or a hostile thought will create a buildup of energy in the body that we call anger. The body is getting ready to fight. The thought that you are being threatened, physically or psychologically, causes the body to contract, and this is the physical side of what we call fear. Research has shown that strong emotions even cause changes in the biochemistry of the body. These biochemical changes represent the physical or material aspect of the emotion. Of course, you are not usually conscious of all your thought patterns, and it is often only through watching your emotions that you can bring them into awareness.

The more you are identified with your thinking, your likes and dislikes, judgments and interpretations, which is to say the less *present* you are as the watching consciousness, the stronger the emotional energy charge will be, whether you are aware of it or not. If you cannot feel your emotions, if you are cut off from them, you will eventually experience them on a purely physical level, as a physical problem or

symptom. A great deal has been written about this in recent years, so we don't need to go into it here. A strong unconscious emotional pattern may even manifest as an external event that appears to just happen to you. For example, I have observed that people who carry a lot of anger inside without being aware of it and without expressing it are more likely to be attacked, verbally or even physically, by other angry people, and often for no apparent reason. They have a strong emanation of anger that certain people pick up subliminally and that triggers their own latent anger.

If you have difficulty feeling your emotions, start by focusing attention on the inner energy field of your body. Feel the body from within. This will also put you in touch with your emotions. We will explore this in more detail later.



You say that an emotion is the mind's reflection in the body. But sometimes there is a conflict between the two: the mind says "no" while the emotion says "yes," or the other way around.

If you really want to know your mind, the body will always give you a truthful reflection, so look at the emotion, or rather feel it in your body. If there is an apparent conflict between them, the thought will be the lie, the emotion will be the truth. Not the ultimate truth of who you are, but the relative truth of your state of mind at that time.

Conflict between surface thoughts and unconscious mental processes is certainly common. You may not yet be able to

bring your unconscious mind activity into awareness *as thoughts*, but it will always be reflected in the body *as an emotion*, and of this you *can* become aware. To watch an emotion in this way is basically the same as listening to or watching a thought, which I described earlier. The only difference is that, while a thought is in your head, an emotion has a strong physical component and so is primarily felt in the body. You can then allow the emotion to *be* there without being controlled by it. You no longer *are* the emotion; you are the watcher, the observing presence. If you practice this, all that is unconscious in you will be brought into the light of consciousness.

So observing our emotions is as important as observing our thoughts?

Yes. Make it a habit to ask yourself: What's going on inside me at this moment? That question will point you in the right direction. But don't analyze, just watch. Focus your attention within. Feel the energy of the emotion. If there is no emotion present, take your attention more deeply into the inner energy field of your body. It is the doorway into Being.



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.

Basically, all emotions are modifications of one primordial, undifferentiated emotion that has its origin in the loss of awareness of who you are beyond name and form. Because of its undifferentiated nature, it is hard to find a name that precisely describes this emotion. "Fear" comes close, but apart from a continuous sense of threat, it also includes a deep sense of abandonment and incompleteness. It may be best to use a term that is as undifferentiated as that basic emotion and simply call it "pain." One of the main tasks of the mind is to fight or remove that emotional pain, which is one of the reasons for its incessant activity, but all it can ever achieve is to cover it up temporarily. In fact, the harder the mind struggles to get rid of the pain, the greater the pain. The mind can never find the solution, nor can it afford to allow you to find the solution, because it is itself an intrinsic part of the "problem." Imagine a chief of police trying to find an arsonist when the arsonist is the chief of police. You will not be free of that pain until you cease to derive your sense of self from identification with the mind, which is to say from ego. The mind is then toppled from its place of power and Being reveals itself as your true nature.

Yes, I know what you are going to ask.

I was going to ask: What about positive emotions such as love and joy?

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. Emotion literally means "disturbance." The word comes from the Latin *emovere*, meaning "to disturb."

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. This is because they arise from beyond the mind. Emotions, on the other hand, being part of the dualistic mind, are subject to the law of opposites. This simply means that you cannot have good without bad. So in the unenlightened, mind-identified condition, what is sometimes wrongly called joy is the usually short-lived pleasure side of the continuously alternating pain/pleasure cycle. Pleasure is always derived from something outside you,

whereas joy arises from within. The very thing that gives you pleasure today will give you pain tomorrow, or it will leave you, so its absence will give you pain. And what is often referred to as love may be pleasurable and exciting for a while, but it is an addictive clinging, an extremely needy condition that can turn into its opposite at the flick of a switch. Many "love" relationships, after the initial euphoria has passed, actually oscillate between "love" and hate, attraction and attack.

Real love doesn't make you suffer. How could it? It doesn't suddenly turn into hate, nor does real joy turn into pain. As I said, even before you are enlightened — before you have freed yourself from your mind — you may get glimpses of true joy, true love, or of a deep inner peace, still but vibrantly alive. These are aspects of your true nature, which is usually obscured by the mind. Even within a "normal" addictive relationship, there can be moments when the presence of something more genuine, something incorruptible, can be felt. But they will only be glimpses, soon to be covered up again through mind interference. It may then seem that you had something very precious and lost it, or your mind may convince you that it was all an illusion anyway. The truth is that it wasn't an illusion, and you cannot lose it. It is part of your natural state, which can be obscured but can never be destroyed by the mind. Even when the sky is heavily overcast, the sun hasn't disappeared. It's still there on the other side of the clouds.

The Buddha says that pain or suffering arises through desire or craving and that to be free of pain we need to cut the bonds of desire.

All cravings are the mind seeking salvation or fulfillment in external things and in the future as a substitute for the joy of Being. As long as I am my mind, I am those cravings, those needs, wants, attachments, and aversions, and apart from them there is no "I" except as a mere possibility, an unfulfilled potential, a seed that has not yet sprouted. In that state, even my desire to become free or enlightened is just another craving for fulfillment or completion in the future. So don't seek to become free of desire or "achieve" enlightenment. Become present. Be there as the observer of the mind. Instead of quoting the Buddha, be the Buddha, be "the awakened one," which is what the word *buddha* means.

Humans have been in the grip of pain for eons, ever since they fell from the state of grace, entered the realm of time and mind, and lost awareness of Being. At that point, they started to perceive themselves as meaningless fragments in an alien universe, unconnected to the Source and to each other.

Pain is inevitable as long as you are identified with your mind, which is to say as long as you are unconscious, spiritually speaking. I am talking here primarily of emotional pain, which is also the main cause of physical pain and physical disease. Resentment, hatred, self-pity, guilt, anger, depression, jealousy, and so on, even the slightest irritation, are all forms of pain. And every pleasure or emotional high contains within itself the seed of pain: its inseparable opposite, which will manifest in time.

Anybody who has ever taken drugs to get "high" will know that the high eventually turns into a low, that the pleasure turns into some form of pain. Many people also know from

their own experience how easily and quickly an intimate relationship can turn from a source of pleasure to a source of pain. Seen from a higher perspective, both the negative and the positive polarities are faces of the same coin, are both part of the underlying pain that is inseparable from the mind-identified egoic state of consciousness.

There are two levels to your pain: the pain that you create now, and the pain from the past that still lives on in your mind and body. Ceasing to create pain in the present and dissolving past pain — this is what I want to talk about now.

CONSCIOUSNESS: THE WAY OUT OF PAIN

CREATE NO MORE PAIN IN THE PRESENT

Nobody's life is entirely free of pain and sorrow. Isn't it a question of learning to live with them rather than trying to avoid them?

The greater part of human pain is unnecessary. It is self-created as long as the unobserved mind runs your life.

The pain that you create now is always some form of nonacceptance, some form of unconscious resistance to what is. On the level of thought, the resistance is some form of judgment. On the emotional level, it is some form of negativity. The intensity of the pain depends on the degree of resistance to the present moment, and this in turn depends on how strongly you are identified with your mind. The mind always seeks to deny the Now and to escape from it. In other words, the more you are identified with your mind, the more you suffer. Or you may put it like this: the more you are able to honor and accept the Now, the more you are free of pain, of suffering — and free of the egoic mind.

Why does the mind habitually deny or resist the Now? Because it cannot function and remain in control without time, which is past and future, so it perceives the timeless Now as threatening. Time and mind are in fact inseparable.

Imagine the Earth devoid of human life, inhabited only by plants and animals. Would it still have a past and a future? Could we still speak of time in any meaningful way? The question "What time is it?" or "What's the date today?" — if anybody were there to ask it — would be quite meaningless. The oak tree or the eagle would be bemused by such a question. "What time?" they would ask. "Well, of course, it's now. The time is now. What else is there?"

Yes, we need the mind as well as time to function in this world, but there comes a point where they take over our lives, and this is where dysfunction, pain, and sorrow set in.

The mind, to ensure that it remains in control, seeks continuously to cover up the present moment with past and future, and so, as the vitality and infinite creative potential of Being, which is inseparable from the Now, becomes covered up by time, your true nature becomes obscured by the mind. An increasingly heavy burden of time has been accumulating in the human mind. All individuals are suffering under this burden, but they also keep adding to it every moment whenever they ignore or deny that precious moment or reduce it to a means of getting to some future moment, which only exists in the mind, never in actuality. The accumulation of time in the collective and individual human mind also holds a vast amount of residual pain from the past.

If you no longer want to create pain for yourself and others, if you no longer want to add to the residue of past pain that still

lives on in you, then don't create any more time, or at least no more than is necessary to deal with the practical aspects of your life. How to stop creating time? Realize deeply that the present moment is all you ever have. Make the Now the primary focus of your life. Whereas before you dwelt in time and paid brief visits to the Now, have your dwelling place in the Now and pay brief visits to past and future when required to deal with the practical aspects of your life situation. Always say "yes" to the present moment. What could be more futile, more insane, than to create inner resistance to something that already *is*? What could be more insane than to oppose life itself, which is now and always now? Surrender to what *is*. Say "yes" to life — and see how life suddenly starts working *for* you rather than against you.



The present moment is sometimes unacceptable, unpleasant, or awful.

It is as it is. Observe how the mind labels it and how this labeling process, this continuous sitting in judgment, creates pain and unhappiness. By watching the mechanics of the mind, you step out of its resistance patterns, and you can then *allow the present moment to be*. This will give you a taste of the state of inner freedom from external conditions, the state of true inner peace. Then see what happens, and take action if necessary or possible.

Accept — then act. Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you had chosen it. Always work with it, not

against it. Make it your friend and ally, not your enemy. This will miraculously transform your whole life.



PAST PAIN: DISSOLVING THE PAIN-BODY

As long as you are unable to access the power of the Now, every emotional pain that you experience leaves behind a residue of pain that lives on in you. It merges with the pain from the past, which was already there, and becomes lodged in your mind and body. This, of course, includes the pain you suffered as a child, caused by the unconsciousness of the world into which you were born.

This accumulated pain is a negative energy field that occupies your body and mind. If you look on it as an invisible entity in its own right, you are getting quite close to the truth. It's the emotional pain-body. It has two modes of being: dormant and active. A pain-body may be dormant 90 percent of the time; in a deeply unhappy person, though, it may be active up to 100 percent of the time. Some people live almost entirely through their pain-body, while others may experience it only in certain situations, such as intimate relationships, or situations linked with past loss or abandonment, physical or emotional hurt, and so on. Anything can trigger it, particularly if it resonates with a pain pattern from your past. When it is ready to awaken from its dormant stage, even a thought or an innocent remark made by someone close to you can activate it.

Some pain-bodies are obnoxious but relatively harmless, for example like a child who won't stop whining. Others are vicious and destructive monsters, true demons. Some are physically violent; many more are emotionally violent. Some will attack people around you or close to you, while others may attack you, their host. Thoughts and feelings you have about your life then become deeply negative and self-destructive. Illnesses and accidents are often created in this way. Some pain-bodies drive their hosts to suicide.

When you thought you knew a person and then you are suddenly confronted with this alien, nasty creature for the first time, you are in for quite a shock. However, it's more important to observe it in yourself than in someone else. Watch out for any sign of unhappiness in yourself, in whatever form — it may be the awakening pain-body. This can take the form of irritation, impatience, a somber mood, a desire to hurt, anger, rage, depression, a need to have some drama in your relationship, and so on. Catch it the moment it awakens from its dormant state.

The pain-body wants to survive, just like every other entity in existence, and it can only survive if it gets you to unconsciously identify with it. It can then rise up, take you over, "become you," and live through you. It needs to get its "food" through you. It will feed on any experience that resonates with its own kind of energy, anything that creates further pain in whatever form: anger, destructiveness, hatred, grief, emotional drama, violence, and even illness. So the pain-body, when it has taken you over, will create a situation in your life that reflects back its own energy frequency for it to feed on. Pain can only feed on pain. Pain cannot feed on joy. It finds it quite indigestible.

Once the pain-body has taken you over, you want more pain. You become a victim or a perpetrator. You want to inflict pain, or you want to suffer pain, or both. There isn't really much difference between the two. You are not conscious of this, of course, and will vehemently claim that you do not want pain. But look closely and you will find that your thinking and behavior are designed to keep the pain going, for yourself and others. If you were truly conscious of it, the pattern would dissolve, for to want more pain is insanity, and nobody is consciously insane.

The pain-body, which is the dark shadow cast by the ego, is actually afraid of the light of your consciousness. It is afraid of being found out. Its survival depends on your unconscious identification with it, as well as on your unconscious fear of facing the pain that lives in you. But if you don't face it, if you don't bring the light of your consciousness into the pain, you will be forced to relive it again and again. The pain-body may seem to you like a dangerous monster that you cannot bear to look at, but I assure you that it is an insubstantial phantom that cannot prevail against the power of your presence.

Some spiritual teachings state that all pain is ultimately an illusion, and this is true. The question is: Is it true for you? A mere belief doesn't make it true. Do you want to experience pain for the rest of your life and keep saying that it is an illusion? Does that free you from the pain? What we are concerned with here is how you can *realize* this truth — that is, make it real in your own experience.

So the pain-body doesn't want you to observe it directly and see it for what it is. The moment you observe it, feel its energy field within you, and take your attention into it, the identification is broken. A higher dimension of consciousness has

come in. I call it *presence*. You are now the witness or the watcher of the pain-body. This means that it cannot use you anymore by pretending to be you, and it can no longer replenish itself through you. You have found your own innermost strength. You have accessed the power of Now.

What happens to the pain-body when we become conscious enough to break our identification with it?

Unconsciousness creates it; consciousness transmutes it into itself. St. Paul expressed this universal principle beautifully: "Everything is shown up by being exposed to the light, and whatever is exposed to the light itself becomes light." Just as you cannot fight the darkness, you cannot fight the pain-body. Trying to do so would create inner conflict and thus further pain. Watching it is enough. Watching it implies accepting it as part of what is at that moment.

The pain-body consists of trapped life-energy that has split off from your total energy field and has temporarily become autonomous through the unnatural process of mind identification. It has turned in on itself and become anti-life, like an animal trying to devour its own tail. Why do you think our civilization has become so life-destructive? But even the life-destructive forces are still life-energy.

When you start to disidentify and become the watcher, the pain-body will continue to operate for a while and will try to trick you into identifying with it again. Although you are no longer energizing it through your identification, it has a certain momentum, just like a spinning wheel that will keep turning for a while even when it is no longer being propelled. At this stage, it may also create physical aches and

pains in different parts of the body, but they won't last. Stay present, stay conscious. Be the ever-alert guardian of your inner space. You need to be present enough to be able to watch the pain-body directly and feel its energy. It then cannot control your thinking. The moment your thinking is aligned with the energy field of the pain-body, you are identified with it and again feeding it with your thoughts.

For example, if anger is the predominant energy vibration of the pain-body and you think angry thoughts, dwelling on what someone did to you or what you are going to do to him or her, then you have become unconscious, and the pain-body has become "you." Where there is anger, there is always pain underneath. Or when a dark mood comes upon you and you start getting into a negative mind-pattern and thinking how dreadful your life is, your thinking has become aligned with the pain-body, and you have become unconscious and vulnerable to the pain-body's attack. "Unconscious," the way that I use the word here, means to be identified with some mental or emotional pattern. It implies a complete absence of the watcher.

Sustained conscious attention severs the link between the pain-body and your thought processes and brings about the process of transmutation. It is as if the pain becomes fuel for the flame of your consciousness, which then burns more brightly as a result. This is the esoteric meaning of the ancient art of alchemy: the transmutation of base metal into gold, of suffering into consciousness. The split within is healed, and you become whole again. Your responsibility then is not to create further pain.

Let me summarize the process. Focus attention on the feeling inside you. Know that it is the pain-body. Accept that it is

there. Don't *think* about it — don't let the feeling turn into thinking. Don't judge or analyze. Don't make an identity for yourself out of it. Stay present, and continue to be the observer of what is happening inside you. Become aware not only of the emotional pain but also of "the one who observes," the silent watcher. This is the power of the Now, the power of your own conscious presence. Then see what happens.



For many women, the pain-body awakens particularly at the time preceding the menstrual flow. I will talk about this and the reason for it in more detail later. Right now, let me just say this: If you are able to stay alert and present at that time and *watch* whatever you feel within, rather than be taken over by it, it affords an opportunity for the most powerful spiritual practice, and a rapid transmutation of all past pain becomes possible.

EGO IDENTIFICATION WITH THE PAIN-BODY

The process that I have just described is profoundly powerful yet simple. It could be taught to a child, and hopefully one day it will be one of the first things children learn in school. Once you have understood the basic principle of being present as the watcher of what happens inside you — and you "understand" it by experiencing it — you have at your disposal the most potent transformational tool.

This is not to deny that you may encounter intense inner resistance to disidentifying from your pain. This will be the

case particularly if you have lived closely identified with your emotional pain-body for most of your life and the whole or a large part of your sense of self is invested in it. What this means is that you have made an unhappy self out of your pain-body and believe that this mind-made fiction is who you are. In that case, unconscious fear of losing your identity will create strong resistance to any disidentification. In other words, you would rather be in pain — *be* the pain-body — than take a leap into the unknown and risk losing the familiar unhappy self.

If this applies to you, observe the resistance within yourself. Observe the attachment to your pain. Be very alert. Observe the peculiar pleasure you derive from being unhappy. Observe the compulsion to talk or think about it. The resistance will cease if you make it conscious. You can then take your attention into the pain-body, stay present as the witness, and so initiate its transmutation.

Only *you* can do this. Nobody can do it *for* you. But if you are fortunate enough to find someone who is intensely conscious, if you can be with them and join them in the state of presence, that can be helpful and will accelerate things. In this way, your own light will quickly grow stronger. When a log that has only just started to burn is placed next to one that is burning fiercely, and after a while they are separated again, the first log will be burning with much greater intensity. After all, it is the same fire. To be such a fire is one of the functions of a spiritual teacher. Some therapists may also be able to fulfill that function, provided that they have gone beyond the level of mind and can create and sustain a state of intense conscious presence while they are working with you.

THE ORIGIN OF FEAR

You mentioned fear as being part of our basic underlying emotional pain. How does fear arise, and why is there so much of it in people's lives? And isn't a certain amount of fear just healthy self-protection? If I didn't have a fear of fire, I might put my hand in it and get burned.

The reason why you don't put your hand in the fire is not because of fear, it's because you know that you'll get burned. You don't need fear to avoid unnecessary danger — just a minimum of intelligence and common sense. For such practical matters, it is useful to apply the lessons learned in the past. Now if someone threatened you with fire or with physical violence, you might experience something like fear. This is an instinctive shrinking back from danger, but not the psychological condition of fear that we are talking about here. The psychological condition of fear is divorced from any concrete and true immediate danger. It comes in many forms: unease, worry, anxiety, nervousness, tension, dread, phobia, and so on. This kind of psychological fear is always of something that might happen, not of something that is happening now. You are in the here and now, while your mind is in the future. This creates an anxiety gap. And if you are identified with your mind and have lost touch with the power and simplicity of the Now, that anxiety gap will be your constant companion. You can always cope with the present moment, but you cannot cope with something that is only a mind projection — you cannot cope with the future.

Moreover, as long as you are identified with your mind, the ego runs your life, as I pointed out earlier. Because of its phantom nature, and despite elaborate defense mechanisms,

the ego is very vulnerable and insecure, and it sees itself as constantly under threat. This, by the way, is the case even if the ego is outwardly very confident. Now remember that an emotion is the body's reaction to your mind. What message is the body receiving continuously from the ego, the false, mind-made self? Danger, I am under threat. And what is the emotion generated by this continuous message? Fear, of course.

Fear seems to have many causes. Fear of loss, fear of failure, fear of being hurt, and so on, but ultimately all fear is the ego's fear of death, of annihilation. To the ego, death is always just around the corner. In this mind-identified state, fear of death affects every aspect of your life. For example, even such a seemingly trivial and "normal" thing as the compulsive need to be right in an argument and make the other person wrong — defending the mental position with which you have identified — is due to the fear of death. If you identify with a mental position, then if you are wrong, your mind-based sense of self is seriously threatened with annihilation. So you as the ego cannot afford to be wrong. To be wrong is to die. Wars have been fought over this, and countless relationships have broken down.

Once you have disidentified from your mind, whether you are right or wrong makes no difference to your sense of self at all, so the forcefully compulsive and deeply unconscious need to be right, which is a form of violence, will no longer be there. You can state clearly and firmly how you feel or what you think, but there will be no aggressiveness or defensiveness about it. Your sense of self is then derived from a deeper and truer place within yourself, not from the mind. Watch out for any kind of defensiveness within yourself.

What are you defending? An illusory identity, an image in your mind, a fictitious entity. By making this pattern conscious, by witnessing it, you disidentify from it. In the light of your consciousness, the unconscious pattern will then quickly dissolve. This is the end of all arguments and power games, which are so corrosive to relationships. Power over others is weakness disguised as strength. True power is within, and it is available to you now.

So anyone who is identified with their mind and, therefore, disconnected from their true power, their deeper self rooted in Being, will have fear as their constant companion. The number of people who have gone beyond mind is as yet extremely small, so you can assume that virtually everyone you meet or know lives in a state of fear. Only the intensity of it varies. It fluctuates between anxiety and dread at one end of the scale and a vague unease and distant sense of threat at the other. Most people become conscious of it only when it takes on one of its more acute forms.

THE EGO'S SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS

Another aspect of the emotional pain that is an intrinsic part of the egoic mind is a deep-seated sense of lack or incompleteness, of not being whole. In some people, this is conscious, in others unconscious. If it is conscious, it manifests as the unsettling and constant feeling of not being worthy or good enough. If it is unconscious, it will only be felt indirectly as an intense craving, wanting and needing. In either case, people will often enter into a compulsive pursuit of ego-gratification and things to identify with in order to fill this hole they feel within. So they strive after possessions, money, success, power, recognition, or a special relationship, basically so that

they can feel better about themselves, feel more complete. But even when they attain all these things, they soon find that the hole is still there, that it is bottomless. Then they are really in trouble, because they cannot delude themselves anymore. Well, they can and do, but it gets more difficult.

As long as the egoic mind is running your life, you cannot truly be at ease; you cannot be at peace or fulfilled except for brief intervals when you obtained what you wanted, when a craving has just been fulfilled. Since the ego is a derived sense of self, it needs to identify with external things. It needs to be both defended and fed constantly. The most common ego identifications have to do with possessions, the work you do, social status and recognition, knowledge and education, physical appearance, special abilities, relationships, personal and family history, belief systems, and often also political, nationalistic, racial, religious, and other collective identifications. None of these is you.

Do you find this frightening? Or is it a relief to know this? All of these things you will have to relinquish sooner or later. Perhaps you find it as yet hard to believe, and I am certainly not asking you to *believe* that your identity cannot be found in any of those things. You will *know* the truth of it for yourself. You will know it at the latest when you feel death approaching. Death is a stripping away of all that is not you. The secret of life is to "die before you die" — and find that there is no death.

MOVING DEEPLY INTO THE NOW

DON'T SEEK YOUR SELF IN THE MIND

I feel that there is still a great deal I need to learn about the workings of my mind before I can get anywhere near full consciousness or spiritual enlightenment.

No, you don't. The problems of the mind cannot be solved on the level of the mind. Once you have understood the basic dysfunction, there isn't really much else that you need to learn or understand. Studying the complexities of the mind may make you a good psychologist, but doing so won't take you beyond the mind, just as the study of madness isn't enough to create sanity. You have already understood the basic mechanics of the unconscious state: identification with the mind, which creates a false self, the ego, as a substitute for your true self rooted in Being. You become as a "branch cut off from the vine," as Jesus puts it.

The ego's needs are endless. It feels vulnerable and threatened and so lives in a state of fear and want. Once you know how the basic dysfunction operates, there is no need to explore all its countless manifestations, no need to make it

into a complex personal problem. The ego, of course, loves that. It is always seeking for something to attach itself to in order to uphold and strengthen its illusory sense of self, and it will readily attach itself to your problems. This is why, for so many people, a large part of their sense of self is intimately connected with their problems. Once this has happened, the last thing they want is to become free of them; that would mean loss of self. There can be a great deal of unconscious ego investment in pain and suffering.

So once you recognize the root of unconsciousness as identification with the mind, which of course includes the emotions, you step out of it. You become *present*. When you are present, you can allow the mind to be as it is without getting entangled in it. The mind in itself is not dysfunctional. It is a wonderful tool. Dysfunction sets in when you seek your self in it and mistake it for who you are. It then becomes the *egoic* mind and takes over your whole life.

END THE DELUSION OF TIME

It seems almost impossible to disidentify from the mind. We are all immersed in it. How do you teach a fish to fly?

Here is the key: End the delusion of time. Time and mind are inseparable. Remove time from the mind and it stops — unless you choose to use it.

To be identified with your mind is to be trapped in time: the compulsion to live almost exclusively through memory and anticipation. This creates an endless preoccupation with past and future and an unwillingness to honor and acknowledge the present moment and *allow it to be*. The compulsion

arises because the past gives you an identity and the future holds the promise of salvation, of fulfillment in whatever form. Both are illusions.

But without a sense of time, how would we function in this world? There would be no goals to strive toward anymore. I wouldn't even know who I am, because my past makes me who I am today. I think time is something very precious, and we need to learn to use it wisely rather than waste it.

Time isn't precious at all, because it is an illusion. What you perceive as precious is not time but the one point that is out of time: the Now. That is precious indeed. The more you are focused on time — past and future — the more you miss the Now, the most precious thing there is.

Why is it the most precious thing? Firstly, because it is the *only* thing. It's all there is. The eternal present is the space within which your whole life unfolds, the one factor that remains constant. Life is now. There was never a time when your life was *not* now, nor will there ever be. Secondly, the Now is the only point that can take you beyond the limited confines of the mind. It is your only point of access into the timeless and formless realm of Being.



NOTHING EXISTS OUTSIDE THE NOW

Aren't past and future just as real, sometimes even more real, than the present? After all, the past determines who we are, as

well as how we perceive and behave in the present. And our future goals determine which actions we take in the present.

You haven't yet grasped the essence of what I am saying because you are trying to understand it mentally. The mind cannot understand this. Only *you* can. Please just listen.

Have you ever experienced, done, thought, or felt anything outside the Now? Do you think you ever will? Is it possible for anything to happen or *be* outside the Now? The answer is obvious, is it not?

Nothing ever happened in the past; it happened in the Now. Nothing will ever happen in the future; it will happen in the Now.

What you think of as the past is a memory trace, stored in the mind, of a former Now. When you remember the past, you reactivate a memory trace — and you do so now. The future is an imagined Now, a projection of the mind. When the future comes, it comes as the Now. When you think about the future, you do it now. Past and future obviously have no reality of their own. Just as the moon has no light of its own, but can only reflect the light of the sun, so are past and future only pale reflections of the light, power, and reality of the eternal present. Their reality is "borrowed" from the Now.

The essence of what I am saying here cannot be understood by the mind. The moment you grasp it, there is a shift in consciousness from mind to Being, from time to presence. Suddenly, everything feels alive, radiates energy, emanates Being.



THE KEY TO THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

In life-threatening emergency situations, the shift in consciousness from time to presence sometimes happens naturally. The personality that has a past and a future momentarily recedes and is replaced by an intense conscious presence, very still but very alert at the same time. Whatever response is needed then arises out of that state of consciousness.

The reason why some people love to engage in dangerous activities, such as mountain climbing, car racing, and so on, although they may not be aware of it, is that it forces them into the Now — that intensely alive state that is free of time, free of problems, free of thinking, free of the burden of the personality. Slipping away from the present moment even for a second may mean death. Unfortunately, they come to depend on a particular activity to be in that state. But you don't need to climb the north face of the Eiger. You can enter that state now.



Since ancient times, spiritual masters of all traditions have pointed to the Now as the key to the spiritual dimension.

Despite this, it seems to have remained a secret. It is certainly not taught in churches and temples. If you go to a church, you may hear readings from the Gospels such as "Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself," or "Nobody who puts his hands to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God." Or you might hear the passage about the beautiful flowers that are not anxious about tomorrow but live with ease in the timeless Now and are provided for abundantly by God. The depth and radical nature of these teachings are not recognized. No one seems to realize that they are meant to be lived and so bring about a profound inner transformation.



The whole essence of Zen consists in walking along the razor's edge of Now — to be so utterly, so completely *present* that no problem, no suffering, nothing that is not *who you are* in your essence, can survive in you. In the Now, in the absence of time, all your problems dissolve. Suffering needs time; it cannot survive in the Now.

The great Zen master Rinzai, in order to take his students' attention away from time, would often raise his finger and slowly ask: "What, at this moment, is lacking?" A powerful question that does not require an answer on the level of the mind. It is designed to take your attention deeply into the Now. A similar question in the Zen tradition is this: "If not now, when?"



The Now is also central to the teaching of Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam. Sufis have a saying: "The Sufi is the son of time present." And Rumi, the great poet and teacher of Sufism, declares: "Past and future veil God from our sight; burn up both of them with fire."

Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth-century spiritual teacher, summed it all up beautifully: "Time is what keeps the light from reaching us. There is no greater obstacle to God than time."



ACCESSING THE POWER OF THE NOW

A moment ago, when you talked about the eternal present and the unreality of past and future, I found myself looking at that tree outside the window. I had looked at it a few times before, but this time it was different. The external perception had not changed much, except that the colors seemed brighter and more vibrant. But there was now an added dimension to it. This is hard to explain. I don't know how, but I was aware of something invisible that I felt was the essence of that tree, its inner spirit, if you like. And somehow I was part of that. I realize now that I hadn't truly seen the tree before, just a flat

and dead image of it. When I look at the tree now, some of that awareness is still present, but I can feel it slipping away. You see, the experience is already receding into the past. Can something like this ever be more than a fleeting glimpse?

You were free of time for a moment. You moved into the Now and therefore perceived the tree without the screen of mind. The awareness of Being became part of your perception. With the timeless dimension comes a different kind of knowing, one that does not "kill" the spirit that lives within every creature and every thing. A knowing that does not destroy the sacredness and mystery of life but contains a deep love and reverence for all that is. A knowing of which the mind knows nothing.

The mind cannot know the tree. It can only know facts or information *about* the tree. My mind cannot know you, only labels, judgments, facts, and opinions *about* you. Being alone knows directly.

There is a place for mind and mind knowledge. It is in the practical realm of day-to-day living. However, when it takes over all aspects of your life, including your relationships with other human beings and with nature, it becomes a monstrous parasite that, unchecked, may well end up killing all life on the planet and finally itself by killing its host.

You have had a glimpse of how the timeless can transform your perceptions. But an experience is not enough, no matter how beautiful or profound. What is needed and what we are concerned with is a permanent shift in consciousness.

So break the old pattern of present-moment denial and present-moment resistance. Make it your practice to withdraw attention

from past and future whenever they are not needed. Step out of the time dimension as much as possible in everyday life. If you find it hard to enter the Now directly, start by observing the habitual tendency of your mind to want to escape from the Now. You will observe that the future is usually imagined as either better or worse than the present. If the imagined future is better, it gives you hope or pleasurable anticipation. If it is worse, it creates anxiety. Both are illusory. Through self-observation, more *presence* comes into your life automatically. The moment you realize you are not present, you *are* present. Whenever you are able to observe your mind, you are no longer trapped in it. Another factor has come in, something that is not of the mind: the witnessing presence.

Be present as the watcher of your mind — of your thoughts and emotions as well as your reactions in various situations. Be at least as interested in your reactions as in the situation or person that causes you to react. Notice also how often your attention is in the past or future. Don't judge or analyze what you observe. Watch the thought, feel the emotion, observe the reaction. Don't make a personal problem out of them. You will then feel something more powerful than any of those things that you observe: the still, observing presence itself behind the content of your mind, the silent watcher.



Intense presence is needed when certain situations trigger a reaction with a strong emotional charge, such as when your self-image is threatened, a challenge comes into your life that

triggers fear, things "go wrong," or an emotional complex from the past is brought up. In those instances, the tendency is for you to become "unconscious." The reaction or emotion takes you over — you "become" it. You act it out. You justify, make wrong, attack, defend...except that it isn't you, it's the reactive pattern, the mind in its habitual survival mode.

Identification with the mind gives it more energy; observation of the mind withdraws energy from it. Identification with the mind creates more time; observation of the mind opens up the dimension of the timeless. The energy that is withdrawn from the mind turns into presence. Once you can feel what it means to be present, it becomes much easier to simply choose to step out of the time dimension whenever time is not needed for practical purposes and move more deeply into the Now. This does not impair your ability to use time — past or future — when you need to refer to it for practical matters. Nor does it impair your ability to use your mind. In fact, it enhances it. When you do use your mind, it will be sharper, more focused.

LETTING GO OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME

Learn to use time in the practical aspects of your life — we may call this "clock time" — but immediately return to present-moment awareness when those practical matters have been dealt with. In this way, there will be no buildup of "psychological time," which is identification with the past and continuous compulsive projection into the future.

Clock time is not just making an appointment or planning a trip. It includes learning from the past so that we don't repeat the same mistakes over and over. Setting goals and working

toward them. Predicting the future by means of patterns and laws, physical, mathematical and so on, learned from the past and taking appropriate action on the basis of our predictions.

But even here, within the sphere of practical living, where we cannot do without reference to past and future, the present moment remains the essential factor: Any lesson from the past becomes relevant and is applied *now*. Any planning as well as working toward achieving a particular goal is done *now*.

The enlightened person's main focus of attention is always the Now, but they are still peripherally aware of time. In other words, they continue to use clock time but are free of psychological time.

Be alert as you practice this so that you do not unwittingly transform clock time into psychological time. For example, if you made a mistake in the past and learn from it now, you are using clock time. On the other hand, if you dwell on it mentally, and self-criticism, remorse, or guilt come up, then you are making the mistake into "me" and "mine": You make it part of your sense of self, and it has become psychological time, which is always linked to a false sense of identity. Nonforgiveness necessarily implies a heavy burden of psychological time.

If you set yourself a goal and work toward it, you are using clock time. You are aware of where you want to go, but you honor and give your fullest attention to the step that you are taking at this moment. If you then become excessively focused on the goal, perhaps because you are seeking happiness, fulfillment, or a more complete sense of self in it, the Now is no longer honored. It becomes reduced to a mere stepping stone to the future, with no intrinsic value. Clock

time then turns into psychological time. Your life's journey is no longer an adventure, just an obsessive need to arrive, to attain, to "make it." You no longer see or smell the flowers by the wayside either, nor are you aware of the beauty and the miracle of life that unfolds all around you when you are present in the Now.



I can see the supreme importance of the Now, but I cannot quite go along with you when you say that time is a complete illusion.

When I say "time is an illusion," my intention is not to make a philosophical statement. I am just reminding you of a simple fact — a fact so obvious that you may find it hard to grasp and may even find it meaningless — but once fully realized, it can cut like a sword through all the mind-created layers of complexity and "problems." Let me say it again: the present moment is all you ever have. There is never a time when your life is not "this moment." Is this not a fact?

THE INSANITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME

You will not have any doubt that psychological time is a mental disease if you look at its collective manifestations. They occur, for example, in the form of ideologies such as communism, national socialism or any nationalism, or rigid religious belief systems, which operate under the implicit assumption that the highest good lies in the future and that therefore the

end justifies the means. The end is an idea, a point in the mind-projected future, when salvation in whatever form — happiness, fulfillment, equality, liberation, and so on — will be attained. Not infrequently, the means of getting there are the enslavement, torture, and murder of people in the present.

For example, it is estimated that as many as fifty million people were murdered to further the cause of communism, to bring about a "better world" in Russia, China, and other countries.² This is a chilling example of how belief in a future heaven creates a present hell. Can there be any doubt that psychological time is a serious and dangerous mental illness?

How does this mind pattern operate in *your* life? Are you always trying to get somewhere other than where you are? Is most of your *doing* just a means to an end? Is fulfillment always just around the corner or confined to short-lived pleasures, such as sex, food, drink, drugs, or thrills and excitement? Are you always focused on becoming, achieving, and attaining, or alternatively chasing some new thrill or pleasure? Do you believe that if you acquire more things you will become more fulfilled, good enough, or psychologically complete? Are you waiting for a man or woman to give meaning to your life?

In the normal, mind-identified or unenlightened state of consciousness, the power and infinite creative potential that lie concealed in the Now are completely obscured by psychological time. Your life then loses its vibrancy, its freshness, its sense of wonder. The old patterns of thought, emotion, behavior, reaction, and desire are acted out in endless repeat performances, a script in your mind that gives you an identity of sorts but distorts or covers up the reality of the Now.

The mind then creates an obsession with the future as an escape from the unsatisfactory present.

NEGATIVITY AND SUFFERING HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN TIME

But the belief that the future will be better than the present is not always an illusion. The present can be dreadful, and things can get better in the future, and often they do.

Usually, the future is a replica of the past. Superficial changes are possible, but *real* transformation is rare and depends upon whether you can become present enough to dissolve the past by accessing the power of the Now. What you perceive as future is an intrinsic part of your state of consciousness now. If your mind carries a heavy burden of past, you will experience more of the same. The past perpetuates itself through lack of presence. The quality of your consciousness at this moment is what shapes the future — which, of course, can only be experienced as the Now.

You may win ten million dollars, but that kind of change is no more than skin deep. You would simply continue to act out the same conditioned patterns in more luxurious surroundings. Humans have learned to split the atom. Instead of killing ten or twenty people with a wooden club, one person can now kill a million just by pushing a button. Is that *real* change?

If it is the quality of your consciousness at this moment that determines the future, then what is it that determines the quality of your consciousness? Your degree of presence. So the only place where true change can occur and where the past can be dissolved is the Now.



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, grievances, sadness, bitterness, and all forms of nonforgiveness 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 past and future and denial of the Now — problems are actually interchangeable. If all your problems or perceived causes of suffering or unhappiness were miraculously removed for you today, but you had not become more present, more conscious, you would soon find yourself with a similar set of problems or causes of suffering, like a shadow that follows you wherever you go. Ultimately, there is only one problem: the time-bound mind itself.

I cannot believe that I could ever reach a point where I am completely free of my problems.

You are right. You can never reach that point because you are at that point now.

There is no salvation in time. You cannot be free in the future. Presence is the key to freedom, so you can only be free now.

FINDING THE LIFE UNDERNEATH YOUR LIFE SITUATION

I don't see how I can be free now. As it happens, I am extremely unhappy with my life at the moment. This is a fact, and I would be deluding myself if I tried to convince myself that all is well when it definitely isn't. To me, the present moment is very unhappy; it is not liberating at all. What keeps me going is the hope or possibility of some improvement in the future.

You think that your attention is in the present moment when it's actually taken up completely by time. You cannot be both unhappy *and* fully present in the Now.

What you refer to as your "life" should more accurately be called your "life situation." It is psychological time: past and future. Certain things in the past didn't go the way you wanted them to go. You are still resisting what happened in the past, and now you are resisting what is. Hope is what keeps you going, but hope keeps you focused on the future, and this continued focus perpetuates your denial of the Now and therefore your unhappiness.

It is true that my present life situation is the result of things that happened in the past, but it is still my present situation, and being stuck in it is what makes me unhappy.

Forget about your life situation for a while and pay attention to

your life.

What is the difference?

Your life situation exists in time.

Your life is now.

Your life situation is mind-stuff.

Your life is real.

Find the “narrow gate that leads to life.” It is called the Now. Narrow your life down to this moment. Your life situation may be full of problems — most life situations are — but find out if you have any problem at this moment. Not tomorrow or in ten minutes, but now. Do you have a problem now?

When you are full of problems, there is no room for anything new to enter, no room for a solution. So whenever you can, make some room, create some space, so that you find the life underneath your life situation.

Use your senses fully. Be where you are. Look around. Just look, don't interpret. See the light, shapes, colors, textures. Be aware of the silent presence of each thing. Be aware of the space that allows everything to be. Listen to the sounds; don't judge them. Listen to the silence underneath the sounds. Touch something — anything — and feel and acknowledge its Being. Observe the rhythm of your breathing; feel the air flowing in and out, feel the life energy inside your body. Allow everything to be, within and without. Allow the “isness” of all things. Move deeply into the Now.

You are leaving behind the deadening world of mental abstraction, of time. You are getting out of the insane mind that is

draining you of life energy, just as it is slowly poisoning and destroying the Earth. You are awakening out of the dream of time into the present.



ALL PROBLEMS ARE ILLUSIONS OF THE MIND

It feels as if a heavy burden has been lifted. A sense of lightness. I feel clear...but my problems are still there waiting for me, aren't they? They haven't been solved. Am I not just temporarily evading them?

If you found yourself in paradise, it wouldn't be long before your mind would say "yes, but...." Ultimately, this is not about solving your problems. It's about realizing that there *are* no problems. Only situations — to be dealt with now, or to be left alone and accepted as part of the "isness" of the present moment until they change or *can* be dealt with. Problems are mind-made and need time to survive. They cannot survive in the actuality of the Now.

Focus your attention on the Now and tell me what problem you have at this moment.



I am not getting any answer because it is impossible to have a problem when your attention is fully in the Now. A situa-

tion that needs to be either dealt with or accepted — yes. Why make it into a problem? Why make anything into a problem? Isn't life challenging enough as it is? What do you need problems for? The mind unconsciously loves problems because they give you an identity of sorts. This is normal, and it is insane. "Problem" means that you are dwelling on a situation mentally without there being a true intention or possibility of taking action now and that you are unconsciously making it part of your sense of self. You become so overwhelmed by your life situation that you lose your sense of life, of Being. Or you are carrying in your mind the insane burden of a hundred things that you will or may have to do in the future instead of focusing your attention on the one thing that you *can* do now.

When you create a problem, you create pain. All it takes is a simple choice, a simple decision: no matter what happens, I will create no more pain for myself. I will create no more problems. Although it is a simple choice, it is also very radical. You won't make that choice unless you are truly fed up with suffering, unless you have truly had enough. And you won't be able to go through with it unless you access the power of the Now. If you create no more pain for yourself, then you create no more pain for others. You also no longer contaminate the beautiful Earth, your inner space, and the collective human psyche with the negativity of problem-making.



If you have ever been in a life-or-death emergency situation, you will know that it wasn't a problem. The mind didn't have

time to fool around and make it into a problem. In a true emergency, the mind stops; you become totally present in the Now, and something infinitely more powerful takes over. This is why there are many reports of ordinary people suddenly becoming capable of incredibly courageous deeds. In any emergency, either you survive or you don't. Either way, it is not a problem.

Some people get angry when they hear me say that problems are illusions. I am threatening to take away their sense of who they are. They have invested much time in a false sense of self. For many years, they have unconsciously defined their whole identity in terms of their problems or their suffering. Who would they be without it?

A great deal of what people say, think, or do is actually motivated by fear, which of course is always linked with having your focus on the future and being out of touch with the Now. As there are no problems in the Now, there is no fear either.

Should a situation arise that you need to deal with now, your action will be clear and incisive if it arises out of present-moment awareness. It is also more likely to be effective. It will not be a reaction coming from the past conditioning of your mind but an intuitive response to the situation. In other instances, when the time-bound mind would have reacted, you will find it more effective to do nothing — just stay centered in the Now.

A QUANTUM LEAP IN THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

I have had glimpses of this state of freedom from mind and time that you describe, but past and future are so overwhelmingly strong that I cannot keep them out for long.

The time-bound mode of consciousness is deeply embedded in the human psyche. But what we are doing here is part of a profound transformation that is taking place in the collective consciousness of the planet and beyond: the awakening of consciousness from the dream of matter, form, and separation. The ending of time. We are breaking mind patterns that have dominated human life for eons. Mind patterns that have created unimaginable suffering on a vast scale. I am not using the word evil. It is more helpful to call it unconsciousness or insanity.

This breaking up of the old mode of consciousness or rather unconsciousness: is it something we have to do or will it happen anyway? I mean, is this change inevitable?

That's a question of perspective. The doing and the happening is in fact a single process; because you are one with the totality of consciousness, you cannot separate the two. But there is no absolute guarantee that humans will make it. The process isn't inevitable or automatic. Your cooperation is an essential part of it. However you look at it, it is a quantum leap in the evolution of consciousness, as well as our only chance of survival as a race.

THE JOY OF BEING

To alert you that you have allowed yourself to be taken over by psychological time, you can use a simple criterion. Ask yourself: Is there joy, ease, and lightness in what I am doing? If there isn't, then time is covering up the present moment, and life is perceived as a burden or a struggle.

If there is no joy, ease, or lightness in what you are doing, it does not necessarily mean that you need to change what

you are doing. It may be sufficient to change the *how*. "How" is always more important than "what." See if you can give much more attention to the *doing* than to the result that you want to achieve through it. Give your fullest attention to whatever the moment presents. This implies that you also completely accept what is, because you cannot give your full attention to something and at the same time resist it.

As soon as you honor the present moment, all unhappiness and struggle dissolve, and life begins to flow with joy and ease. When you act out of present-moment awareness, whatever you do becomes imbued with a sense of quality, care, and love — even the most simple action.



So do not be concerned with the fruit of your action — just give attention to the action itself. The fruit will come of its own accord. This is a powerful spiritual practice. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the oldest and most beautiful spiritual teachings in existence, nonattachment to the fruit of your action is called *Karma Yoga*. It is described as the path of "consecrated action."

When the compulsive striving away from the Now ceases, the joy of Being flows into everything you do. The moment your attention turns to the Now, you feel a presence, a stillness, a peace. You no longer depend on the future for fulfillment and satisfaction — you don't look to it for salvation.

Therefore, you are not attached to the results. Neither failure nor success has the power to change your inner state of Being. You have found the life underneath your life situation.

In the absence of psychological time, your sense of self is derived from Being, not from your personal past. Therefore, the psychological need to become anything other than who you are already is no longer there. In the world, on the level of your life situation, you may indeed become wealthy, knowledgeable, successful, free of this or that, but in the deeper dimension of Being you are complete and whole now.

In that state of wholeness, would we still be able or willing to pursue external goals?

Of course, but you will not have illusory expectations that anything or anybody in the future will save you or make you happy. As far as your life situation is concerned, there may be things to be attained or acquired. That's the world of form, of gain and loss. Yet on a deeper level you are already complete, and when you realize that, there is a playful, joyous energy behind what you do. Being free of psychological time, you no longer pursue your goals with grim determination, driven by fear, anger, discontent, or the need to become someone. Nor will you remain inactive through fear of failure, which to the ego is loss of self. When your deeper sense of self is derived from Being, when you are free of "becoming" as a psychological need, neither your happiness nor your sense of self depends on the outcome, and so there is freedom from fear. You don't seek permanency where it cannot be found: in the world of form, of gain and loss, birth

and death. You don't demand that situations, conditions, places, or people should make you happy, and then suffer when they don't live up to your expectations.

Everything is honored, but nothing matters. Forms are born and die, yet you are aware of the eternal underneath the forms. You know that "nothing real can be threatened."³

When this is your state of Being, how can you not succeed? You have succeeded already.

MIND STRATEGIES FOR AVOIDING THE NOW

LOSS OF NOW: THE CORE DELUSION

Even if I completely accept that ultimately time is an illusion, what difference is that going to make in my life? I still have to live in a world that is completely dominated by time.

Intellectual agreement is just another belief and won't make much difference to your life. To realize this truth, you need to live it. When every cell of your body is so present that it feels vibrant with life, and when you can feel that life every moment as the joy of Being, then it can be said that you are free of time.

But I still have to pay the bills tomorrow, and I am still going to grow old and die just like everybody else. So how can I ever say that I am free of time?

Tomorrow's bills are not the problem. The dissolution of the physical body is not a problem. Loss of Now is the problem, or rather: the core delusion that turns a mere situation, event, or emotion into a personal problem and into suffering. Loss of Now is loss of Being.

To be free of time is to be free of the psychological need of past for your identity and future for your fulfillment. It represents the most profound transformation of consciousness that you can imagine. In some rare cases, this shift in consciousness happens dramatically and radically, once and for all. When it does, it usually comes about through total surrender in the midst of intense suffering. Most people, however, have to work at it.

When you have had your first few glimpses of the timeless state of consciousness, you begin to move back and forth between the dimensions of time and presence. First you become aware of just how rarely your attention is truly in the Now. But to know that you are *not* present is a great success: That knowing is presence — even if initially it only lasts for a couple of seconds of clock time before it is lost again. Then, with increasing frequency, you choose to have the focus of your consciousness in the present moment rather than in the past or future, and whenever you realize that you had lost the Now, you are able to stay in it not just for a couple of seconds, but for longer periods as perceived from the external perspective of clock time. So before you are firmly established in the state of presence, which is to say before you are fully conscious, you shift back and forth for a while between consciousness and unconsciousness, between the state of presence and the state of mind identification. You lose the Now, and you return to it, again and again. Eventually, presence becomes your predominant state.

For most people, presence is experienced either never at all or only accidentally and briefly on rare occasions without being recognized for what it is. Most humans alternate not between consciousness and unconsciousness but only between different levels of unconsciousness.

**ORDINARY UNCONSCIOUSNESS
AND DEEP UNCONSCIOUSNESS**

What do you mean by different levels of unconsciousness?

As you probably know, in sleep you constantly move between the phases of dreamless sleep and the dream state. Similarly, in wakefulness most people only shift between ordinary unconsciousness and deep unconsciousness. What I call ordinary unconsciousness means being identified with your thought processes and emotions, your reactions, desires, and aversions. It is most people's normal state. In that state, you are run by the egoic mind, and you are unaware of Being. It is a state not of acute pain or unhappiness but of an almost continuous low level of unease, discontent, boredom, or nervousness — a kind of background static. You may not realize this because it is so much a part of "normal" living, just as you are not aware of a continuous low background noise, such as the hum of an air conditioner, until it stops. When it suddenly does stop, there is a sense of relief. Many people use alcohol, drugs, sex, food, work, television, or even shopping as anesthetics in an unconscious attempt to remove the basic unease. When this happens, an activity that might be very enjoyable if used in moderation becomes imbued with a compulsive or addictive quality, and all that is ever achieved through it is extremely short-lived symptom relief.

The unease of ordinary unconsciousness turns into the pain of deep unconsciousness — a state of more acute and more obvious suffering or unhappiness — when things "go wrong," when the ego is threatened or there is a major challenge, threat, or loss, real or imagined, in your life situation

or conflict in a relationship. It is an intensified version of ordinary unconsciousness, different from it not in kind but in degree.

In ordinary unconsciousness, habitual resistance to or denial of what is creates the unease and discontent that most people accept as normal living. When this resistance becomes intensified through some challenge or threat to the ego, it brings up intense negativity such as anger, acute fear, aggression, depression, and so on. Deep unconsciousness often means that the pain-body has been triggered and that you have become identified with it. Physical violence would be impossible without deep unconsciousness. It can also occur easily whenever and wherever a crowd of people or even an entire nation generates a negative collective energy field.

The best indicator of your level of consciousness is how you deal with life's challenges when they come. Through those challenges, an already unconscious person tends to become more deeply unconscious, and a conscious person more intensely conscious. You can use a challenge to awaken you, or you can allow it to pull you into even deeper sleep. The dream of ordinary unconsciousness then turns into a nightmare.

If you cannot be present even in normal circumstances, such as when you are sitting alone in a room, walking in the woods, or listening to someone, then you certainly won't be able to stay conscious when something "goes wrong" or you are faced with difficult people or situations, with loss or the threat of loss. You will be taken over by a reaction, which ultimately is always some form of fear, and pulled into deep unconsciousness. Those challenges are your tests. Only the way in which you deal with them will show you and others where you are at as far as your state of consciousness

is concerned, not how long you can sit with your eyes closed or what visions you see.

So it is essential to bring more consciousness into your life in ordinary situations when everything is going relatively smoothly. In this way, you grow in presence power. It generates an energy field in you and around you of a high vibrational frequency. No unconsciousness, no negativity, no discord or violence can enter that field and survive, just as darkness cannot survive in the presence of light.

When you learn to be the witness of your thoughts and emotions, which is an essential part of being present, you may be surprised when you first become aware of the background "static" of ordinary unconsciousness and realize how rarely, if ever, you are truly at ease within yourself. On the level of your thinking, you will find a great deal of resistance in the form of judgment, discontent, and mental projection away from the Now. On the emotional level, there will be an undercurrent of unease, tension, boredom, or nervousness. Both are aspects of the mind in its habitual resistance mode.

WHAT ARE THEY SEEKING?

Carl Jung tells in one of his books of a conversation he had with a Native American chief who pointed out to him that in his perception most white people have tense faces, staring eyes, and a cruel demeanor. He said: "They are always seeking something. What are they seeking? The whites always want something. They are always uneasy and restless. We don't know what they want. We think they are mad."

The undercurrent of constant unease started long before the rise of Western industrial civilization, of course, but in Western

civilization, which now covers almost the entire globe, including most of the East, it manifests in an unprecedentedly acute form. It was already there at the time of Jesus, and it was there six hundred years before that at the time of Buddha, and long before that. Why are you always anxious? Jesus asked his disciples. "Can anxious thought add a single day to your life?" And the Buddha taught that the root of suffering is to be found in our constant wanting and craving.

Resistance to the Now as a collective dysfunction is intrinsically connected to loss of awareness of Being and forms the basis of our dehumanized industrial civilization. Freud, by the way, also recognized the existence of this undercurrent of unease and wrote about it in his book *Civilization and Its Discontents*, but he did not recognize the true root of the unease and failed to realize that freedom from it is possible. This collective dysfunction has created a very unhappy and extraordinarily violent civilization that has become a threat not only to itself but also to all life on the planet.

DISSOLVING ORDINARY UNCONSCIOUSNESS

So how can we be free of this affliction?

Make it conscious. Observe the many ways in which unease, discontent, and tension arise within you through unnecessary judgment, resistance to what is, and denial of the Now. Anything unconscious dissolves when you shine the light of consciousness on it. Once you know how to dissolve ordinary unconsciousness, the light of your presence will shine brightly, and it will be much easier to deal with deep unconsciousness whenever you feel its gravitational pull. However,

ordinary unconsciousness may not be easy to detect initially because it is so normal.

Make it a habit to monitor your mental-emotional state through self-observation. "Am I at ease at this moment?" is a good question to ask yourself frequently. Or you can ask: "What's going on inside me at this moment?" Be at least as interested in what goes on inside you as what happens outside. If you get the inside right, the outside will fall into place. Primary reality is within, secondary reality without. But don't answer these questions immediately. Direct your attention inward. Have a look inside yourself. What kind of thoughts is your mind producing? What do you feel? Direct your attention into the body. Is there any tension? Once you detect that there is a low level of unease, the background static, see in what way you are avoiding, resisting, or denying life — by denying the Now. There are many ways in which people unconsciously resist the present moment. I will give you a few examples. With practice, your power of self-observation, of monitoring your inner state, will become sharpened.

FREEDOM FROM UNHAPPINESS

Do you resent doing what you are doing? It may be your job, or you may have agreed to do something and are doing it, but part of you resents and resists it. Are you carrying unspoken resentment toward a person close to you? Do you realize that the energy you thus emanate is so harmful in its effects that you are in fact contaminating yourself as well as those around you? Have a good look inside. Is there even the slightest trace of resentment, unwillingness? If there is,

observe it on both the mental and the emotional levels. What thoughts is your mind creating around this situation? Then look at the emotion, which is the body's reaction to those thoughts. Feel the emotion. Does it feel pleasant or unpleasant? Is it an energy that you would actually *choose* to have inside you? Do you *have* a choice?

Maybe you *are* being taken advantage of, maybe the activity you are engaged in is tedious, maybe someone close to you is dishonest, irritating, or unconscious, but all this is irrelevant. Whether your thoughts and emotions about this situation are justified or not makes no difference. The fact is that you are resisting what *is*. You are making the present moment into an enemy. You are creating unhappiness, conflict between the inner and the outer. Your unhappiness is polluting not only your own inner being and those around you but also the collective human psyche of which you are an inseparable part. The pollution of the planet is only an outward reflection of an inner psychic pollution: millions of unconscious individuals not taking responsibility for their inner space.

Either stop doing what you are doing, speak to the person concerned and express fully what you feel, or drop the negativity that your mind has created around the situation and that serves no purpose whatsoever except to strengthen a false sense of self. Recognizing its futility is important. Negativity is never the optimum way of dealing with any situation. In fact, in most cases it keeps you stuck in it, blocking real change. Anything that is done with negative energy will become contaminated by it and in time give rise to more pain, more unhappiness. Furthermore, any negative inner

state is contagious: Unhappiness spreads more easily than a physical disease. Through the law of resonance, it triggers and feeds latent negativity in others, unless they are immune — that is, highly conscious.

Are you polluting the world or cleaning up the mess? You are responsible for your inner space; nobody else is, just as you are responsible for the planet. As within, so without: If humans clear inner pollution, then they will also cease to create outer pollution.

How can we drop negativity, as you suggest?

By dropping it. How do you drop a piece of hot coal that you are holding in your hand? How do you drop some heavy and useless baggage that you are carrying? By recognizing that you don't want to suffer the pain or carry the burden anymore and then letting go of it.

Deep unconsciousness, such as the pain-body, or other deep pain, such as the loss of a loved one, usually needs to be transmuted through acceptance combined with the light of your presence — your sustained attention. Many patterns in ordinary unconsciousness, on the other hand, can simply be dropped once you know that you don't want them and don't need them anymore, once you realize that you have a choice, that you are not just a bundle of conditioned reflexes. All this implies that you are able to access the power of Now. Without it, you have no choice.

If you call some emotions negative, aren't you creating a mental polarity of good and bad, as you explained earlier?

No. The polarity was created at an earlier stage when your mind judged the present moment as bad; this judgment then created the negative emotion.

But if you call some emotions negative, aren't you really saying that they shouldn't be there, that it's not okay to have those emotions? My understanding is that we should give ourselves permission to have whatever feelings come up, rather than judge them as bad or say that we shouldn't have them. It's okay to feel resentful; it's okay to be angry, irritated, moody, or whatever — otherwise, we get into repression, inner conflict, or denial. Everything is okay as it is.

Of course. Once a mind pattern, an emotion, or a reaction is there, accept it. You were not conscious enough to have a choice in the matter. That's not a judgment, just a fact. If you *had* a choice, or realized that you *do* have a choice, would you choose suffering or joy, ease or unease, peace or conflict? Would you choose a thought or feeling that cuts you off from your natural state of well-being, the joy of life within? Any such feeling I call negative, which simply means bad. Not in the sense that "You shouldn't have done that," but just plain factual bad, like feeling sick in the stomach.

How is it possible that humans killed in excess of one hundred million fellow humans in the twentieth century alone?²⁴ Humans inflicting pain of such magnitude on one another is beyond anything you can imagine. And that's not taking into account the mental, emotional and physical violence, the torture, pain, and cruelty they continue to inflict on each other as well as on other sentient beings on a daily basis.

Do they act in this way because they are in touch with their natural state, the joy of life within? Of course not. Only people

who are in a deeply negative state, who feel very bad indeed, would create such a reality as a reflection of how they feel. Now they are engaged in destroying nature and the planet that sustains them. Unbelievable but true. Humans are a dangerously insane and very sick species. That's not a judgment. It's a fact. It is also a fact that the sanity is there underneath the madness. Healing and redemption are available right now.

Coming back specifically to what you said — it is certainly true that when you accept your resentment, moodiness, anger, and so on, you are no longer forced to act them out blindly, and you are less likely to project them onto others. But I wonder if you are not deceiving yourself. When you have been practicing acceptance for a while, as you have, there comes a point when you need to go on to the next stage, where those negative emotions are not created anymore. If you don't, your "acceptance" just becomes a mental label that allows your ego to continue to indulge in unhappiness and so strengthen its sense of separation from other people, your surroundings, your here and now. As you know, separation is the basis for the ego's sense of identity. True acceptance would transmute those feelings at once. And if you really knew deeply that everything is "okay," as you put it, and which of course is true, then would you have those negative feelings in the first place? Without judgment, without resistance to what is, they would not arise. You have an idea in your mind that "everything is okay," but deep down you don't really believe it, and so the old mental-emotional patterns of resistance are still in place. That's what makes you feel bad.

That's okay, too.

Are you defending your right to be unconscious, your right to suffer? Don't worry: Nobody is going to take that away from you. Once you realize that a certain kind of food makes you sick, would you carry on eating that food and keep asserting that it is okay to be sick?

WHEREVER YOU ARE, BE THERE TOTALLY

Can you give some more examples of ordinary unconsciousness?

See if you can catch yourself complaining, in either speech or thought, about a situation you find yourself in, what other people do or say, your surroundings, your life situation, even the weather. To complain is always nonacceptance of what is. It invariably carries an unconscious negative charge. When you complain, you make yourself into a victim. When you speak out, you are in your power. So change the situation by taking action or by speaking out if necessary or possible; leave the situation or accept it. All else is madness.

Ordinary unconsciousness is always linked in some way with denial of the Now. The Now, of course, also implies the here. Are you resisting your here and now? Some people would always rather be somewhere else. Their "here" is never good enough. Through self-observation, find out if that is the case in your life. Wherever you are, be there totally. If you find your here and now intolerable and it makes you unhappy, you have three options: remove yourself from the situation, change it, or accept it totally. If you want to take responsibility for your life, you must choose one of those three options, and you must choose now. Then accept the consequences. No excuses. No negativity. No psychic pollution. Keep your inner space clear.

If you take any action — leaving or changing your situation — drop the negativity first, if at all possible. Action arising out of insight into what is required is more effective than action arising out of negativity.

Any action is often better than no action, especially if you have been stuck in an unhappy situation for a long time. If it is a mistake, at least you learn something, in which case it's no longer a mistake. If you remain stuck, you learn nothing. Is fear preventing you from taking action? Acknowledge the fear, watch it, take your attention into it, be fully present with it. Doing so cuts the link between the fear and your thinking. *Don't let the fear rise up into your mind.* Use the power of the Now. Fear cannot prevail against it.

If there is truly nothing that you can do to change your here and now, and you can't remove yourself from the situation, then accept your here and now totally by dropping all inner resistance. The false, unhappy self that loves feeling miserable, resentful, or sorry for itself can then no longer survive. This is called surrender. Surrender is not weakness. There is great strength in it. Only a surrendered person has spiritual power. Through surrender, you will be free internally of the situation. You may then find that the situation changes without any effort on your part. In any case, you are free.

Or is there something that you "should" be doing but are not doing it? Get up and do it now. Alternatively, completely accept your inactivity, laziness, or passivity at this moment, if that is your choice. Go into it fully. Enjoy it. Be as lazy or inactive as you can. If you go into it fully and consciously, you will soon come out of it. Or maybe you won't. Either way, there is no inner conflict, no resistance, no negativity.

Are you stressed? Are you so busy getting to the future that the present is reduced to a means of getting there? Stress is caused by being "here" but wanting to be "there," or being in the present but wanting to be in the future. It's a split that tears you apart inside. To create and live with such an inner split is insane. The fact that everyone else is doing it doesn't make it any less insane. If you have to, you can move fast, work fast, or even run, without projecting yourself into the future and without resisting the present. As you move, work, run — do it totally. Enjoy the flow of energy, the high energy of that moment. Now you are no longer stressed, no longer splitting yourself in two. Just moving, running, working — and enjoying it. Or you can drop the whole thing and sit on a park bench. But when you do, watch your mind. It may say: "You should be working. You are wasting time." Observe the mind. Smile at it.

Does the past take up a great deal of your attention? Do you frequently talk and think about it, either positively or negatively? The great things that you have achieved, your adventures or experiences, or your victim story and the dreadful things that were done to you, or maybe what you did to someone else? Are your thought processes creating guilt, pride, resentment, anger, regret, or self-pity? Then you are not only reinforcing a false sense of self but also helping to accelerate your body's aging process by creating an accumulation of past in your psyche. Verify this for yourself by observing those around you who have a strong tendency to hold on to the past.

Die to the past every moment. You don't need it. Only refer to it when it is absolutely relevant to the present. Feel the power of this moment and the fullness of Being. Feel your presence.



Are you worried? Do you have many “what if” thoughts? You are identified with your mind, which is projecting itself into an imaginary future situation and creating fear. There is no way that you can cope with such a situation, because it doesn't exist. It's a mental phantom. You can stop this health- and life-corroding insanity simply by acknowledging the present moment. Become aware of your breathing. Feel the air flowing in and out of your body. Feel your inner energy field. All that you ever have to deal with, cope with, in real life — as opposed to imaginary mind projections — is *this moment*. Ask yourself what “problem” you have right now, not next year, tomorrow, or five minutes from now. What is wrong with this moment? You can always cope with the Now, but you can never cope with the future — nor do you have to. The answer, the strength, the right action or the resource will be there when you need it, not before, not after.

“One day I'll make it.” Is your goal taking up so much of your attention that you reduce the present moment to a means to an end? Is it taking the joy out of your doing? Are you waiting to start living? If you develop such a mind pattern, no matter what you achieve or get, the present will never be good enough; the future will always seem better. A perfect recipe for permanent dissatisfaction and nonfulfillment, don't you agree?

Are you a habitual “waiter”? How much of your life do you spend waiting? What I call “small-scale waiting” is waiting in

line at the post office, in a traffic jam, at the airport, or waiting for someone to arrive, to finish work, and so on. "Large-scale waiting" is waiting for the next vacation, for a better job, for the children to grow up, for a truly meaningful relationship, for success, to make money, to be important, to become enlightened. It is not uncommon for people to spend their whole life waiting to start living.

Waiting is a state of mind. Basically, it means that you want the future; you don't want the present. You don't want what you've got, and you want what you haven't got. With every kind of waiting, you unconsciously create inner conflict between your here and now, where you don't want to be, and the projected future, where you want to be. This greatly reduces the quality of your life by making you lose the present.

There is nothing wrong with striving to improve your life situation. You can improve your life situation, but you cannot improve your life. Life is primary. Life is your deepest inner Being. It is already whole, complete, perfect. Your life situation consists of your circumstances and your experiences. There is nothing wrong with setting goals and striving to achieve things. The mistake lies in using it as a substitute for the feeling of life, for Being. The only point of access for that is the Now. You are then like an architect who pays no attention to the foundation of a building but spends a lot of time working on the superstructure.

For example, many people are waiting for prosperity. It cannot come in the future. When you honor, acknowledge, and fully accept your present reality — where you are, who you are, what you are doing right now — when you fully accept what you have got, you are grateful for what you have got, grateful for what is, grateful for Being. Gratitude for the

present moment and the fullness of *life now* is true prosperity. It cannot come in the future. Then, in time, that prosperity manifests for you in various ways.

If you are dissatisfied with what you have got, or even frustrated or angry about your present lack, that may motivate you to become rich, but even if you do make millions, you will continue to experience the inner condition of lack, and deep down you will continue to feel unfulfilled. You may have many exciting experiences that money can buy, but they will come and go and always leave you with an empty feeling and the need for further physical or psychological gratification. You won't abide in Being and so feel the fullness of life now that alone is true prosperity.

So give up waiting as a state of mind. When you catch yourself slipping into waiting... snap out of it. Come into the present moment. Just be, and enjoy being. If you are present, there is never any need for you to wait for anything. So next time somebody says, "Sorry to have kept you waiting," you can reply, "That's all right, I wasn't waiting. I was just standing here enjoying myself — in joy in my self."

These are just a few of the habitual mind strategies for denying the present moment that are part of ordinary unconsciousness. They are easy to overlook because they are so much a part of normal living: the background static of perpetual discontent. But the more you practice monitoring your inner mental-emotional state, the easier it will be to know when you have been trapped in past or future, which is to say unconscious, and to awaken out of the dream of time into the present. But beware: The false, unhappy self, based on mind identification, lives on time. It knows that the present moment is its own death and so feels very threatened

by it. It will do all it can to take you out of it. It will try to keep you trapped in time.

THE INNER PURPOSE OF YOUR LIFE'S JOURNEY

I can see the truth of what you are saying, but I still think that we must have purpose on our life's journey; otherwise we just drift, and purpose means future, doesn't it? How do we reconcile that with living in the present?

When you are on a journey, it is certainly helpful to know where you are going or at least the general direction in which you are moving, but don't forget: The only thing that is ultimately real about your journey is the step that you are taking at this moment. That's all there ever is.

Your life's journey has an outer purpose and an inner purpose. The outer purpose is to arrive at your goal or destination, to accomplish what you set out to do, to achieve this or that, which, of course, implies future. But if your destination, or the steps you are going to take in the future, take up so much of your attention that they become more important to you than the step you are taking now, then you completely miss the journey's inner purpose, which has nothing to do with *where* you are going or *what* you are doing, but everything to do with *how*. It has nothing to do with future but everything to do with the quality of your consciousness at this moment. The outer purpose belongs to the horizontal dimension of space and time; the inner purpose concerns a deepening of your Being in the vertical dimension of the timeless Now. Your outer journey may contain a million steps; your inner journey only has one: the step you are

taking right now. As you become more deeply aware of this one step, you realize that it already contains within itself all the other steps as well as the destination. This one step then becomes transformed into an expression of perfection, an act of great beauty and quality. It will have taken you into Being, and the light of Being will shine through it. This is both the purpose and the fulfillment of your inner journey, the journey into yourself.



Does it matter whether we achieve our outer purpose, whether we succeed or fail in the world?

It will matter to you as long as you haven't realized your inner purpose. After that, the outer purpose is just a game that you may continue to play simply because you enjoy it. It is also possible to fail completely in your outer purpose and at the same time totally succeed in your inner purpose. Or the other way around, which is actually more common: outer riches and inner poverty, or to "gain the world and lose your soul," as Jesus puts it. Ultimately, of course, every outer purpose is doomed to "fail" sooner or later, simply because it is subject to the law of impermanence of all things. The sooner you realize that your outer purpose cannot give you lasting fulfillment, the better. When you have seen the limitations of your outer purpose, you give up your unrealistic expectation that it should make you happy, and you make it subservient to your inner purpose.

THE PAST CANNOT SURVIVE IN YOUR PRESENCE

You mentioned that thinking or talking about the past unnecessarily is one of the ways in which we avoid the present. But apart from the past that we remember and perhaps identify with, isn't there another level of past within us that is much more deep-seated? I am talking about the unconscious past that conditions our lives, especially through early childhood experiences, perhaps even past-life experiences. And then there is our cultural conditioning, which has to do with where we live geographically and the historical time period in which we live. All these things determine how we see the world, how we react, what we think, what kind of relationships we have, how we live our lives. How could we ever become conscious of all that or get rid of it? How long would that take? And even if we did, what would there be left?

What is left when illusion ends?

There is no need to investigate the unconscious past in you except as it manifests at this moment as a thought, an emotion, a desire, a reaction, or an external event that happens to you. Whatever you need to know about the unconscious past in you, the challenges of the present will bring it out. If you delve into the past, it will become a bottomless pit: There is always more. You may think that you need more time to understand the past or become free of it, in other words, that the future will eventually free you of the past. This is a delusion. Only the present can free you of the past. More time cannot free you of time. Access the power of Now. That is the key.

What is the power of Now?

None other than the power of your presence, your consciousness liberated from thought forms.

So deal with the past on the level of the present. The more attention you give to the past, the more you energize it, and the more likely you are to make a "self" out of it. Don't misunderstand: Attention is essential, but not to the past as past. Give attention to the present; give attention to your behavior, to your reactions, moods, thoughts, emotions, fears, and desires as they occur in the present. There's the past in you. If you can be present enough to watch all those things, not critically or analytically but nonjudgmentally, then you are dealing with the past and dissolving it through the power of your presence. You cannot find yourself by going into the past. You find yourself by coming into the present.

Isn't it helpful to understand the past and so understand why we do certain things, react in certain ways, or why we unconsciously create our particular kind of drama, patterns in relationships, and so on?

As you become more conscious of your present reality, you may suddenly get certain insights as to *why* your conditioning functions in those particular ways — for example, why your relationships follow certain patterns — and you may remember things that happened in the past or see them more clearly. That is fine and can be helpful, but it is not essential. What is essential is your conscious presence. *That* dissolves the past. That is the transformative agent. So don't seek to understand the past, but be as present as you can. The past cannot survive in your presence. It can only survive in your absence.

THE STATE OF PRESENCE

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS

You keep talking about the state of presence as the key. I think I understand it intellectually, but I don't know if I have ever truly experienced it. I wonder — is it what I think it is, or is it something entirely different?

It's not what you think it is! You can't think about presence, and the mind can't understand it. Understanding presence is *being present*.

Try a little experiment. Close your eyes and say to yourself: "I wonder what my next thought is going to be." Then become very alert and wait for the next thought. Be like a cat watching a mouse hole. What thought is going to come out of the mouse hole? Try it now.



Well?

I had to wait for quite a long time before a thought came in.

Exactly. As long as you are in a state of intense presence, you are free of thought. You are still, yet highly alert. The instant your conscious attention sinks below a certain level, thought rushes in. The mental noise returns; the stillness is lost. You are back in time.

To test their degree of presence, some Zen masters have been known to creep up on their students from behind and suddenly hit them with a stick. Quite a shock! If the student had been fully present and in a state of alertness, if he had "kept his loin girded and his lamp burning," which is one of the analogies that Jesus uses for presence, he would have noticed the master coming up from behind and stopped him or stepped aside. But if he were hit, that would mean he was immersed in thought, which is to say absent, unconscious.

To stay present in everyday life, it helps to be deeply rooted within yourself; otherwise, the mind, which has incredible momentum, will drag you along like a wild river.

What do you mean by "rooted within yourself"?

It means to inhabit your body fully. To always have some of your attention in the inner energy field of your body. To feel the body from within, so to speak. Body awareness keeps you present. It anchors you in the Now (see chapter 6).

THE ESOTERIC MEANING OF "WAITING"

In a sense, the state of presence could be compared to waiting. Jesus used the analogy of waiting in some of his parables.

This is not the usual bored or restless kind of waiting that is a denial of the present and that I spoke about already. It is not a waiting in which your attention is focused on some point in the future and the present is perceived as an undesirable obstacle that prevents you from having what you want. There is a qualitatively different kind of waiting, one that requires your total alertness. Something could happen at any moment, and if you are not absolutely awake, absolutely still, you will miss it. This is the kind of waiting Jesus talks about. In that state, all your attention is in the Now. There is none left for daydreaming, thinking, remembering, anticipating. There is no tension in it, no fear, just alert presence. You are present with your whole Being, with every cell of your body. In that state, the "you" that has a past and a future — the personality, if you like — is hardly there anymore. And yet nothing of value is lost. You are still essentially yourself. In fact, you are more fully yourself than you ever were before, or rather it is only now that you are truly yourself.

"Be like a servant waiting for the return of the master," says Jesus. The servant does not know at what hour the master is going to come. So he stays awake, alert, poised, still, lest he miss the master's arrival. In another parable, Jesus speaks of the five careless (unconscious) women who do not have enough oil (consciousness) to keep their lamps burning (stay present) and so miss the bridegroom (the Now) and don't get to the wedding feast (enlightenment). These five stand in contrast to the five wise women who have enough oil (stay conscious).

Even the men who wrote the Gospels did not understand the meaning of these parables, so the first misinterpretations and distortions crept in as they were written down.

With subsequent erroneous interpretations, the real meaning was completely lost. These are parables not about the end of the world but about the end of psychological time. They point to the transcendence of the egoic mind and the possibility of living in an entirely new state of consciousness.

BEAUTY ARISES IN THE STILLNESS OF YOUR PRESENCE

What you have just described is something that I occasionally experience for brief moments when I am alone and surrounded by nature.

Yes. Zen masters use the word *satori* to describe a flash of insight, a moment of no-mind and total presence. Although *satori* is not a lasting transformation, be grateful when it comes, for it gives you a taste of enlightenment. You may, indeed, have experienced it many times without knowing what it is and realizing its importance. Presence is needed to become aware of the beauty, the majesty, the sacredness of nature. Have you ever gazed up into the infinity of space on a clear night, awestruck by the absolute stillness and inconceivable vastness of it? Have you listened, truly listened, to the sound of a mountain stream in the forest? Or to the song of a blackbird at dusk on a quiet summer evening? To become aware of such things, the mind needs to be still. You have to put down for a moment your personal baggage of problems, of past and future, as well as all your knowledge; otherwise, you will see but not see, hear but not hear. Your total presence is required.

Beyond the beauty of the external forms, there is more here: something that cannot be named, something ineffable, some deep, inner, holy essence. Whenever and wherever there is

beauty, this inner essence shines through somehow. It only reveals itself to you when you are present. Could it be that this nameless essence and your presence are one and the same? Would it be there without your presence? Go deeply into it. Find out for yourself.



When you experienced those moments of presence, you likely didn't realize that you were briefly in a state of no-mind. This is because the gap between that state and the influx of thought was too narrow. Your *satori* may only have lasted for a few seconds before the mind came in, but it was there; otherwise, you would not have experienced the beauty. Mind can neither recognize nor create beauty. Only for a few seconds, while you were completely present, was that beauty or that sacredness there. Because of the narrowness of that gap and a lack of vigilance and alertness on your part, you were probably unable to see the fundamental difference between the perception, the thoughtless awareness of beauty, and the naming and interpreting of it as thought: The time gap was so small that it seemed to be a single process. The truth is, however, that the moment thought came in, all you had was a memory of it.

The wider the time gap between perception and thought, the more depth there is to you as a human being, which is to say the more conscious you are.

Many people are so imprisoned in their minds that the beauty of nature does not really exist for them. They might

say, "What a pretty flower," but that's just a mechanical mental labeling. Because they are not still, not present, they don't truly see the flower, don't feel its essence, its holiness --- just as they don't know themselves, don't feel their own essence, their own holiness.

Because we live in such a mind-dominated culture, most modern art, architecture, music, and literature are devoid of beauty, of inner essence, with very few exceptions. The reason is that the people who create those things cannot — even for a moment — free themselves from their mind. So they are never in touch with that place within where true creativity and beauty arise. The mind left to itself creates monstrosities, and not only in art galleries. Look at our urban landscapes and industrial wastelands. No civilization has ever produced so much ugliness.

REALIZING PURE CONSCIOUSNESS

Is presence the same as Being?

When you become conscious of Being, what is really happening is that Being becomes conscious of itself. When Being becomes conscious of itself — that's presence. Since Being, consciousness, and life are synonymous, we could say that presence means consciousness becoming conscious of itself, or life attaining self-consciousness. But don't get attached to the words, and don't make an effort to understand this. There is nothing that you need to understand before you can become present.

I do understand what you just said, but it seems to imply that Being, the ultimate transcendental reality, is not yet complete,

that it is undergoing a process of development. Does God need time for personal growth?

Yes, but only as seen from the limited perspective of the manifested universe. In the Bible, God declares: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, and I am the living One." In the timeless realm where God dwells, which is also *your* home, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, are one, and the essence of everything that ever has been and ever will be is eternally present in an unmanifested state of oneness and perfection — totally beyond anything the human mind can ever imagine or comprehend. In our world of seemingly separate forms, however, timeless perfection is an inconceivable concept. Here even consciousness, which is the light emanating from the eternal Source, seems to be subject to a process of development, but this is due to our limited perception. It is not so in absolute terms. Nevertheless, let me continue to speak for a moment about the evolution of consciousness in this world.

Everything that exists has Being, has God-essence, has some degree of consciousness. Even a stone has rudimentary consciousness; otherwise, it would not be, and its atoms and molecules would disperse. Everything is alive. The sun, the earth, plants, animals, humans — all are expressions of consciousness in varying degrees, consciousness manifesting as form.

The world arises when consciousness takes on shapes and forms, thought forms and material forms. Look at the millions of life forms on this planet alone. In the sea, on land, in the air — and then each life form is replicated millions of times. To what end? Is someone or something playing a game, a game with form? This is what the ancient seers of

India asked themselves. They saw the world as *lila*, a kind of divine game that God is playing. The individual life forms are obviously not very important in this game. In the sea, most life forms don't survive for more than a few minutes after being born. The human form turns to dust pretty quickly too, and when it is gone it is as if it had never been. Is that tragic or cruel? Only if you create a separate identity for each form, if you forget that its consciousness is God-essence expressing itself in form. But you don't truly know that until you realize your own God-essence as pure consciousness.

If a fish is born in your aquarium and you call him John, write out a birth certificate, tell him about his family history, and two minutes later he gets eaten by another fish — that's tragic. But it's only tragic because you projected a separate self where there was none. You got hold of a fraction of a dynamic process, a molecular dance, and made a separate entity out of it.

Consciousness takes on the disguise of forms until they reach such complexity that it completely loses itself in them. In present-day humans, consciousness is completely identified with its disguise. It only knows itself as form and therefore lives in fear of the annihilation of its physical or psychological form. This is the egoic mind, and this is where considerable dysfunction sets in. It now looks as if something had gone very wrong somewhere along the line of evolution. But even this is part of *lila*, the divine game. Finally, the pressure of suffering created by this apparent dysfunction forces consciousness to disidentify from form and awakens it from its dream of form: It regains self-consciousness, but it is at a far deeper level than when it lost it.

This process is explained by Jesus in his parable of the lost son, who leaves his father's home, squanders his wealth, becomes destitute, and is then forced by his suffering to return home. When he does, his father *loves him more* than before. The son's state is the same as it was before, yet not the same. It has an added dimension of depth. The parable describes a journey from unconscious perfection, through apparent imperfection and "evil" to conscious perfection.

Can you now see the deeper and wider significance of becoming present as the watcher of your mind? Whenever you watch the mind, you withdraw consciousness from mind forms, and it then becomes what we call the watcher or the witness. Consequently, the watcher — pure consciousness beyond form — becomes stronger, and the mental formations become weaker. When we talk about watching the mind we are personalizing an event that is truly of cosmic significance: Through you, consciousness is awakening out of its dream of identification with form and withdrawing from form. This foreshadows, but is already part of, an event that is probably still in the distant future as far as chronological time is concerned. The event is called — the end of the world.



When consciousness frees itself from its identification with physical and mental forms, it becomes what we may call pure or enlightened consciousness, or presence. This has already happened in a few individuals, and it seems destined to happen soon on a much larger scale, although there is no absolute guarantee that it *will* happen. Most humans are still

in the grip of the egoic mode of consciousness: identified with their mind and run by their mind. If they do not free themselves from their mind in time, they will be destroyed by it. They will experience increasing confusion, conflict, violence, illness, despair, madness. Egoic mind has become like a sinking ship. If you don't get off, you will go down with it. The collective egoic mind is the most dangerously insane and destructive entity ever to inhabit this planet. What do you think will happen on this planet if human consciousness remains unchanged?

Already for most humans, the only respite they find from their own minds is to occasionally revert to a level of consciousness below thought. Everyone does that every night during sleep. But this also happens to some extent through sex, alcohol, and other drugs that suppress excessive mind activity. If it weren't for alcohol, tranquilizers, antidepressants, as well as the illegal drugs, which are all consumed in vast quantities, the insanity of the human mind would become even more glaringly obvious than it is already. I believe that, if deprived of their drugs, a large part of the population would become a danger to themselves and others. These drugs, of course, simply keep you stuck in dysfunction. Their widespread use only delays the breakdown of the old mind structures and the emergence of higher consciousness. While individual users may get some relief from the daily torture inflicted on them by their minds, they are prevented from generating enough conscious presence to rise above thought and so find true liberation.

Falling back to a level of consciousness below mind, which is the pre-thinking level of our distant ancestors and of animals and plants, is not an option for us. There is no way back. If

the human race is to survive, it will have to go on to the next stage. Consciousness is evolving throughout the universe in billions of forms. So even if we didn't make it, this wouldn't matter on a cosmic scale. No gain in consciousness is ever lost, so it would simply express itself through some other form. But the very fact that I am speaking here and you are listening or reading this is a clear sign that the new consciousness is gaining a foothold on the planet.

There is nothing personal in this: I am not teaching you. You are consciousness, and you are listening to yourself. There is an Eastern saying: "The teacher and the taught together create the teaching." In any case, the words in themselves are not important. They are not the Truth; they only point to it. I speak from presence, and as I speak, you may be able to join me in that state. Although every word that I use has a history, of course, and comes from the past, as all language does, the words that I speak to you now are carriers of the high-energy frequency of presence, quite apart from the meaning they convey as words.

Silence is an even more potent carrier of presence, so when you read this or listen to me speak, be aware of the silence between and underneath the words. Be aware of the gaps. To listen to the silence, wherever you are, is an easy and direct way of becoming present. Even if there is noise, there is always some silence underneath and in between the sounds. Listening to the silence immediately creates stillness inside you. Only the stillness in you can perceive the silence outside. And what is stillness other than presence, consciousness freed from thought forms? Here is the living realization of what we have been talking about.



CHRIST: THE REALITY OF YOUR DIVINE PRESENCE

Don't get attached to any one word. You can substitute "Christ" for presence, if that is more meaningful to you. Christ is your God-essence or the Self, as it is sometimes called in the East. The only difference between Christ and presence is that Christ refers to your indwelling divinity regardless of whether you are conscious of it or not, whereas presence means your *awakened* divinity or God-essence.

Many misunderstandings and false beliefs about Christ will clear if you realize that there is no past or future in Christ. To say that Christ *was* or *will be* is a contradiction in terms. Jesus was. He was a man who lived two thousand years ago and realized divine presence, his true nature. And so he said: "Before Abraham was, I am." He did not say: "I already existed before Abraham was born." That would have meant that he was still within the dimension of time and form identity. The words *I am* used in a sentence that starts in the past tense indicate a radical shift, a discontinuity in the temporal dimension. It is a Zen-like statement of great profundity. Jesus attempted to convey directly, not through discursive thought, the meaning of presence, of self-realization. He had gone beyond the consciousness dimension governed by time, into the realm of the timeless. The dimension of eternity had come into this world. Eternity, of course, does not mean endless time, but no time. Thus, the man Jesus became Christ, a vehicle for pure consciousness. And what is

God's self-definition in the Bible? Did God say, "I have always been, and I always will be?" Of course not. That would have given reality to past and future. God said: "I AM THAT I AM." No time here, just presence.

The "second coming" of Christ is a transformation of human consciousness, a shift from time to presence, from thinking to pure consciousness, not the arrival of some man or woman. If "Christ" were to return tomorrow in some externalized form, what could he or she possibly say to you other than this: "I am the Truth. I am divine presence. I am eternal life. I am within you. I am here. I am Now."



Never personalize Christ. Don't make Christ into a form identity. Avatars, divine mothers, enlightened masters, the very few that are real, are not special as persons. Without a false self to uphold, defend, and feed, they are more simple, more ordinary than the ordinary man or woman. Anyone with a strong ego would regard them as insignificant or, more likely, not see them at all.

If you are drawn to an enlightened teacher, it is because there is already enough presence in you to recognize presence in another. There were many people who did not recognize Jesus or the Buddha, as there are and always have been many people who are drawn to false teachers. Egos are drawn to bigger egos. Darkness cannot recognize light. Only light can recognize light. So don't believe that the light is outside you or that it can only come through one particular

form. If only your master is an incarnation of God, then who are you? Any kind of exclusivity is identification with form, and identification with form means ego, no matter how well disguised.

Use the master's presence to reflect your own identity beyond name and form back to you and to become more intensely present yourself. You will soon realize that there is no "mine" or "yours" in presence. Presence is one.

Group work can also be helpful for intensifying the light of your presence. A group of people coming together in a state of presence generates a collective energy field of great intensity. It not only raises the degree of presence of each member of the group but also helps to free the collective human consciousness from its current state of mind dominance. This will make the state of presence increasingly more accessible to individuals. However, unless at least one member of the group is already firmly established in it and thus can hold the energy frequency of that state, the egoic mind can easily reassert itself and sabotage the group's endeavors. Although group work is invaluable, it is not enough, and you must not come to depend on it. Nor must you come to depend on a teacher or a master, except during the transitional period, when you are learning the meaning and practice of presence.

THE INNER BODY

BEING IS YOUR DEEPEST SELF

You spoke earlier about the importance of having deep roots within or inhabiting the body. Can you explain what you meant by that?

The body can become a point of access into the realm of Being. Let's go into that more deeply now.

I am still not quite sure if I fully understand what you mean by Being.

"Water? What do you mean by that? I don't understand it." This is what a fish would say if it had a human mind.

Please stop trying to understand Being. You have already had significant glimpses of Being, but the mind will always try to squeeze it into a little box and then put a label on it. It cannot be done. It cannot become an object of knowledge. In Being, subject and object merge into one.

Being can be *felt* as the ever-present *I am* that is beyond name and form. To feel and thus to know that you *are* and to

abide in that deeply rooted state is enlightenment, is the truth that Jesus says will make you free.

Free from what?

Free from the *illusion* that you are nothing more than your physical body and your mind. This “*illusion of the self*,” as the Buddha calls it, is the core error. Free from *fear* in its countless disguises as the inevitable consequence of that illusion — the fear that is your constant tormentor as long as you derive your sense of self only from this ephemeral and vulnerable form. And free from *sin*, which is the suffering you unconsciously inflict on yourself and others as long as this illusory sense of self governs what you think, say, and do.

LOOK BEYOND THE WORDS

I don't like the word sin. It implies that I am being judged and found guilty.

I can understand that. Over the centuries, many erroneous views and interpretations have accumulated around words such as *sin*, due to ignorance, misunderstanding, or a desire to control, but they contain an essential core of truth. If you are unable to look beyond such interpretations and so cannot recognize the reality to which the word points, then don't use it. Don't get stuck on the level of words. A word is no more than a means to an end. It's an abstraction. Not unlike a signpost, it points beyond itself. The word *honey* isn't honey. You can study and talk about honey for as long as you like, but you won't really *know* it until you taste it. After you have tasted

it, the word becomes less important to you. You won't be attached to it anymore. Similarly, you can talk or think about *God* continuously for the rest of your life, but does that mean you know or have even glimpsed the reality to which the word points? It really is no more than an obsessive attachment to a signpost, a mental idol.

The reverse also applies: If, for whatever reason, you disliked the word *honey*, that might prevent you from ever tasting it. If you had a strong aversion to the word *God*, which is a negative form of attachment, you may be denying not just the word but also the reality to which it points. You would be cutting yourself off from the possibility of experiencing that reality. All this is, of course, intrinsically connected with being identified with your mind.

So, if a word doesn't work for you anymore, then drop it and replace it with one that does work. If you don't like the word *sin*, then call it unconsciousness or insanity. That may get you closer to the truth, the reality behind the word, than a long-misused word like *sin*, and leaves little room for guilt.

I don't like those words either. They imply that there is something wrong with me. I am being judged.

Of course there is something wrong with you — and you are not being judged.

I don't mean to offend you personally, but do you not belong to the human race that killed over one hundred million members of its own species in the twentieth century alone?

You mean guilt by association?

It is not a question of guilt. But as long as you are run by the egoic mind, you are part of the collective insanity. Perhaps you haven't looked very deeply into the human condition in its state of dominance by the egoic mind. Open your eyes and see the fear, the despair, the greed, and the violence that are all-pervasive. See the heinous cruelty and suffering on an unimaginable scale that humans have inflicted and continue to inflict on each other as well as on other life forms on the planet. You don't need to condemn. Just observe. That is sin. That is insanity. That is unconsciousness. Above all, don't forget to observe your own mind. Seek out the root of the insanity there.

FINDING YOUR INVISIBLE AND INDESTRUCTIBLE REALITY

You said that identification with our physical form is part of the illusion, so how can the body, the physical form, bring you to a realization of Being?

The body that you can see and touch cannot take you into Being. But that visible and tangible body is only an outer shell, or rather a limited and distorted perception of a deeper reality. In your natural state of connectedness with Being, this deeper reality can be felt every moment as the invisible inner body, the animating presence within you. So to "inhabit the body" is to feel the body from within, to feel the life inside the body and thereby come to know that you are beyond the outer form.

But that is only the beginning of an inward journey that will take you ever more deeply into a realm of great stillness and peace, yet also of great power and vibrant life. At first, you

may only get fleeting glimpses of it, but through them you will begin to realize that you are not just a meaningless fragment in an alien universe, briefly suspended between birth and death, allowed a few short-lived pleasures followed by pain and ultimate annihilation. Underneath your outer form, you are connected with something so vast, so immeasurable and sacred, that it cannot be conceived or spoken of -- yet I am speaking of it now. I am speaking of it not to give you something to believe in but to show you how you can know it for yourself.

You are cut off from Being as long as your mind takes up all your attention. When this happens — and it happens continuously for most people — you are not in your body. The mind absorbs all your consciousness and transforms it into mind stuff. You cannot stop thinking. Compulsive thinking has become a collective disease. Your whole sense of who you are is then derived from mind activity. Your identity, as it is no longer rooted in Being, becomes a vulnerable and ever-needy mental construct, which creates fear as the predominant underlying emotion. The one thing that truly matters is then missing from your life: awareness of your deeper self — your invisible and indestructible reality.

To become conscious of Being, you need to reclaim consciousness from the mind. This is one of the most essential tasks on your spiritual journey. It will free vast amounts of consciousness that previously had been trapped in useless and compulsive thinking. A very effective way of doing this is simply to take the focus of your attention away from thinking and direct it into the body, where Being can be felt in the first instance as the invisible energy field that gives life to what you perceive as the physical body.

CONNECTING WITH THE INNER BODY

Please try it now. You may find it helpful to close your eyes for this practice. Later on, when "being in the body" has become natural and easy, this will no longer be necessary. Direct your attention into the body. Feel it from within. Is it alive? Is there life in your hands, arms, legs, and feet — in your abdomen, your chest? Can you feel the subtle energy field that pervades the entire body and gives vibrant life to every organ and every cell? Can you feel it simultaneously in all parts of the body as a single field of energy? Keep focusing on the feeling of your inner body for a few moments. Do not start to think about it. Feel it. The more attention you give it, the clearer and stronger this feeling will become. It will feel as if every cell is becoming more alive, and if you have a strong visual sense, you may get an image of your body becoming luminous. Although such an image can help you temporarily, pay more attention to the feeling than to any image that may arise. An image, no matter how beautiful or powerful, is already defined in form, so there is less scope for penetrating more deeply.



The feeling of your inner body is formless, limitless, and unfathomable. You can always go into it more deeply. If you cannot feel very much at this stage, pay attention to whatever you *can* feel. Perhaps there is just a slight tingling in your hands or feet. That's good enough for the moment. Just focus on the feeling. Your body is coming alive. Later, we will

practice some more. Please open your eyes now, but keep some attention in the inner energy field of the body even as you look around the room. The inner body lies at the threshold between your form identity and your essence identity, your true nature. Never lose touch with it.



TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE BODY

Why have most religions condemned or denied the body? It seems that spiritual seekers have always regarded the body as a hindrance or even as sinful.

Why have so few seekers become finders?

On the level of the body, humans are very close to animals. All the basic bodily functions — pleasure, pain, breathing, eating, drinking, defecating, sleeping, the drive to find a mate and procreate, and of course birth and death — we share with the animals. A long time after their fall from a state of grace and oneness into illusion, humans suddenly woke up in what seemed to be an animal body — and they found this very disturbing. "Don't fool yourself. You are no more than an animal." This seemed to be the truth that was staring them in the face. But it was too disturbing a truth to tolerate. Adam and Eve saw that they were naked, and they became afraid. Unconscious denial of their animal nature set in very quickly. The threat that they might be taken over by powerful instinctual drives and revert back to complete unconsciousness was indeed a very real one. Shame and

taboos appeared around certain parts of the body and bodily functions, especially sexuality. The light of their consciousness was not yet strong enough to make friends with their animal nature, to allow it to be and even enjoy that aspect of themselves — let alone to go deeply into it to find the divine hidden within it, the reality within the illusion. So they did what they had to do. They began to disassociate from their body. They now saw themselves as *having* a body, rather than just being it.

When religions arose, this disassociation became even more pronounced as the "you are not your body" belief. Countless people in East and West throughout the ages have tried to find God, salvation, or enlightenment through denial of the body. This took the form of denial of sense pleasures and of sexuality in particular, fasting, and other ascetic practices. They even inflicted pain on the body in an attempt to weaken or punish it because they regarded it as sinful. In Christianity, this used to be called mortification of the flesh. Others tried to escape from the body by entering trance states or seeking out-of-body experiences. Many still do. Even the Buddha is said to have practiced body denial through fasting and extreme forms of asceticism for six years, but he did not attain enlightenment until after he had given up this practice.

The fact is that no one has ever become enlightened through denying or fighting the body or through an out-of-body experience. Although such an experience can be fascinating and can give you a glimpse of the state of liberation from the material form, in the end you will always have to return to the body, where the essential work of transformation takes place. Transformation is *through* the body, not away from it. This is

why no true master has ever advocated fighting or leaving the body, although their mind-based followers often have.

Of the ancient teachings concerning the body, only certain fragments survive, such as Jesus's statement that "your whole body will be filled with light," or they survive as myths, such as the belief that Jesus never relinquished his body but remained one with it and ascended into "heaven" with it. Almost no one to this day has understood those fragments or the hidden meaning of certain myths, and the "you are not your body" belief has prevailed universally, leading to body denial and attempts to escape from the body. Countless seekers have thus been prevented from attaining spiritual realization for themselves and becoming finders.

Is it possible to recover the lost teachings on the significance of the body or to reconstruct them from the existing fragments?

There is no need for that. All spiritual teachings originate from the same Source. In that sense, there is and always has been only one master, who manifests in many different forms. I am that master, and so are you, once you are able to access the Source within. And the way to it is through the inner body. Although all spiritual teachings originate from the same Source, once they become verbalized and written down they are obviously no more than collections of words — and a word is nothing but a signpost, as we talked about earlier. All such teachings are signposts pointing the way back to the Source.

I have already spoken of the Truth that is hidden within your body, but I will summarize for you again the lost teachings of the masters — so here is another signpost. Please endeavor to feel your inner body as you read or listen.

SERMON ON THE BODY

What you perceive as a dense physical structure called the body, which is subject to disease, old age, and death, is not ultimately real — is not you. It is a misperception of your essential reality that is beyond birth and death, and is due to the limitations of your mind, which, having lost touch with Being, creates the body as evidence of its illusory belief in separation and to justify its state of fear. But do not turn away from the body, for within that symbol of impermanence, limitation, and death that you perceive as the illusory creation of your mind is concealed the splendor of your essential and immortal reality. Do not turn your attention elsewhere in your search for the Truth, for it is nowhere else to be found but within your body.

Do not fight against the body, for in doing so you are fighting against your own reality. You *are* your body. The body that you can see and touch is only a thin illusory veil. Underneath it lies the invisible inner body, the doorway into Being, into Life Unmanifested. Through the inner body, you are inseparably connected to this unmanifested One Life — birthless, deathless, eternally present. Through the inner body, you are forever one with God.

**HAVE DEEP ROOTS WITHIN**

The key is to be in a state of permanent connectedness with your inner body — to feel it at all times. This will rapidly

deepen and transform your life. The more consciousness you direct into the inner body, the higher its vibrational frequency becomes, much like a light that grows brighter as you turn up the dimmer switch and so increase the flow of electricity. At this higher energy level, negativity cannot affect you anymore, and you tend to attract new circumstances that reflect this higher frequency.

If you keep your attention in the body as much as possible, you will be anchored in the Now. You won't lose yourself in the external world, and you won't lose yourself in your mind. Thoughts and emotions, fears and desires, may still be there to some extent, but they won't take you over.

Please examine where your attention is at this moment. You are listening to me, or you are reading these words in a book. That is the focus of your attention. You are also peripherally aware of your surroundings, other people, and so on. Furthermore, there may be some mind activity around what you are hearing or reading, some mental commentary. Yet there is no need for any of this to absorb *all* your attention. See if you can be in touch with your inner body at the same time. Keep some of your attention within. Don't let it all flow out. Feel your whole body from within, as a single field of energy. It is almost as if you were listening or reading with your whole body. Let this be your practice in the days and weeks to come.

Do not give all your attention away to the mind and the external world. By all means focus on what you are doing, but feel the inner body at the same time whenever possible. Stay rooted within. Then observe how this changes your state of consciousness and the quality of what you are doing.

Whenever you are waiting, wherever it may be, use that time to feel the inner body. In this way, traffic jams and lines become very enjoyable. Instead of mentally projecting yourself away from the Now, go more deeply into the Now by going more deeply into the body.

The art of inner-body awareness will develop into a completely new way of living, a state of permanent connectedness with Being, and will add a depth to your life that you have never known before.

It is easy to stay present as the observer of your mind when you are deeply rooted within your body. No matter what happens on the outside, nothing can shake you anymore.

Unless you stay present — and inhabiting your body is always an essential aspect of it — you will continue to be run by your mind. The script in your head that you learned a long time ago, the conditioning of your mind, will dictate your thinking and your behavior. You may be free of it for brief intervals, but rarely for long. This is especially true when something “goes wrong” or there is some loss or upset. Your conditioned reaction will then be involuntary, automatic, and predictable, fueled by the one basic emotion that underlies the mind-identified state of consciousness: fear.

So when such challenges come, as they always do, make it a habit to go within at once and focus as much as you can on the inner energy field of your body. This need not take long, just a few seconds. But you need to do it the moment that the challenge presents itself. Any delay will allow a conditioned mental-emotional reaction to arise and take you over. When you focus within and feel the inner body, you immediately become still and present as you are withdrawing

consciousness from the mind. If a response is required in that situation, it will come up from this deeper level. Just as the sun is infinitely brighter than a candle flame, there is infinitely more intelligence in Being than in your mind.

As long as you are in conscious contact with your inner body, you are like a tree that is deeply rooted in the earth, or a building with a deep and solid foundation. The latter analogy is used by Jesus in the generally misunderstood parable of the two men who build a house. One man builds it on the sand, without a foundation, and when the storms and floods come, the house is swept away. The other man *digs deep* until he reaches the rock, then builds his house, which is not swept away by the floods.

BEFORE YOU ENTER THE BODY, FORGIVE

I felt very uncomfortable when I tried to put my attention on the inner body. There was a feeling of agitation and some nausea. So I haven't been able to experience what you are talking about.

What you felt was a lingering emotion that you were probably unaware of, until you started putting some attention into the body. Unless you first give it some attention, the emotion will prevent you from gaining access to the inner body, which lies at a deeper level underneath it. Attention does not mean that you start *thinking* about it. It means to just observe the emotion, to feel it fully, and so to acknowledge and accept it as it is. Some emotions are easily identified: anger, fear, grief, and so on. Others may be much harder to label. They may just be vague feelings of unease, heaviness, or constriction, halfway between an emotion and a physical sensation. In any case,

what matters is not whether you can attach a mental label to it but whether you can bring the feeling of it into awareness as much as possible. Attention is the key to transformation — and full attention also implies acceptance. Attention is like a beam of light — the focused power of your consciousness that transmutes everything into itself.

In a fully functional organism, an emotion has a very short life span. It is like a momentary ripple or wave on the surface of your Being. When you are not in your body, however, an emotion can survive inside you for days or weeks, or join with other emotions of a similar frequency that have merged and become the pain-body, a parasite that can live inside you for years, feed on your energy, lead to physical illness, and make your life miserable (see chapter 2).

So place your attention on feeling the emotion, and check whether your mind is holding on to a grievance pattern such as blame, self-pity, or resentment that is feeding the emotion. If that is the case, it means that you haven't forgiven. Non-forgiveness is often toward another person or yourself, but it may just as well be toward any situation or condition — past, present, or future — that your mind refuses to accept. Yes, there can be nonforgiveness even with regard to the future. This is the mind's refusal to accept uncertainty, to accept that the future is ultimately beyond its control. Forgiveness is to relinquish your grievance and so to let go of grief. It happens naturally once you realize that your grievance serves no purpose except to strengthen a false sense of self. Forgiveness is to offer no resistance to life — to allow life to live through you. The alternatives are pain and suffering, a greatly restricted flow of life energy, and in many cases physical disease.

The moment you truly forgive, you have reclaimed your power from the mind. Nonforgiveness is the very nature of the mind, just as the mind-made false self, the ego, cannot survive without strife and conflict. The mind cannot forgive. Only you can. You become present, you enter your body, you feel the vibrant peace and stillness that emanate from Being. That is why Jesus said: "Before you enter the temple, forgive."



YOUR LINK WITH THE UNMANIFESTED

What is the relationship between presence and the inner body?

Presence is pure consciousness — consciousness that has been reclaimed from the mind, from the world of form. The inner body is your link with the Unmanifested, and in its deepest aspect is the Unmanifested: the Source from which consciousness emanates, as light emanates from the sun. Awareness of the inner body is consciousness remembering its origin and returning to the Source.

Is the Unmanifested the same as Being?

Yes. The word *Unmanifested* attempts, by way of negation, to express That which cannot be spoken, thought, or imagined. It points to what it *is* by saying what it *is not*. *Being*, on the other hand, is a positive term. Please don't get attached to either of these words or start believing in them. They are no more than signposts.

You said that presence is consciousness that has been reclaimed from the mind. Who does the reclaiming?

You do. But since in your essence you *are* consciousness, we might as well say that it is an awakening of consciousness from the dream of form. This does not mean that your own form will instantly vanish in an explosion of light. You can continue in your present form yet be aware of the formless and deathless deep within you.

I must admit that this is way beyond my comprehension, and yet on some deeper level I seem to know what you are talking about. It's more like a feeling than anything else. Am I deceiving myself?

No, you are not. Feeling will get you closer to the truth of who you are than thinking. I cannot tell you anything that deep within you don't already know. When you have reached a certain stage of inner connectedness, you recognize the truth when you hear it. If you haven't reached that stage yet, the practice of body awareness will bring about the deepening that is necessary.

SLOWING DOWN THE AGING PROCESS

In the meantime, awareness of the inner body has other benefits in the physical realm. One of them is a significant slowing down of the aging of the physical body.

Whereas the outer body normally appears to grow old and wither fairly quickly, the inner body does not change with time, except that you may feel it more deeply and become it more fully. If you are twenty years old now, the energy field of

your inner body will feel just the same when you are eighty. It will be just as vibrantly alive. As soon as your habitual state changes from being out of the body and trapped in your mind to being in the body and present in the Now, your physical body will feel lighter, clearer, more alive. As there is more consciousness in the body, its molecular structure actually becomes less dense. More consciousness means a lessening of the illusion of materiality.

When you become identified more with the timeless inner body than with the outer body, when presence becomes your normal mode of consciousness and past and future no longer dominate your attention, you do not accumulate time anymore in your psyche and in the cells of the body. The accumulation of time as the psychological burden of past and future greatly impairs the cells' capacity for self-renewal. So if you inhabit the inner body, the outer body will grow old at a much slower rate, and even when it does, your timeless essence will shine through the outer form, and you will not give the appearance of an old person.

Is there any scientific evidence for this?

Try it out and you will be the evidence.

STRENGTHENING THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Another benefit of this practice in the physical realm is a great strengthening of the immune system, which occurs when you inhabit the body. The more consciousness you bring into the body, the stronger the immune system becomes. It is as if every cell awakens and rejoices. The body loves your attention. It is also a potent form of self-healing. Most illnesses

creep in when you are not present in the body. If the master is not present in the house, all kinds of shady characters will take up residence there. When you inhabit your body, it will be hard for unwanted guests to enter.

It is not only your physical immune system that becomes strengthened; your psychic immune system is greatly enhanced as well. The latter protects you from the negative mental-emotional force fields of others, which are highly contagious. Inhabiting the body protects you not by putting up a shield, but by raising the frequency vibration of your total energy field, so that anything that vibrates at a lower frequency, such as fear, anger, depression, and so on, now exists in what is virtually a different order of reality. It doesn't enter your field of consciousness anymore, or if it does you don't need to offer any resistance to it because it passes right through you. Please don't just accept or reject what I am saying. Put it to the test.

There is a simple but powerful self-healing meditation that you can do whenever you feel the need to boost your immune system. It is particularly effective if used when you feel the first symptoms of an illness, but it also works with illnesses that are already entrenched if you use it at frequent intervals and with an intense focus. It will also counteract any disruption of your energy field by some form of negativity. However, it is not a substitute for the moment-to-moment practice of being in the body; otherwise, its effect will only be temporary. Here it is.

When you are unoccupied for a few minutes, and especially last thing at night before falling asleep and first thing in the morning before getting up, "flood" your body with consciousness. Close your eyes. Lie flat on your back. Choose

different parts of your body to focus your attention on briefly at first: hands, feet, arms, legs, abdomen, chest, head, and so on. Feel the life energy inside those parts as intensely as you can. Stay with each part for fifteen seconds or so. Then let your attention run through the body like a wave a few times, from feet to head and back again. This need only take a minute or so. After that, feel the inner body in its totality, as a single field of energy. Hold that feeling for a few minutes. Be intensely present during that time, present in every cell of your body. Don't be concerned if the mind occasionally succeeds in drawing your attention out of the body and you lose yourself in some thought. As soon as you notice that this has happened, just return your attention to the inner body.

LET THE BREATH TAKE YOU INTO THE BODY

At times, when my mind has been very active, it has acquired such momentum that I find it impossible to take my attention away from it and feel the inner body. This happens particularly when I get into a worry or anxiety pattern. Do you have any suggestions?

If at any time you are finding it hard to get in touch with the inner body, it is usually easier to focus on your breathing first. Conscious breathing, which is a powerful meditation in its own right, will gradually put you in touch with the body. Follow the breath with your attention as it moves in and out of your body. Breathe into the body, and feel your abdomen expanding and contracting slightly with each inhalation and exhalation. If you find it easy to visualize, close your eyes and see yourself surrounded by light or immersed in a luminous substance — a sea of consciousness. Then breathe in

that light. Feel that luminous substance filling up your body and making it luminous also. Then gradually focus more on the feeling. You are now in your body. Don't get attached to any visual image.



CREATIVE USE OF MIND

If you need to use your mind for a specific purpose, use it in conjunction with your inner body. Only if you are able to be conscious without thought can you use your mind creatively, and the easiest way to enter that state is through your body. Whenever an answer, a solution, or a creative idea is needed, stop thinking for a moment by focusing attention on your inner energy field. Become aware of the stillness. When you resume thinking, it will be fresh and creative. In any thought activity, make it a habit to go back and forth every few minutes or so between thinking and an inner kind of listening, an inner stillness. We could say: don't just think with your head, think with your whole body.



THE ART OF LISTENING

When listening to another person, don't just listen with your mind, listen with your whole body. Feel the energy field of

your inner body as you listen. That takes attention away from thinking and creates a still space that enables you to truly listen without the mind interfering. You are giving the other person space — space to be. It is the most precious gift you can give. Most people don't know how to listen because the major part of their attention is taken up by thinking. They pay more attention to that than to what the other person is saying, and none at all to what really matters: the Being of the other person underneath the words and the mind. Of course, you cannot feel someone else's Being except through your own. This is the beginning of the realization of one-ness, which is love. At the deepest level of Being, you are one with all that is.

Most human relationships consist mainly of minds interacting with each other, not of human beings communicating, being in communion. No relationship can thrive in that way, and that is why there is so much conflict in relationships. When the mind is running your life, conflict, strife, and problems are inevitable. Being in touch with your inner body creates a clear space of no-mind within which the relationship can flower.

PORTALS INTO THE UNMANIFESTED

GOING DEEPLY INTO THE BODY

I can feel the energy inside my body, especially in my arms and legs, but I don't seem to be able to go more deeply, as you suggested earlier.

Make it into a meditation. It needn't take long. Ten to fifteen minutes of clock time should be sufficient. Make sure first that there are no external distractions such as telephones or people who are likely to interrupt you. Sit on a chair, but don't lean back. Keep the spine erect. Doing so will help you to stay alert. Alternatively, choose your own favorite position for meditation.

Make sure the body is relaxed. Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Feel yourself breathing into the lower abdomen, as it were. Observe how it expands and contracts slightly with each in and out breath. Then become aware of the entire inner energy field of the body. Don't think about it — *feel* it. By doing this, you reclaim consciousness from the mind. If you find it helpful, use the "light" visualization I described earlier.

When you can feel the inner body clearly as a single field of energy, let go, if possible, of any visual image and focus exclusively on the feeling. If you can, also drop any mental image you may still have of the physical body. All that is left then is an all-encompassing sense of presence or "beingness," and the inner body is felt to be without a boundary. Then take your attention even more deeply into that feeling. Become one with it. Merge with the energy field, so that there is no longer a perceived duality of the observer and the observed, of you and your body. The distinction between inner and outer also dissolves now, so there is no inner body anymore. By going deeply into the body, you have transcended the body.

Stay in this realm of pure Being for as long as feels comfortable; then become aware again of the physical body, your breathing and physical senses, and open your eyes. Look at your surroundings for a few minutes in a meditative way — that is, without labeling them mentally — and continue to feel the inner body as you do so.



Having access to that formless realm is truly liberating. It frees you from bondage to form and identification with form. It is life in its undifferentiated state prior to its fragmentation into multiplicity. We may call it the Unmanifested, the invisible Source of all things, the Being within all beings. It is a realm of deep stillness and peace, but also of joy and intense aliveness. Whenever you are present, you become "transparent" to some extent to the light, the pure consciousness that

emanates from this Source. You also realize that the light is not separate from who you are but constitutes your very essence.

THE SOURCE OF CHI

Is the Unmanifested what in the East is called chi, a kind of universal life energy?

No, it isn't. The Unmanifested is the source of chi. Chi is the inner energy field of your body. It is the bridge between the outer you and the Source. It lies halfway between the manifested, the world of form, and the Unmanifested. Chi can be likened to a river or an energy stream. If you take the focus of your consciousness deeply into the inner body, you are tracing the course of this river back to its Source. Chi is movement; the Unmanifested is stillness. When you reach a point of absolute stillness, which is nevertheless vibrant with life, you have gone beyond the inner body and beyond chi to the Source itself: the Unmanifested. Chi is the link between the Unmanifested and the physical universe.

So if you take your attention deeply into the inner body, you may reach this point, this singularity, where the world dissolves into the Unmanifested and the Unmanifested takes on form as the energy stream of chi, which then becomes the world. This is the point of birth and death. When your consciousness is directed outward, mind and world arise. When it is directed inward, it realizes its own Source and returns home into the Unmanifested. Then, when your consciousness comes back to the manifested world, you reassume the form identity that you temporarily relinquished. You have a name, a past, a life situation, a future. But in one essential

respect, you are not the same person you were before: You will have glimpsed a reality within yourself that is not "of this world," although it isn't separate from it, just as it isn't separate from you.

Now let your spiritual practice be this: As you go about your life, don't give 100 percent of your attention to the external world and to your mind. Keep some within. I have spoken about this already. Feel the inner body even when engaged in everyday activities, especially when engaged in relationships or when you are relating with nature. Feel the stillness deep inside it. Keep the portal open. It is quite possible to be conscious of the Unmanifested throughout your life. You feel it as a deep sense of peace somewhere in the background, a stillness that never leaves you, no matter what happens out here. You become a bridge between the Unmanifested and the manifested, between God and the world. This is the state of connectedness with the Source that we call enlightenment.

Don't get the impression that the Unmanifested is separate from the manifested. How could it be? It is the life within every form, the inner essence of all that exists. It pervades this world. Let me explain.

DREAMLESS SLEEP

You take a journey into the Unmanifested every night when you enter the phase of deep dreamless sleep. You merge with the Source. You draw from it the vital energy that sustains you for a while when you return to the manifested, the world of separate forms. This energy is much more vital than food: "Man does not live by bread alone." But in dreamless sleep, you don't go into it consciously. Although the bodily

functions are still operating, "you" no longer exist in that state. Can you imagine what it would be like to go into dreamless sleep with full consciousness? It is impossible to imagine it, because that state has no content.

The Unmanifested does not liberate you until you enter it consciously. That's why Jesus did not say: the truth will make you free, but rather: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." This is not a conceptual truth. It is the truth of eternal life beyond form, which is known directly or not at all. But don't attempt to stay conscious in dreamless sleep. It is highly unlikely that you will succeed. At most, you may remain conscious during the dream phase, but not beyond that. This is called lucid dreaming, which may be interesting and fascinating, but it is not liberating.

So use your inner body as a portal through which you enter the Unmanifested, and keep that portal open so that you stay connected with the Source at all times. It makes no difference, as far as the inner body is concerned, whether your outer physical body is old or young, frail or strong. The inner body is timeless. If you are not yet able to feel the inner body, use one of the other portals, although ultimately they are all one. Some I have spoken about at length already, but I'll mention them again briefly here.

OTHER PORTALS

The Now can be seen as the main portal. It is an essential aspect of every other portal, including the inner body. You cannot be *in your body* without being intensely present in the Now.

Time and the manifested are as inextricably linked as are the timeless Now and the Unmanifested. When you dissolve

psychological time through intense present-moment awareness, you become conscious of the Unmanifested both directly and indirectly. Directly, you feel it as the radiance and power of your conscious presence — no content, just presence. Indirectly, you are aware of the Unmanifested in and through the sensory realm. In other words, you feel the God-essence in every creature, every flower, every stone, and you realize: "All that is, is holy." This is why Jesus, speaking entirely from his essence or Christ identity, says in the Gospel of Thomas: "Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up a stone, and you will find me there."

Another portal into the Unmanifested is created through the cessation of thinking. This can start with a very simple thing, such as taking one conscious breath or looking, in a state of intense alertness, at a flower, so that there is no mental commentary running at the same time. There are many ways to create a gap in the incessant stream of thought. This is what meditation is all about. Thought is part of the realm of the manifested. Continuous mind activity keeps you imprisoned in the world of form and becomes an opaque screen that prevents you from becoming conscious of the Unmanifested, conscious of the formless and timeless God-essence in yourself and in all things and all creatures. When you are intensely *present*, you don't need to be concerned about the cessation of thinking, of course, because the mind then stops automatically. That's why I said the Now is an essential aspect of every other portal.

Surrender — the letting go of mental-emotional resistance to what *is* — also becomes a portal into the Unmanifested. The reason for this is simple: inner resistance cuts you off from other people, from yourself, from the world around you. It

strengthens the feeling of separateness on which the ego depends for its survival. The stronger the feeling of separateness, the more you are bound to the manifested, to the world of separate forms. The more you are bound to the world of form, the harder and more impenetrable your form identity becomes. The portal is closed, and you are cut off from the inner dimension, the dimension of depth. In the state of surrender, your form identity softens and becomes somewhat "transparent," as it were, so the Unmanifested can shine through you.

It's up to you to open a portal in your life that gives you conscious access to the Unmanifested. Get in touch with the energy field of the inner body, be intensely present, disidentify from the mind, surrender to what is; these are all portals you can use — but you only need to use one.

Surely love must also be one of those portals?

No, it isn't. As soon as one of the portals is open, love is present in you as the "feeling-realization" of oneness. Love isn't a portal; it's what comes *through* the portal into this world. As long as you are completely trapped in your form identity, there can be no love. Your task is not to search for love but to find a portal through which love can enter.

SILENCE

Are there any other portals apart from those you just mentioned?

Yes, there are. The Unmanifested is not separate from the manifested. It pervades this world, but it is so well disguised

that almost everybody misses it completely. If you know where to look, you'll find it everywhere. A portal opens up every moment.

Do you hear that dog barking in the distance? Or that car passing by? Listen carefully. Can you feel the presence of the Unmanifested in that? You can't? Look for it in the silence out of which the sounds come and into which they return. Pay more attention to the silence than to the sounds. Paying attention to outer silence creates inner silence: the mind becomes still. A portal is opening up.

Every sound is born out of silence, dies back into silence, and during its life span is surrounded by silence. Silence enables the sound to be. It is an intrinsic but unmanifested part of every sound, every musical note, every song, every word. The Unmanifested is present in this world as silence. This is why it has been said that nothing in this world is so like God as silence. All you have to do is pay attention to it. Even during a conversation, become conscious of the gaps between words, the brief silent intervals between sentences. As you do that, the dimension of stillness grows within you. You cannot pay attention to silence without simultaneously becoming still within. Silence without, stillness within. You have entered the Unmanifested.

SPACE

Just as no sound can exist without silence, nothing can exist without no-thing, without the empty space that enables it to be. Every physical object or body has come out of nothing, is surrounded by nothing, and will eventually return to nothing. Not only that, but even inside every physical body there is far

more "nothing" than "something." Physicists tell us that the solidity of matter is an illusion. Even seemingly solid matter, including your physical body, is nearly 100 percent empty space — so vast are the distances between the atoms compared to their size. What is more, even inside every atom there is mostly empty space. What is left is more like a vibrational frequency than particles of solid matter, more like a musical note. Buddhists have known that for over 2,500 years. "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form," states the *Heart Sutra*, one of the best known ancient Buddhist texts. The essence of all things is emptiness.

The Unmanifested is not only present in this world as silence; it also pervades the entire physical universe as space — from within and without. This is just as easy to miss as silence. Everybody pays attention to the things in space, but who pays attention to space itself?

You seem to be implying that "emptiness" or "nothing" is not just nothing, that there is some mysterious quality to it. What is this nothing?

You cannot ask such a question. Your mind is trying to make nothing into something. The moment you make it into something, you have missed it. Nothing — space — is the appearance of the Unmanifested as an externalized phenomenon in a sense-perceived world. That's about as much as one can say about it, and even that is a kind of paradox. It cannot become an object of knowledge. You can't do a Ph.D. on "nothing." When scientists study space, they usually make it into something and thereby miss its essence entirely. Not surprisingly, the latest theory is that space isn't empty at all, that it is filled with some substance. Once you have a theory, it's

not too hard to find evidence to substantiate it, at least until some other theory comes along.

"Nothing" can only become a portal into the Unmanifested for you if you don't try to grasp or understand it.

Isn't that what we are doing here?

Not at all. I am giving you pointers to show you how you can bring the dimension of the Unmanifested into your life. We are not trying to understand it. There is nothing to understand.

Space has no "existence." "To exist" literally means "to stand out." You cannot understand space because it doesn't stand out. Although in itself it has no existence, it enables everything else to exist. Silence has no existence either, nor does the Un-manifested.

So what happens if you withdraw attention from the objects in space and become aware of space itself? What is the essence of this room? The furniture, pictures, and so on are in the room, but they are not the room. The floor, walls, and ceiling define the boundary of the room, but they are not the room either. So what is the essence of the room? Space, of course, empty space. There would be no "room" without it. Since space is "nothing," we can say that what is *not* there is more important than what is there. So become aware of the space that is all around you. Don't think about it. Feel it, as it were. Pay attention to "nothing."

As you do that, a shift in consciousness takes place inside you. Here is why. The inner equivalent to objects in space such as furniture, walls, and so on are your mind objects:

thoughts, emotions, and the objects of the senses. And the inner equivalent of space is the consciousness that enables your mind objects to be, just as space allows all things to be. So if you withdraw attention from *things* — objects in space — you automatically withdraw attention from your mind objects as well. In other words: You cannot think and be aware of space — or of silence, for that matter. By becoming aware of the empty space around you, you simultaneously become aware of the space of no-mind, of pure consciousness: the Unmanifested. This is how the contemplation of space can become a portal for you.

Space and silence are two aspects of the same thing, the same no-thing. They are an externalization of inner space and inner silence, which is stillness: the infinitely creative womb of all existence. Most humans are completely unconscious of this dimension. There is no inner space, no stillness. They are out of balance. In other words, they know the world, or think they do, but they don't know God. They identify exclusively with their own physical and psychological form, unconscious of essence. And because every form is highly unstable, they live in fear. This fear causes a deep misperception of themselves and of other humans, a distortion in their vision of the world.

If some cosmic convulsion brought about the end of our world, the Unmanifested would remain totally unaffected by this. *A Course in Miracles* expresses this truth poignantly: "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God."

If you remain in conscious connection with the Unmanifested, you value, love, and deeply respect the manifested and every life form in it as an expression of the One Life

beyond form. You also know that every form is destined to dissolve again and that ultimately nothing out here matters all that much. You have "overcome the world," in the words of Jesus, or, as the Buddha put it, you have "crossed over to the other shore."

THE TRUE NATURE OF SPACE AND TIME

Now consider this: If there were nothing but silence, it wouldn't exist for you; you wouldn't know what it is. Only when sound appears does silence come into being. Similarly, if there were only space without any objects in space, it wouldn't exist for you. Imagine yourself as a point of consciousness floating in the vastness of space — no stars, no galaxies, just emptiness. Suddenly, space wouldn't be vast anymore; it would not be there at all. There would be no speed, no movement from here to there. At least two points of reference are needed for distance and space to come into being. Space comes into being the moment the One becomes two, and as "two" become the "ten thousand things," as Lao Tse calls the manifested world, space becomes more and more vast. So world and space arise simultaneously.

Nothing could be without space, yet space is nothing. Before the universe came into being, before the "big bang," if you like, there wasn't a vast empty space waiting to be filled. There was no space, as there was no thing. There was only the Unmanifested — the One. When the One became "the ten thousand things," suddenly space seemed to be there and enabled the many to be. Where did it come from? Was it created by God to accommodate the universe? Of course not. Space is no-thing, so it was never created.

Go out on a clear night and look up at the sky. The thousands of stars you can see with the naked eye are no more than an infinitesimal fraction of what is there. Over 100 billion galaxies can already be detected with the most powerful telescopes, each galaxy an "island universe" with billions of stars. Yet what is even more awe-inspiring is the infinity of space itself, the depth and stillness that allows all of that magnificence to be. Nothing could be more awe-inspiring and majestic than the inconceivable vastness and stillness of space, and yet what is it? Emptiness, vast emptiness.

What appears to us as space in our universe perceived through the mind and the senses is the Unmanifested itself, externalized. It is the "body" of God. And the greatest miracle is this: That stillness and vastness that enables the universe to *be* is not just out there in space — it is also within you. When you are utterly and totally *present*, you encounter it as the still inner space of no-mind. Within you, it is vast in depth, not in extension. Spacial extension is ultimately a misperception of infinite depth — an attribute of the one transcendental reality.

According to Einstein, space and time are not separate. I don't really understand it, but I think he is saying that time is the fourth dimension of space. He calls it the "space-time continuum."

Yes. What you perceive externally as space and time are ultimately illusory, but they contain a core of truth. They are the two essential attributes of God, infinity and eternity, perceived as if they had an external existence outside you. Within you, both space and time have an inner equivalent that reveals their true nature, as well as your own. Whereas space is the still, infinitely deep realm of no-mind, the inner equivalent of

time is presence, awareness of the eternal Now. Remember that there is no distinction between them. When space and time are realized within as the Unmanifested — no-mind and presence — external space and time continue to exist for you, but they become much less important. The world, too, continues to exist for you, but it will not bind you anymore.

Hence, the ultimate purpose of the world lies not within the world but in transcendence of the world. Just as you would not be conscious of space if there were no objects in space, the world is needed for the Unmanifested to be realized. You may have heard the Buddhist saying: "If there were no illusion, there would be no enlightenment." It is through the world and ultimately through *you* that the Unmanifested knows itself. You are here to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold. *That is how important you are!*

CONSCIOUS DEATH

Apart from dreamless sleep, which I mentioned already, there is one other involuntary portal. It opens up briefly at the time of physical death. Even if you have missed all the other opportunities for spiritual realization during your lifetime, one last portal will open up for you immediately after the body has died.

There are countless accounts by people who had a visual impression of this portal as radiant light and then returned from what is commonly known as a near-death experience. Many of them also spoke of a sense of blissful serenity and deep peace. In the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, it is described as "the luminous splendor of the colorless light of Emptiness,"

which it says is "your own true self." This portal opens up only very briefly, and unless you have already encountered the dimension of the Unmanifested in your lifetime, you will likely miss it. Most people carry too much residual resistance, too much fear, too much attachment to sensory experience, too much identification with the manifested world. So they see the portal, turn away in fear, and then lose consciousness. Most of what happens after that is involuntary and automatic. Eventually, there will be another round of birth and death. Their presence wasn't strong enough yet for conscious immortality.

So going through this portal does not mean annihilation?

As with all the other portals, your radiant true nature remains, but not the personality. In any case, whatever is real or of true value in your personality is your true nature shining through. This is never lost. Nothing that is of value, nothing that is *real*, is ever lost.

Approaching death and death itself, the dissolution of the physical form, is always a great opportunity for spiritual realization. This opportunity is tragically missed most of the time, since we live in a culture that is almost totally ignorant of death, as it is almost totally ignorant of anything that truly matters.

Every portal is a portal of death, the death of the false self. When you go through it, you cease to derive your identity from your psychological, mind-made form. You then realize that death is an illusion, just as your identification with form was an illusion. The end of illusion — that's all that death is. It is painful only as long as you cling to illusion.

ENLIGHTENED RELATIONSHIPS

ENTER THE NOW FROM WHEREVER YOU ARE

I always thought that true enlightenment is not possible except through love in a relationship between a man and a woman. Isn't this what makes us whole again? How can one's life be fulfilled until that happens?

Is that true in your experience? Has this happened to you?

Not yet, but how could it be otherwise? I know that it will happen.

*In other words, you are waiting for an event *in time* to save you. Is this not the core error that we have been talking about? Salvation is not elsewhere in place or time. It is here and now.*

What does that statement mean, "salvation is here and now"? I don't understand it. I don't even know what salvation means.

Most people pursue physical pleasures or various forms of psychological gratification because they believe that those

things will make them happy or free them from a feeling of fear or lack. Happiness may be perceived as a heightened sense of aliveness attained through physical pleasure, or a more secure and more complete sense of self attained through some form of psychological gratification. This is the search for salvation from a state of unsatisfactoriness or insufficiency. Invariably, any satisfaction that they obtain is short-lived, so the condition of satisfaction or fulfillment is usually projected once again onto an imaginary point away from the here and now. "When I obtain *this* or am free of *that* — then I will be okay." This is the unconscious mind-set that creates the illusion of salvation in the future.

True salvation is fulfillment, peace, life in all its fullness. It is to be who you are, to feel within you the good that has no opposite, the joy of Being that depends on nothing outside itself. It is felt not as a passing experience but as an abiding presence. In theistic language, it is to "know God" — not as something outside you but as your own innermost essence. True salvation is to know yourself as an inseparable part of the timeless and formless One Life from which all that exists derives its being.

True salvation is a state of freedom — from fear, from suffering, from a perceived state of lack and insufficiency and therefore from all wanting, needing, grasping, and clinging. It is freedom from compulsive thinking, from negativity, and above all from past and future as a psychological need. Your mind is telling you that you cannot get there from here. Something needs to happen, or you need to become this or that before you can be free and fulfilled. It is saying, in fact, that you need time — that you need to find, sort out, do, achieve, acquire, become, or understand something before

you can be free or complete. You see time as the means to salvation, whereas in truth it is the greatest obstacle to salvation. You think that you can't get there from where and who you are at this moment because you are not yet complete or good enough, but the truth is that here and now is the only point from where you *can* get there. You "get" there by realizing that you *are* there already. You find God the moment you realize that you don't need to seek God. So there is no *only* way to salvation: Any condition can be used, but no particular condition is needed. However, there is only one point of access: the Now. There can be no salvation away from this moment. You are lonely and without a partner? Enter the Now from there. You are in a relationship? Enter the Now from there.

There is nothing you can ever do or attain that will get you closer to salvation than it is at this moment. This may be hard to grasp for a mind accustomed to thinking that everything worthwhile is in the future. Nor can anything that you ever did or that was done to you in the past prevent you from saying yes to what *is* and taking your attention deeply into the Now. You cannot do this in the future. You do it now or not at all.



LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIPS

Unless and until you access the consciousness frequency of presence, all relationships, and particularly intimate relationships, are deeply flawed and ultimately dysfunctional. They

may seem perfect for a while, such as when you are "in love," but invariably that apparent perfection gets disrupted as arguments, conflicts, dissatisfaction, and emotional or even physical violence occur with increasing frequency. It seems that most "love relationships" become love/hate relationships before long. Love can then turn into savage attack, feelings of hostility, or complete withdrawal of affection at the flick of a switch. This is considered normal. The relationship then oscillates for a while, a few months or a few years, between the polarities of "love" and hate, and it gives you as much pleasure as it gives you pain. It is not uncommon for couples to become addicted to those cycles. Their drama makes them feel alive. When a balance between the positive/negative polarities is lost and the negative, destructive cycles occur with increasing frequency and intensity, which tends to happen sooner or later, then it will not be long before the relationship finally collapses.

It may appear that if you could only eliminate the negative or destructive cycles, then all would be well and the relationship would flower beautifully — but alas, this is not possible. The polarities are mutually interdependent. You cannot have one without the other. The positive already contains within itself the as yet unmanifested negative. Both are in fact different aspects of the same dysfunction. I am speaking here of what are commonly called romantic relationships — not of true love, which has no opposite because it arises from beyond the mind. Love as a continuous state is as yet very rare — as rare as conscious human beings. Brief and elusive glimpses of love, however, are possible whenever there is a gap in the stream of mind.

The negative side of a relationship is, of course, more easily recognizable as dysfunctional than the positive one. And it is also easier to recognize the source of negativity in your partner than to see it in yourself. It can manifest in many forms: possessiveness, jealousy, control, withdrawal and unspoken resentment, the need to be right, insensitivity and self-absorption, emotional demands and manipulation, the urge to argue, criticize, judge, blame, or attack, anger, unconscious revenge for past pain inflicted by a parent, and rage and physical violence.

On the positive side, you are "in love" with your partner. This is at first a deeply satisfying state. You feel intensely alive. Your existence has suddenly become meaningful because someone needs you, wants you, and makes you feel special, and you do the same for him or her. When you are together, you feel whole. The feeling can become so intense that the rest of the world fades into insignificance.

However, you may also have noticed that there is a neediness and a clinging quality to that intensity. You become addicted to the other person. He or she acts on you like a drug. You are on a high when the drug is available, but even the possibility or the thought that he or she might no longer be there for you can lead to jealousy, possessiveness, attempts at manipulation through emotional blackmail, blaming and accusing — fear of loss. If the other person does leave you, this can give rise to the most intense hostility or the most profound grief and despair. In an instant, loving tenderness can turn into a savage attack or dreadful grief. Where is the love now? Can love change into its opposite in an instant? Was it love in the first place, or just an addictive grasping and clinging?

ADDICTION AND THE SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS

Why should we become addicted to another person?

The reason why the romantic love relationship is such an intense and universally sought-after experience is that it seems to offer liberation from a deep-seated state of fear, need, lack, and incompleteness that is part of the human condition in its unredeemed and unenlightened state. There is a physical as well as a psychological dimension to this state.

On the physical level, you are obviously not whole, nor will you ever be: You are either a man or a woman, which is to say, one-half of the whole. On this level, the longing for wholeness — the return to oneness — manifests as male-female attraction, man's need for a woman, woman's need for a man. It is an almost irresistible urge for union with the opposite energy polarity. The root of this physical urge is a spiritual one: the longing for an end to duality, a return to the state of wholeness. Sexual union is the closest you can get to this state on the physical level. This is why it is the most deeply satisfying experience the physical realm can offer. But sexual union is no more than a fleeting glimpse of wholeness, an instant of bliss. As long as it is unconsciously sought as a means of salvation, you are seeking the end of duality on the level of form, where it cannot be found. You are given a tantalizing glimpse of heaven, but you are not allowed to dwell there, and find yourself again in a separate body.

On the psychological level, the sense of lack and incompleteness is, if anything, even greater than on the physical level. As long as you are identified with the mind, you have an externally derived sense of self. That is to say, you get your

sense of who you are from things that ultimately have nothing to do with who you are: your social role, possessions, external appearance, successes and failures, belief systems, and so on. This false, mind-made self, the ego, feels vulnerable, insecure, and is always seeking new things to identify with to give it a feeling that it exists. But nothing is ever enough to give it lasting fulfillment. Its fear remains; its sense of lack and neediness remains.

But then that special relationship comes along. It seems to be the answer to all the ego's problems and to meet all its needs. At least this is how it appears at first. All the other things that you derived your sense of self from before now become relatively insignificant. You now have a single focal point that replaces them all, that gives meaning to your life, and through which you define your identity: the person you are "in love" with. You are no longer a disconnected fragment in an uncaring universe, or so it seems. Your world now has a center: the loved one. The fact that the center is outside you and that, therefore, you still have an externally derived sense of self does not seem to matter at first. What matters is that the underlying feelings of incompleteness, of fear, lack, and unfulfillment so characteristic of the egoic state are no longer there — or are they? Have they dissolved, or do they continue to exist underneath the happy surface reality?

If in your relationships you experience both "love" and the opposite of love — attack, emotional violence, and so on — then it is likely that you are confusing ego attachment and addictive clinging with love. You cannot love your partner one moment and attack him or her the next. True love has no opposite. If your "love" has an opposite, then it is not love but a strong ego-need for a more complete and deeper sense of

self, a need that the other person temporarily meets. It is the ego's substitute for salvation, and for a short time it almost does feel like salvation.

But there comes a point when your partner behaves in ways that fail to meet your needs, or rather those of your ego. The feelings of fear, pain, and lack that are an intrinsic part of egoic consciousness but had been covered up by the "love relationship" now resurface. Just as with every other addiction, you are on a high when the drug is available, but invariably there comes a time when the drug no longer works for you. When those painful feelings reappear, you feel them even more strongly than before, and what is more, you now perceive your partner as the *cause* of those feelings. This means that you project them outward and attack the other with all the savage violence that is part of your pain. This attack may awaken the partner's own pain, and he or she may counter your attack. At this point, the ego is still unconsciously hoping that its attack or its attempts at manipulation will be sufficient punishment to induce your partner to change their behavior, so that it can use them again as a cover-up for your pain.

Every addiction arises from an unconscious refusal to face and move through your own pain. Every addiction starts with pain and ends with pain. Whatever the substance you are addicted to — alcohol, food, legal or illegal drugs, or a person — you are using something or somebody to cover up your pain. That is why, after the initial euphoria has passed, there is so much unhappiness, so much pain in intimate relationships. They do not cause pain and unhappiness. They *bring out* the pain and unhappiness that is already in you. Every addiction does that. Every addiction reaches a point where it

does not work for you anymore, and then you feel the pain more intensely than ever.

This is one reason why most people are always trying to escape from the present moment and are seeking some kind of salvation in the future. The first thing that they might encounter if they focused their attention on the Now is their own pain, and this is what they fear. If they only knew how easy it is to access in the Now the power of presence that dissolves the past and its pain, the reality that dissolves the illusion. If they only knew how close they are to their own reality, how close to God.

Avoidance of relationships in an attempt to avoid pain is not the answer either. The pain is there anyway. Three failed relationships in as many years are more likely to force you into awakening than three years on a desert island or shut away in your room. But if you could bring intense presence into your aloneness, that would work for you too.



FROM ADDICTIVE TO ENLIGHTENED RELATIONSHIPS

Can we change an addictive relationship into a true one?

Yes. Being present and intensifying your presence by taking your attention ever more deeply into the Now: Whether you are living alone or with a partner, this remains the key. For love to flourish, the light of your presence needs to be strong enough so that you no longer get taken over by the thinker or

the pain-body and mistake them for who you are. To know yourself as the Being underneath the thinker, the stillness underneath the mental noise, the love and joy underneath the pain, is freedom, salvation, enlightenment. To disidentify from the pain-body is to bring presence into the pain and thus transmute it. To disidentify from thinking is to be the silent watcher of your thoughts and behavior, especially the repetitive patterns of your mind and the roles played by the ego.

If you stop investing it with "selfness," the mind loses its compulsive quality, which basically is the compulsion to judge, and so to resist what *is*, which creates conflict, drama, and new pain. In fact, the moment that judgment stops through acceptance of what *is*, you are free of the mind. You have made room for love, for joy, for peace. First you stop judging yourself; then you stop judging your partner. The greatest catalyst for change in a relationship is complete acceptance of your partner as he or she is, without needing to judge or change them in any way. That immediately takes you beyond ego. All mind games and all addictive clinging are then over. There are no victims and no perpetrators anymore, no accuser and accused. This is also the end of all codependency, of being drawn into somebody else's unconscious pattern and thereby enabling it to continue. You will then either separate — in love — or move ever more deeply into the Now together — into Being. Can it be that simple? Yes, it is that simple.

Love is a state of Being. Your love is not outside; it is deep within you. You can never lose it, and it cannot leave you. It is not dependent on some other body, some external form. In the stillness of your presence, you can feel your own formless and timeless reality as the unmanifested life that

animates your physical form. You can then feel the same life deep within every other human and every other creature. You look beyond the veil of form and separation. This is the realization of oneness. This is love.

What is God? The eternal One Life underneath all the forms of life. What is love? To feel the presence of that One Life deep within yourself and within all creatures. To be it. Therefore, all love is the love of God.



Love is not selective, just as the light of the sun is not selective. It does not make one person special. It is not exclusive. Exclusivity is not the love of God but the "love" of ego. However, the intensity with which true love is felt can vary. There may be one person who reflects your love back to you more clearly and more intensely than others, and if that person feels the same toward you, it can be said that you are in a love relationship with him or her. The bond that connects you with that person is the same bond that connects you with the person sitting next to you on a bus, or with a bird, a tree, a flower. Only the degree of intensity with which it is felt differs.

Even in an otherwise addictive relationship, there may be moments when something more real shines through, something beyond your mutual addictive needs. These are moments when both your and your partner's mind briefly subside and the pain-body is temporarily in a dormant state. This may sometimes happen during physical intimacy, or when you are both witnessing the miracle of childbirth,

or in the presence of death, or when one of you is seriously ill — anything that renders the mind powerless. When this happens, your Being, which is usually buried underneath the mind, becomes revealed, and it is this that makes true communication possible.

True communication is communion — the realization of oneness, which is love. Usually, this is quickly lost again, unless you are able to stay present enough to keep out the mind and its old patterns. As soon as the mind and mind identification return, you are no longer yourself but a mental image of yourself, and you start playing games and roles again to get your ego needs met. You are a human mind again, pretending to be a human being, interacting with another mind, playing a drama called "love."

Although brief glimpses are possible, love cannot flourish unless you are permanently free of mind identification and your presence is intense enough to have dissolved the pain-body — or you can at least remain present as the watcher. The pain-body cannot then take you over and so become destructive of love.

RELATIONSHIPS AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

As the egoic mode of consciousness and all the social, political, and economic structures that it created enter the final stage of collapse, the relationships between men and women reflect the deep state of crisis in which humanity now finds itself. As humans have become increasingly identified with their mind, most relationships are not rooted in Being and so turn into a source of pain and become dominated by problems and conflict.

Millions are now living alone or as single parents, unable to establish an intimate relationship or unwilling to repeat the insane drama of past relationships. Others go from one relationship to another, from one pleasure-and-pain cycle to another, in search of the elusive goal of fulfillment through union with the opposite energy polarity. Still others compromise and continue to be together in a dysfunctional relationship in which negativity prevails, for the sake of the children or security, through force of habit, fear of being alone, or some other mutually "beneficial" arrangement, or even through the unconscious addiction to the excitement of emotional drama and pain.

However, every crisis represents not only danger but also opportunity. If relationships energize and magnify egoic mind patterns and activate the pain-body, as they do at this time, why not accept this fact rather than try to escape from it? Why not cooperate with it instead of avoiding relationships or continuing to pursue the phantom of an ideal partner as an answer to your problems or a means of feeling fulfilled? The opportunity that is concealed within every crisis does not manifest until all the facts of any given situation are acknowledged and fully accepted. As long as you deny them, as long as you try to escape from them or wish that things were different, the window of opportunity does not open up, and you remain trapped inside that situation, which will remain the same or deteriorate further.

With the acknowledgment and acceptance of the facts also comes a degree of freedom from them. For example, when you know there is disharmony and you hold that "knowing," through your knowing a new factor has come in, and the disharmony cannot remain unchanged. When you know you

are not at peace, your knowing creates a still space that surrounds your nonpeace in a loving and tender embrace and then transmutes your nonpeace into peace. As far as inner transformation is concerned, there is nothing you can do about it. You cannot transform yourself, and you certainly cannot transform your partner or anybody else. All you can do is create a space for transformation to happen, for grace and love to enter.



So whenever your relationship is not working, whenever it brings out the "madness" in you and in your partner, be glad. What was unconscious is being brought up to the light. It is an opportunity for salvation. Every moment, hold the knowing of that moment, particularly of your inner state. If there is anger, know that there is anger. If there is jealousy, defensiveness, the urge to argue, the need to be right, an inner child demanding love and attention, or emotional pain of any kind — whatever it is, know the reality of that moment and hold the knowing. The relationship then becomes your *sadhana*, your spiritual practice. If you observe unconscious behavior in your partner, hold it in the loving embrace of your knowing so that you won't react. Unconsciousness and knowing cannot coexist for long — even if the knowing is only in the other person and not in the one who is acting out the unconsciousness. The energy form that lies behind hostility and attack finds the presence of love absolutely intolerable. If you react at all to your partner's unconsciousness, you become unconscious yourself. But if you then remember to know your reaction, nothing is lost.

Humanity is under great pressure to evolve because it is our only chance of survival as a race. This will affect every aspect of your life and close relationships in particular. Never before have relationships been as problematic and conflict ridden as they are now. As you may have noticed, they are not here to make you happy or fulfilled. If you continue to pursue the goal of salvation through a relationship, you will be disillusioned again and again. But if you accept that the relationship is here to make you *conscious* instead of happy, then the relationship will offer you salvation, and you will be aligning yourself with the higher consciousness that wants to be born into this world. For those who hold on to the old patterns, there will be increasing pain, violence, confusion, and madness.

I suppose that it takes two to make a relationship into a spiritual practice, as you suggest. For example, my partner is still acting out his old patterns of jealousy and control. I have pointed this out many times, but he is unable to see it.

How many people does it take to make your life into a spiritual practice? Never mind if your partner will not cooperate. Sanity — consciousness — can only come into this world through you. You do not need to wait for the world to become sane, or for somebody else to become conscious, before you can be enlightened. You may wait forever. Do not accuse each other of being unconscious. The moment you start to argue, you have identified with a mental position and are now defending not only that position but also your sense of self. The ego is in charge. You have become unconscious. At times, it may be appropriate to point out certain aspects of your partner's behavior. If you are very alert, very present,

you can do so without ego involvement — without blaming, accusing, or making the other wrong.

When your partner behaves unconsciously, relinquish all judgment. Judgment is either to confuse someone's unconscious behavior with who they are or to project your own unconsciousness onto another person and mistake *that* for who they are. To relinquish judgment does not mean that you do not recognize dysfunction and unconsciousness when you see it. It means "being the knowing" rather than "being the reaction" and the judge. You will then either be totally free of reaction or you may react and still be the knowing, the space in which the reaction is watched and allowed to be. Instead of fighting the darkness, you bring in the light. Instead of reacting to delusion, you see the delusion yet at the same time look through it. Being the knowing creates a clear space of loving presence that allows all things and all people to be as they are. No greater catalyst for transformation exists. If you practice this, your partner cannot stay with you *and* remain unconscious.

If you both agree that the relationship will be your spiritual practice, so much the better. You can then express your thoughts and feelings to each other as soon as they occur, or as soon as a reaction comes up, so that you do not create a time gap in which an unexpressed or unacknowledged emotion or grievance can fester and grow. Learn to give expression to what you feel without blaming. Learn to listen to your partner in an open, nondefensive way. Give your partner space for expressing himself or herself. Be present. Accusing, defending, attacking — all those patterns that are designed to strengthen or protect the ego or to get its needs met will then become redundant. Giving space to others —

and to yourself — is vital. Love cannot flourish without it. When you have removed the two factors that are destructive to relationships — when the pain-body has been transmuted and you are no longer identified with mind and mental positions — and if your partner has done the same, you will experience the bliss of the flowering of relationship. Instead of mirroring to each other your pain and your unconsciousness, instead of satisfying your mutual addictive ego needs, you will reflect back to each other the love that you feel deep within, the love that comes with the realization of your oneness with all that is. This is the love that has no opposite.

If your partner is still identified with the mind and the pain-body while you are already free, this will represent a major challenge — not to you but to your partner. It is not easy to live with an enlightened person, or rather it is so easy that the ego finds it extremely threatening. Remember that the ego needs problems, conflict, and "enemies" to strengthen the sense of separateness on which its identity depends. The unenlightened partner's mind will be deeply frustrated because its fixed positions are not resisted, which means they will become shaky and weak, and there is even the "danger" that they may collapse altogether, resulting in loss of self. The pain-body is demanding feedback and not getting it. The need for argument, drama, and conflict is not being met. But beware: Some people who are unresponsive, withdrawn, insensitive, or cut off from their feelings may think and try to convince others that they are enlightened, or at least that there is "nothing wrong" with them and everything wrong with their partner. Men tend to do that more than women. They may see their female partners as irrational or emotional. But if you can feel your emotions, you are not far from the radiant inner body just underneath. If you are

mainly in your head, the distance is much greater, and you need to bring consciousness into the emotional body before you can reach the inner body.

If there isn't an emanation of love and joy, complete presence and openness toward all beings, then it is not enlightenment. Another indicator is how a person behaves in difficult or challenging situations or when things "go wrong." If your "enlightenment" is egoic self-delusion, then life will soon give you a challenge that will bring out your unconsciousness in whatever form — as fear, anger, defensiveness, judgment, depression, and so on. If you are in a relationship, many of your challenges will come through your partner. For example, a woman may be challenged by an unresponsive male partner who lives almost entirely in his head. She will be challenged by his inability to *hear* her, to give her attention and space to be, which is due to his lack of presence. The absence of love in the relationship, which is usually more keenly felt by a woman than a man, will trigger the woman's pain-body, and through it she will attack her partner — blame, criticize, make wrong, and so on. This in turn now becomes *his* challenge. To defend himself against her pain-body's attack, which he sees as totally unwarranted, he will become even more deeply entrenched in his mental positions as he justifies, defends himself, or counterattacks. Eventually, this may activate his own pain-body. When both partners have thus been taken over, a level of deep unconsciousness has been reached, of emotional violence, savage attack and counterattack. It will not subside until both pain-bodies have replenished themselves and then enter the dormant stage. Until the next time.

This is only one of an endless number of possible scenarios. Many volumes have been written, and many more could be

written, about the ways in which unconsciousness is brought out in male-female relationships. But, as I said earlier, once you understand the root of the dysfunction, you do not need to explore its countless manifestations.

Let's briefly look again at the scenario I have just described. Every challenge that it contains is actually a disguised opportunity for salvation. At every stage of the unfolding dysfunctional process, freedom from unconsciousness is possible. For example, the woman's hostility could become a signal for the man to come out of his mind-identified state, awaken into the Now, become present — instead of becoming even more identified with his mind, even more unconscious. Instead of "being" the pain-body, the woman could be the knowing that watches the emotional pain in herself, thus accessing the power of the Now and initiating the transmutation of the pain. This would remove the compulsive and automatic outward projection of it. She could then express her feelings to her partner. There is no guarantee, of course, that he will listen, but it gives him a good chance to become present and certainly breaks the insane cycle of the involuntary acting out of old mind patterns. If the woman misses that opportunity, the man could watch his own mental-emotional reaction to her pain, his own defensiveness, rather than *being* the reaction. He could then watch his own pain-body being triggered and thus bring consciousness into his emotions. In this way, a clear and still space of pure awareness would come into being — the knowing, the silent witness, the watcher. This awareness does not deny the pain and yet is beyond it. It allows the pain to be and yet transmutes it at the same time. It accepts everything and transforms everything. A door would have opened up for her through which she could easily join him in that space.

If you are consistently or at least predominantly present in your relationship, this will be the greatest challenge for your partner. They will not be able to tolerate your presence for very long and stay unconscious. If they are ready, they will walk through the door that you opened for them and join you in that state. If they are not, you will separate like oil and water. The light is too painful for someone who wants to remain in darkness.

WHY WOMEN ARE CLOSER TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Are the obstacles to enlightenment the same for a man as for a woman?

Yes, but the emphasis is different. Generally speaking, it is easier for a woman to feel and be in her body, so she is naturally closer to Being and potentially closer to enlightenment than a man. This is why many ancient cultures instinctively chose female figures or analogies to represent or describe the formless and transcendental reality. It was often seen as a womb that gives birth to everything in creation and sustains and nourishes it during its life as form. In the *Tao Te Ching*, one of the most ancient and profound books ever written, the *Tao*, which could be translated as *Being*, is described as "infinite, eternally present, the mother of the universe." Naturally, women are closer to it than men since they virtually "embody" the Unmanifested. What is more, all creatures and all things must eventually return to the Source. "All things vanish into the Tao. It alone endures." Since the Source is seen as female, this is represented as the light and dark sides of the archetypal feminine in psychology

and mythology. The Goddess or Divine Mother has two aspects: She gives life, and she takes life.

When the mind took over and humans lost touch with the reality of their divine essence, they started to think of God as a male figure. Society became male-dominated, and the female was made subordinate to the male.

I am not suggesting a return to earlier female representations of the divine. Some people now use the term *Goddess* instead of *God*. They are redressing a balance between male and female that was lost a long time ago, and that is good. But it is still a representation and a concept, perhaps temporarily useful, just as a map or a signpost is temporarily useful, but more a hindrance than a help when you are ready to realize the reality beyond all concepts and images. What does remain true, however, is that the energy frequency of the mind appears to be essentially male. The mind resists, fights for control, uses, manipulates, attacks, tries to grasp and possess, and so on. This is why the traditional God is a patriarchal, controlling authority figure, an often angry man who you should live in fear of, as the Old Testament suggests. This God is a projection of the human mind.

To go beyond the mind and reconnect with the deeper reality of Being, very different qualities are needed: surrender, non-judgment, an openness that allows life to be instead of resisting it, the capacity to hold all things in the loving embrace of your knowing. All these qualities are much more closely related to the female principle. Whereas mind-energy is hard and rigid, Being-energy is soft and yielding and yet infinitely more powerful than mind. The mind runs our civilization, whereas Being is in charge of all life on our planet and

beyond. Being is the very Intelligence whose visible manifestation is the physical universe. Although women are potentially closer to it, men can also access it within themselves.

At this time, the vast majority of men as well as women are still in the grip of the mind: identified with the thinker and the pain-body. This, of course, is what prevents enlightenment and the flowering of love. As a general rule, the major obstacle for men tends to be the thinking mind, and the major obstacle for women the pain-body, although in certain individual cases the opposite may be true, and in others the two factors may be equal.

DISSOLVING THE COLLECTIVE FEMALE PAIN-BODY

Why is the pain-body more of an obstacle for women?

The pain-body usually has a collective as well as a personal aspect. The personal aspect is the accumulated residue of emotional pain suffered in one's own past. The collective one is the pain accumulated in the collective human psyche over thousands of years through disease, torture, war, murder, cruelty, madness, and so on. Everyone's personal pain-body also partakes of this collective pain-body. There are different strands in the collective pain-body. For example, certain races or countries in which extreme forms of strife and violence occur have a heavier collective pain-body than others. Anyone with a strong pain-body and not enough consciousness to disidentify from it will not only continuously or periodically be forced to relive their emotional pain but may also easily become either the perpetrator or the victim of violence, depending on whether their pain-body is predominantly active or passive. On the other hand, they may also be potentially

closer to enlightenment. This potential isn't necessarily realized, of course, but if you are trapped in a nightmare you will probably be more strongly motivated to awaken than someone who is just caught in the ups and downs of an ordinary dream.

Apart from her personal pain-body, every woman has her share in what could be described as the collective female pain-body — unless she is fully conscious. This consists of accumulated pain suffered by women partly through male subjugation of the female, through slavery, exploitation, rape, childbirth, child loss, and so on, over thousands of years. The emotional or physical pain that for many women precedes and coincides with the menstrual flow is the pain-body in its collective aspect that awakens from its dormancy at that time, although it can be triggered at other times too. It restricts the free flow of life energy through the body, of which menstruation is a physical expression. Let's dwell on this for a moment and see how it can become an opportunity for enlightenment.

Often a woman is "taken over" by the pain-body at that time. It has an extremely powerful energetic charge that can easily pull you into unconscious identification with it. You are then actively possessed by an energy field that occupies your inner space and pretends to be you — but, of course, is not you at all. It speaks through you, acts through you, thinks through you. It will create negative situations in your life so that it can feed on the energy. It wants more pain, in whatever form. I have described this process already. It can be vicious and destructive. It is pure pain, past pain — and it is not you.

The number of women who are now approaching the fully conscious state already exceeds that of men and will be growing even faster in the years to come. Men may catch up with

them in the end, but for some considerable time there will be a gap between the consciousness of men and that of women. Women are regaining the function that is their birthright and, therefore, comes to them more naturally than it does to men: to be a bridge between the manifested world and the Unmanifested, between physicality and spirit. Your main task as a woman now is to transmute the pain-body so that it no longer comes between you and your true self, the essence of who you are. Of course, you also have to deal with the other obstacle to enlightenment, which is the thinking mind, but the intense presence you generate when dealing with the pain-body will also free you from identification with the mind.

The first thing to remember is this: As long as you make an identity for yourself out of the pain, you cannot become free of it. As long as part of your sense of self is invested in your emotional pain, you will unconsciously resist or sabotage every attempt that you make to heal that pain. Why? Quite simply because you want to keep yourself intact, and the pain has become an essential part of you. This is an unconscious process, and the only way to overcome it is to make it conscious.

To suddenly see that you are or have been attached to your pain can be quite a shocking realization. The moment you realize this, you have broken the attachment. The pain-body is an energy field, almost like an entity, that has become temporarily lodged in your inner space. It is life energy that has become trapped, energy that is no longer flowing. Of course, the pain-body is there because of certain things that happened in the past. It is the living past in you, and if you identify with it, you identify with the past. A victim identity is the belief that the past is more powerful than the present, which

is the opposite of the truth. It is the belief that other people and what they did to you are responsible for who you are now, for your emotional pain or your inability to be your true self. The truth is that the only power there is is contained within this moment: It is the power of your presence. Once you know that, you also realize that you are responsible for your inner space now — nobody else is — and that the past cannot prevail against the power of the Now.



So identification prevents you from dealing with the pain-body. Some women who are already conscious enough to have relinquished their victim identity on the personal level are still holding on to a collective victim identity: "what men did to women." They are right — and they are also wrong. They are right inasmuch as the collective female pain-body is in large part due to male violence inflicted on women and repression of the female principle throughout the planet over millennia. They are wrong if they derive a sense of self from this fact and thereby keep themselves imprisoned in a collective victim identity. If a woman is still holding on to anger, resentment, or condemnation, she is holding on to her pain-body. This may give her a comforting sense of identity, of solidarity with other women, but it is keeping her in bondage to the past and blocking full access to her essence and true power. If women exclude themselves from men, that fosters a sense of separation and therefore a strengthening of the ego. And the stronger the ego, the more distant you are from your true nature.

So do not use the pain-body to give you an identity. Use it for enlightenment instead. Transmute it into consciousness. One of the best times for this is during menses. I believe that, in the years to come, many women will enter the fully conscious state during that time. Usually, it is a time of unconsciousness for many women, as they are taken over by the collective female pain-body. Once you have reached a certain level of consciousness, however, you can reverse this, so instead of becoming unconscious you become *more* conscious. I have described the basic process already, but let me take you through it again, this time with special reference to the collective female pain-body.

When you know that the menstrual flow is approaching, before you feel the first signs of what is commonly called premenstrual tension, the awakening of the collective female pain-body, become very alert and inhabit your body as fully as possible. When the first sign appears, you need to be alert enough to "catch" it before it takes you over. For example, the first sign may be a sudden, strong irritation or a flash of anger, or it may be a purely physical symptom. Whatever it is, catch it before it can take over your thinking or behavior. This simply means putting the spotlight of your attention on it. If it is an emotion, feel the strong energy charge behind it. Know that it is the pain-body. At the same time, be the knowing; that is to say, be aware of your conscious presence and feel its power. Any emotion that you take your presence into will quickly subside and become transmuted. If it is a purely physical symptom, the attention that you give it will prevent it from turning into an emotion or a thought. Then continue to be alert and wait for the next sign of the pain-body. When it appears, catch it again in the same way as before.

Later, when the pain-body has fully awakened from its dormant state, you may experience considerable turbulence in your inner space for a while, perhaps for several days. Whatever form this takes, stay present. Give it your complete attention. Watch the turbulence inside you. Know it is there. Hold the knowing, and be the knowing. Remember: Do not let the pain-body use your mind and take over your thinking. Watch it. Feel its energy directly, inside your body. As you know, full attention means full acceptance.

Through sustained attention and thus acceptance, there comes transmutation. The pain-body becomes transformed into radiant consciousness, just as a piece of wood, when placed in or near a fire, itself is transformed into fire. Menstruation will then become not only a joyful and fulfilling expression of your womanhood but also a sacred time of transmutation, when you give birth to a new consciousness. Your true nature then shines forth, both in its female aspect as the Goddess and in its transcendental aspect as the divine Being that you are beyond male and female duality.

If your male partner is conscious enough, he can help you with the practice I have just described by holding the frequency of intense presence particularly at this time. If he stays present whenever you fall back into unconscious identification with the pain-body, which can and will happen at first, you will be able to quickly rejoin him in that state. This means that whenever the pain-body temporarily takes over, whether during menses or at other times, your partner will not mistake it for who you are. Even if the pain-body attacks him, as it probably will, he will not react to it as if it were "you," withdraw, or put up some kind of defense. He will hold the space of intense presence. Nothing else is needed

for transformation. At other times, you will be able to do the same for him or help him reclaim consciousness from the mind by drawing his attention into the here and now whenever he becomes identified with his thinking.

In this way, a permanent energy field of a pure and high frequency will arise between you. No illusion, no pain, no conflict, nothing that is not you, and nothing that is not love can survive in it. This represents the fulfillment of the divine, transpersonal purpose of your relationship. It becomes a vortex of consciousness that will draw in many others.



GIVE UP THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF

When one is fully conscious, would one still have a need for a relationship? Would a man still feel drawn to a woman? Would a woman still feel incomplete without a man?

Enlightened or not, you are either a man or a woman, so on the level of your form identity you are not complete. You are one-half of the whole. This incompleteness is felt as male-female attraction, the pull toward the opposite energy polarity, no matter how conscious you are. But in that state of inner connectedness, you feel this pull somewhere on the surface or periphery of your life. Anything that happens to you in that state feels somewhat like that. The whole world seems like waves or ripples on the surface of a vast and deep ocean. You are that ocean and, of course, you are also a ripple, but a ripple that has realized its true identity as the

ocean, and compared to that vastness and depth, the world of waves and ripples is not all that important.

This does not mean that you don't relate deeply to other people or to your partner. In fact, you can relate deeply *only* if you are conscious of Being. Coming from Being, you are able to focus beyond the veil of form. In Being, male and female are one. Your form may continue to have certain needs, but Being has none. It is already complete and whole. If those needs are met, that is beautiful, but whether or not they are met makes no difference to your deep inner state. So it is perfectly possible for an enlightened person, if the need for the male or female polarity is not met, to feel a sense of lack or incompleteness on the outer level of his or her being, yet at the same time be totally complete, fulfilled, and at peace within.

In the quest for enlightenment, is being gay a help or a hindrance, or does it not make any difference?

As you approach adulthood, uncertainty about your sexuality followed by the realization that you are "different" from others may force you to disidentify from socially conditioned patterns of thought and behavior. This will automatically raise your level of consciousness above that of the unconscious majority, whose members unquestioningly take on board all inherited patterns. In that respect, being gay can be a help. Being an outsider to some extent, someone who does not "fit in" with others or is rejected by them for whatever reason, makes life difficult, but it also places you at an advantage as far as enlightenment is concerned. It takes you out of unconsciousness almost by force.

On the other hand, if you then develop a sense of identity based on your gayness, you have escaped one trap only to fall into another. You will play roles and games dictated by a mental image you have of yourself as gay. You will become unconscious. You will become unreal. Underneath your ego mask, you will become very unhappy. If this happens to you, being gay will have become a hindrance. But you always get another chance, of course. Acute unhappiness can be a great awakener.

Is it not true that you need to have a good relationship with yourself and love yourself before you can have a fulfilling relationship with another person?

If you cannot be at ease with yourself when you are alone, you will seek a relationship to cover up your unease. You can be sure that the unease will then reappear in some other form within the relationship, and you will probably hold your partner responsible for it.

All you really need to do is accept this moment fully. You are then at ease in the here and now and at ease with yourself.

But do you need to have a relationship with yourself at all? Why can't you just be yourself? When you have a relationship with yourself, you have split yourself into two: "I" and "myself," subject and object. That mind-created duality is the root cause of all unnecessary complexity, of all problems and conflict in your life. In the state of enlightenment, you are yourself — "you" and "yourself" merge into one. You do not judge yourself, you do not feel sorry for yourself, you are not proud of yourself, you do not love yourself, you do not

hate yourself, and so on. The split caused by self-reflective consciousness is healed, its curse removed. There is no "self" that you need to protect, defend, or feed anymore. When you are enlightened, there is one relationship that you no longer have: the relationship with yourself. Once you have given that up, all your other relationships will be love relationships.

BEYOND HAPPINESS AND UNHAPPINESS THERE IS PEACE

THE HIGHER GOOD BEYOND GOOD AND BAD

Is there a difference between happiness and inner peace?

Yes. Happiness depends on conditions being perceived as positive; inner peace does not.

Is it not possible to attract only positive conditions into our life? If our attitude and our thinking are always positive, we would manifest only positive events and situations, wouldn't we?

Do you truly know what is positive and what is negative? Do you have the total picture? There have been many people for whom limitation, failure, loss, illness, or pain in whatever form turned out to be their greatest teacher. It taught them to let go of false self-images and superficial ego-dictated goals and desires. It gave them depth, humility, and compassion. It made them more *real*.

Whenever anything negative happens to you, there is a deep lesson concealed within it, although you may not see it at the

time. Even a brief illness or an accident can show you what is real and unreal in your life, what ultimately matters and what doesn't.

Seen from a higher perspective, conditions *are* always positive. To be more precise: they are neither positive nor negative. They are as they are. And when you live in complete acceptance of what *is* — which is the only sane way to live — there is no "good" or "bad" in your life anymore. There is only a higher good — which includes the "bad." Seen from the perspective of the mind, however, there is good-bad, like-dislike, love-hate. Hence, in the Book of Genesis, it is said that Adam and Eve were no longer allowed to dwell in "paradise" when they "ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

This sounds to me like denial and self-deception. When something dreadful happens to me or someone close to me — accident, illness, pain of some kind, or death — I can pretend that it isn't bad, but the fact remains that it is bad, so why deny it?

You are not pretending anything. You are allowing it to be as it is, that's all. This "allowing to be" takes you beyond the mind with its resistance patterns that create the positive-negative polarities. It is an essential aspect of forgiveness. Forgiveness of the present is even more important than forgiveness of the past. If you forgive every moment — allow it to be as it is — then there will be no accumulation of resentment that needs to be forgiven at some later time.

Remember that we are not talking about happiness here. For example, when a loved one has just died, or you feel your own death approaching, you cannot be happy. It is impossible. But

you *can* be at peace. There may be sadness and tears, but provided that you have relinquished resistance, underneath the sadness you will feel a deep serenity, a stillness, a sacred presence. This is the emanation of Being, this is inner peace, the good that has no opposite.

What if it is a situation that I can do something about? How can I allow it to be and change it at the same time?

Do what you have to do. In the meantime, accept what *is*. Since mind and resistance are synonymous, acceptance immediately frees you from mind dominance and thus reconnects you with Being. As a result, the usual ego motivations for "doing" — fear, greed, control, defending or feeding the false sense of self — will cease to operate. An intelligence much greater than the mind is now in charge, and so a different quality of consciousness will flow into your doing.

"Accept whatever comes to you woven in the pattern of your destiny, for what could more aptly fit your needs?" This was written two thousand years ago by Marcus Aurelius, one of those exceedingly rare humans who possessed worldly power as well as wisdom.

It seems that most people need to experience a great deal of suffering before they will relinquish resistance and accept — before they will forgive. As soon as they do, one of the greatest miracles happens: the awakening of Being-consciousness through what appears as evil, the transmutation of suffering into inner peace. The ultimate effect of all the evil and suffering in the world is that it will force humans into realizing who they are beyond name and form. Thus, what we perceive

as evil from our limited perspective is actually part of the higher good that has no opposite. This, however, does not become true for you except through forgiveness. Until that happens, evil has not been redeemed and therefore remains evil.

Through forgiveness, which essentially means recognizing the insubstantiality of the past and allowing the present moment to be as it is, the miracle of transformation happens not only within but also without. A silent space of intense presence arises both in you and around you. Whoever or whatever enters that field of consciousness will be affected by it, sometimes visibly and immediately, sometimes at deeper levels with visible changes appearing at a later time. You dissolve discord, heal pain, dispel unconsciousness — without *doing* anything — simply by *being* and holding that frequency of intense presence.



THE END OF YOUR LIFE DRAMA

In that state of acceptance and inner peace, even though you may not call it "bad," can anything still come into your life that would be called "bad" from a perspective of ordinary consciousness?

Most of the so-called bad things that happen in people's lives are due to unconsciousness. They are self-created, or rather ego-created. I sometimes refer to those things as "drama." When you are fully conscious, drama does not come into

your life anymore. Let me remind you briefly how the ego operates and how it creates drama.

Ego is the unobserved mind that runs your life when you are not present as the witnessing consciousness, the watcher. The ego perceives itself as a separate fragment in a hostile universe, with no real inner connection to any other being, surrounded by other egos which it either sees as a potential threat or which it will attempt to use for its own ends. The basic ego patterns are designed to combat its own deep-seated fear and sense of lack. They are resistance, control, power, greed, defense, attack. Some of the ego's strategies are extremely clever, yet they never truly solve any of its problems, simply because the ego itself is the problem.

When egos come together, whether in personal relationships or in organizations or institutions, "bad" things happen sooner or later: drama of one kind or another, in the form of conflict, problems, power struggles, emotional or physical violence, and so on. This includes collective evils such as war, genocide, and exploitation — all due to massed unconsciousness. Furthermore, many types of illness are caused by the ego's continuous resistance, which creates restrictions and blockages in the flow of energy through the body. When you reconnect with Being and are no longer run by your mind, you cease to create those things. You do not create or participate in drama anymore.

Whenever two or more egos come together, drama of one kind or another ensues. But even if you live totally alone, you still create your own drama. When you feel sorry for yourself, that's drama. When you feel guilty or anxious, that's drama. When you let the past or future obscure the present, you are creating time, psychological time — the stuff out of which

drama is made. Whenever you are not honoring the present moment by allowing it to be, you are creating drama.

Most people are in love with their particular life drama. Their story is their identity. The ego runs their life. They have their whole sense of self invested in it. Even their — usually unsuccessful — search for an answer, a solution, or for healing becomes part of it. What they fear and resist most is the end of their drama. As long as they *are* their mind, what they fear and resist most is their own awakening.

When you live in complete acceptance of what is, that is the end of all drama in your life. Nobody can even have an argument with you, no matter how hard he or she tries. You cannot have an argument with a fully conscious person. An argument implies identification with your mind and a mental position, as well as resistance and reaction to the other person's position. The result is that the polar opposites become mutually energized. These are the mechanics of unconsciousness. You can still make your point clearly and firmly, but there will be no reactive force behind it, no defense or attack. So it won't turn into drama. When you are fully conscious, you cease to be in conflict. "No one who is at one with himself can even conceive of conflict," states *A Course in Miracles*. This refers not only to conflict with other people but more fundamentally to conflict within you, which ceases when there is no longer any clash between the demands and expectations of your mind and what is.

IMPERMANENCE AND THE CYCLES OF LIFE

However, as long as you are in the physical dimension and linked to the collective human psyche, physical pain —

although rare — is still possible. This is not to be confused with suffering, with mental-emotional pain. All suffering is ego-created and is due to resistance. Also, as long as you are in this dimension, you are still subject to its cyclical nature and to the law of impermanence of all things, but you no longer perceive this as “bad” — it just is.

Through allowing the “isness” of all things, a deeper dimension underneath the play of opposites reveals itself to you as an abiding presence, an unchanging deep stillness, an uncaused joy beyond good and bad. This is the joy of Being, the peace of God.

On the level of form, there is birth and death, creation and destruction, growth and dissolution, of seemingly separate forms. This is reflected everywhere: in the life cycle of a star or a planet, a physical body, a tree, a flower; in the rise and fall of nations, political systems, civilizations; and in the inevitable cycles of gain and loss in the life of an individual.

There are cycles of success, when things come to you and thrive, and cycles of failure, when they wither or disintegrate and you have to let them go in order to make room for new things to arise, or for transformation to happen. If you cling and resist at that point, it means you are refusing to go with the flow of life, and you will suffer.

It is not true that the up cycle is good and the down cycle bad, except in the mind’s judgment. Growth is usually considered positive, but nothing can grow forever. If growth, of whatever kind, were to go on and on, it would eventually become monstrous and destructive. Dissolution is needed for new growth to happen. One cannot exist without the other.

The down cycle is absolutely essential for spiritual realization. You must have failed deeply on some level or experienced

some deep loss or pain to be drawn to the spiritual dimension. Or perhaps your very success became empty and meaningless and so turned out to be failure. Failure lies concealed in every success, and success in every failure. In this world, which is to say on the level of form, everybody "fails" sooner or later, of course, and every achievement eventually comes to naught. All forms are impermanent.

You can still be active and enjoy manifesting and creating new forms and circumstances, but you won't be identified with them. You do not need them to give you a sense of self. They are not your life — only your life situation.

Your physical energy is also subject to cycles. It cannot always be at a peak. There will be times of low as well as high energy. There will be periods when you are highly active and creative, but there may also be times when everything seems stagnant, when it seems that you are not getting anywhere, not achieving anything. A cycle can last for anything from a few hours to a few years. There are large cycles and small cycles within these large ones. Many illnesses are created through fighting against the cycles of low energy, which are vital for regeneration. The compulsion to do, and the tendency to derive your sense of self-worth and identity from external factors such as achievement, is an inevitable illusion as long as you are identified with the mind. This makes it hard or impossible for you to accept the low cycles and allow them to be. Thus, the intelligence of the organism may take over as a self-protective measure and create an illness in order to force you to stop, so that the necessary regeneration can take place.

The cyclical nature of the universe is closely linked with the impermanence of all things and situations. The Buddha made this a central part of his teaching. All conditions are

highly unstable and in constant flux, or, as he put it, impermanence is a characteristic of every condition, every situation you will ever encounter in your life. It will change, disappear, or no longer satisfy you. Impermanence is also central to Jesus's teaching: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal...."

As long as a condition is judged as "good" by your mind, whether it be a relationship, a possession, a social role, a place, or your physical body, the mind attaches itself to it and identifies with it. It makes you happy, makes you feel good about yourself, and it may become part of who you are or think you are. But nothing lasts in this dimension where moth and rust consume. Either it ends or it changes, or it may undergo a polarity shift: The same condition that was good yesterday or last year has suddenly or gradually turned into bad. The same condition that made you happy then makes you unhappy. The prosperity of today becomes the empty consumerism of tomorrow. The happy wedding and honeymoon become the unhappy divorce or the unhappy coexistence. Or a condition disappears, so its absence makes you unhappy. When a condition or situation that the mind has attached itself to and identified with changes or disappears, the mind cannot accept it. It will cling to the disappearing condition and resist the change. It is almost as if a limb were being torn off your body.

We sometimes hear of people who have lost all their money or whose reputations have been ruined committing suicide. Those are the extreme cases. Others, whenever a major loss of one kind or another occurs, just become deeply unhappy or make themselves ill. They cannot distinguish between

their life and their life situation. I recently read about a famous actress who died in her eighties. As her beauty started to fade and became ravaged by old age, she grew desperately unhappy and became a recluse. She, too, had identified with a condition: her external appearance. First, the condition gave her a happy sense of self, then an unhappy one. If she had been able to connect with the formless and timeless life within, she could have watched and allowed the fading of her external form from a place of serenity and peace. Moreover, her external form would have become increasingly transparent to the light shining through from her ageless true nature, so her beauty would not really have faded but simply become transformed into spiritual beauty. However, nobody told her that this is possible. The most essential kind of knowledge is not yet widely accessible.



The Buddha taught that even your happiness is *dukkha* — a Pali word meaning “suffering” or “unsatisfactoriness.” It is inseparable from its opposite. This means that your happiness and unhappiness are in fact one. Only the illusion of time separates them.

This is not being negative. It is simply recognizing the nature of things, so that you don’t pursue an illusion for the rest of your life. Nor is it saying that you should no longer appreciate pleasant or beautiful things or conditions. But to seek something through them that they cannot give — an identity, a sense of permanency and fulfillment — is a recipe for frustration and suffering. The whole advertising industry and

consumer society would collapse if people became enlightened and no longer sought to find their identity through things. The more you seek happiness in this way, the more it will elude you. Nothing out there will ever satisfy you except temporarily and superficially, but you may need to experience many disillusionments before you realize that truth. Things and conditions can give you pleasure, but they will also give you pain. Things and conditions can give you pleasure, but they cannot give you joy. Nothing can give you joy. Joy is uncaused and arises from within as the joy of Being. It is an essential part of the inner state of peace, the state that has been called the peace of God. It is your natural state, not something that you need to work hard for or struggle to attain.

Many people never realize that there can be no "salvation" in anything they do, possess, or attain. Those who do realize it often become world-weary and depressed: If nothing can give you true fulfillment, what is there left to strive for, what is the point in anything? The Old Testament prophet must have arrived at such a realization when he wrote: "I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." When you reach this point, you are one step away from despair — and one step away from enlightenment.

A Buddhist monk once told me: "All I have learned in the twenty years that I have been a monk I can sum up in one sentence: All that arises passes away. This I know." What he meant, of course, was this: I have learned to offer no resistance to what is; I have learned to allow the present moment to be and to accept the impermanent nature of all things and conditions. Thus have I found peace.

To offer no resistance to life is to be in a state of grace, ease, and lightness. This state is then no longer dependent upon things being in a certain way, good or bad. It seems almost paradoxical, yet when your inner dependency on form is gone, the general conditions of your life, the outer forms, tend to improve greatly. Things, people, or conditions that you thought you needed for your happiness now come to you with no struggle or effort on your part, and you are free to enjoy and appreciate them — while they last. All those things, of course, will still pass away, cycles will come and go, but with dependency gone there is no fear of loss anymore. Life flows with ease.

The happiness that is derived from some secondary source is never very deep. It is only a pale reflection of the joy of Being, the vibrant peace that you find within as you enter the state of nonresistance. Being takes you beyond the polar opposites of the mind and frees you from dependency on form. Even if everything were to collapse and crumble all around you, you would still feel a deep inner core of peace. You may not be happy, but you will be at peace.



USING AND RELINQUISHING NEGATIVITY

All inner resistance is experienced as negativity in one form or another. All negativity is resistance. In this context, the two words are almost synonymous. Negativity ranges from irritation or impatience to fierce anger, from a depressed mood or sullen resentment to suicidal despair. Sometimes the resistance triggers the emotional pain-body, in which

case even a minor situation may produce intense negativity, such as anger, depression, or deep grief.

The ego believes that through negativity it can manipulate reality and get what it wants. It believes that through it, it can attract a desirable condition or dissolve an undesirable one. *A Course in Miracles* rightly points out that, whenever you are unhappy, there is the unconscious belief that the unhappiness "buys" you what you want. If "you" — the mind — did not believe that unhappiness works, why would you create it? The fact is, of course, that negativity does not work. Instead of attracting a desirable condition, it stops it from arising. Instead of dissolving an undesirable one, it keeps it in place. Its only "useful" function is that it strengthens the ego, and that is why the ego loves it.

Once you have identified with some form of negativity, you do not want to let go, and on a deeply unconscious level, you do not want positive change. It would threaten your identity as a depressed, angry, or hard-done-by person. You will then ignore, deny, or sabotage the positive in your life. This is a common phenomenon. It is also insane.

Negativity is totally unnatural. It is a psychic pollutant, and there is a deep link between the poisoning and destruction of nature and the vast negativity that has accumulated in the collective human psyche. No other life-form on the planet knows negativity, only humans, just as no other life-form violates and poisons the Earth that sustains it. Have you ever seen an unhappy flower or a stressed oak tree? Have you come across a depressed dolphin, a frog that has a problem with self-esteem, a cat that cannot relax, or a bird that carries hatred and resentment? The only animals that may occasionally experience something akin to negativity or show signs of

neurotic behavior are those that live in close contact with humans and so link into the human mind and its insanity.

Watch any plant or animal and let it teach you acceptance of what is, surrender to the Now. Let it teach you Being. Let it teach you integrity — which means to be one, to be yourself, to be real. Let it teach you how to live and how to die, and how *not* to make living and dying into a problem.

I have lived with several Zen masters — all of them cats. Even ducks have taught me important spiritual lessons. Just watching them is a meditation. How peacefully they float along, at ease with themselves, totally present in the Now, dignified and perfect as only a mindless creature can be. Occasionally, however, two ducks will get into a fight — sometimes for no apparent reason, or because one duck has strayed into another's private space. The fight usually lasts only for a few seconds, and then the ducks separate, swim off in opposite directions, and vigorously flap their wings a few times. They then continue to swim on peacefully as if the fight had never happened. When I observed that for the first time, I suddenly realized that by flapping their wings they were releasing surplus energy, thus preventing it from becoming trapped in their body and turning into negativity. This is natural wisdom, and it is easy for them because they do not have a mind that keeps the past alive unnecessarily and then builds an identity around it.

Couldn't a negative emotion also contain an important message? For example, if I often feel depressed, it may be a signal that there is something wrong with my life, and it may force me to look at my life situation and make some changes. So I need to listen to what the emotion is telling me and not just dismiss it as negative.

Yes, recurring negative emotions do sometimes contain a message, as do illnesses. But any changes that you make, whether they have to do with your work, your relationships, or your surroundings, are ultimately only cosmetic unless they arise out of a change in your level of consciousness. And as far as that is concerned, it can only mean one thing: becoming more present. When you have reached a certain degree of presence, you don't need negativity anymore to tell you what is needed in your life situation. But as long as negativity is there, use it. Use it as a kind of signal that reminds you to be more present.

How do we stop negativity from arising, and how do we get rid of it once it is there?

As I said, you stop it from arising by being fully present. But don't become discouraged. There are as yet few people on the planet who can sustain a state of continuous presence, although some are getting close to it. Soon, I believe, there will be many more.

Whenever you notice that some form of negativity has arisen within you, look on it not as a failure, but as a helpful signal that is telling you: "Wake up. Get out of your mind. Be present."

There is a novel by Aldous Huxley called *Island*, written in his later years when he became very interested in spiritual teachings. It tells the story of a man shipwrecked on a remote island cut off from the rest of the world. This island contains a unique civilization. The unusual thing about it is that its inhabitants, unlike those of the rest of the world, are actually sane. The first thing that the man notices are the

colorful parrots perched in the trees, and they seem to be constantly croaking the words "Attention. Here and Now. Attention. Here and Now." We later learn that the islanders taught them these words in order to be reminded continuously to stay present.

So whenever you feel negativity arising within you, whether caused by an external factor, a thought, or even nothing in particular that you are aware of, look on it as a voice saying "Attention. Here and Now. Wake up." Even the slightest irritation is significant and needs to be acknowledged and looked at; otherwise, there will be a cumulative buildup of unobserved reactions. As I said before, you may be able to just drop it once you realize that you don't want to have this energy field inside you and that it serves no purpose. But then make sure that you drop it completely. If you cannot drop it, just accept that it is there and take your attention into the feeling, as I pointed out earlier.

As an alternative to dropping a negative reaction, you can make it disappear by imagining yourself becoming transparent to the external cause of the reaction. I recommend that you practice it with little, even trivial, things first. Let's say that you are sitting quietly at home. Suddenly, there is the penetrating sound of a car alarm from across the street. Irritation arises. What is the purpose of the irritation? None whatsoever. Why did you create it? You didn't. The mind did. It was totally automatic, totally unconscious. Why did the mind create it? Because it holds the unconscious belief that its resistance, which you experience as negativity or unhappiness in some form, will somehow dissolve the undesirable condition. This, of course, is a delusion. The resistance that it creates, the irritation or anger in this case, is far

more disturbing than the original cause that it is attempting to dissolve.

All this can be transformed into spiritual practice. Feel yourself becoming transparent, as it were, without the solidity of a material body. Now allow the noise, or whatever causes a negative reaction, to pass right through you. It is no longer hitting a solid "wall" inside you. As I said, practice with little things first. The car alarm, the dog barking, the children screaming, the traffic jam. Instead of having a wall of resistance inside you that gets constantly and painfully hit by things that "should not be happening," let everything pass through you.

Somebody says something to you that is rude or designed to hurt. Instead of going into unconscious reaction and negativity, such as attack, defense, or withdrawal, you let it pass right through you. Offer no resistance. It is as if there is nobody there to get hurt anymore. That is forgiveness. In this way, you become invulnerable. You can still tell that person that his or her behavior is unacceptable, if that is what you choose to do. But that person no longer has the power to control your inner state. You are then in your power — not in someone else's, nor are you run by your mind. Whether it is a car alarm, a rude person, a flood, an earthquake, or the loss of all your possessions, the resistance mechanism is the same.

I have been practicing meditation, I have been to workshops, I have read many books on spirituality. I try to be in a state of nonresistance — but if you ask me whether I have found true and lasting inner peace, my honest answer would have to be "no." Why haven't I found it? What else can I do?

You are still seeking outside, and you cannot get out of the seeking mode. Maybe the next workshop will have the answer, maybe that new technique. To you I would say: Don't look for peace. Don't look for any other state than the one you are in now; otherwise, you will set up inner conflict and unconscious resistance. Forgive yourself for not being at peace. The moment you *completely* accept your non-peace, your non-peace becomes transmuted into peace. Anything you accept fully will get you there, will take you into peace. This is the miracle of surrender.



You may have heard the phrase "turn the other cheek," which a great teacher of enlightenment used two thousand years ago. He was attempting to convey symbolically the secret of nonresistance and nonreaction. In this statement, as in all his others, he was concerned only with your inner reality, not with the outer conduct of your life.

Do you know the story of Banzan? Before he became a great Zen master, he spent many years in the pursuit of enlightenment, but it eluded him. Then one day, as he was walking in the marketplace, he overheard a conversation between a butcher and his customer. "Give me the best piece of meat you have," said the customer. And the butcher replied, "Every piece of meat I have is the best. There is no piece of meat here that is not the best." Upon hearing this, Banzan became enlightened.

I can see you are waiting for some explanation. When you accept what is, every piece of meat — every moment — is the best. That is enlightenment.

THE NATURE OF COMPASSION

Having gone beyond the mind-made opposites, you become like a deep lake. The outer situation of your life and whatever happens there is the surface of the lake. Sometimes calm, sometimes windy and rough, according to the cycles and seasons. Deep down, however, the lake is always undisturbed. You are the whole lake, not just the surface, and you are in touch with your own depth, which remains absolutely still. You don't resist change by mentally clinging to any situation. Your inner peace does not depend on it. You abide in Being — unchanging, timeless, deathless — and you are no longer dependent for fulfillment or happiness on the outer world of constantly fluctuating forms. You can enjoy them, play with them, create new forms, appreciate the beauty of it all. But there will be no need to attach yourself to any of it.

When you become this detached, does it not mean that you also become remote from other human beings?

On the contrary. As long as you are unaware of Being, the reality of other humans will elude you, because you have not found your own. Your mind will like or dislike their form, which is not just their body but includes their mind as well. True relationship becomes possible only when there is an awareness of Being. Coming from Being, you will perceive another person's body and mind as just a screen, as it were,

behind which you can feel their true reality, as you feel yours. So, when confronted with someone else's suffering or unconscious behavior, you stay present and in touch with Being and are thus able to look beyond the form and feel the other person's radiant and pure Being through your own. At the level of Being, all suffering is recognized as an illusion. Suffering is due to identification with form. Miracles of healing sometimes occur through this realization, by awakening Being-consciousness in others — if they are ready.

Is that what compassion is?

Yes. Compassion is the awareness of a deep bond between yourself and all creatures. But there are two sides to compassion, two sides to this bond. On the one hand, since you are still here as a physical body, you share the vulnerability and mortality of your physical form with every other human and with every living being. Next time you say, "I have nothing in common with this person," remember that you have a great deal in common: A few years from now — two years or seventy years, it doesn't make much difference — both of you will have become rotting corpses, then piles of dust, then nothing at all. This is a sobering and humbling realization that leaves little room for pride. Is this a negative thought? No, it is a fact. Why close your eyes to it? In that sense, there is total equality between you and every other creature.

One of the most powerful spiritual practices is to meditate deeply on the mortality of physical forms, including your own. This is called: Die before you die. Go into it deeply. Your physical form is dissolving, is no more. Then a moment comes when all mind-forms or thoughts also die. Yet you are still there — the divine presence that you are.

Radiant, fully awake. Nothing that was real ever died, only names, forms, and illusions.



The realization of this deathless dimension, your true nature, is the other side of compassion. On a deep feeling-level, you now recognize not only your own immortality but through your own that of every other creature as well. On the level of form, you share mortality and the precariousness of existence. On the level of Being, you share eternal, radiant life. These are the two aspects of compassion. In compassion, the seemingly opposite feelings of sadness and joy merge into one and become transmuted into a deep inner peace. This is the peace of God. It is one of the most noble feelings that humans are capable of, and it has great healing and transformative power. But true compassion, as I have just described it, is as yet rare. To have deep empathy for the suffering of another being certainly requires a high degree of consciousness but represents only one side of compassion. It is not complete. True compassion goes beyond empathy or sympathy. It does not happen until sadness merges with joy, the joy of Being beyond form, the joy of eternal life.

TOWARD A DIFFERENT ORDER OF REALITY

I don't agree that the body needs to die. I am convinced that we can achieve physical immortality. We believe in death and that's why the body dies.

The body does not die because you believe in death. The body exists, or seems to, because you believe in death. Body and death are part of the same illusion, created by the egoic mode of consciousness, which has no awareness of the Source of life and sees itself as separate and constantly under threat. So it creates the illusion that you are a body, a dense, physical vehicle that is constantly under threat.

To perceive yourself as a vulnerable body that was born and a little later dies — that's the illusion. Body and death: one illusion. You cannot have one without the other. You want to keep one side of the illusion and get rid of the other, but that is impossible. Either you keep all of it or you relinquish all of it.

However, you cannot escape from the body, nor do you have to. The body is an incredible misperception of your true nature. But your true nature is concealed somewhere within that illusion, not outside it, so the body is still the only point of access to it.

If you saw an angel but mistook it for a stone statue, all you would have to do is adjust your vision and look more closely at the "stone statue," not start looking somewhere else. You would then find that there never was a stone statue.

If belief in death creates the body, why does an animal have a body? An animal doesn't have an ego, and it doesn't believe in death....

But it still dies, or seems to.

Remember that your perception of the world is a reflection of your state of consciousness. You are not separate from it, and there is no objective world out there. Every moment,

your consciousness creates the world that you inhabit. One of the greatest insights that has come out of modern physics is that of the unity between the observer and the observed: the person conducting the experiment — the observing consciousness — cannot be separated from the observed phenomena, and a different way of looking causes the observed phenomena to behave differently. If you believe, on a deep level, in separation and the struggle for survival, then you see that belief reflected all around you and your perceptions are governed by fear. You inhabit a world of death and of bodies fighting, killing, and devouring each other.

Nothing is what it seems to be. The world that you create and see through the egoic mind may seem a very imperfect place, even a vale of tears. But whatever you perceive is only a kind of symbol, like an image in a dream. It is how your consciousness interprets and interacts with the molecular energy dance of the universe. This energy is the raw material of so-called physical reality. You see it in terms of bodies and birth and death, or as a struggle for survival. An infinite number of completely different interpretations, completely different worlds, is possible and, in fact, exists — all depending on the perceiving consciousness. Every being is a focal point of consciousness, and every such focal point creates its own world, although all those worlds are interconnected. There is a human world, an ant world, a dolphin world, and so on. There are countless beings whose consciousness frequency is so different from yours that you are probably unaware of their existence, as they are of yours. Highly conscious beings who are aware of their connectedness with the Source and with each other would inhabit a world that to you would appear as a heavenly realm — and yet all worlds are ultimately one.

Our collective human world is largely created through the level of consciousness we call mind. Even within the collective human world there are vast differences, many different "sub-worlds," depending on the perceivers or creators of their respective worlds. Since all worlds are interconnected, when collective human consciousness becomes transformed, nature and the animal kingdom will reflect that transformation. Hence the statement in the Bible that in the coming age "The lion shall lie down with the lamb." This points to the possibility of a completely different order of reality.

The world as it appears to us now is, as I said, largely a reflection of the egoic mind. Fear being an unavoidable consequence of egoic delusion, it is a world dominated by fear. Just as the images in a dream are symbols of inner states and feelings, so our collective reality is largely a symbolic expression of fear and of the heavy layers of negativity that have accumulated in the collective human psyche. We are not separate from our world, so when the majority of humans become free of egoic delusion, this inner change will affect all of creation. You will literally inhabit a new world. It is a shift in planetary consciousness. The strange Buddhist saying that every tree and every blade of grass will eventually become enlightened points to the same truth. According to St. Paul, the whole of creation is waiting for humans to become enlightened. That is how I interpret his saying that "The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed." St. Paul goes on to say that all of creation will become redeemed through this: "Up to the present...the whole created universe in all its parts groans as if in the pangs of childbirth."

What is being born is a new consciousness and, as its inevitable reflection, a new world. This is also foretold in the New Testament Book of Revelation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

But don't confuse cause and effect. Your primary task is not to seek salvation through creating a better world, but to awaken out of identification with form. You are then no longer bound to this world, this level of reality. You can feel your roots in the Unmanifested and so are free of attachment to the manifested world. You can still enjoy the passing pleasures of this world, but there is no fear of loss anymore, so you don't need to cling to them. Although you can enjoy sensory pleasures, the craving for sensory experience is gone, as is the constant search for fulfillment through psychological gratification, through feeding the ego. You are in touch with something infinitely greater than any pleasure, greater than any manifested thing.

In a way, you then don't need the world anymore. You don't even need it to be different from the way it is.

It is only at this point that you begin to make a real contribution toward bringing about a better world, toward creating a different order of reality. It is only at this point that you are able to feel true compassion and to help others at the level of cause. Only those who have transcended the world can bring about a better world.

You may remember that we talked about the dual nature of true compassion, which is awareness of a common bond of shared mortality and immortality. At this deep level, compassion becomes healing in the widest sense. In that state,

your healing influence is primarily based not on doing but on being. Everybody you come in contact with will be touched by your presence and affected by the peace that you emanate, whether they are conscious of it or not. When you are fully present and people around you manifest unconscious behavior, you won't feel the need to react to it, so you don't give it any reality. Your peace is so vast and deep that anything that is not peace disappears into it as if it had never existed. This breaks the karmic cycle of action and reaction. Animals, trees, flowers will feel your peace and respond to it. You teach through being, through demonstrating the peace of God. You become the "light of the world," an emanation of pure consciousness, and so you eliminate suffering on the level of cause. You eliminate unconsciousness from the world.



This doesn't mean that you may not also teach through doing — for example, by pointing out how to disidentify from the mind, recognize unconscious patterns within oneself, and so on. But who you *are* is always a more vital teaching and a more powerful transformer of the world than what you say, and more essential even than what you do.

Furthermore, to recognize the primacy of Being, and thus work on the level of cause, does not exclude the possibility that your compassion may simultaneously manifest on the level of doing and of effect by alleviating suffering whenever you come across it. When a hungry person asks you for bread and you have some, you will give it. But as you give the bread, even though your interaction may only be very

brief, what really matters is this moment of shared Being, of which the bread is only a symbol. A deep healing takes place within it. In that moment, there is no giver, no receiver.

But there shouldn't be any hunger and starvation in the first place. How can we create a better world without tackling evils such as hunger and violence first?

All evils are the effect of unconsciousness. You can alleviate the effects of unconsciousness, but you cannot eliminate them unless you eliminate their cause. True change happens within, not without.

If you feel called upon to alleviate suffering in the world, that is a very noble thing to do, but remember not to focus exclusively on the outer; otherwise, you will encounter frustration and despair. Without a profound change in human consciousness, the world's suffering is a bottomless pit. So don't let your compassion become one-sided. Empathy with someone else's pain or lack and a desire to help need to be balanced with a deeper realization of the eternal nature of all life and the ultimate illusion of all pain. Then let your peace flow into whatever you do and you will be working on the levels of effect and cause simultaneously.

This also applies if you are supporting a movement designed to stop deeply unconscious humans from destroying themselves, each other, and the planet, or from continuing to inflict dreadful suffering on other sentient beings. Remember: Just as you cannot fight the darkness, so you cannot fight unconsciousness. If you try to do so, the polar opposites will become strengthened and more deeply entrenched. You will become identified with one of the polarities, you will cre-

ate an "enemy," and so be drawn into unconsciousness yourself. Raise awareness by disseminating information, or at the most, practice passive resistance. But make sure that you carry no resistance within, no hatred, no negativity. "Love your enemies," said Jesus, which, of course, means "have no enemies."

Once you get involved in working on the level of effect, it is all too easy to lose yourself in it. Stay alert and very, very present. The causal level needs to remain your primary focus, the teaching of enlightenment your main purpose, and peace your most precious gift to the world.

THE MEANING OF SURRENDER

ACCEPTANCE OF THE NOW

You mentioned "surrender" a few times. I don't like that idea. It sounds somewhat fatalistic. If we always accept the way things are, we are not going to make any effort to improve them. It seems to me what progress is all about, both in our personal lives and collectively, is not to accept the limitations of the present but to strive to go beyond them and create something better. If we hadn't done this, we would still be living in caves. How do you reconcile surrender with changing things and getting things done?

To some people, surrender may have negative connotations, implying defeat, giving up, failing to rise to the challenges of life, becoming lethargic, and so on. True surrender, however, is something entirely different. It does not mean to passively put up with whatever situation you find yourself in and to do nothing about it. Nor does it mean to cease making plans or initiating positive action.

Surrender is the simple but profound wisdom of yielding to rather than opposing the flow of life. The only place where

you can experience the flow of life is the Now, so to surrender is to accept the present moment unconditionally and without reservation. It is to relinquish inner resistance to what is. Inner resistance is to say "no" to what is, through mental judgment and emotional negativity. It becomes particularly pronounced when things "go wrong," which means that there is a gap between the demands or rigid expectations of your mind and what is. That is the pain gap. If you have lived long enough, you will know that things "go wrong" quite often. It is precisely at those times that surrender needs to be practiced if you want to eliminate pain and sorrow from your life. Acceptance of what is immediately frees you from mind identification and thus reconnects you with Being. Resistance is the mind.

Surrender is a purely inner phenomenon. It does not mean that on the outer level you cannot take action and change the situation. In fact, it is not the overall situation that you need to accept when you surrender, but just the tiny segment called the Now.

For example, if you were stuck in the mud somewhere, you wouldn't say: "Okay, I resign myself to being stuck in the mud." Resignation is not surrender. You don't need to accept an undesirable or unpleasant life situation. Nor do you need to deceive yourself and say that there is nothing wrong with being stuck in the mud. No. You recognize fully that you want to get out of it. You then narrow your attention down to the present moment without mentally labeling it in any way. This means that there is no judgment of the Now. Therefore, there is no resistance, no emotional negativity. You accept the "isness" of this moment. Then you take action and do all that you can to get out of the mud. Such

action I call positive action. It is far more effective than negative action, which arises out of anger, despair, or frustration. Until you achieve the desired result, you continue to practice surrender by refraining from labeling the Now.

Let me give you a visual analogy to illustrate the point I am making. You are walking along a path at night, surrounded by a thick fog. But you have a powerful flashlight that cuts through the fog and creates a narrow, clear space in front of you. The fog is your life situation, which includes past and future; the flashlight is your conscious presence; the clear space is the Now.

Non-surrender hardens your psychological form, the shell of the ego, and so creates a strong sense of separateness. The world around you and people in particular come to be perceived as threatening. The unconscious compulsion to destroy others through judgment arises, as does the need to compete and dominate. Even nature becomes your enemy and your perceptions and interpretations are governed by fear. The mental disease that we call paranoia is only a slightly more acute form of this normal but dysfunctional state of consciousness.

Not only your psychological form but also your physical form — your body — becomes hard and rigid through resistance. Tension arises in different parts of the body, and the body as a whole contracts. The free flow of life energy through the body, which is essential for its healthy functioning, is greatly restricted. Bodywork and certain forms of physical therapy can be helpful in restoring this flow, but unless you practice surrender in your everyday life, those things can only give temporary symptom relief since the cause — the resistance pattern — has not been dissolved.

There is something within you that remains unaffected by the transient circumstances that make up your life situation, and only through surrender do you have access to it. It is your life, your very Being — which exists eternally in the timeless realm of the present. Finding this life is “the one thing that is needed” that Jesus talked about.



If you find your life situation unsatisfactory or even intolerable, it is only by surrendering first that you can break the unconscious resistance pattern that perpetuates that situation.

Surrender is perfectly compatible with taking action, initiating change, or achieving goals. But in the surrendered state a totally different energy, a different quality, flows into your doing. Surrender reconnects you with the source-energy of Being, and if your doing is infused with Being, it becomes a joyful celebration of life energy that takes you more deeply into the Now. Through nonresistance, the quality of your consciousness and, therefore, the quality of whatever you are doing or creating is enhanced immeasurably. The results will then look after themselves and reflect that quality. We could call this *surrendered action*. It is not work as we have known it for thousands of years. As more humans awaken, the word *work* is going to disappear from our vocabulary, and perhaps a new word will be created to replace it.

It is the quality of your consciousness at this moment that is the main determinant of what kind of future you will experience, so to surrender is the most important thing you can do

to bring about positive change. Any action you take is secondary. No truly positive action can arise out of an unsurrendered state of consciousness.

I can see that if I am in a situation that is unpleasant or unsatisfactory and I completely accept the moment as it is, there will be no suffering or unhappiness. I will have risen above it. But I still can't quite see where the energy or motivation for taking action and bringing about change would come from if there isn't a certain amount of dissatisfaction.

In the state of surrender, you see very clearly what needs to be done, and you take action, doing one thing at a time and focusing on one thing at a time. Learn from nature: See how everything gets accomplished and how the miracle of life unfolds without dissatisfaction or unhappiness. That's why Jesus said: "Look at the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin."

If your overall situation is unsatisfactory or unpleasant, *separate out this instant* and surrender to what is. That's the flashlight cutting through the fog. Your state of consciousness then ceases to be controlled by external conditions. You are no longer coming from reaction and resistance.

Then look at the specifics of the situation. Ask yourself, "Is there anything I can do to change the situation, improve it, or remove myself from it?" If so, you take appropriate action. Focus not on the one hundred things that you will or may have to do at some future time but on the one thing that you can do now. This doesn't mean you should not do any planning. It may well be that planning is the one thing you can do now. But make sure you don't start to run "mental movies,"

project yourself into the future, and so lose the Now. Any action you take may not bear fruit immediately. Until it does — do not resist what is. If there is no action you can take, and you cannot remove yourself from the situation either, then use the situation to make you go more deeply into surrender, more deeply into the Now, more deeply into Being. When you enter this timeless dimension of the present, change often comes about in strange ways without the need for a great deal of doing on your part. Life becomes helpful and cooperative. If inner factors such as fear, guilt, or inertia prevented you from taking action, they will dissolve in the light of your conscious presence.

Do not confuse surrender with an attitude of "I can't be bothered anymore" or "I just don't care anymore." If you look at it closely, you will find that such an attitude is tainted with negativity in the form of hidden resentment and so is not surrender at all but masked resistance. As you surrender, direct your attention inward to check if there is any trace of resistance left inside you. Be very alert when you do so; otherwise, a pocket of resistance may continue to hide in some dark corner in the form of a thought or an unacknowledged emotion.

FROM MIND ENERGY TO SPIRITUAL ENERGY

Letting go of resistance is easier said than done. I still don't see clearly how to let go. If you say it is by surrendering, the question remains: "How?"

Start by acknowledging that there is resistance. Be there when it happens, when the resistance arises. Observe how your mind creates it, how it labels the situation, yourself, or others. Look at the thought process involved. Feel the energy

of the emotion. By witnessing the resistance, you will see that it serves no purpose. By focusing all your attention on the Now, the unconscious resistance is made conscious, and that is the end of it. You cannot be conscious *and* unhappy, conscious *and* in negativity. Negativity, unhappiness, or suffering in whatever form means that there is resistance, and resistance is always unconscious.

Surely I can be conscious of my unhappy feelings?

Would you choose unhappiness? If you did not choose it, how did it arise? What is its purpose? Who is keeping it alive? You say that you are conscious of your unhappy feelings, but the truth is that you are identified with them and keep the process alive through compulsive thinking. All *that* is unconscious. If you were conscious, that is to say totally present in the Now, all negativity would dissolve almost instantly. It could not survive in your presence. It can only survive in your absence. Even the pain-body cannot survive for long in your presence. You keep your unhappiness alive by giving it time. That is its lifeblood. Remove time through intense present-moment awareness and it dies. But do you want it to die? Have you truly had enough? Who would you be without it?

Until you practice surrender, the spiritual dimension is something you read about, talk about, get excited about, write books about, think about, believe in — or don't, as the case may be. It makes no difference. Not until you surrender does it become a living reality in your life. When you do, the energy that you emanate and which then runs your life is of a much higher vibrational frequency than the mind energy that still runs our world — the energy that created the existing social,

political, and economic structures of our civilization, and which also continuously perpetuates itself through our educational systems and the media. Through surrender, spiritual energy comes into this world. It creates no suffering for yourself, for other humans, or any other life form on the planet. Unlike mind energy, it does not pollute the earth, and it is not subject to the law of polarities, which dictates that nothing can exist without its opposite, that there can be no good without bad. Those who run on mind energy, which is still the vast majority of the Earth's population, remain unaware of the existence of spiritual energy. It belongs to a different order of reality and will create a different world when a sufficient number of humans enter the surrendered state and so become totally free of negativity. If the Earth is to survive, this will be the energy of those who inhabit it.

Jesus referred to this energy when he made his famous prophetic statement in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the gentle; they shall have the earth for their possession." It is a silent but intense presence that dissolves the unconscious patterns of the mind. They may still remain active for a while, but they won't run your life anymore. The external conditions that were being resisted also tend to shift or dissolve quickly through surrender. It is a powerful transformer of situations and people. If conditions do not shift immediately, your acceptance of the Now enables you to rise above them. Either way, you are free.

SURRENDER IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

What about people who want to use me, manipulate or control me? Am I to surrender to them?

They are cut off from Being, so they unconsciously attempt to get energy and power from you. It is true that only an unconscious person will try to use or manipulate others, but it is equally true that only an unconscious person *can* be used and manipulated. If you resist or fight unconscious behavior in others, you become unconscious yourself. But surrender doesn't mean that you allow yourself to be used by unconscious people. Not at all. It is perfectly possible to say "no" firmly and clearly to a person or to walk away from a situation and be in a state of complete inner nonresistance at the same time. When you say "no" to a person or a situation, let it come not from reaction but from insight, from a clear realization of what is right or not right for you at that moment. Let it be a nonreactive "no," a high-quality "no," a "no" that is free of all negativity and so creates no further suffering.

I am in a situation at work that is unpleasant. I have tried to surrender to it, but I find it impossible. A lot of resistance keeps coming up.

If you cannot surrender, take action immediately: Speak up or do something to bring about a change in the situation — or remove yourself from it. Take responsibility for your life. Do not pollute your beautiful, radiant inner Being nor the Earth with negativity. Do not give unhappiness in any form whatsoever a dwelling place inside you.

If you cannot take action, for example if you are in prison, then you have two choices left: resistance or surrender. Bondage or inner freedom from external conditions. Suffering or inner peace.

Is nonresistance also to be practiced in the external conduct of our lives, such as nonresistance to violence, or is it something that just concerns our inner life?

You only need to be concerned with the inner aspect. That is primary. Of course, that will also transform the conduct of your outer life, your relationships, and so on.

Your relationships will be changed profoundly by surrender. If you can never accept what is, by implication you will not be able to accept anybody the way they are. You will judge, criticize, label, reject, or attempt to change people. Furthermore, if you continuously make the Now into a means to an end in the future, you will also make every person you encounter or relate with into a means to an end. The relationship — the human being — is then of secondary importance to you, or of no importance at all. What you can get out of the relationship is primary — be it material gain, a sense of power, physical pleasure, or some form of ego gratification.

Let me illustrate how surrender can work in relationships. When you become involved in an argument or some conflict situation, perhaps with a partner or someone close to you, start by observing how defensive you become as your own position is attacked, or feel the force of your own aggression as you attack the other person's position. Observe the attachment to your views and opinions. Feel the mental-emotional energy behind your need to be right and make the other person wrong. That's the energy of the egoic mind. You make it conscious by acknowledging it, by feeling it as fully as possible. Then one day, in the middle of an argument, you will suddenly realize that you have a choice, and you may decide to drop your own reaction — just to see what happens. You

surrender. I don't mean dropping the reaction just verbally by saying, "Okay, you are right," with a look on your face that says, "I am above all this childish unconsciousness." That's just displacing the resistance to another level, with the egoic mind still in charge, claiming superiority. I am speaking of letting go of the entire mental-emotional energy field inside you that was fighting for power.

The ego is cunning, so you have to be very alert, very present, and totally honest with yourself to see whether you have truly relinquished your identification with a mental position and so freed yourself from your mind. If you suddenly feel very light, clear, and deeply at peace, that is an unmistakable sign that you have truly surrendered. Then observe what happens to the other person's mental position as you no longer energize it through resistance. When identification with mental positions is out of the way, true communication begins.

What about nonresistance in the face of violence, aggression, and the like?

Nonresistance doesn't necessarily mean doing nothing. All it means is that any "doing" becomes nonreactive. Remember the deep wisdom underlying the practice of Eastern martial arts: Don't resist the opponent's force. Yield to overcome.

Having said that, "doing nothing" when you are in a state of intense presence is a very powerful transformer and healer of situations and people. In Taoism, there is a term called *wu wei*, which is usually translated as "actionless activity" or "sitting quietly doing nothing." In ancient China, this was regarded as one of the highest achievements or virtues. It is radically different from inactivity in the ordinary state of

consciousness, or rather unconsciousness, which stems from fear, inertia, or indecision. The real "doing nothing" implies inner nonresistance and intense alertness.

On the other hand, if action is required, you will no longer react from your conditioned mind, but you will respond to the situation out of your conscious presence. In that state, your mind is free of concepts, including the concept of non-violence. So who can predict what you will do?

The ego believes that in your resistance lies your strength, whereas in truth resistance cuts you off from Being, the only place of true power. Resistance is weakness and fear masquerading as strength. What the ego sees as weakness is your Being in its purity, innocence, and power. What it sees as strength is weakness. So the ego exists in a continuous resistance-mode and plays counterfeit roles to cover up your "weakness," which in truth is your power.

Until there is surrender, unconscious role-playing constitutes a large part of human interaction. In surrender, you no longer need ego defenses and false masks. You become very simple, very real. "That's dangerous," says the ego. "You'll get hurt. You'll become vulnerable." What the ego doesn't know, of course, is that only through the letting go of resistance, through becoming "vulnerable," can you discover your true and essential invulnerability.

TRANSFORMING ILLNESS INTO ENLIGHTENMENT

If someone is seriously ill and completely accepts their condition and surrenders to the illness, would they not have given up their will to get back to health? The determination to fight the illness would not be there anymore, would it?

Surrender is inner acceptance of what *is* without any reservations. We are talking about your *life* — this instant — not the conditions or circumstances of your life, not what I call your life situation. We have spoken about this already.

With regard to illness, this is what it means. Illness is part of your life situation. As such, it has a past and a future. Past and future form an uninterrupted continuum, unless the redeeming power of the Now is activated through your conscious presence. As you know, underneath the various conditions that make up your life situation, which exists in time, there is something deeper, more essential: your Life, your very Being in the timeless Now.

As there are no problems in the Now, there is no illness either. The belief in a label that someone attaches to your condition keeps the condition in place, empowers it, and makes a seemingly solid reality out of a temporary imbalance. It gives it not only reality and solidity but also a continuity in time that it did not have before. By focusing on this instant and refraining from labeling it mentally, illness is reduced to one or several of these factors: physical pain, weakness, discomfort, or disability. *That* is what you surrender to — now. You do not surrender to the idea of "illness." Allow the suffering to force you into the present moment, into a state of intense conscious presence. Use it for enlightenment.

Surrender does not transform what *is*, at least not directly. Surrender transforms *you*. When *you* are transformed, your whole world is transformed, because the world is only a reflection. We spoke about this earlier.

If you looked in the mirror and did not like what you saw, you would have to be mad to attack the image in the mirror. That

is precisely what you do when you are in a state of nonacceptance. And, of course, if you attack the image, it attacks you back. If you accept the image, no matter what it is, if you become friendly toward it, it cannot *not* become friendly toward you. This is how you change the world.

Illness is not the problem. You are the problem — as long as the egoic mind is in control. When you are ill or disabled, do not feel that you have failed in some way, do not feel guilty. Do not blame life for treating you unfairly, but do not blame yourself either. All that is resistance. If you have a major illness, use it for enlightenment. Anything “bad” that happens in your life — use it for enlightenment. Withdraw time from the illness. Do not give it any past or future. Let it force you into intense present-moment awareness — and see what happens.

Become an alchemist. Transmute base metal into gold, suffering into consciousness, disaster into enlightenment.

Are you seriously ill and feeling angry now about what I have just said? Then that is a clear sign that the illness has become part of your sense of self and that you are now protecting your identity — as well as protecting the illness. The condition that is labeled “illness” has nothing to do with who you truly are.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

As far as the still unconscious majority of the population is concerned, only a critical limit-situation has the potential to crack the hard shell of the ego and force them into surrender and so into the awakened state. A limit-situation arises when through some disaster, drastic upheaval, deep loss, or

suffering your whole world is shattered and doesn't make sense anymore. It is an encounter with death, be it physical or psychological. The egoic mind, the creator of this world, collapses. Out of the ashes of the old world, a new world can then come into being.

There is no guarantee, of course, that even a limit-situation will do it, but the potential is always there. Some people's resistance to what is even intensifies in such a situation, and so it becomes a descent into hell. In others, there may only be partial surrender, but even that will give them a certain depth and serenity that were not there before. Parts of the ego shell break off, and this allows small amounts of the radiance and peace that lie beyond the mind to shine through.

Limit-situations have produced many miracles. There have been murderers on death row waiting for execution who, in the last few hours of their lives, experienced the egoless state and the deep joy and peace that come with it. The inner resistance to the situation they found themselves in became so intense as to produce unbearable suffering, and there was nowhere to run and nothing to do to escape it, not even a mind-projected future. So they were forced into complete acceptance of the unacceptable. They were forced into surrender. In this way, they were able to enter the state of grace with which comes redemption: complete release from the past. Of course, it is not really the limit-situation that makes room for the miracle of grace and redemption, but the act of surrender.

So whenever any kind of disaster strikes, or something goes seriously "wrong" — illness, disability, loss of home or fortune or of a socially defined identity, breakup of a close

relationship, death or suffering of a loved one, or your own impending death — know that there is another side to it, that you are just one step away from something incredible: a complete alchemical transmutation of the base metal of pain and suffering into gold. That one step is called surrender.

I do not mean to say that you will become happy in such a situation. You will not. But fear and pain will become transmuted into an inner peace and serenity that come from a very deep place — from the Unmanifested itself. It is “the peace of God, which passes all understanding.” Compared to that, happiness is quite a shallow thing. With this radiant peace comes the realization — not on the level of mind but within the depth of your Being — that you are indestructible, immortal. This is not a belief. It is absolute certainty that needs no external evidence or proof from some secondary source.

TRANSFORMING SUFFERING INTO PEACE

I read about a stoic philosopher in ancient Greece who, when he was told that his son had died in an accident, replied, “I knew he was not immortal.” Is that surrender? If it is, I don’t want it. There are some situations in which surrender seems unnatural and inhuman.

Being cut off from your feelings is not surrender. But we don't know what his inner state was when he said those words. In certain extreme situations, it may still be impossible for you to accept the Now. But you always get a second chance at surrender.

Your first chance is to surrender each moment to the reality of that moment. Knowing that what is cannot be undone —

because it already is — you say yes to what is or accept what isn't. Then you do what you have to do, whatever the situation requires. If you abide in this state of acceptance, you create no more negativity, no more suffering, no more unhappiness. You then live in a state of nonresistance, a state of grace and lightness, free of struggle.

Whenever you are unable to do that, whenever you miss that chance — either because you are not generating enough conscious presence to prevent some habitual and unconscious resistance pattern from arising or because the condition is so extreme as to be absolutely unacceptable to you — then you are creating some form of pain, some form of suffering. It may look as if the situation is creating the suffering, but ultimately this is not so — your resistance is.

Now here is your second chance at surrender: If you cannot accept what is outside, then accept what is *inside*. If you cannot accept the external condition, accept the internal condition. This means: Do not resist the pain. Allow it to be there. Surrender to the grief, despair, fear, loneliness, or whatever form the suffering takes. Witness it without labeling it mentally. Embrace it. Then see how the miracle of surrender transmutes deep suffering into deep peace. This is your crucifixion. Let it become your resurrection and ascension.

I do not see how one can surrender to suffering. As you yourself pointed out, suffering is non-surrender. How could you surrender to non-surrender?

Forget about surrender for a moment. When your pain is deep, all talk of surrender will probably seem futile and meaningless anyway. When your pain is deep, you will likely

have a strong urge to escape from it rather than surrender to it. You don't want to feel what you feel. What could be more normal? But there is no escape, no way out. There are many pseudo escapes — work, drink, drugs, anger, projection, suppression, and so on — but they don't free you from the pain. Suffering does not diminish in intensity when you make it unconscious. When you deny emotional pain, everything you do or think as well as your relationships become contaminated with it. You broadcast it, so to speak, as the energy you emanate, and others will pick it up subliminally. If they are unconscious, they may even feel compelled to attack or hurt you in some way, or you may hurt them in an unconscious projection of your pain. You attract and manifest whatever corresponds to your inner state.

When there is no way out, there is still always a way *through*. So don't turn away from the pain. Face it. Feel it fully. *Feel it* — don't *think* about it! Express it if necessary, but don't create a script in your mind around it. Give all your attention to the feeling, not to the person, event, or situation that seems to have caused it. Don't let the mind use the pain to create a victim identity for yourself out of it. Feeling sorry for yourself and telling others your story will keep you stuck in suffering. Since it is impossible to get away from the feeling, the only possibility of change is to move into it; otherwise, nothing will shift. So give your complete attention to what you feel, and refrain from mentally labeling it. As you go into the feeling, be intensely alert. At first, it may seem like a dark and terrifying place, and when the urge to turn away from it comes, observe it but don't act on it. Keep putting your attention on the pain, keep feeling the grief, the fear, the dread, the loneliness, whatever it is. Stay alert, stay present — present with your whole Being, with every cell of your body. As you do so,

you are bringing a light into this darkness. This is the flame of your consciousness.

At this stage, you don't need to be concerned with surrender anymore. It has happened already. How? Full attention is full acceptance, is surrender. By giving full attention, you use the power of the Now, which is the power of your presence. No hidden pocket of resistance can survive in it. Presence removes time. Without time, no suffering, no negativity, can survive.

The acceptance of suffering is a journey into death. Facing deep pain, allowing it to be, taking your attention into it, is to enter death consciously. When you have died this death, you realize that there is no death — and there is nothing to fear. Only the ego dies. Imagine a ray of sunlight that has forgotten it is an inseparable part of the sun and deludes itself into believing it has to fight for survival and create and cling to an identity other than the sun. Would the death of this delusion not be incredibly liberating?

Do you want an easy death? Would you rather die without pain, without agony? Then die to the past every moment, and let the light of your presence shine away the heavy, time-bound self you thought of as "you."



THE WAY OF THE CROSS

There are many accounts of people who say they have found God through their deep suffering, and there is the Christian

expression "the way of the cross," which I suppose points to the same thing.

We are concerned with nothing else here.

Strictly speaking, they did not find God through their suffering, because suffering implies resistance. They found God through surrender, through total acceptance of what is, into which they were forced by their intense suffering. They must have realized on some level that their pain was self-created.

How do you equate surrender with finding God?

Since resistance is inseparable from the mind, relinquishment of resistance — surrender — is the end of the mind as your master, the impostor pretending to be "you," the false god. All judgment and all negativity dissolve. The realm of Being, which had been obscured by the mind, then opens up. Suddenly, a great stillness arises within you, an unfathomable sense of peace. And within that peace, there is great joy. And within that joy, there is love. And at the innermost core, there is the sacred, the immeasurable, That which cannot be named.

I don't call it finding God, because how can you find that which was never lost, the very life that you are? The word God is limiting not only because of thousands of years of misperception and misuse, but also because it implies an entity other than you. God is Being itself, not a being. There can be no subject-object relationship here, no duality, no you and God. God-realization is the most natural thing there is. The amazing and incomprehensible fact is not that you *can* become conscious of God but that you are *not* conscious of God.

The way of the cross that you mentioned is the old way to enlightenment, and until recently it was the only way. But don't dismiss it or underestimate its efficacy. It still works.

The way of the cross is a complete reversal. It means that the worst thing in your life, your cross, turns into the best thing that ever happened to you, by forcing you into surrender, into "death," forcing you to become as nothing, to become as God — because God, too, is no-thing.

At this time, as far as the unconscious majority of humans is concerned, the way of the cross is still the only way. They will only awaken through further suffering, and enlightenment as a collective phenomenon will be predictably preceded by vast upheavals. This process reflects the workings of certain universal laws that govern the growth of consciousness and thus was foreseen by some seers. It is described, among other places, in the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse, though cloaked in obscure and sometimes impenetrable symbology. This suffering is inflicted not by God but by humans on themselves and on each other, as well as by certain defensive measures that the Earth, which is a living, intelligent organism, is going to take to protect herself from the onslaught of human madness.

However, there is a growing number of humans alive today whose consciousness is sufficiently evolved not to need any more suffering before the realization of enlightenment. You may be one of them.

Enlightenment through suffering — the way of the cross — means to be forced into the kingdom of heaven kicking and screaming. You finally surrender because you can't stand the pain anymore, but the pain could go on for a long time until

this happens. Enlightenment consciously chosen means to relinquish your attachment to past and future and to make the Now the main focus of your life. It means choosing to dwell in the state of presence rather than in time. It means saying yes to what is. You then don't need pain anymore. How much more time do you think you will need before you are able to say, "I will create no more pain, no more suffering"? How much more pain do you need before you can make that choice?

If you think that you need more time, you will get more time — and more pain. Time and pain are inseparable.

THE POWER TO CHOOSE

What about all those people who, it seems, actually want to suffer? I have a friend whose partner is physically abusive toward her, and her previous relationship was of a similar kind. Why does she choose such men, and why is she refusing to get out of that situation now? Why do so many people actually choose pain?

I know that the word *choose* is a favorite New Age term, but it isn't entirely accurate in this context. It is misleading to say that somebody "chose" a dysfunctional relationship or any other negative situation in his or her life. Choice implies consciousness — a high degree of consciousness. Without it, you have no choice. Choice begins the moment you disidentify from the mind and its conditioned patterns, the moment you become present. Until you reach that point, you are unconscious, spiritually speaking. This means that you are compelled to think, feel, and act in certain ways according to the conditioning of your mind. That is why Jesus said: "Forgive

them, for they know not what they do." This is not related to intelligence in the conventional sense of the word. I have met many highly intelligent and educated people who were also completely unconscious, which is to say completely identified with their mind. In fact, if mental development and increased knowledge are not counterbalanced by a corresponding growth in consciousness, the potential for unhappiness and disaster is very great.

Your friend is stuck in a relationship with an abusive partner, and not for the first time. Why? No choice. The mind, conditioned as it is by the past, always seeks to re-create what it knows and is familiar with. Even if it is painful, at least it is familiar. The mind always adheres to the known. The unknown is dangerous because it has no control over it. That's why the mind dislikes and ignores the present moment. Present-moment awareness creates a gap not only in the stream of mind but also in the past-future continuum. Nothing truly new and creative can come into this world except through that gap, that clear space of infinite possibility.

So your friend, being identified with her mind, may be re-creating a pattern learned in the past in which intimacy and abuse are inseparably linked. Alternatively, she may be acting out a mind pattern learned in early childhood according to which she is unworthy and deserves to be punished. It is possible, too, that she lives a large part of her life through the pain-body, which always seeks more pain on which to feed. Her partner has his own unconscious patterns, which complement hers. Of course her situation is self-created, but who or what is the self that is doing the creating? A mental-emotional pattern from the past, no more. Why make a self out of it? If you tell her that she has chosen her condition or

situation, you are reinforcing her state of mind identification. But is her mind pattern who she is? Is it her self? Is her true identity derived from the past? Show your friend how to be the observing presence behind her thoughts and her emotions. Tell her about the pain-body and how to free herself from it. Teach her the art of inner-body awareness. Demonstrate to her the meaning of presence. As soon as she is able to access the power of the Now, and thereby break through her conditioned past, she will have a choice.

Nobody chooses dysfunction, conflict, pain. Nobody chooses insanity. They happen because there is not enough presence in you to dissolve the past, not enough light to dispel the darkness. You are not fully here. You have not quite woken up yet. In the meantime, the conditioned mind is running your life.

Similarly, if you are one of the many people who have an issue with their parents, if you still harbor resentment about something they did or did not do, then you still believe that they had a choice — that they could have acted differently. It always looks as if people had a choice, but that is an illusion. As long as your mind with its conditioned patterns runs your life, as long as you are your mind, what choice do you have? None. You are not even there. The mind-identified state is severely dysfunctional. It is a form of insanity. Almost everyone is suffering from this illness in varying degrees. The moment you realize this, there can be no more resentment. How can you resent someone's illness? The only appropriate response is compassion.

So that means nobody is responsible for what they do? I don't like that idea.

If you are run by your mind, although you have no choice you will still suffer the consequences of your unconsciousness, and you will create further suffering. You will bear the burden of fear, conflict, problems, and pain. The suffering thus created will eventually force you out of your unconscious state.

What you say about choice also applies to forgiveness, I suppose. You need to be fully conscious and surrender before you can forgive.

“Forgiveness” is a term that has been in use for two thousand years, but most people have a very limited view of what it means. You cannot truly forgive yourself or others as long as you derive your sense of self from the past. Only through accessing the power of the Now, which is your own power, can there be true forgiveness. This renders the past powerless, and you realize deeply that nothing you ever did or that was ever done to you could touch even in the slightest the radiant essence of who you are. The whole concept of forgiveness then becomes unnecessary.

And how do I get to that point of realization?

When you surrender to what is and so become fully present, the past ceases to have any power. You do not need it anymore. Presence is the key. The Now is the key.

How will I know when I have surrendered?

When you no longer need to ask the question.

YOU ARE NOT YOUR MIND

THE GREATEST OBSTACLE TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Enlightenment — what is that?

A beggar had been sitting by the side of a road for over thirty years. One day a stranger walked by. "Spare some change?" mumbled the beggar, mechanically holding out his old baseball cap. "I have nothing to give you," said the stranger. Then he asked: "What's that you are sitting on?" "Nothing," replied the beggar. "Just an old box. I have been sitting on it for as long as I can remember." "Ever looked inside?" asked the stranger. "No," said the beggar. "What's the point? There's nothing in there." "Have a look inside," insisted the stranger. The beggar managed to pry open the lid. With astonishment, disbelief, and elation, he saw that the box was filled with gold.

I am that stranger who has nothing to give you and who is telling you to look inside. Not inside any box, as in the parable, but somewhere even closer: inside yourself.

"But I am not a beggar," I can hear you say.

Those who have not found their true wealth, which is the radiant joy of Being and the deep, unshakable peace that comes with it, are beggars, even if they have great material wealth. They are looking outside for scraps of pleasure or fulfillment, for validation, security, or love, while they have a treasure within that not only includes all those things but is infinitely greater than anything the world can offer.

The word enlightenment conjures up the idea of some superhuman accomplishment, and the ego likes to keep it that way, but it is simply your natural state of *felt* oneness with Being. It is a state of connectedness with something immeasurable and indestructible, something that, almost paradoxically, is essentially you and yet is much greater than you. It is finding your true nature beyond name and form. The inability to feel this connectedness gives rise to the illusion of separation, from yourself and from the world around you. You then perceive yourself, consciously or unconsciously, as an isolated fragment. Fear arises, and conflict within and without becomes the norm.

I love the Buddha's simple definition of enlightenment as "the end of suffering." There is nothing superhuman in that, is there? Of course, as a definition, it is incomplete. It only tells you what enlightenment is not: no suffering. But what's left when there is no more suffering? The Buddha is silent on that, and his silence implies that you'll have to find out for yourself. He uses a negative definition so that the mind cannot make it into something to believe in or into a superhuman accomplishment, a goal that is impossible for you to attain. Despite this precaution, the majority of Buddhists still believe that enlightenment is for the Buddha, not for them, at least not in this lifetime.

You used the word Being. Can you explain what you mean by that?

Being is the eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death. However, Being is not only beyond but also deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence. This means that it is accessible to you now as your own deepest self, your true nature. But don't seek to grasp it with your mind. Don't try to understand it. You can know it only when the mind is still. When you are present, when your attention is fully and intensely in the Now, Being can be felt, but it can never be understood mentally. To regain awareness of Being and to abide in that state of "feeling-realization" is enlightenment.



When you say Being, are you talking about God? If you are, then why don't you say it?

The word *God* has become empty of meaning through thousands of years of misuse. I use it sometimes, but I do so sparingly. By misuse, I mean that people who have never even glimpsed the realm of the sacred, the infinite vastness behind that word, use it with great conviction, as if they knew what they are talking about. Or they argue against it, as if they knew what it is that they are denying. This misuse gives rise to absurd beliefs, assertions, and egoic delusions, such as "My or our God is the only true God, and your God is false," or Nietzsche's famous statement "God is dead."

The word *God* has become a closed concept. The moment the word is uttered, a mental image is created, no longer, perhaps, of an old man with a white beard, but still a mental representation of someone or something outside you, and, yes, almost inevitably a *male* someone or something.

Neither *God* nor *Being* nor any other word can define or explain the ineffable reality behind the word, so the only important question is whether the word is a help or a hindrance in enabling you to experience That toward which it points. Does it point beyond itself to that transcendental reality, or does it lend itself too easily to becoming no more than an idea in your head that you believe in, a mental idol?

The word *Being* explains nothing, but nor does *God*. *Being*, however, has the advantage that it is an open concept. It does not reduce the infinite invisible to a finite entity. It is impossible to form a mental image of it. Nobody can claim exclusive possession of *Being*. It is your very essence, and it is immediately accessible to you as the feeling of your own presence, the realization *I am* that is prior to I am this or I am that. So it is only a small step from the word *Being* to the experience of *Being*.



What is the greatest obstacle to experiencing this reality?

Identification with your mind, which causes thought to become compulsive. Not to be able to stop thinking is a dreadful affliction, but we don't realize this because almost everybody is suffering from it, so it is considered normal.

This incessant mental noise prevents you from finding that realm of inner stillness that is inseparable from Being. It also creates a false mind-made self that casts a shadow of fear and suffering. We will look at all that in more detail later.

The philosopher Descartes believed that he had found the most fundamental truth when he made his famous statement: "I think, therefore I am." He had, in fact, given expression to the most basic error: to equate thinking with Being and identity with thinking. The compulsive thinker, which means almost everyone, lives in a state of apparent separateness, in an insanely complex world of continuous problems and conflict, a world that reflects the ever-increasing fragmentation of the mind. Enlightenment is a state of wholeness, of being "at one" and therefore at peace. At one with life in its manifested aspect, the world, as well as with your deepest self and life unmanifested — at one with Being. Enlightenment is not only the end of suffering and of continuous conflict within and without, but also the end of the dreadful enslavement to incessant thinking. What an incredible liberation this is!

Identification with your mind creates an opaque screen of concepts, labels, images, words, judgments, and definitions that blocks all true relationship. It comes between you and yourself, between you and your fellow man and woman, between you and nature, between you and God. It is this screen of thought that creates the illusion of separateness, the illusion that there is you *and* a totally separate "other." You then forget the essential fact that, underneath the level of physical appearances and separate forms, you are one with all that is. By "forget," I mean that you can no longer *feel* this oneness as self-evident reality.

You may *believe* it to be true, but you no longer *know* it to be true. A belief may be comforting. Only through your own experience, however, does it become liberating.

Thinking has become a disease. Disease happens when things get out of balance. For example, there is nothing wrong with cells dividing and multiplying in the body, but when this process continues in disregard of the total organism, cells proliferate and we have disease.

The mind is a superb instrument if used rightly. Used wrongly, however, it becomes very destructive. To put it more accurately, it is not so much that you use your mind wrongly — you usually don't use it at all. It uses *you*. This is the disease. You believe that you *are* your mind. This is the delusion. The instrument has taken you over.

I don't quite agree. It is true that I do a lot of aimless thinking, like most people, but I can still choose to use my mind to get and accomplish things, and I do that all the time.

Just because you can solve a crossword puzzle or build an atom bomb doesn't mean that you use your mind. Just as dogs love to chew bones, the mind loves to get its teeth into problems. That's why it does crossword puzzles and builds atom bombs. You have no interest in either. Let me ask you this: can you be free of your mind whenever you want to? Have you found the "off" button?

You mean stop thinking altogether? No, I can't, except maybe for a moment or two.

Then the mind is using you. You are unconsciously identified

with it, so you don't even know that you are its slave. It's almost as if you were possessed without knowing it, and so you take the possessing entity to be yourself. The beginning of freedom is the realization that you are not the possessing entity — the thinker. Knowing this enables you to observe the entity. The moment you start *watching the thinker*, a higher level of consciousness becomes activated. You then begin to realize that there is a vast realm of intelligence beyond thought, that thought is only a tiny aspect of that intelligence. You also realize that all the things that truly matter — beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace — arise from beyond the mind. You begin to awaken.



FREEING YOURSELF FROM YOUR MIND

What exactly do you mean by "watching the thinker"?

When someone goes to the doctor and says, "I hear a voice in my head," he or she will most likely be sent to a psychiatrist. The fact is that, in a very similar way, virtually everyone hears a voice, or several voices, in their head all the time: the involuntary thought processes that you don't realize you have the power to stop. Continuous monologues or dialogues.

You have probably come across "mad" people in the street incessantly talking or muttering to themselves. Well, that's not much different from what you and all other "normal" people do, except that you don't do it out loud. The voice comments, speculates, judges, compares, complains, likes,

dislikes, and so on. The voice isn't necessarily relevant to the situation you find yourself in at the time; it may be reviving the recent or distant past or rehearsing or imagining possible future situations. Here it often imagines things going wrong and negative outcomes; this is called worry. Sometimes this soundtrack is accompanied by visual images or "mental movies." Even if the voice is relevant to the situation at hand, it will interpret it in terms of the past. This is because the voice belongs to your conditioned mind, which is the result of all your past history as well as of the collective cultural mind-set you inherited. So you see and judge the present through the eyes of the past and get a totally distorted view of it. It is not uncommon for the voice to be a person's own worst enemy. Many people live with a tormentor in their head that continuously attacks and punishes them and drains them of vital energy. It is the cause of untold misery and unhappiness, as well as of disease.

The good news is that you *can* free yourself from your mind. This is the only true liberation. You can take the first step right now. Start listening to the voice in your head as often as you can. Pay particular attention to any repetitive thought patterns, those old gramophone records that have been playing in your head perhaps for many years. This is what I mean by "watching the thinker," which is another way of saying: listen to the voice in your head, *be* there as the witnessing presence.

When you listen to that voice, listen to it impartially. That is to say, do not judge. Do not judge or condemn what you hear, for doing so would mean that the same voice has come in again through the back door. You'll soon realize: *there* is the voice, and here *I am* listening to it, watching it. This *I am*

realization, this sense of your own presence, is not a thought. It arises from beyond the mind.



So when you listen to a thought, you are aware not only of the thought but also of yourself as the witness of the thought. A new dimension of consciousness has come in. As you listen to the thought, you feel a conscious presence — your deeper self — behind or underneath the thought, as it were. The thought then loses its power over you and quickly subsides, because you are no longer energizing the mind through identification with it. This is the beginning of the end of involuntary and compulsive thinking.

When a thought subsides, you experience a discontinuity in the mental stream — a gap of “no-mind.” At first, the gaps will be short, a few seconds perhaps, but gradually they will become longer. When these gaps occur, you feel a certain stillness and peace inside you. This is the beginning of your natural state of felt oneness with Being, which is usually obscured by the mind. With practice, the sense of stillness and peace will deepen. In fact, there is no end to its depth. You will also feel a subtle emanation of joy arising from deep within: the joy of Being.

It is not a trancelike state. Not at all. There is no loss of consciousness here. The opposite is the case. If the price of peace were a lowering of your consciousness, and the price of stillness a lack of vitality and alertness, then they would not be worth having. In this state of inner connectedness, you are

much more alert, more awake than in the mind-identified state. You are fully present. It also raises the vibrational frequency of the energy field that gives life to the physical body.

As you go more deeply into this realm of no-mind, as it is sometimes called in the East, you realize the state of pure consciousness. In that state, you feel your own presence with such intensity and such joy that all thinking, all emotions, your physical body, as well as the whole external world become relatively insignificant in comparison to it. And yet this is not a selfish but a selfless state. It takes you beyond what you previously thought of as "your self." That presence is essentially you and at the same time inconceivably greater than you. What I am trying to convey here may sound paradoxical or even contradictory, but there is no other way that I can express it.



Instead of "watching the thinker," you can also create a gap in the mind stream simply by directing the focus of your attention into the Now. Just become intensely conscious of the present moment. This is a deeply satisfying thing to do. In this way, you draw consciousness away from mind activity and create a gap of no-mind in which you are highly alert and aware but not thinking. This is the essence of meditation.

In your everyday life, you can practice this by taking any routine activity that normally is only a means to an end and giving it your fullest attention, so that it becomes an end in

itself. For example, every time you walk up and down the stairs in your house or place of work, pay close attention to every step, every movement, even your breathing. Be totally present. Or when you wash your hands, pay attention to all the sense perceptions associated with the activity: the sound and feel of the water, the movement of your hands, the scent of the soap, and so on. Or when you get into your car, after you close the door, pause for a few seconds and observe the flow of your breath. Become aware of a silent but powerful sense of presence. There is one certain criterion by which you can measure your success in this practice: the degree of peace that you feel within.



So the single most vital step on your journey toward enlightenment is this: learn to disidentify from your mind. Every time you create a gap in the stream of mind, the light of your consciousness grows stronger.

One day you may catch yourself smiling at the voice in your head, as you would smile at the antics of a child. This means that you no longer take the content of your mind all that seriously, as your sense of self does not depend on it.

ENLIGHTENMENT: RISING ABOVE THOUGHT

Isn't thinking essential in order to survive in this world?

Your mind is an instrument, a tool. It is there to be used for a specific task, and when the task is completed, you lay it

down. As it is, I would say about 80 to 90 percent of most people's thinking is not only repetitive and useless, but because of its dysfunctional and often negative nature, much of it is also harmful. Observe your mind and you will find this to be true. It causes a serious leakage of vital energy.

This kind of compulsive thinking is actually an addiction. What characterizes an addiction? Quite simply this: you no longer feel that you have the choice to stop. It seems stronger than you. It also gives you a false sense of pleasure, pleasure that invariably turns into pain.

Why should we be addicted to thinking?

Because you are identified with it, which means that you derive your sense of self from the content and activity of your mind. Because you believe that you would cease to be if you stopped thinking. As you grow up, you form a mental image of who you are, based on your personal and cultural conditioning. We may call this phantom self the ego. It consists of mind activity and can only be kept going through constant thinking. The term *ego* means different things to different people, but when I use it here it means a false self, created by unconscious identification with the mind.

To the ego, the present moment hardly exists. Only past and future are considered important. This total reversal of the truth accounts for the fact that in the ego mode the mind is so dysfunctional. It is always concerned with keeping the past alive, because without it — who are you? It constantly projects itself into the future to ensure its continued survival and to seek some kind of release or fulfillment there. It says: "One day, when this, that, or the other happens, I am going

to be okay, happy, at peace." Even when the ego seems to be concerned with the present, it is not the present that it sees: It misperceives it completely because it looks at it through the eyes of the past. Or it reduces the present to a means to an end, an end that always lies in the mind-projected future. Observe your mind and you'll see that this is how it works.

The present moment holds the key to liberation. But you cannot find the present moment as long as you *are* your mind.

I don't want to lose my ability to analyze and discriminate. I wouldn't mind learning to think more clearly, in a more focused way, but I don't want to lose my mind. The gift of thought is the most precious thing we have. Without it, we would just be another species of animal.

The predominance of mind is no more than a stage in the evolution of consciousness. We need to go on to the next stage now as a matter of urgency; otherwise, we will be destroyed by the mind, which has grown into a monster. I will talk about this in more detail later. Thinking and consciousness are not synonymous. Thinking is only a small aspect of consciousness. Thought cannot exist without consciousness, but consciousness does not need thought.

Enlightenment means rising above thought, not falling back to a level below thought, the level of an animal or a plant. In the enlightened state, you still use your thinking mind when needed, but in a much more focused and effective way than before. You use it mostly for practical purposes, but you are free of the involuntary internal dialogue, and there is inner stillness. When you do use your mind, and particularly when

a creative solution is needed, you oscillate every few minutes or so between thought and stillness, between mind and no-mind. No-mind is consciousness without thought. Only in that way is it possible to think creatively, because only in that way does thought have any real power. Thought alone, when it is no longer connected with the much vaster realm of consciousness, quickly becomes barren, insane, destructive.

The mind is essentially a survival machine. Attack and defense against other minds, gathering, storing, and analyzing information — this is what it is good at, but it is not at all creative. All true artists, whether they know it or not, create from a place of no-mind, from inner stillness. The mind then gives form to the creative impulse or insight. Even the great scientists have reported that their creative breakthroughs came at a time of mental quietude. The surprising result of a nationwide inquiry among America's most eminent mathematicians, including Einstein, to find out their working methods, was that thinking "plays only a subordinate part in the brief, decisive phase of the creative act itself."¹ So I would say that the simple reason why the majority of scientists are *not* creative is not because they don't know how to think but because they don't know how to stop thinking!

It wasn't through the mind, through thinking, that the miracle that is life on earth or your body was created and is being sustained. There is clearly an intelligence at work that is far greater than the mind. How can a single human cell measuring 1/1,000 of an inch in diameter contain instructions within its DNA that would fill 1,000 books of 600 pages each? The more we learn about the workings of the body, the more we realize just how vast is the intelligence at work within it and how little we know. When the mind reconnects

with that, it becomes a most wonderful tool. It then serves something greater than itself.

EMOTION: THE BODY'S REACTION TO YOUR MIND

What about emotions? I get caught up in my emotions more than I do in my mind.

Mind, in the way I use the word, is not just thought. It includes your emotions as well as all unconscious mental-emotional reactive patterns. Emotion arises at the place where mind and body meet. It is the body's reaction to your mind — or you might say, a reflection of your mind in the body. For example, an attack thought or a hostile thought will create a buildup of energy in the body that we call anger. The body is getting ready to fight. The thought that you are being threatened, physically or psychologically, causes the body to contract, and this is the physical side of what we call fear. Research has shown that strong emotions even cause changes in the biochemistry of the body. These biochemical changes represent the physical or material aspect of the emotion. Of course, you are not usually conscious of all your thought patterns, and it is often only through watching your emotions that you can bring them into awareness.

The more you are identified with your thinking, your likes and dislikes, judgments and interpretations, which is to say the less *present* you are as the watching consciousness, the stronger the emotional energy charge will be, whether you are aware of it or not. If you cannot feel your emotions, if you are cut off from them, you will eventually experience them on a purely physical level, as a physical problem or

symptom. A great deal has been written about this in recent years, so we don't need to go into it here. A strong unconscious emotional pattern may even manifest as an external event that appears to just happen to you. For example, I have observed that people who carry a lot of anger inside without being aware of it and without expressing it are more likely to be attacked, verbally or even physically, by other angry people, and often for no apparent reason. They have a strong emanation of anger that certain people pick up subliminally and that triggers their own latent anger.

If you have difficulty feeling your emotions, start by focusing attention on the inner energy field of your body. Feel the body from within. This will also put you in touch with your emotions. We will explore this in more detail later.



You say that an emotion is the mind's reflection in the body. But sometimes there is a conflict between the two: the mind says "no" while the emotion says "yes," or the other way around.

If you really want to know your mind, the body will always give you a truthful reflection, so look at the emotion, or rather feel it in your body. If there is an apparent conflict between them, the thought will be the lie, the emotion will be the truth. Not the ultimate truth of who you are, but the relative truth of your state of mind at that time.

Conflict between surface thoughts and unconscious mental processes is certainly common. You may not yet be able to

bring your unconscious mind activity into awareness as *thoughts*, but it will always be reflected in the body as *an emotion*, and of this you can become aware. To watch an emotion in this way is basically the same as listening to or watching a thought, which I described earlier. The only difference is that, while a thought is in your head, an emotion has a strong physical component and so is primarily felt in the body. You can then allow the emotion to be there without being controlled by it. You no longer are the emotion; you are the watcher, the observing presence. If you practice this, all that is unconscious in you will be brought into the light of consciousness.

So observing our emotions is as important as observing our thoughts?

Yes. Make it a habit to ask yourself: What's going on inside me at this moment? That question will point you in the right direction. But don't analyze, just watch. Focus your attention within. Feel the energy of the emotion. If there is no emotion present, take your attention more deeply into the inner energy field of your body. It is the doorway into Being.



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.

Basically, all emotions are modifications of one primordial, undifferentiated emotion that has its origin in the loss of awareness of who you are beyond name and form. Because of its undifferentiated nature, it is hard to find a name that precisely describes this emotion. "Fear" comes close, but apart from a continuous sense of threat, it also includes a deep sense of abandonment and incompleteness. It may be best to use a term that is as undifferentiated as that basic emotion and simply call it "pain." One of the main tasks of the mind is to fight or remove that emotional pain, which is one of the reasons for its incessant activity, but all it can ever achieve is to cover it up temporarily. In fact, the harder the mind struggles to get rid of the pain, the greater the pain. The mind can never find the solution, nor can it afford to allow you to find the solution, because it is itself an intrinsic part of the "problem." Imagine a chief of police trying to find an arsonist when the arsonist is the chief of police. You will not be free of that pain until you cease to derive your sense of self from identification with the mind, which is to say from ego. The mind is then toppled from its place of power and Being reveals itself as your true nature.

Yes, I know what you are going to ask.

I was going to ask: What about positive emotions such as love and joy?

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. Emotion literally means "disturbance." The word comes from the Latin *emovere*, meaning "to disturb."

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. This is because they arise from beyond the mind. Emotions, on the other hand, being part of the dualistic mind, are subject to the law of opposites. This simply means that you cannot have good without bad. So in the unenlightened, mind-identified condition, what is sometimes wrongly called joy is the usually short-lived pleasure side of the continuously alternating pain/pleasure cycle. Pleasure is always derived from something outside you,

whereas joy arises from within. The very thing that gives you pleasure today will give you pain tomorrow, or it will leave you, so its absence will give you pain. And what is often referred to as love may be pleasurable and exciting for a while, but it is an addictive clinging, an extremely needy condition that can turn into its opposite at the flick of a switch. Many "love" relationships, after the initial euphoria has passed, actually oscillate between "love" and hate, attraction and attack.

Real love doesn't make you suffer. How could it? It doesn't suddenly turn into hate, nor does real joy turn into pain. As I said, even before you are enlightened — before you have freed yourself from your mind — you may get glimpses of true joy, true love, or of a deep inner peace, still but vibrantly alive. These are aspects of your true nature, which is usually obscured by the mind. Even within a "normal" addictive relationship, there can be moments when the presence of something more genuine, something incorruptible, can be felt. But they will only be glimpses, soon to be covered up again through mind interference. It may then seem that you had something very precious and lost it, or your mind may convince you that it was all an illusion anyway. The truth is that it wasn't an illusion, and you cannot lose it. It is part of your natural state, which can be obscured but can never be destroyed by the mind. Even when the sky is heavily overcast, the sun hasn't disappeared. It's still there on the other side of the clouds.

The Buddha says that pain or suffering arises through desire or craving and that to be free of pain we need to cut the bonds of desire.

All cravings are the mind seeking salvation or fulfillment in external things and in the future as a substitute for the joy of Being. As long as I am my mind, I am those cravings, those needs, wants, attachments, and aversions, and apart from them there is no "I" except as a mere possibility, an unfulfilled potential, a seed that has not yet sprouted. In that state, even my desire to become free or enlightened is just another craving for fulfillment or completion in the future. So don't seek to become free of desire or "achieve" enlightenment. Become present. Be there as the observer of the mind. Instead of quoting the Buddha, be the Buddha, be "the awakened one," which is what the word *buddha* means.

Humans have been in the grip of pain for eons, ever since they fell from the state of grace, entered the realm of time and mind, and lost awareness of Being. At that point, they started to perceive themselves as meaningless fragments in an alien universe, unconnected to the Source and to each other.

Pain is inevitable as long as you are identified with your mind, which is to say as long as you are unconscious, spiritually speaking. I am talking here primarily of emotional pain, which is also the main cause of physical pain and physical disease. Resentment, hatred, self-pity, guilt, anger, depression, jealousy, and so on, even the slightest irritation, are all forms of pain. And every pleasure or emotional high contains within itself the seed of pain: its inseparable opposite, which will manifest in time.

Anybody who has ever taken drugs to get "high" will know that the high eventually turns into a low, that the pleasure turns into some form of pain. Many people also know from

their own experience how easily and quickly an intimate relationship can turn from a source of pleasure to a source of pain. Seen from a higher perspective, both the negative and the positive polarities are faces of the same coin, are both part of the underlying pain that is inseparable from the mind-identified egoic state of consciousness.

There are two levels to your pain: the pain that you create now, and the pain from the past that still lives on in your mind and body. Ceasing to create pain in the present and dissolving past pain — this is what I want to talk about now.

CONSCIOUSNESS: THE WAY OUT OF PAIN

CREATE NO MORE PAIN IN THE PRESENT

Nobody's life is entirely free of pain and sorrow. Isn't it a question of learning to live with them rather than trying to avoid them?

The greater part of human pain is unnecessary. It is self-created as long as the unobserved mind runs your life.

The pain that you create now is always some form of nonacceptance, some form of unconscious resistance to what is. On the level of thought, the resistance is some form of judgment. On the emotional level, it is some form of negativity. The intensity of the pain depends on the degree of resistance to the present moment, and this in turn depends on how strongly you are identified with your mind. The mind always seeks to deny the Now and to escape from it. In other words, the more you are identified with your mind, the more you suffer. Or you may put it like this: the more you are able to honor and accept the Now, the more you are free of pain, of suffering — and free of the egoic mind.

Why does the mind habitually deny or resist the Now? Because it cannot function and remain in control without time, which is past and future, so it perceives the timeless Now as threatening. Time and mind are in fact inseparable.

Imagine the Earth devoid of human life, inhabited only by plants and animals. Would it still have a past and a future? Could we still speak of time in any meaningful way? The question "What time is it?" or "What's the date today?" — if anybody were there to ask it — would be quite meaningless. The oak tree or the eagle would be bemused by such a question. "What time?" they would ask. "Well, of course, it's now. The time is now. What else is there?"

Yes, we need the mind as well as time to function in this world, but there comes a point where they take over our lives, and this is where dysfunction, pain, and sorrow set in.

The mind, to ensure that it remains in control, seeks continuously to cover up the present moment with past and future, and so, as the vitality and infinite creative potential of Being, which is inseparable from the Now, becomes covered up by time, your true nature becomes obscured by the mind. An increasingly heavy burden of time has been accumulating in the human mind. All individuals are suffering under this burden, but they also keep adding to it every moment whenever they ignore or deny that precious moment or reduce it to a means of getting to some future moment, which only exists in the mind, never in actuality. The accumulation of time in the collective and individual human mind also holds a vast amount of residual pain from the past.

If you no longer want to create pain for yourself and others, if you no longer want to add to the residue of past pain that still

lives on in you, then don't create any more time, or at least no more than is necessary to deal with the practical aspects of your life. How to stop creating time? Realize deeply that the present moment is all you ever have. Make the Now the primary focus of your life. Whereas before you dwelt in time and paid brief visits to the Now, have your dwelling place in the Now and pay brief visits to past and future when required to deal with the practical aspects of your life situation. Always say "yes" to the present moment. What could be more futile, more insane, than to create inner resistance to something that already *is*? What could be more insane than to oppose life itself, which is now and always now? Surrender to what *is*. Say "yes" to life — and see how life suddenly starts working *for* you rather than against you.



The present moment is sometimes unacceptable, unpleasant, or awful.

It is as it is. Observe how the mind labels it and how this labeling process, this continuous sitting in judgment, creates pain and unhappiness. By watching the mechanics of the mind, you step out of its resistance patterns, and you can then *allow the present moment to be*. This will give you a taste of the state of inner freedom from external conditions, the state of true inner peace. Then see what happens, and take action if necessary or possible.

Accept — then act. Whatever the present moment contains, accept it as if you had chosen it. Always work with it, not

against it. Make it your friend and ally, not your enemy. This will miraculously transform your whole life.



PAST PAIN: DISSOLVING THE PAIN-BODY

As long as you are unable to access the power of the Now, every emotional pain that you experience leaves behind a residue of pain that lives on in you. It merges with the pain from the past, which was already there, and becomes lodged in your mind and body. This, of course, includes the pain you suffered as a child, caused by the unconsciousness of the world into which you were born.

This accumulated pain is a negative energy field that occupies your body and mind. If you look on it as an invisible entity in its own right, you are getting quite close to the truth. It's the emotional pain-body. It has two modes of being: dormant and active. A pain-body may be dormant 90 percent of the time; in a deeply unhappy person, though, it may be active up to 100 percent of the time. Some people live almost entirely through their pain-body, while others may experience it only in certain situations, such as intimate relationships, or situations linked with past loss or abandonment, physical or emotional hurt, and so on. Anything can trigger it, particularly if it resonates with a pain pattern from your past. When it is ready to awaken from its dormant stage, even a thought or an innocent remark made by someone close to you can activate it.

Some pain-bodies are obnoxious but relatively harmless, for example like a child who won't stop whining. Others are vicious and destructive monsters, true demons. Some are physically violent; many more are emotionally violent. Some will attack people around you or close to you, while others may attack you, their host. Thoughts and feelings you have about your life then become deeply negative and self-destructive. Illnesses and accidents are often created in this way. Some pain-bodies drive their hosts to suicide.

When you thought you knew a person and then you are suddenly confronted with this alien, nasty creature for the first time, you are in for quite a shock. However, it's more important to observe it in yourself than in someone else. Watch out for any sign of unhappiness in yourself, in whatever form — it may be the awakening pain-body. This can take the form of irritation, impatience, a somber mood, a desire to hurt, anger, rage, depression, a need to have some drama in your relationship, and so on. Catch it the moment it awakens from its dormant state.

The pain-body wants to survive, just like every other entity in existence, and it can only survive if it gets you to unconsciously identify with it. It can then rise up, take you over, "become you," and live through you. It needs to get its "food" through you. It will feed on any experience that resonates with its own kind of energy, anything that creates further pain in whatever form: anger, destructiveness, hatred, grief, emotional drama, violence, and even illness. So the pain-body, when it has taken you over, will create a situation in your life that reflects back its own energy frequency for it to feed on. Pain can only feed on pain. Pain cannot feed on joy. It finds it quite indigestible.

Once the pain-body has taken you over, you want more pain. You become a victim or a perpetrator. You want to inflict pain, or you want to suffer pain, or both. There isn't really much difference between the two. You are not conscious of this, of course, and will vehemently claim that you do not want pain. But look closely and you will find that your thinking and behavior are designed to keep the pain going, for yourself and others. If you were truly conscious of it, the pattern would dissolve, for to want more pain is insanity, and nobody is consciously insane.

The pain-body, which is the dark shadow cast by the ego, is actually afraid of the light of your consciousness. It is afraid of being found out. Its survival depends on your unconscious identification with it, as well as on your unconscious fear of facing the pain that lives in you. But if you don't face it, if you don't bring the light of your consciousness into the pain, you will be forced to relive it again and again. The pain-body may seem to you like a dangerous monster that you cannot bear to look at, but I assure you that it is an insubstantial phantom that cannot prevail against the power of your presence.

Some spiritual teachings state that all pain is ultimately an illusion, and this is true. The question is: Is it true for you? A mere belief doesn't make it true. Do you want to experience pain for the rest of your life and keep saying that it is an illusion? Does that free you from the pain? What we are concerned with here is how you can *realize* this truth — that is, make it real in your own experience.

So the pain-body doesn't want you to observe it directly and see it for what it is. The moment you observe it, feel its energy field within you, and take your attention into it, the identification is broken. A higher dimension of consciousness has

come in. I call it *presence*. You are now the witness or the watcher of the pain-body. This means that it cannot use you anymore by pretending to be you, and it can no longer replenish itself through you. You have found your own innermost strength. You have accessed the power of Now.

What happens to the pain-body when we become conscious enough to break our identification with it?

Unconsciousness creates it; consciousness transmutes it into itself. St. Paul expressed this universal principle beautifully: "Everything is shown up by being exposed to the light, and whatever is exposed to the light itself becomes light." Just as you cannot fight the darkness, you cannot fight the pain-body. Trying to do so would create inner conflict and thus further pain. Watching it is enough. Watching it implies accepting it as part of what is at that moment.

The pain-body consists of trapped life-energy that has split off from your total energy field and has temporarily become autonomous through the unnatural process of mind identification. It has turned in on itself and become anti-life, like an animal trying to devour its own tail. Why do you think our civilization has become so life-destructive? But even the life-destructive forces are still life-energy.

When you start to disidentify and become the watcher, the pain-body will continue to operate for a while and will try to trick you into identifying with it again. Although you are no longer energizing it through your identification, it has a certain momentum, just like a spinning wheel that will keep turning for a while even when it is no longer being propelled. At this stage, it may also create physical aches and

pains in different parts of the body, but they won't last. Stay present, stay conscious. Be the ever-alert guardian of your inner space. You need to be present enough to be able to watch the pain-body directly and feel its energy. It then cannot control your thinking. The moment your thinking is aligned with the energy field of the pain-body, you are identified with it and again feeding it with your thoughts.

For example, if anger is the predominant energy vibration of the pain-body and you think angry thoughts, dwelling on what someone did to you or what you are going to do to him or her, then you have become unconscious, and the pain-body has become "you." Where there is anger, there is always pain underneath. Or when a dark mood comes upon you and you start getting into a negative mind-pattern and thinking how dreadful your life is, your thinking has become aligned with the pain-body, and you have become unconscious and vulnerable to the pain-body's attack. "Unconscious," the way that I use the word here, means to be identified with some mental or emotional pattern. It implies a complete absence of the watcher.

Sustained conscious attention severs the link between the pain-body and your thought processes and brings about the process of transmutation. It is as if the pain becomes fuel for the flame of your consciousness, which then burns more brightly as a result. This is the esoteric meaning of the ancient art of alchemy: the transmutation of base metal into gold, of suffering into consciousness. The split within is healed, and you become whole again. Your responsibility then is not to create further pain.

Let me summarize the process. Focus attention on the feeling inside you. Know that it is the pain-body. Accept that it is

there. Don't *think* about it — don't let the feeling turn into thinking. Don't judge or analyze. Don't make an identity for yourself out of it. Stay present, and continue to be the observer of what is happening inside you. Become aware not only of the emotional pain but also of "the one who observes," the silent watcher. This is the power of the Now, the power of your own conscious presence. Then see what happens.



For many women, the pain-body awakens particularly at the time preceding the menstrual flow. I will talk about this and the reason for it in more detail later. Right now, let me just say this: If you are able to stay alert and present at that time and *watch* whatever you feel within, rather than be taken over by it, it affords an opportunity for the most powerful spiritual practice, and a rapid transmutation of all past pain becomes possible.

EGO IDENTIFICATION WITH THE PAIN-BODY

The process that I have just described is profoundly powerful yet simple. It could be taught to a child, and hopefully one day it will be one of the first things children learn in school. Once you have understood the basic principle of being present as the watcher of what happens inside you — and you "understand" it by experiencing it — you have at your disposal the most potent transformational tool.

This is not to deny that you may encounter intense inner resistance to disidentifying from your pain. This will be the

case particularly if you have lived closely identified with your emotional pain-body for most of your life and the whole or a large part of your sense of self is invested in it. What this means is that you have made an unhappy self out of your pain-body and believe that this mind-made fiction is who you are. In that case, unconscious fear of losing your identity will create strong resistance to any disidentification. In other words, you would rather be in pain — *be* the pain-body — than take a leap into the unknown and risk losing the familiar unhappy self.

If this applies to you, observe the resistance within yourself. Observe the attachment to your pain. Be very alert. Observe the peculiar pleasure you derive from being unhappy. Observe the compulsion to talk or think about it. The resistance will cease if you make it conscious. You can then take your attention into the pain-body, stay present as the witness, and so initiate its transmutation.

Only *you* can do this. Nobody can do it *for* you. But if you are fortunate enough to find someone who is intensely conscious, if you can be with them and join them in the state of presence, that can be helpful and will accelerate things. In this way, your own light will quickly grow stronger. When a log that has only just started to burn is placed next to one that is burning fiercely, and after a while they are separated again, the first log will be burning with much greater intensity. After all, it is the same fire. To be such a fire is one of the functions of a spiritual teacher. Some therapists may also be able to fulfill that function, provided that they have gone beyond the level of mind and can create and sustain a state of intense conscious presence while they are working with you.

THE ORIGIN OF FEAR

You mentioned fear as being part of our basic underlying emotional pain. How does fear arise, and why is there so much of it in people's lives? And isn't a certain amount of fear just healthy self-protection? If I didn't have a fear of fire, I might put my hand in it and get burned.

The reason why you don't put your hand in the fire is not because of fear, it's because you know that you'll get burned. You don't need fear to avoid unnecessary danger — just a minimum of intelligence and common sense. For such practical matters, it is useful to apply the lessons learned in the past. Now if someone threatened you with fire or with physical violence, you might experience something like fear. This is an instinctive shrinking back from danger, but not the psychological condition of fear that we are talking about here. The psychological condition of fear is divorced from any concrete and true immediate danger. It comes in many forms: unease, worry, anxiety, nervousness, tension, dread, phobia, and so on. This kind of psychological fear is always of something that might happen, not of something that is happening now. You are in the here and now, while your mind is in the future. This creates an anxiety gap. And if you are identified with your mind and have lost touch with the power and simplicity of the Now, that anxiety gap will be your constant companion. You can always cope with the present moment, but you cannot cope with something that is only a mind projection — you cannot cope with the future.

Moreover, as long as you are identified with your mind, the ego runs your life, as I pointed out earlier. Because of its phantom nature, and despite elaborate defense mechanisms,

the ego is very vulnerable and insecure, and it sees itself as constantly under threat. This, by the way, is the case even if the ego is outwardly very confident. Now remember that an emotion is the body's reaction to your mind. What message is the body receiving continuously from the ego, the false, mind-made self? Danger, I am under threat. And what is the emotion generated by this continuous message? Fear, of course.

Fear seems to have many causes. Fear of loss, fear of failure, fear of being hurt, and so on, but ultimately all fear is the ego's fear of death, of annihilation. To the ego, death is always just around the corner. In this mind-identified state, fear of death affects every aspect of your life. For example, even such a seemingly trivial and "normal" thing as the compulsive need to be right in an argument and make the other person wrong — defending the mental position with which you have identified — is due to the fear of death. If you identify with a mental position, then if you are wrong, your mind-based sense of self is seriously threatened with annihilation. So you as the ego cannot afford to be wrong. To be wrong is to die. Wars have been fought over this, and countless relationships have broken down.

Once you have disidentified from your mind, whether you are right or wrong makes no difference to your sense of self at all, so the forcefully compulsive and deeply unconscious need to be right, which is a form of violence, will no longer be there. You can state clearly and firmly how you feel or what you think, but there will be no aggressiveness or defensiveness about it. Your sense of self is then derived from a deeper and truer place within yourself, not from the mind. Watch out for any kind of defensiveness within yourself.

What are you defending? An illusory identity, an image in your mind, a fictitious entity. By making this pattern conscious, by witnessing it, you disidentify from it. In the light of your consciousness, the unconscious pattern will then quickly dissolve. This is the end of all arguments and power games, which are so corrosive to relationships. Power over others is weakness disguised as strength. True power is within, and it is available to you now.

So anyone who is identified with their mind and, therefore, disconnected from their true power, their deeper self rooted in Being, will have fear as their constant companion. The number of people who have gone beyond mind is as yet extremely small, so you can assume that virtually everyone you meet or know lives in a state of fear. Only the intensity of it varies. It fluctuates between anxiety and dread at one end of the scale and a vague unease and distant sense of threat at the other. Most people become conscious of it only when it takes on one of its more acute forms.

THE EGO'S SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS

Another aspect of the emotional pain that is an intrinsic part of the egoic mind is a deep-seated sense of lack or incompleteness, of not being whole. In some people, this is conscious, in others unconscious. If it is conscious, it manifests as the unsettling and constant feeling of not being worthy or good enough. If it is unconscious, it will only be felt indirectly as an intense craving, wanting and needing. In either case, people will often enter into a compulsive pursuit of ego-gratification and things to identify with in order to fill this hole they feel within. So they strive after possessions, money, success, power, recognition, or a special relationship, basically so that

they can feel better about themselves, feel more complete. But even when they attain all these things, they soon find that the hole is still there, that it is bottomless. Then they are really in trouble, because they cannot delude themselves anymore. Well, they can and do, but it gets more difficult.

As long as the egoic mind is running your life, you cannot truly be at ease; you cannot be at peace or fulfilled except for brief intervals when you obtained what you wanted, when a craving has just been fulfilled. Since the ego is a derived sense of self, it needs to identify with external things. It needs to be both defended and fed constantly. The most common ego identifications have to do with possessions, the work you do, social status and recognition, knowledge and education, physical appearance, special abilities, relationships, personal and family history, belief systems, and often also political, nationalistic, racial, religious, and other collective identifications. None of these is you.

Do you find this frightening? Or is it a relief to know this? All of these things you will have to relinquish sooner or later. Perhaps you find it as yet hard to believe, and I am certainly not asking you to *believe* that your identity cannot be found in any of those things. You will *know* the truth of it for yourself. You will know it at the latest when you feel death approaching. Death is a stripping away of all that is not you. The secret of life is to "die before you die" — and find that there is no death.

MOVING DEEPLY INTO THE NOW

DON'T SEEK YOUR SELF IN THE MIND

I feel that there is still a great deal I need to learn about the workings of my mind before I can get anywhere near full consciousness or spiritual enlightenment.

No, you don't. The problems of the mind cannot be solved on the level of the mind. Once you have understood the basic dysfunction, there isn't really much else that you need to learn or understand. Studying the complexities of the mind may make you a good psychologist, but doing so won't take you beyond the mind, just as the study of madness isn't enough to create sanity. You have already understood the basic mechanics of the unconscious state: identification with the mind, which creates a false self, the ego, as a substitute for your true self rooted in Being. You become as a "branch cut off from the vine," as Jesus puts it.

The ego's needs are endless. It feels vulnerable and threatened and so lives in a state of fear and want. Once you know how the basic dysfunction operates, there is no need to explore all its countless manifestations, no need to make it

into a complex personal problem. The ego, of course, loves that. It is always seeking for something to attach itself to in order to uphold and strengthen its illusory sense of self, and it will readily attach itself to your problems. This is why, for so many people, a large part of their sense of self is intimately connected with their problems. Once this has happened, the last thing they want is to become free of them; that would mean loss of self. There can be a great deal of unconscious ego investment in pain and suffering.

So once you recognize the root of unconsciousness as identification with the mind, which of course includes the emotions, you step out of it. You become *present*. When you are present, you can allow the mind to be as it is without getting entangled in it. The mind in itself is not dysfunctional. It is a wonderful tool. Dysfunction sets in when you seek your self in it and mistake it for who you are. It then becomes the *egoic* mind and takes over your whole life.

END THE DELUSION OF TIME

It seems almost impossible to disidentify from the mind. We are all immersed in it. How do you teach a fish to fly?

Here is the key: End the delusion of time. Time and mind are inseparable. Remove time from the mind and it stops — unless you choose to use it.

To be identified with your mind is to be trapped in time: the compulsion to live almost exclusively through memory and anticipation. This creates an endless preoccupation with past and future and an unwillingness to honor and acknowledge the present moment and *allow it to be*. The compulsion

arises because the past gives you an identity and the future holds the promise of salvation, of fulfillment in whatever form. Both are illusions.

But without a sense of time, how would we function in this world? There would be no goals to strive toward anymore. I wouldn't even know who I am, because my past makes me who I am today. I think time is something very precious, and we need to learn to use it wisely rather than waste it.

Time isn't precious at all, because it is an illusion. What you perceive as precious is not time but the one point that is out of time: the Now. That is precious indeed. The more you are focused on time — past and future — the more you miss the Now, the most precious thing there is.

Why is it the most precious thing? Firstly, because it is the *only* thing. It's all there is. The eternal present is the space within which your whole life unfolds, the one factor that remains constant. Life is now. There was never a time when your life was *not* now, nor will there ever be. Secondly, the Now is the only point that can take you beyond the limited confines of the mind. It is your only point of access into the timeless and formless realm of Being.



NOTHING EXISTS OUTSIDE THE NOW

Aren't past and future just as real, sometimes even more real, than the present? After all, the past determines who we are, as

well as how we perceive and behave in the present. And our future goals determine which actions we take in the present.

You haven't yet grasped the essence of what I am saying because you are trying to understand it mentally. The mind cannot understand this. Only *you* can. Please just listen.

Have you ever experienced, done, thought, or felt anything outside the Now? Do you think you ever will? Is it possible for anything to happen or be outside the Now? The answer is obvious, is it not?

Nothing ever happened in the past; it happened in the Now. Nothing will ever happen in the future; it will happen in the Now.

What you think of as the past is a memory trace, stored in the mind, of a former Now. When you remember the past, you reactivate a memory trace — and you do so now. The future is an imagined Now, a projection of the mind. When the future comes, it comes as the Now. When you think about the future, you do it now. Past and future obviously have no reality of their own. Just as the moon has no light of its own, but can only reflect the light of the sun, so are past and future only pale reflections of the light, power, and reality of the eternal present. Their reality is "borrowed" from the Now.

The essence of what I am saying here cannot be understood by the mind. The moment you grasp it, there is a shift in consciousness from mind to Being, from time to presence. Suddenly, everything feels alive, radiates energy, emanates Being.



THE KEY TO THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

In life-threatening emergency situations, the shift in consciousness from time to presence sometimes happens naturally. The personality that has a past and a future momentarily recedes and is replaced by an intense conscious presence, very still but very alert at the same time. Whatever response is needed then arises out of that state of consciousness.

The reason why some people love to engage in dangerous activities, such as mountain climbing, car racing, and so on, although they may not be aware of it, is that it forces them into the Now — that intensely alive state that is free of time, free of problems, free of thinking, free of the burden of the personality. Slipping away from the present moment even for a second may mean death. Unfortunately, they come to depend on a particular activity to be in that state. But you don't need to climb the north face of the Eiger. You can enter that state now.



Since ancient times, spiritual masters of all traditions have pointed to the Now as the key to the spiritual dimension.

Despite this, it seems to have remained a secret. It is certainly not taught in churches and temples. If you go to a church, you may hear readings from the Gospels such as "Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself," or "Nobody who puts his hands to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God." Or you might hear the passage about the beautiful flowers that are not anxious about tomorrow but live with ease in the timeless Now and are provided for abundantly by God. The depth and radical nature of these teachings are not recognized. No one seems to realize that they are meant to be lived and so bring about a profound inner transformation.



The whole essence of Zen consists in walking along the razor's edge of Now — to be so utterly, so completely *present* that no problem, no suffering, nothing that is not *who you are* in your essence, can survive in you. In the Now, in the absence of time, all your problems dissolve. Suffering needs time; it cannot survive in the Now.

The great Zen master Rinzai, in order to take his students' attention away from time, would often raise his finger and slowly ask: "What, at this moment, is lacking?" A powerful question that does not require an answer on the level of the mind. It is designed to take your attention deeply into the Now. A similar question in the Zen tradition is this: "If not now, when?"



The Now is also central to the teaching of Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam. Sufis have a saying: "The Sufi is the son of time present." And Rumi, the great poet and teacher of Sufism, declares: "Past and future veil God from our sight; burn up both of them with fire."

Meister Eckhart, the thirteenth-century spiritual teacher, summed it all up beautifully: "Time is what keeps the light from reaching us. There is no greater obstacle to God than time."



ACCESSING THE POWER OF THE NOW

A moment ago, when you talked about the eternal present and the unreality of past and future, I found myself looking at that tree outside the window. I had looked at it a few times before, but this time it was different. The external perception had not changed much, except that the colors seemed brighter and more vibrant. But there was now an added dimension to it. This is hard to explain. I don't know how, but I was aware of something invisible that I felt was the essence of that tree, its inner spirit, if you like. And somehow I was part of that. I realize now that I hadn't truly seen the tree before, just a flat

and dead image of it. When I look at the tree now, some of that awareness is still present, but I can feel it slipping away. You see, the experience is already receding into the past. Can something like this ever be more than a fleeting glimpse?

You were free of time for a moment. You moved into the Now and therefore perceived the tree without the screen of mind. The awareness of Being became part of your perception. With the timeless dimension comes a different kind of knowing, one that does not "kill" the spirit that lives within every creature and every thing. A knowing that does not destroy the sacredness and mystery of life but contains a deep love and reverence for all that is. A knowing of which the mind knows nothing.

The mind cannot know the tree. It can only know facts or information *about* the tree. My mind cannot know you, only labels, judgments, facts, and opinions *about* you. Being alone knows directly.

There is a place for mind and mind knowledge. It is in the practical realm of day-to-day living. However, when it takes over all aspects of your life, including your relationships with other human beings and with nature, it becomes a monstrous parasite that, unchecked, may well end up killing all life on the planet and finally itself by killing its host.

You have had a glimpse of how the timeless can transform your perceptions. But an experience is not enough, no matter how beautiful or profound. What is needed and what we are concerned with is a permanent shift in consciousness.

So break the old pattern of present-moment denial and present-moment resistance. Make it your practice to withdraw attention

from past and future whenever they are not needed. Step out of the time dimension as much as possible in everyday life. If you find it hard to enter the Now directly, start by observing the habitual tendency of your mind to want to escape from the Now. You will observe that the future is usually imagined as either better or worse than the present. If the imagined future is better, it gives you hope or pleasurable anticipation. If it is worse, it creates anxiety. Both are illusory. Through self-observation, more *presence* comes into your life automatically. The moment you realize you are not present, you *are* present. Whenever you are able to observe your mind, you are no longer trapped in it. Another factor has come in, something that is not of the mind: the witnessing presence.

Be present as the watcher of your mind — of your thoughts and emotions as well as your reactions in various situations. Be at least as interested in your reactions as in the situation or person that causes you to react. Notice also how often your attention is in the past or future. Don't judge or analyze what you observe. Watch the thought, feel the emotion, observe the reaction. Don't make a personal problem out of them. You will then feel something more powerful than any of those things that you observe: the still, observing presence itself behind the content of your mind, the silent watcher.



Intense presence is needed when certain situations trigger a reaction with a strong emotional charge, such as when your self-image is threatened, a challenge comes into your life that

triggers fear, things "go wrong," or an emotional complex from the past is brought up. In those instances, the tendency is for you to become "unconscious." The reaction or emotion takes you over — you "become" it. You act it out. You justify, make wrong, attack, defend...except that it isn't you, it's the reactive pattern, the mind in its habitual survival mode.

Identification with the mind gives it more energy; observation of the mind withdraws energy from it. Identification with the mind creates more time; observation of the mind opens up the dimension of the timeless. The energy that is withdrawn from the mind turns into presence. Once you can feel what it means to be present, it becomes much easier to simply choose to step out of the time dimension whenever time is not needed for practical purposes and move more deeply into the Now. This does not impair your ability to use time — past or future — when you need to refer to it for practical matters. Nor does it impair your ability to use your mind. In fact, it enhances it. When you do use your mind, it will be sharper, more focused.

LETTING GO OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME

Learn to use time in the practical aspects of your life — we may call this "clock time" — but immediately return to present-moment awareness when those practical matters have been dealt with. In this way, there will be no buildup of "psychological time," which is identification with the past and continuous compulsive projection into the future.

Clock time is not just making an appointment or planning a trip. It includes learning from the past so that we don't repeat the same mistakes over and over. Setting goals and working

toward them. Predicting the future by means of patterns and laws, physical, mathematical and so on, learned from the past and taking appropriate action on the basis of our predictions.

But even here, within the sphere of practical living, where we cannot do without reference to past and future, the present moment remains the essential factor: Any lesson from the past becomes relevant and is applied *now*. Any planning as well as working toward achieving a particular goal is done *now*.

The enlightened person's main focus of attention is always the Now, but they are still peripherally aware of time. In other words, they continue to use clock time but are free of psychological time.

Be alert as you practice this so that you do not unwittingly transform clock time into psychological time. For example, if you made a mistake in the past and learn from it now, you are using clock time. On the other hand, if you dwell on it mentally, and self-criticism, remorse, or guilt come up, then you are making the mistake into "me" and "mine": You make it part of your sense of self, and it has become psychological time, which is always linked to a false sense of identity. Nonforgiveness necessarily implies a heavy burden of psychological time.

If you set yourself a goal and work toward it, you are using clock time. You are aware of where you want to go, but you honor and give your fullest attention to the step that you are taking at this moment. If you then become excessively focused on the goal, perhaps because you are seeking happiness, fulfillment, or a more complete sense of self in it, the Now is no longer honored. It becomes reduced to a mere stepping stone to the future, with no intrinsic value. Clock

time then turns into psychological time. Your life's journey is no longer an adventure, just an obsessive need to arrive, to attain, to "make it." You no longer see or smell the flowers by the wayside either, nor are you aware of the beauty and the miracle of life that unfolds all around you when you are present in the Now.



I can see the supreme importance of the Now, but I cannot quite go along with you when you say that time is a complete illusion.

When I say "time is an illusion," my intention is not to make a philosophical statement. I am just reminding you of a simple fact — a fact so obvious that you may find it hard to grasp and may even find it meaningless — but once fully realized, it can cut like a sword through all the mind-created layers of complexity and "problems." Let me say it again: the present moment is all you ever have. There is never a time when your life is not "this moment." Is this not a fact?

THE INSANITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TIME

You will not have any doubt that psychological time is a mental disease if you look at its collective manifestations. They occur, for example, in the form of ideologies such as communism, national socialism or any nationalism, or rigid religious belief systems, which operate under the implicit assumption that the highest good lies in the future and that therefore the

end justifies the means. The end is an idea, a point in the mind-projected future, when salvation in whatever form — happiness, fulfillment, equality, liberation, and so on — will be attained. Not infrequently, the means of getting there are the enslavement, torture, and murder of people in the present.

For example, it is estimated that as many as fifty million people were murdered to further the cause of communism, to bring about a "better world" in Russia, China, and other countries.² This is a chilling example of how belief in a future heaven creates a present hell. Can there be any doubt that psychological time is a serious and dangerous mental illness?

How does this mind pattern operate in *your* life? Are you always trying to get somewhere other than where you are? Is most of your *doing* just a means to an end? Is fulfillment always just around the corner or confined to short-lived pleasures, such as sex, food, drink, drugs, or thrills and excitement? Are you always focused on becoming, achieving, and attaining, or alternatively chasing some new thrill or pleasure? Do you believe that if you acquire more things you will become more fulfilled, good enough, or psychologically complete? Are you waiting for a man or woman to give meaning to your life?

In the normal, mind-identified or unenlightened state of consciousness, the power and infinite creative potential that lie concealed in the Now are completely obscured by psychological time. Your life then loses its vibrancy, its freshness, its sense of wonder. The old patterns of thought, emotion, behavior, reaction, and desire are acted out in endless repeat performances, a script in your mind that gives you an identity of sorts but distorts or covers up the reality of the Now.

The mind then creates an obsession with the future as an escape from the unsatisfactory present.

NEGATIVITY AND SUFFERING HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN TIME

But the belief that the future will be better than the present is not always an illusion. The present can be dreadful, and things can get better in the future, and often they do.

Usually, the future is a replica of the past. Superficial changes are possible, but *real* transformation is rare and depends upon whether you can become present enough to dissolve the past by accessing the power of the Now. What you perceive as future is an intrinsic part of your state of consciousness now. If your mind carries a heavy burden of past, you will experience more of the same. The past perpetuates itself through lack of presence. The quality of your consciousness at this moment is what shapes the future — which, of course, can only be experienced as the Now.

You may win ten million dollars, but that kind of change is no more than skin deep. You would simply continue to act out the same conditioned patterns in more luxurious surroundings. Humans have learned to split the atom. Instead of killing ten or twenty people with a wooden club, one person can now kill a million just by pushing a button. Is that *real* change?

If it is the quality of your consciousness at this moment that determines the future, then what is it that determines the quality of your consciousness? Your degree of presence. So the only place where true change can occur and where the past can be dissolved is the Now.



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, grievances, sadness, bitterness, and all forms of nonforgiveness 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 past and future and denial of the Now — problems are actually interchangeable. If all your problems or perceived causes of suffering or unhappiness were miraculously removed for you today, but you had not become more present, more conscious, you would soon find yourself with a similar set of problems or causes of suffering, like a shadow that follows you wherever you go. Ultimately, there is only one problem: the time-bound mind itself.

I cannot believe that I could ever reach a point where I am completely free of my problems.

You are right. You can never reach that point because you are at that point now.

There is no salvation in time. You cannot be free in the future. Presence is the key to freedom, so you can only be free now.

FINDING THE LIFE UNDERNEATH YOUR LIFE SITUATION

I don't see how I can be free now. As it happens, I am extremely unhappy with my life at the moment. This is a fact, and I would be deluding myself if I tried to convince myself that all is well when it definitely isn't. To me, the present moment is very unhappy; it is not liberating at all. What keeps me going is the hope or possibility of some improvement in the future.

You think that your attention is in the present moment when it's actually taken up completely by time. You cannot be both unhappy *and* fully present in the Now.

What you refer to as your "life" should more accurately be called your "life situation." It is psychological time: past and future. Certain things in the past didn't go the way you wanted them to go. You are still resisting what happened in the past, and now you are resisting what is. Hope is what keeps you going, but hope keeps you focused on the future, and this continued focus perpetuates your denial of the Now and therefore your unhappiness.

It is true that my present life situation is the result of things that happened in the past, but it is still my present situation, and being stuck in it is what makes me unhappy.

Forget about your life situation for a while and pay attention to

your life.

What is the difference?

Your life situation exists in time.

Your life is now.

Your life situation is mind-stuff.

Your life is real.

Find the “narrow gate that leads to life.” It is called the Now. Narrow your life down to this moment. Your life situation may be full of problems — most life situations are — but find out if you have any problem at this moment. Not tomorrow or in ten minutes, but now. Do you have a problem now?

When you are full of problems, there is no room for anything new to enter, no room for a solution. So whenever you can, make some room, create some space, so that you find the life underneath your life situation.

Use your senses fully. Be where you are. Look around. Just look, don't interpret. See the light, shapes, colors, textures. Be aware of the silent presence of each thing. Be aware of the space that allows everything to be. Listen to the sounds; don't judge them. Listen to the silence underneath the sounds. Touch something — anything — and feel and acknowledge its Being. Observe the rhythm of your breathing; feel the air flowing in and out, feel the life energy inside your body. Allow everything to be, within and without. Allow the “isness” of all things. Move deeply into the Now.

You are leaving behind the deadening world of mental abstraction, of time. You are getting out of the insane mind that is

draining you of life energy, just as it is slowly poisoning and destroying the Earth. You are awakening out of the dream of time into the present.



ALL PROBLEMS ARE ILLUSIONS OF THE MIND

It feels as if a heavy burden has been lifted. A sense of lightness. I feel clear...but my problems are still there waiting for me, aren't they? They haven't been solved. Am I not just temporarily evading them?

If you found yourself in paradise, it wouldn't be long before your mind would say "yes, but...." Ultimately, this is not about solving your problems. It's about realizing that there *are* no problems. Only situations — to be dealt with now, or to be left alone and accepted as part of the "isness" of the present moment until they change or *can* be dealt with. Problems are mind-made and need time to survive. They cannot survive in the actuality of the Now.

Focus your attention on the Now and tell me what problem you have at this moment.



I am not getting any answer because it is impossible to have a problem when your attention is fully in the Now. A situa-

tion that needs to be either dealt with or accepted — yes. Why make it into a problem? Why make anything into a problem? Isn't life challenging enough as it is? What do you need problems for? The mind unconsciously loves problems because they give you an identity of sorts. This is normal, and it is insane. "Problem" means that you are dwelling on a situation mentally without there being a true intention or possibility of taking action now and that you are unconsciously making it part of your sense of self. You become so overwhelmed by your life situation that you lose your sense of life, of Being. Or you are carrying in your mind the insane burden of a hundred things that you will or may have to do in the future instead of focusing your attention on the one thing that you *can* do now.

When you create a problem, you create pain. All it takes is a simple choice, a simple decision: no matter what happens, I will create no more pain for myself. I will create no more problems. Although it is a simple choice, it is also very radical. You won't make that choice unless you are truly fed up with suffering, unless you have truly had enough. And you won't be able to go through with it unless you access the power of the Now. If you create no more pain for yourself, then you create no more pain for others. You also no longer contaminate the beautiful Earth, your inner space, and the collective human psyche with the negativity of problem-making.



If you have ever been in a life-or-death emergency situation, you will know that it wasn't a problem. The mind didn't have

time to fool around and make it into a problem. In a true emergency, the mind stops; you become totally present in the Now, and something infinitely more powerful takes over. This is why there are many reports of ordinary people suddenly becoming capable of incredibly courageous deeds. In any emergency, either you survive or you don't. Either way, it is not a problem.

Some people get angry when they hear me say that problems are illusions. I am threatening to take away their sense of who they are. They have invested much time in a false sense of self. For many years, they have unconsciously defined their whole identity in terms of their problems or their suffering. Who would they be without it?

A great deal of what people say, think, or do is actually motivated by fear, which of course is always linked with having your focus on the future and being out of touch with the Now. As there are no problems in the Now, there is no fear either.

Should a situation arise that you need to deal with now, your action will be clear and incisive if it arises out of present-moment awareness. It is also more likely to be effective. It will not be a reaction coming from the past conditioning of your mind but an intuitive response to the situation. In other instances, when the time-bound mind would have reacted, you will find it more effective to do nothing — just stay centered in the Now.

A QUANTUM LEAP IN THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

I have had glimpses of this state of freedom from mind and time that you describe, but past and future are so overwhelmingly strong that I cannot keep them out for long.

The time-bound mode of consciousness is deeply embedded in the human psyche. But what we are doing here is part of a profound transformation that is taking place in the collective consciousness of the planet and beyond: the awakening of consciousness from the dream of matter, form, and separation. The ending of time. We are breaking mind patterns that have dominated human life for eons. Mind patterns that have created unimaginable suffering on a vast scale. I am not using the word evil. It is more helpful to call it unconsciousness or insanity.

This breaking up of the old mode of consciousness or rather unconsciousness: is it something we have to do or will it happen anyway? I mean, is this change inevitable?

That's a question of perspective. The doing and the happening is in fact a single process; because you are one with the totality of consciousness, you cannot separate the two. But there is no absolute guarantee that humans will make it. The process isn't inevitable or automatic. Your cooperation is an essential part of it. However you look at it, it is a quantum leap in the evolution of consciousness, as well as our only chance of survival as a race.

THE JOY OF BEING

To alert you that you have allowed yourself to be taken over by psychological time, you can use a simple criterion. Ask yourself: Is there joy, ease, and lightness in what I am doing? If there isn't, then time is covering up the present moment, and life is perceived as a burden or a struggle.

If there is no joy, ease, or lightness in what you are doing, it does not necessarily mean that you need to change what

you are doing. It may be sufficient to change the *how*. "How" is always more important than "what." See if you can give much more attention to the *doing* than to the result that you want to achieve through it. Give your fullest attention to whatever the moment presents. This implies that you also completely accept what is, because you cannot give your full attention to something and at the same time resist it.

As soon as you honor the present moment, all unhappiness and struggle dissolve, and life begins to flow with joy and ease. When you act out of present-moment awareness, whatever you do becomes imbued with a sense of quality, care, and love — even the most simple action.



So do not be concerned with the fruit of your action — just give attention to the action itself. The fruit will come of its own accord. This is a powerful spiritual practice. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the oldest and most beautiful spiritual teachings in existence, nonattachment to the fruit of your action is called *Karma Yoga*. It is described as the path of "consecrated action."

When the compulsive striving away from the Now ceases, the joy of Being flows into everything you do. The moment your attention turns to the Now, you feel a presence, a stillness, a peace. You no longer depend on the future for fulfillment and satisfaction — you don't look to it for salvation.

Therefore, you are not attached to the results. Neither failure nor success has the power to change your inner state of Being. You have found the life underneath your life situation.

In the absence of psychological time, your sense of self is derived from Being, not from your personal past. Therefore, the psychological need to become anything other than who you are already is no longer there. In the world, on the level of your life situation, you may indeed become wealthy, knowledgeable, successful, free of this or that, but in the deeper dimension of Being you are complete and whole now.

In that state of wholeness, would we still be able or willing to pursue external goals?

Of course, but you will not have illusory expectations that anything or anybody in the future will save you or make you happy. As far as your life situation is concerned, there may be things to be attained or acquired. That's the world of form, of gain and loss. Yet on a deeper level you are already complete, and when you realize that, there is a playful, joyous energy behind what you do. Being free of psychological time, you no longer pursue your goals with grim determination, driven by fear, anger, discontent, or the need to become someone. Nor will you remain inactive through fear of failure, which to the ego is loss of self. When your deeper sense of self is derived from Being, when you are free of "becoming" as a psychological need, neither your happiness nor your sense of self depends on the outcome, and so there is freedom from fear. You don't seek permanency where it cannot be found: in the world of form, of gain and loss, birth

and death. You don't demand that situations, conditions, places, or people should make you happy, and then suffer when they don't live up to your expectations.

Everything is honored, but nothing matters. Forms are born and die, yet you are aware of the eternal underneath the forms. You know that "nothing real can be threatened."³

When this is your state of Being, how can you not succeed? You have succeeded already.

MIND STRATEGIES FOR AVOIDING THE NOW

LOSS OF NOW: THE CORE DELUSION

Even if I completely accept that ultimately time is an illusion, what difference is that going to make in my life? I still have to live in a world that is completely dominated by time.

Intellectual agreement is just another belief and won't make much difference to your life. To realize this truth, you need to live it. When every cell of your body is so present that it feels vibrant with life, and when you can feel that life every moment as the joy of Being, then it can be said that you are free of time.

But I still have to pay the bills tomorrow, and I am still going to grow old and die just like everybody else. So how can I ever say that I am free of time?

Tomorrow's bills are not the problem. The dissolution of the physical body is not a problem. Loss of Now is the problem, or rather: the core delusion that turns a mere situation, event, or emotion into a personal problem and into suffering. Loss of Now is loss of Being.

To be free of time is to be free of the psychological need of past for your identity and future for your fulfillment. It represents the most profound transformation of consciousness that you can imagine. In some rare cases, this shift in consciousness happens dramatically and radically, once and for all. When it does, it usually comes about through total surrender in the midst of intense suffering. Most people, however, have to work at it.

When you have had your first few glimpses of the timeless state of consciousness, you begin to move back and forth between the dimensions of time and presence. First you become aware of just how rarely your attention is truly in the Now. But to know that you are *not* present is a great success: That knowing is presence — even if initially it only lasts for a couple of seconds of clock time before it is lost again. Then, with increasing frequency, you choose to have the focus of your consciousness in the present moment rather than in the past or future, and whenever you realize that you had lost the Now, you are able to stay in it not just for a couple of seconds, but for longer periods as perceived from the external perspective of clock time. So before you are firmly established in the state of presence, which is to say before you are fully conscious, you shift back and forth for a while between consciousness and unconsciousness, between the state of presence and the state of mind identification. You lose the Now, and you return to it, again and again. Eventually, presence becomes your predominant state.

For most people, presence is experienced either never at all or only accidentally and briefly on rare occasions without being recognized for what it is. Most humans alternate not between consciousness and unconsciousness but only between different levels of unconsciousness.

**ORDINARY UNCONSCIOUSNESS
AND DEEP UNCONSCIOUSNESS**

What do you mean by different levels of unconsciousness?

As you probably know, in sleep you constantly move between the phases of dreamless sleep and the dream state. Similarly, in wakefulness most people only shift between ordinary unconsciousness and deep unconsciousness. What I call ordinary unconsciousness means being identified with your thought processes and emotions, your reactions, desires, and aversions. It is most people's normal state. In that state, you are run by the egoic mind, and you are unaware of Being. It is a state not of acute pain or unhappiness but of an almost continuous low level of unease, discontent, boredom, or nervousness — a kind of background static. You may not realize this because it is so much a part of "normal" living, just as you are not aware of a continuous low background noise, such as the hum of an air conditioner, until it stops. When it suddenly does stop, there is a sense of relief. Many people use alcohol, drugs, sex, food, work, television, or even shopping as anesthetics in an unconscious attempt to remove the basic unease. When this happens, an activity that might be very enjoyable if used in moderation becomes imbued with a compulsive or addictive quality, and all that is ever achieved through it is extremely short-lived symptom relief.

The unease of ordinary unconsciousness turns into the pain of deep unconsciousness — a state of more acute and more obvious suffering or unhappiness — when things "go wrong," when the ego is threatened or there is a major challenge, threat, or loss, real or imagined, in your life situation

or conflict in a relationship. It is an intensified version of ordinary unconsciousness, different from it not in kind but in degree.

In ordinary unconsciousness, habitual resistance to or denial of what is creates the unease and discontent that most people accept as normal living. When this resistance becomes intensified through some challenge or threat to the ego, it brings up intense negativity such as anger, acute fear, aggression, depression, and so on. Deep unconsciousness often means that the pain-body has been triggered and that you have become identified with it. Physical violence would be impossible without deep unconsciousness. It can also occur easily whenever and wherever a crowd of people or even an entire nation generates a negative collective energy field.

The best indicator of your level of consciousness is how you deal with life's challenges when they come. Through those challenges, an already unconscious person tends to become more deeply unconscious, and a conscious person more intensely conscious. You can use a challenge to awaken you, or you can allow it to pull you into even deeper sleep. The dream of ordinary unconsciousness then turns into a nightmare.

If you cannot be present even in normal circumstances, such as when you are sitting alone in a room, walking in the woods, or listening to someone, then you certainly won't be able to stay conscious when something "goes wrong" or you are faced with difficult people or situations, with loss or the threat of loss. You will be taken over by a reaction, which ultimately is always some form of fear, and pulled into deep unconsciousness. Those challenges are your tests. Only the way in which you deal with them will show you and others where you are at as far as your state of consciousness

is concerned, not how long you can sit with your eyes closed or what visions you see.

So it is essential to bring more consciousness into your life in ordinary situations when everything is going relatively smoothly. In this way, you grow in presence power. It generates an energy field in you and around you of a high vibrational frequency. No unconsciousness, no negativity, no discord or violence can enter that field and survive, just as darkness cannot survive in the presence of light.

When you learn to be the witness of your thoughts and emotions, which is an essential part of being present, you may be surprised when you first become aware of the background "static" of ordinary unconsciousness and realize how rarely, if ever, you are truly at ease within yourself. On the level of your thinking, you will find a great deal of resistance in the form of judgment, discontent, and mental projection away from the Now. On the emotional level, there will be an undercurrent of unease, tension, boredom, or nervousness. Both are aspects of the mind in its habitual resistance mode.

WHAT ARE THEY SEEKING?

Carl Jung tells in one of his books of a conversation he had with a Native American chief who pointed out to him that in his perception most white people have tense faces, staring eyes, and a cruel demeanor. He said: "They are always seeking something. What are they seeking? The whites always want something. They are always uneasy and restless. We don't know what they want. We think they are mad."

The undercurrent of constant unease started long before the rise of Western industrial civilization, of course, but in Western

civilization, which now covers almost the entire globe, including most of the East, it manifests in an unprecedentedly acute form. It was already there at the time of Jesus, and it was there six hundred years before that at the time of Buddha, and long before that. Why are you always anxious? Jesus asked his disciples. "Can anxious thought add a single day to your life?" And the Buddha taught that the root of suffering is to be found in our constant wanting and craving.

Resistance to the Now as a collective dysfunction is intrinsically connected to loss of awareness of Being and forms the basis of our dehumanized industrial civilization. Freud, by the way, also recognized the existence of this undercurrent of unease and wrote about it in his book *Civilization and Its Discontents*, but he did not recognize the true root of the unease and failed to realize that freedom from it is possible. This collective dysfunction has created a very unhappy and extraordinarily violent civilization that has become a threat not only to itself but also to all life on the planet.

DISSOLVING ORDINARY UNCONSCIOUSNESS

So how can we be free of this affliction?

Make it conscious. Observe the many ways in which unease, discontent, and tension arise within you through unnecessary judgment, resistance to what is, and denial of the Now. Anything unconscious dissolves when you shine the light of consciousness on it. Once you know how to dissolve ordinary unconsciousness, the light of your presence will shine brightly, and it will be much easier to deal with deep unconsciousness whenever you feel its gravitational pull. However,

ordinary unconsciousness may not be easy to detect initially because it is so normal.

Make it a habit to monitor your mental-emotional state through self-observation. "Am I at ease at this moment?" is a good question to ask yourself frequently. Or you can ask: "What's going on inside me at this moment?" Be at least as interested in what goes on inside you as what happens outside. If you get the inside right, the outside will fall into place. Primary reality is within, secondary reality without. But don't answer these questions immediately. Direct your attention inward. Have a look inside yourself. What kind of thoughts is your mind producing? What do you feel? Direct your attention into the body. Is there any tension? Once you detect that there is a low level of unease, the background static, see in what way you are avoiding, resisting, or denying life — by denying the Now. There are many ways in which people unconsciously resist the present moment. I will give you a few examples. With practice, your power of self-observation, of monitoring your inner state, will become sharpened.

FREEDOM FROM UNHAPPINESS

Do you resent doing what you are doing? It may be your job, or you may have agreed to do something and are doing it, but part of you resents and resists it. Are you carrying unspoken resentment toward a person close to you? Do you realize that the energy you thus emanate is so harmful in its effects that you are in fact contaminating yourself as well as those around you? Have a good look inside. Is there even the slightest trace of resentment, unwillingness? If there is,

observe it on both the mental and the emotional levels. What thoughts is your mind creating around this situation? Then look at the emotion, which is the body's reaction to those thoughts. Feel the emotion. Does it feel pleasant or unpleasant? Is it an energy that you would actually *choose* to have inside you? Do you *have* a choice?

Maybe you *are* being taken advantage of, maybe the activity you are engaged in is tedious, maybe someone close to you is dishonest, irritating, or unconscious, but all this is irrelevant. Whether your thoughts and emotions about this situation are justified or not makes no difference. The fact is that you are resisting what *is*. You are making the present moment into an enemy. You are creating unhappiness, conflict between the inner and the outer. Your unhappiness is polluting not only your own inner being and those around you but also the collective human psyche of which you are an inseparable part. The pollution of the planet is only an outward reflection of an inner psychic pollution: millions of unconscious individuals not taking responsibility for their inner space.

Either stop doing what you are doing, speak to the person concerned and express fully what you feel, or drop the negativity that your mind has created around the situation and that serves no purpose whatsoever except to strengthen a false sense of self. Recognizing its futility is important. Negativity is never the optimum way of dealing with any situation. In fact, in most cases it keeps you stuck in it, blocking real change. Anything that is done with negative energy will become contaminated by it and in time give rise to more pain, more unhappiness. Furthermore, any negative inner

state is contagious: Unhappiness spreads more easily than a physical disease. Through the law of resonance, it triggers and feeds latent negativity in others, unless they are immune — that is, highly conscious.

Are you polluting the world or cleaning up the mess? You are responsible for your inner space; nobody else is, just as you are responsible for the planet. As within, so without: If humans clear inner pollution, then they will also cease to create outer pollution.

How can we drop negativity, as you suggest?

By dropping it. How do you drop a piece of hot coal that you are holding in your hand? How do you drop some heavy and useless baggage that you are carrying? By recognizing that you don't want to suffer the pain or carry the burden anymore and then letting go of it.

Deep unconsciousness, such as the pain-body, or other deep pain, such as the loss of a loved one, usually needs to be transmuted through acceptance combined with the light of your presence — your sustained attention. Many patterns in ordinary unconsciousness, on the other hand, can simply be dropped once you know that you don't want them and don't need them anymore, once you realize that you have a choice, that you are not just a bundle of conditioned reflexes. All this implies that you are able to access the power of Now. Without it, you have no choice.

If you call some emotions negative, aren't you creating a mental polarity of good and bad, as you explained earlier?

No. The polarity was created at an earlier stage when your mind judged the present moment as bad; this judgment then created the negative emotion.

But if you call some emotions negative, aren't you really saying that they shouldn't be there, that it's not okay to have those emotions? My understanding is that we should give ourselves permission to have whatever feelings come up, rather than judge them as bad or say that we shouldn't have them. It's okay to feel resentful; it's okay to be angry, irritated, moody, or whatever — otherwise, we get into repression, inner conflict, or denial. Everything is okay as it is.

Of course. Once a mind pattern, an emotion, or a reaction is there, accept it. You were not conscious enough to have a choice in the matter. That's not a judgment, just a fact. If you *had* a choice, or realized that you *do* have a choice, would you choose suffering or joy, ease or unease, peace or conflict? Would you choose a thought or feeling that cuts you off from your natural state of well-being, the joy of life within? Any such feeling I call negative, which simply means bad. Not in the sense that "You shouldn't have done that," but just plain factual bad, like feeling sick in the stomach.

How is it possible that humans killed in excess of one hundred million fellow humans in the twentieth century alone?²⁴ Humans inflicting pain of such magnitude on one another is beyond anything you can imagine. And that's not taking into account the mental, emotional and physical violence, the torture, pain, and cruelty they continue to inflict on each other as well as on other sentient beings on a daily basis.

Do they act in this way because they are in touch with their natural state, the joy of life within? Of course not. Only people

who are in a deeply negative state, who feel very bad indeed, would create such a reality as a reflection of how they feel. Now they are engaged in destroying nature and the planet that sustains them. Unbelievable but true. Humans are a dangerously insane and very sick species. That's not a judgment. It's a fact. It is also a fact that the sanity is there underneath the madness. Healing and redemption are available right now.

Coming back specifically to what you said — it is certainly true that when you accept your resentment, moodiness, anger, and so on, you are no longer forced to act them out blindly, and you are less likely to project them onto others. But I wonder if you are not deceiving yourself. When you have been practicing acceptance for a while, as you have, there comes a point when you need to go on to the next stage, where those negative emotions are not created anymore. If you don't, your "acceptance" just becomes a mental label that allows your ego to continue to indulge in unhappiness and so strengthen its sense of separation from other people, your surroundings, your here and now. As you know, separation is the basis for the ego's sense of identity. True acceptance would transmute those feelings at once. And if you really knew deeply that everything is "okay," as you put it, and which of course is true, then would you have those negative feelings in the first place? Without judgment, without resistance to what is, they would not arise. You have an idea in your mind that "everything is okay," but deep down you don't really believe it, and so the old mental-emotional patterns of resistance are still in place. That's what makes you feel bad.

That's okay, too.

Are you defending your right to be unconscious, your right to suffer? Don't worry: Nobody is going to take that away from you. Once you realize that a certain kind of food makes you sick, would you carry on eating that food and keep asserting that it is okay to be sick?

WHEREVER YOU ARE, BE THERE TOTALLY

Can you give some more examples of ordinary unconsciousness?

See if you can catch yourself complaining, in either speech or thought, about a situation you find yourself in, what other people do or say, your surroundings, your life situation, even the weather. To complain is always nonacceptance of what is. It invariably carries an unconscious negative charge. When you complain, you make yourself into a victim. When you speak out, you are in your power. So change the situation by taking action or by speaking out if necessary or possible; leave the situation or accept it. All else is madness.

Ordinary unconsciousness is always linked in some way with denial of the Now. The Now, of course, also implies the here. Are you resisting your here and now? Some people would always rather be somewhere else. Their "here" is never good enough. Through self-observation, find out if that is the case in your life. Wherever you are, be there totally. If you find your here and now intolerable and it makes you unhappy, you have three options: remove yourself from the situation, change it, or accept it totally. If you want to take responsibility for your life, you must choose one of those three options, and you must choose now. Then accept the consequences. No excuses. No negativity. No psychic pollution. Keep your inner space clear.

If you take any action — leaving or changing your situation — drop the negativity first, if at all possible. Action arising out of insight into what is required is more effective than action arising out of negativity.

Any action is often better than no action, especially if you have been stuck in an unhappy situation for a long time. If it is a mistake, at least you learn something, in which case it's no longer a mistake. If you remain stuck, you learn nothing. Is fear preventing you from taking action? Acknowledge the fear, watch it, take your attention into it, be fully present with it. Doing so cuts the link between the fear and your thinking. *Don't let the fear rise up into your mind.* Use the power of the Now. Fear cannot prevail against it.

If there is truly nothing that you can do to change your here and now, and you can't remove yourself from the situation, then accept your here and now totally by dropping all inner resistance. The false, unhappy self that loves feeling miserable, resentful, or sorry for itself can then no longer survive. This is called surrender. Surrender is not weakness. There is great strength in it. Only a surrendered person has spiritual power. Through surrender, you will be free internally of the situation. You may then find that the situation changes without any effort on your part. In any case, you are free.

Or is there something that you "should" be doing but are not doing it? Get up and do it now. Alternatively, completely accept your inactivity, laziness, or passivity at this moment, if that is your choice. Go into it fully. Enjoy it. Be as lazy or inactive as you can. If you go into it fully and consciously, you will soon come out of it. Or maybe you won't. Either way, there is no inner conflict, no resistance, no negativity.

Are you stressed? Are you so busy getting to the future that the present is reduced to a means of getting there? Stress is caused by being "here" but wanting to be "there," or being in the present but wanting to be in the future. It's a split that tears you apart inside. To create and live with such an inner split is insane. The fact that everyone else is doing it doesn't make it any less insane. If you have to, you can move fast, work fast, or even run, without projecting yourself into the future and without resisting the present. As you move, work, run — do it totally. Enjoy the flow of energy, the high energy of that moment. Now you are no longer stressed, no longer splitting yourself in two. Just moving, running, working — and enjoying it. Or you can drop the whole thing and sit on a park bench. But when you do, watch your mind. It may say: "You should be working. You are wasting time." Observe the mind. Smile at it.

Does the past take up a great deal of your attention? Do you frequently talk and think about it, either positively or negatively? The great things that you have achieved, your adventures or experiences, or your victim story and the dreadful things that were done to you, or maybe what you did to someone else? Are your thought processes creating guilt, pride, resentment, anger, regret, or self-pity? Then you are not only reinforcing a false sense of self but also helping to accelerate your body's aging process by creating an accumulation of past in your psyche. Verify this for yourself by observing those around you who have a strong tendency to hold on to the past.

Die to the past every moment. You don't need it. Only refer to it when it is absolutely relevant to the present. Feel the power of this moment and the fullness of Being. Feel your presence.



Are you worried? Do you have many “what if” thoughts? You are identified with your mind, which is projecting itself into an imaginary future situation and creating fear. There is no way that you can cope with such a situation, because it doesn't exist. It's a mental phantom. You can stop this health- and life-corroding insanity simply by acknowledging the present moment. Become aware of your breathing. Feel the air flowing in and out of your body. Feel your inner energy field. All that you ever have to deal with, cope with, in real life — as opposed to imaginary mind projections — is *this moment*. Ask yourself what “problem” you have right now, not next year, tomorrow, or five minutes from now. What is wrong with this moment? You can always cope with the Now, but you can never cope with the future — nor do you have to. The answer, the strength, the right action or the resource will be there when you need it, not before, not after.

“One day I'll make it.” Is your goal taking up so much of your attention that you reduce the present moment to a means to an end? Is it taking the joy out of your doing? Are you waiting to start living? If you develop such a mind pattern, no matter what you achieve or get, the present will never be good enough; the future will always seem better. A perfect recipe for permanent dissatisfaction and nonfulfillment, don't you agree?

Are you a habitual “waiter”? How much of your life do you spend waiting? What I call “small-scale waiting” is waiting in

line at the post office, in a traffic jam, at the airport, or waiting for someone to arrive, to finish work, and so on. "Large-scale waiting" is waiting for the next vacation, for a better job, for the children to grow up, for a truly meaningful relationship, for success, to make money, to be important, to become enlightened. It is not uncommon for people to spend their whole life waiting to start living.

Waiting is a state of mind. Basically, it means that you want the future; you don't want the present. You don't want what you've got, and you want what you haven't got. With every kind of waiting, you unconsciously create inner conflict between your here and now, where you don't want to be, and the projected future, where you want to be. This greatly reduces the quality of your life by making you lose the present.

There is nothing wrong with striving to improve your life situation. You can improve your life situation, but you cannot improve your life. Life is primary. Life is your deepest inner Being. It is already whole, complete, perfect. Your life situation consists of your circumstances and your experiences. There is nothing wrong with setting goals and striving to achieve things. The mistake lies in using it as a substitute for the feeling of life, for Being. The only point of access for that is the Now. You are then like an architect who pays no attention to the foundation of a building but spends a lot of time working on the superstructure.

For example, many people are waiting for prosperity. It cannot come in the future. When you honor, acknowledge, and fully accept your present reality — where you are, who you are, what you are doing right now — when you fully accept what you have got, you are grateful for what you have got, grateful for what is, grateful for Being. Gratitude for the

present moment and the fullness of *life now* is true prosperity. It cannot come in the future. Then, in time, that prosperity manifests for you in various ways.

If you are dissatisfied with what you have got, or even frustrated or angry about your present lack, that may motivate you to become rich, but even if you do make millions, you will continue to experience the inner condition of lack, and deep down you will continue to feel unfulfilled. You may have many exciting experiences that money can buy, but they will come and go and always leave you with an empty feeling and the need for further physical or psychological gratification. You won't abide in Being and so feel the fullness of life now that alone is true prosperity.

So give up waiting as a state of mind. When you catch yourself slipping into waiting... snap out of it. Come into the present moment. Just be, and enjoy being. If you are present, there is never any need for you to wait for anything. So next time somebody says, "Sorry to have kept you waiting," you can reply, "That's all right, I wasn't waiting. I was just standing here enjoying myself — in joy in my self."

These are just a few of the habitual mind strategies for denying the present moment that are part of ordinary unconsciousness. They are easy to overlook because they are so much a part of normal living: the background static of perpetual discontent. But the more you practice monitoring your inner mental-emotional state, the easier it will be to know when you have been trapped in past or future, which is to say unconscious, and to awaken out of the dream of time into the present. But beware: The false, unhappy self, based on mind identification, lives on time. It knows that the present moment is its own death and so feels very threatened

by it. It will do all it can to take you out of it. It will try to keep you trapped in time.

THE INNER PURPOSE OF YOUR LIFE'S JOURNEY

I can see the truth of what you are saying, but I still think that we must have purpose on our life's journey; otherwise we just drift, and purpose means future, doesn't it? How do we reconcile that with living in the present?

When you are on a journey, it is certainly helpful to know where you are going or at least the general direction in which you are moving, but don't forget: The only thing that is ultimately real about your journey is the step that you are taking at this moment. That's all there ever is.

Your life's journey has an outer purpose and an inner purpose. The outer purpose is to arrive at your goal or destination, to accomplish what you set out to do, to achieve this or that, which, of course, implies future. But if your destination, or the steps you are going to take in the future, take up so much of your attention that they become more important to you than the step you are taking now, then you completely miss the journey's inner purpose, which has nothing to do with *where* you are going or *what* you are doing, but everything to do with *how*. It has nothing to do with future but everything to do with the quality of your consciousness at this moment. The outer purpose belongs to the horizontal dimension of space and time; the inner purpose concerns a deepening of your Being in the vertical dimension of the timeless Now. Your outer journey may contain a million steps; your inner journey only has one: the step you are

taking right now. As you become more deeply aware of this one step, you realize that it already contains within itself all the other steps as well as the destination. This one step then becomes transformed into an expression of perfection, an act of great beauty and quality. It will have taken you into Being, and the light of Being will shine through it. This is both the purpose and the fulfillment of your inner journey, the journey into yourself.



Does it matter whether we achieve our outer purpose, whether we succeed or fail in the world?

It will matter to you as long as you haven't realized your inner purpose. After that, the outer purpose is just a game that you may continue to play simply because you enjoy it. It is also possible to fail completely in your outer purpose and at the same time totally succeed in your inner purpose. Or the other way around, which is actually more common: outer riches and inner poverty, or to "gain the world and lose your soul," as Jesus puts it. Ultimately, of course, every outer purpose is doomed to "fail" sooner or later, simply because it is subject to the law of impermanence of all things. The sooner you realize that your outer purpose cannot give you lasting fulfillment, the better. When you have seen the limitations of your outer purpose, you give up your unrealistic expectation that it should make you happy, and you make it subservient to your inner purpose.

THE PAST CANNOT SURVIVE IN YOUR PRESENCE

You mentioned that thinking or talking about the past unnecessarily is one of the ways in which we avoid the present. But apart from the past that we remember and perhaps identify with, isn't there another level of past within us that is much more deep-seated? I am talking about the unconscious past that conditions our lives, especially through early childhood experiences, perhaps even past-life experiences. And then there is our cultural conditioning, which has to do with where we live geographically and the historical time period in which we live. All these things determine how we see the world, how we react, what we think, what kind of relationships we have, how we live our lives. How could we ever become conscious of all that or get rid of it? How long would that take? And even if we did, what would there be left?

What is left when illusion ends?

There is no need to investigate the unconscious past in you except as it manifests at this moment as a thought, an emotion, a desire, a reaction, or an external event that happens to you. Whatever you need to know about the unconscious past in you, the challenges of the present will bring it out. If you delve into the past, it will become a bottomless pit: There is always more. You may think that you need more time to understand the past or become free of it, in other words, that the future will eventually free you of the past. This is a delusion. Only the present can free you of the past. More time cannot free you of time. Access the power of Now. That is the key.

What is the power of Now?

None other than the power of your presence, your consciousness liberated from thought forms.

So deal with the past on the level of the present. The more attention you give to the past, the more you energize it, and the more likely you are to make a "self" out of it. Don't misunderstand: Attention is essential, but not to the past as past. Give attention to the present; give attention to your behavior, to your reactions, moods, thoughts, emotions, fears, and desires as they occur in the present. There's the past in you. If you can be present enough to watch all those things, not critically or analytically but nonjudgmentally, then you are dealing with the past and dissolving it through the power of your presence. You cannot find yourself by going into the past. You find yourself by coming into the present.

Isn't it helpful to understand the past and so understand why we do certain things, react in certain ways, or why we unconsciously create our particular kind of drama, patterns in relationships, and so on?

As you become more conscious of your present reality, you may suddenly get certain insights as to *why* your conditioning functions in those particular ways — for example, why your relationships follow certain patterns — and you may remember things that happened in the past or see them more clearly. That is fine and can be helpful, but it is not essential. What is essential is your conscious presence. *That* dissolves the past. That is the transformative agent. So don't seek to understand the past, but be as present as you can. The past cannot survive in your presence. It can only survive in your absence.

THE STATE OF PRESENCE

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS

You keep talking about the state of presence as the key. I think I understand it intellectually, but I don't know if I have ever truly experienced it. I wonder — is it what I think it is, or is it something entirely different?

It's not what you think it is! You can't think about presence, and the mind can't understand it. Understanding presence is *being present*.

Try a little experiment. Close your eyes and say to yourself: "I wonder what my next thought is going to be." Then become very alert and wait for the next thought. Be like a cat watching a mouse hole. What thought is going to come out of the mouse hole? Try it now.



Well?

I had to wait for quite a long time before a thought came in.

Exactly. As long as you are in a state of intense presence, you are free of thought. You are still, yet highly alert. The instant your conscious attention sinks below a certain level, thought rushes in. The mental noise returns; the stillness is lost. You are back in time.

To test their degree of presence, some Zen masters have been known to creep up on their students from behind and suddenly hit them with a stick. Quite a shock! If the student had been fully present and in a state of alertness, if he had "kept his loin girded and his lamp burning," which is one of the analogies that Jesus uses for presence, he would have noticed the master coming up from behind and stopped him or stepped aside. But if he were hit, that would mean he was immersed in thought, which is to say absent, unconscious.

To stay present in everyday life, it helps to be deeply rooted within yourself; otherwise, the mind, which has incredible momentum, will drag you along like a wild river.

What do you mean by "rooted within yourself"?

It means to inhabit your body fully. To always have some of your attention in the inner energy field of your body. To feel the body from within, so to speak. Body awareness keeps you present. It anchors you in the Now (see chapter 6).

THE ESOTERIC MEANING OF "WAITING"

In a sense, the state of presence could be compared to waiting. Jesus used the analogy of waiting in some of his parables.

This is not the usual bored or restless kind of waiting that is a denial of the present and that I spoke about already. It is not a waiting in which your attention is focused on some point in the future and the present is perceived as an undesirable obstacle that prevents you from having what you want. There is a qualitatively different kind of waiting, one that requires your total alertness. Something could happen at any moment, and if you are not absolutely awake, absolutely still, you will miss it. This is the kind of waiting Jesus talks about. In that state, all your attention is in the Now. There is none left for daydreaming, thinking, remembering, anticipating. There is no tension in it, no fear, just alert presence. You are present with your whole Being, with every cell of your body. In that state, the "you" that has a past and a future — the personality, if you like — is hardly there anymore. And yet nothing of value is lost. You are still essentially yourself. In fact, you are more fully yourself than you ever were before, or rather it is only now that you are truly yourself.

"Be like a servant waiting for the return of the master," says Jesus. The servant does not know at what hour the master is going to come. So he stays awake, alert, poised, still, lest he miss the master's arrival. In another parable, Jesus speaks of the five careless (unconscious) women who do not have enough oil (consciousness) to keep their lamps burning (stay present) and so miss the bridegroom (the Now) and don't get to the wedding feast (enlightenment). These five stand in contrast to the five wise women who have enough oil (stay conscious).

Even the men who wrote the Gospels did not understand the meaning of these parables, so the first misinterpretations and distortions crept in as they were written down.

With subsequent erroneous interpretations, the real meaning was completely lost. These are parables not about the end of the world but about the end of psychological time. They point to the transcendence of the egoic mind and the possibility of living in an entirely new state of consciousness.

BEAUTY ARISES IN THE STILLNESS OF YOUR PRESENCE

What you have just described is something that I occasionally experience for brief moments when I am alone and surrounded by nature.

Yes. Zen masters use the word *satori* to describe a flash of insight, a moment of no-mind and total presence. Although *satori* is not a lasting transformation, be grateful when it comes, for it gives you a taste of enlightenment. You may, indeed, have experienced it many times without knowing what it is and realizing its importance. Presence is needed to become aware of the beauty, the majesty, the sacredness of nature. Have you ever gazed up into the infinity of space on a clear night, awestruck by the absolute stillness and inconceivable vastness of it? Have you listened, truly listened, to the sound of a mountain stream in the forest? Or to the song of a blackbird at dusk on a quiet summer evening? To become aware of such things, the mind needs to be still. You have to put down for a moment your personal baggage of problems, of past and future, as well as all your knowledge; otherwise, you will see but not see, hear but not hear. Your total presence is required.

Beyond the beauty of the external forms, there is more here: something that cannot be named, something ineffable, some deep, inner, holy essence. Whenever and wherever there is

beauty, this inner essence shines through somehow. It only reveals itself to you when you are present. Could it be that this nameless essence and your presence are one and the same? Would it be there without your presence? Go deeply into it. Find out for yourself.



When you experienced those moments of presence, you likely didn't realize that you were briefly in a state of no-mind. This is because the gap between that state and the influx of thought was too narrow. Your *satori* may only have lasted for a few seconds before the mind came in, but it was there; otherwise, you would not have experienced the beauty. Mind can neither recognize nor create beauty. Only for a few seconds, while you were completely present, was that beauty or that sacredness there. Because of the narrowness of that gap and a lack of vigilance and alertness on your part, you were probably unable to see the fundamental difference between the perception, the thoughtless awareness of beauty, and the naming and interpreting of it as thought: The time gap was so small that it seemed to be a single process. The truth is, however, that the moment thought came in, all you had was a memory of it.

The wider the time gap between perception and thought, the more depth there is to you as a human being, which is to say the more conscious you are.

Many people are so imprisoned in their minds that the beauty of nature does not really exist for them. They might

say, "What a pretty flower," but that's just a mechanical mental labeling. Because they are not still, not present, they don't truly see the flower, don't feel its essence, its holiness --- just as they don't know themselves, don't feel their own essence, their own holiness.

Because we live in such a mind-dominated culture, most modern art, architecture, music, and literature are devoid of beauty, of inner essence, with very few exceptions. The reason is that the people who create those things cannot — even for a moment — free themselves from their mind. So they are never in touch with that place within where true creativity and beauty arise. The mind left to itself creates monstrosities, and not only in art galleries. Look at our urban landscapes and industrial wastelands. No civilization has ever produced so much ugliness.

REALIZING PURE CONSCIOUSNESS

Is presence the same as Being?

When you become conscious of Being, what is really happening is that Being becomes conscious of itself. When Being becomes conscious of itself — that's presence. Since Being, consciousness, and life are synonymous, we could say that presence means consciousness becoming conscious of itself, or life attaining self-consciousness. But don't get attached to the words, and don't make an effort to understand this. There is nothing that you need to understand before you can become present.

I do understand what you just said, but it seems to imply that Being, the ultimate transcendental reality, is not yet complete,

that it is undergoing a process of development. Does God need time for personal growth?

Yes, but only as seen from the limited perspective of the manifested universe. In the Bible, God declares: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, and I am the living One." In the timeless realm where God dwells, which is also *your* home, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, are one, and the essence of everything that ever has been and ever will be is eternally present in an unmanifested state of oneness and perfection — totally beyond anything the human mind can ever imagine or comprehend. In our world of seemingly separate forms, however, timeless perfection is an inconceivable concept. Here even consciousness, which is the light emanating from the eternal Source, seems to be subject to a process of development, but this is due to our limited perception. It is not so in absolute terms. Nevertheless, let me continue to speak for a moment about the evolution of consciousness in this world.

Everything that exists has Being, has God-essence, has some degree of consciousness. Even a stone has rudimentary consciousness; otherwise, it would not be, and its atoms and molecules would disperse. Everything is alive. The sun, the earth, plants, animals, humans — all are expressions of consciousness in varying degrees, consciousness manifesting as form.

The world arises when consciousness takes on shapes and forms, thought forms and material forms. Look at the millions of life forms on this planet alone. In the sea, on land, in the air — and then each life form is replicated millions of times. To what end? Is someone or something playing a game, a game with form? This is what the ancient seers of

India asked themselves. They saw the world as *lila*, a kind of divine game that God is playing. The individual life forms are obviously not very important in this game. In the sea, most life forms don't survive for more than a few minutes after being born. The human form turns to dust pretty quickly too, and when it is gone it is as if it had never been. Is that tragic or cruel? Only if you create a separate identity for each form, if you forget that its consciousness is God-essence expressing itself in form. But you don't truly know that until you realize your own God-essence as pure consciousness.

If a fish is born in your aquarium and you call him John, write out a birth certificate, tell him about his family history, and two minutes later he gets eaten by another fish — that's tragic. But it's only tragic because you projected a separate self where there was none. You got hold of a fraction of a dynamic process, a molecular dance, and made a separate entity out of it.

Consciousness takes on the disguise of forms until they reach such complexity that it completely loses itself in them. In present-day humans, consciousness is completely identified with its disguise. It only knows itself as form and therefore lives in fear of the annihilation of its physical or psychological form. This is the egoic mind, and this is where considerable dysfunction sets in. It now looks as if something had gone very wrong somewhere along the line of evolution. But even this is part of *lila*, the divine game. Finally, the pressure of suffering created by this apparent dysfunction forces consciousness to disidentify from form and awakens it from its dream of form: It regains self-consciousness, but it is at a far deeper level than when it lost it.

This process is explained by Jesus in his parable of the lost son, who leaves his father's home, squanders his wealth, becomes destitute, and is then forced by his suffering to return home. When he does, his father *loves him more* than before. The son's state is the same as it was before, yet not the same. It has an added dimension of depth. The parable describes a journey from unconscious perfection, through apparent imperfection and "evil" to conscious perfection.

Can you now see the deeper and wider significance of becoming present as the watcher of your mind? Whenever you watch the mind, you withdraw consciousness from mind forms, and it then becomes what we call the watcher or the witness. Consequently, the watcher — pure consciousness beyond form — becomes stronger, and the mental formations become weaker. When we talk about watching the mind we are personalizing an event that is truly of cosmic significance: Through you, consciousness is awakening out of its dream of identification with form and withdrawing from form. This foreshadows, but is already part of, an event that is probably still in the distant future as far as chronological time is concerned. The event is called — the end of the world.



When consciousness frees itself from its identification with physical and mental forms, it becomes what we may call pure or enlightened consciousness, or presence. This has already happened in a few individuals, and it seems destined to happen soon on a much larger scale, although there is no absolute guarantee that it *will* happen. Most humans are still

in the grip of the egoic mode of consciousness: identified with their mind and run by their mind. If they do not free themselves from their mind in time, they will be destroyed by it. They will experience increasing confusion, conflict, violence, illness, despair, madness. Egoic mind has become like a sinking ship. If you don't get off, you will go down with it. The collective egoic mind is the most dangerously insane and destructive entity ever to inhabit this planet. What do you think will happen on this planet if human consciousness remains unchanged?

Already for most humans, the only respite they find from their own minds is to occasionally revert to a level of consciousness below thought. Everyone does that every night during sleep. But this also happens to some extent through sex, alcohol, and other drugs that suppress excessive mind activity. If it weren't for alcohol, tranquilizers, antidepressants, as well as the illegal drugs, which are all consumed in vast quantities, the insanity of the human mind would become even more glaringly obvious than it is already. I believe that, if deprived of their drugs, a large part of the population would become a danger to themselves and others. These drugs, of course, simply keep you stuck in dysfunction. Their widespread use only delays the breakdown of the old mind structures and the emergence of higher consciousness. While individual users may get some relief from the daily torture inflicted on them by their minds, they are prevented from generating enough conscious presence to rise above thought and so find true liberation.

Falling back to a level of consciousness below mind, which is the pre-thinking level of our distant ancestors and of animals and plants, is not an option for us. There is no way back. If

the human race is to survive, it will have to go on to the next stage. Consciousness is evolving throughout the universe in billions of forms. So even if we didn't make it, this wouldn't matter on a cosmic scale. No gain in consciousness is ever lost, so it would simply express itself through some other form. But the very fact that I am speaking here and you are listening or reading this is a clear sign that the new consciousness is gaining a foothold on the planet.

There is nothing personal in this: I am not teaching you. You are consciousness, and you are listening to yourself. There is an Eastern saying: "The teacher and the taught together create the teaching." In any case, the words in themselves are not important. They are not the Truth; they only point to it. I speak from presence, and as I speak, you may be able to join me in that state. Although every word that I use has a history, of course, and comes from the past, as all language does, the words that I speak to you now are carriers of the high-energy frequency of presence, quite apart from the meaning they convey as words.

Silence is an even more potent carrier of presence, so when you read this or listen to me speak, be aware of the silence between and underneath the words. Be aware of the gaps. To listen to the silence, wherever you are, is an easy and direct way of becoming present. Even if there is noise, there is always some silence underneath and in between the sounds. Listening to the silence immediately creates stillness inside you. Only the stillness in you can perceive the silence outside. And what is stillness other than presence, consciousness freed from thought forms? Here is the living realization of what we have been talking about.



CHRIST: THE REALITY OF YOUR DIVINE PRESENCE

Don't get attached to any one word. You can substitute "Christ" for presence, if that is more meaningful to you. Christ is your God-essence or the Self, as it is sometimes called in the East. The only difference between Christ and presence is that Christ refers to your indwelling divinity regardless of whether you are conscious of it or not, whereas presence means your *awakened* divinity or God-essence.

Many misunderstandings and false beliefs about Christ will clear if you realize that there is no past or future in Christ. To say that Christ *was* or *will be* is a contradiction in terms. Jesus was. He was a man who lived two thousand years ago and realized divine presence, his true nature. And so he said: "Before Abraham was, I am." He did not say: "I already existed before Abraham was born." That would have meant that he was still within the dimension of time and form identity. The words *I am* used in a sentence that starts in the past tense indicate a radical shift, a discontinuity in the temporal dimension. It is a Zen-like statement of great profundity. Jesus attempted to convey directly, not through discursive thought, the meaning of presence, of self-realization. He had gone beyond the consciousness dimension governed by time, into the realm of the timeless. The dimension of eternity had come into this world. Eternity, of course, does not mean endless time, but no time. Thus, the man Jesus became Christ, a vehicle for pure consciousness. And what is

God's self-definition in the Bible? Did God say, "I have always been, and I always will be?" Of course not. That would have given reality to past and future. God said: "I AM THAT I AM." No time here, just presence.

The "second coming" of Christ is a transformation of human consciousness, a shift from time to presence, from thinking to pure consciousness, not the arrival of some man or woman. If "Christ" were to return tomorrow in some externalized form, what could he or she possibly say to you other than this: "I am the Truth. I am divine presence. I am eternal life. I am within you. I am here. I am Now."



Never personalize Christ. Don't make Christ into a form identity. Avatars, divine mothers, enlightened masters, the very few that are real, are not special as persons. Without a false self to uphold, defend, and feed, they are more simple, more ordinary than the ordinary man or woman. Anyone with a strong ego would regard them as insignificant or, more likely, not see them at all.

If you are drawn to an enlightened teacher, it is because there is already enough presence in you to recognize presence in another. There were many people who did not recognize Jesus or the Buddha, as there are and always have been many people who are drawn to false teachers. Egos are drawn to bigger egos. Darkness cannot recognize light. Only light can recognize light. So don't believe that the light is outside you or that it can only come through one particular

form. If only your master is an incarnation of God, then who are you? Any kind of exclusivity is identification with form, and identification with form means ego, no matter how well disguised.

Use the master's presence to reflect your own identity beyond name and form back to you and to become more intensely present yourself. You will soon realize that there is no "mine" or "yours" in presence. Presence is one.

Group work can also be helpful for intensifying the light of your presence. A group of people coming together in a state of presence generates a collective energy field of great intensity. It not only raises the degree of presence of each member of the group but also helps to free the collective human consciousness from its current state of mind dominance. This will make the state of presence increasingly more accessible to individuals. However, unless at least one member of the group is already firmly established in it and thus can hold the energy frequency of that state, the egoic mind can easily reassert itself and sabotage the group's endeavors. Although group work is invaluable, it is not enough, and you must not come to depend on it. Nor must you come to depend on a teacher or a master, except during the transitional period, when you are learning the meaning and practice of presence.

THE INNER BODY

BEING IS YOUR DEEPEST SELF

You spoke earlier about the importance of having deep roots within or inhabiting the body. Can you explain what you meant by that?

The body can become a point of access into the realm of Being. Let's go into that more deeply now.

I am still not quite sure if I fully understand what you mean by Being.

"Water? What do you mean by that? I don't understand it." This is what a fish would say if it had a human mind.

Please stop trying to understand Being. You have already had significant glimpses of Being, but the mind will always try to squeeze it into a little box and then put a label on it. It cannot be done. It cannot become an object of knowledge. In Being, subject and object merge into one.

Being can be *felt* as the ever-present *I am* that is beyond name and form. To feel and thus to know that you *are* and to

abide in that deeply rooted state is enlightenment, is the truth that Jesus says will make you free.

Free from what?

Free from the *illusion* that you are nothing more than your physical body and your mind. This “*illusion of the self*,” as the Buddha calls it, is the core error. Free from *fear* in its countless disguises as the inevitable consequence of that illusion — the fear that is your constant tormentor as long as you derive your sense of self only from this ephemeral and vulnerable form. And free from *sin*, which is the suffering you unconsciously inflict on yourself and others as long as this illusory sense of self governs what you think, say, and do.

LOOK BEYOND THE WORDS

I don't like the word sin. It implies that I am being judged and found guilty.

I can understand that. Over the centuries, many erroneous views and interpretations have accumulated around words such as *sin*, due to ignorance, misunderstanding, or a desire to control, but they contain an essential core of truth. If you are unable to look beyond such interpretations and so cannot recognize the reality to which the word points, then don't use it. Don't get stuck on the level of words. A word is no more than a means to an end. It's an abstraction. Not unlike a signpost, it points beyond itself. The word *honey* isn't honey. You can study and talk about honey for as long as you like, but you won't really *know* it until you taste it. After you have tasted

it, the word becomes less important to you. You won't be attached to it anymore. Similarly, you can talk or think about *God* continuously for the rest of your life, but does that mean you know or have even glimpsed the reality to which the word points? It really is no more than an obsessive attachment to a signpost, a mental idol.

The reverse also applies: If, for whatever reason, you disliked the word *honey*, that might prevent you from ever tasting it. If you had a strong aversion to the word *God*, which is a negative form of attachment, you may be denying not just the word but also the reality to which it points. You would be cutting yourself off from the possibility of experiencing that reality. All this is, of course, intrinsically connected with being identified with your mind.

So, if a word doesn't work for you anymore, then drop it and replace it with one that does work. If you don't like the word *sin*, then call it unconsciousness or insanity. That may get you closer to the truth, the reality behind the word, than a long-misused word like *sin*, and leaves little room for guilt.

I don't like those words either. They imply that there is something wrong with me. I am being judged.

Of course there is something wrong with you — and you are not being judged.

I don't mean to offend you personally, but do you not belong to the human race that killed over one hundred million members of its own species in the twentieth century alone?

You mean guilt by association?

It is not a question of guilt. But as long as you are run by the egoic mind, you are part of the collective insanity. Perhaps you haven't looked very deeply into the human condition in its state of dominance by the egoic mind. Open your eyes and see the fear, the despair, the greed, and the violence that are all-pervasive. See the heinous cruelty and suffering on an unimaginable scale that humans have inflicted and continue to inflict on each other as well as on other life forms on the planet. You don't need to condemn. Just observe. That is sin. That is insanity. That is unconsciousness. Above all, don't forget to observe your own mind. Seek out the root of the insanity there.

FINDING YOUR INVISIBLE AND INDESTRUCTIBLE REALITY

You said that identification with our physical form is part of the illusion, so how can the body, the physical form, bring you to a realization of Being?

The body that you can see and touch cannot take you into Being. But that visible and tangible body is only an outer shell, or rather a limited and distorted perception of a deeper reality. In your natural state of connectedness with Being, this deeper reality can be felt every moment as the invisible inner body, the animating presence within you. So to "inhabit the body" is to feel the body from within, to feel the life inside the body and thereby come to know that you are beyond the outer form.

But that is only the beginning of an inward journey that will take you ever more deeply into a realm of great stillness and peace, yet also of great power and vibrant life. At first, you

may only get fleeting glimpses of it, but through them you will begin to realize that you are not just a meaningless fragment in an alien universe, briefly suspended between birth and death, allowed a few short-lived pleasures followed by pain and ultimate annihilation. Underneath your outer form, you are connected with something so vast, so immeasurable and sacred, that it cannot be conceived or spoken of -- yet I am speaking of it now. I am speaking of it not to give you something to believe in but to show you how you can know it for yourself.

You are cut off from Being as long as your mind takes up all your attention. When this happens — and it happens continuously for most people — you are not in your body. The mind absorbs all your consciousness and transforms it into mind stuff. You cannot stop thinking. Compulsive thinking has become a collective disease. Your whole sense of who you are is then derived from mind activity. Your identity, as it is no longer rooted in Being, becomes a vulnerable and ever-needy mental construct, which creates fear as the predominant underlying emotion. The one thing that truly matters is then missing from your life: awareness of your deeper self — your invisible and indestructible reality.

To become conscious of Being, you need to reclaim consciousness from the mind. This is one of the most essential tasks on your spiritual journey. It will free vast amounts of consciousness that previously had been trapped in useless and compulsive thinking. A very effective way of doing this is simply to take the focus of your attention away from thinking and direct it into the body, where Being can be felt in the first instance as the invisible energy field that gives life to what you perceive as the physical body.

CONNECTING WITH THE INNER BODY

Please try it now. You may find it helpful to close your eyes for this practice. Later on, when "being in the body" has become natural and easy, this will no longer be necessary. Direct your attention into the body. Feel it from within. Is it alive? Is there life in your hands, arms, legs, and feet — in your abdomen, your chest? Can you feel the subtle energy field that pervades the entire body and gives vibrant life to every organ and every cell? Can you feel it simultaneously in all parts of the body as a single field of energy? Keep focusing on the feeling of your inner body for a few moments. Do not start to think about it. Feel it. The more attention you give it, the clearer and stronger this feeling will become. It will feel as if every cell is becoming more alive, and if you have a strong visual sense, you may get an image of your body becoming luminous. Although such an image can help you temporarily, pay more attention to the feeling than to any image that may arise. An image, no matter how beautiful or powerful, is already defined in form, so there is less scope for penetrating more deeply.



The feeling of your inner body is formless, limitless, and unfathomable. You can always go into it more deeply. If you cannot feel very much at this stage, pay attention to whatever you *can* feel. Perhaps there is just a slight tingling in your hands or feet. That's good enough for the moment. Just focus on the feeling. Your body is coming alive. Later, we will

practice some more. Please open your eyes now, but keep some attention in the inner energy field of the body even as you look around the room. The inner body lies at the threshold between your form identity and your essence identity, your true nature. Never lose touch with it.



TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE BODY

Why have most religions condemned or denied the body? It seems that spiritual seekers have always regarded the body as a hindrance or even as sinful.

Why have so few seekers become finders?

On the level of the body, humans are very close to animals. All the basic bodily functions — pleasure, pain, breathing, eating, drinking, defecating, sleeping, the drive to find a mate and procreate, and of course birth and death — we share with the animals. A long time after their fall from a state of grace and oneness into illusion, humans suddenly woke up in what seemed to be an animal body — and they found this very disturbing. "Don't fool yourself. You are no more than an animal." This seemed to be the truth that was staring them in the face. But it was too disturbing a truth to tolerate. Adam and Eve saw that they were naked, and they became afraid. Unconscious denial of their animal nature set in very quickly. The threat that they might be taken over by powerful instinctual drives and revert back to complete unconsciousness was indeed a very real one. Shame and

taboos appeared around certain parts of the body and bodily functions, especially sexuality. The light of their consciousness was not yet strong enough to make friends with their animal nature, to allow it to be and even enjoy that aspect of themselves — let alone to go deeply into it to find the divine hidden within it, the reality within the illusion. So they did what they had to do. They began to disassociate from their body. They now saw themselves as *having* a body, rather than just being it.

When religions arose, this disassociation became even more pronounced as the "you are not your body" belief. Countless people in East and West throughout the ages have tried to find God, salvation, or enlightenment through denial of the body. This took the form of denial of sense pleasures and of sexuality in particular, fasting, and other ascetic practices. They even inflicted pain on the body in an attempt to weaken or punish it because they regarded it as sinful. In Christianity, this used to be called mortification of the flesh. Others tried to escape from the body by entering trance states or seeking out-of-body experiences. Many still do. Even the Buddha is said to have practiced body denial through fasting and extreme forms of asceticism for six years, but he did not attain enlightenment until after he had given up this practice.

The fact is that no one has ever become enlightened through denying or fighting the body or through an out-of-body experience. Although such an experience can be fascinating and can give you a glimpse of the state of liberation from the material form, in the end you will always have to return to the body, where the essential work of transformation takes place. Transformation is *through* the body, not away from it. This is

why no true master has ever advocated fighting or leaving the body, although their mind-based followers often have.

Of the ancient teachings concerning the body, only certain fragments survive, such as Jesus's statement that "your whole body will be filled with light," or they survive as myths, such as the belief that Jesus never relinquished his body but remained one with it and ascended into "heaven" with it. Almost no one to this day has understood those fragments or the hidden meaning of certain myths, and the "you are not your body" belief has prevailed universally, leading to body denial and attempts to escape from the body. Countless seekers have thus been prevented from attaining spiritual realization for themselves and becoming finders.

Is it possible to recover the lost teachings on the significance of the body or to reconstruct them from the existing fragments?

There is no need for that. All spiritual teachings originate from the same Source. In that sense, there is and always has been only one master, who manifests in many different forms. I am that master, and so are you, once you are able to access the Source within. And the way to it is through the inner body. Although all spiritual teachings originate from the same Source, once they become verbalized and written down they are obviously no more than collections of words — and a word is nothing but a signpost, as we talked about earlier. All such teachings are signposts pointing the way back to the Source.

I have already spoken of the Truth that is hidden within your body, but I will summarize for you again the lost teachings of the masters — so here is another signpost. Please endeavor to feel your inner body as you read or listen.

SERMON ON THE BODY

What you perceive as a dense physical structure called the body, which is subject to disease, old age, and death, is not ultimately real — is not you. It is a misperception of your essential reality that is beyond birth and death, and is due to the limitations of your mind, which, having lost touch with Being, creates the body as evidence of its illusory belief in separation and to justify its state of fear. But do not turn away from the body, for within that symbol of impermanence, limitation, and death that you perceive as the illusory creation of your mind is concealed the splendor of your essential and immortal reality. Do not turn your attention elsewhere in your search for the Truth, for it is nowhere else to be found but within your body.

Do not fight against the body, for in doing so you are fighting against your own reality. You *are* your body. The body that you can see and touch is only a thin illusory veil. Underneath it lies the invisible inner body, the doorway into Being, into Life Unmanifested. Through the inner body, you are inseparably connected to this unmanifested One Life — birthless, deathless, eternally present. Through the inner body, you are forever one with God.

**HAVE DEEP ROOTS WITHIN**

The key is to be in a state of permanent connectedness with your inner body — to feel it at all times. This will rapidly

deepen and transform your life. The more consciousness you direct into the inner body, the higher its vibrational frequency becomes, much like a light that grows brighter as you turn up the dimmer switch and so increase the flow of electricity. At this higher energy level, negativity cannot affect you anymore, and you tend to attract new circumstances that reflect this higher frequency.

If you keep your attention in the body as much as possible, you will be anchored in the Now. You won't lose yourself in the external world, and you won't lose yourself in your mind. Thoughts and emotions, fears and desires, may still be there to some extent, but they won't take you over.

Please examine where your attention is at this moment. You are listening to me, or you are reading these words in a book. That is the focus of your attention. You are also peripherally aware of your surroundings, other people, and so on. Furthermore, there may be some mind activity around what you are hearing or reading, some mental commentary. Yet there is no need for any of this to absorb *all* your attention. See if you can be in touch with your inner body at the same time. Keep some of your attention within. Don't let it all flow out. Feel your whole body from within, as a single field of energy. It is almost as if you were listening or reading with your whole body. Let this be your practice in the days and weeks to come.

Do not give all your attention away to the mind and the external world. By all means focus on what you are doing, but feel the inner body at the same time whenever possible. Stay rooted within. Then observe how this changes your state of consciousness and the quality of what you are doing.

Whenever you are waiting, wherever it may be, use that time to feel the inner body. In this way, traffic jams and lines become very enjoyable. Instead of mentally projecting yourself away from the Now, go more deeply into the Now by going more deeply into the body.

The art of inner-body awareness will develop into a completely new way of living, a state of permanent connectedness with Being, and will add a depth to your life that you have never known before.

It is easy to stay present as the observer of your mind when you are deeply rooted within your body. No matter what happens on the outside, nothing can shake you anymore.

Unless you stay present — and inhabiting your body is always an essential aspect of it — you will continue to be run by your mind. The script in your head that you learned a long time ago, the conditioning of your mind, will dictate your thinking and your behavior. You may be free of it for brief intervals, but rarely for long. This is especially true when something “goes wrong” or there is some loss or upset. Your conditioned reaction will then be involuntary, automatic, and predictable, fueled by the one basic emotion that underlies the mind-identified state of consciousness: fear.

So when such challenges come, as they always do, make it a habit to go within at once and focus as much as you can on the inner energy field of your body. This need not take long, just a few seconds. But you need to do it the moment that the challenge presents itself. Any delay will allow a conditioned mental-emotional reaction to arise and take you over. When you focus within and feel the inner body, you immediately become still and present as you are withdrawing

consciousness from the mind. If a response is required in that situation, it will come up from this deeper level. Just as the sun is infinitely brighter than a candle flame, there is infinitely more intelligence in Being than in your mind.

As long as you are in conscious contact with your inner body, you are like a tree that is deeply rooted in the earth, or a building with a deep and solid foundation. The latter analogy is used by Jesus in the generally misunderstood parable of the two men who build a house. One man builds it on the sand, without a foundation, and when the storms and floods come, the house is swept away. The other man *digs deep* until he reaches the rock, then builds his house, which is not swept away by the floods.

BEFORE YOU ENTER THE BODY, FORGIVE

I felt very uncomfortable when I tried to put my attention on the inner body. There was a feeling of agitation and some nausea. So I haven't been able to experience what you are talking about.

What you felt was a lingering emotion that you were probably unaware of, until you started putting some attention into the body. Unless you first give it some attention, the emotion will prevent you from gaining access to the inner body, which lies at a deeper level underneath it. Attention does not mean that you start *thinking* about it. It means to just observe the emotion, to feel it fully, and so to acknowledge and accept it as it is. Some emotions are easily identified: anger, fear, grief, and so on. Others may be much harder to label. They may just be vague feelings of unease, heaviness, or constriction, halfway between an emotion and a physical sensation. In any case,

what matters is not whether you can attach a mental label to it but whether you can bring the feeling of it into awareness as much as possible. Attention is the key to transformation — and full attention also implies acceptance. Attention is like a beam of light — the focused power of your consciousness that transmutes everything into itself.

In a fully functional organism, an emotion has a very short life span. It is like a momentary ripple or wave on the surface of your Being. When you are not in your body, however, an emotion can survive inside you for days or weeks, or join with other emotions of a similar frequency that have merged and become the pain-body, a parasite that can live inside you for years, feed on your energy, lead to physical illness, and make your life miserable (see chapter 2).

So place your attention on feeling the emotion, and check whether your mind is holding on to a grievance pattern such as blame, self-pity, or resentment that is feeding the emotion. If that is the case, it means that you haven't forgiven. Non-forgiveness is often toward another person or yourself, but it may just as well be toward any situation or condition — past, present, or future — that your mind refuses to accept. Yes, there can be nonforgiveness even with regard to the future. This is the mind's refusal to accept uncertainty, to accept that the future is ultimately beyond its control. Forgiveness is to relinquish your grievance and so to let go of grief. It happens naturally once you realize that your grievance serves no purpose except to strengthen a false sense of self. Forgiveness is to offer no resistance to life — to allow life to live through you. The alternatives are pain and suffering, a greatly restricted flow of life energy, and in many cases physical disease.

The moment you truly forgive, you have reclaimed your power from the mind. Nonforgiveness is the very nature of the mind, just as the mind-made false self, the ego, cannot survive without strife and conflict. The mind cannot forgive. Only you can. You become present, you enter your body, you feel the vibrant peace and stillness that emanate from Being. That is why Jesus said: "Before you enter the temple, forgive."



YOUR LINK WITH THE UNMANIFESTED

What is the relationship between presence and the inner body?

Presence is pure consciousness — consciousness that has been reclaimed from the mind, from the world of form. The inner body is your link with the Unmanifested, and in its deepest aspect is the Unmanifested: the Source from which consciousness emanates, as light emanates from the sun. Awareness of the inner body is consciousness remembering its origin and returning to the Source.

Is the Unmanifested the same as Being?

Yes. The word *Unmanifested* attempts, by way of negation, to express That which cannot be spoken, thought, or imagined. It points to what it *is* by saying what it *is not*. *Being*, on the other hand, is a positive term. Please don't get attached to either of these words or start believing in them. They are no more than signposts.

You said that presence is consciousness that has been reclaimed from the mind. Who does the reclaiming?

You do. But since in your essence you *are* consciousness, we might as well say that it is an awakening of consciousness from the dream of form. This does not mean that your own form will instantly vanish in an explosion of light. You can continue in your present form yet be aware of the formless and deathless deep within you.

I must admit that this is way beyond my comprehension, and yet on some deeper level I seem to know what you are talking about. It's more like a feeling than anything else. Am I deceiving myself?

No, you are not. Feeling will get you closer to the truth of who you are than thinking. I cannot tell you anything that deep within you don't already know. When you have reached a certain stage of inner connectedness, you recognize the truth when you hear it. If you haven't reached that stage yet, the practice of body awareness will bring about the deepening that is necessary.

SLOWING DOWN THE AGING PROCESS

In the meantime, awareness of the inner body has other benefits in the physical realm. One of them is a significant slowing down of the aging of the physical body.

Whereas the outer body normally appears to grow old and wither fairly quickly, the inner body does not change with time, except that you may feel it more deeply and become it more fully. If you are twenty years old now, the energy field of

your inner body will feel just the same when you are eighty. It will be just as vibrantly alive. As soon as your habitual state changes from being out of the body and trapped in your mind to being in the body and present in the Now, your physical body will feel lighter, clearer, more alive. As there is more consciousness in the body, its molecular structure actually becomes less dense. More consciousness means a lessening of the illusion of materiality.

When you become identified more with the timeless inner body than with the outer body, when presence becomes your normal mode of consciousness and past and future no longer dominate your attention, you do not accumulate time anymore in your psyche and in the cells of the body. The accumulation of time as the psychological burden of past and future greatly impairs the cells' capacity for self-renewal. So if you inhabit the inner body, the outer body will grow old at a much slower rate, and even when it does, your timeless essence will shine through the outer form, and you will not give the appearance of an old person.

Is there any scientific evidence for this?

Try it out and you will be the evidence.

STRENGTHENING THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Another benefit of this practice in the physical realm is a great strengthening of the immune system, which occurs when you inhabit the body. The more consciousness you bring into the body, the stronger the immune system becomes. It is as if every cell awakens and rejoices. The body loves your attention. It is also a potent form of self-healing. Most illnesses

creep in when you are not present in the body. If the master is not present in the house, all kinds of shady characters will take up residence there. When you inhabit your body, it will be hard for unwanted guests to enter.

It is not only your physical immune system that becomes strengthened; your psychic immune system is greatly enhanced as well. The latter protects you from the negative mental-emotional force fields of others, which are highly contagious. Inhabiting the body protects you not by putting up a shield, but by raising the frequency vibration of your total energy field, so that anything that vibrates at a lower frequency, such as fear, anger, depression, and so on, now exists in what is virtually a different order of reality. It doesn't enter your field of consciousness anymore, or if it does you don't need to offer any resistance to it because it passes right through you. Please don't just accept or reject what I am saying. Put it to the test.

There is a simple but powerful self-healing meditation that you can do whenever you feel the need to boost your immune system. It is particularly effective if used when you feel the first symptoms of an illness, but it also works with illnesses that are already entrenched if you use it at frequent intervals and with an intense focus. It will also counteract any disruption of your energy field by some form of negativity. However, it is not a substitute for the moment-to-moment practice of being in the body; otherwise, its effect will only be temporary. Here it is.

When you are unoccupied for a few minutes, and especially last thing at night before falling asleep and first thing in the morning before getting up, "flood" your body with consciousness. Close your eyes. Lie flat on your back. Choose

different parts of your body to focus your attention on briefly at first: hands, feet, arms, legs, abdomen, chest, head, and so on. Feel the life energy inside those parts as intensely as you can. Stay with each part for fifteen seconds or so. Then let your attention run through the body like a wave a few times, from feet to head and back again. This need only take a minute or so. After that, feel the inner body in its totality, as a single field of energy. Hold that feeling for a few minutes. Be intensely present during that time, present in every cell of your body. Don't be concerned if the mind occasionally succeeds in drawing your attention out of the body and you lose yourself in some thought. As soon as you notice that this has happened, just return your attention to the inner body.

LET THE BREATH TAKE YOU INTO THE BODY

At times, when my mind has been very active, it has acquired such momentum that I find it impossible to take my attention away from it and feel the inner body. This happens particularly when I get into a worry or anxiety pattern. Do you have any suggestions?

If at any time you are finding it hard to get in touch with the inner body, it is usually easier to focus on your breathing first. Conscious breathing, which is a powerful meditation in its own right, will gradually put you in touch with the body. Follow the breath with your attention as it moves in and out of your body. Breathe into the body, and feel your abdomen expanding and contracting slightly with each inhalation and exhalation. If you find it easy to visualize, close your eyes and see yourself surrounded by light or immersed in a luminous substance — a sea of consciousness. Then breathe in

that light. Feel that luminous substance filling up your body and making it luminous also. Then gradually focus more on the feeling. You are now in your body. Don't get attached to any visual image.



CREATIVE USE OF MIND

If you need to use your mind for a specific purpose, use it in conjunction with your inner body. Only if you are able to be conscious without thought can you use your mind creatively, and the easiest way to enter that state is through your body. Whenever an answer, a solution, or a creative idea is needed, stop thinking for a moment by focusing attention on your inner energy field. Become aware of the stillness. When you resume thinking, it will be fresh and creative. In any thought activity, make it a habit to go back and forth every few minutes or so between thinking and an inner kind of listening, an inner stillness. We could say: don't just think with your head, think with your whole body.



THE ART OF LISTENING

When listening to another person, don't just listen with your mind, listen with your whole body. Feel the energy field of

your inner body as you listen. That takes attention away from thinking and creates a still space that enables you to truly listen without the mind interfering. You are giving the other person space — space to be. It is the most precious gift you can give. Most people don't know how to listen because the major part of their attention is taken up by thinking. They pay more attention to that than to what the other person is saying, and none at all to what really matters: the Being of the other person underneath the words and the mind. Of course, you cannot feel someone else's Being except through your own. This is the beginning of the realization of one-ness, which is love. At the deepest level of Being, you are one with all that is.

Most human relationships consist mainly of minds interacting with each other, not of human beings communicating, being in communion. No relationship can thrive in that way, and that is why there is so much conflict in relationships. When the mind is running your life, conflict, strife, and problems are inevitable. Being in touch with your inner body creates a clear space of no-mind within which the relationship can flower.

PORTALS INTO THE UNMANIFESTED

GOING DEEPLY INTO THE BODY

I can feel the energy inside my body, especially in my arms and legs, but I don't seem to be able to go more deeply, as you suggested earlier.

Make it into a meditation. It needn't take long. Ten to fifteen minutes of clock time should be sufficient. Make sure first that there are no external distractions such as telephones or people who are likely to interrupt you. Sit on a chair, but don't lean back. Keep the spine erect. Doing so will help you to stay alert. Alternatively, choose your own favorite position for meditation.

Make sure the body is relaxed. Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Feel yourself breathing into the lower abdomen, as it were. Observe how it expands and contracts slightly with each in and out breath. Then become aware of the entire inner energy field of the body. Don't think about it — *feel* it. By doing this, you reclaim consciousness from the mind. If you find it helpful, use the "light" visualization I described earlier.

When you can feel the inner body clearly as a single field of energy, let go, if possible, of any visual image and focus exclusively on the feeling. If you can, also drop any mental image you may still have of the physical body. All that is left then is an all-encompassing sense of presence or "beingness," and the inner body is felt to be without a boundary. Then take your attention even more deeply into that feeling. Become one with it. Merge with the energy field, so that there is no longer a perceived duality of the observer and the observed, of you and your body. The distinction between inner and outer also dissolves now, so there is no inner body anymore. By going deeply into the body, you have transcended the body.

Stay in this realm of pure Being for as long as feels comfortable; then become aware again of the physical body, your breathing and physical senses, and open your eyes. Look at your surroundings for a few minutes in a meditative way — that is, without labeling them mentally — and continue to feel the inner body as you do so.



Having access to that formless realm is truly liberating. It frees you from bondage to form and identification with form. It is life in its undifferentiated state prior to its fragmentation into multiplicity. We may call it the Unmanifested, the invisible Source of all things, the Being within all beings. It is a realm of deep stillness and peace, but also of joy and intense aliveness. Whenever you are present, you become "transparent" to some extent to the light, the pure consciousness that

emanates from this Source. You also realize that the light is not separate from who you are but constitutes your very essence.

THE SOURCE OF CHI

Is the Unmanifested what in the East is called chi, a kind of universal life energy?

No, it isn't. The Unmanifested is the source of chi. Chi is the inner energy field of your body. It is the bridge between the outer you and the Source. It lies halfway between the manifested, the world of form, and the Unmanifested. Chi can be likened to a river or an energy stream. If you take the focus of your consciousness deeply into the inner body, you are tracing the course of this river back to its Source. Chi is movement; the Unmanifested is stillness. When you reach a point of absolute stillness, which is nevertheless vibrant with life, you have gone beyond the inner body and beyond chi to the Source itself: the Unmanifested. Chi is the link between the Unmanifested and the physical universe.

So if you take your attention deeply into the inner body, you may reach this point, this singularity, where the world dissolves into the Unmanifested and the Unmanifested takes on form as the energy stream of chi, which then becomes the world. This is the point of birth and death. When your consciousness is directed outward, mind and world arise. When it is directed inward, it realizes its own Source and returns home into the Unmanifested. Then, when your consciousness comes back to the manifested world, you reassume the form identity that you temporarily relinquished. You have a name, a past, a life situation, a future. But in one essential

respect, you are not the same person you were before: You will have glimpsed a reality within yourself that is not "of this world," although it isn't separate from it, just as it isn't separate from you.

Now let your spiritual practice be this: As you go about your life, don't give 100 percent of your attention to the external world and to your mind. Keep some within. I have spoken about this already. Feel the inner body even when engaged in everyday activities, especially when engaged in relationships or when you are relating with nature. Feel the stillness deep inside it. Keep the portal open. It is quite possible to be conscious of the Unmanifested throughout your life. You feel it as a deep sense of peace somewhere in the background, a stillness that never leaves you, no matter what happens out here. You become a bridge between the Unmanifested and the manifested, between God and the world. This is the state of connectedness with the Source that we call enlightenment.

Don't get the impression that the Unmanifested is separate from the manifested. How could it be? It is the life within every form, the inner essence of all that exists. It pervades this world. Let me explain.

DREAMLESS SLEEP

You take a journey into the Unmanifested every night when you enter the phase of deep dreamless sleep. You merge with the Source. You draw from it the vital energy that sustains you for a while when you return to the manifested, the world of separate forms. This energy is much more vital than food: "Man does not live by bread alone." But in dreamless sleep, you don't go into it consciously. Although the bodily

functions are still operating, "you" no longer exist in that state. Can you imagine what it would be like to go into dreamless sleep with full consciousness? It is impossible to imagine it, because that state has no content.

The Unmanifested does not liberate you until you enter it consciously. That's why Jesus did not say: the truth will make you free, but rather: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." This is not a conceptual truth. It is the truth of eternal life beyond form, which is known directly or not at all. But don't attempt to stay conscious in dreamless sleep. It is highly unlikely that you will succeed. At most, you may remain conscious during the dream phase, but not beyond that. This is called lucid dreaming, which may be interesting and fascinating, but it is not liberating.

So use your inner body as a portal through which you enter the Unmanifested, and keep that portal open so that you stay connected with the Source at all times. It makes no difference, as far as the inner body is concerned, whether your outer physical body is old or young, frail or strong. The inner body is timeless. If you are not yet able to feel the inner body, use one of the other portals, although ultimately they are all one. Some I have spoken about at length already, but I'll mention them again briefly here.

OTHER PORTALS

The Now can be seen as the main portal. It is an essential aspect of every other portal, including the inner body. You cannot be *in your body* without being intensely present in the Now.

Time and the manifested are as inextricably linked as are the timeless Now and the Unmanifested. When you dissolve

psychological time through intense present-moment awareness, you become conscious of the Unmanifested both directly and indirectly. Directly, you feel it as the radiance and power of your conscious presence — no content, just presence. Indirectly, you are aware of the Unmanifested in and through the sensory realm. In other words, you feel the God-essence in every creature, every flower, every stone, and you realize: "All that is, is holy." This is why Jesus, speaking entirely from his essence or Christ identity, says in the Gospel of Thomas: "Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up a stone, and you will find me there."

Another portal into the Unmanifested is created through the cessation of thinking. This can start with a very simple thing, such as taking one conscious breath or looking, in a state of intense alertness, at a flower, so that there is no mental commentary running at the same time. There are many ways to create a gap in the incessant stream of thought. This is what meditation is all about. Thought is part of the realm of the manifested. Continuous mind activity keeps you imprisoned in the world of form and becomes an opaque screen that prevents you from becoming conscious of the Unmanifested, conscious of the formless and timeless God-essence in yourself and in all things and all creatures. When you are intensely *present*, you don't need to be concerned about the cessation of thinking, of course, because the mind then stops automatically. That's why I said the Now is an essential aspect of every other portal.

Surrender — the letting go of mental-emotional resistance to what *is* — also becomes a portal into the Unmanifested. The reason for this is simple: inner resistance cuts you off from other people, from yourself, from the world around you. It

strengthens the feeling of separateness on which the ego depends for its survival. The stronger the feeling of separateness, the more you are bound to the manifested, to the world of separate forms. The more you are bound to the world of form, the harder and more impenetrable your form identity becomes. The portal is closed, and you are cut off from the inner dimension, the dimension of depth. In the state of surrender, your form identity softens and becomes somewhat "transparent," as it were, so the Unmanifested can shine through you.

It's up to you to open a portal in your life that gives you conscious access to the Unmanifested. Get in touch with the energy field of the inner body, be intensely present, disidentify from the mind, surrender to what is; these are all portals you can use — but you only need to use one.

Surely love must also be one of those portals?

No, it isn't. As soon as one of the portals is open, love is present in you as the "feeling-realization" of oneness. Love isn't a portal; it's what comes *through* the portal into this world. As long as you are completely trapped in your form identity, there can be no love. Your task is not to search for love but to find a portal through which love can enter.

SILENCE

Are there any other portals apart from those you just mentioned?

Yes, there are. The Unmanifested is not separate from the manifested. It pervades this world, but it is so well disguised

that almost everybody misses it completely. If you know where to look, you'll find it everywhere. A portal opens up every moment.

Do you hear that dog barking in the distance? Or that car passing by? Listen carefully. Can you feel the presence of the Unmanifested in that? You can't? Look for it in the silence out of which the sounds come and into which they return. Pay more attention to the silence than to the sounds. Paying attention to outer silence creates inner silence: the mind becomes still. A portal is opening up.

Every sound is born out of silence, dies back into silence, and during its life span is surrounded by silence. Silence enables the sound to be. It is an intrinsic but unmanifested part of every sound, every musical note, every song, every word. The Unmanifested is present in this world as silence. This is why it has been said that nothing in this world is so like God as silence. All you have to do is pay attention to it. Even during a conversation, become conscious of the gaps between words, the brief silent intervals between sentences. As you do that, the dimension of stillness grows within you. You cannot pay attention to silence without simultaneously becoming still within. Silence without, stillness within. You have entered the Unmanifested.

SPACE

Just as no sound can exist without silence, nothing can exist without no-thing, without the empty space that enables it to be. Every physical object or body has come out of nothing, is surrounded by nothing, and will eventually return to nothing. Not only that, but even inside every physical body there is far

more "nothing" than "something." Physicists tell us that the solidity of matter is an illusion. Even seemingly solid matter, including your physical body, is nearly 100 percent empty space — so vast are the distances between the atoms compared to their size. What is more, even inside every atom there is mostly empty space. What is left is more like a vibrational frequency than particles of solid matter, more like a musical note. Buddhists have known that for over 2,500 years. "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form," states the *Heart Sutra*, one of the best known ancient Buddhist texts. The essence of all things is emptiness.

The Unmanifested is not only present in this world as silence; it also pervades the entire physical universe as space — from within and without. This is just as easy to miss as silence. Everybody pays attention to the things in space, but who pays attention to space itself?

You seem to be implying that "emptiness" or "nothing" is not just nothing, that there is some mysterious quality to it. What is this nothing?

You cannot ask such a question. Your mind is trying to make nothing into something. The moment you make it into something, you have missed it. Nothing — space — is the appearance of the Unmanifested as an externalized phenomenon in a sense-perceived world. That's about as much as one can say about it, and even that is a kind of paradox. It cannot become an object of knowledge. You can't do a Ph.D. on "nothing." When scientists study space, they usually make it into something and thereby miss its essence entirely. Not surprisingly, the latest theory is that space isn't empty at all, that it is filled with some substance. Once you have a theory, it's

not too hard to find evidence to substantiate it, at least until some other theory comes along.

"Nothing" can only become a portal into the Unmanifested for you if you don't try to grasp or understand it.

Isn't that what we are doing here?

Not at all. I am giving you pointers to show you how you can bring the dimension of the Unmanifested into your life. We are not trying to understand it. There is nothing to understand.

Space has no "existence." "To exist" literally means "to stand out." You cannot understand space because it doesn't stand out. Although in itself it has no existence, it enables everything else to exist. Silence has no existence either, nor does the Un-manifested.

So what happens if you withdraw attention from the objects in space and become aware of space itself? What is the essence of this room? The furniture, pictures, and so on are in the room, but they are not the room. The floor, walls, and ceiling define the boundary of the room, but they are not the room either. So what is the essence of the room? Space, of course, empty space. There would be no "room" without it. Since space is "nothing," we can say that what is *not* there is more important than what is there. So become aware of the space that is all around you. Don't think about it. Feel it, as it were. Pay attention to "nothing."

As you do that, a shift in consciousness takes place inside you. Here is why. The inner equivalent to objects in space such as furniture, walls, and so on are your mind objects:

thoughts, emotions, and the objects of the senses. And the inner equivalent of space is the consciousness that enables your mind objects to be, just as space allows all things to be. So if you withdraw attention from *things* — objects in space — you automatically withdraw attention from your mind objects as well. In other words: You cannot think and be aware of space — or of silence, for that matter. By becoming aware of the empty space around you, you simultaneously become aware of the space of no-mind, of pure consciousness: the Unmanifested. This is how the contemplation of space can become a portal for you.

Space and silence are two aspects of the same thing, the same no-thing. They are an externalization of inner space and inner silence, which is stillness: the infinitely creative womb of all existence. Most humans are completely unconscious of this dimension. There is no inner space, no stillness. They are out of balance. In other words, they know the world, or think they do, but they don't know God. They identify exclusively with their own physical and psychological form, unconscious of essence. And because every form is highly unstable, they live in fear. This fear causes a deep misperception of themselves and of other humans, a distortion in their vision of the world.

If some cosmic convulsion brought about the end of our world, the Unmanifested would remain totally unaffected by this. *A Course in Miracles* expresses this truth poignantly: "Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God."

If you remain in conscious connection with the Unmanifested, you value, love, and deeply respect the manifested and every life form in it as an expression of the One Life

beyond form. You also know that every form is destined to dissolve again and that ultimately nothing out here matters all that much. You have "overcome the world," in the words of Jesus, or, as the Buddha put it, you have "crossed over to the other shore."

THE TRUE NATURE OF SPACE AND TIME

Now consider this: If there were nothing but silence, it wouldn't exist for you; you wouldn't know what it is. Only when sound appears does silence come into being. Similarly, if there were only space without any objects in space, it wouldn't exist for you. Imagine yourself as a point of consciousness floating in the vastness of space — no stars, no galaxies, just emptiness. Suddenly, space wouldn't be vast anymore; it would not be there at all. There would be no speed, no movement from here to there. At least two points of reference are needed for distance and space to come into being. Space comes into being the moment the One becomes two, and as "two" become the "ten thousand things," as Lao Tse calls the manifested world, space becomes more and more vast. So world and space arise simultaneously.

Nothing could be without space, yet space is nothing. Before the universe came into being, before the "big bang," if you like, there wasn't a vast empty space waiting to be filled. There was no space, as there was no thing. There was only the Unmanifested — the One. When the One became "the ten thousand things," suddenly space seemed to be there and enabled the many to be. Where did it come from? Was it created by God to accommodate the universe? Of course not. Space is no-thing, so it was never created.

Go out on a clear night and look up at the sky. The thousands of stars you can see with the naked eye are no more than an infinitesimal fraction of what is there. Over 100 billion galaxies can already be detected with the most powerful telescopes, each galaxy an "island universe" with billions of stars. Yet what is even more awe-inspiring is the infinity of space itself, the depth and stillness that allows all of that magnificence to be. Nothing could be more awe-inspiring and majestic than the inconceivable vastness and stillness of space, and yet what is it? Emptiness, vast emptiness.

What appears to us as space in our universe perceived through the mind and the senses is the Unmanifested itself, externalized. It is the "body" of God. And the greatest miracle is this: That stillness and vastness that enables the universe to *be* is not just out there in space — it is also within you. When you are utterly and totally *present*, you encounter it as the still inner space of no-mind. Within you, it is vast in depth, not in extension. Spacial extension is ultimately a misperception of infinite depth — an attribute of the one transcendental reality.

According to Einstein, space and time are not separate. I don't really understand it, but I think he is saying that time is the fourth dimension of space. He calls it the "space-time continuum."

Yes. What you perceive externally as space and time are ultimately illusory, but they contain a core of truth. They are the two essential attributes of God, infinity and eternity, perceived as if they had an external existence outside you. Within you, both space and time have an inner equivalent that reveals their true nature, as well as your own. Whereas space is the still, infinitely deep realm of no-mind, the inner equivalent of

time is presence, awareness of the eternal Now. Remember that there is no distinction between them. When space and time are realized within as the Unmanifested — no-mind and presence — external space and time continue to exist for you, but they become much less important. The world, too, continues to exist for you, but it will not bind you anymore.

Hence, the ultimate purpose of the world lies not within the world but in transcendence of the world. Just as you would not be conscious of space if there were no objects in space, the world is needed for the Unmanifested to be realized. You may have heard the Buddhist saying: "If there were no illusion, there would be no enlightenment." It is through the world and ultimately through *you* that the Unmanifested knows itself. You are here to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold. *That is how important you are!*

CONSCIOUS DEATH

Apart from dreamless sleep, which I mentioned already, there is one other involuntary portal. It opens up briefly at the time of physical death. Even if you have missed all the other opportunities for spiritual realization during your lifetime, one last portal will open up for you immediately after the body has died.

There are countless accounts by people who had a visual impression of this portal as radiant light and then returned from what is commonly known as a near-death experience. Many of them also spoke of a sense of blissful serenity and deep peace. In the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, it is described as "the luminous splendor of the colorless light of Emptiness,"

which it says is "your own true self." This portal opens up only very briefly, and unless you have already encountered the dimension of the Unmanifested in your lifetime, you will likely miss it. Most people carry too much residual resistance, too much fear, too much attachment to sensory experience, too much identification with the manifested world. So they see the portal, turn away in fear, and then lose consciousness. Most of what happens after that is involuntary and automatic. Eventually, there will be another round of birth and death. Their presence wasn't strong enough yet for conscious immortality.

So going through this portal does not mean annihilation?

As with all the other portals, your radiant true nature remains, but not the personality. In any case, whatever is real or of true value in your personality is your true nature shining through. This is never lost. Nothing that is of value, nothing that is *real*, is ever lost.

Approaching death and death itself, the dissolution of the physical form, is always a great opportunity for spiritual realization. This opportunity is tragically missed most of the time, since we live in a culture that is almost totally ignorant of death, as it is almost totally ignorant of anything that truly matters.

Every portal is a portal of death, the death of the false self. When you go through it, you cease to derive your identity from your psychological, mind-made form. You then realize that death is an illusion, just as your identification with form was an illusion. The end of illusion — that's all that death is. It is painful only as long as you cling to illusion.

ENLIGHTENED RELATIONSHIPS

ENTER THE NOW FROM WHEREVER YOU ARE

I always thought that true enlightenment is not possible except through love in a relationship between a man and a woman. Isn't this what makes us whole again? How can one's life be fulfilled until that happens?

Is that true in your experience? Has this happened to you?

Not yet, but how could it be otherwise? I know that it will happen.

*In other words, you are waiting for an event *in time* to save you. Is this not the core error that we have been talking about? Salvation is not elsewhere in place or time. It is here and now.*

What does that statement mean, "salvation is here and now"? I don't understand it. I don't even know what salvation means.

Most people pursue physical pleasures or various forms of psychological gratification because they believe that those

things will make them happy or free them from a feeling of fear or lack. Happiness may be perceived as a heightened sense of aliveness attained through physical pleasure, or a more secure and more complete sense of self attained through some form of psychological gratification. This is the search for salvation from a state of unsatisfactoriness or insufficiency. Invariably, any satisfaction that they obtain is short-lived, so the condition of satisfaction or fulfillment is usually projected once again onto an imaginary point away from the here and now. "When I obtain *this* or am free of *that* — then I will be okay." This is the unconscious mind-set that creates the illusion of salvation in the future.

True salvation is fulfillment, peace, life in all its fullness. It is to be who you are, to feel within you the good that has no opposite, the joy of Being that depends on nothing outside itself. It is felt not as a passing experience but as an abiding presence. In theistic language, it is to "know God" — not as something outside you but as your own innermost essence. True salvation is to know yourself as an inseparable part of the timeless and formless One Life from which all that exists derives its being.

True salvation is a state of freedom — from fear, from suffering, from a perceived state of lack and insufficiency and therefore from all wanting, needing, grasping, and clinging. It is freedom from compulsive thinking, from negativity, and above all from past and future as a psychological need. Your mind is telling you that you cannot get there from here. Something needs to happen, or you need to become this or that before you can be free and fulfilled. It is saying, in fact, that you need time — that you need to find, sort out, do, achieve, acquire, become, or understand something before

you can be free or complete. You see time as the means to salvation, whereas in truth it is the greatest obstacle to salvation. You think that you can't get there from where and who you are at this moment because you are not yet complete or good enough, but the truth is that here and now is the only point from where you *can* get there. You "get" there by realizing that you *are* there already. You find God the moment you realize that you don't need to seek God. So there is no *only* way to salvation: Any condition can be used, but no particular condition is needed. However, there is only one point of access: the Now. There can be no salvation away from this moment. You are lonely and without a partner? Enter the Now from there. You are in a relationship? Enter the Now from there.

There is nothing you can ever do or attain that will get you closer to salvation than it is at this moment. This may be hard to grasp for a mind accustomed to thinking that everything worthwhile is in the future. Nor can anything that you ever did or that was done to you in the past prevent you from saying yes to what *is* and taking your attention deeply into the Now. You cannot do this in the future. You do it now or not at all.



LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIPS

Unless and until you access the consciousness frequency of presence, all relationships, and particularly intimate relationships, are deeply flawed and ultimately dysfunctional. They

may seem perfect for a while, such as when you are "in love," but invariably that apparent perfection gets disrupted as arguments, conflicts, dissatisfaction, and emotional or even physical violence occur with increasing frequency. It seems that most "love relationships" become love/hate relationships before long. Love can then turn into savage attack, feelings of hostility, or complete withdrawal of affection at the flick of a switch. This is considered normal. The relationship then oscillates for a while, a few months or a few years, between the polarities of "love" and hate, and it gives you as much pleasure as it gives you pain. It is not uncommon for couples to become addicted to those cycles. Their drama makes them feel alive. When a balance between the positive/negative polarities is lost and the negative, destructive cycles occur with increasing frequency and intensity, which tends to happen sooner or later, then it will not be long before the relationship finally collapses.

It may appear that if you could only eliminate the negative or destructive cycles, then all would be well and the relationship would flower beautifully — but alas, this is not possible. The polarities are mutually interdependent. You cannot have one without the other. The positive already contains within itself the as yet unmanifested negative. Both are in fact different aspects of the same dysfunction. I am speaking here of what are commonly called romantic relationships — not of true love, which has no opposite because it arises from beyond the mind. Love as a continuous state is as yet very rare — as rare as conscious human beings. Brief and elusive glimpses of love, however, are possible whenever there is a gap in the stream of mind.

The negative side of a relationship is, of course, more easily recognizable as dysfunctional than the positive one. And it is also easier to recognize the source of negativity in your partner than to see it in yourself. It can manifest in many forms: possessiveness, jealousy, control, withdrawal and unspoken resentment, the need to be right, insensitivity and self-absorption, emotional demands and manipulation, the urge to argue, criticize, judge, blame, or attack, anger, unconscious revenge for past pain inflicted by a parent, and rage and physical violence.

On the positive side, you are "in love" with your partner. This is at first a deeply satisfying state. You feel intensely alive. Your existence has suddenly become meaningful because someone needs you, wants you, and makes you feel special, and you do the same for him or her. When you are together, you feel whole. The feeling can become so intense that the rest of the world fades into insignificance.

However, you may also have noticed that there is a neediness and a clinging quality to that intensity. You become addicted to the other person. He or she acts on you like a drug. You are on a high when the drug is available, but even the possibility or the thought that he or she might no longer be there for you can lead to jealousy, possessiveness, attempts at manipulation through emotional blackmail, blaming and accusing — fear of loss. If the other person does leave you, this can give rise to the most intense hostility or the most profound grief and despair. In an instant, loving tenderness can turn into a savage attack or dreadful grief. Where is the love now? Can love change into its opposite in an instant? Was it love in the first place, or just an addictive grasping and clinging?

ADDICTION AND THE SEARCH FOR WHOLENESS

Why should we become addicted to another person?

The reason why the romantic love relationship is such an intense and universally sought-after experience is that it seems to offer liberation from a deep-seated state of fear, need, lack, and incompleteness that is part of the human condition in its unredeemed and unenlightened state. There is a physical as well as a psychological dimension to this state.

On the physical level, you are obviously not whole, nor will you ever be: You are either a man or a woman, which is to say, one-half of the whole. On this level, the longing for wholeness — the return to oneness — manifests as male-female attraction, man's need for a woman, woman's need for a man. It is an almost irresistible urge for union with the opposite energy polarity. The root of this physical urge is a spiritual one: the longing for an end to duality, a return to the state of wholeness. Sexual union is the closest you can get to this state on the physical level. This is why it is the most deeply satisfying experience the physical realm can offer. But sexual union is no more than a fleeting glimpse of wholeness, an instant of bliss. As long as it is unconsciously sought as a means of salvation, you are seeking the end of duality on the level of form, where it cannot be found. You are given a tantalizing glimpse of heaven, but you are not allowed to dwell there, and find yourself again in a separate body.

On the psychological level, the sense of lack and incompleteness is, if anything, even greater than on the physical level. As long as you are identified with the mind, you have an externally derived sense of self. That is to say, you get your

sense of who you are from things that ultimately have nothing to do with who you are: your social role, possessions, external appearance, successes and failures, belief systems, and so on. This false, mind-made self, the ego, feels vulnerable, insecure, and is always seeking new things to identify with to give it a feeling that it exists. But nothing is ever enough to give it lasting fulfillment. Its fear remains; its sense of lack and neediness remains.

But then that special relationship comes along. It seems to be the answer to all the ego's problems and to meet all its needs. At least this is how it appears at first. All the other things that you derived your sense of self from before now become relatively insignificant. You now have a single focal point that replaces them all, that gives meaning to your life, and through which you define your identity: the person you are "in love" with. You are no longer a disconnected fragment in an uncaring universe, or so it seems. Your world now has a center: the loved one. The fact that the center is outside you and that, therefore, you still have an externally derived sense of self does not seem to matter at first. What matters is that the underlying feelings of incompleteness, of fear, lack, and unfulfillment so characteristic of the egoic state are no longer there — or are they? Have they dissolved, or do they continue to exist underneath the happy surface reality?

If in your relationships you experience both "love" and the opposite of love — attack, emotional violence, and so on — then it is likely that you are confusing ego attachment and addictive clinging with love. You cannot love your partner one moment and attack him or her the next. True love has no opposite. If your "love" has an opposite, then it is not love but a strong ego-need for a more complete and deeper sense of

self, a need that the other person temporarily meets. It is the ego's substitute for salvation, and for a short time it almost does feel like salvation.

But there comes a point when your partner behaves in ways that fail to meet your needs, or rather those of your ego. The feelings of fear, pain, and lack that are an intrinsic part of egoic consciousness but had been covered up by the "love relationship" now resurface. Just as with every other addiction, you are on a high when the drug is available, but invariably there comes a time when the drug no longer works for you. When those painful feelings reappear, you feel them even more strongly than before, and what is more, you now perceive your partner as the *cause* of those feelings. This means that you project them outward and attack the other with all the savage violence that is part of your pain. This attack may awaken the partner's own pain, and he or she may counter your attack. At this point, the ego is still unconsciously hoping that its attack or its attempts at manipulation will be sufficient punishment to induce your partner to change their behavior, so that it can use them again as a cover-up for your pain.

Every addiction arises from an unconscious refusal to face and move through your own pain. Every addiction starts with pain and ends with pain. Whatever the substance you are addicted to — alcohol, food, legal or illegal drugs, or a person — you are using something or somebody to cover up your pain. That is why, after the initial euphoria has passed, there is so much unhappiness, so much pain in intimate relationships. They do not cause pain and unhappiness. They *bring out* the pain and unhappiness that is already in you. Every addiction does that. Every addiction reaches a point where it

does not work for you anymore, and then you feel the pain more intensely than ever.

This is one reason why most people are always trying to escape from the present moment and are seeking some kind of salvation in the future. The first thing that they might encounter if they focused their attention on the Now is their own pain, and this is what they fear. If they only knew how easy it is to access in the Now the power of presence that dissolves the past and its pain, the reality that dissolves the illusion. If they only knew how close they are to their own reality, how close to God.

Avoidance of relationships in an attempt to avoid pain is not the answer either. The pain is there anyway. Three failed relationships in as many years are more likely to force you into awakening than three years on a desert island or shut away in your room. But if you could bring intense presence into your aloneness, that would work for you too.



FROM ADDICTIVE TO ENLIGHTENED RELATIONSHIPS

Can we change an addictive relationship into a true one?

Yes. Being present and intensifying your presence by taking your attention ever more deeply into the Now: Whether you are living alone or with a partner, this remains the key. For love to flourish, the light of your presence needs to be strong enough so that you no longer get taken over by the thinker or

the pain-body and mistake them for who you are. To know yourself as the Being underneath the thinker, the stillness underneath the mental noise, the love and joy underneath the pain, is freedom, salvation, enlightenment. To disidentify from the pain-body is to bring presence into the pain and thus transmute it. To disidentify from thinking is to be the silent watcher of your thoughts and behavior, especially the repetitive patterns of your mind and the roles played by the ego.

If you stop investing it with "selfness," the mind loses its compulsive quality, which basically is the compulsion to judge, and so to resist what *is*, which creates conflict, drama, and new pain. In fact, the moment that judgment stops through acceptance of what *is*, you are free of the mind. You have made room for love, for joy, for peace. First you stop judging yourself; then you stop judging your partner. The greatest catalyst for change in a relationship is complete acceptance of your partner as he or she is, without needing to judge or change them in any way. That immediately takes you beyond ego. All mind games and all addictive clinging are then over. There are no victims and no perpetrators anymore, no accuser and accused. This is also the end of all codependency, of being drawn into somebody else's unconscious pattern and thereby enabling it to continue. You will then either separate — in love — or move ever more deeply into the Now together — into Being. Can it be that simple? Yes, it is that simple.

Love is a state of Being. Your love is not outside; it is deep within you. You can never lose it, and it cannot leave you. It is not dependent on some other body, some external form. In the stillness of your presence, you can feel your own formless and timeless reality as the unmanifested life that

animates your physical form. You can then feel the same life deep within every other human and every other creature. You look beyond the veil of form and separation. This is the realization of oneness. This is love.

What is God? The eternal One Life underneath all the forms of life. What is love? To feel the presence of that One Life deep within yourself and within all creatures. To be it. Therefore, all love is the love of God.



Love is not selective, just as the light of the sun is not selective. It does not make one person special. It is not exclusive. Exclusivity is not the love of God but the "love" of ego. However, the intensity with which true love is felt can vary. There may be one person who reflects your love back to you more clearly and more intensely than others, and if that person feels the same toward you, it can be said that you are in a love relationship with him or her. The bond that connects you with that person is the same bond that connects you with the person sitting next to you on a bus, or with a bird, a tree, a flower. Only the degree of intensity with which it is felt differs.

Even in an otherwise addictive relationship, there may be moments when something more real shines through, something beyond your mutual addictive needs. These are moments when both your and your partner's mind briefly subside and the pain-body is temporarily in a dormant state. This may sometimes happen during physical intimacy, or when you are both witnessing the miracle of childbirth,

or in the presence of death, or when one of you is seriously ill — anything that renders the mind powerless. When this happens, your Being, which is usually buried underneath the mind, becomes revealed, and it is this that makes true communication possible.

True communication is communion — the realization of oneness, which is love. Usually, this is quickly lost again, unless you are able to stay present enough to keep out the mind and its old patterns. As soon as the mind and mind identification return, you are no longer yourself but a mental image of yourself, and you start playing games and roles again to get your ego needs met. You are a human mind again, pretending to be a human being, interacting with another mind, playing a drama called "love."

Although brief glimpses are possible, love cannot flourish unless you are permanently free of mind identification and your presence is intense enough to have dissolved the pain-body — or you can at least remain present as the watcher. The pain-body cannot then take you over and so become destructive of love.

RELATIONSHIPS AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

As the egoic mode of consciousness and all the social, political, and economic structures that it created enter the final stage of collapse, the relationships between men and women reflect the deep state of crisis in which humanity now finds itself. As humans have become increasingly identified with their mind, most relationships are not rooted in Being and so turn into a source of pain and become dominated by problems and conflict.

Millions are now living alone or as single parents, unable to establish an intimate relationship or unwilling to repeat the insane drama of past relationships. Others go from one relationship to another, from one pleasure-and-pain cycle to another, in search of the elusive goal of fulfillment through union with the opposite energy polarity. Still others compromise and continue to be together in a dysfunctional relationship in which negativity prevails, for the sake of the children or security, through force of habit, fear of being alone, or some other mutually "beneficial" arrangement, or even through the unconscious addiction to the excitement of emotional drama and pain.

However, every crisis represents not only danger but also opportunity. If relationships energize and magnify egoic mind patterns and activate the pain-body, as they do at this time, why not accept this fact rather than try to escape from it? Why not cooperate with it instead of avoiding relationships or continuing to pursue the phantom of an ideal partner as an answer to your problems or a means of feeling fulfilled? The opportunity that is concealed within every crisis does not manifest until all the facts of any given situation are acknowledged and fully accepted. As long as you deny them, as long as you try to escape from them or wish that things were different, the window of opportunity does not open up, and you remain trapped inside that situation, which will remain the same or deteriorate further.

With the acknowledgment and acceptance of the facts also comes a degree of freedom from them. For example, when you know there is disharmony and you hold that "knowing," through your knowing a new factor has come in, and the disharmony cannot remain unchanged. When you know you

are not at peace, your knowing creates a still space that surrounds your nonpeace in a loving and tender embrace and then transmutes your nonpeace into peace. As far as inner transformation is concerned, there is nothing you can do about it. You cannot transform yourself, and you certainly cannot transform your partner or anybody else. All you can do is create a space for transformation to happen, for grace and love to enter.



So whenever your relationship is not working, whenever it brings out the "madness" in you and in your partner, be glad. What was unconscious is being brought up to the light. It is an opportunity for salvation. Every moment, hold the knowing of that moment, particularly of your inner state. If there is anger, know that there is anger. If there is jealousy, defensiveness, the urge to argue, the need to be right, an inner child demanding love and attention, or emotional pain of any kind — whatever it is, know the reality of that moment and hold the knowing. The relationship then becomes your *sadhana*, your spiritual practice. If you observe unconscious behavior in your partner, hold it in the loving embrace of your knowing so that you won't react. Unconsciousness and knowing cannot coexist for long — even if the knowing is only in the other person and not in the one who is acting out the unconsciousness. The energy form that lies behind hostility and attack finds the presence of love absolutely intolerable. If you react at all to your partner's unconsciousness, you become unconscious yourself. But if you then remember to know your reaction, nothing is lost.

Humanity is under great pressure to evolve because it is our only chance of survival as a race. This will affect every aspect of your life and close relationships in particular. Never before have relationships been as problematic and conflict ridden as they are now. As you may have noticed, they are not here to make you happy or fulfilled. If you continue to pursue the goal of salvation through a relationship, you will be disillusioned again and again. But if you accept that the relationship is here to make you *conscious* instead of happy, then the relationship will offer you salvation, and you will be aligning yourself with the higher consciousness that wants to be born into this world. For those who hold on to the old patterns, there will be increasing pain, violence, confusion, and madness.

I suppose that it takes two to make a relationship into a spiritual practice, as you suggest. For example, my partner is still acting out his old patterns of jealousy and control. I have pointed this out many times, but he is unable to see it.

How many people does it take to make your life into a spiritual practice? Never mind if your partner will not cooperate. Sanity — consciousness — can only come into this world through you. You do not need to wait for the world to become sane, or for somebody else to become conscious, before you can be enlightened. You may wait forever. Do not accuse each other of being unconscious. The moment you start to argue, you have identified with a mental position and are now defending not only that position but also your sense of self. The ego is in charge. You have become unconscious. At times, it may be appropriate to point out certain aspects of your partner's behavior. If you are very alert, very present,

you can do so without ego involvement — without blaming, accusing, or making the other wrong.

When your partner behaves unconsciously, relinquish all judgment. Judgment is either to confuse someone's unconscious behavior with who they are or to project your own unconsciousness onto another person and mistake *that* for who they are. To relinquish judgment does not mean that you do not recognize dysfunction and unconsciousness when you see it. It means "being the knowing" rather than "being the reaction" and the judge. You will then either be totally free of reaction or you may react and still be the knowing, the space in which the reaction is watched and allowed to be. Instead of fighting the darkness, you bring in the light. Instead of reacting to delusion, you see the delusion yet at the same time look through it. Being the knowing creates a clear space of loving presence that allows all things and all people to be as they are. No greater catalyst for transformation exists. If you practice this, your partner cannot stay with you *and* remain unconscious.

If you both agree that the relationship will be your spiritual practice, so much the better. You can then express your thoughts and feelings to each other as soon as they occur, or as soon as a reaction comes up, so that you do not create a time gap in which an unexpressed or unacknowledged emotion or grievance can fester and grow. Learn to give expression to what you feel without blaming. Learn to listen to your partner in an open, nondefensive way. Give your partner space for expressing himself or herself. Be present. Accusing, defending, attacking — all those patterns that are designed to strengthen or protect the ego or to get its needs met will then become redundant. Giving space to others —

and to yourself — is vital. Love cannot flourish without it. When you have removed the two factors that are destructive to relationships — when the pain-body has been transmuted and you are no longer identified with mind and mental positions — and if your partner has done the same, you will experience the bliss of the flowering of relationship. Instead of mirroring to each other your pain and your unconsciousness, instead of satisfying your mutual addictive ego needs, you will reflect back to each other the love that you feel deep within, the love that comes with the realization of your oneness with all that is. This is the love that has no opposite.

If your partner is still identified with the mind and the pain-body while you are already free, this will represent a major challenge — not to you but to your partner. It is not easy to live with an enlightened person, or rather it is so easy that the ego finds it extremely threatening. Remember that the ego needs problems, conflict, and "enemies" to strengthen the sense of separateness on which its identity depends. The unenlightened partner's mind will be deeply frustrated because its fixed positions are not resisted, which means they will become shaky and weak, and there is even the "danger" that they may collapse altogether, resulting in loss of self. The pain-body is demanding feedback and not getting it. The need for argument, drama, and conflict is not being met. But beware: Some people who are unresponsive, withdrawn, insensitive, or cut off from their feelings may think and try to convince others that they are enlightened, or at least that there is "nothing wrong" with them and everything wrong with their partner. Men tend to do that more than women. They may see their female partners as irrational or emotional. But if you can feel your emotions, you are not far from the radiant inner body just underneath. If you are

mainly in your head, the distance is much greater, and you need to bring consciousness into the emotional body before you can reach the inner body.

If there isn't an emanation of love and joy, complete presence and openness toward all beings, then it is not enlightenment. Another indicator is how a person behaves in difficult or challenging situations or when things "go wrong." If your "enlightenment" is egoic self-delusion, then life will soon give you a challenge that will bring out your unconsciousness in whatever form — as fear, anger, defensiveness, judgment, depression, and so on. If you are in a relationship, many of your challenges will come through your partner. For example, a woman may be challenged by an unresponsive male partner who lives almost entirely in his head. She will be challenged by his inability to *hear* her, to give her attention and space to be, which is due to his lack of presence. The absence of love in the relationship, which is usually more keenly felt by a woman than a man, will trigger the woman's pain-body, and through it she will attack her partner — blame, criticize, make wrong, and so on. This in turn now becomes *his* challenge. To defend himself against her pain-body's attack, which he sees as totally unwarranted, he will become even more deeply entrenched in his mental positions as he justifies, defends himself, or counterattacks. Eventually, this may activate his own pain-body. When both partners have thus been taken over, a level of deep unconsciousness has been reached, of emotional violence, savage attack and counterattack. It will not subside until both pain-bodies have replenished themselves and then enter the dormant stage. Until the next time.

This is only one of an endless number of possible scenarios. Many volumes have been written, and many more could be

written, about the ways in which unconsciousness is brought out in male-female relationships. But, as I said earlier, once you understand the root of the dysfunction, you do not need to explore its countless manifestations.

Let's briefly look again at the scenario I have just described. Every challenge that it contains is actually a disguised opportunity for salvation. At every stage of the unfolding dysfunctional process, freedom from unconsciousness is possible. For example, the woman's hostility could become a signal for the man to come out of his mind-identified state, awaken into the Now, become present — instead of becoming even more identified with his mind, even more unconscious. Instead of "being" the pain-body, the woman could be the knowing that watches the emotional pain in herself, thus accessing the power of the Now and initiating the transmutation of the pain. This would remove the compulsive and automatic outward projection of it. She could then express her feelings to her partner. There is no guarantee, of course, that he will listen, but it gives him a good chance to become present and certainly breaks the insane cycle of the involuntary acting out of old mind patterns. If the woman misses that opportunity, the man could watch his own mental-emotional reaction to her pain, his own defensiveness, rather than *being* the reaction. He could then watch his own pain-body being triggered and thus bring consciousness into his emotions. In this way, a clear and still space of pure awareness would come into being — the knowing, the silent witness, the watcher. This awareness does not deny the pain and yet is beyond it. It allows the pain to be and yet transmutes it at the same time. It accepts everything and transforms everything. A door would have opened up for her through which she could easily join him in that space.

If you are consistently or at least predominantly present in your relationship, this will be the greatest challenge for your partner. They will not be able to tolerate your presence for very long and stay unconscious. If they are ready, they will walk through the door that you opened for them and join you in that state. If they are not, you will separate like oil and water. The light is too painful for someone who wants to remain in darkness.

WHY WOMEN ARE CLOSER TO ENLIGHTENMENT

Are the obstacles to enlightenment the same for a man as for a woman?

Yes, but the emphasis is different. Generally speaking, it is easier for a woman to feel and be in her body, so she is naturally closer to Being and potentially closer to enlightenment than a man. This is why many ancient cultures instinctively chose female figures or analogies to represent or describe the formless and transcendental reality. It was often seen as a womb that gives birth to everything in creation and sustains and nourishes it during its life as form. In the *Tao Te Ching*, one of the most ancient and profound books ever written, the *Tao*, which could be translated as *Being*, is described as "infinite, eternally present, the mother of the universe." Naturally, women are closer to it than men since they virtually "embody" the Unmanifested. What is more, all creatures and all things must eventually return to the Source. "All things vanish into the Tao. It alone endures." Since the Source is seen as female, this is represented as the light and dark sides of the archetypal feminine in psychology

and mythology. The Goddess or Divine Mother has two aspects: She gives life, and she takes life.

When the mind took over and humans lost touch with the reality of their divine essence, they started to think of God as a male figure. Society became male-dominated, and the female was made subordinate to the male.

I am not suggesting a return to earlier female representations of the divine. Some people now use the term *Goddess* instead of *God*. They are redressing a balance between male and female that was lost a long time ago, and that is good. But it is still a representation and a concept, perhaps temporarily useful, just as a map or a signpost is temporarily useful, but more a hindrance than a help when you are ready to realize the reality beyond all concepts and images. What does remain true, however, is that the energy frequency of the mind appears to be essentially male. The mind resists, fights for control, uses, manipulates, attacks, tries to grasp and possess, and so on. This is why the traditional God is a patriarchal, controlling authority figure, an often angry man who you should live in fear of, as the Old Testament suggests. This God is a projection of the human mind.

To go beyond the mind and reconnect with the deeper reality of Being, very different qualities are needed: surrender, non-judgment, an openness that allows life to be instead of resisting it, the capacity to hold all things in the loving embrace of your knowing. All these qualities are much more closely related to the female principle. Whereas mind-energy is hard and rigid, Being-energy is soft and yielding and yet infinitely more powerful than mind. The mind runs our civilization, whereas Being is in charge of all life on our planet and

beyond. Being is the very Intelligence whose visible manifestation is the physical universe. Although women are potentially closer to it, men can also access it within themselves.

At this time, the vast majority of men as well as women are still in the grip of the mind: identified with the thinker and the pain-body. This, of course, is what prevents enlightenment and the flowering of love. As a general rule, the major obstacle for men tends to be the thinking mind, and the major obstacle for women the pain-body, although in certain individual cases the opposite may be true, and in others the two factors may be equal.

DISSOLVING THE COLLECTIVE FEMALE PAIN-BODY

Why is the pain-body more of an obstacle for women?

The pain-body usually has a collective as well as a personal aspect. The personal aspect is the accumulated residue of emotional pain suffered in one's own past. The collective one is the pain accumulated in the collective human psyche over thousands of years through disease, torture, war, murder, cruelty, madness, and so on. Everyone's personal pain-body also partakes of this collective pain-body. There are different strands in the collective pain-body. For example, certain races or countries in which extreme forms of strife and violence occur have a heavier collective pain-body than others. Anyone with a strong pain-body and not enough consciousness to disidentify from it will not only continuously or periodically be forced to relive their emotional pain but may also easily become either the perpetrator or the victim of violence, depending on whether their pain-body is predominantly active or passive. On the other hand, they may also be potentially

closer to enlightenment. This potential isn't necessarily realized, of course, but if you are trapped in a nightmare you will probably be more strongly motivated to awaken than someone who is just caught in the ups and downs of an ordinary dream.

Apart from her personal pain-body, every woman has her share in what could be described as the collective female pain-body — unless she is fully conscious. This consists of accumulated pain suffered by women partly through male subjugation of the female, through slavery, exploitation, rape, childbirth, child loss, and so on, over thousands of years. The emotional or physical pain that for many women precedes and coincides with the menstrual flow is the pain-body in its collective aspect that awakens from its dormancy at that time, although it can be triggered at other times too. It restricts the free flow of life energy through the body, of which menstruation is a physical expression. Let's dwell on this for a moment and see how it can become an opportunity for enlightenment.

Often a woman is "taken over" by the pain-body at that time. It has an extremely powerful energetic charge that can easily pull you into unconscious identification with it. You are then actively possessed by an energy field that occupies your inner space and pretends to be you — but, of course, is not you at all. It speaks through you, acts through you, thinks through you. It will create negative situations in your life so that it can feed on the energy. It wants more pain, in whatever form. I have described this process already. It can be vicious and destructive. It is pure pain, past pain — and it is not you.

The number of women who are now approaching the fully conscious state already exceeds that of men and will be growing even faster in the years to come. Men may catch up with

them in the end, but for some considerable time there will be a gap between the consciousness of men and that of women. Women are regaining the function that is their birthright and, therefore, comes to them more naturally than it does to men: to be a bridge between the manifested world and the Unmanifested, between physicality and spirit. Your main task as a woman now is to transmute the pain-body so that it no longer comes between you and your true self, the essence of who you are. Of course, you also have to deal with the other obstacle to enlightenment, which is the thinking mind, but the intense presence you generate when dealing with the pain-body will also free you from identification with the mind.

The first thing to remember is this: As long as you make an identity for yourself out of the pain, you cannot become free of it. As long as part of your sense of self is invested in your emotional pain, you will unconsciously resist or sabotage every attempt that you make to heal that pain. Why? Quite simply because you want to keep yourself intact, and the pain has become an essential part of you. This is an unconscious process, and the only way to overcome it is to make it conscious.

To suddenly see that you are or have been attached to your pain can be quite a shocking realization. The moment you realize this, you have broken the attachment. The pain-body is an energy field, almost like an entity, that has become temporarily lodged in your inner space. It is life energy that has become trapped, energy that is no longer flowing. Of course, the pain-body is there because of certain things that happened in the past. It is the living past in you, and if you identify with it, you identify with the past. A victim identity is the belief that the past is more powerful than the present, which

is the opposite of the truth. It is the belief that other people and what they did to you are responsible for who you are now, for your emotional pain or your inability to be your true self. The truth is that the only power there is is contained within this moment: It is the power of your presence. Once you know that, you also realize that you are responsible for your inner space now — nobody else is — and that the past cannot prevail against the power of the Now.



So identification prevents you from dealing with the pain-body. Some women who are already conscious enough to have relinquished their victim identity on the personal level are still holding on to a collective victim identity: "what men did to women." They are right — and they are also wrong. They are right inasmuch as the collective female pain-body is in large part due to male violence inflicted on women and repression of the female principle throughout the planet over millennia. They are wrong if they derive a sense of self from this fact and thereby keep themselves imprisoned in a collective victim identity. If a woman is still holding on to anger, resentment, or condemnation, she is holding on to her pain-body. This may give her a comforting sense of identity, of solidarity with other women, but it is keeping her in bondage to the past and blocking full access to her essence and true power. If women exclude themselves from men, that fosters a sense of separation and therefore a strengthening of the ego. And the stronger the ego, the more distant you are from your true nature.

So do not use the pain-body to give you an identity. Use it for enlightenment instead. Transmute it into consciousness. One of the best times for this is during menses. I believe that, in the years to come, many women will enter the fully conscious state during that time. Usually, it is a time of unconsciousness for many women, as they are taken over by the collective female pain-body. Once you have reached a certain level of consciousness, however, you can reverse this, so instead of becoming unconscious you become *more* conscious. I have described the basic process already, but let me take you through it again, this time with special reference to the collective female pain-body.

When you know that the menstrual flow is approaching, before you feel the first signs of what is commonly called premenstrual tension, the awakening of the collective female pain-body, become very alert and inhabit your body as fully as possible. When the first sign appears, you need to be alert enough to "catch" it before it takes you over. For example, the first sign may be a sudden, strong irritation or a flash of anger, or it may be a purely physical symptom. Whatever it is, catch it before it can take over your thinking or behavior. This simply means putting the spotlight of your attention on it. If it is an emotion, feel the strong energy charge behind it. Know that it is the pain-body. At the same time, be the knowing; that is to say, be aware of your conscious presence and feel its power. Any emotion that you take your presence into will quickly subside and become transmuted. If it is a purely physical symptom, the attention that you give it will prevent it from turning into an emotion or a thought. Then continue to be alert and wait for the next sign of the pain-body. When it appears, catch it again in the same way as before.

Later, when the pain-body has fully awakened from its dormant state, you may experience considerable turbulence in your inner space for a while, perhaps for several days. Whatever form this takes, stay present. Give it your complete attention. Watch the turbulence inside you. Know it is there. Hold the knowing, and be the knowing. Remember: Do not let the pain-body use your mind and take over your thinking. Watch it. Feel its energy directly, inside your body. As you know, full attention means full acceptance.

Through sustained attention and thus acceptance, there comes transmutation. The pain-body becomes transformed into radiant consciousness, just as a piece of wood, when placed in or near a fire, itself is transformed into fire. Menstruation will then become not only a joyful and fulfilling expression of your womanhood but also a sacred time of transmutation, when you give birth to a new consciousness. Your true nature then shines forth, both in its female aspect as the Goddess and in its transcendental aspect as the divine Being that you are beyond male and female duality.

If your male partner is conscious enough, he can help you with the practice I have just described by holding the frequency of intense presence particularly at this time. If he stays present whenever you fall back into unconscious identification with the pain-body, which can and will happen at first, you will be able to quickly rejoin him in that state. This means that whenever the pain-body temporarily takes over, whether during menses or at other times, your partner will not mistake it for who you are. Even if the pain-body attacks him, as it probably will, he will not react to it as if it were "you," withdraw, or put up some kind of defense. He will hold the space of intense presence. Nothing else is needed

for transformation. At other times, you will be able to do the same for him or help him reclaim consciousness from the mind by drawing his attention into the here and now whenever he becomes identified with his thinking.

In this way, a permanent energy field of a pure and high frequency will arise between you. No illusion, no pain, no conflict, nothing that is not you, and nothing that is not love can survive in it. This represents the fulfillment of the divine, transpersonal purpose of your relationship. It becomes a vortex of consciousness that will draw in many others.



GIVE UP THE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF

When one is fully conscious, would one still have a need for a relationship? Would a man still feel drawn to a woman? Would a woman still feel incomplete without a man?

Enlightened or not, you are either a man or a woman, so on the level of your form identity you are not complete. You are one-half of the whole. This incompleteness is felt as male-female attraction, the pull toward the opposite energy polarity, no matter how conscious you are. But in that state of inner connectedness, you feel this pull somewhere on the surface or periphery of your life. Anything that happens to you in that state feels somewhat like that. The whole world seems like waves or ripples on the surface of a vast and deep ocean. You are that ocean and, of course, you are also a ripple, but a ripple that has realized its true identity as the

ocean, and compared to that vastness and depth, the world of waves and ripples is not all that important.

This does not mean that you don't relate deeply to other people or to your partner. In fact, you can relate deeply *only* if you are conscious of Being. Coming from Being, you are able to focus beyond the veil of form. In Being, male and female are one. Your form may continue to have certain needs, but Being has none. It is already complete and whole. If those needs are met, that is beautiful, but whether or not they are met makes no difference to your deep inner state. So it is perfectly possible for an enlightened person, if the need for the male or female polarity is not met, to feel a sense of lack or incompleteness on the outer level of his or her being, yet at the same time be totally complete, fulfilled, and at peace within.

In the quest for enlightenment, is being gay a help or a hindrance, or does it not make any difference?

As you approach adulthood, uncertainty about your sexuality followed by the realization that you are "different" from others may force you to disidentify from socially conditioned patterns of thought and behavior. This will automatically raise your level of consciousness above that of the unconscious majority, whose members unquestioningly take on board all inherited patterns. In that respect, being gay can be a help. Being an outsider to some extent, someone who does not "fit in" with others or is rejected by them for whatever reason, makes life difficult, but it also places you at an advantage as far as enlightenment is concerned. It takes you out of unconsciousness almost by force.

On the other hand, if you then develop a sense of identity based on your gayness, you have escaped one trap only to fall into another. You will play roles and games dictated by a mental image you have of yourself as gay. You will become unconscious. You will become unreal. Underneath your ego mask, you will become very unhappy. If this happens to you, being gay will have become a hindrance. But you always get another chance, of course. Acute unhappiness can be a great awakener.

Is it not true that you need to have a good relationship with yourself and love yourself before you can have a fulfilling relationship with another person?

If you cannot be at ease with yourself when you are alone, you will seek a relationship to cover up your unease. You can be sure that the unease will then reappear in some other form within the relationship, and you will probably hold your partner responsible for it.

All you really need to do is accept this moment fully. You are then at ease in the here and now and at ease with yourself.

But do you need to have a relationship with yourself at all? Why can't you just be yourself? When you have a relationship with yourself, you have split yourself into two: "I" and "myself," subject and object. That mind-created duality is the root cause of all unnecessary complexity, of all problems and conflict in your life. In the state of enlightenment, you are yourself — "you" and "yourself" merge into one. You do not judge yourself, you do not feel sorry for yourself, you are not proud of yourself, you do not love yourself, you do not

hate yourself, and so on. The split caused by self-reflective consciousness is healed, its curse removed. There is no "self" that you need to protect, defend, or feed anymore. When you are enlightened, there is one relationship that you no longer have: the relationship with yourself. Once you have given that up, all your other relationships will be love relationships.

BEYOND HAPPINESS AND UNHAPPINESS THERE IS PEACE

THE HIGHER GOOD BEYOND GOOD AND BAD

Is there a difference between happiness and inner peace?

Yes. Happiness depends on conditions being perceived as positive; inner peace does not.

Is it not possible to attract only positive conditions into our life? If our attitude and our thinking are always positive, we would manifest only positive events and situations, wouldn't we?

Do you truly know what is positive and what is negative? Do you have the total picture? There have been many people for whom limitation, failure, loss, illness, or pain in whatever form turned out to be their greatest teacher. It taught them to let go of false self-images and superficial ego-dictated goals and desires. It gave them depth, humility, and compassion. It made them more *real*.

Whenever anything negative happens to you, there is a deep lesson concealed within it, although you may not see it at the

time. Even a brief illness or an accident can show you what is real and unreal in your life, what ultimately matters and what doesn't.

Seen from a higher perspective, conditions *are* always positive. To be more precise: they are neither positive nor negative. They are as they are. And when you live in complete acceptance of what *is* — which is the only sane way to live — there is no "good" or "bad" in your life anymore. There is only a higher good — which includes the "bad." Seen from the perspective of the mind, however, there is good-bad, like-dislike, love-hate. Hence, in the Book of Genesis, it is said that Adam and Eve were no longer allowed to dwell in "paradise" when they "ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

This sounds to me like denial and self-deception. When something dreadful happens to me or someone close to me — accident, illness, pain of some kind, or death — I can pretend that it isn't bad, but the fact remains that it is bad, so why deny it?

You are not pretending anything. You are allowing it to be as it is, that's all. This "allowing to be" takes you beyond the mind with its resistance patterns that create the positive-negative polarities. It is an essential aspect of forgiveness. Forgiveness of the present is even more important than forgiveness of the past. If you forgive every moment — allow it to be as it is — then there will be no accumulation of resentment that needs to be forgiven at some later time.

Remember that we are not talking about happiness here. For example, when a loved one has just died, or you feel your own death approaching, you cannot be happy. It is impossible. But

you *can* be at peace. There may be sadness and tears, but provided that you have relinquished resistance, underneath the sadness you will feel a deep serenity, a stillness, a sacred presence. This is the emanation of Being, this is inner peace, the good that has no opposite.

What if it is a situation that I can do something about? How can I allow it to be and change it at the same time?

Do what you have to do. In the meantime, accept what *is*. Since mind and resistance are synonymous, acceptance immediately frees you from mind dominance and thus reconnects you with Being. As a result, the usual ego motivations for "doing" — fear, greed, control, defending or feeding the false sense of self — will cease to operate. An intelligence much greater than the mind is now in charge, and so a different quality of consciousness will flow into your doing.

"Accept whatever comes to you woven in the pattern of your destiny, for what could more aptly fit your needs?" This was written two thousand years ago by Marcus Aurelius, one of those exceedingly rare humans who possessed worldly power as well as wisdom.

It seems that most people need to experience a great deal of suffering before they will relinquish resistance and accept — before they will forgive. As soon as they do, one of the greatest miracles happens: the awakening of Being-consciousness through what appears as evil, the transmutation of suffering into inner peace. The ultimate effect of all the evil and suffering in the world is that it will force humans into realizing who they are beyond name and form. Thus, what we perceive

as evil from our limited perspective is actually part of the higher good that has no opposite. This, however, does not become true for you except through forgiveness. Until that happens, evil has not been redeemed and therefore remains evil.

Through forgiveness, which essentially means recognizing the insubstantiality of the past and allowing the present moment to be as it is, the miracle of transformation happens not only within but also without. A silent space of intense presence arises both in you and around you. Whoever or whatever enters that field of consciousness will be affected by it, sometimes visibly and immediately, sometimes at deeper levels with visible changes appearing at a later time. You dissolve discord, heal pain, dispel unconsciousness — without *doing* anything — simply by *being* and holding that frequency of intense presence.



THE END OF YOUR LIFE DRAMA

In that state of acceptance and inner peace, even though you may not call it "bad," can anything still come into your life that would be called "bad" from a perspective of ordinary consciousness?

Most of the so-called bad things that happen in people's lives are due to unconsciousness. They are self-created, or rather ego-created. I sometimes refer to those things as "drama." When you are fully conscious, drama does not come into

your life anymore. Let me remind you briefly how the ego operates and how it creates drama.

Ego is the unobserved mind that runs your life when you are not present as the witnessing consciousness, the watcher. The ego perceives itself as a separate fragment in a hostile universe, with no real inner connection to any other being, surrounded by other egos which it either sees as a potential threat or which it will attempt to use for its own ends. The basic ego patterns are designed to combat its own deep-seated fear and sense of lack. They are resistance, control, power, greed, defense, attack. Some of the ego's strategies are extremely clever, yet they never truly solve any of its problems, simply because the ego itself is the problem.

When egos come together, whether in personal relationships or in organizations or institutions, "bad" things happen sooner or later: drama of one kind or another, in the form of conflict, problems, power struggles, emotional or physical violence, and so on. This includes collective evils such as war, genocide, and exploitation — all due to massed unconsciousness. Furthermore, many types of illness are caused by the ego's continuous resistance, which creates restrictions and blockages in the flow of energy through the body. When you reconnect with Being and are no longer run by your mind, you cease to create those things. You do not create or participate in drama anymore.

Whenever two or more egos come together, drama of one kind or another ensues. But even if you live totally alone, you still create your own drama. When you feel sorry for yourself, that's drama. When you feel guilty or anxious, that's drama. When you let the past or future obscure the present, you are creating time, psychological time — the stuff out of which

drama is made. Whenever you are not honoring the present moment by allowing it to be, you are creating drama.

Most people are in love with their particular life drama. Their story is their identity. The ego runs their life. They have their whole sense of self invested in it. Even their — usually unsuccessful — search for an answer, a solution, or for healing becomes part of it. What they fear and resist most is the end of their drama. As long as they *are* their mind, what they fear and resist most is their own awakening.

When you live in complete acceptance of what is, that is the end of all drama in your life. Nobody can even have an argument with you, no matter how hard he or she tries. You cannot have an argument with a fully conscious person. An argument implies identification with your mind and a mental position, as well as resistance and reaction to the other person's position. The result is that the polar opposites become mutually energized. These are the mechanics of unconsciousness. You can still make your point clearly and firmly, but there will be no reactive force behind it, no defense or attack. So it won't turn into drama. When you are fully conscious, you cease to be in conflict. "No one who is at one with himself can even conceive of conflict," states *A Course in Miracles*. This refers not only to conflict with other people but more fundamentally to conflict within you, which ceases when there is no longer any clash between the demands and expectations of your mind and what is.

IMPERMANENCE AND THE CYCLES OF LIFE

However, as long as you are in the physical dimension and linked to the collective human psyche, physical pain —

although rare — is still possible. This is not to be confused with suffering, with mental-emotional pain. All suffering is ego-created and is due to resistance. Also, as long as you are in this dimension, you are still subject to its cyclical nature and to the law of impermanence of all things, but you no longer perceive this as “bad” — it just is.

Through allowing the “isness” of all things, a deeper dimension underneath the play of opposites reveals itself to you as an abiding presence, an unchanging deep stillness, an uncaused joy beyond good and bad. This is the joy of Being, the peace of God.

On the level of form, there is birth and death, creation and destruction, growth and dissolution, of seemingly separate forms. This is reflected everywhere: in the life cycle of a star or a planet, a physical body, a tree, a flower; in the rise and fall of nations, political systems, civilizations; and in the inevitable cycles of gain and loss in the life of an individual.

There are cycles of success, when things come to you and thrive, and cycles of failure, when they wither or disintegrate and you have to let them go in order to make room for new things to arise, or for transformation to happen. If you cling and resist at that point, it means you are refusing to go with the flow of life, and you will suffer.

It is not true that the up cycle is good and the down cycle bad, except in the mind’s judgment. Growth is usually considered positive, but nothing can grow forever. If growth, of whatever kind, were to go on and on, it would eventually become monstrous and destructive. Dissolution is needed for new growth to happen. One cannot exist without the other.

The down cycle is absolutely essential for spiritual realization. You must have failed deeply on some level or experienced

some deep loss or pain to be drawn to the spiritual dimension. Or perhaps your very success became empty and meaningless and so turned out to be failure. Failure lies concealed in every success, and success in every failure. In this world, which is to say on the level of form, everybody "fails" sooner or later, of course, and every achievement eventually comes to naught. All forms are impermanent.

You can still be active and enjoy manifesting and creating new forms and circumstances, but you won't be identified with them. You do not need them to give you a sense of self. They are not your life — only your life situation.

Your physical energy is also subject to cycles. It cannot always be at a peak. There will be times of low as well as high energy. There will be periods when you are highly active and creative, but there may also be times when everything seems stagnant, when it seems that you are not getting anywhere, not achieving anything. A cycle can last for anything from a few hours to a few years. There are large cycles and small cycles within these large ones. Many illnesses are created through fighting against the cycles of low energy, which are vital for regeneration. The compulsion to do, and the tendency to derive your sense of self-worth and identity from external factors such as achievement, is an inevitable illusion as long as you are identified with the mind. This makes it hard or impossible for you to accept the low cycles and allow them to be. Thus, the intelligence of the organism may take over as a self-protective measure and create an illness in order to force you to stop, so that the necessary regeneration can take place.

The cyclical nature of the universe is closely linked with the impermanence of all things and situations. The Buddha made this a central part of his teaching. All conditions are

highly unstable and in constant flux, or, as he put it, impermanence is a characteristic of every condition, every situation you will ever encounter in your life. It will change, disappear, or no longer satisfy you. Impermanence is also central to Jesus's teaching: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal...."

As long as a condition is judged as "good" by your mind, whether it be a relationship, a possession, a social role, a place, or your physical body, the mind attaches itself to it and identifies with it. It makes you happy, makes you feel good about yourself, and it may become part of who you are or think you are. But nothing lasts in this dimension where moth and rust consume. Either it ends or it changes, or it may undergo a polarity shift: The same condition that was good yesterday or last year has suddenly or gradually turned into bad. The same condition that made you happy then makes you unhappy. The prosperity of today becomes the empty consumerism of tomorrow. The happy wedding and honeymoon become the unhappy divorce or the unhappy coexistence. Or a condition disappears, so its absence makes you unhappy. When a condition or situation that the mind has attached itself to and identified with changes or disappears, the mind cannot accept it. It will cling to the disappearing condition and resist the change. It is almost as if a limb were being torn off your body.

We sometimes hear of people who have lost all their money or whose reputations have been ruined committing suicide. Those are the extreme cases. Others, whenever a major loss of one kind or another occurs, just become deeply unhappy or make themselves ill. They cannot distinguish between

their life and their life situation. I recently read about a famous actress who died in her eighties. As her beauty started to fade and became ravaged by old age, she grew desperately unhappy and became a recluse. She, too, had identified with a condition: her external appearance. First, the condition gave her a happy sense of self, then an unhappy one. If she had been able to connect with the formless and timeless life within, she could have watched and allowed the fading of her external form from a place of serenity and peace. Moreover, her external form would have become increasingly transparent to the light shining through from her ageless true nature, so her beauty would not really have faded but simply become transformed into spiritual beauty. However, nobody told her that this is possible. The most essential kind of knowledge is not yet widely accessible.



The Buddha taught that even your happiness is *dukkha* — a Pali word meaning “suffering” or “unsatisfactoriness.” It is inseparable from its opposite. This means that your happiness and unhappiness are in fact one. Only the illusion of time separates them.

This is not being negative. It is simply recognizing the nature of things, so that you don’t pursue an illusion for the rest of your life. Nor is it saying that you should no longer appreciate pleasant or beautiful things or conditions. But to seek something through them that they cannot give — an identity, a sense of permanency and fulfillment — is a recipe for frustration and suffering. The whole advertising industry and

consumer society would collapse if people became enlightened and no longer sought to find their identity through things. The more you seek happiness in this way, the more it will elude you. Nothing out there will ever satisfy you except temporarily and superficially, but you may need to experience many disillusionments before you realize that truth. Things and conditions can give you pleasure, but they will also give you pain. Things and conditions can give you pleasure, but they cannot give you joy. Nothing can give you joy. Joy is uncaused and arises from within as the joy of Being. It is an essential part of the inner state of peace, the state that has been called the peace of God. It is your natural state, not something that you need to work hard for or struggle to attain.

Many people never realize that there can be no "salvation" in anything they do, possess, or attain. Those who do realize it often become world-weary and depressed: If nothing can give you true fulfillment, what is there left to strive for, what is the point in anything? The Old Testament prophet must have arrived at such a realization when he wrote: "I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind." When you reach this point, you are one step away from despair — and one step away from enlightenment.

A Buddhist monk once told me: "All I have learned in the twenty years that I have been a monk I can sum up in one sentence: All that arises passes away. This I know." What he meant, of course, was this: I have learned to offer no resistance to what is; I have learned to allow the present moment to be and to accept the impermanent nature of all things and conditions. Thus have I found peace.

To offer no resistance to life is to be in a state of grace, ease, and lightness. This state is then no longer dependent upon things being in a certain way, good or bad. It seems almost paradoxical, yet when your inner dependency on form is gone, the general conditions of your life, the outer forms, tend to improve greatly. Things, people, or conditions that you thought you needed for your happiness now come to you with no struggle or effort on your part, and you are free to enjoy and appreciate them — while they last. All those things, of course, will still pass away, cycles will come and go, but with dependency gone there is no fear of loss anymore. Life flows with ease.

The happiness that is derived from some secondary source is never very deep. It is only a pale reflection of the joy of Being, the vibrant peace that you find within as you enter the state of nonresistance. Being takes you beyond the polar opposites of the mind and frees you from dependency on form. Even if everything were to collapse and crumble all around you, you would still feel a deep inner core of peace. You may not be happy, but you will be at peace.



USING AND RELINQUISHING NEGATIVITY

All inner resistance is experienced as negativity in one form or another. All negativity is resistance. In this context, the two words are almost synonymous. Negativity ranges from irritation or impatience to fierce anger, from a depressed mood or sullen resentment to suicidal despair. Sometimes the resistance triggers the emotional pain-body, in which

case even a minor situation may produce intense negativity, such as anger, depression, or deep grief.

The ego believes that through negativity it can manipulate reality and get what it wants. It believes that through it, it can attract a desirable condition or dissolve an undesirable one. *A Course in Miracles* rightly points out that, whenever you are unhappy, there is the unconscious belief that the unhappiness "buys" you what you want. If "you" — the mind — did not believe that unhappiness works, why would you create it? The fact is, of course, that negativity does not work. Instead of attracting a desirable condition, it stops it from arising. Instead of dissolving an undesirable one, it keeps it in place. Its only "useful" function is that it strengthens the ego, and that is why the ego loves it.

Once you have identified with some form of negativity, you do not want to let go, and on a deeply unconscious level, you do not want positive change. It would threaten your identity as a depressed, angry, or hard-done-by person. You will then ignore, deny, or sabotage the positive in your life. This is a common phenomenon. It is also insane.

Negativity is totally unnatural. It is a psychic pollutant, and there is a deep link between the poisoning and destruction of nature and the vast negativity that has accumulated in the collective human psyche. No other life-form on the planet knows negativity, only humans, just as no other life-form violates and poisons the Earth that sustains it. Have you ever seen an unhappy flower or a stressed oak tree? Have you come across a depressed dolphin, a frog that has a problem with self-esteem, a cat that cannot relax, or a bird that carries hatred and resentment? The only animals that may occasionally experience something akin to negativity or show signs of

neurotic behavior are those that live in close contact with humans and so link into the human mind and its insanity.

Watch any plant or animal and let it teach you acceptance of what is, surrender to the Now. Let it teach you Being. Let it teach you integrity — which means to be one, to be yourself, to be real. Let it teach you how to live and how to die, and how *not* to make living and dying into a problem.

I have lived with several Zen masters — all of them cats. Even ducks have taught me important spiritual lessons. Just watching them is a meditation. How peacefully they float along, at ease with themselves, totally present in the Now, dignified and perfect as only a mindless creature can be. Occasionally, however, two ducks will get into a fight — sometimes for no apparent reason, or because one duck has strayed into another's private space. The fight usually lasts only for a few seconds, and then the ducks separate, swim off in opposite directions, and vigorously flap their wings a few times. They then continue to swim on peacefully as if the fight had never happened. When I observed that for the first time, I suddenly realized that by flapping their wings they were releasing surplus energy, thus preventing it from becoming trapped in their body and turning into negativity. This is natural wisdom, and it is easy for them because they do not have a mind that keeps the past alive unnecessarily and then builds an identity around it.

Couldn't a negative emotion also contain an important message? For example, if I often feel depressed, it may be a signal that there is something wrong with my life, and it may force me to look at my life situation and make some changes. So I need to listen to what the emotion is telling me and not just dismiss it as negative.

Yes, recurring negative emotions do sometimes contain a message, as do illnesses. But any changes that you make, whether they have to do with your work, your relationships, or your surroundings, are ultimately only cosmetic unless they arise out of a change in your level of consciousness. And as far as that is concerned, it can only mean one thing: becoming more present. When you have reached a certain degree of presence, you don't need negativity anymore to tell you what is needed in your life situation. But as long as negativity is there, use it. Use it as a kind of signal that reminds you to be more present.

How do we stop negativity from arising, and how do we get rid of it once it is there?

As I said, you stop it from arising by being fully present. But don't become discouraged. There are as yet few people on the planet who can sustain a state of continuous presence, although some are getting close to it. Soon, I believe, there will be many more.

Whenever you notice that some form of negativity has arisen within you, look on it not as a failure, but as a helpful signal that is telling you: "Wake up. Get out of your mind. Be present."

There is a novel by Aldous Huxley called *Island*, written in his later years when he became very interested in spiritual teachings. It tells the story of a man shipwrecked on a remote island cut off from the rest of the world. This island contains a unique civilization. The unusual thing about it is that its inhabitants, unlike those of the rest of the world, are actually sane. The first thing that the man notices are the

colorful parrots perched in the trees, and they seem to be constantly croaking the words "Attention. Here and Now. Attention. Here and Now." We later learn that the islanders taught them these words in order to be reminded continuously to stay present.

So whenever you feel negativity arising within you, whether caused by an external factor, a thought, or even nothing in particular that you are aware of, look on it as a voice saying "Attention. Here and Now. Wake up." Even the slightest irritation is significant and needs to be acknowledged and looked at; otherwise, there will be a cumulative buildup of unobserved reactions. As I said before, you may be able to just drop it once you realize that you don't want to have this energy field inside you and that it serves no purpose. But then make sure that you drop it completely. If you cannot drop it, just accept that it is there and take your attention into the feeling, as I pointed out earlier.

As an alternative to dropping a negative reaction, you can make it disappear by imagining yourself becoming transparent to the external cause of the reaction. I recommend that you practice it with little, even trivial, things first. Let's say that you are sitting quietly at home. Suddenly, there is the penetrating sound of a car alarm from across the street. Irritation arises. What is the purpose of the irritation? None whatsoever. Why did you create it? You didn't. The mind did. It was totally automatic, totally unconscious. Why did the mind create it? Because it holds the unconscious belief that its resistance, which you experience as negativity or unhappiness in some form, will somehow dissolve the undesirable condition. This, of course, is a delusion. The resistance that it creates, the irritation or anger in this case, is far

more disturbing than the original cause that it is attempting to dissolve.

All this can be transformed into spiritual practice. Feel yourself becoming transparent, as it were, without the solidity of a material body. Now allow the noise, or whatever causes a negative reaction, to pass right through you. It is no longer hitting a solid "wall" inside you. As I said, practice with little things first. The car alarm, the dog barking, the children screaming, the traffic jam. Instead of having a wall of resistance inside you that gets constantly and painfully hit by things that "should not be happening," let everything pass through you.

Somebody says something to you that is rude or designed to hurt. Instead of going into unconscious reaction and negativity, such as attack, defense, or withdrawal, you let it pass right through you. Offer no resistance. It is as if there is nobody there to get hurt anymore. *That* is forgiveness. In this way, you become invulnerable. You can still tell that person that his or her behavior is unacceptable, if that is what you choose to do. But that person no longer has the power to control your inner state. You are then in your power — not in someone else's, nor are you run by your mind. Whether it is a car alarm, a rude person, a flood, an earthquake, or the loss of all your possessions, the resistance mechanism is the same.

I have been practicing meditation, I have been to workshops, I have read many books on spirituality. I try to be in a state of nonresistance — but if you ask me whether I have found true and lasting inner peace, my honest answer would have to be "no." Why haven't I found it? What else can I do?

You are still seeking outside, and you cannot get out of the seeking mode. Maybe the next workshop will have the answer, maybe that new technique. To you I would say: Don't look for peace. Don't look for any other state than the one you are in now; otherwise, you will set up inner conflict and unconscious resistance. Forgive yourself for not being at peace. The moment you *completely* accept your non-peace, your non-peace becomes transmuted into peace. Anything you accept fully will get you there, will take you into peace. This is the miracle of surrender.



You may have heard the phrase "turn the other cheek," which a great teacher of enlightenment used two thousand years ago. He was attempting to convey symbolically the secret of nonresistance and nonreaction. In this statement, as in all his others, he was concerned only with your inner reality, not with the outer conduct of your life.

Do you know the story of Banzan? Before he became a great Zen master, he spent many years in the pursuit of enlightenment, but it eluded him. Then one day, as he was walking in the marketplace, he overheard a conversation between a butcher and his customer. "Give me the best piece of meat you have," said the customer. And the butcher replied, "Every piece of meat I have is the best. There is no piece of meat here that is not the best." Upon hearing this, Banzan became enlightened.

I can see you are waiting for some explanation. When you accept what is, every piece of meat — every moment — is the best. That is enlightenment.

THE NATURE OF COMPASSION

Having gone beyond the mind-made opposites, you become like a deep lake. The outer situation of your life and whatever happens there is the surface of the lake. Sometimes calm, sometimes windy and rough, according to the cycles and seasons. Deep down, however, the lake is always undisturbed. You are the whole lake, not just the surface, and you are in touch with your own depth, which remains absolutely still. You don't resist change by mentally clinging to any situation. Your inner peace does not depend on it. You abide in Being — unchanging, timeless, deathless — and you are no longer dependent for fulfillment or happiness on the outer world of constantly fluctuating forms. You can enjoy them, play with them, create new forms, appreciate the beauty of it all. But there will be no need to attach yourself to any of it.

When you become this detached, does it not mean that you also become remote from other human beings?

On the contrary. As long as you are unaware of Being, the reality of other humans will elude you, because you have not found your own. Your mind will like or dislike their form, which is not just their body but includes their mind as well. True relationship becomes possible only when there is an awareness of Being. Coming from Being, you will perceive another person's body and mind as just a screen, as it were,

behind which you can feel their true reality, as you feel yours. So, when confronted with someone else's suffering or unconscious behavior, you stay present and in touch with Being and are thus able to look beyond the form and feel the other person's radiant and pure Being through your own. At the level of Being, all suffering is recognized as an illusion. Suffering is due to identification with form. Miracles of healing sometimes occur through this realization, by awakening Being-consciousness in others — if they are ready.

Is that what compassion is?

Yes. Compassion is the awareness of a deep bond between yourself and all creatures. But there are two sides to compassion, two sides to this bond. On the one hand, since you are still here as a physical body, you share the vulnerability and mortality of your physical form with every other human and with every living being. Next time you say, "I have nothing in common with this person," remember that you have a great deal in common: A few years from now — two years or seventy years, it doesn't make much difference — both of you will have become rotting corpses, then piles of dust, then nothing at all. This is a sobering and humbling realization that leaves little room for pride. Is this a negative thought? No, it is a fact. Why close your eyes to it? In that sense, there is total equality between you and every other creature.

One of the most powerful spiritual practices is to meditate deeply on the mortality of physical forms, including your own. This is called: Die before you die. Go into it deeply. Your physical form is dissolving, is no more. Then a moment comes when all mind-forms or thoughts also die. Yet you are still there — the divine presence that you are.

Radiant, fully awake. Nothing that was real ever died, only names, forms, and illusions.



The realization of this deathless dimension, your true nature, is the other side of compassion. On a deep feeling-level, you now recognize not only your own immortality but through your own that of every other creature as well. On the level of form, you share mortality and the precariousness of existence. On the level of Being, you share eternal, radiant life. These are the two aspects of compassion. In compassion, the seemingly opposite feelings of sadness and joy merge into one and become transmuted into a deep inner peace. This is the peace of God. It is one of the most noble feelings that humans are capable of, and it has great healing and transformative power. But true compassion, as I have just described it, is as yet rare. To have deep empathy for the suffering of another being certainly requires a high degree of consciousness but represents only one side of compassion. It is not complete. True compassion goes beyond empathy or sympathy. It does not happen until sadness merges with joy, the joy of Being beyond form, the joy of eternal life.

TOWARD A DIFFERENT ORDER OF REALITY

I don't agree that the body needs to die. I am convinced that we can achieve physical immortality. We believe in death and that's why the body dies.

The body does not die because you believe in death. The body exists, or seems to, because you believe in death. Body and death are part of the same illusion, created by the egoic mode of consciousness, which has no awareness of the Source of life and sees itself as separate and constantly under threat. So it creates the illusion that you are a body, a dense, physical vehicle that is constantly under threat.

To perceive yourself as a vulnerable body that was born and a little later dies — that's the illusion. Body and death: one illusion. You cannot have one without the other. You want to keep one side of the illusion and get rid of the other, but that is impossible. Either you keep all of it or you relinquish all of it.

However, you cannot escape from the body, nor do you have to. The body is an incredible misperception of your true nature. But your true nature is concealed somewhere within that illusion, not outside it, so the body is still the only point of access to it.

If you saw an angel but mistook it for a stone statue, all you would have to do is adjust your vision and look more closely at the "stone statue," not start looking somewhere else. You would then find that there never was a stone statue.

If belief in death creates the body, why does an animal have a body? An animal doesn't have an ego, and it doesn't believe in death....

But it still dies, or seems to.

Remember that your perception of the world is a reflection of your state of consciousness. You are not separate from it, and there is no objective world out there. Every moment,

your consciousness creates the world that you inhabit. One of the greatest insights that has come out of modern physics is that of the unity between the observer and the observed: the person conducting the experiment — the observing consciousness — cannot be separated from the observed phenomena, and a different way of looking causes the observed phenomena to behave differently. If you believe, on a deep level, in separation and the struggle for survival, then you see that belief reflected all around you and your perceptions are governed by fear. You inhabit a world of death and of bodies fighting, killing, and devouring each other.

Nothing is what it seems to be. The world that you create and see through the egoic mind may seem a very imperfect place, even a vale of tears. But whatever you perceive is only a kind of symbol, like an image in a dream. It is how your consciousness interprets and interacts with the molecular energy dance of the universe. This energy is the raw material of so-called physical reality. You see it in terms of bodies and birth and death, or as a struggle for survival. An infinite number of completely different interpretations, completely different worlds, is possible and, in fact, exists — all depending on the perceiving consciousness. Every being is a focal point of consciousness, and every such focal point creates its own world, although all those worlds are interconnected. There is a human world, an ant world, a dolphin world, and so on. There are countless beings whose consciousness frequency is so different from yours that you are probably unaware of their existence, as they are of yours. Highly conscious beings who are aware of their connectedness with the Source and with each other would inhabit a world that to you would appear as a heavenly realm — and yet all worlds are ultimately one.

Our collective human world is largely created through the level of consciousness we call mind. Even within the collective human world there are vast differences, many different "sub-worlds," depending on the perceivers or creators of their respective worlds. Since all worlds are interconnected, when collective human consciousness becomes transformed, nature and the animal kingdom will reflect that transformation. Hence the statement in the Bible that in the coming age "The lion shall lie down with the lamb." This points to the possibility of a completely different order of reality.

The world as it appears to us now is, as I said, largely a reflection of the egoic mind. Fear being an unavoidable consequence of egoic delusion, it is a world dominated by fear. Just as the images in a dream are symbols of inner states and feelings, so our collective reality is largely a symbolic expression of fear and of the heavy layers of negativity that have accumulated in the collective human psyche. We are not separate from our world, so when the majority of humans become free of egoic delusion, this inner change will affect all of creation. You will literally inhabit a new world. It is a shift in planetary consciousness. The strange Buddhist saying that every tree and every blade of grass will eventually become enlightened points to the same truth. According to St. Paul, the whole of creation is waiting for humans to become enlightened. That is how I interpret his saying that "The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed." St. Paul goes on to say that all of creation will become redeemed through this: "Up to the present...the whole created universe in all its parts groans as if in the pangs of childbirth."

What is being born is a new consciousness and, as its inevitable reflection, a new world. This is also foretold in the New Testament Book of Revelation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

But don't confuse cause and effect. Your primary task is not to seek salvation through creating a better world, but to awaken out of identification with form. You are then no longer bound to this world, this level of reality. You can feel your roots in the Unmanifested and so are free of attachment to the manifested world. You can still enjoy the passing pleasures of this world, but there is no fear of loss anymore, so you don't need to cling to them. Although you can enjoy sensory pleasures, the craving for sensory experience is gone, as is the constant search for fulfillment through psychological gratification, through feeding the ego. You are in touch with something infinitely greater than any pleasure, greater than any manifested thing.

In a way, you then don't need the world anymore. You don't even need it to be different from the way it is.

It is only at this point that you begin to make a real contribution toward bringing about a better world, toward creating a different order of reality. It is only at this point that you are able to feel true compassion and to help others at the level of cause. Only those who have transcended the world can bring about a better world.

You may remember that we talked about the dual nature of true compassion, which is awareness of a common bond of shared mortality and immortality. At this deep level, compassion becomes healing in the widest sense. In that state,

your healing influence is primarily based not on doing but on being. Everybody you come in contact with will be touched by your presence and affected by the peace that you emanate, whether they are conscious of it or not. When you are fully present and people around you manifest unconscious behavior, you won't feel the need to react to it, so you don't give it any reality. Your peace is so vast and deep that anything that is not peace disappears into it as if it had never existed. This breaks the karmic cycle of action and reaction. Animals, trees, flowers will feel your peace and respond to it. You teach through being, through demonstrating the peace of God. You become the "light of the world," an emanation of pure consciousness, and so you eliminate suffering on the level of cause. You eliminate unconsciousness from the world.



This doesn't mean that you may not also teach through doing — for example, by pointing out how to disidentify from the mind, recognize unconscious patterns within oneself, and so on. But who you *are* is always a more vital teaching and a more powerful transformer of the world than what you say, and more essential even than what you do.

Furthermore, to recognize the primacy of Being, and thus work on the level of cause, does not exclude the possibility that your compassion may simultaneously manifest on the level of doing and of effect by alleviating suffering whenever you come across it. When a hungry person asks you for bread and you have some, you will give it. But as you give the bread, even though your interaction may only be very

brief, what really matters is this moment of shared Being, of which the bread is only a symbol. A deep healing takes place within it. In that moment, there is no giver, no receiver.

But there shouldn't be any hunger and starvation in the first place. How can we create a better world without tackling evils such as hunger and violence first?

All evils are the effect of unconsciousness. You can alleviate the effects of unconsciousness, but you cannot eliminate them unless you eliminate their cause. True change happens within, not without.

If you feel called upon to alleviate suffering in the world, that is a very noble thing to do, but remember not to focus exclusively on the outer; otherwise, you will encounter frustration and despair. Without a profound change in human consciousness, the world's suffering is a bottomless pit. So don't let your compassion become one-sided. Empathy with someone else's pain or lack and a desire to help need to be balanced with a deeper realization of the eternal nature of all life and the ultimate illusion of all pain. Then let your peace flow into whatever you do and you will be working on the levels of effect and cause simultaneously.

This also applies if you are supporting a movement designed to stop deeply unconscious humans from destroying themselves, each other, and the planet, or from continuing to inflict dreadful suffering on other sentient beings. Remember: Just as you cannot fight the darkness, so you cannot fight unconsciousness. If you try to do so, the polar opposites will become strengthened and more deeply entrenched. You will become identified with one of the polarities, you will cre-

ate an "enemy," and so be drawn into unconsciousness yourself. Raise awareness by disseminating information, or at the most, practice passive resistance. But make sure that you carry no resistance within, no hatred, no negativity. "Love your enemies," said Jesus, which, of course, means "have no enemies."

Once you get involved in working on the level of effect, it is all too easy to lose yourself in it. Stay alert and very, very present. The causal level needs to remain your primary focus, the teaching of enlightenment your main purpose, and peace your most precious gift to the world.

THE MEANING OF SURRENDER

ACCEPTANCE OF THE NOW

You mentioned "surrender" a few times. I don't like that idea. It sounds somewhat fatalistic. If we always accept the way things are, we are not going to make any effort to improve them. It seems to me what progress is all about, both in our personal lives and collectively, is not to accept the limitations of the present but to strive to go beyond them and create something better. If we hadn't done this, we would still be living in caves. How do you reconcile surrender with changing things and getting things done?

To some people, surrender may have negative connotations, implying defeat, giving up, failing to rise to the challenges of life, becoming lethargic, and so on. True surrender, however, is something entirely different. It does not mean to passively put up with whatever situation you find yourself in and to do nothing about it. Nor does it mean to cease making plans or initiating positive action.

Surrender is the simple but profound wisdom of yielding to rather than opposing the flow of life. The only place where

you can experience the flow of life is the Now, so to surrender is to accept the present moment unconditionally and without reservation. It is to relinquish inner resistance to what is. Inner resistance is to say "no" to what is, through mental judgment and emotional negativity. It becomes particularly pronounced when things "go wrong," which means that there is a gap between the demands or rigid expectations of your mind and what is. That is the pain gap. If you have lived long enough, you will know that things "go wrong" quite often. It is precisely at those times that surrender needs to be practiced if you want to eliminate pain and sorrow from your life. Acceptance of what is immediately frees you from mind identification and thus reconnects you with Being. Resistance is the mind.

Surrender is a purely inner phenomenon. It does not mean that on the outer level you cannot take action and change the situation. In fact, it is not the overall situation that you need to accept when you surrender, but just the tiny segment called the Now.

For example, if you were stuck in the mud somewhere, you wouldn't say: "Okay, I resign myself to being stuck in the mud." Resignation is not surrender. You don't need to accept an undesirable or unpleasant life situation. Nor do you need to deceive yourself and say that there is nothing wrong with being stuck in the mud. No. You recognize fully that you want to get out of it. You then narrow your attention down to the present moment without mentally labeling it in any way. This means that there is no judgment of the Now. Therefore, there is no resistance, no emotional negativity. You accept the "isness" of this moment. Then you take action and do all that you can to get out of the mud. Such

action I call positive action. It is far more effective than negative action, which arises out of anger, despair, or frustration. Until you achieve the desired result, you continue to practice surrender by refraining from labeling the Now.

Let me give you a visual analogy to illustrate the point I am making. You are walking along a path at night, surrounded by a thick fog. But you have a powerful flashlight that cuts through the fog and creates a narrow, clear space in front of you. The fog is your life situation, which includes past and future; the flashlight is your conscious presence; the clear space is the Now.

Non-surrender hardens your psychological form, the shell of the ego, and so creates a strong sense of separateness. The world around you and people in particular come to be perceived as threatening. The unconscious compulsion to destroy others through judgment arises, as does the need to compete and dominate. Even nature becomes your enemy and your perceptions and interpretations are governed by fear. The mental disease that we call paranoia is only a slightly more acute form of this normal but dysfunctional state of consciousness.

Not only your psychological form but also your physical form — your body — becomes hard and rigid through resistance. Tension arises in different parts of the body, and the body as a whole contracts. The free flow of life energy through the body, which is essential for its healthy functioning, is greatly restricted. Bodywork and certain forms of physical therapy can be helpful in restoring this flow, but unless you practice surrender in your everyday life, those things can only give temporary symptom relief since the cause — the resistance pattern — has not been dissolved.

There is something within you that remains unaffected by the transient circumstances that make up your life situation, and only through surrender do you have access to it. It is your life, your very Being — which exists eternally in the timeless realm of the present. Finding this life is “the one thing that is needed” that Jesus talked about.



If you find your life situation unsatisfactory or even intolerable, it is only by surrendering first that you can break the unconscious resistance pattern that perpetuates that situation.

Surrender is perfectly compatible with taking action, initiating change, or achieving goals. But in the surrendered state a totally different energy, a different quality, flows into your doing. Surrender reconnects you with the source-energy of Being, and if your doing is infused with Being, it becomes a joyful celebration of life energy that takes you more deeply into the Now. Through nonresistance, the quality of your consciousness and, therefore, the quality of whatever you are doing or creating is enhanced immeasurably. The results will then look after themselves and reflect that quality. We could call this *surrendered action*. It is not work as we have known it for thousands of years. As more humans awaken, the word *work* is going to disappear from our vocabulary, and perhaps a new word will be created to replace it.

It is the quality of your consciousness at this moment that is the main determinant of what kind of future you will experience, so to surrender is the most important thing you can do

to bring about positive change. Any action you take is secondary. No truly positive action can arise out of an unsurrendered state of consciousness.

I can see that if I am in a situation that is unpleasant or unsatisfactory and I completely accept the moment as it is, there will be no suffering or unhappiness. I will have risen above it. But I still can't quite see where the energy or motivation for taking action and bringing about change would come from if there isn't a certain amount of dissatisfaction.

In the state of surrender, you see very clearly what needs to be done, and you take action, doing one thing at a time and focusing on one thing at a time. Learn from nature: See how everything gets accomplished and how the miracle of life unfolds without dissatisfaction or unhappiness. That's why Jesus said: "Look at the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin."

If your overall situation is unsatisfactory or unpleasant, *separate out this instant* and surrender to what is. That's the flashlight cutting through the fog. Your state of consciousness then ceases to be controlled by external conditions. You are no longer coming from reaction and resistance.

Then look at the specifics of the situation. Ask yourself, "Is there anything I can do to change the situation, improve it, or remove myself from it?" If so, you take appropriate action. Focus not on the one hundred things that you will or may have to do at some future time but on the one thing that you can do now. This doesn't mean you should not do any planning. It may well be that planning is the one thing you can do now. But make sure you don't start to run "mental movies,"

project yourself into the future, and so lose the Now. Any action you take may not bear fruit immediately. Until it does — do not resist what is. If there is no action you can take, and you cannot remove yourself from the situation either, then use the situation to make you go more deeply into surrender, more deeply into the Now, more deeply into Being. When you enter this timeless dimension of the present, change often comes about in strange ways without the need for a great deal of doing on your part. Life becomes helpful and cooperative. If inner factors such as fear, guilt, or inertia prevented you from taking action, they will dissolve in the light of your conscious presence.

Do not confuse surrender with an attitude of "I can't be bothered anymore" or "I just don't care anymore." If you look at it closely, you will find that such an attitude is tainted with negativity in the form of hidden resentment and so is not surrender at all but masked resistance. As you surrender, direct your attention inward to check if there is any trace of resistance left inside you. Be very alert when you do so; otherwise, a pocket of resistance may continue to hide in some dark corner in the form of a thought or an unacknowledged emotion.

FROM MIND ENERGY TO SPIRITUAL ENERGY

Letting go of resistance is easier said than done. I still don't see clearly how to let go. If you say it is by surrendering, the question remains: "How?"

Start by acknowledging that there is resistance. Be there when it happens, when the resistance arises. Observe how your mind creates it, how it labels the situation, yourself, or others. Look at the thought process involved. Feel the energy

of the emotion. By witnessing the resistance, you will see that it serves no purpose. By focusing all your attention on the Now, the unconscious resistance is made conscious, and that is the end of it. You cannot be conscious *and* unhappy, conscious *and* in negativity. Negativity, unhappiness, or suffering in whatever form means that there is resistance, and resistance is always unconscious.

Surely I can be conscious of my unhappy feelings?

Would you choose unhappiness? If you did not choose it, how did it arise? What is its purpose? Who is keeping it alive? You say that you are conscious of your unhappy feelings, but the truth is that you are identified with them and keep the process alive through compulsive thinking. All *that* is unconscious. If you were conscious, that is to say totally present in the Now, all negativity would dissolve almost instantly. It could not survive in your presence. It can only survive in your absence. Even the pain-body cannot survive for long in your presence. You keep your unhappiness alive by giving it time. That is its lifeblood. Remove time through intense present-moment awareness and it dies. But do you want it to die? Have you truly had enough? Who would you be without it?

Until you practice surrender, the spiritual dimension is something you read about, talk about, get excited about, write books about, think about, believe in — or don't, as the case may be. It makes no difference. Not until you surrender does it become a living reality in your life. When you do, the energy that you emanate and which then runs your life is of a much higher vibrational frequency than the mind energy that still runs our world — the energy that created the existing social,

political, and economic structures of our civilization, and which also continuously perpetuates itself through our educational systems and the media. Through surrender, spiritual energy comes into this world. It creates no suffering for yourself, for other humans, or any other life form on the planet. Unlike mind energy, it does not pollute the earth, and it is not subject to the law of polarities, which dictates that nothing can exist without its opposite, that there can be no good without bad. Those who run on mind energy, which is still the vast majority of the Earth's population, remain unaware of the existence of spiritual energy. It belongs to a different order of reality and will create a different world when a sufficient number of humans enter the surrendered state and so become totally free of negativity. If the Earth is to survive, this will be the energy of those who inhabit it.

Jesus referred to this energy when he made his famous prophetic statement in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the gentle; they shall have the earth for their possession." It is a silent but intense presence that dissolves the unconscious patterns of the mind. They may still remain active for a while, but they won't run your life anymore. The external conditions that were being resisted also tend to shift or dissolve quickly through surrender. It is a powerful transformer of situations and people. If conditions do not shift immediately, your acceptance of the Now enables you to rise above them. Either way, you are free.

SURRENDER IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

What about people who want to use me, manipulate or control me? Am I to surrender to them?

They are cut off from Being, so they unconsciously attempt to get energy and power from you. It is true that only an unconscious person will try to use or manipulate others, but it is equally true that only an unconscious person *can* be used and manipulated. If you resist or fight unconscious behavior in others, you become unconscious yourself. But surrender doesn't mean that you allow yourself to be used by unconscious people. Not at all. It is perfectly possible to say "no" firmly and clearly to a person or to walk away from a situation and be in a state of complete inner nonresistance at the same time. When you say "no" to a person or a situation, let it come not from reaction but from insight, from a clear realization of what is right or not right for you at that moment. Let it be a nonreactive "no," a high-quality "no," a "no" that is free of all negativity and so creates no further suffering.

I am in a situation at work that is unpleasant. I have tried to surrender to it, but I find it impossible. A lot of resistance keeps coming up.

If you cannot surrender, take action immediately: Speak up or do something to bring about a change in the situation — or remove yourself from it. Take responsibility for your life. Do not pollute your beautiful, radiant inner Being nor the Earth with negativity. Do not give unhappiness in any form whatsoever a dwelling place inside you.

If you cannot take action, for example if you are in prison, then you have two choices left: resistance or surrender. Bondage or inner freedom from external conditions. Suffering or inner peace.

Is nonresistance also to be practiced in the external conduct of our lives, such as nonresistance to violence, or is it something that just concerns our inner life?

You only need to be concerned with the inner aspect. That is primary. Of course, that will also transform the conduct of your outer life, your relationships, and so on.

Your relationships will be changed profoundly by surrender. If you can never accept what is, by implication you will not be able to accept anybody the way they are. You will judge, criticize, label, reject, or attempt to change people. Furthermore, if you continuously make the Now into a means to an end in the future, you will also make every person you encounter or relate with into a means to an end. The relationship — the human being — is then of secondary importance to you, or of no importance at all. What you can get out of the relationship is primary — be it material gain, a sense of power, physical pleasure, or some form of ego gratification.

Let me illustrate how surrender can work in relationships. When you become involved in an argument or some conflict situation, perhaps with a partner or someone close to you, start by observing how defensive you become as your own position is attacked, or feel the force of your own aggression as you attack the other person's position. Observe the attachment to your views and opinions. Feel the mental-emotional energy behind your need to be right and make the other person wrong. That's the energy of the egoic mind. You make it conscious by acknowledging it, by feeling it as fully as possible. Then one day, in the middle of an argument, you will suddenly realize that you have a choice, and you may decide to drop your own reaction — just to see what happens. You

surrender. I don't mean dropping the reaction just verbally by saying, "Okay, you are right," with a look on your face that says, "I am above all this childish unconsciousness." That's just displacing the resistance to another level, with the egoic mind still in charge, claiming superiority. I am speaking of letting go of the entire mental-emotional energy field inside you that was fighting for power.

The ego is cunning, so you have to be very alert, very present, and totally honest with yourself to see whether you have truly relinquished your identification with a mental position and so freed yourself from your mind. If you suddenly feel very light, clear, and deeply at peace, that is an unmistakable sign that you have truly surrendered. Then observe what happens to the other person's mental position as you no longer energize it through resistance. When identification with mental positions is out of the way, true communication begins.

What about nonresistance in the face of violence, aggression, and the like?

Nonresistance doesn't necessarily mean doing nothing. All it means is that any "doing" becomes nonreactive. Remember the deep wisdom underlying the practice of Eastern martial arts: Don't resist the opponent's force. Yield to overcome.

Having said that, "doing nothing" when you are in a state of intense presence is a very powerful transformer and healer of situations and people. In Taoism, there is a term called *wu wei*, which is usually translated as "actionless activity" or "sitting quietly doing nothing." In ancient China, this was regarded as one of the highest achievements or virtues. It is radically different from inactivity in the ordinary state of

consciousness, or rather unconsciousness, which stems from fear, inertia, or indecision. The real "doing nothing" implies inner nonresistance and intense alertness.

On the other hand, if action is required, you will no longer react from your conditioned mind, but you will respond to the situation out of your conscious presence. In that state, your mind is free of concepts, including the concept of non-violence. So who can predict what you will do?

The ego believes that in your resistance lies your strength, whereas in truth resistance cuts you off from Being, the only place of true power. Resistance is weakness and fear masquerading as strength. What the ego sees as weakness is your Being in its purity, innocence, and power. What it sees as strength is weakness. So the ego exists in a continuous resistance-mode and plays counterfeit roles to cover up your "weakness," which in truth is your power.

Until there is surrender, unconscious role-playing constitutes a large part of human interaction. In surrender, you no longer need ego defenses and false masks. You become very simple, very real. "That's dangerous," says the ego. "You'll get hurt. You'll become vulnerable." What the ego doesn't know, of course, is that only through the letting go of resistance, through becoming "vulnerable," can you discover your true and essential invulnerability.

TRANSFORMING ILLNESS INTO ENLIGHTENMENT

If someone is seriously ill and completely accepts their condition and surrenders to the illness, would they not have given up their will to get back to health? The determination to fight the illness would not be there anymore, would it?

Surrender is inner acceptance of what *is* without any reservations. We are talking about your *life* — this instant — not the conditions or circumstances of your life, not what I call your life situation. We have spoken about this already.

With regard to illness, this is what it means. Illness is part of your life situation. As such, it has a past and a future. Past and future form an uninterrupted continuum, unless the redeeming power of the Now is activated through your conscious presence. As you know, underneath the various conditions that make up your life situation, which exists in time, there is something deeper, more essential: your Life, your very Being in the timeless Now.

As there are no problems in the Now, there is no illness either. The belief in a label that someone attaches to your condition keeps the condition in place, empowers it, and makes a seemingly solid reality out of a temporary imbalance. It gives it not only reality and solidity but also a continuity in time that it did not have before. By focusing on this instant and refraining from labeling it mentally, illness is reduced to one or several of these factors: physical pain, weakness, discomfort, or disability. *That* is what you surrender to — now. You do not surrender to the idea of "illness." Allow the suffering to force you into the present moment, into a state of intense conscious presence. Use it for enlightenment.

Surrender does not transform what *is*, at least not directly. Surrender transforms *you*. When *you* are transformed, your whole world is transformed, because the world is only a reflection. We spoke about this earlier.

If you looked in the mirror and did not like what you saw, you would have to be mad to attack the image in the mirror. That

is precisely what you do when you are in a state of nonacceptance. And, of course, if you attack the image, it attacks you back. If you accept the image, no matter what it is, if you become friendly toward it, it cannot *not* become friendly toward you. This is how you change the world.

Illness is not the problem. You are the problem — as long as the egoic mind is in control. When you are ill or disabled, do not feel that you have failed in some way, do not feel guilty. Do not blame life for treating you unfairly, but do not blame yourself either. All that is resistance. If you have a major illness, use it for enlightenment. Anything “bad” that happens in your life — use it for enlightenment. Withdraw time from the illness. Do not give it any past or future. Let it force you into intense present-moment awareness — and see what happens.

Become an alchemist. Transmute base metal into gold, suffering into consciousness, disaster into enlightenment.

Are you seriously ill and feeling angry now about what I have just said? Then that is a clear sign that the illness has become part of your sense of self and that you are now protecting your identity — as well as protecting the illness. The condition that is labeled “illness” has nothing to do with who you truly are.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

As far as the still unconscious majority of the population is concerned, only a critical limit-situation has the potential to crack the hard shell of the ego and force them into surrender and so into the awakened state. A limit-situation arises when through some disaster, drastic upheaval, deep loss, or

suffering your whole world is shattered and doesn't make sense anymore. It is an encounter with death, be it physical or psychological. The egoic mind, the creator of this world, collapses. Out of the ashes of the old world, a new world can then come into being.

There is no guarantee, of course, that even a limit-situation will do it, but the potential is always there. Some people's resistance to what is even intensifies in such a situation, and so it becomes a descent into hell. In others, there may only be partial surrender, but even that will give them a certain depth and serenity that were not there before. Parts of the ego shell break off, and this allows small amounts of the radiance and peace that lie beyond the mind to shine through.

Limit-situations have produced many miracles. There have been murderers on death row waiting for execution who, in the last few hours of their lives, experienced the egoless state and the deep joy and peace that come with it. The inner resistance to the situation they found themselves in became so intense as to produce unbearable suffering, and there was nowhere to run and nothing to do to escape it, not even a mind-projected future. So they were forced into complete acceptance of the unacceptable. They were forced into surrender. In this way, they were able to enter the state of grace with which comes redemption: complete release from the past. Of course, it is not really the limit-situation that makes room for the miracle of grace and redemption, but the act of surrender.

So whenever any kind of disaster strikes, or something goes seriously "wrong" — illness, disability, loss of home or fortune or of a socially defined identity, breakup of a close

relationship, death or suffering of a loved one, or your own impending death — know that there is another side to it, that you are just one step away from something incredible: a complete alchemical transmutation of the base metal of pain and suffering into gold. That one step is called surrender.

I do not mean to say that you will become happy in such a situation. You will not. But fear and pain will become transmuted into an inner peace and serenity that come from a very deep place — from the Unmanifested itself. It is “the peace of God, which passes all understanding.” Compared to that, happiness is quite a shallow thing. With this radiant peace comes the realization — not on the level of mind but within the depth of your Being — that you are indestructible, immortal. This is not a belief. It is absolute certainty that needs no external evidence or proof from some secondary source.

TRANSFORMING SUFFERING INTO PEACE

I read about a stoic philosopher in ancient Greece who, when he was told that his son had died in an accident, replied, “I knew he was not immortal.” Is that surrender? If it is, I don’t want it. There are some situations in which surrender seems unnatural and inhuman.

Being cut off from your feelings is not surrender. But we don't know what his inner state was when he said those words. In certain extreme situations, it may still be impossible for you to accept the Now. But you always get a second chance at surrender.

Your first chance is to surrender each moment to the reality of that moment. Knowing that what is cannot be undone —

because it already is — you say yes to what is or accept what isn't. Then you do what you have to do, whatever the situation requires. If you abide in this state of acceptance, you create no more negativity, no more suffering, no more unhappiness. You then live in a state of nonresistance, a state of grace and lightness, free of struggle.

Whenever you are unable to do that, whenever you miss that chance — either because you are not generating enough conscious presence to prevent some habitual and unconscious resistance pattern from arising or because the condition is so extreme as to be absolutely unacceptable to you — then you are creating some form of pain, some form of suffering. It may look as if the situation is creating the suffering, but ultimately this is not so — your resistance is.

Now here is your second chance at surrender: If you cannot accept what is outside, then accept what is *inside*. If you cannot accept the external condition, accept the internal condition. This means: Do not resist the pain. Allow it to be there. Surrender to the grief, despair, fear, loneliness, or whatever form the suffering takes. Witness it without labeling it mentally. Embrace it. Then see how the miracle of surrender transmutes deep suffering into deep peace. This is your crucifixion. Let it become your resurrection and ascension.

I do not see how one can surrender to suffering. As you yourself pointed out, suffering is non-surrender. How could you surrender to non-surrender?

Forget about surrender for a moment. When your pain is deep, all talk of surrender will probably seem futile and meaningless anyway. When your pain is deep, you will likely

have a strong urge to escape from it rather than surrender to it. You don't want to feel what you feel. What could be more normal? But there is no escape, no way out. There are many pseudo escapes — work, drink, drugs, anger, projection, suppression, and so on — but they don't free you from the pain. Suffering does not diminish in intensity when you make it unconscious. When you deny emotional pain, everything you do or think as well as your relationships become contaminated with it. You broadcast it, so to speak, as the energy you emanate, and others will pick it up subliminally. If they are unconscious, they may even feel compelled to attack or hurt you in some way, or you may hurt them in an unconscious projection of your pain. You attract and manifest whatever corresponds to your inner state.

When there is no way out, there is still always a way *through*. So don't turn away from the pain. Face it. Feel it fully. *Feel it* — don't *think* about it! Express it if necessary, but don't create a script in your mind around it. Give all your attention to the feeling, not to the person, event, or situation that seems to have caused it. Don't let the mind use the pain to create a victim identity for yourself out of it. Feeling sorry for yourself and telling others your story will keep you stuck in suffering. Since it is impossible to get away from the feeling, the only possibility of change is to move into it; otherwise, nothing will shift. So give your complete attention to what you feel, and refrain from mentally labeling it. As you go into the feeling, be intensely alert. At first, it may seem like a dark and terrifying place, and when the urge to turn away from it comes, observe it but don't act on it. Keep putting your attention on the pain, keep feeling the grief, the fear, the dread, the loneliness, whatever it is. Stay alert, stay present — present with your whole Being, with every cell of your body. As you do so,

you are bringing a light into this darkness. This is the flame of your consciousness.

At this stage, you don't need to be concerned with surrender anymore. It has happened already. How? Full attention is full acceptance, is surrender. By giving full attention, you use the power of the Now, which is the power of your presence. No hidden pocket of resistance can survive in it. Presence removes time. Without time, no suffering, no negativity, can survive.

The acceptance of suffering is a journey into death. Facing deep pain, allowing it to be, taking your attention into it, is to enter death consciously. When you have died this death, you realize that there is no death — and there is nothing to fear. Only the ego dies. Imagine a ray of sunlight that has forgotten it is an inseparable part of the sun and deludes itself into believing it has to fight for survival and create and cling to an identity other than the sun. Would the death of this delusion not be incredibly liberating?

Do you want an easy death? Would you rather die without pain, without agony? Then die to the past every moment, and let the light of your presence shine away the heavy, time-bound self you thought of as "you."



THE WAY OF THE CROSS

There are many accounts of people who say they have found God through their deep suffering, and there is the Christian

expression "the way of the cross," which I suppose points to the same thing.

We are concerned with nothing else here.

Strictly speaking, they did not find God through their suffering, because suffering implies resistance. They found God through surrender, through total acceptance of what is, into which they were forced by their intense suffering. They must have realized on some level that their pain was self-created.

How do you equate surrender with finding God?

Since resistance is inseparable from the mind, relinquishment of resistance — surrender — is the end of the mind as your master, the impostor pretending to be "you," the false god. All judgment and all negativity dissolve. The realm of Being, which had been obscured by the mind, then opens up. Suddenly, a great stillness arises within you, an unfathomable sense of peace. And within that peace, there is great joy. And within that joy, there is love. And at the innermost core, there is the sacred, the immeasurable, That which cannot be named.

I don't call it finding God, because how can you find that which was never lost, the very life that you are? The word God is limiting not only because of thousands of years of misperception and misuse, but also because it implies an entity other than you. God is Being itself, not a being. There can be no subject-object relationship here, no duality, no you and God. God-realization is the most natural thing there is. The amazing and incomprehensible fact is not that you *can* become conscious of God but that you are *not* conscious of God.

The way of the cross that you mentioned is the old way to enlightenment, and until recently it was the only way. But don't dismiss it or underestimate its efficacy. It still works.

The way of the cross is a complete reversal. It means that the worst thing in your life, your cross, turns into the best thing that ever happened to you, by forcing you into surrender, into "death," forcing you to become as nothing, to become as God — because God, too, is no-thing.

At this time, as far as the unconscious majority of humans is concerned, the way of the cross is still the only way. They will only awaken through further suffering, and enlightenment as a collective phenomenon will be predictably preceded by vast upheavals. This process reflects the workings of certain universal laws that govern the growth of consciousness and thus was foreseen by some seers. It is described, among other places, in the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse, though cloaked in obscure and sometimes impenetrable symbology. This suffering is inflicted not by God but by humans on themselves and on each other, as well as by certain defensive measures that the Earth, which is a living, intelligent organism, is going to take to protect herself from the onslaught of human madness.

However, there is a growing number of humans alive today whose consciousness is sufficiently evolved not to need any more suffering before the realization of enlightenment. You may be one of them.

Enlightenment through suffering — the way of the cross — means to be forced into the kingdom of heaven kicking and screaming. You finally surrender because you can't stand the pain anymore, but the pain could go on for a long time until

this happens. Enlightenment consciously chosen means to relinquish your attachment to past and future and to make the Now the main focus of your life. It means choosing to dwell in the state of presence rather than in time. It means saying yes to what is. You then don't need pain anymore. How much more time do you think you will need before you are able to say, "I will create no more pain, no more suffering"? How much more pain do you need before you can make that choice?

If you think that you need more time, you will get more time — and more pain. Time and pain are inseparable.

THE POWER TO CHOOSE

What about all those people who, it seems, actually want to suffer? I have a friend whose partner is physically abusive toward her, and her previous relationship was of a similar kind. Why does she choose such men, and why is she refusing to get out of that situation now? Why do so many people actually choose pain?

I know that the word *choose* is a favorite New Age term, but it isn't entirely accurate in this context. It is misleading to say that somebody "chose" a dysfunctional relationship or any other negative situation in his or her life. Choice implies consciousness — a high degree of consciousness. Without it, you have no choice. Choice begins the moment you disidentify from the mind and its conditioned patterns, the moment you become present. Until you reach that point, you are unconscious, spiritually speaking. This means that you are compelled to think, feel, and act in certain ways according to the conditioning of your mind. That is why Jesus said: "Forgive

them, for they know not what they do." This is not related to intelligence in the conventional sense of the word. I have met many highly intelligent and educated people who were also completely unconscious, which is to say completely identified with their mind. In fact, if mental development and increased knowledge are not counterbalanced by a corresponding growth in consciousness, the potential for unhappiness and disaster is very great.

Your friend is stuck in a relationship with an abusive partner, and not for the first time. Why? No choice. The mind, conditioned as it is by the past, always seeks to re-create what it knows and is familiar with. Even if it is painful, at least it is familiar. The mind always adheres to the known. The unknown is dangerous because it has no control over it. That's why the mind dislikes and ignores the present moment. Present-moment awareness creates a gap not only in the stream of mind but also in the past-future continuum. Nothing truly new and creative can come into this world except through that gap, that clear space of infinite possibility.

So your friend, being identified with her mind, may be re-creating a pattern learned in the past in which intimacy and abuse are inseparably linked. Alternatively, she may be acting out a mind pattern learned in early childhood according to which she is unworthy and deserves to be punished. It is possible, too, that she lives a large part of her life through the pain-body, which always seeks more pain on which to feed. Her partner has his own unconscious patterns, which complement hers. Of course her situation is self-created, but who or what is the self that is doing the creating? A mental-emotional pattern from the past, no more. Why make a self out of it? If you tell her that she has chosen her condition or

situation, you are reinforcing her state of mind identification. But is her mind pattern who she is? Is it her self? Is her true identity derived from the past? Show your friend how to be the observing presence behind her thoughts and her emotions. Tell her about the pain-body and how to free herself from it. Teach her the art of inner-body awareness. Demonstrate to her the meaning of presence. As soon as she is able to access the power of the Now, and thereby break through her conditioned past, she will have a choice.

Nobody chooses dysfunction, conflict, pain. Nobody chooses insanity. They happen because there is not enough presence in you to dissolve the past, not enough light to dispel the darkness. You are not fully here. You have not quite woken up yet. In the meantime, the conditioned mind is running your life.

Similarly, if you are one of the many people who have an issue with their parents, if you still harbor resentment about something they did or did not do, then you still believe that they had a choice — that they could have acted differently. It always looks as if people had a choice, but that is an illusion. As long as your mind with its conditioned patterns runs your life, as long as you are your mind, what choice do you have? None. You are not even there. The mind-identified state is severely dysfunctional. It is a form of insanity. Almost everyone is suffering from this illness in varying degrees. The moment you realize this, there can be no more resentment. How can you resent someone's illness? The only appropriate response is compassion.

So that means nobody is responsible for what they do? I don't like that idea.

If you are run by your mind, although you have no choice you will still suffer the consequences of your unconsciousness, and you will create further suffering. You will bear the burden of fear, conflict, problems, and pain. The suffering thus created will eventually force you out of your unconscious state.

What you say about choice also applies to forgiveness, I suppose. You need to be fully conscious and surrender before you can forgive.

“Forgiveness” is a term that has been in use for two thousand years, but most people have a very limited view of what it means. You cannot truly forgive yourself or others as long as you derive your sense of self from the past. Only through accessing the power of the Now, which is your own power, can there be true forgiveness. This renders the past powerless, and you realize deeply that nothing you ever did or that was ever done to you could touch even in the slightest the radiant essence of who you are. The whole concept of forgiveness then becomes unnecessary.

And how do I get to that point of realization?

When you surrender to what is and so become fully present, the past ceases to have any power. You do not need it anymore. Presence is the key. The Now is the key.

How will I know when I have surrendered?

When you no longer need to ask the question.

THIS BOOK DOES NOT CLAIM TO BE AN ACCOUNT OF facts and events but of personal experiences, experiences which millions of prisoners have suffered time and again. It is the inside story of a concentration camp, told by one of its survivors. This tale is not concerned with the great horrors, which have already been described often enough (though less often believed), but with the multitude of small torments. In other words, it will try to answer this question: How was everyday life in a concentration camp reflected in the mind of the average prisoner?

Most of the events described here did not take place in the large and famous camps, but in the small ones where most of the real extermination took place. This story is not about the suffering and death of great heroes and martyrs, nor is it about the prominent Capos - prisoners who acted as trustees, having special privileges - or well-known prisoners. Thus it is not so much concerned with the sufferings of the mighty, but with the sacrifices, the crucifixion and the deaths of the great army of unknown and unrecorded victims.

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It was these common prisoners, who bore no distinguishing marks on their sleeves, whom the Capos really despised. While these ordinary prisoners had little or nothing to eat, the Capos were never hungry; in fact many of the Capos fared better in the camp than they had in their entire lives. Often they were harder on the prisoners than were the guards, and beat them more cruelly than the SS men did. These Capos, of course, were chosen only from those prisoners whose characters promised to make them suitable for such procedures, and if they did not comply with what was expected of them, they were immediately demoted. They soon became much like the SS men and the camp wardens and may be judged on a similar psychological basis.

It is easy for the outsider to get the wrong conception of camp life, a conception mingled with sentiment and pity. Little does he know of the hard fight for existence which raged among the prisoners. This was an unrelenting struggle for daily bread and for life itself, for one's own sake or for that of a good friend.

Let us take the case of a transport which was officially announced to transfer a certain number of prisoners to another camp; but it was a fairly safe guess that its final destination would be the gas chambers. A selection of sick or feeble prisoners incapable of work would be sent to one of the big central camps which were fitted with gas chambers and crematoriums. The selection process was the signal for a free fight among all the prisoners, or of group against group. All that mattered was that one's own name and that of one's friend were crossed off the list of victims,

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though everyone knew that for each man saved another victim had to be found.

A definite number of prisoners had to go with each transport. It did not really matter which, since each of them was nothing but a number. On their admission to the camp (at least this was the method in Auschwitz) all their documents had been taken from them, together with their other possessions. Each prisoner, therefore, had had an opportunity to claim a fictitious name or profession; and for various reasons many did this. The authorities were interested only in the captives' numbers. These numbers were often tattooed on their skin, and also had to be sewn to a certain spot on the trousers, jacket, or coat. Any guard who wanted to make a charge against a prisoner just glanced at his number (and how we dreaded such glances!); he never asked for his name.

To return to the convoy about to depart. There was neither time nor desire to consider moral or ethical issues. Every man was controlled by one thought only: to keep himself alive for the family waiting for him at home, and to save his friends. With no hesitation, therefore, he would arrange for another prisoner, another "number," to take his place in the transport.

As I have already mentioned, the process of selecting Capos was a negative one; only the most brutal of the prisoners were chosen for this job (although there were some happy exceptions). But apart from the selection of Capos which was undertaken by the SS, there was a sort of self-selecting process going on the whole time among all of the prisoners. On the average, only those prisoners could keep alive who, after years of trekking from camp to camp, had lost all scruples in

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their fight for existence; they were prepared to use every means, honest and otherwise, even brutal force, theft, and betrayal of their friends, in order to save themselves. We who have come back, by the aid of many lucky chances or miracles - whatever one may choose to call them - we know: the best of us did not return.

Many factual accounts about concentration camps are already on record. Here, facts will be significant only as far as they are part of a man's experiences. It is the exact nature of these experiences that the following essay will attempt to describe. For those who have been inmates in a camp, it will attempt to explain their experiences in the light of present-day knowledge. And for those who have never been inside, it may help them to comprehend, and above all to understand, the experiences of that only too small percentage of prisoners who survived and who now find life very difficult. These former prisoners often say, "We dislike talking about our experiences. No explanations are needed for those who have been inside, and the others will understand neither how we felt then nor how we feel now."

To attempt a methodical presentation of the subject is very difficult, as psychology requires a certain scientific detachment. But does a man who makes his observations while he himself is a prisoner possess the necessary detachment? Such detachment is granted to the outsider, but he is too far removed to make any statements of real value. Only the man inside knows. His judgments may not be objective; his evaluations may be out of proportion. This is inevitable. An at-

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tempt must be made to avoid any personal bias, and that is the real difficulty of a book of this kind. At times it will be necessary to have the courage to tell of very intimate experiences. I had intended to write this book anonymously, using my prison number only. But when the manuscript was completed, I saw that as an anonymous publication it would lose half its value, and that I must have the courage to state my convictions openly. I therefore refrained from deleting any of the passages, in spite of an intense dislike of exhibitionism.

I shall leave it to others to distill the contents of this book into dry theories. These might become a contribution to the psychology of prison life, which was investigated after the First World War, and which acquainted us with the syndrome of "barbed wire sickness." We are indebted to the Second World War for enriching our knowledge of the "psychopathology of the masses," (if I may quote a variation of the well-known phrase and title of a book by LeBon), for the war gave us the war of nerves and it gave us the concentration camp.

As this story is about my experiences as an ordinary prisoner, it is important that I mention, not without pride, that I was not employed as a psychiatrist in camp, or even as a doctor, except for the last few weeks. A few of my colleagues were lucky enough to be employed in poorly heated first-aid posts applying bandages made of scraps of waste paper. But I was Number 119,104, and most of the time I was digging and laying tracks for railway lines. At one time, my job was to dig a tunnel, without help, for a water main under a road. This feat did not go unrewarded; just before Christmas 1944, I was presented with a gift of

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so-called "premium coupons." These were issued by the construction firm to which we were practically sold as slaves: the firm paid the camp authorities a fixed price per day, per prisoner. The coupons cost the firm fifty pfennigs each and could be exchanged for six cigarettes, often weeks later, although they sometimes lost their validity. I became the proud owner of a token worth twelve cigarettes. But more important, the cigarettes could be exchanged for twelve soups, and twelve soups were often a very real respite from starvation.

The privilege of actually smoking cigarettes was reserved for the Capo, who had his assured quota of weekly coupons; or possibly for a prisoner who worked as a foreman in a warehouse or workshop and received a few cigarettes in exchange for doing dangerous jobs. The only exceptions to this were those who had lost the will to live and wanted to "enjoy" their last days. Thus, when we saw a comrade smoking his own cigarettes, we knew he had given up faith in his strength to carry on, and, once lost, the will to live seldom returned.

When one examines the vast amount of material which has been amassed as the result of many prisoners' observations and experiences, three phases of the inmate's mental reactions to camp life become apparent: the period following his admission; the period when he is well entrenched in camp routine; and the period following his release and liberation.

The symptom that characterizes the first phase is shock. Under certain conditions shock may even precede the prisoner's formal admission to the camp. I

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shall give as an example the circumstances of my own admission.

Fifteen hundred persons had been traveling by train for several days and nights: there were eighty people in each coach. All had to lie on top of their luggage, the few remnants of their personal possessions. The carriages were so full that only the top parts of the windows were free to let in the grey of dawn. Everyone expected the train to head for some munitions factory, in which we would be employed as forced labor. We did not know whether we were still in Silesia or already in Poland. The engine's whistle had an uncanny sound, like a cry for help sent out in commiseration for the unhappy load which it was destined to lead into perdition. Then the train shunted, obviously nearing a main station. Suddenly a cry broke from the ranks of the anxious passengers, "There is a sign, Auschwitz!" Everyone's heart missed a beat at that moment. Auschwitz - the very name stood for all that was horrible: gas chambers, crematoriums, massacres. Slowly, almost hesitatingly, the train moved on as if it wanted to spare its passengers the dreadful realization as long as possible: Auschwitz!

With the progressive dawn, the outlines of an immense camp became visible: long stretches of several rows of barbed-wire fences; watch towers; search lights; and long columns of ragged human figures, grey in the greyness of dawn, trekking along the straight desolate roads, to what destination we did not know. There were isolated shouts and whistles of command. We did not know their meaning. My imagination led me to see gallows with people dangling on them. I was horrified, but this was just as well, because step by

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step we had to become accustomed to a terrible and immense horror.

Eventually we moved into the station. The initial silence was interrupted by shouted commands. We were to hear those rough, shrill tones from then on, over and over again in all the camps. Their sound was almost like the last cry of a victim, and yet there was a difference. It had a rasping hoarseness, as if it came from the throat of a man who had to keep shouting like that, a man who was being murdered again and again. The carriage doors were flung open and a small detachment of prisoners stormed inside. They wore striped uniforms, their heads were shaved, but they looked well fed. They spoke in every possible European tongue, and all with a certain amount of humor, which sounded grotesque under the circumstances. Like a drowning man clutching a straw, my inborn optimism (which has often controlled my feelings even in the most desperate situations) clung to this thought: These prisoners look quite well, they seem to be in good spirits and even laugh. Who knows? I might manage to share their favorable position.

In psychiatry there is a certain condition known as "delusion of reprieve." The condemned man, immediately before his execution, gets the illusion that he might be reprieved at the very last minute. We, too, clung to shreds of hope and believed to the last moment that it would not be so bad. Just the sight of the red cheeks and round faces of those prisoners was a great encouragement. Little did we know then that they formed a specially chosen elite, who for years had been the receiving squad for new transports as they rolled into the station day after day. They took

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charge of the new arrivals and their luggage, including scarce items and smuggled jewelry. Auschwitz must have been a strange spot in this Europe of the last years of the war. There must have been unique treasures of gold and silver, platinum and diamonds, not only in the huge storehouses but also in the hands of the SS.

Fifteen hundred captives were cooped up in a shed built to accommodate probably two hundred at the most. We were cold and hungry and there was not enough room for everyone to squat on the bare ground, let alone to lie down. One five-ounce piece of bread was our only food in four days. Yet I heard the senior prisoners in charge of the shed bargain with one member of the receiving party about a tie-pin made of platinum and diamonds. Most of the profits would eventually be traded for liquor - schnapps. I do not remember any more just how many thousands of marks were needed to purchase the quantity of schnapps required for a "gay evening," but I do know that those long-term prisoners needed schnapps. Under such conditions, who could blame them for trying to dope themselves? There was another group of prisoners who got liquor supplied in almost unlimited quantities by the SS: these were the men who were employed in the gas chambers and crematoriums, and who knew very well that one day they would be relieved by a new shift of men, and that they would have to leave their enforced role of executioner and become victims themselves.

Nearly everyone in our transport lived under the illusion that he would be reprieved, that everything would yet be well. We did not realize the meaning

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behind the scene that was to follow presently. We were told to leave our luggage in the train and to fall into two lines - women on one side, men on the other - in order to file past a senior SS officer. Surprisingly enough, I had the courage to hide my haversack under my coat. My line filed past the officer, man by man. I realized that it would be dangerous if the officer spotted my bag. He would at least knock me down; I knew that from previous experience. Instinctively, I straightened on approaching the officer, so that he would not notice my heavy load. Then I was face to face with him. He was a tall man who looked slim and fit in his spotless uniform. What a contrast to us, who were untidy and grimy after our long journey! He had assumed an attitude of careless ease, supporting his right elbow with his left hand. His right hand was lifted, and with the forefinger of that hand he pointed very leisurely to the right or to the left. None of us had the slightest idea of the sinister meaning behind that little movement of a man's finger, pointing now to the right and now to the left, but far more frequently to the left.

It was my turn. Somebody whispered to me that to be sent to the right side would mean work, the way to the left being for the sick and those incapable of work, who would be sent to a special camp. I just waited for things to take their course, the first of many such times to come. My haversack weighed me down a bit to the left, but I made an effort to walk upright. The SS man looked me over, appeared to hesitate, then put both his hands on my shoulders. I tried very hard to look smart, and he turned my shoulders very slowly until I faced right, and I moved over to that side.

The significance of the finger game was explained to

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us in the evening. It was the first selection, the first verdict made on our existence or non-existence. For the great majority of our transport, about 90 per cent, it meant death. Their sentence was carried out within the next few hours. Those who were sent to the left were marched from the station straight to the crematorium. This building, as I was told by someone who worked there, had the word "bath" written over its doors in several European languages. On entering, each prisoner was handed a piece of soap, and then..... but mercifully I do not need to describe the events which followed. Many accounts have been written about this horror.

We who were saved, the minority of our transport, found out the truth in the evening. I inquired from prisoners who had been there for some time where my colleague and friend P---- had been sent.

"Was he sent to the left side?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Then you can see him there," I was told.

"Where?" A hand pointed to the chimney a few hundred yards off, which was sending a column of flame up into the grey sky of Poland. It dissolved into a sinister cloud of smoke.

"That's where your friend is, floating up to Heaven," was the answer. But I still did not understand until the truth was explained to me in plain words.

But I am telling things out of their turn. From a psychological point of view, we had a long, long way in front of us from the break of that dawn at the station until our first night's rest at the camp.

Escorted by SS guards with loaded guns, we were

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made to run from the station, past electrically charged barbed wire, through the camp, to the cleansing station; for those of us who had passed the first selection, this was a real bath. Again our illusion of reprieve found confirmation. The SS men seemed almost charming. Soon we found out their reason. They were nice to us as long as they saw watches on our wrists and could persuade us in well-meaning tones to hand them over. Would we not have to hand over all our possessions anyway, and why should not that relatively nice person have the watch? Maybe one day he would do one a good turn.

We waited in a shed which seemed to be the anteroom to the disinfecting chamber. SS men appeared and spread out blankets into which we had to throw all our possessions, all our watches and jewelry. There were still naïve prisoners among us who asked, to the amusement of the more seasoned ones who were there as helpers, if they could not keep a wedding ring, a medal or a good-luck piece. No one could yet grasp the fact that everything would be taken away.

I tried to take one of the old prisoners into my confidence. Approaching him furtively, I pointed to the roll of paper in the inner pocket of my coat and said, "Look, this is the manuscript of a scientific book. I know what you will say; that I should be grateful to escape with my life, that that should be all I can expect of fate. But I cannot help myself. I must keep this manuscript at all costs; it contains my life's work. Do you understand that?"

Yes, he was beginning to understand. A grin spread slowly over his face, first piteous, then more amused, mocking, insulting, until he bellowed one word at me

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in answer to my question, a word that was ever present in the vocabulary of the camp inmates: "Shit!" At that moment I saw the plain truth and did what marked the culminating point of the first phase of my psychological reaction: I struck out my whole former life.

Suddenly there was a stir among my fellow travelers, who had been standing about with pale, frightened faces, helplessly debating. Again we heard the hoarsely shouted commands. We were driven with blows into the immediate anteroom of the bath. There we assembled around an SS man who waited until we had all arrived. Then he said, "I will give you two minutes, and I shall time you by my watch. In these two minutes you will get fully undressed and drop everything on the floor where you are standing. You will take nothing with you except your shoes, your belt or suspenders, and possibly a truss. I am starting to count - now!"

With unthinkable haste, people tore off their clothes. As the time grew shorter, they became increasingly nervous and pulled clumsily at their under-wear, belts and shoelaces. Then we heard the first sounds of whipping; leather straps beating down on naked bodies.

Next we were herded into another room to be shaved: not only our heads were shorn, but not a hair was left on our entire bodies. Then on to the showers, where we lined up again. We hardly recognized each other; but with great relief some people noted that real water dripped from the sprays.

While we were waiting for the shower, our nakedness was brought home to us: we really had nothing

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now except our bare bodies - even minus hair; all we possessed, literally, was our naked existence. What else remained for us as a material link with our former lives? For me there were my glasses and my belt; the latter I had to exchange later on for a piece of bread. There was an extra bit of excitement in store for the owners of trusses. In the evening the senior prisoner in charge of our hut welcomed us with a speech in which he gave us his word of honor that he would hang, personally, "from that beam" - he pointed to it - any person who had sewn money or precious stones into his truss. Proudly he explained that as a senior inhabitant the camp laws entitled him to do so.

Where our shoes were concerned, matters were not so simple. Although we were supposed to keep them, those who had fairly decent pairs had to give them up after all and were given in exchange shoes that did not fit. In for real trouble were those prisoners who had followed the apparently well-meant advice (given in the anteroom) of the senior prisoners and had shortened their jackboots by cutting the tops off, then smearing soap on the cut edges to hide the sabotage. The SS men seemed to have waited for just that. All suspected of this crime had to go into a small adjoining room. After a time we again heard the lashings of the strap, and the screams of tortured men. This time it lasted for quite a while.

Thus the illusions some of us still held were destroyed one by one, and then, quite unexpectedly, most of us were overcome by a grim sense of humor. We knew that we had nothing to lose except our so ridiculously naked lives. When the showers started to run, we all tried very hard to make fun, both about

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ourselves and about each other. After all, real water did flow from the sprays!

Apart from that strange kind of humor, another sensation seized us: curiosity. I have experienced this kind of curiosity before, as a fundamental reaction toward certain strange circumstances. When my life was once endangered by a climbing accident, I felt only one sensation at the critical moment: curiosity, curiosity as to whether I should come out of it alive or with a fractured skull or some other injuries.

Cold curiosity predominated even in Auschwitz, somehow detaching the mind from its surroundings, which came to be regarded with a kind of objectivity. At that time one cultivated this state of mind as a means of protection. We were anxious to know what would happen next; and what would be the consequence, for example, of our standing in the open air, in the chill of late autumn, stark naked, and still wet from the showers. In the next few days our curiosity evolved into surprise; surprise that we did not catch cold.

There were many similar surprises in store for new arrivals. The medical men among us learned first of all: "Textbooks tell lies!" Somewhere it is said that man cannot exist without sleep for more than a stated number of hours. Quite wrong! I had been convinced that there were certain things I just could not do: I could not sleep without this or I could not live with that or the other. The first night in Auschwitz we slept in beds which were constructed in tiers. On each tier (measuring about six-and-a-half to eight feet) slept nine men, directly on the boards. Two blankets were shared by each nine men. We could, of course, lie only

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on our sides, crowded and huddled against each other, which had some advantages because of the bitter cold. Though it was forbidden to take shoes up to the bunks, some people did use them secretly as pillows in spite of the fact that they were caked with mud. Otherwise one's head had to rest on the crook of an almost dislocated arm. And yet sleep came and brought oblivion and relief from pain for a few hours.

I would like to mention a few similar surprises on how much we could endure: we were unable to clean our teeth, and yet, in spite of that and a severe vitamin deficiency, we had healthier gums than ever before. We had to wear the same shirts for half a year, until they had lost all appearance of being shirts. For days we were unable to wash, even partially, because of frozen water-pipes, and yet the sores and abrasions on hands which were dirty from work in the soil did not suppurate (that is, unless there was frostbite). Or for instance, a light sleeper, who used to be disturbed by the slightest noise in the next room, now found himself lying pressed against a comrade who snored loudly a few inches from his ear and yet slept quite soundly through the noise.

If someone now asked of us the truth of Dostoevski's statement that flatly defines man as a being who can get used to anything, we would reply, "Yes, a man can get used to anything, but do not ask us how." But our psychological investigations have not taken us that far yet; neither had we prisoners reached that point. We were still in the first phase of our psychological reactions.

The thought of suicide was entertained by nearly everyone, if only for a brief time. It was born of the

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hopelessness of the situation, the constant danger of death looming over us daily and hourly, and the closeness of the deaths suffered by many of the others. From personal convictions which will be mentioned later, I made myself a firm promise, on my first evening in camp, that I would not "run into the wire." This was a phrase used in camp to describe the most popular method of suicide - touching the electrically charged barbed-wire fence. It was not entirely difficult for me to make this decision. There was little point in committing suicide, since, for the average inmate, life expectation, calculating objectively and counting all likely chances, was very poor. He could not with any assurance expect to be among the small percentage of men who survived all the selections. The prisoner of Auschwitz, in the first phase of shock, did not fear death. Even the gas chambers lost their horrors for him after the first few days - after all, they spared him the act of committing suicide.

Friends whom I have met later have told me that I was not one of those whom the shock of admission greatly depressed. I only smiled, and quite sincerely, when the following episode occurred the morning after our first night in Auschwitz. In spite of strict orders not to leave our "blocks," a colleague of mine, who had arrived in Auschwitz several weeks previously, smuggled himself into our hut. He wanted to calm and comfort us and tell us a few things. He had become so thin that at first we did not recognize him. With a show of good humor and a Devil-may-care attitude he gave us a few hurried tips: "Don't be afraid! Don't fear the selections! Dr. M---- (the SS medical chief) has a soft spot for doctors." (This was wrong; my friend's kindly

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words were misleading. One prisoner, the doctor of a block of huts and a man of some sixty years, told me how he had entreated Dr. M---- to let off his son, who was destined for gas. Dr. M---- coldly refused.)

"But one thing I beg of you"; he continued, "shave daily, if at all possible, even if you have to use a piece of glass to do it . . . even if you have to give your last piece of bread for it. You will look younger and the scraping will make your cheeks look ruddier. If you want to stay alive, there is only one way: look fit for work. If you even limp, because, let us say, you have a small blister on your heel, and an SS man spots this, he will wave you aside and the next day you are sure to be gassed. Do you know what we mean by a 'Moslem'? A man who looks miserable, down and out, sick and emaciated, and who cannot manage hard physical labor any longer . . . that is a 'Moslem.' Sooner or later, usually sooner, every 'Moslem' goes to the gas chambers. Therefore, remember: shave, stand and walk smartly; then you need not be afraid of gas. All of you standing here, even if you have only been here twenty-four hours, you need not fear gas, except perhaps you." And then he pointed to me and said, "I hope you don't mind my telling you frankly." To the others he repeated, "Of all of you he is the only one who must fear the next selection. So, don't worry!"

And I smiled. I am now convinced that anyone in my place on that day would have done the same.

I think it was Lessing who once said, "There are things which must cause you to lose your reason or you have none to lose." An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal behavior. Even we psy-

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chiatrists expect the reactions of a man to an abnormal situation, such as being committed to an asylum, to be abnormal in proportion to the degree of his normality. The reaction of a man to his admission to a concentration camp also represents an abnormal state of mind, but judged objectively it is a normal and, as will be shown later, typical reaction to the given circumstances. These reactions, as I have described them, began to change in a few days. The prisoner passed from the first to the second phase; the phase of relative apathy in which he achieved a kind of emotional death.

Apart from the already described reactions, the newly arrived prisoner experienced the tortures of other most painful emotions, all of which he tried to deaden. First of all, there was his boundless longing for his home and his family. This often could become so acute that he felt himself consumed by longing. Then there was disgust; disgust with all the ugliness which surrounded him, even in its mere external forms.

Most of the prisoners were given a uniform of rags which would have made a scarecrow elegant by comparison. Between the huts in the camp lay pure filth, and the more one worked to clear it away, the more one had to come in contact with it. It was a favorite practice to detail a new arrival to a work group whose job was to clean the latrines and remove the sewage. If, as usually happened, some of the excrement splashed into his face during its transport over bumpy fields, any sign of disgust by the prisoner or any attempt to wipe off the filth would only be punished with a blow from a Capo. And thus the mortification of normal reactions was hastened.

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At first the prisoner looked away if he saw the punishment parades of another group; he could not bear to see fellow prisoners march up and down for hours in the mire, their movements directed by blows. Days or weeks later things changed. Early in the morning, when it was still dark, the prisoner stood in front of the gate with his detachment, ready to march. He heard a scream and saw how a comrade was knocked down, pulled to his feet again, and knocked down once more - and why? He was feverish but had reported to sick-bay at an improper time. He was being punished for this irregular attempt to be relieved of his duties.

But the prisoner who had passed into the second stage of his psychological reactions did not avert his eyes any more. By then his feelings were blunted, and he watched unmoved. Another example: he found himself waiting at sick-bay, hoping to be granted two days of light work inside the camp because of injuries or perhaps edema or fever. He stood unmoved while a twelve-year-old boy was carried in who had been forced to stand at attention for hours in the snow or to work outside with bare feet because there were no shoes for him in the camp. His toes had become frostbitten, and the doctor on duty picked off the black gangrenous stumps with tweezers, one by one. Disgust, horror and pity are emotions that our spectator could not really feel any more. The sufferers, the dying and the dead, became such commonplace sights to him after a few weeks of camp life that they could not move him any more.

I spent some time in a hut for typhus patients who ran very high temperatures and were often delirious,

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many of them moribund. After one of them had just died, I watched without any emotional upset the scene that followed, which was repeated over and over again with each death. One by one the prisoners approached the still warm body. One grabbed the remains of a messy meal of potatoes; another decided that the corpse's wooden shoes were an improvement on his own, and exchanged them. A third man did the same with the dead man's coat, and another was glad to be able to secure some - just imagine! - genuine string.

All this I watched with unconcern. Eventually I asked the "nurse" to remove the body. When he decided to do so, he took the corpse by its legs, allowing it to drop into the small corridor between the two rows of boards which were the beds for the fifty typhus patients, and dragged it across the bumpy earthen floor toward the door. The two steps which led up into the open air always constituted a problem for us, since we were exhausted from a chronic lack of food. After a few months' stay in the camp we could not walk up those steps, which were each about six inches high, without putting our hands on the door jambs to pull ourselves up.

The man with the corpse approached the steps. Wearily he dragged himself up. Then the body: first the feet, then the trunk, and finally - with an uncanny rattling noise - the head of the corpse bumped up the two steps.

My place was on the opposite side of the hut, next to the small, sole window, which was built near the floor. While my cold hands clasped a bowl of hot soup from which I sipped greedily, I happened to look out the window. The corpse which had just been removed

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stared in at me with glazed eyes. Two hours before I had spoken to that man. Now I continued sipping my soup.

If my lack of emotion had not surprised me from the standpoint of professional interest, I would not remember this incident now, because there was so little feeling involved in it.

Apathy, the blunting of the emotions and the feeling that one could not care any more, were the symptoms arising during the second stage of the prisoner's psychological reactions, and which eventually made him insensitive to daily and hourly beatings. By means of this insensibility the prisoner soon surrounded himself with a very necessary protective shell.

Beatings occurred on the slightest provocation, sometimes for no reason at all. For example, bread was rationed out at our work site and we had to line up for it. Once, the man behind me stood off a little to one side and that lack of symmetry displeased the SS guard. I did not know what was going on in the line behind me, nor in the mind of the SS guard, but suddenly I received two sharp blows on my head. Only then did I spot the guard at my side who was using his stick. At such a moment it is not the physical pain which hurts the most (and this applies to adults as much as to punished children); it is the mental agony caused by the injustice, the unreasonableness of it all.

Strangely enough, a blow which does not even find its mark can, under certain circumstances, hurt more than one that finds its mark. Once I was standing on a railway track in a snowstorm. In spite of the weather

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our party had to keep on working. I worked quite hard at mending the track with gravel, since that was the only way to keep warm. For only one moment I paused to get my breath and to lean on my shovel. Unfortunately the guard turned around just then and thought I was loafing. The pain he caused me was not from any insults or any blows. That guard did not think it worth his while to say anything, not even a swear word, to the ragged, emaciated figure standing before him, which probably reminded him only vaguely of a human form. Instead, he playfully picked up a stone and threw it at me. That, to me, seemed the way to attract the attention of a beast, to call a domestic animal back to its job, a creature with which you have so little in common that you do not even punish it.

The most painful part of beatings is the insult which they imply. At one time we had to carry some long, heavy girders over icy tracks. If one man slipped, he endangered not only himself but all the others who carried the same girder. An old friend of mine had a congenitally dislocated hip. He was glad to be capable of working in spite of it, since the physically disabled were almost certainly sent to death when a selection took place. He limped over the track with an especially heavy girder, and seemed about to fall and drag the others with him. As yet, I was not carrying a girder so I jumped to his assistance without stopping to think. I was immediately hit on the back, rudely reprimanded and ordered to return to my place. A few minutes previously the same guard who struck me had told us deprecatingly that we "pigs" lacked the spirit of comradeship.

Another time, in a forest, with the temperature at 2°

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F, we began to dig up the topsoil, which was frozen hard, in order to lay water pipes. By then I had grown rather weak physically. Along came a foreman with chubby rosy cheeks. His face definitely reminded me of a pig's head. I noticed that he wore lovely warm gloves in that bitter cold. For a time he watched me silently. I felt that trouble was brewing, for in front of me lay the mound of earth which showed exactly how much I had dug.

Then he began: "You pig, I have been watching you the whole time! I'll teach you to work, yet! Wait till you dig dirt with your teeth - you'll die like an animal! In two days I'll finish you off! You've never done a stroke of work in your life. What were you, swine? A businessman?"

I was past caring. But I had to take his threat of killing me seriously, so I straightened up and looked him directly in the eye. "I was a doctor - a specialist."

"What? A doctor? I bet you got a lot of money out of people."

"As it happens, I did most of my work for no money at all, in clinics for the poor." But, now, I had said too much. He threw himself on me and knocked me down, shouting like a madman. I can no longer remember what he shouted.

I want to show with this apparently trivial story that there are moments when indignation can rouse even a seemingly hardened prisoner - indignation not about cruelty or pain, but about the insult connected with it. That time blood rushed to my head because I had to listen to a man judge my life who had so little idea of it, a man (I must confess: the following remark, which I made to my fellow-prisoners after the scene, afforded

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me childish relief) "who looked so vulgar and brutal that the nurse in the out-patient ward in my hospital would not even have admitted him to the waiting room."

Fortunately the Capo in my working party was obligated to me; he had taken a liking to me because I listened to his love stories and matrimonial troubles, which he poured out during the long marches to our work site. I had made an impression on him with my diagnosis of his character and with my psychotherapeutic advice. After that he was grateful, and this had already been of value to me. On several previous occasions he had reserved a place for me next to him in one of the first five rows of our detachment, which usually consisted of two hundred and eighty men. That favor was important. We had to line up early in the morning while it was still dark. Everybody was afraid of being late and of having to stand in the back rows. If men were required for an unpleasant and disliked job, the senior Capo appeared and usually collected the men he needed from the back rows. These men had to march away to another, especially dreaded kind of work under the command of strange guards. Occasionally the senior Capo chose men from the first five rows, just to catch those who tried to be clever. All protests and entreaties were silenced by a few well-aimed kicks, and the chosen victims were chased to the meeting place with shouts and blows.

However, as long as my Capo felt the need of pouring out his heart, this could not happen to me. I had a guaranteed place of honor next to him. But there was another advantage, too. Like nearly all the camp inmates I was suffering from edema. My legs were so

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swollen and the skin on them so tightly stretched that I could scarcely bend my knees. I had to leave my shoes unlaced in order to make them fit my swollen feet. There would not have been space for socks even if I had had any. So my partly bare feet were always wet and my shoes always full of snow. This, of course, caused frostbite and chilblains. Every single step became real torture. Clumps of ice formed on our shoes during our marches over snow-covered fields. Over and again men slipped and those following behind stumbled on top of them. Then the column would stop for a moment, but not for long. One of the guards soon took action and worked over the men with the butt of his rifle to make them get up quickly. The more to the front of the column you were, the less often you were disturbed by having to stop and then to make up for lost time by running on your painful feet. I was very happy to be the personally appointed physician to His Honor the Capo, and to march in the first row at an even pace.

As an additional payment for my services, I could be sure that as long as soup was being dealt out at lunchtime at our work site, he would, when my turn came, dip the ladle right to the bottom of the vat and fish out a few peas. This Capo, a former army officer, even had the courage to whisper to the foreman, whom I had quarreled with, that he knew me to be an unusually good worker. That didn't help matters, but he nevertheless managed to save my life (one of the many times it was to be saved). The day after the episode with the foreman he smuggled me into another work party.

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There were foremen who felt sorry for us and who did their best to ease our situation, at least at the building site. But even they kept on reminding us that an ordinary laborer did several times as much work as we did, and in a shorter time. But they did see reason if they were told that a normal workman did not live on 10½ ounces of bread (theoretically - actually we often had less) and 1¾ pints of thin soup per day; that a normal laborer did not live under the mental stress we had to submit to, not having news of our families, who had either been sent to another camp or gassed right away; that a normal workman was not threatened by death continuously, daily and hourly. I even allowed myself to say once to a kindly foreman, "If you could learn from me how to do a brain operation in as short a time as I am learning this road work from you, I would have great respect for you." And he grinned.

Apathy, the main symptom of the second phase, was a necessary mechanism of self-defense. Reality dimmed, and all efforts and all emotions were centered on one task: preserving one's own life and that of the other fellow. It was typical to hear the prisoners, while they were being herded back to camp from their work sites in the evening, sigh with relief and say, "Well, another day is over."

It can be readily understood that such a state of strain, coupled with the constant necessity of concentrating on the task of staying alive, forced the prisoner's inner life down to a primitive level. Several of my colleagues in camp who were trained in psychoanalysis often spoke of a "regression" in the camp inmate - a retreat to a more primitive form of mental

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life. His wishes and desires became obvious in his dreams.

What did the prisoner dream about most frequently? Of bread, cake, cigarettes, and nice warm baths. The lack of having these simple desires satisfied led him to seek wish-fulfillment in dreams. Whether these dreams did any good is another matter; the dreamer had to wake from them to the reality of camp life, and to the terrible contrast between that and his dream illusions.

I shall never forget how I was roused one night by the groans of a fellow prisoner, who threw himself about in his sleep, obviously having a horrible nightmare. Since I had always been especially sorry for people who suffered from fearful dreams or deliria, I wanted to wake the poor man. Suddenly I drew back the hand which was ready to shake him, frightened at the thing I was about to do. At that moment I became intensely conscious of the fact that no dream, no matter how horrible, could be as bad as the reality of the camp which surrounded us, and to which I was about to recall him.

Because of the high degree of undernourishment which the prisoners suffered, it was natural that the desire for food was the major primitive instinct around which mental life centered. Let us observe the majority of prisoners when they happened to work near each other and were, for once, not closely watched. They would immediately start discussing food. One fellow would ask another working next to him in the ditch what his favorite dishes were. Then they would exchange recipes and plan the menu for the day when they would have a reunion - the day in a distant future

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when they would be liberated and returned home. They would go on and on, picturing it all in detail, until suddenly a warning was passed down the trench, usually in the form of a special password or number: "The guard is coming."

I always regarded the discussions about food as dangerous. Is it not wrong to provoke the organism with such detailed and affective pictures of delicacies when it has somehow managed to adapt itself to extremely small rations and low calories? Though it may afford momentary psychological relief, it is an illusion which physiologically, surely, must not be without danger.

During the later part of our imprisonment, the daily ration consisted of very watery soup given out once daily, and the usual small bread ration. In addition to that, there was the so-called "extra allowance," consisting of three-fourths of an ounce of margarine, or of a slice of poor quality sausage, or of a little piece of cheese, or a bit of synthetic honey, or a spoonful of watery jam, varying daily. In calories, this diet was absolutely inadequate, especially taking into consideration our heavy manual work and our constant exposure to the cold in inadequate clothing. The sick who were "under special care" - that is, those who were allowed to lie in the huts instead of leaving the camp for work - were even worse off.

When the last layers of subcutaneous fat had vanished, and we looked like skeletons disguised with skin and rags, we could watch our bodies beginning to devour themselves. The organism digested its own protein, and the muscles disappeared. Then the body had no powers of resistance left. One after another the

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members of the little community in our hut died. Each of us could calculate with fair accuracy whose turn would be next, and when his own would come. After many observations we knew the symptoms well, which made the correctness of our prognoses quite certain. "He won't last long," or, "This is the next one," we whispered to each other, and when, during our daily search for lice, we saw our own naked bodies in the evening, we thought alike: This body here, my body, is really a corpse already. What has become of me? I am but a small portion of a great mass of human flesh . . . of a mass behind barbed wire, crowded into a few earthen huts; a mass of which daily a certain portion begins to rot because it has become lifeless.

I mentioned above how unavoidable were the thoughts about food and favorite dishes which forced themselves into the consciousness of the prisoner, whenever he had a moment to spare. Perhaps it can be understood, then, that even the strongest of us was longing for the time when he would have fairly good food again, not for the sake of good food itself, but for the sake of knowing that the sub-human existence, which had made us unable to think of anything other than food, would at last cease.

Those who have not gone through a similar experience can hardly conceive of the soul-destroying mental conflict and clashes of will power which a famished man experiences. They can hardly grasp what it means to stand digging in a trench, listening only for the siren to announce 9:30 or 10:00 A.M. - the half-hour lunch interval - when bread would be rationed out (as long as it was still available); repeatedly asking the fore-

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man - if he wasn't a disagreeable fellow - what the time was; and tenderly touching a piece of bread in one's coat pocket, first stroking it with frozen gloveless fingers, then breaking off a crumb and putting it in one's mouth and finally, with the last bit of will power, pocketing it again, having promised oneself that morning to hold out till afternoon.

We could hold endless debates on the sense or nonsense of certain methods of dealing with the small bread ration, which was given out only once daily during the latter part of our confinement. There were two schools of thought. One was in favor of eating up the ration immediately. This had the twofold advantage of satisfying the worst hunger pangs for a very short time at least once a day and of safeguarding against possible theft or loss of the ration. The second group, which held with dividing the ration up, used different arguments. I finally joined their ranks.

The most ghastly moment of the twenty-four hours of camp life was the awakening, when, at a still nocturnal hour, the three shrill blows of a whistle tore us pitilessly from our exhausted sleep and from the longings in our dreams. We then began the tussle with our wet shoes, into which we could scarcely force our feet, which were sore and swollen with edema. And there were the usual moans and groans about petty troubles, such as the snapping of wires which replaced shoelaces. One morning I heard someone, whom I knew to be brave and dignified, cry like a child because he finally had to go to the snowy marching grounds in his bare feet, as his shoes were too shrunken for him to wear. In those ghastly minutes, 1

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found a little bit of comfort; a small piece of bread which I drew out of my pocket and munched with absorbed delight.

Undernourishment, besides being the cause of the general preoccupation with food, probably also explains the fact that the sexual urge was generally absent. Apart from the initial effects of shock, this appears to be the only explanation of a phenomenon which a psychologist was bound to observe in those all-male camps: that, as opposed to all other strictly male establishments - such as army barracks - there was little sexual perversion. Even in his dreams the prisoner did not seem to concern himself with sex, although his frustrated emotions and his finer, higher feelings did find definite expression in them.

With the majority of the prisoners, the primitive life and the effort of having to concentrate on just saving one's skin led to a total disregard of anything not serving that purpose, and explained the prisoners' complete lack of sentiment. This was brought home to me on my transfer from Auschwitz to a camp affiliated with Dachau. The train which carried us - about 2,000 prisoners - passed through Vienna. At about midnight we passed one of the Viennese railway stations. The track was going to lead us past the street where I was born, past the house where I had lived many years of my life, in fact, until I was taken prisoner.

There were fifty of us in the prison car, which had two small, barred peepholes. There was only enough room for one group to squat on the floor, while the others, who had to stand up for hours, crowded round the peepholes. Standing on tiptoe and looking past the

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others' heads through the bars of the window, I caught an eerie glimpse of my native town. We all felt more dead than alive, since we thought that our transport was heading for the camp at Mauthausen and that we had only one or two weeks to live. I had a distinct feeling that I saw the streets, the squares and the houses of my childhood with the eyes of a dead man who had come back from another world and was looking down on a ghostly city.

After hours of delay the train left the station. And there was the street - my street! The young lads who had a number of years of camp life behind them and for whom such a journey was a great event stared attentively through the peephole. I began to beg them, to entreat them, to let me stand in front for one moment only. I tried to explain how much a look through that window meant to me just then. My request was refused with rudeness and cynicism: "You lived here all those years? Well, then you have seen quite enough already!"

In general there was also a "cultural hibernation" in the camp. There were two exceptions to this: politics and religion. Politics were talked about everywhere in camp, almost continuously; the discussions were based chiefly on rumors, which were snapped up and passed around avidly. The rumors about the military situation were usually contradictory. They followed one another rapidly and succeeded only in making a contribution to the war of nerves that was waged in the minds of all the prisoners. Many times, hopes for a speedy end to the war, which had been fanned by optimistic rumors, were disappointed. Some men lost

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all hope, but it was the incorrigible optimists who were the most irritating companions.

The religious interest of the prisoners, as far and as soon as it developed, was the most sincere imaginable. The depth and vigor of religious belief often surprised and moved a new arrival. Most impressive in this connection were improvised prayers or services in the corner of a hut, or in the darkness of the locked cattle truck in which we were brought back from a distant work site, tired, hungry and frozen in our ragged clothing.

In the winter and spring of 1945 there was an outbreak of typhus which infected nearly all the prisoners. The mortality was great among the weak, who had to keep on with their hard work as long as they possibly could. The quarters for the sick were most inadequate, there were practically no medicines or attendants. Some of the symptoms of the disease were extremely disagreeable: an irrepressible aversion to even a scrap of food (which was an additional danger to life) and terrible attacks of delirium. The worst case of delirium was suffered by a friend of mine who thought that he was dying and wanted to pray. In his delirium he could not find the words to do so. To avoid these attacks of delirium, I tried, as did many of the others, to keep awake for most of the night. For hours I composed speeches in my mind. Eventually I began to reconstruct the manuscript which I had lost in the disinfection chamber of Auschwitz, and scribbled the key words in shorthand on tiny scraps of paper.

Occasionally a scientific debate developed in camp. Once I witnessed something I had never seen, even in my normal life, although it lay somewhat near my own

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professional interests: a spiritualistic seance. I had been invited to attend by the camp's chief doctor (also a prisoner), who knew that I was a specialist in psychiatry. The meeting took place in his small, private room in the sick quarters. A small circle had gathered, among them, quite illegally, the warrant officer from the sanitation squad.

One man began to invoke the spirits with a kind of prayer. The camp's clerk sat in front of a blank sheet of paper, without any conscious intention of writing. During the next ten minutes (after which time the seance was terminated because of the medium's failure to conjure the spirits to appear) his pencil slowly drew lines across the paper, forming quite legibly "VAE V." It was asserted that the clerk had never learned Latin and that he had never before heard the words "*vae victis*" - woe to the vanquished. In my opinion he must have heard them once in his life, without recollecting them, and they must have been available to the "spirit" (the spirit of his subconscious mind) at that time, a few months before our liberation and the end of the war.

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 a 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

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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! 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 was 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 one 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 up-turned 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 on 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

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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 transfixated 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.

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"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 did not 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 thy heart, love is as strong as death."

This intensification of inner life helped the prisoner find a refuge from the emptiness, desolation and spirit-

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ual poverty of his existence, by letting him escape into the past. When given free rein, his imagination played with past events, often not important ones, but minor happenings and trifling things. His nostalgic memory glorified them and they assumed a strange character. Their world and their existence seemed very distant and the spirit reached out for them longingly: In my mind I took bus rides, unlocked the front door of my apartment, answered my telephone, switched on the electric lights. Our thoughts often centered on such details, and these memories could move one to tears.

As the inner life of the prisoner tended to become more intense, he also experienced the beauty of art and nature as never before. Under their influence he sometimes even forgot his own frightful circumstances. If someone had seen our faces on the journey from Auschwitz to a Bavarian camp as we beheld the mountains of Salzburg with their summits glowing in the sunset, through the little barred windows of the prison carriage, he would never have believed that those were the faces of men who had given up all hope of life and liberty. Despite that factor - or maybe because of it - we were carried away by nature's beauty, which we had missed for so long.

In camp, too, a man might draw the attention of a comrade working next to him to a nice view of the setting sun shining through the tall trees of the Bavarian woods (as in the famous water color by Dürer), the same woods in which we had built an enormous, hidden munitions plant. One evening, when we were already resting on the floor of our hut, dead tired, soup bowls in hand, a fellow prisoner rushed in and asked

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us to run out to the assembly grounds and see the wonderful sunset. Standing outside we saw sinister clouds glowing in the west and the whole sky alive with clouds of ever-changing shapes and colors, from steel blue to blood red. The desolate grey mud huts provided a sharp contrast, while the puddles on the muddy ground reflected the glowing sky. Then, after minutes of moving silence, one prisoner said to another, "How beautiful the world *could* be!"

Another time we were at work in a trench. The dawn was grey around us; grey was the sky above; grey the snow in the pale light of dawn; grey the rags in which my fellow prisoners were clad, and grey their faces. I was again conversing silently with my wife, or perhaps I was struggling to find the *reason* for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious "Yes" in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. "*Et lux in tenebris lucet*" - and the light shineth in the darkness. For hours I stood hacking at the icy ground. The guard passed by, insulting me, and once again I communed with my beloved. More and more I felt that she was present, that she was with me; I had the feeling that I was able to touch her, able to stretch out my hand and grasp hers. The feeling was very strong: she was *there*. Then, at that very moment, a bird flew down silently and perched just in

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front of me, on the heap of soil which I had dug up from the ditch, and looked steadily at me.

Earlier, I mentioned art. Is there such a thing in a concentration camp? It rather depends on what one chooses to call art. A kind of cabaret was improvised from time to time. A hut was cleared temporarily, a few wooden benches were pushed or nailed together and a program was drawn up. In the evening those who had fairly good positions in camp - the Capos and the workers who did not have to leave camp on distant marches - assembled there. They came to have a few laughs or perhaps to cry a little; anyway, to forget. There were songs, poems, jokes, some with underlying satire regarding the camp. All were meant to help us forget, and they did help. The gatherings were so effective that a few ordinary prisoners went to see the cabaret in spite of their fatigue even though they missed their daily portion of food by going.

During the half-hour lunch interval when soup (which the contractors paid for and for which they did not spend much) was ladled out at our work site, we were allowed to assemble in an unfinished engine room. On entering, everyone got a ladleful of the watery soup. While we sipped it greedily, a prisoner climbed onto a tub and sang Italian arias. We enjoyed the songs, and he was guaranteed a double helping of soup, straight "from the bottom" - that meant with peas!

Rewards were given in camp not only for entertainment, but also for applause. I, for example, could have found protection (how lucky I was never in need of it!) from the camp's most dreaded Capo, who for more

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than one good reason was known as "The Murderous Capo." This is how it happened. One evening I had the great honor of being invited again to the room where the spiritualistic seance had taken place. There were gathered the same intimate friends of the chief doctor and, most illegally, the warrant officer from the sanitation squad was again present. The Murderous Capo entered the room by chance, and he was asked to recite one of his poems, which had become famous (or infamous) in camp. He did not need to be asked twice and quickly produced a kind of diary from which he began to read samples of his art. I bit my lips till they hurt in order to keep from laughing at one of his love poems, and very likely that saved my life. Since I was also generous with my applause, my life might have been saved even had I been detailed to his working party to which I had previously been assigned for one day - a day that was quite enough for me. It was useful, anyway, to be known to The Murderous Capo from a favorable angle. So I applauded as hard as I could.

Generally speaking, of course, any pursuit of art in camp was somewhat grotesque. I would say that the real impression made by anything connected with art arose only from the ghostlike contrast between the performance and the background of desolate camp life. I shall never forget how I awoke from the deep sleep of exhaustion on my second night in Auschwitz - roused by music. The senior warden of the hut had some kind of celebration in his room, which was near the entrance of the hut. Tipsy voices bawled some hackneyed tunes. Suddenly there was a silence and into the night a violin sang a desperately sad

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tango, an unusual tune not spoiled by frequent playing. The violin wept and a part of me wept with it, for on that same day someone had a twenty-fourth birthday. That someone lay in another part of the Auschwitz camp, possibly only a few hundred or a thousand yards away, and yet completely out of reach. That someone was my wife.

To discover that there was any semblance of art in a concentration camp must be surprise enough for an outsider, but he may be even more astonished to hear that one could find a sense of humor there as well; of course, only the faint trace of one, and then only for a few seconds or minutes. Humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds. I practically trained a friend of mine who worked next to me on the building site to develop a sense of humor. I suggested to him that we would promise each other to invent at least one amusing story daily, about some incident that could happen one day after our liberation. He was a surgeon and had been an assistant on the staff of a large hospital. So I once tried to get him to smile by describing to him how he would be unable to lose the habits of camp life when he returned to his former work. On the building site (especially when the supervisor made his tour of inspection) the foreman encouraged us to work faster by shouting: "Action! Action!" I told my friend, "One day you will be back in the operating room, performing a big abdominal operation. Suddenly an orderly

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will rush in announcing the arrival of the senior surgeon by shouting, 'Action! Action!' "

Sometimes the other men invented amusing dreams about the future, such as forecasting that during a future dinner engagement they might forget themselves when the soup was served and beg the hostess to ladle it "from the bottom."

The attempt to develop a sense of humor and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living. Yet it is possible to practice the art of living even in a concentration camp, although suffering is omnipresent. To draw an analogy: a man's suffering is similar to the behavior of gas. If a certain quantity of gas is pumped into an empty chamber, it will fill the chamber completely and evenly, no matter how big the chamber. Thus suffering completely fills the human soul and conscious mind, no matter whether the suffering is great or little. Therefore the "size" of human suffering is absolutely relative.

It also follows that a very trifling thing can cause the greatest of joys. Take as an example something that happened on our journey from Auschwitz to the camp affiliated with Dachau. We had all been afraid that our transport was heading for the Mauthausen camp. We became more and more tense as we approached a certain bridge over the Danube which the train would have to cross to reach Mauthausen, according to the statement of experienced traveling companions. Those who have never seen anything similar cannot possibly imagine the dance of joy performed in the carriage by

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the prisoners when they saw that our transport was not crossing the bridge and was instead heading "only" for Dachau.

And again, what happened on our arrival in that camp, after a journey lasting two days and three nights? There had not been enough room for everybody to crouch on the floor of the carriage at the same time. The majority of us had to stand all the way, while a few took turns at squatting on the scanty straw which was soaked with human urine. When we arrived the first important news that we heard from older prisoners was that this comparatively small camp (its population was 2,500) had no "oven," no crematorium, no gas! That meant that a person who had become a "Moslem" could not be taken straight to the gas chamber, but would have to wait until a so-called "sick convoy" had been arranged to return to Auschwitz. This joyful surprise put us all in a good mood. The wish of the senior warden of our hut in Auschwitz had come true: we had come, as quickly as possible, to a camp which did not have a "chimney" - unlike Auschwitz. We laughed and cracked jokes in spite of, and during, all we had to go through in the next few hours.

When we new arrivals were counted, one of us was missing. So we had to wait outside in the rain and cold wind until the missing man was found. He was at last discovered in a hut, where he had fallen asleep from exhaustion. Then the roll call was turned into a punishment parade. All through the night and late into the next morning, we had to stand outside, frozen and soaked to the skin after the strain of our long journey. And yet we were all very pleased! There was no

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chimney in this camp and Auschwitz was a long way off.

Another time we saw a group of convicts pass our work site. How obvious the relativity of all suffering appeared to us then! We envied those prisoners their relatively well-regulated, secure and happy life. They surely had regular opportunities to take baths, we thought sadly. They surely had toothbrushes and clothesbrushes, mattresses - a separate one for each of them - and monthly mail bringing them news of the whereabouts of their relatives, or at least of whether they were still alive or not. We had lost all that a long time ago.

And how we envied those of us who had the opportunity to get into a factory and work in a sheltered room! It was everyone's wish to have such a lifesaving piece of luck. The scale of relative luck extends even further. Even among those detachments outside the camp (in one of which I was a member) there were some units which were considered worse than others. One could envy a man who did not have to wade in deep, muddy clay on a steep slope emptying the tubs of a small field railway for twelve hours daily. Most of the daily accidents occurred on this job, and they were often fatal.

In other work parties the foremen maintained an apparently local tradition of dealing out numerous blows, which made us talk of the relative luck of not being under their command, or perhaps of being under it only temporarily. Once, by an unlucky chance, I got into such a group. If an air raid alarm had not interrupted us after two hours (during which time the foreman had worked on me especially), making it

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necessary to regroup the workers afterwards, I think that I would have returned to camp on one of the sledges which carried those who had died or were dying from exhaustion. No one can imagine the relief that the siren can bring in such a situation; not even a boxer who has heard the bell signifying the finish of a round and who is thus saved at the last minute from the danger of a knockout.

We were grateful for the smallest of mercies. We were glad when there was time to delouse before going to bed, although in itself this was no pleasure, as it meant standing naked in an unheated hut where icicles hung from the ceiling. But we were thankful if there was no air raid alarm during this operation and the lights were not switched off. If we could not do the job properly, we were kept awake half the night.

The meager pleasures of camp life provided a kind of negative happiness, - "freedom from suffering," as Schopenhauer put it - and even that in a relative way only. Real positive pleasures, even small ones, were very few. I remember drawing up a kind of balance sheet of pleasures one day and finding that in many, many past weeks I had experienced only two pleasurable moments. One occurred when, on returning from work, I was admitted to the cook house after a long wait and was assigned to the line filing up to prisoner-cook F----. He stood behind one of the huge pans and ladled soup into the bowls which were held out to him by the prisoners, who hurriedly filed past. He was the only cook who did not look at the men whose bowls he was filling; the only cook who dealt out the soup equally, regardless of recipient, and who did not make favorites of his personal friends or countrymen, pick-

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ing out the potatoes for them, while the others got watery soup skimmed from the top.

But it is not for me to pass judgment on those prisoners who put their own people above everyone else. Who can throw a stone at a man who favors his friends under circumstances when, sooner or later, it is a question of life or death? No man should judge unless he asks himself in absolute honesty whether in a similar situation he might not have done the same.

Long after I had resumed normal life again (that means a long time after my release from camp), somebody showed me an illustrated weekly with photographs of prisoners lying crowded on their bunks, staring dully at a visitor. "Isn't this terrible, the dreadful staring faces - everything about it."

"Why?" I asked, for I genuinely did not understand. For at that moment I saw it all again: at 5:00 A.M. it was still pitch dark outside. I was lying on the hard boards in an earthen hut where about seventy of us were "taken care of." We were sick and did not have to leave camp for work; we did not have to go on parade. We could lie all day in our little corner in the hut and doze and wait for the daily distribution of bread (which, of course, was reduced for the sick) and for the daily helping of soup (watered down and also decreased in quantity). But how content we were; happy in spite of everything. While we cowered against each other to avoid any unnecessary loss of warmth, and were too lazy and disinterested to move a finger unnecessarily, we heard shrill whistles and shouts from the square where the night shift had just returned and was assembling for roll call. The door

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was flung open, and the snowstorm blew into our hut. An exhausted comrade, covered with snow, stumbled inside to sit down for a few minutes. But the senior warden turned him out again. It was strictly forbidden to admit a stranger to a hut while a check-up on the men was in progress. How sorry I was for that fellow and how glad not to be in his skin at that moment, but instead to be sick and able to doze on in the sick quarters! What a lifesaver it was to have two days there, and perhaps even two extra days after those!

All this came to my mind when I saw the photographs in the magazine. When I explained, my listeners understood why I did not find the photograph so terrible: the people shown on it might not have been so unhappy after all.

On my fourth day in the sick quarters I had just been detailed to the night shift when the chief doctor rushed in and asked me to volunteer for medical duties in another camp containing typhus patients. Against the urgent advice of my friends (and despite the fact that almost none of my colleagues offered their services), I decided to volunteer. I knew that in a working party I would die in a short time. But if I had to die there might at least be some sense in my death. I thought that it would doubtless be more to the purpose to try and help my comrades as a doctor than to vegetate or finally lose my life as the unproductive laborer that I was then.

For me this was simple mathematics, not sacrifice. But secretly, the warrant officer from the sanitation squad had ordered that the two doctors who had volunteered for the typhus camp should be "taken care of" till they left. We looked so weak that he

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feared that he might have two additional corpses on his hands, rather than two doctors.

I mentioned earlier how everything that was not connected with the immediate task of keeping oneself and one's closest friends alive lost its value. Everything was sacrificed to this end. A man's character became involved to the point that he was caught in a mental turmoil which threatened all the values he held and threw them into doubt. Under the influence of a world which no longer recognized the value of human life and human dignity, which had robbed man of his will and had made him an object to be exterminated (having planned, however, to make full use of him first - to the last ounce of his physical resources) - under this influence the personal ego finally suffered a loss of values. If the man in the concentration camp did not struggle against this in a last effort to save his self-respect, he lost the feeling of being an individual, a being with a mind, with inner freedom and personal value. He thought of himself then as only a part of an enormous mass of people; his existence descended to the level of animal life. The men were herded - sometimes to one place then to another; sometimes driven together, then apart - like a flock of sheep without a thought or a will of their own. A small but dangerous pack watched them from all sides, well versed in methods of torture and sadism. They drove the herd incessantly, backwards and forwards, with shouts, kicks and blows. And we, the sheep, thought of two things only - how to evade the bad dogs and how to get a little food.

Just like sheep that crowd timidly into the center of

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a herd, each of us tried to get into the middle of our formations. That gave one a better chance of avoiding the blows of the guards who were marching on either side and to the front and rear of our column. The central position had the added advantage of affording protection against the bitter winds. It was, therefore, in an attempt to save one's own skin that one literally tried to submerge into the crowd. This was done automatically in the formations. But at other times it was a very conscious effort on our part - in conformity with one of the camp's most imperative laws of self-preservation: Do not be conspicuous. We tried at all times to avoid attracting the attention of the SS.

There were times, of course, when it was possible, and even necessary, to keep away from the crowd. It is well known that an enforced community life, in which attention is paid to everything one does at all times, may result in an irresistible urge to get away, at least for a short while. The prisoner craved to be alone with himself and his thoughts. He yearned for privacy and for solitude. After my transportation to a so-called "rest camp," I had the rare fortune to find solitude for about five minutes at a time. Behind the earthen hut where I worked and in which were crowded about fifty delirious patients, there was a quiet spot in a corner of the double fence of barbed wire surrounding the camp. A tent had been improvised there with a few poles and branches of trees in order to shelter a half-dozen corpses (the daily death rate in the camp). There was also a shaft leading to the water pipes. I squatted on the wooden lid of this shaft whenever my services were not needed. I just sat and looked out at the green flowering slopes and the distant blue hills of the Bavarian

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ian landscape, framed by the meshes of barbed wire. I dreamed longingly, and my thoughts wandered north and northeast, in the direction of my home, but I could only see clouds.

The corpses near me, crawling with lice, did not bother me. Only the steps of passing guards could rouse me from my dreams; or perhaps it would be a call to the sick-bay or to collect a newly arrived supply of medicine for my hut - consisting of perhaps five or ten tablets of aspirin, to last for several days for fifty patients. I collected them and then did my rounds, feeling the patients' pulses and giving half-tablets to the serious cases. But the desperately ill received no medicine. It would not have helped, and besides, it would have deprived those for whom there was still some hope. For light cases, I had nothing, except perhaps a word of encouragement. In this way I dragged myself from patient to patient, though I myself was weak and exhausted from a serious attack of typhus. Then I went back to my lonely place on the wood cover of the water shaft.

This shaft, incidentally, once saved the lives of three fellow prisoners. Shortly before liberation, mass transports were organized to go to Dachau, and these three prisoners wisely tried to avoid the trip. They climbed down the shaft and hid there from the guards. I calmly sat on the lid, looking innocent and playing a childish game of throwing pebbles at the barbed wire. On spotting me, the guard hesitated for a moment, but then passed on. Soon I could tell the three men below that the worst danger was over.

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It is very difficult for an outsider to grasp how very little value was placed on human life in camp. The camp inmate was hardened, but possibly became more conscious of this complete disregard of human existence when a convoy of sick men was arranged. The emaciated bodies of the sick were thrown on two-wheeled carts which were drawn by prisoners for many miles, often through snowstorms, to the next camp. If one of the sick men had died before the cart left, he was thrown on anyway - the list had to be correct! The list was the only thing that mattered. A man counted only because he had a prison number. One literally became a number: dead or alive - that was unimportant; the life of a "number" was completely irrelevant. What stood behind that number and that life mattered even less: the fate, the history, the name of the man. In the transport of sick patients that I, in my capacity as a doctor, had to accompany from one camp in Bavaria to another, there was a young prisoner whose brother was not on the list and therefore would have to be left behind. The young man begged so long that the camp warden decided to work an exchange, and the brother took the place of a man who, at the moment, preferred to stay behind. But the list had to be correct! That was easy. The brother just exchanged numbers with the other prisoner.

As I have mentioned before, we had no documents; everyone was lucky to own his body, which, after all, was still breathing. All else about us, i.e.. the rags hanging from our gaunt skeletons, was only of interest if we were assigned to a transport of sick patients. The departing "Moslems" were examined with unabashed

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curiosity to see whether their coats or shoes were not better than one's own. After all, their fates were sealed. But those who stayed behind in camp, who were still capable of some work, had to make use of every means to improve their chances of survival. They were not sentimental. The prisoners saw themselves completely dependent on the moods of the guards - playthings of fate - and this made them even less human than the circumstances warranted.

In Auschwitz I had laid down a rule for myself which proved to be a good one and which most of my comrades later followed. I generally answered all kinds of questions truthfully. But I was silent about anything that was not expressly asked for. If I were asked my age, I gave it. If asked about my profession, I said "doctor," but did not elaborate. The first morning in Auschwitz an SS officer came to the parade ground. We had to fall into separate groups of prisoners: over forty years, under forty years, metal workers, mechanics, and so forth. Then we were examined for ruptures and some prisoners had to form a new group. The group that I was in was driven to another hut, where we lined up again. After being sorted out once more and having answered questions as to my age and profession, I was sent to another small group. Once more we were driven to another hut and grouped differently. This continued for some time, and I became quite unhappy, finding myself among strangers who spoke unintelligible foreign languages. Then came the last selection, and I found myself back in the group that had been with me in the first hut!

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They had barely noticed that I had been sent from hut to hut in the meantime. But I was aware that in those few minutes fate had passed me in many different forms.

When the transport of sick patients for the "rest camp" was organized, my name (that is, my number) was put on the list, since a few doctors were needed. But no one was convinced that the destination was really a rest camp. A few weeks previously the same transport had been prepared. Then, too, everyone had thought that it was destined for the gas ovens. When it was announced that anyone who volunteered for the dreaded night shift would be taken off the transport list, eighty-two prisoners volunteered immediately. A quarter of an hour later the transport was canceled, but the eighty-two stayed on the list for the night shift. For the majority of them, this meant death within the next fortnight.

Now the transport for the rest camp was arranged for the second time. Again no one knew whether this was a ruse to obtain the last bit of work from the sick - if only for fourteen days - or whether it would go to the gas ovens or to a genuine rest camp. The chief doctor, who had taken a liking to me, told me furtively one evening at a quarter to ten, "I have made it known in the orderly room that you can still have your name crossed off the list; you may do so up till ten o'clock."

I told him that this was not my way; that I had learned to let fate take its course. "I might as well stay with my friends," I said. There was a look of pity in his eyes, as if he knew. . . . He shook my hand silently, as

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though it were a farewell, not for life, but from life. Slowly I walked back to my hut. There I found a good friend waiting for me.

"You really want to go with them?" he asked sadly.

"Yes, I am going."

Tears came to his eyes and I tried to comfort him. Then there was something else to do - to make my will:

"Listen, Otto, if I don't get back home to my wife, and if you should see her again, then tell her that I talked of her daily, hourly. You remember. Secondly, I have loved her more than anyone. Thirdly, the short time I have been married to her outweighs everything, even all we have gone through here."

Otto, where are you now? Are you alive? What has happened to you since our last hour together? Did you find your wife again? And do you remember how I made you learn my will by heart - word for word - in spite of your childlike tears?

The next morning I departed with the transport. This time it was not a ruse. We were not heading for the gas chambers, and we actually did go to a rest camp. Those who had pitied me remained in a camp where famine was to rage even more fiercely than in our new camp. They tried to save themselves, but they only sealed their own fates. Months later, after liberation, I met a friend from the old camp. He related to me how he, as camp policeman, had searched for a piece of human flesh that was missing from a pile of corpses. He confiscated it from a pot in which he found it cooking. Cannibalism had broken out. I had left just in time.

Does this not bring to mind the story of Death in

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Teheran? A rich and mighty Persian once walked in his garden with one of his servants. The servant cried that he had just encountered Death, who had threatened him. He begged his master to give him his fastest horse so that he could make haste and flee to Teheran, which he could reach that same evening. The master consented and the servant galloped off on the horse. On returning to his house the master himself met Death, and questioned him, "Why did you terrify and threaten my servant?" "I did not threaten him; I only showed surprise in still finding him here when I planned to meet him tonight in Teheran," said Death.

The camp inmate was frightened of making decisions and of taking any sort of initiative whatsoever. This was the result of a strong feeling that fate was one's master, and that one must not try to influence it in any way, but instead let it take its own course. In addition, there was a great apathy, which contributed in no small part to the feelings of the prisoner. At times, lightning decisions had to be made, decisions which spelled life or death. The prisoner would have preferred to let fate make the choice for him. This escape from commitment was most apparent when a prisoner had to make the decision for or against an escape attempt. In those minutes in which he had to make up his mind - and it was always a question of minutes - he suffered the tortures of Hell. Should he make the attempt to flee? Should he take the risk?

I, too, experienced this torment. As the battle-front drew nearer, I had the opportunity to escape. A colleague of mine who had to visit huts outside the camp in the course of his medical duties wanted to escape

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and take me with him. Under the pretense of holding a consultation about a patient whose illness required a specialist's advice, he smuggled me out. Outside the camp, a member of a foreign resistance movement was to supply us with uniforms and documents. At the last moment there were some technical difficulties and we had to return to camp once more. We used this opportunity to provide ourselves with provisions - a few rotten potatoes - and to look for a rucksack.

We broke into an empty hut of the women's camp, which was vacant, as the women had been sent to another camp. The hut was in great disorder; it was obvious that many women had acquired supplies and fled. There were rags, straw, rotting food, and broken crockery. Some bowls were still in good condition and would have been very valuable to us, but we decided not to take them. We knew that lately, as conditions had become desperate, they had been used not only for food, but also as washbasins and chamber pots. (There was a strictly enforced rule against having any kind of utensil in the hut. However, some people were forced to break this rule, especially the typhus patients, who were much too weak to go outside even with help.) While I acted as a screen, my friend broke into the hut and returned shortly with a rucksack which he hid under his coat. He had seen another one inside which I was to take. So we changed places and I went in. As I searched in the rubbish, finding the rucksack and even a toothbrush, I suddenly saw, among all the things that had been left behind, the body of a woman.

I ran back to my hut to collect all my possessions: my food bowl, a pair of torn mittens "inherited" from

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a dead typhus patient, and a few scraps of paper covered with shorthand notes (on which, as I mentioned before, I had started to reconstruct the manuscript which I lost at Auschwitz). I made a quick last round of my patients, who were lying huddled on the rotten planks of wood on either side of the huts. I came to my only countryman, who was almost dying, and whose life it had been my ambition to save in spite of his condition. I had to keep my intention to escape to myself, but my comrade seemed to guess that something was wrong (perhaps I showed a little nervousness). In a tired voice he asked me, "You, too, are getting out?" I denied it, but I found it difficult to avoid his sad look. After my round I returned to him. Again a hopeless look greeted me and somehow I felt it to be an accusation. The unpleasant feeling that had gripped me as soon as I had told my friend I would escape with him became more intense. Suddenly I decided to take fate into my own hands for once. I ran out of the hut and told my friend that I could not go with him. As soon as I had told him with finality that I had made up my mind to stay with my patients, the unhappy feeling left me. I did not know what the following days would bring, but I had gained an inward peace that I had never experienced before. I returned to the hut, sat down on the boards at my countryman's feet and tried to comfort him; then I chatted with the others, trying to quiet them in their delirium.

Our last day in camp arrived. As the battle-front came nearer, mass transports had taken nearly all the prisoners to other camps. The camp authorities, the Capos and the cooks had fled. On this day an order was given that the camp must be evacuated completely

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by sunset. Even the few remaining prisoners (the sick, a few doctors, and some "nurses") would have to leave. At night, the camp was to be set on fire. In the afternoon the trucks which were to collect the sick had not yet appeared. Instead the camp gates were suddenly closed and the barbed wire closely watched, so that no one could attempt an escape. The remaining prisoners seemed to be destined to burn with the camp. For the second time my friend and I decided to escape.

We had been given an order to bury three men outside the barbed-wire fence. We were the only two in camp who had strength enough to do the job. Nearly all the others lay in the few huts which were still in use, prostrate with fever and delirium. We now made our plans: along with the first body we would smuggle out my friend's rucksack, hiding it in the old laundry tub which served as a coffin. When we took out the second body we would also carry out my rucksack, and on the third trip we intended to make our escape. The first two trips went according to plan. After we returned, I waited while my friend tried to find a piece of bread so that we would have something to eat during the next few days in the woods. I waited. Minutes passed. I became more and more impatient as he did not return. After three years of imprisonment, I was picturing freedom joyously, imagining how wonderful it would be to run toward the battle-front. But we did not get that far.

The very moment when my friend came back, the camp gate was thrown open. A splendid, aluminum-colored car, on which were painted large red crosses, slowly rolled on to the parade ground. A delegate from

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the International Red Cross in Geneva had arrived, and the camp and its inmates were under his protection. The delegate billeted himself in a farmhouse in the vicinity, in order to be near the camp at all times in case of emergency. Who worried about escape now? Boxes with medicines were unloaded from the car, cigarettes were distributed, we were photographed and joy reigned supreme. Now there was no need for us to risk running toward the fighting line.

In our excitement we had forgotten the third body, so we carried it outside and dropped it into the narrow grave we had dug for the three corpses. The guard who accompanied us - a relatively inoffensive man - suddenly became quite gentle. He saw that the tables might be turned and tried to win our goodwill. He joined in the short prayers that we offered for the dead men before throwing soil over them. After the tension and excitement of the past days and hours, those last days in our race with death, the words of our prayer asking for peace, were as fervent as any ever uttered by the human voice.

And so the last day in camp passed in anticipation of freedom. But we had rejoiced too early. The Red Cross delegate had assured us that an agreement had been signed, and that the camp must not be evacuated. But that night the SS arrived with trucks and brought an order to clear the camp. The last remaining prisoners were to be taken to a central camp, from which they would be sent to Switzerland within forty-eight hours - to be exchanged for some prisoners of war. We scarcely recognized the SS. They were so friendly, trying to persuade us to get in the trucks without fear, telling us that we should be grateful for our good luck.

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Those who were strong enough crowded into the trucks and the seriously ill and feeble were lifted up with difficulty. My friend and I - we did not hide our rucksacks now - stood in the last group, from which thirteen would be chosen for the next to last truck. The chief doctor counted out the requisite number, but he omitted the two of us. The thirteen were loaded into the truck and we had to stay behind. Surprised, very annoyed and disappointed, we blamed the chief doctor, who excused himself by saying that he had been tired and distracted. He said that he had thought we still intended to escape. Impatiently we sat down, keeping our rucksacks on our backs, and waited with the few remaining prisoners for the last truck. We had to wait a long time. Finally we lay down on the mattresses of the deserted guard-room, exhausted by the excitement of the last few hours and days, during which we had fluctuated continuously between hope and despair. We slept in our clothes and shoes, ready for the journey.

The noise of rifles and cannons woke us; the flashes of tracer bullets and gun shots entered the hut. The chief doctor dashed in and ordered us to take cover on the floor. One prisoner jumped on my stomach from the bed above me and with his shoes on. That awakened me all right! Then we grasped what was happening: the battle-front had reached us! The shooting decreased and morning dawned. Outside on the pole at the camp gate a white flag floated in the wind.

Many weeks later we found out that even in those last hours fate had toyed with us few remaining prisoners. We found out just how uncertain human decisions are, especially in matters of life and death. I was

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confronted with photographs which had been taken in a small camp not far from ours. Our friends who had thought they were traveling to freedom that night had been taken in the trucks to this camp, and there they were locked in the huts and burned to death. Their partially charred bodies were recognizable on the photograph. I thought again of Death in Teheran.

Apart from its role as a defensive mechanism, the prisoners' apathy was also the result of other factors. Hunger and lack of sleep contributed to it (as they do in normal life, also) and to the general irritability which was another characteristic of the prisoners' mental state. The lack of sleep was due partly to the pestering of vermin which infested the terribly over-crowded huts because of the general lack of hygiene and sanitation. The fact that we had neither nicotine nor caffeine also contributed to the state of apathy and irritability.

Besides these physical causes, there were mental ones, in the form of certain complexes. The majority of prisoners suffered from a kind of inferiority complex. We all had once been or had fancied ourselves to be "somebody." Now we were treated like complete nonentities. (The consciousness of one's inner value is anchored in higher, more spiritual things, and cannot be shaken by camp life. But how many free men, let alone prisoners, possess it?) Without consciously thinking about it, the average prisoner felt himself utterly degraded. This became obvious when one observed the contrasts offered by the singular sociological structure of the camp. The more "prominent" prisoners, the Capos, the cooks, the store-keepers and the camp policemen, did not, as a rule, feel degraded

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at all, like the majority of prisoners, but on the contrary - promoted! Some even developed miniature delusions of grandeur. The mental reaction of the envious and grumbling majority toward this favored minority found expression in several ways, sometimes in jokes. For instance, I heard one prisoner talk to another about a Capo, saying, "Imagine! I knew that man when he was only the president of a large bank. Isn't it fortunate that he has risen so far in the world?"

Whenever the degraded majority and the promoted minority came into conflict (and there were plenty of opportunities for this, starting with the distribution of food) the results were explosive. Therefore, the general irritability (whose physical causes were discussed above) became most intense when these mental tensions were added. It is not surprising that this tension often ended in a general fight. Since the prisoner continually witnessed scenes of beatings, the impulse toward violence was increased. I myself felt my fists clench when anger came over me while I was famished and tired. I was usually very tired, since we had to stoke our stove - which we were allowed to keep in our hut for the typhus patients - throughout the nights. However, some of the most idyllic hours I have ever spent were in the middle of the night when all the others were delirious or sleeping. I could lie stretched out in front of the stove and roast a few pilfered potatoes in a fire made from stolen charcoal. But the following day I always felt even more tired, insensitive and irritable.

While I was working as a doctor in the typhus block, I also had to take the place of the senior block warden

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who was ill. Therefore, I was responsible to the camp authority for keeping the hut clean - if "clean" can be used to describe such a condition. The pretense at inspection to which the hut was frequently submitted was more for the purpose of torture than of hygiene. More food and a few drugs would have helped, but the only concern of the inspectors was whether a piece of straw was left in the center corridor, or whether the dirty, ragged and verminous blankets of the patients were tucked in neatly at their feet. As to the fate of the inmates, they were quite unconcerned. If I reported smartly, whipping my prison cap from my shorn head and clicking my heels, "Hut number VI/9: 52 patients, two nursing orderlies, and one doctor," they were satisfied. And then they would leave. But until they arrived - often they were hours later than announced, and sometimes did not come at all - I was forced to keep straightening blankets, picking up bits of straw which fell from the bunks, and shouting at the poor devils who tossed in their beds and threatened to upset all my efforts at tidiness and cleanliness. Apathy was particularly increased among the feverish patients, so that they did not react at all unless they were shouted at. Even this failed at times, and then it took tremendous self-control not to strike them. For one's own irritability took on enormous proportions in the face of the other's apathy and especially in the face of the danger (i.e., the approaching inspection) which was caused by it.

In attempting this psychological presentation and a psychopathological explanation of the typical characteristics of a concentration camp inmate, I may give

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the impression that the human being is completely and unavoidably influenced by his surroundings. (In this case the surroundings being the unique structure of camp life, which forced the prisoner to conform his conduct to a certain set pattern.) But what about human liberty? Is there no spiritual freedom in regard to behavior and reaction to any given surroundings? Is that theory true which would have us believe that man is no more than a product of many conditional and environmental factors - be they of a biological, psychological or sociological nature? Is man but an accidental product of these? Most important, do the prisoners' reactions to the singular world of the concentration camp prove that man cannot escape the influences of his surroundings? Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances?

We can answer these questions from experience as well as on principle. The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man *can* preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

And there were always choices to make. Every day,

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every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate.

Seen from this point of view, the mental reactions of the inmates of a concentration camp must seem more to us than the mere expression of certain physical and sociological conditions. Even though conditions such as lack of sleep, insufficient food and various mental stresses may suggest that the inmates were bound to react in certain ways, in the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision, and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, therefore, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him - mentally and spiritually. He may retain his human dignity even in a concentration camp. Dostoevski said once, "There is only one thing that I dread: not to be worthy of my sufferings." These words frequently came to my mind after I became acquainted with those martyrs whose behavior in camp, whose suffering and death, bore witness to the fact that the last inner freedom cannot be lost. It can be said that they were worthy of their sufferings; the way they bore their suffering was a genuine inner achievement. It is this spiritual freedom - which cannot be taken away - that makes life meaningful and purposeful.

An active life serves the purpose of giving man the

opportunity to realize values in creative work, while a passive life of enjoyment affords him the opportunity to obtain fulfillment in experiencing beauty, art, or nature. But there is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces. A creative life and a life of enjoyment are banned to him. But not only creativeness and enjoyment are meaningful. If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.

The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity - even under the most difficult circumstances - to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified and unselfish. Or in the bitter fight for self-preservation he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal. Here lies the chance for a man either to make use of or to forgo the opportunities of attaining the moral values that a difficult situation may afford him. And this decides whether he is worthy of his sufferings or not.

Do not think that these considerations are unworldly and too far removed from real life. It is true that only a few people are capable of reaching such high moral standards. Of the prisoners only a few kept their full inner liberty and obtained those values which their suffering afforded, but even one such example is sufficient proof that man's inner strength may raise him

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above his outward fate. Such men are not only in concentration camps. Everywhere man is confronted with fate, with the chance of achieving something through his own suffering.

Take the fate of the sick - especially those who are incurable. I once read a letter written by a young invalid, in which he told a friend that he had just found out he would not live for long, that even an operation would be of no help. He wrote further that he remembered a film he had seen in which a man was portrayed who waited for death in a courageous and dignified way. The boy had thought it a great accomplishment to meet death so well. Now - he wrote - fate was offering him a similar chance.

Those of us who saw the film called *Resurrection* - taken from a book by Tolstoy - years ago, may have had similar thoughts. Here were great destinies and great men. For us, at that time, there was no great fate; there was no chance to achieve such greatness. After the picture we went to the nearest cafe, and over a cup of coffee and a sandwich we forgot the strange metaphysical thoughts which for one moment had crossed our minds. But when we ourselves were confronted with a great destiny and faced with the decision of meeting it with equal spiritual greatness, by then we had forgotten our youthful resolutions of long ago, and we failed.

Perhaps there came a day for some of us when we saw the same film again, or a similar one. But by then other pictures may have simultaneously unrolled before one's inner eye; pictures of people who attained much more in their lives than a sentimental film could show. Some details of a particular man's inner great-

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ness may have come to one's mind, like the story of the young woman whose death I witnessed in a concentration camp. It is a simple story. There is little to tell and it may sound as if I had invented it; but to me it seems like a poem.

This young woman knew that she would die in the next few days. But when I talked to her she was cheerful in spite of this knowledge. "I am grateful that fate has hit me so hard," she told me. "In my former life I was spoiled and did not take spiritual accomplishments seriously." Pointing through the window of the hut, she said, "This tree here is the only friend I have in my loneliness." Through that window she could see just one branch of a chestnut tree, and on the branch were two blossoms. "I often talk to this tree," she said to me. I was startled and didn't quite know how to take her words. Was she delirious? Did she have occasional hallucinations? Anxiously I asked her if the tree replied. "Yes." What did it say to her? She answered, "It said to me, 'I am here - I am here - I am life, eternal life!'"

We have stated that that which was ultimately responsible for the state of the prisoner's inner self was not so much the enumerated psychophysical causes as it was the result of a free decision. Psychological observations of the prisoners have shown that only the men who allowed their inner hold on their moral and spiritual selves to subside eventually fell victim to the camp's degenerating influences. The question now arises, what could, or should, have constituted this "inner hold"?

Former prisoners, when writing or relating their

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experiences, agree that the most depressing influence of all was that a prisoner could not know how long his term of imprisonment would be. He had been given no date for his release. (In our camp it was pointless even to talk about it.) Actually a prison term was not only uncertain but unlimited. A well-known research psychologist has pointed out that life in a concentration camp could be called a "provisional existence." We can add to this by defining it as a "provisional existence of unknown limit."

New arrivals usually knew nothing about the conditions at a camp. Those who had come back from other camps were obliged to keep silent, and from some camps no one had returned. On entering camp a change took place in the minds of the men. With the end of uncertainty there came the uncertainty of the end. It was impossible to foresee whether or when, if at all, this form of existence would end.

The latin *word finis* has two meanings: the end or the finish, and a goal to reach. A man who could not see the end of his "provisional existence" was not able to aim at an ultimate goal in life. He ceased living for the future, in contrast to a man in normal life. Therefore the whole structure of his inner life changed; signs of decay set in which we know from other areas of life. The unemployed worker, for example, is in a similar position. His existence has become provisional and in a certain sense he cannot live for the future or aim at a goal. Research work done on unemployed miners has shown that they suffer from a peculiar sort of deformed time - inner time - which is a result of their unemployed state. Prisoners, too, suffered from this strange "time-experience." In camp, a small time unit,

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a day, for example, filled with hourly tortures and fatigue, appeared endless. A larger time unit, perhaps a week, seemed to pass very quickly. My comrades agreed when I said that in camp a day lasted longer than a week. How paradoxical was our time-experience! In this connection we are reminded of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, which contains some very pointed psychological remarks. Mann studies the spiritual development of people who are in an analogous psychological position, i.e., tuberculosis patients in a sanatorium who also know no date for their release. They experience a similar existence - without a future and without a goal.

One of the prisoners, who on his arrival marched with a long column of new inmates from the station to the camp, told me later that he had felt as though he were marching at his own funeral. His life had seemed to him absolutely without future. He regarded it as over and done, as if he had already died. This feeling of lifelessness was intensified by other causes: in time, it was the limitlessness of the term of imprisonment which was most acutely felt; in space, the narrow limits of the prison. Anything outside the barbed wire became remote - out of reach and, in a way, unreal. The events and the people outside, all the normal life there, had a ghostly aspect for the prisoner. The outside life, that is, as much as he could see of it, appeared to him almost as it might have to a dead man who looked at it from another world.

A man who let himself decline because he could not see any future goal found himself occupied with retrospective thoughts. In a different connection, we have already spoken of the tendency there was to look into the past, to help make the present, with all its horrors,

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less real. But in robbing the present of its reality there lay a certain danger. It became easy to overlook the opportunities to make something positive of camp life, opportunities which really did exist. Regarding our "provisional existence" as unreal was in itself an important factor in causing the prisoners to lose their hold on life; everything in a way became pointless. Such people forget that often it is just such an exceptionally difficult external situation which gives man the opportunity to grow spiritually beyond himself. Instead of taking the camp's difficulties as a test of their inner strength, they did not take their life seriously and despised it as something of no consequence. They preferred to close their eyes and to live in the past. Life for such people became meaningless.

Naturally only a few people were capable of reaching great spiritual heights. But a few were given the chance to attain human greatness even through their apparent worldly failure and death, an accomplishment which in ordinary circumstances they would never have achieved. To the others of us, the mediocre and the half-hearted, the words of Bismarck could be applied: "Life is like being at the dentist. You always think that the worst is still to come, and yet it is over already." Varying this, we could say that most men in a concentration camp believed that the real opportunities of life had passed. Yet, in reality, there was an opportunity and a challenge. One could make a victory of those experiences turning life into an inner triumph, or one could ignore the challenge and simply vegetate, as did a majority of the prisoners.

Any attempt at fighting the camp's psychopathological influence on the prisoner by psychotherapeutic or

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psychohygienic methods had to aim at giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which he could look forward. Instinctively some of the prisoners attempted to find one on their own. It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future - *sub specie aeternitatis*. And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force his mind to the task.

I remember a personal experience. Almost in tears from pain (I had terrible sores on my feet from wearing torn shoes), I limped a few kilometers with our long column of men from the camp to our work site. Very cold, bitter winds struck us. I kept thinking of the endless little problems of our miserable life. What would there be to eat tonight? If a piece of sausage came as extra ration, should I exchange it for a piece of bread? Should I trade my last cigarette, which was left from a bonus I received a fortnight ago, for a bowl of soup? How could I get a piece of wire to replace the fragment which served as one of my shoelaces? Would I get to our work site in time to join my usual working party or would I have to join another, which might have a brutal foreman? What could I do to get on good terms with the Capo, who could help me to obtain work in camp instead of undertaking this horribly long daily march?

I became disgusted with the state of affairs which compelled me, daily and hourly, to think of only such trivial things. I forced my thoughts to turn to another subject. Suddenly I saw myself standing on the platform of a well-lit, warm and pleasant lecture room. In front of me sat an attentive audience on comfortable

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upholstered seats. I was giving a lecture on the psychology of the concentration camp! All that oppressed me at that moment became objective, seen and described from the remote viewpoint of science. By this method I succeeded somehow in rising above the situation, above the sufferings of the moment, and I observed them as if they were already of the past. Both I and my troubles became the object of an interesting psychoscientific study undertaken by myself. What does Spinoza say in his *Ethics*? - "*Affectus, qui passio est, desinit esse passio simulatque eius claram et distinctam formamus ideam.*" Emotion, which is suffering, ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and precise picture of it.

The prisoner who had lost faith in the future - his future - was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay. Usually this happened quite suddenly, in the form of a crisis, the symptoms of which were familiar to the experienced camp inmate. We all feared this moment - not for ourselves, which would have been pointless, but for our friends. Usually it began with the prisoner refusing one morning to get dressed and wash or to go out on the parade grounds. No entreaties, no blows, no threats had any effect. He just lay there, hardly moving. If this crisis was brought about by an illness, he refused to be taken to the sick-bay or to do anything to help himself. He simply gave up. There he remained, lying in his own excreta, and nothing bothered him any more.

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I once had a dramatic demonstration of the close link between the loss of faith in the future and this dangerous giving up. F----, my senior block warden, a fairly well-known composer and librettist, confided in me one day: "I would like to tell you something, Doctor. I have had a strange dream. A voice told me that I could wish for something, that I should only say what I wanted to know, and all my questions would be answered. What do you think I asked? That I would like to know when the war would be over for me. You know what I mean, Doctor - for me! I wanted to know when we, when our camp, would be liberated and our sufferings come to an end."

"And when did you have this dream?" I asked.

"In February, 1945," he answered. It was then the beginning of March.

"What did your dream voice answer?"

Furtively he whispered to me, "March thirtieth."

When F---- told me about his dream, he was still full of hope and convinced that the voice of his dream would be right. But as the promised day drew nearer, the war news which reached our camp made it appear very unlikely that we would be free on the promised date. On March twenty-ninth, F---- suddenly became ill and ran a high temperature. On March thirtieth, the day his prophecy had told him that the war and suffering would be over for him, he became delirious and lost consciousness. On March thirty-first, he was dead. To all outward appearances, he had died of typhus.

Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man - his courage and

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hope, or lack of them - and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect. The ultimate cause of my friend's death was that the expected liberation did not come and he was severely disappointed. This suddenly lowered his body's resistance against the latent typhus infection. His faith in the future and his will to live had become paralyzed and his body fell victim to illness - and thus the voice of his dream was right after all.

The observations of this one case and the conclusion drawn from them are in accordance with something that was drawn to my attention by the chief doctor of our concentration camp. The death rate in the week between Christmas, 1944, and New Year's, 1945, increased in camp beyond all previous experience. In his opinion, the explanation for this increase did not lie in the harder working conditions or the deterioration of our food supplies or a change of weather or new epidemics. It was simply that the majority of the prisoners had lived in the naive hope that they would be home again by Christmas. As the time drew near and there was no encouraging news, the prisoners lost courage and disappointment overcame them. This had a dangerous influence on their powers of resistance and a great number of them died.

As we said before, any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in the camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal. Nietzsche's words, "He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*," could be the guiding motto for all psychotherapeutic and psychohygienic efforts regarding prisoners. Whenever there was an opportunity for it,

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one had to give them a why - an aim - for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible *how* of their existence. Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost. The typical reply with which such a man rejected all encouraging arguments was, "I have nothing to expect from life any more." What sort of answer can one give to that?

What was really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life. We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men, that *it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us.* We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life - daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.

These tasks, and therefore the meaning of life, differ from man to man, and from moment to moment. Thus it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way. Questions about the meaning of life can never be answered by sweeping statements. "Life" does not mean something vague, but something very real and concrete, just as life's tasks are also very real and concrete. They form man's destiny, which is different and unique for each individual. No man and no destiny can be compared with any other man or any other destiny. No situation repeats itself, and each situation calls for a different response. Sometimes the situation

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in which a man finds himself may require him to shape his own fate by action. At other times it is more advantageous for him to make use of an opportunity for contemplation and to realize assets in this way. Sometimes man may be required simply to accept fate, to bear his cross. Every situation is distinguished by its uniqueness, and there is always only one right answer to the problem posed by the situation at hand.

When a man finds that it is his destiny to suffer, he will have to accept his suffering as his task; his single and unique task. He will have to acknowledge the fact that even in suffering he is unique and alone in the universe. No one can relieve him of his suffering or suffer in his place. His unique opportunity lies in the way in which he bears his burden.

For us, as prisoners, these thoughts were not speculations far removed from reality. They were the only thoughts that could be of help to us. They kept us from despair, even when there seemed to be no chance of coming out of it alive. Long ago we had passed the stage of asking what was the meaning of life, a naive query which understands life as the attaining of some aim through the active creation of something of value. For us, the meaning of life embraced the wider cycles of life and death, of suffering and of dying.

Once the meaning of suffering had been revealed to us, we refused to minimize or alleviate the camp's tortures by ignoring them or harboring false illusions and entertaining artificial optimism. Suffering had become a task on which we did not want to turn our backs. We had realized its hidden opportunities for achievement, the opportunities which caused the poet Rilke to write, "*Wie viel ist aufzuleiden!*" (How much

suffering there is to get through!) Rilke spoke of "getting through suffering" as others would talk of "getting through work." There was plenty of suffering for us to get through. Therefore, it was necessary to face up to the full amount of suffering, trying to keep moments of weakness and furtive tears to a minimum. But there was no need to be ashamed of tears, for tears bore witness that a man had the greatest of courage, the courage to suffer. Only very few realized that. Shame-facedly some confessed occasionally that they had wept, like the comrade who answered my question of how he had gotten over his edema, by confessing, "I have wept it out of my system."

The tender beginnings of a psychotherapy or psychohygiene were, when they were possible at all in the camp, either individual or collective in nature. The individual psychotherapeutic attempts were often a kind of "life-saving procedure." These efforts were usually concerned with the prevention of suicides. A very strict camp ruling forbade any efforts to save a man who attempted suicide. It was forbidden, for example, to cut down a man who was trying to hang himself. Therefore, it was all important to prevent these attempts from occurring.

I remember two cases of would-be suicide, which bore a striking similarity to each other. Both men had talked of their intentions to commit suicide. Both used the typical argument - they had nothing more to expect from life. In both cases it was a question of getting them to realize that life was still expecting something from them; something in the future was expected of them. We found, in fact, that for the one it was his

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child whom he adored and who was waiting for him in a foreign country. For the other it was a thing, not a person. This man was a scientist and had written a series of books which still needed to be finished. His work could not be done by anyone else, any more than another person could ever take the place of the father in his child's affections.

This uniqueness and singleness which distinguishes each individual and gives a meaning to his existence has a bearing on creative work as much as it does on human love. When the impossibility of replacing a person is realized, it allows the responsibility which a man has for his existence and its continuance to appear in all its magnitude. A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the "why" for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any "how."

The opportunities for collective psychotherapy were naturally limited in camp. The right example was more effective than words could ever be. A senior block warden who did not side with the authorities had, by his just and encouraging behavior, a thousand opportunities to exert a far-reaching moral influence on those under his jurisdiction. The immediate influence of behavior is always more effective than that of words. But at times a word was effective too, when mental receptiveness had been intensified by some outer circumstances. I remember an incident when there was occasion for psychotherapeutic work on the inmates of a whole hut, due to an intensification of

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their receptiveness because of a certain external situation.

It had been a bad day. On parade, an announcement had been made about the many actions that would, from then on, be regarded as sabotage and therefore punishable by immediate death by hanging. Among these were crimes such as cutting small strips from our old blankets (in order to improvise ankle supports) and very minor "thefts." A few days previously a semi-starved prisoner had broken into the potato store to steal a few pounds of potatoes. The theft had been discovered and some prisoners had recognized the "burglar." When the camp authorities heard about it they ordered that the guilty man be given up to them or the whole camp would starve for a day. Naturally the 2,500 men preferred to fast.

On the evening of this day of fasting we lay in our earthen huts - in a very low mood. Very little was said and every word sounded irritable. Then, to make matters even worse, the light went out. Tempers reached their lowest ebb. But our senior block warden was a wise man. He improvised a little talk about all that was on our minds at that moment. He talked about the many comrades who had died in the last few days, either of sickness or of suicide. But he also mentioned what may have been the real reason for their deaths: giving up hope. He maintained that there should be some way of preventing possible future victims from reaching this extreme state. And it was to me that the warden pointed to give this advice.

God knows, I was not in the mood to give psychological explanations or to preach any sermons - to offer my comrades a kind of medical care of their

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souls. I was cold and hungry, irritable and tired, but I had to make the effort and use this unique opportunity. Encouragement was now more necessary than ever.

So I began by mentioning the most trivial of comforts first. I said that even in this Europe in the sixth winter of the Second World War, our situation was not the most terrible we could think of. I said that each of us had to ask himself what irreplaceable losses he had suffered up to then. I speculated that for most of them these losses had really been few. Whoever was still alive had reason for hope. Health, family, happiness, professional abilities, fortune, position in society - all these were things that could be achieved again or restored. After all, we still had all our bones intact. Whatever we had gone through could still be an asset to us in the future. And I quoted from Nietzsche: "*Was mich nicht umbringt, macht mich starker.*" (That which does not kill me, makes me stronger.)

Then I spoke about the future. I said that to the impartial the future must seem hopeless. I agreed that each of us could guess for himself how small were his chances of survival. I told them that although there was still no typhus epidemic in the camp, I estimated my own chances at about one in twenty. But I also told them that, in spite of this, I had no intention of losing hope and giving up. For no man knew what the future would bring, much less the next hour. Even if we could not expect any sensational military events in the next few days, who knew better than we, with our experience of camps, how great chances sometimes opened up, quite suddenly, at least for the individual. For instance, one might be attached unexpectedly to a special group with exceptionally good working condi-

tions - for this was the kind of thing which constituted the "luck" of the prisoner.

But I did not only talk of the future and the veil which was drawn over it. I also mentioned the past; all its joys, and how its light shone even in the present darkness. Again I quoted a poet - to avoid sounding like a preacher myself - who had written, "*Was Du erlebst, kann keine Macht der Welt Dir rauben.*" (What you have experienced, no power on earth can take from you.) Not only our experiences, but all we have done, whatever great thoughts we may have had, and all we have suffered, all this is not lost, though it is past; we have brought it into being. Having been is also a kind of being, and perhaps the surest kind.

Then I spoke of the many opportunities of giving life a meaning. I told my comrades (who lay motionless, although occasionally a sigh could be heard) that human life, under any circumstances, never ceases to have a meaning, and that this infinite meaning of life includes suffering and dying, privation and death. I asked the poor creatures who listened to me attentively in the darkness of the hut to face up to the seriousness of our position. They must not lose hope but should keep their courage in the certainty that the hopelessness of our struggle did not detract from its dignity and its meaning. I said that someone looks down on each of us in difficult hours - a friend, a wife, somebody alive or dead, or a God - and he would not expect us to disappoint him. He would hope to find us suffering proudly - not miserably - knowing how to die.

And finally I spoke of our sacrifice, which had meaning in every case. It was in the nature of this sacrifice that it should appear to be pointless in the

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normal world, the world of material success. But in reality our sacrifice did have a meaning. Those of us who had any religious faith, I said frankly, could understand without difficulty. I told them of a comrade who on his arrival in camp had tried to make a pact with Heaven that his suffering and death should save the human being he loved from a painful end. For this man, suffering and death were meaningful; his was a sacrifice of the deepest significance. He did not want to die for nothing. None of us wanted that.

The purpose of my words was to find a full meaning in our life, then and there, in that hut and in that practically hopeless situation. I saw that my efforts had been successful. When the electric bulb flared up again, I saw the miserable figures of my friends limping toward me to thank me with tears in their eyes. But I have to confess here that only too rarely had I the inner strength to make contact with my companions in suffering and that I must have missed many opportunities for doing so.

We now come to the third stage of a prisoner's mental reactions: the psychology of the prisoner after his liberation. But prior to that we shall consider a question which the psychologist is asked frequently, especially when he has personal knowledge of these matters: What can you tell us about the psychological make-up of the camp guards? How is it possible that men of flesh and blood could treat others as so many prisoners say they have been treated? Having once heard these accounts and having come to believe that these things did happen, one is bound to ask how, psychologically, they could happen. To answer this

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question without going into great detail, a few things must be pointed out:

First, among the guards there were some sadists, sadists in the purest clinical sense.

Second, these sadists were always selected when a really severe detachment of guards was needed.

There was great joy at our work site when we had permission to warm ourselves for a few minutes (after two hours of work in the bitter frost) in front of a little stove which was fed with twigs and scraps of wood. But there were always some foremen who found a great pleasure in taking this comfort from us. How clearly their faces reflected this pleasure when they not only forbade us to stand there but turned over the stove and dumped its lovely fire into the snow! When the SS took a dislike to a person, there was always some special man in their ranks known to have a passion for, and to be highly specialized in, sadistic torture, to whom the unfortunate prisoner was sent.

Third, the feelings of the majority of the guards had been dulled by the number of years in which, in ever-increasing doses, they had witnessed the brutal methods of the camp. These morally and mentally hardened men at least refused to take active part in sadistic measures. But they did not prevent others from carrying them out.

Fourth, it must be stated that even among the guards there were some who took pity on us. I shall only mention the commander of the camp from which I was liberated. It was found after the liberation - only the camp doctor, a prisoner himself, had known of it previously - that this man had paid no small sum of money from his own pocket in order to purchase

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medicines for his prisoners from the nearest market town.¹ But the senior camp warden, a prisoner himself, was harder than any of the SS guards. He beat the other prisoners at every slightest opportunity, while the camp commander, to my knowledge, never once lifted his hand against any of us.

It is apparent that the mere knowledge that a man was either a camp guard or a prisoner tells us almost nothing. Human kindness can be found in all groups, even those which as a whole it would be easy to condemn. The boundaries between groups overlapped and we must not try to simplify matters by saying that these men were angels and those were devils. Certainly, it was a considerable achievement for a guard or foreman to be kind to the prisoners in spite of all the

¹An interesting incident with reference to this SS commander is in regard to the attitude toward him of some of his Jewish prisoners. At the end of the war when the American troops liberated the prisoners from our camp, three young Hungarian Jews hid this commander in the Bavarian woods. Then they went to the commandant of the American Forces who was very eager to capture this SS commander and they said they would tell him where he was but only under certain conditions: the American commander must promise that absolutely no harm would come to this man. After a while, the American officer finally promised these young Jews that the SS commander when taken into captivity would be kept safe from harm. Not only did the American officer keep his promise but, as a matter of fact, the former SS commander of this concentration camp was in a sense restored to his command, for he supervised the collection of clothing among the nearby Bavarian villages, and its distribution to all of us who at that time still wore the clothes we had inherited from other inmates of Camp Auschwitz who were not as fortunate as we, having been sent to the gas chamber immediately upon their arrival at the railway station.

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camp's influences, and, on the other hand, the baseness of a prisoner who treated his own companions badly was exceptionally contemptible. Obviously the prisoners found the lack of character in such men especially upsetting, while they were profoundly moved by the smallest kindness received from any of the guards. I remember how one day a foreman secretly gave me a piece of bread which I knew he must have saved from his breakfast ration. It was far more than the small piece of bread which moved me to tears at that time. It was the human "something" which this man also gave to me - the word and look which accompanied the gift.

From all this we may learn that there are two races of men in this world, but only these two - the "race" of the decent man and the "race" of the indecent man. Both are found everywhere; they penetrate into all groups of society. No group consists entirely of decent or indecent people. In this sense, no group is of "pure race" - and therefore one occasionally found a decent fellow among the camp guards.

Life in a concentration camp tore open the human soul and exposed its depths. Is it surprising that in those depths we again found only human qualities which in their very nature were a mixture of good and evil? The rift dividing good from evil, which goes through all human beings, reaches into the lowest depths and becomes apparent even on the bottom of the abyss which is laid open by the concentration camp.

And now to the last chapter in the psychology of a concentration camp - the psychology of the prisoner

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who has been released. In describing the experiences of liberation, which naturally must be personal, we shall pick up the threads of that part of our narrative which told of the morning when the white flag was hoisted above the camp gates after days of high tension. This state of inner suspense was followed by total relaxation. But it would be quite wrong to think that we went mad with joy. What, then, did happen?

With tired steps we prisoners dragged ourselves to the camp gates. Timidly we looked around and glanced at each other questioningly. Then we ventured a few steps out of camp. This time no orders were shouted at us, nor was there any need to duck quickly to avoid a blow or kick. Oh no! This time the guards offered us cigarettes! We hardly recognized them at first; they had hurriedly changed into civilian clothes. We walked slowly along the road leading from the camp. Soon our legs hurt and threatened to buckle. But we limped on; we wanted to see the camp's surroundings for the first time with the eyes of free men. "Freedom" - we repeated to ourselves, and yet we could not grasp it. We had said this word so often during all the years we dreamed about it, that it had lost its meaning. Its reality did not penetrate into our consciousness; we could not grasp the fact that freedom was ours.

We came to meadows full of flowers. We saw and realized that they were there, but we had no feelings about them. The first spark of joy came when we saw a rooster with a tail of multicolored feathers. But it remained only a spark; we did not yet belong to this world.

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In the evening when we all met again in our hut, one said secretly to the other, "Tell me, were you pleased today?"

And the other replied, feeling ashamed as he did not know that we all felt similarly, "Truthfully, no!" We had literally lost the ability to feel pleased and had to relearn it slowly.

Psychologically, what was happening to the liberated prisoners could be called "depersonalization." Everything appeared unreal, unlikely, as in a dream. We could not believe it was true. How often in the past years had we been deceived by dreams! We dreamt that the day of liberation had come, that we had been set free, had returned home, greeted our friends, embraced our wives, sat down at the table and started to tell of all the things we had gone through - even of how we had often seen the day of liberation in our dreams. And then - a whistle shrilled in our ears, the signal to get up, and our dreams of freedom came to an end. And now the dream had come true. But could we truly believe in it?

The body has fewer inhibitions than the mind. It made good use of the new freedom from the first moment on. It began to eat ravenously, for hours and days, even half the night. It is amazing what quantities one can eat. And when one of the prisoners was invited out by a friendly farmer in the neighborhood, he ate and ate and then drank coffee, which loosened his tongue, and he then began to talk, often for hours. The pressure which had been on his mind for years was released at last. Hearing him talk, one got the

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impression that he *had* to talk, that his desire to speak was irresistible. I have known people who have been under heavy pressure only for a short time (for example, through a cross-examination by the Gestapo) to have similar reactions. Many days passed, until not only the tongue was loosened, but something within oneself as well; then feeling suddenly broke through the strange fetters which had restrained it.

One day, a few days after the liberation, I walked through the country past flowering meadows, for miles and miles, toward the market town near the camp. Larks rose to the sky and I could hear their joyous song. There was no one to be seen for miles around; there was nothing but the wide earth and sky and the larks' jubilation and the freedom of space. I stopped, looked around, and up to the sky - and then I went down on my knees. At that moment there was very little I knew of myself or of the worlds - I had but one sentence in mind - always the same: "I called to the Lord from my narrow prison and He answered me in the freedom of space."

How long I knelt there and repeated this sentence memory can no longer recall. But I know that on that day, in that hour, my new life started. Step for step I progressed, until I again became a human being.

The way that led from the acute mental tension of the last days in camp (from that war of nerves to mental peace) was certainly not free from obstacles. It would be an error to think that a liberated prisoner was not in need of spiritual care any more. We have to consider that a man who has been under such enor-

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mous mental pressure for such a long time is naturally in some danger after his liberation, especially since the pressure was released quite suddenly. This danger (in the sense of psychological hygiene) is the psychological counterpart of the bends. Just as the physical health of the caisson worker would be endangered if he left his diver's chamber suddenly (where he is under enormous atmospheric pressure), so the man who has suddenly been liberated from mental pressure can suffer damage to his moral and spiritual health.

During this psychological phase one observed that people with natures of a more primitive kind could not escape the influences of the brutality which had surrounded them in camp life. Now, being free, they thought they could use their freedom "licentiously and ruthlessly. The only thing that had changed for them was that they were now the oppressors instead of the oppressed. They became instigators, not objects, of willful force and injustice. They justified their behavior by their own terrible experiences. This was often revealed in apparently insignificant events. A friend was walking across a field with me toward the camp when suddenly we came to a field of green crops. Automatically, I avoided it. but he drew his arm through mine and dragged me through it. I stammered something about not treading down the young crops. He became annoyed, gave me an angry look and shouted, "You don't say! And hasn't enough been taken from us? My wife and child have been gassed - not to mention everything else - and you would forbid me to tread on a few stalks of oats!"

Only slowly could these men be guided back to the commonplace truth that no one has the right to do

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wrong, not even if wrong has been done to them. We had to strive to lead them back to this truth, or the consequences would have been much worse than the loss of a few thousand stalks of oats. I can still see the prisoner who rolled up his shirt sleeves, thrust his right hand under my nose and shouted, "May this hand be cut off if I don't stain it with blood on the day when I get home!" I want to emphasize that the man who said these words was not a bad fellow. He had been the best of comrades in camp and afterwards.

Apart from the moral deformity resulting from the sudden release of mental pressure, there were two other fundamental experiences which threatened to damage the character of the liberated prisoner: bitterness and disillusionment when he returned to his former life.

Bitterness was caused by a number of things he came up against in his former home town. When, on his return, a man found that in many places he was met only with a shrug of the shoulders and with hackneyed phrases, he tended to become bitter and to ask himself why he had gone through all that he had. When he heard the same phrases nearly everywhere - "We did not know about it." and "We, too, have suffered." then he asked himself, have they really nothing better to say to me?

The experience of disillusionment is different. Here it was not one's fellow man (whose superficiality and lack of feeling was so disgusting that one finally felt like creeping into a hole and neither hearing nor seeing human beings any more) but fate itself which seemed so cruel. A man who for years had thought he had reached the absolute limit of all possible suffering now

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found that suffering has no limits, and that he could suffer still more, and still more intensely.

When we spoke about attempts to give a man in camp mental courage, we said that he had to be shown something to look forward to in the future. He had to be reminded that life still waited for him, that a human being waited for his return. But after liberation? There were some men who found that no one awaited them. Woe to him who found that the person whose memory alone had given him courage in camp did not exist any more! Woe to him who, when the day of his dreams finally came, found it so different from all he had longed for! Perhaps he boarded a trolley, traveled out to the home which he had seen for years in his mind, and only in his mind, and pressed the bell, just as he has longed to do in thousands of dreams, only to find that the person who should open the door was not there, and would never be there again.

We all said to each other in camp that there could be no earthly happiness which could compensate for all we had suffered. We were not hoping for happiness - it was not that which gave us courage and gave meaning to our suffering, our sacrifices and our dying. And yet we were not prepared for unhappiness. This disillusionment, which awaited not a small number of prisoners, was an experience which these men have found very hard to get over and which, for a psychiatrist, is also very difficult to help them overcome. But this must not be a discouragement to him; on the contrary, it should provide an added stimulus.

But for every one of the liberated prisoners, the day comes when, looking back on his camp experiences,

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he can no longer understand how he endured it all. As the day of his liberation eventually came, when everything seemed to him like a beautiful dream, so also the day comes when all his camp experiences seem to him nothing but a nightmare.

The crowning experience of all, for the homecoming man, is the wonderful feeling that, after all he has suffered, there is nothing he need fear any more - except his God

PART TWO

*Logotherapy in a
Nutshell**

READERS OF MY SHORT AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STORY usually ask for a fuller and more direct explanation of my therapeutic doctrine. Accordingly I added a brief section on logotherapy to the original edition of *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*. But that was not enough, and I have been besieged by requests for a more extended treatment. Therefore in the present edition I have completely rewritten and considerably expanded my account.

The assignment was not easy. To convey to the reader within a short space all the material which required twenty volumes in German is an almost hopeless task. I am reminded of the American doctor who once turned up in my office in Vienna and asked me, "Now, Doctor, are you a psychoanalyst?" Whereupon I replied, "Not exactly a psychoanalyst; let's say a psychotherapist." Then he continued questioning

*This part, which has been revised and updated, first appeared as "Basic Concepts of Logotherapy" in the 1962 edition of *Man's Search for Meaning*.

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me: "What school do you stand for?" I answered, "It is my own theory; it is called *logotherapy*." "Can you tell me in one sentence what is meant by logotherapy?" he asked. "At least, what is the difference between psychoanalysis and logotherapy?" "Yes," I said, "but in the first place, can you tell me in one sentence what you think the essence of psychoanalysis is?" This was his answer: "During psychoanalysis, the patient must lie down on a couch and tell you things which sometimes are very disagreeable to tell." Whereupon I immediately retorted with the following improvisation: "Now, in logotherapy the patient may remain sitting erect but he must hear things which sometimes are very disagreeable to hear."

Of course, this was meant facetiously and not as a capsule version of logotherapy. However, there is something in it, inasmuch as logotherapy, in comparison with psychoanalysis, is a method less *retrospective* and less *introspective*. Logotherapy focuses rather on the future, that is to say, on the meanings to be fulfilled by the patient in his future. (Logotherapy, indeed, is a meaning-centered psychotherapy.) At the same time, logotherapy defocuses all the vicious-circle formations and feedback mechanisms which play such a great role in the development of neuroses. Thus, the typical self-centeredness of the neurotic is broken up instead of being continually fostered and reinforced.

To be sure, this kind of statement is an oversimplification; yet in logotherapy the patient is actually confronted with and reoriented toward the meaning of his life. And to make him aware of this meaning can contribute much to his ability to overcome his neurosis.

LOGOTHERAPY IN A NUTSHELL

Let me explain why I have employed the term "logotherapy" as the name for my theory. *Logos* is a Greek word which denotes "meaning." Logotherapy, or, as it has been called by some authors, "The Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy," focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as on man's search for such a meaning. According to logotherapy, this striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man. That is why I speak of a *will to meaning* in contrast to the pleasure principle (or, as we could also term it, the *will to pleasure*) on which Freudian psychoanalysis is centered, as well as in contrast to the *will to power* on which Adlerian psychology, using the term "striving for superiority," is focused.

THE WILL TO MEANING

Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own *will to meaning*. There are some authors who contend that meanings and values are "nothing but defense mechanisms, reaction formations and sublimations." But as for myself, I would not be willing to live merely for the sake of my "defense mechanisms," nor would I be ready to die merely for the sake of my "reaction formations." Man, however, is able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values!

A public-opinion poll was conducted a few years ago in France. The results showed that 89 percent of the

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people polled admitted that man needs "something" for the sake of which to live. Moreover, 61 percent conceded that there was something, or someone, in their own lives for whose sake they were even ready to die. I repeated this poll at my hospital department in Vienna among both the patients and the personnel, and the outcome was practically the same as among the thousands of people screened in France; the difference was only 2 percent.

Another statistical survey, of 7,948 students at forty-eight colleges, was conducted by social scientists from Johns Hopkins University. Their preliminary report is part of a two-year study sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health. Asked what they considered "very-important" to them now, 16 percent of the students checked "making a lot of money"; 78 percent said their first goal was "finding a purpose and meaning to my life."

Of course, there may be some cases in which an individual's concern with values is really a camouflage of hidden inner conflicts; but, if so, they represent the exceptions from the rule rather than the rule itself. In these cases we have actually to deal with pseudovalues, and as such they have to be unmasks. Unmasking, however, should stop as soon as one is confronted with what is authentic and genuine in man, e.g., man's desire for a life that is as meaningful as possible. If it does not stop then, the only thing that the "unmasking psychologist" really unmasks is his own "hidden motive" - namely, his unconscious need to debase and depreciate what is genuine, what is genuinely human, in man.

EXISTENTIAL FRUSTRATION

Man's will to meaning can also be frustrated, in which case logotherapy speaks of "existential frustration." The term "existential" may be used in three ways: to refer to (1) *existence* itself, i.e., the specifically human mode of being; (2) the *meaning* of existence; and (3) the striving to find a concrete meaning in personal existence, that is to say, the *will* to meaning.

Existential frustration can also result in neuroses. For this type of neuroses, logotherapy has coined the term "noögenic neuroses" in contrast to neuroses in the traditional sense of the word, i.e., psychogenic neuroses. Noögenic neuroses have their origin not in the psychological but rather in the "noölogical" (from the Greek *noös* meaning mind) dimension of human existence. This is another logotherapeutic term which denotes anything pertaining to the specifically human dimension.

NOÖGENIC NEUROSES

Noögenic neuroses do not emerge from conflicts between drives and instincts but rather from existential problems. Among such problems, the frustration of the will to meaning plays a large role.

It is obvious that in noögenic cases the appropriate and adequate therapy is not psychotherapy in general but rather logotherapy; a therapy, that is, which dares to enter the specifically human dimension.

Let me quote the following instance: A high-ranking American diplomat came to my office in Vienna in

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order to continue psychoanalytic treatment which he had begun five years previously with an analyst in New York. At the outset I asked him why he thought he should be analyzed, why his analysis had been started in the first place. It turned out that the patient was discontented with his career and found it most difficult to comply with American foreign policy. His analyst, however, had told him again and again that he should try to reconcile himself with his father; because the government of the U.S. as well as his superiors were "nothing but" father images and, consequently, his dissatisfaction with his job was due to the hatred he unconsciously harbored toward his father. Through an analysis lasting five years, the patient had been prompted more and more to accept his analyst's interpretations until he finally was unable to see the forest of reality for the trees of symbols and images. After a few interviews, it was clear that his will to meaning was frustrated by his vocation, and he actually longed to be engaged in some other kind of work. As there was no reason for not giving up his profession and embarking on a different one, he did so, with most gratifying results. He has remained contented in this new occupation for over five years, as he recently reported. I doubt that, in this case, I was dealing with a neurotic condition at all, and that is why I thought that he did not need any psychotherapy, nor even logotherapy, for the simple reason that he was not actually a patient. Not every conflict is necessarily neurotic; some amount of conflict is normal and healthy. In a similar sense suffering is not always a pathological phenomenon; rather than being a symp-

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torn of neurosis, suffering may well be a human achievement, especially if the suffering grows out of existential frustration. I would strictly deny that one's search for a meaning to his existence, or even his doubt of it, in every case is derived from, or results in, any disease. Existential frustration is in itself neither pathological nor pathogenic. A man's concern, even his despair, over the worthwhileness of life is an *existential distress* but by no means a *mental disease*. It may well be that interpreting the first in terms of the latter motivates a doctor to bury his patient's existential despair under a heap of tranquilizing drugs. It is his task, rather, to pilot the patient through his existential crisis of growth and development.

Logotherapy regards its assignment as that of assisting the patient to find meaning in his life. Inasmuch as logotherapy makes him aware of the hidden *logos* of his existence, it is an analytical process. To this extent, logotherapy resembles psychoanalysis. However, in logotherapy's attempt to make something conscious again it does not restrict its activity to *instinctual* facts within the individual's unconscious but also cares for *existential* realities, such as the potential meaning of his existence to be fulfilled as well as his *will* to meaning. Any analysis, however, even when it refrains from including the *noölogical* dimension in its therapeutic process, tries to make the patient aware of what he actually longs for in the depth of his being. Logotherapy deviates from psychoanalysis insofar as it considers man a being whose main concern consists in fulfilling a meaning, rather than in the mere gratification and satisfaction of drives and instincts, or in

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merely reconciling the conflicting claims of id, ego and superego, or in the mere adaptation and adjustment to society and environment.

NOÖ-DYNAMICS

To be sure, man's search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium. However, precisely such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health. There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: "He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*." I can see in these words a motto which holds true for any psychotherapy. In the Nazi concentration camps, one could have witnessed that those who knew that there was a task waiting for them to fulfill were most apt to survive. The same conclusion has since been reached by other authors of books on concentration camps, and also by psychiatric investigations into Japanese, North Korean and North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camps.

As for myself, when I was taken to the concentration camp of Auschwitz, a manuscript of mine ready for publication was confiscated.¹ Certainly, my deep desire to write this manuscript anew helped me to survive the rigors of the camps I was in. For instance, when in a camp in Bavaria I fell ill with typhus fever, I

¹It was the first version of my first book, the English translation of which was published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York, in 1955, under the title *The Doctor and the Soul: An Introduction to Logotherapy*.

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jotted down on little scraps of paper many notes intended to enable me to rewrite the manuscript, should I live to the day of liberation. I am sure that this reconstruction of my lost manuscript in the dark barracks of a Bavarian concentration camp assisted me in overcoming the danger of cardiovascular collapse.

Thus it can be seen that mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become. Such a tension is inherent in the human being and therefore is indispensable to mental well-being. We should not, then, be hesitant about challenging man with a potential meaning for him to fulfill. It is only thus that we evoke his will to meaning from its state of latency. I consider it a dangerous misconception of mental hygiene to assume that what man needs in the first place is equilibrium or, as it is called in biology, "homeostasis," i.e., a tensionless state. What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him. What man needs is not homeostasis but what I call "noö-dynamics," i.e., the existential dynamics in a polar field of tension where one pole is represented by a meaning that is to be fulfilled and the other pole by the man who has to fulfill it. And one should not think that this holds true only for normal conditions; in neurotic individuals, it is even more valid. If architects want to strengthen a decrepit arch, they *increase* the load which is laid upon it, for thereby the parts are joined

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more firmly together. So if therapists wish to foster their patients' mental health, they should not be afraid to create a sound amount of tension through a reorientation toward the meaning of one's life.

Having shown the beneficial impact of meaning orientation, I turn to the detrimental influence of that feeling of which so many patients complain today, namely the feeling of the total and ultimate meaninglessness of their lives. They lack the awareness of a meaning worth living for. They are haunted by the experience of their inner emptiness, a void within themselves; they are caught in that situation which I have called the "existential vacuum."

THE EXISTENTIAL VACUUM

The existential vacuum is a widespread phenomenon of the twentieth century. This is understandable; it may be due to a twofold loss which man has had to undergo since he became a truly human being. At the beginning of human history, man lost some of the basic animal instincts in which an animal's behavior is imbedded and by which it is secured. Such security, like Paradise, is closed to man forever; man has to make choices. In addition to this, however, man has suffered another loss in his more recent development inasmuch as the traditions which buttressed his behavior are now rapidly diminishing. No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even know what he wishes to do. Instead, he either wishes to do what other people do (conformism) or he does what other people wish him to do (totalitarianism).

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A statistical survey recently revealed that among my European students, 25 percent showed a more-or-less marked degree of existential vacuum. Among my American students it was not 25 but 60 percent.

The existential vacuum manifests itself mainly in a state of boredom. Now we can understand Schopenhauer when he said that mankind was apparently doomed to vacillate eternally between the two extremes of distress and boredom. In actual fact, boredom is now causing, and certainly bringing to psychiatrists, more problems to solve than distress. And these problems are growing increasingly crucial, for progressive automation will probably lead to an enormous increase in the leisure hours available to the average worker. The pity of it is that many of these will not know what to do with all their newly acquired free time.

Let us consider, for instance, "Sunday neurosis," that kind of depression which afflicts people who become aware of the lack of content in their lives when the rush of the busy week is over and the void within themselves becomes manifest. Not a few cases of suicide can be traced back to this existential vacuum. Such widespread phenomena as depression, aggression and addiction are not understandable unless we recognize the existential vacuum underlying them. This is also true of the crises of pensioners and aging people.

Moreover, there are various masks and guises under which the existential vacuum appears. Sometimes the frustrated will to meaning is vicariously compensated for by a will to power, including the most primitive form of the will to power, the will to money. In other

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cases, the place of frustrated will to meaning is taken by the will to pleasure. That is why existential frustration often eventuates in sexual compensation. We can observe in such cases that the sexual libido becomes rampant in the existential vacuum.

An analogous event occurs in neurotic cases. There are certain types of feedback mechanisms and vicious-circle formations which I will touch upon later. One can observe again and again, however, that this symptomatology has invaded an existential vacuum wherein it then continues to flourish. In such patients, what we have to deal with is not a noögenic neurosis. However, we will never succeed in having the patient overcome his condition if we have not supplemented the psychotherapeutic treatment with logotherapy. For by filling the existential vacuum, the patient will be prevented from suffering further relapses. Therefore, logotherapy is indicated not only in noögenic cases, as pointed out above, but also in psychogenic cases, and sometimes even the somatogenic (pseudo-) neuroses. Viewed in this light, a statement once made by Magda B. Arnold is justified: "Every therapy must in some way, no matter how restricted, also be logotherapy."²

Let us now consider what we can do if a patient asks what the meaning of his life is.

THE MEANING OF LIFE

I doubt whether a doctor can answer this question in general terms. For the meaning of life differs from man

²Magda B. Arnold and John A. Gasson, *The Human Person*, Ronald Press, New York, 1954, p. 618.

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to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. To put the question in general terms would be comparable to the question posed to a chess champion: "Tell me, Master, what is the best move in the world?" There simply is no such thing as the best or even a good move apart from a particular situation in a game and the particular personality of one's opponent. The same holds for human existence. One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it.

As each situation in life represents a challenge to man and presents a problem for him to solve, the question of the meaning of life may actually be reversed. Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is *he* who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by *answering for* his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible. Thus, logotherapy sees in responsibility the very essence of human existence.

THE ESSENCE OF EXISTENCE

This emphasis on responsibility is reflected in the categorical imperative of logotherapy, which is: "Live

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as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!" It seems to me that there is nothing which would stimulate a man's sense of responsibility more than this maxim, which invites him to imagine first that the present is past and, second, that the past may yet be changed and amended. Such a precept confronts him with life's *finiteness* as well as the *finality* of what he makes out of both his life and himself.

Logotherapy tries to make the patient fully aware of his own irresponsibility; therefore, it must leave to him the option for what, to what, or to whom he understands himself to be responsible. That is why a logotherapist is the least tempted of all psychotherapists to impose value judgments on his patients, for he will never permit the patient to pass to the doctor the responsibility of judging.

It is, therefore, up to the patient to decide whether he should interpret his life task as being responsible to society or to his own conscience. There are people, however, who do not interpret their own lives merely in terms of a task assigned to them but also in terms of the taskmaster who has assigned it to them.

Logotherapy is neither teaching nor preaching. It is as far removed from logical reasoning as it is from moral exhortation. To put it figuratively, the role played by a logotherapist is that of an eye specialist rather than that of a painter. A painter tries to convey to us a picture of the world as he sees it; an ophthalmologist tries to enable us to see the world as it really is. The logotherapist's role consists of widening and

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broadening the visual field of the patient so that the whole spectrum of potential meaning becomes conscious and visible to him.

By declaring that man is responsible and must actualize the potential meaning of his life, I wish to stress that the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system. I have termed this constitutive characteristic "the self-transcendence of human existence." It denotes the fact that being human always points, and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself - be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself - by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love - the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence.

Thus far we have shown that the meaning of life always changes, but that it never ceases to be. According to logotherapy, we can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by creating a work or doing a deed; (2) by experiencing something or encountering someone; and (3) by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering. The first, the way of achievement or accomplishment, is quite obvious. The second and third need further elaboration.

The second way of finding a meaning in life is by experiencing something - such as goodness, truth and

beauty - by experiencing nature and culture or, last but not least, by experiencing another human being in his very uniqueness - by loving him.

THE MEANING OF LOVE

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true.

In logotherapy, love is not interpreted as a mere epiphenomenon³ of sexual drives and instincts in the sense of a so-called sublimation. Love is as primary a phenomenon as sex. Normally, sex is a mode of expression for love. Sex is justified, even sanctified, as soon as, but only as long as, it is a vehicle of love. Thus love is not understood as a mere side-effect of sex; rather, sex is a way of expressing the experience of that ultimate togetherness which is called love.

The third way of finding a meaning in life is by suffering.

³A phenomenon that occurs as the result of a primary phenomenon.

THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement. When we are no longer able to change a situation - just think of an incurable disease such as inoperable cancer - we are challenged to change ourselves.

Let me cite a clear-cut example: Once, an elderly general practitioner consulted me because of his severe depression. He could not overcome the loss of his wife who had died two years before and whom he had loved above all else. Now, how could I help him? What should I tell him? Well, I refrained from telling him anything but instead confronted him with the question, "What would have happened, Doctor, if you had died first, and your wife would have had to survive you?" "Oh," he said, "for her this would have been terrible; how she would have suffered!" Whereupon I replied, "You see, Doctor, such a suffering has been spared her, and it was you who have spared her this suffering - to be sure, at the price that now you have to survive and mourn her." He said no word but shook my hand and calmly left my office. In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice.

Of course, this was no therapy in the proper sense since, first, his despair was no disease; and second, I

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could not change his fate; I could not revive his wife. But in that moment I did succeed in changing his *attitude* toward his unalterable fate inasmuch as from that time on he could at least see a meaning in his suffering. It is one of the basic tenets of logotherapy that man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life. That is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has a meaning.

But let me make it perfectly clear that in no way is suffering *necessary* to find meaning. I only insist that meaning is possible even in spite of suffering - provided, certainly, that the suffering is unavoidable. If it *were* avoidable, however, the meaningful thing to do would be to remove its cause, be it psychological, biological or political. To suffer unnecessarily is masochistic rather than heroic.

Edith Weisskopf-Joelson, before her death professor of psychology at the University of Georgia, contended, in her article on logotherapy, that "our current mental-hygiene philosophy stresses the idea that people ought to be happy, that unhappiness is a symptom of maladjustment. Such a value system might be responsible for the fact that the burden of unavoidable unhappiness is increased by unhappiness about being unhappy."⁴ And in another paper she expressed the hope that logotherapy "may help counteract certain unhealthy trends in the present-day culture of the United States, where the incurable sufferer is given very little opportunity to be proud of his suffering and

⁴"Some Comments on a Viennese School of Psychiatry," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 51 (1955), pp. 701 - 3

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to consider it ennobling rather than degrading" so that "he is not only unhappy, but also ashamed of being unhappy."⁵

There are situations in which one is cut off from the opportunity to do one's work or to enjoy one's life; but what never can be ruled out is the unavoidability of suffering. In accepting this challenge to suffer bravely, life has a meaning up to the last moment, and it retains this meaning literally to the end. In other words, life's meaning is an unconditional one, for it even includes the potential meaning of unavoidable suffering.

Let me recall that which was perhaps the deepest experience I had in the concentration camp. The odds of surviving the camp were no more than one in twenty-eight, as can easily be verified by exact statistics. It did not even seem possible, let alone probable, that the manuscript of my first book, which I had hidden in my coat when I arrived at Auschwitz, would ever be rescued. Thus, I had to undergo and to overcome the loss of my mental child. And now it seemed as if nothing and no one would survive me; neither a physical nor a mental child of my own! So I found myself confronted with the question whether under such circumstances my life was ultimately void of any meaning.

Not yet did I notice that an answer to this question with which I was wrestling so passionately was already in store for me, and that soon thereafter this answer would be given to me. This was the case when I had to surrender my clothes and in turn inherited the worn-

⁵"Logotherapy and Existential Analysis," *Acta Psychotherapeutica*, 6 (1958), pp. 193-204.

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out rags of an inmate who had already been sent to the gas chamber immediately after his arrival at the Auschwitz railway station. Instead of the many pages of my manuscript, I found in a pocket of the newly acquired coat one single page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book, containing the most important Jewish prayer, *Shema Yisrael*. How should I have interpreted such a "coincidence" other than as a challenge to *live* my thoughts instead of merely putting them on paper?

A bit later, I remember, it seemed to me that I would die in the near future. In this critical situation, however, my concern was different from that of most of my comrades. Their question was, "Will we survive the camp? For, if not, all this suffering has no meaning." The question which beset me was, "Has all this suffering, this dying around us, a meaning? For, if not, then ultimately there is no meaning to survival; for a life whose meaning depends upon such a happenstance - as whether one escapes or not - ultimately would not be worth living at all."

META-CLINICAL PROBLEMS

More and more, a psychiatrist is approached today by patients who confront him with human problems rather than neurotic symptoms. Some of the people who nowadays call on a psychiatrist would have seen a pastor, priest or rabbi in former days. Now they often refuse to be handed over to a clergyman and instead confront the doctor with questions such as, "What is the meaning of my life?"

A LOGODRAMA

I should like to cite the following instance: Once, the mother of a boy who had died at the age of eleven years was admitted to my hospital department after a suicide attempt. Dr. Kurt Kocourek invited her to join a therapeutic group, and it happened that I stepped into the room where he was conducting a psychodrama. She was telling her story. At the death of her boy she was left alone with another, older son, who was crippled, suffering from the effects of infantile paralysis. The poor boy had to be moved around in a wheelchair. His mother, however, rebelled against her fate. But when she tried to commit suicide together with him, it was the crippled son who prevented her from doing so; he liked living! For him, life had remained meaningful. Why was it not so for his mother? How could her life still have a meaning? And how could we help her to become aware of it?

Improvising, I participated in the discussion, and questioned another woman in the group. I asked her how old she was and she answered, "Thirty." I replied, "No, you are not thirty but instead eighty and lying on your deathbed. And now you are looking back on your life, a life which was childless but full of financial success and social prestige." And then I invited her to imagine what she would feel in this situation. "What will you think of it? What will you say to yourself?" Let me quote what she actually said from a tape which was recorded during that session. "Oh, I married a millionaire, I had an easy life full of wealth, and I lived it up! I flirted with men; I teased them! But now I am eighty; I have no children of my

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own. Looking back as an old woman, I cannot see what all that was for; actually, I must say, my life was a failure!"

I then invited the mother of the handicapped son to imagine herself similarly looking back over *her* life. Let us listen to what she had to say as recorded on the tape: "I wished to have children and this wish has been granted to me; one boy died; the other, however, the crippled one, would have been sent to an institution if I had not taken over his care. Though he is crippled and helpless, he is after all my boy. And so I have made a fuller life possible for him; I have made a better human being out of my son." At this moment, there was an outburst of tears and, crying, she continued: "As for myself, I can look back peacefully on my life; for I can say my life was full of meaning, and I have tried hard to fulfill it; I have done my best - I have done the best for my son. My life was no failure!" Viewing her life as if from her deathbed, she had suddenly been able to see a meaning in it, a meaning which even included all of her sufferings. By the same token, however, it had become clear as well that a life of short duration, like that, for example, of her dead boy, could be so rich in joy and love that it could contain more meaning than a life lasting eighty years.

After a while I proceeded to another question, this time addressing myself to the whole group. The question was whether an ape which was being used to develop poliomyelitis serum, and for this reason punctured again and again, would ever be able to grasp the meaning of its suffering. Unanimously, the group replied that of course it would not; with its limited intelligence, it could not enter into the world of man,

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i.e., the only world in which the meaning of its suffering would be understandable. Then I pushed forward with the following question: "And what about man? Are you sure that the human world is a terminal point in the evolution of the cosmos? Is it not conceivable that there is still another dimension, a world beyond man's world; a world in which the question of an ultimate meaning of human suffering would find an answer?"

THE SUPER-MEANING

This ultimate meaning necessarily exceeds and surpasses the finite intellectual capacities of man; in logotherapy, we speak in this context of a super-meaning. What is demanded of man is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaningfulness in rational terms. *Logos* is deeper than logic.

A psychiatrist who goes beyond the concept of the super-meaning will sooner or later be embarrassed by his patients, just as I was when my daughter at about six years of age asked me the question, "Why do we speak of the *good* Lord?" Whereupon I said, "Some weeks ago, you were suffering from measles, and then the *good* Lord sent you full recovery." However, the little girl was not content; she retorted, "Well, but please, Daddy, do not forget: in the first place, he had sent me the measles."

However, when a patient stands on the firm ground of religious belief, there can be no objection to making use of the therapeutic effect of his religious convic-

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tions and thereby drawing upon his spiritual resources. In order to do so, the psychiatrist may put himself in the place of the patient. That is exactly what I did once, for instance, when a rabbi from Eastern Europe turned to me and told me his story. He had lost his first wife and their six children in the concentration camp of Auschwitz where they were gassed, and now it turned out that his second wife was sterile. I observed that procreation is not the only meaning of life, for then life in itself would become meaningless, and something which in itself is meaningless cannot be rendered meaningful merely by its perpetuation. However, the rabbi evaluated his plight as an orthodox Jew in terms of despair that there was no son of his own who would ever say *Kaddish*⁶ for him after his death.

But I would not give up. I made a last attempt to help him by inquiring whether he did not hope to see his children again in Heaven. However, my question was followed by an outburst of tears, and now the true reason for his despair came to the fore: he explained that his children, since they died as innocent martyrs,⁷ were thus found worthy of the highest place in Heaven, but as for himself he could not expect, as an old, sinful man, to be assigned the same place. I did not give up but retorted, "Is it not conceivable, Rabbi, that precisely this was the meaning of your surviving your children: that you may be purified through these years of suffering, so that finally you, too, though not innocent like your children, may *become* worthy of joining them in Heaven? Is it not written in the Psalms

⁶A prayer for the dead.

⁷*L'kiddush basbem*, i.e., for the sanctification of God's name.

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that God preserves all your tears?⁸ So perhaps none of your sufferings were in vain." For the first time in many years he found relief from his suffering through the new point of view which I was able to open up to him.

LIFE'S TRANSITORINESS

Those things which seem to take meaning away from human life include not only suffering but dying as well. I never tire of saying that the only really transitory aspects of life are the potentialities; but as soon as they are actualized, they are rendered realities at that very moment; they are saved and delivered into the past, wherein they are rescued and preserved from transitoriness. For, in the past, nothing is irretrievably lost but everything irrevocably stored.

Thus, the transitoriness of our existence in no way makes it meaningless. But it does constitute our responsibility; for everything hinges upon our realizing the essentially transitory possibilities. Man constantly makes his choice concerning the mass of present potentialities; which of these will be condemned to nonbeing and which will be actualized? Which choice will be made an actuality once and forever, an immortal "footprint in the sands of time"? At any moment, man must decide, for better or for worse, what will be the monument of his existence.

Usually, to be sure, man considers only the stubble field of transitoriness and overlooks the full granaries

⁸"Thou hast kept count of my tossings; put thou my tears in thy bottle! Are they not in thy book?" (Ps. 56, 8.)

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of the past, wherein he had salvaged once and for all his deeds, his joys and also his sufferings. Nothing can be undone, and nothing can be done away with. I should say *having been* is the surest kind of being.

Logotherapy, keeping in mind the essential transitoriness of human existence, is not pessimistic but rather activistic. To express this point figuratively we might say: The pessimist resembles a man who observes with fear and sadness that his wall calendar, from which he daily tears a sheet, grows thinner with each passing day. On the other hand, the person who attacks the problems of life actively is like a man who removes each successive leaf from his calendar and files it neatly and carefully away with its predecessors, after first having jotted down a few diary notes on the back. He can reflect with pride and joy on all the richness set down in these notes, on all the life he has already lived to the fullest. What will it matter to him if he notices that he is growing old? Has he any reason to envy the young people whom he sees, or wax nostalgic over his own lost youth? What reasons has he to envy a young person? For the possibilities that a young person has, the future which is in store for him? "No, thank you," he will think. "Instead of possibilities, I have realities in my past, not only the reality of work done and of love loved, but of sufferings bravely suffered. These sufferings are even the things of which I am most proud, though these are things which cannot inspire envy."

LOGOTHERAPY AS A TECHNIQUE

A realistic fear, like the fear of death, cannot be tranquilized away by its psychodynamic interpretation; on the other hand, a neurotic fear, such as agoraphobia, cannot be cured by philosophical understanding. However, logotherapy has developed a special technique to handle such cases, too. To understand what is going on whenever this technique is used, we take as a starting point a condition which is frequently observed in neurotic individuals, namely, anticipatory anxiety. It is characteristic of this fear that it produces precisely that of which the patient is afraid. An individual, for example, who is afraid of blushing when he enters a large room and faces many people will actually be more prone to blush under these circumstances. In this context, one might amend the saying "The wish is father to the thought" to "The fear is mother of the event."

Ironically enough, in the same way that fear brings to pass what one is afraid of, likewise a forced intention makes impossible what one forcibly wishes. This excessive intention, or "hyper-intention," as I call it, can be observed particularly in cases of sexual neurosis. The more a man tries to demonstrate his sexual potency or a woman her ability to experience orgasm, the less they are able to succeed. Pleasure is, and must remain, a side-effect or by-product, and is destroyed and spoiled to the degree to which it is made a goal in itself.

In addition to excessive intention as described above, excessive attention, or "hyper-reflection," as it is called in logotherapy, may also be pathogenic (that

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is, lead to sickness). The following clinical report will indicate what I mean: A young woman came to me complaining of being frigid. The case history showed that in her childhood she had been sexually abused by her father. However, it had not been this traumatic experience in itself which had eventuated in her sexual neurosis, as could easily be evidenced. For it turned out that, through reading popular psychoanalytic literature, the patient had lived constantly with the fearful expectation of the toll which her traumatic experience would someday take. This anticipatory anxiety resulted both in excessive intention to confirm her femininity and excessive attention centered upon herself rather than upon her partner. This was enough to incapacitate the patient for the peak experience of sexual pleasure, since the orgasm was made an object of intention, and an object of attention as well, instead of remaining an unintended effect of unreflected dedication and surrender to the partner. After undergoing short-term logotherapy, the patient's excessive attention and intention of her ability to experience orgasm had been "dereflected," to introduce another logotherapeutic term. When her attention was refocused toward the proper object, i.e., the partner, orgasm established itself spontaneously.⁹

Logotherapy bases its technique called "paradoxi-

⁹In order to treat cases of sexual impotence, a specific logotherapeutic technique has been developed, based on the theory of hyper-intention and hyper-reflection as sketched above (Viktor E. Frankl, "The Pleasure Principle and Sexual Neurosis," *The International Journal of Sexology*, Vol. 5, No. 3 [1952], pp. 128-30). Of course, this cannot be dealt with in this brief presentation of the principles of logotherapy.

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cal intention" on the twofold fact that fear brings about that which one is afraid of, and that hyperintention makes impossible what one wishes. In German I described paradoxical intention as early as 1939.¹⁰ In this approach the phobic patient is invited to intend, even if only for a moment, precisely that which he fears.

Let me recall a case. A young physician consulted me because of his fear of perspiring. Whenever he expected an outbreak of perspiration, this anticipatory anxiety was enough to precipitate excessive sweating. In order to cut this circle formation I advised the patient, in the event that sweating should recur, to resolve deliberately to show people how much he could sweat. A week later he returned to report that whenever he met anyone who triggered his anticipatory anxiety, he said to himself, "I only sweated out a quart before, but now I'm going to pour at least ten quarts!" The result was that, after suffering from his phobia for four years, he was able, after a single session, to free himself permanently of it within one week.

The reader will note that this procedure consists of a reversal of the patient's attitude, inasmuch as his fear is replaced by a paradoxical wish. By this treatment, the wind is taken out of the sails of the anxiety.

Such a procedure, however, must make use of the specifically human capacity for self-detachment inherent in a sense of humor. This basic capacity to detach

¹⁰"Viktor E. Frankl, "Zur medikamentosen Unterstützung der Psychotherapie bei Neurosen," *Schweizer Archiv für Neurologie und Psychiatrie*, Vol. 43, pp. 26-31.

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one from oneself is actualized whenever the logotherapeutic technique called paradoxical intention is applied. At the same time, the patient is enabled to put himself at a distance from his own neurosis. A statement consistent with this is found in Gordon W. Allport's book, *The Individual and His Religion*: "The neurotic who learns to laugh at himself may be on the way to self-management, perhaps to cure."¹¹ Paradoxical intention is the empirical validation and clinical application of Allport's statement.

A few more case reports may serve to clarify this method further. The following patient was a book-keeper who had been treated by many doctors and in several clinics without any therapeutic success. When he was admitted to my hospital department, he was in extreme despair, confessing that he was close to suicide. For some years, he had suffered from a writer's cramp which had recently become so severe that he was in danger of losing his job. Therefore, only immediate short-term therapy could alleviate the situation. In starting treatment, Dr. Eva Kozdera recommended to the patient that he do just the opposite of what he usually had done; namely, instead of trying to write as neatly and legibly as possible, to write with the worst possible scrawl. He was advised to say to himself, "Now I will show people what a good scribbler I am!" And at the moment in which he deliberately tried to scribble, he was unable to do so. "I tried to scrawl but simply could not do it," he said the next day. Within forty-eight hours the patient was in this way freed from his writer's cramp, and remained free for the

¹¹New York, The Macmillan Co., 1956, p. 92.

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observation period after he had been treated. He is a happy man again and fully able to work.

A similar case, dealing, however, with speaking rather than writing, was related to me by a colleague in the Laryngological Department of the Vienna Poliklinik Hospital. It was the most severe case of stuttering he had come across in his many years of practice. Never in his life, as far as the stutterer could remember, had he been free from his speech trouble, even for a moment, except once. This happened when he was twelve years old and had hooked a ride on a streetcar. When caught by the conductor, he thought that the only way to escape would be to elicit his sympathy, and so he tried to demonstrate that he was just a poor stuttering boy. At that moment, when he tried to stutter, he was unable to do it. Without meaning to, he had practiced paradoxical intention, though not for therapeutic purposes.

However, this presentation should not leave the impression that paradoxical intention is effective only in monosymptomatic cases. By means of this logotherapeutic technique, my staff at the Vienna Poliklinik Hospital has succeeded in bringing relief even in obsessive-compulsive neuroses of a most severe degree and duration. I refer, for instance, to a woman sixty-five years of age who had suffered for sixty years from a washing compulsion. Dr. Eva Kozdera started logotherapeutic treatment by means of paradoxical intention, and two months later the patient was able to lead a normal life. Before admission to the Neurological Department of the Vienna Poliklinik Hospital, she had confessed, "Life was hell for me." Handicapped by her compulsion and bacteriophobic obsession, she

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finally remained in bed all day unable to do any housework. It would not be accurate to say that she is now completely free of symptoms, for an obsession may come to her mind. However, she is able to "joke about it," as she says; in short, to apply paradoxical intention.

Paradoxical intention can also be applied in cases of sleep disturbance. The fear of sleeplessness¹² results in a hyper-intention to fall asleep, which, in turn, incapacitates the patient to do so. To overcome this particular fear, I usually advise the patient not to try to sleep but rather to try to do just the opposite, that is, to stay awake as long as possible. In other words, the hyper-intention to fall asleep, arising from the anticipatory anxiety of not being able to do so, must be replaced by the paradoxical intention not to fall asleep, which soon will be followed by sleep.

Paradoxical intention is no panacea. Yet it lends itself as a useful tool in treating obsessive-compulsive and phobic conditions, especially in cases with underlying anticipatory anxiety. Moreover, it is a short-term therapeutic device. However, one should not conclude that such a short-term therapy necessarily results in only temporary therapeutic effects. One of "the more common illusions of Freudian orthodoxy," to quote the late Emil A. Gutheil, "is that the durability of results corresponds to the length of therapy."¹³ In my files there is, for instance, the case report of a patient

¹²The fear of sleeplessness is, in the majority of cases, due to the patient's ignorance of the fact that the organism provides itself *by itself* with the minimum amount of sleep really needed.

"American Journal of Psychotherapy, 10(1956), p. 134.

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to whom paradoxical intention was administered more than twenty years ago; the therapeutic effect proved to be, nevertheless, a permanent one.

One of the most remarkable facts is that paradoxical intention is effective regardless of the etiological basis of the case concerned. This confirms a statement once made by Edith Weisskopf-Joelson: "Although traditional psychotherapy has insisted that therapeutic practices have to be based on findings on etiology, it is possible that certain factors might cause neuroses during early childhood and that entirely different factors might relieve neuroses during adulthood."¹⁴

As for the actual causation of neuroses, apart from constitutional elements, whether somatic or psychic in nature, such feedback mechanisms as anticipatory anxiety seem to be a major pathogenic factor. A given symptom is responded to by a phobia, the phobia triggers the symptom, and the symptom, in turn, reinforces the phobia. A similar chain of events, however, can be observed in obsessive-compulsive cases in which the patient fights the ideas which haunt him.¹⁵ Thereby, however, he increases their power to disturb him, since pressure precipitates counterpressure. Again the symptom is reinforced! On the other hand, as soon as the patient stops fighting his obsessions and instead tries to ridicule them by dealing with them in

¹⁴"Some Comments on a Viennese School of Psychiatry," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 51 (1955), pp. 701-3.

"This is often motivated by the patient's fear that his obsessions indicate an imminent or even actual psychosis; the patient is not aware of the empirical fact that an obsessive-compulsive neurosis is immunizing him against a formal psychosis rather than endangering him in this direction.

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an ironical way - by applying paradoxical intention - *the vicious circle is cut*, the symptom diminishes and finally atrophies. In the fortunate case where there is no existential vacuum which invites and elicits the symptom, the patient will not only succeed in ridiculing his neurotic fear but finally will succeed in completely ignoring it.

As we see, anticipatory anxiety has to be counteracted by paradoxical intention; hyper-intention as well as hyper-reflection have to be counteracted by de-reflection; dereflection, however, ultimately is not possible except by the patient's orientation toward his specific vocation and mission in life.¹⁶

It is not the neurotic's self-concern, whether pity or contempt, which breaks the circle formation; the cue to cure is self-transcendence!

THE COLLECTIVE NEUROSIS

Every age has its own collective neurosis, and every age needs its own psychotherapy to cope with it. The existential vacuum which is the mass neurosis of the present time can be described as a private and personal form of nihilism; for nihilism can be defined as the contention that being has no meaning. As for psychotherapy, however, it will never be able to cope with this state of affairs on a mass scale if it does not keep itself free from the impact and influence of the

¹⁶This conviction is supported by Allport who once said, "As the focus of striving shifts from the conflict to selfless goals, the life as a whole becomes sounder even though the neurosis may never completely disappear" (op. cit., p. 95).

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contemporary trends of a nihilistic philosophy; otherwise it represents a symptom of the mass neurosis rather than its possible cure. Psychotherapy would not only reflect a nihilistic philosophy but also, even though unwillingly and unwittingly, transmit to the patient what is actually a caricature rather than a true picture of man.

First of all, there is a danger inherent in the teaching of man's "nothingbutness," the theory that man is nothing but the result of biological, psychological and sociological conditions, or the product of heredity and environment. Such a view of man makes a neurotic believe what he is prone to believe anyway, namely, that he is the pawn and victim of outer influences or inner circumstances. This neurotic fatalism is fostered and strengthened by a psychotherapy which denies that man is free.

To be sure, a human being is a finite thing, and his freedom is restricted. It is not freedom from conditions, but it *is* freedom to take a stand toward the conditions. As I once put it: "As a professor in two fields, neurology and psychiatry, I am fully aware of the extent to which man is subject to biological, psychological and sociological conditions. But in addition to being a professor in two fields I am a survivor of four camps - concentration camps, that is - and as such I also bear witness to the unexpected extent to which man is capable of defying and braving even the worst conditions conceivable."¹⁷

¹⁷"Value Dimensions in Teaching," a color television film produced by Hollywood Animators, Inc., for the California Junior College Association.

CRITIQUE OF PAN-DETERMINISM

Psychoanalysis has often been blamed for its so-called pan-sexualism. I, for one, doubt whether this reproach has ever been legitimate. However, there is something which seems to me to be an even more erroneous and dangerous assumption, namely, that which I call "pan-determinism." By that I mean the view of man which disregards his capacity to take a stand toward any conditions whatsoever. Man is *not* fully conditioned and determined but rather determines himself whether he gives in to conditions or stands up to them. In other words, man is ultimately self-determining. Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment.

By the same token, every human being has the freedom to change at any instant. Therefore, we can predict his future only within the large framework of a statistical survey referring to a whole group; the individual personality, however, remains essentially unpredictable. The basis for any predictions would be represented by biological, psychological or sociological conditions. Yet one of the main features of human existence is the capacity to rise above such conditions, to grow beyond them. Man is capable of changing the world for the better if possible, and of changing himself for the better if necessary.

Let me cite the case of Dr. J. He was the only man I ever encountered in my whole life whom I would dare to call a Mephistophelean being, a satanic figure. At that time he was generally called "the mass murderer of Steinhof" (the large mental hospital in Vienna).

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When the Nazis started their euthanasia program, he held all the strings in his hands and was so fanatic in the job assigned to him that he tried not to let one single psychotic individual escape the gas chamber. After the war, when I came back to Vienna, I asked what had happened to Dr. J. "He had been imprisoned by the Russians in one of the isolation cells of Steinhof," they told me. "The next day, however, the door of his cell stood open and Dr. J. was never seen again." Later I was convinced that, like others, he had with the help of his comrades made his way to South America. More recently, however, I was consulted by a former Austrian diplomat who had been imprisoned behind the Iron Curtain for many years, first in Siberia and then in the famous Lubianka prison in Moscow. While I was examining him neurologically, he suddenly asked me whether I happened to know Dr. J. After my affirmative reply he continued: "I made his acquaintance in Lubianka. There he died, at about the age of forty, from cancer of the urinary bladder. Before he died, however, he showed himself to be the best comrade you can imagine! He gave consolation to everybody. He lived up to the highest conceivable moral standard. He was the best friend I ever met during my long years in prison!"

This is the story of Dr. J., "the mass murderer of Steinhof." How can we dare to predict the behavior of man? We may predict the movements of a machine, of an automaton; more than this, we may even try to predict the mechanisms or "dynamisms" of the human *psyche* as well. But man is more than *psyche*.

Freedom, however, is not the last word. Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is

but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibility. In fact, freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility. That is why *I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.*

THE PSYCHIATRIC CREDO

There is nothing conceivable which would so condition a man as to leave him without the slightest freedom. Therefore, a residue of freedom, however limited it may be, is left to man in neurotic and even psychotic cases. Indeed, the innermost core of the patient's personality is not even touched by a psychosis.

An incurably psychotic individual may lose his usefulness but yet retain the dignity of a human being. This is my psychiatric credo. Without it I should not think it worthwhile to be a psychiatrist. For whose sake? Just for the sake of a damaged brain machine which cannot be repaired? If the patient were not definitely more, euthanasia would be justified.

PSYCHIATRY REHUMANIZED

For too long a time - for half a century, in fact - psychiatry tried to interpret the human mind merely as a mechanism, and consequently the therapy of mental disease merely in terms of a technique. I believe this dream has been dreamt out. What now begins to loom on the horizon are not the sketches of a psychologized

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medicine but rather those of a humanized psychiatry.

A doctor, however, who would still interpret his own role mainly as that of a technician would confess that he sees in his patient nothing more than a machine, instead of seeing the human being behind the disease!

A human being is not one thing among others; *things* determine each other, but *man* is ultimately self-determining. What he becomes - within the limits of endowment and environment - he has made out of himself. In the concentration camps, for example, in this living laboratory and on this testing ground, we watched and witnessed some of our comrades behave like swine while others behaved like saints. Man has both potentialities within himself; which one is actualized depends on decisions but not on conditions.

Our generation is realistic, for we have come to know man as he really is. After all, man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the *Shema Yisrael* on his lips.

POSTSCRIPT 1984

*The Case for a Tragic
Optimism**

Dedicated to the memory of Edith Weisskopf-Jelson, whose pioneering efforts in logotherapy in the United States began as early as 1955 and whose contributions to the field have been invaluable.

LET US FIRST ASK OURSELVES WHAT SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD by "a tragic optimism." In brief it means that one is, and remains, optimistic in spite of the "tragic triad," as it is called in logotherapy, a triad which consists of those aspects of human existence which may be circumscribed by: (1) pain; (2) guilt; and (3) death. This chapter, in fact, raises the question, How is it possible to say yes to life in spite of all that? How, to pose the question differently, can life retain its potential meaning in spite of its tragic aspects? After all, "saying yes to life in spite of everything," to use the phrase in which the title of a German book of mine

*This chapter is based on a lecture I presented at the Third World Congress of Logotherapy, Regensburg University, West Germany, June 1983.

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is couched, presupposes that life is potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable. And this in turn presupposes the human capacity to creatively turn life's negative aspects into something positive or constructive. In other words, what matters is to make the best of any given situation. "The best," however, is that which in Latin is called *optimum* - hence the reason I speak of a tragic optimism, that is, an optimism in the face of tragedy and in view of the human potential which at its best always allows for: (1) turning suffering into a human achievement and accomplishment; (2) deriving from guilt the opportunity to change oneself for the better; and (3) deriving from life's transitoriness an incentive to take responsible action.

It must be kept in mind, however, that optimism is not anything to be commanded or ordered. One cannot even force oneself to be optimistic indiscriminately, against all odds, against all hope. And what is true for hope is also true for the other two components of the triad inasmuch as faith and love cannot be commanded or ordered either.

To the European, it is a characteristic of the American culture that, again and again, one is commanded and ordered to "be happy." But happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue. One must have a reason to "be happy." Once the reason is found, however, one becomes happy automatically. As we see, a human being is not one in pursuit of happiness but rather in search of a reason to become happy, last but not least, through actualizing the potential meaning inherent and dormant in a given situation.

This need for a reason is similar in another specifi-

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cally human phenomenon - laughter. If you want anyone to laugh you have to provide him with a reason, e.g., you have to tell him a joke. In no way is it possible to evoke real laughter by urging him, or having him urge himself, to laugh. Doing so would be the same as urging people posed in front of a camera to say "cheese," only to find that in the finished photographs their faces are frozen in artificial smiles.

In logotherapy, such a behavior pattern is called "hyper-intention." It plays an important role in the causation of sexual neurosis, be it frigidity or impotence. The more a patient, instead of forgetting himself through giving himself, directly strives for orgasm, i.e., sexual pleasure, the more this pursuit of sexual pleasure becomes self-defeating. Indeed, what is called "the pleasure principle" is, rather, a fun-spoiler.

Once an individual's search for a meaning is successful, it not only renders him happy but also gives him the capability to cope with suffering. And what happens if one's groping for a meaning has been in vain? This may well result in a fatal condition. Let us recall, for instance, what sometimes happened in extreme situations such as prisoner-of-war camps or concentration camps. In the first, as I was told by American soldiers, a behavior pattern crystallized to which they referred as "give-up-itis." In the concentration camps, this behavior was paralleled by those who one morning, at five, refused to get up and go to work and instead stayed in the hut, on the straw wet with urine and faeces. Nothing - neither warnings nor threats - could induce them to change their minds. And then something typical occurred: they took out a cigarette from deep down in a pocket where they had

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hidden it and started smoking. At that moment we knew that for the next forty-eight hours or so we would watch them dying. Meaning orientation had subsided, and consequently the seeking of immediate pleasure had taken over.

Is this not reminiscent of another parallel, a parallel that confronts us day by day? I think of those youngsters who, on a worldwide scale, refer to themselves as the "no future" generation. To be sure, it is not just a cigarette to which they resort; it is drugs.

In fact, the drug scene is one aspect of a more general mass phenomenon, namely the feeling of meaninglessness resulting from a frustration of our existential needs which in turn has become a universal phenomenon in our industrial societies. Today it is not only logotherapists who claim that the feeling of meaninglessness plays an ever increasing role in the etiology of neurosis. As Irvin D. Yalom of Stanford University states in *Existential Psychotherapy*: "Of forty consecutive patients applying for therapy at a psychiatric outpatient clinic . . . twelve (30 percent) had some major problem involving meaning (as adjudged from self-ratings, therapists, or independent judges)."¹ Thousands of miles east of Palo Alto, the situation differs only by 1 percent; the most recent pertinent statistics indicate that in Vienna, 29 percent of the population complain that meaning is missing from their lives.

As to the causation of the feeling of meaninglessness, one may say, albeit in an oversimplifying vein,

¹Basic Books, New York, 1980, p. 448.

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that people have enough to live by but nothing to live for; they have the means but no meaning. To be sure, some do not even have the means. In particular, I think of the mass of people who are today unemployed. Fifty years ago, I published a study² devoted to a specific type of depression I had diagnosed in cases of young patients suffering from what I called "unemployment neurosis." And I could show that this neurosis really originated in a twofold erroneous identification: being jobless was equated with being useless, and being useless was equated with having a meaningless life. Consequently, whenever I succeeded in persuading the patients to volunteer in youth organizations, adult education, public libraries and the like - in other words, as soon as they could fill their abundant free time with some sort of unpaid but meaningful activity - their depression disappeared although their economic situation had not changed and their hunger was the same. The truth is that man does not live by welfare alone.

Along with unemployment neurosis, which is triggered by an individual's socioeconomic situation, there are other types of depression which are traceable back to psychodynamic or biochemical conditions, whichever the case may be. Accordingly, psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy are indicated respectively. Insofar as the feeling of meaninglessness is concerned, however, we should not overlook and forget that, *per se*, it is not a matter of pathology; rather than being the sign

²"Wirtschaftskrise und Seelenleben vom Standpunkt des Jugendberaters," *Sozialärztliche Rundschau*, Vol. 4 (1933), pp. 43-46.

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and symptom of a neurosis, it is, I would say, the proof of one's humanness. But although it is not caused by anything pathological, it may well cause a pathological reaction; in other words, it is potentially pathogenic. Just consider the mass neurotic syndrome so pervasive in the young generation: there is ample empirical evidence that the three facets of this syndrome - depression, aggression, addiction - are due to what is called in logotherapy "the existential vacuum," a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness.

It goes without saying that not each and every case of depression is to be traced back to a feeling of meaninglessness, nor does suicide - in which depression sometimes eventuates - always result from an existential vacuum. But even if each and every case of suicide had not been *undertaken* out of a feeling of meaninglessness, it may well be that an individual's impulse to take his life would have been *overcome* had he been aware of some meaning and purpose worth living for.

If, thus, a strong meaning orientation plays a decisive role in the prevention of suicide, what about intervention in cases in which there is a suicide risk? As a young doctor I spent four years in Austria's largest state hospital where I was in charge of the pavilion in which severely depressed patients were accommodated - most of them having been admitted after a suicide attempt. I once calculated that I must have explored twelve thousand patients during those four years. What accumulated was quite a store of experience from which I still draw whenever I am confronted with someone who is prone to suicide. I

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explain to such a person that patients have repeatedly told me how happy they were that the suicide attempt had not been successful; weeks, months, years later, they told me, it turned out that there *was* a solution to their problem, an answer to their question, a meaning to their life. "Even if things only take such a good turn in one of a thousand cases," my explanation continues, "who can guarantee that in your case it will not happen one day, sooner or later? But in the first place, you have to live to see the day on which it may happen, so you have to survive in order to see that day dawn, and from now on the responsibility for survival does not leave you."

Regarding the second facet of the mass neurotic syndrome - aggression - let me cite an experiment once conducted by Carolyn Wood Sherif. She had succeeded in artificially building up mutual aggressions between groups of boy scouts, and observed that the aggressions only subsided when the youngsters dedicated themselves to a collective purpose - that is, the joint task of dragging out of the mud a carriage in which food had to be brought to their camp. Immediately, they were not only challenged but also united by a meaning they had to fulfill.³

As for the third issue, addiction, I am reminded of the findings presented by Annemarie von Forstmeyer who noted that, as evidenced by tests and statistics, 90

³For further information on this experiment, see Viktor E. Frankl, *The Unconscious God*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1978, p. 140; and Viktor E. Frankl, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1978, p. 36.

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percent of the alcoholics she studied had suffered from an abysmal feeling of meaninglessness. Of the drug addicts studied by Stanley Krippner, 100 percent believed that "things seemed meaningless."⁴

Now let us turn to the question of meaning itself. To begin with, I would like to clarify that, in the first place, the logotherapist is concerned with the potential meaning inherent and dormant in all the single situations one has to face throughout his or her life. Therefore, I will not be elaborating here on the meaning of one's life as a whole, although I do not deny that such a long-range meaning does exist. To invoke an analogy, consider a movie: it consists of thousands upon thousands of individual pictures, and each of them makes sense and carries a meaning, yet the meaning of the whole film cannot be seen before its last sequence is shown. However, we cannot understand the whole film without having first understood each of its components, each of the individual pictures. Isn't it the same with life? Doesn't the final meaning of life, too, reveal itself, if at all, only at its end, on the verge of death? And doesn't this final meaning, too, depend on whether or not the potential meaning of each single situation has been actualized to the best of the respective individual's knowledge and belief?

The fact remains that meaning, and its perception, as seen from the logotherapeutic angle, is completely down to earth rather than afloat in the air or resident in an ivory tower. Sweepingly, I would locate the cognition of meaning - of the personal meaning of a con-

⁴For further information, see *The Unconscious God*, pp. 97-100; and *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*, pp. 26-28.

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crete situation - midway between an "aha" experience along the lines of Karl Bühler's concept and a Gestalt perception, say, along the lines of Max Wertheimer's theory. The perception of meaning differs from the classical concept of Gestalt perception insofar as the latter implies the sudden awareness of a "figure" on a "ground," whereas the perception of meaning, as I see it, more specifically boils down to becoming aware of a possibility against the background of reality or, to express it in plain words, to becoming aware of *what can be done* about a given situation.

And how does a human being go about *finding* meaning? As Charlotte Bühler has stated: "All we can do is study the lives of people who seem to have found their answers to the questions of what ultimately human life is about as against those who have not."⁵ In addition to such a biographical approach, however, we may as well embark on a biological approach. Logotherapy conceives of conscience as a prompter which, if need be, indicates the direction in which we have to move in a given life situation. In order to carry out such a task, conscience must apply a measuring stick to the situation one is confronted with, and this situation has to be evaluated in the light of a set of criteria, in the light of a hierarchy of values. These values, however, cannot be espoused and adopted by us on a conscious level - they are something that we *are*. They have crystallized in the course of the evolution of our species; they are founded on our biological

⁵"Basic Theoretical Concepts of Humanistic Psychology," *American Psychologist*, XXVI (April 1971), p. 378.

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past and are rooted in our biological depth. Konrad Lorenz might have had something similar in mind when he developed the concept of a biological *a priori*, and when both of us recently discussed my own view on the biological foundation of the valuing process, he enthusiastically expressed his accord. In any case, if a pre-reflective axiological self-understanding exists, we may assume that it is ultimately anchored in our biological heritage.

As logotherapy teaches, there are three main avenues on which one arrives at meaning in life. The first is by creating a work or by doing a deed. The second is by experiencing something or encountering someone; in other words, meaning can be found not only in work but also in love. Edith Weisskopf-Joelson observed in this context that the logotherapeutic "notion that experiencing can be as valuable as achieving is therapeutic because it compensates for our one-sided emphasis on the external world of achievement at the expense of the internal world of experience."⁶

Most important, however, is the third avenue to meaning in life: even the helpless victim of a hopeless situation, facing a fate he cannot change, may rise above himself, may grow beyond himself, and by so doing change himself. He may turn a personal tragedy into a triumph. Again it was Edith Weisskopf-Joelson who, as mentioned on p. 136, once expressed the hope that logotherapy "may help counteract certain unhealthy trends in the present-day culture of the United States, where the incurable sufferer is given very little

⁶"The Place of Logotherapy in the World Today," *The International Forum for Logotherapy*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1980), pp. 3-7.

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opportunity to be proud of his suffering and to consider it ennobling rather than degrading" so that "he is not only unhappy, but also ashamed of being unhappy."

For a quarter of a century I ran the neurological department of a general hospital and bore witness to my patients' capacity to turn their predicaments into human achievements. In addition to such practical experience, empirical evidence is also available which supports the possibility that one may find meaning in suffering. Researchers at the Yale University School of Medicine "have been impressed by the number of prisoners of war of the Vietnam war who explicitly claimed that although their captivity was extraordinarily stressful - filled with torture, disease, malnutrition, and solitary confinement - they nevertheless . . . benefited from the captivity experience, seeing it as a growth experience."⁷

But the most powerful arguments in favor of "a tragic optimism" are those which in Latin are called *argumenta ad hominem*. Jerry Long, to cite an example, is a living testimony to "the defiant power of the human spirit," as it is called in logotherapy.⁸ To quote the *Texarkana Gazette*, "Jerry Long has been paralyzed from his neck down since a diving accident which rendered him a quadriplegic three years ago. He

⁷W. H. Sledge, J. A. Boydston and A. J. Rabe, "Self-Concept Changes Related to War Captivity," *Arch. Gen. Psychiatry*, 37 (1980), pp. 430-443.

⁸"The Defiant Power of the Human Spirit" was in fact the title of a paper presented by Long at the Third World Congress of Logotherapy in June 1983.

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was 17 when the accident occurred. Today Long can use his mouth stick to type. He 'attends' two courses at Community College via a special telephone. The intercom allows Long to both hear and participate in class discussions. He also occupies his time by reading, watching television and writing." And in a letter I received from him, he writes: "I view my life as being abundant with meaning and purpose. The attitude that I adopted on that fateful day has become my personal credo for life: I broke my neck, it didn't break me. I am currently enrolled in my first psychology course in college. I believe that my handicap will only enhance my ability to help others. I know that without the suffering, the growth that I have achieved would have been impossible."

Is this to say that suffering is indispensable to the discovery of meaning? In no way. I only insist that meaning is available in spite of - nay, even through - suffering, provided, as noted in Part Two of this book, that the suffering is unavoidable. If it is avoidable, the meaningful thing to do is to remove its cause, for unnecessary suffering is masochistic rather than heroic. If, on the other hand, one cannot change a situation that causes his suffering, he can still choose his attitude.⁹ Long had not been chosen to break his

⁹I won't forget an interview I once heard on Austrian TV, given by a Polish cardiologist who, during World War II, had helped organize the Warsaw ghetto upheaval. "What a heroic deed," exclaimed the reporter. "Listen," calmly replied the doctor, "to take a gun and shoot is no great thing; but if the SS leads you to a gas chamber or to a mass grave to execute you on the spot, and you can't do anything about it - except for going your way with dignity - you see, this is what I would call heroism." Attitudinal heroism, so to speak.

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neck, but he did decide not to let himself be broken by what had happened to him.

As we see, the priority stays with creatively changing the situation that causes us to suffer. But the superiority goes to the "know-how to suffer," if need be. And there is empirical evidence that - literally - the "man in the street" is of the same opinion. Austrian public-opinion pollsters recently reported that those held in highest esteem by most of the people interviewed are neither the great artists nor the great scientists, neither the great statesmen nor the great sports figures, but those who master a hard lot with their heads held high.

In turning to the second aspect of the tragic triad, namely guilt, I would like to depart from a theological concept that has always been fascinating to me. I refer to what is called *mysterium iniquitatis*, meaning, as I see it, that a crime in the final analysis remains inexplicable inasmuch as it cannot be fully traced back to biological, psychological and/or sociological factors. Totally explaining one's crime would be tantamount to explaining away his or her guilt and to seeing in him or her not a free and responsible human being but a machine to be repaired. Even criminals themselves abhor this treatment and prefer to be held responsible for their deeds. From a convict serving his sentence in an Illinois penitentiary I received a letter in which he deplored that "the criminal never has a chance to explain himself. He is offered a variety of excuses to choose from. Society is blamed and in many instances the blame is put on the victim." Furthermore, when I addressed the prisoners in San Quentin, I told them

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that "you are human beings like me, and as such you were free to commit a crime, to become guilty. Now, however, you are responsible for overcoming guilt by rising above it, by growing beyond yourselves, by changing for the better." They felt understood.¹⁰ And from Frank E. W., an ex-prisoner, I received a note which stated that he had "started a logotherapy group for ex-felons. We are 27 strong and the newer ones are staying out of prison through the peer strength of those of us from the original group. Only one returned - and he is now free."

As for the concept of collective guilt, I personally think that it is totally unjustified to hold one person responsible for the behavior of another person or a collective of persons. Since the end of World War II, I have not become weary of publicly arguing against the collective guilt concept.¹² Sometimes, however, it takes a lot of didactic tricks to detach people from their superstitions. An American woman once confronted me with the reproach, "How can you still write some of your books in German, Adolf Hitler's language?" In response, I asked her if she had knives in her kitchen, and when she answered that she did, I acted dismayed and shocked, exclaiming, "How can you still use knives after so many killers have used them to stab and murder their victims?" She stopped objecting to my writing books in German.

¹⁰See also Joseph B. Fabry, *The Pursuit of Meaning*, New York, Harper and Row, 1980.

¹¹Cf. Viktor E. Frankl, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1978, pp. 42-43.

¹²See also Viktor E. Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1967.

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The third aspect of the tragic triad concerns death. But it concerns life as well, for at any time each of the moments of which life consists is dying, and that moment will never recur. And yet is not this transitoriness a reminder that challenges us to make the best possible use of each moment of our lives? It certainly is, and hence my imperative: *Live as if you were living for the second time and had acted as wrongly the first time as you are about to act now.*

In fact, the opportunities to act properly, the potentialities to fulfill a meaning, are affected by the irreversibility of our lives. But also the potentialities alone are so affected. For as soon as we have used an opportunity and have actualized a potential meaning, we have done so once and for all. We have rescued it into the past wherein it has been safely delivered and deposited. In the past, nothing is irretrievably lost, but rather, on the contrary, everything is irrevocably stored and treasured. To be sure, people tend to see only the stubble fields of transitoriness but overlook and forget the full granaries of the past into which they have brought the harvest of their lives: the deeds done, the loves loved, and last but not least, the sufferings they have gone through with courage and dignity.

From this one may see that there is no reason to pity old people. Instead, young people should envy them. It is true that the old have no opportunities, no possibilities in the future. But they have more than that. Instead of possibilities in the future, they have realities in the past - the potentialities they have actualized, the meanings they have fulfilled, the values they have realized - and nothing and nobody can ever remove these assets from the past.

In view of the possibility of finding meaning in suffering, life's meaning is an unconditional one, at least potentially. That unconditional meaning, however, is paralleled by the unconditional value of each and every person. It is that which warrants the indelible quality of the dignity of man. Just as life remains potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable, so too does the value of each and every person stay with him or her, and it does so because it is based on the values that he or she has realized in the past, and is not contingent on the usefulness that he or she may or may not retain in the present.

More specifically, this usefulness is usually defined in terms of functioning for the benefit of society. But today's society is characterized by achievement orientation, and consequently it adores people who are successful and happy and, in particular, it adores the young. It virtually ignores the value of all those who are otherwise, and in so doing blurs the decisive difference between being valuable in the sense of dignity and being valuable in the sense of usefulness. If one is not cognizant of this difference and holds that an individual's value stems only from his present usefulness, then, believe me, one owes it only to personal inconsistency not to plead for euthanasia along the lines of Hitler's program, that is to say, "mercy" killing of all those who have lost their social usefulness, be it because of old age, incurable illness, mental deterioration, or whatever handicap they may suffer.

Confounding the dignity of man with mere usefulness arises from a conceptual confusion that in turn may be traced back to the contemporary nihilism

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transmitted on many an academic campus and many an analytical couch. Even in the setting of training analyses such an indoctrination may take place. Nihilism does not contend that there is nothing, but it states that everything is meaningless. And George A. Sargent was right when he promulgated the concept of "learned meaninglessness." He himself remembered a therapist who said, "George, you must realize that the world is a joke. There is no justice, everything is random. Only when you realize this will you understand how silly it is to take yourself seriously. There is no grand purpose in the universe. It just is. There's no particular meaning in what decision you make today about how to act."¹³

One must not generalize such a criticism. In principle, training is indispensable, but if so, therapists should see their task in immunizing the trainee against nihilism rather than inoculating him with the cynicism that is a defense mechanism against their own nihilism.

Logotherapists may even conform to some of the training and licensing requirements stipulated by the other schools of psychotherapy. In other words, one may howl with the wolves, if need be, but when doing so, one should be, I would urge, a sheep in wolf's clothing. There is no need to become untrue to the basic concept of man and the principles of the philosophy of life inherent in logotherapy. Such a loyalty is not hard to maintain in view of the fact that, as Elisabeth S. Lukas once pointed out, "throughout

¹³"Transference and Countertransference in Logotherapy," *The International Forum for Logotherapy*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 1982), pp. 115-18.

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the history of psychotherapy, there has never been a school as undogmatic as logotherapy."¹⁴ And at the First World Congress of Logotherapy (San Diego, California, November 6-8, 1980) I argued not only for the rehumanization of psychotherapy but also for what I called "the degurification of logotherapy." My interest does not lie in raising parrots that just rehash "their master's voice," but rather in passing the torch to "independent and inventive, innovative and creative spirits."

Sigmund Freud once asserted, "Let one attempt to expose a number of the most diverse people uniformly to hunger. With the increase of the imperative urge of hunger all individual differences will blur, and in their stead will appear the uniform expression of the one unstilled urge." Thank heaven, Sigmund Freud was spared knowing the concentration camps from the inside. His subjects lay on a couch designed in the plush style of Victorian culture, not in the filth of Auschwitz. *There*, the "individual differences" did *not* "blur" but, on the contrary, people became more different; people unmasked themselves, both the swine and the saints. And today you need no longer hesitate to use the word "saints": think of Father Maximilian Kolbe who was starved and finally murdered by an injection of carbolic acid at Auschwitz and who in 1983 was canonized.

¹⁴Logotherapy is not imposed on those who are interested in psychotherapy. It is not comparable to an Oriental bazaar but rather to a supermarket. In the former, the customer is talked into buying something. In the latter, he is shown, and offered, various things from which he may pick what he deems usable and valuable.

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You may be prone to blame me for invoking examples that are the exceptions to the rule. "*Sed omnia praeclara tam difficilia quam rara sunt*" (but everything great is just as difficult to realize as it is rare to find) reads the last sentence of the *Ethics* of Spinoza. You may of course ask whether we really need to refer to "saints." Wouldn't it suffice just to refer to *decent* people? It is true that they form a minority. More than that, they always will remain a minority. And yet I see therein the very challenge to join the minority. For the world is in a bad state, but everything will become still worse unless each of us does his best.

So, let us be alert - alert in a twofold sense:

Since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of.

And since Hiroshima we know what is at stake.

1

What Are Emotions For?

It is with the heart that one sees rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY,

The Little Prince

Ponder the last moments of Gary and Mary Jane Chauncey, a couple completely devoted to their eleven-year-old daughter Andrea, who was confined to a wheelchair by cerebral palsy. The Chauncey family were passengers on an Amtrak train that crashed into a river after a barge hit and weakened a railroad bridge in Louisiana's bayou country. Thinking first of their daughter, the couple tried their best to save Andrea as water rushed into the sinking train; somehow they managed to push Andrea through a window to rescuers. Then, as the car sank beneath the water, they perished.¹

Andrea's story, of parents whose last heroic act is to ensure their child's survival, captures a moment of almost mythic courage. Without doubt such incidents of parental sacrifice for their progeny have been repeated countless times in human history and prehistory, and countless more in the larger course of evolution of our species.² Seen from the perspective of evolutionary biologists, such parental self-sacrifice is in the service of "reproductive success" in passing on one's genes to future generations. But from the perspective of a parent making a desperate decision in a moment of crisis, it is about nothing other than love.

As an insight into the purpose and potency of emotions, this exemplary act of parental heroism testifies to the role of altruistic love—and every other emotion we feel—in human life.³ It suggests that our deepest feelings, our passions and longings, are essential guides, and that our species owes much of its existence to their power in human affairs. That power is extraordinary: Only a potent love—the urgency of saving a cherished child—could lead a parent to override the impulse for personal survival. Seen from the intellect, their self-sacrifice was arguably irrational; seen from the heart, it was the only

choice to make.

Sociobiologists point to the preeminence of heart over head at such crucial moments when they conjecture about why evolution has given emotion such a central role in the human psyche. Our emotions, they say, guide us in facing predicaments and tasks too important to leave to intellect alone—danger, painful loss, persisting toward a goal despite frustrations, bonding with a mate, building a family. Each emotion offers a distinctive readiness to act; each points us in a direction that has worked well to handle the recurring challenges of human life.⁴ As these eternal situations were repeated and repeated over our evolutionary history, the survival value of our emotional repertoire was attested to by its becoming imprinted in our nerves as innate, automatic tendencies of the human heart.

A view of human nature that ignores the power of emotions is sadly shortsighted. The very name *Homo sapiens*, the thinking species, is misleading in light of the new appreciation and vision of the place of emotions in our lives that science now offers. As we all know from experience, when it comes to shaping our decisions and our actions, feeling counts every bit as much—and often more—than thought. We have gone too far in emphasizing the value and import of the purely rational—of what IQ measures—in human life. For better or worse, intelligence can come to nothing when the emotions hold sway.

WHEN PASSIONS OVERWHELM REASON

It was a tragedy of errors. Fourteen-year-old Matilda Crabtree was just playing a practical joke on her father: she jumped out of a closet and yelled “Boo!” as her parents came home at one in the morning from visiting friends.

But Bobby Crabtree and his wife thought Matilda was staying with friends that night. Hearing noises as he entered the house, Crabtree reached for his .357 caliber pistol and went into Matilda’s bedroom to investigate. When his daughter jumped from the closet, Crabtree shot her in the neck. Matilda Crabtree died twelve hours later.⁵

One emotional legacy of evolution is the fear that mobilizes us to protect our family from danger; that impulse impelled Bobby Crabtree to get his gun and search his house for the intruder he thought was prowling there. Fear primed Crabtree to shoot before he could fully register what he was shooting at, even before he could recognize his

daughter's voice. Automatic reactions of this sort have become etched in our nervous system, evolutionary biologists presume, because for a long and crucial period in human prehistory they made the difference between survival and death. Even more important, they mattered for the main task of evolution: being able to bear progeny who would carry on these very genetic predispositions—a sad irony, given the tragedy at the Crabtree household.

But while our emotions have been wise guides in the evolutionary long run, the new realities civilization presents have arisen with such rapidity that the slow march of evolution cannot keep up. Indeed, the first laws and proclamations of ethics—the Code of Hammurabi, the Ten Commandments of the Hebrews, the Edicts of Emperor Ashoka—can be read as attempts to harness, subdue, and domesticate emotional life. As Freud described in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, society has had to enforce from without rules meant to subdue tides of emotional excess that surge too freely within.

Despite these social constraints, passions overwhelm reason time and again. This given of human nature arises from the basic architecture of mental life. In terms of biological design for the basic neural circuitry of emotion, what we are born with is what worked best for the last 50,000 human generations, not the last 500 generations—and certainly not the last five. The slow, deliberate forces of evolution that have shaped our emotions have done their work over the course of a million years; the last 10,000 years—despite having witnessed the rapid rise of human civilization and the explosion of the human population from five million to five billion—have left little imprint on our biological templates for emotional life.

For better or for worse, our appraisal of every personal encounter and our responses to it are shaped not just by our rational judgments or our personal history, but also by our distant ancestral past. This leaves us with sometimes tragic propensities, as witness the sad events at the Crabtree household. In short, we too often confront postmodern dilemmas with an emotional repertoire tailored to the urgencies of the Pleistocene. That predicament is at the heart of my subject.

Impulses to Action

One early spring day I was driving along a highway over a mountain pass in Colorado, when a snow flurry suddenly blotted out the car a few lengths ahead of me. As I peered ahead I couldn't make out

anything; the swirling snow was now a blinding whiteness. Pressing my foot on the brake, I could feel anxiety flood my body and hear the thumping of my heart.

The anxiety built to full fear: I pulled over to the side of the road, waiting for the flurry to pass. A half hour later the snow stopped, visibility returned, and I continued on my way—only to be stopped a few hundred yards down the road, where an ambulance crew was helping a passenger in a car that had rear-ended a slower car in front; the collision blocked the highway. If I had continued driving in the blinding snow, I probably would have hit them.

The caution fear forced on me that day may have saved my life. Like a rabbit frozen in terror at the hint of a passing fox—or a protomammal hiding from a marauding dinosaur—I was overtaken by an internal state that compelled me to stop, pay attention, and take heed of a coming danger.

All emotions are, in essence, impulses to act, the instant plans for handling life that evolution has instilled in us. The very root of the word *emotion* is *motere*, the Latin verb “to move,” plus the prefix “e-” to connote “move away,” suggesting that a tendency to act is implicit in every emotion. That emotions lead to actions is most obvious in watching animals or children; it is only in “civilized” adults we so often find the great anomaly in the animal kingdom, emotions—root impulses to act—divorced from obvious reaction.⁶

In our emotional repertoire each emotion plays a unique role, as revealed by their distinctive biological signatures (see [Appendix A](#) for details on “basic” emotions). With new methods to peer into the body and brain, researchers are discovering more physiological details of how each emotion prepares the body for a very different kind of response:⁷

- With *anger* blood flows to the hands, making it easier to grasp a weapon or strike at a foe; heart rate increases, and a rush of hormones such as adrenaline generates a pulse of energy strong enough for vigorous action.
- With *fear* blood goes to the large skeletal muscles, such as in the legs, making it easier to flee—and making the face blanch as blood is shunted away from it (creating the feeling that the blood “runs cold”). At the same time, the body freezes, if only for a moment, perhaps allowing time to gauge whether hiding might be a better reaction. Circuits in the brain’s emotional centers trigger a flood of hormones

that put the body on general alert, making it edgy and ready for action, and attention fixates on the threat at hand, the better to evaluate what response to make.

- Among the main biological changes in *happiness* is an increased activity in a brain center that inhibits negative feelings and fosters an increase in available energy, and a quieting of those that generate worrisome thought. But there is no particular shift in physiology save a quiescence, which makes the body recover more quickly from the biological arousal of upsetting emotions. This configuration offers the body a general rest, as well as readiness and enthusiasm for whatever task is at hand and for striving toward a great variety of goals.

- *Love*, tender feelings, and sexual satisfaction entail parasympathetic arousal—the physiological opposite of the “fight-or-flight” mobilization shared by fear and anger. The parasympathetic pattern, dubbed the “relaxation response,” is a bodywide set of reactions that generates a general state of calm and contentment, facilitating cooperation.

- The lifting of the eyebrows in *surprise* allows the taking in of a larger visual sweep and also permits more light to strike the retina. This offers more information about the unexpected event, making it easier to figure out exactly what is going on and concoct the best plan for action.

- Around the world an expression of *disgust* looks the same, and sends the identical message: something is offensive in taste or smell, or metaphorically so. The facial expression of disgust—the upper lip curled to the side as the nose wrinkles slightly—suggests a primordial attempt, as Darwin observed, to close the nostrils against a noxious odor or to spit out a poisonous food.

- A main function for *sadness* is to help adjust to a significant loss, such as the death of someone close or a major disappointment. Sadness brings a drop in energy and enthusiasm for life’s activities, particularly diversions and pleasures, and, as it deepens and approaches depression, slows the body’s metabolism. This introspective withdrawal creates the opportunity to mourn a loss or frustrated hope, grasp its consequences for one’s life, and, as energy returns, plan new beginnings. This loss of energy may well have kept saddened—and vulnerable—early humans close to home, where they were safer.

These biological propensities to act are shaped further by our life

experience and our culture. For instance, universally the loss of a loved one elicits sadness and grief. But how we show our grieving—how emotions are displayed or held back for private moments—is molded by culture, as are which particular people in our lives fall into the category of “loved ones” to be mourned.

The protracted period of evolution when these emotional responses were hammered into shape was certainly a harsher reality than most humans endured as a species after the dawn of recorded history. It was a time when few infants survived to childhood and few adults to thirty years, when predators could strike at any moment, when the vagaries of droughts and floods meant the difference between starvation and survival. But with the coming of agriculture and even the most rudimentary human societies, the odds for survival began to change dramatically. In the last ten thousand years, when these advances took hold throughout the world, the ferocious pressures that had held the human population in check eased steadily.

Those same pressures had made our emotional responses so valuable for survival; as they waned, so did the goodness of fit of parts of our emotional repertoire. While in the ancient past a hair-trigger anger may have offered a crucial edge for survival, the availability of automatic weaponry to thirteen-year-olds has made it too often a disastrous reaction.⁸

Our Two Minds

A friend was telling me about her divorce, a painful separation. Her husband had fallen in love with a younger woman at work, and suddenly announced he was leaving to live with the other woman. Months of bitter wrangling over house, money, and custody of the children followed. Now, some months later, she was saying that her independence was appealing to her, that she was happy to be on her own. “I just don’t think about him anymore—I really don’t care,” she said. But as she said it, her eyes momentarily welled up with tears.

That moment of teary eyes could easily pass unnoticed. But the empathic understanding that someone’s watering eyes means she is sad despite her words to the contrary is an act of comprehending just as surely as is distilling meaning from words on a printed page. One is an act of the emotional mind, the other of the rational mind. In a very real sense we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels.

These two fundamentally different ways of knowing interact to

construct our mental life. One, the rational mind, is the mode of comprehension we are typically conscious of: more prominent in awareness, thoughtful, able to ponder and reflect. But alongside that there is another system of knowing: impulsive and powerful, if sometimes illogical—the emotional mind. (For a more detailed description of the characteristics of the emotional mind, see [Appendix B.](#))

The emotional/rational dichotomy approximates the folk distinction between “heart” and “head”; knowing something is right “in your heart” is a different order of conviction—somehow a deeper kind of certainty—than thinking so with your rational mind. There is a steady gradient in the ratio of rational-to-emotional control over the mind; the more intense the feeling, the more dominant the emotional mind becomes—and the more ineffectual the rational. This is an arrangement that seems to stem from eons of evolutionary advantage to having emotions and intuitions guide our instantaneous response in situations where our lives are in peril—and where pausing to think over what to do could cost us our lives.

These two minds, the emotional and the rational, operate in tight harmony for the most part, intertwining their very different ways of knowing to guide us through the world. Ordinarily there is a balance between emotional and rational minds, with emotion feeding into and informing the operations of the rational mind, and the rational mind refining and sometimes vetoing the inputs of the emotions. Still, the emotional and rational minds are semi-independent faculties, each, as we shall see, reflecting the operation of distinct, but interconnected, circuitry in the brain.

In many or most moments these minds are exquisitely coordinated; feelings are essential to thought, thought to feeling. But when passions surge the balance tips: it is the emotional mind that captures the upper hand, swamping the rational mind. The sixteenth-century humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote in a satirical vein of this perennial tension between reason and emotion:⁹

Jupiter has bestowed far more passion than reason—you could calculate the ratio as 24 to one. He set up two raging tyrants in opposition to Reason's solitary power: anger and lust. How far Reason can prevail against the combined forces of these two the common life of man makes quite clear. Reason does the only thing she can and shouts herself hoarse, repeating formulas of virtue, while the other two bid her go hang herself, and are increasingly noisy and offensive, until at last their Ruler is exhausted,

gives up, and surrenders.

HOW THE BRAIN GREW

To better grasp the potent hold of the emotions on the thinking mind—and why feeling and reason are so readily at war—consider how the brain evolved. Human brains, with their three pounds or so of cells and neural juices, are about triple the size of those in our nearest cousins in evolution, the nonhuman primates. Over millions of years of evolution, the brain has grown from the bottom up, with its higher centers developing as elaborations of lower, more ancient parts. (The growth of the brain in the human embryo roughly retraces this evolutionary course.)

The most primitive part of the brain, shared with all species that have more than a minimal nervous system, is the brainstem surrounding the top of the spinal cord. This root brain regulates basic life functions like breathing and the metabolism of the body's other organs, as well as controlling stereotyped reactions and movements. This primitive brain cannot be said to think or learn; rather it is a set of preprogrammed regulators that keep the body running as it should and reacting in a way that ensures survival. This brain reigned supreme in the Age of the Reptiles: Picture a snake hissing to signal the threat of an attack.

From the most primitive root, the brainstem, emerged the emotional centers. Millions of years later in evolution, from these emotional areas evolved the thinking brain or “neocortex,” the great bulb of convoluted tissues that make up the top layers. The fact that the thinking brain grew from the emotional reveals much about the relationship of thought to feeling; there was an emotional brain long before there was a rational one.

The most ancient root of our emotional life is in the sense of smell, or, more precisely, in the olfactory lobe, the cells that take in and analyze smell. Every living entity, be it nutritious, poisonous, sexual partner, predator or prey, has a distinctive molecular signature that can be carried in the wind. In those primitive times smell commended itself as a paramount sense for survival.

From the olfactory lobe the ancient centers for emotion began to evolve, eventually growing large enough to encircle the top of the brainstem. In its rudimentary stages, the olfactory center was

composed of little more than thin layers of neurons gathered to analyze smell. One layer of cells took in what was smelled and sorted it out into the relevant categories: edible or toxic, sexually available, enemy or meal. A second layer of cells sent reflexive messages throughout the nervous system telling the body what to do: bite, spit, approach, flee, chase.¹⁰

With the arrival of the first mammals came new, key layers of the emotional brain. These, surrounding the brainstem, look roughly like a bagel with a bite taken out at the bottom where the brainstem nestles into them. Because this part of the brain rings and borders the brainstem, it was called the “limbic” system, from “*limbus*,” the Latin word for “ring.” This new neural territory added emotions proper to the brain’s repertoire.¹¹ When we are in the grip of craving or fury, head-over-heels in love or recoiling in dread, it is the limbic system that has us in its grip.

As it evolved, the limbic system refined two powerful tools: learning and memory. These revolutionary advances allowed an animal to be much smarter in its choices for survival, and to fine-tune its responses to adapt to changing demands rather than having invariable and automatic reactions. If a food led to sickness, it could be avoided next time. Decisions like knowing what to eat and what to spurn were still determined largely through smell; the connections between the olfactory bulb and the limbic system now took on the tasks of making distinctions among smells and recognizing them, comparing a present smell with past ones, and so discriminating good from bad. This was done by the “rhinencephalon,” literally, the “nose brain,” a part of the limbic wiring, and the rudimentary basis of the neocortex, the thinking brain.

About 100 million years ago the brain in mammals took a great growth spurt. Piled on top of the thin two-layered cortex—the regions that plan, comprehend what is sensed, coordinate movement—several new layers of brain cells were added to form the neocortex. In contrast to the ancient brain’s two-layered cortex, the neocortex offered an extraordinary intellectual edge.

The *Homo sapiens* neocortex, so much larger than in any other species, has added all that is distinctly human. The neocortex is the seat of thought; it contains the centers that put together and comprehend what the senses perceive. It adds to a feeling what we think about it—and allows us to have feelings about ideas, art, symbols, imaginings.

In evolution the neocortex allowed a judicious fine-tuning that no doubt has made enormous advantages in an organism's ability to survive adversity, making it more likely that its progeny would in turn pass on the genes that contain that same neural circuitry. The survival edge is due to the neocortex's talent for strategizing, long-term planning, and other mental wiles. Beyond that, the triumphs of art, of civilization and culture, are all fruits of the neocortex.

This new addition to the brain allowed the addition of nuance to emotional life. Take love. Limbic structures generate feelings of pleasure and sexual desire—the emotions that feed sexual passion. But the addition of the neocortex and its connections to the limbic system allowed for the mother-child bond that is the basis of the family unit and the long-term commitment to childrearing that makes human development possible. (Species that have no neocortex, such as reptiles, lack maternal affection; when their young hatch, the newborns must hide to avoid being cannibalized.) In humans the protective bond between parent and child allows much of maturation to go on over the course of a long childhood—during which the brain continues to develop.

As we proceed up the phylogenetic scale from reptile to rhesus to human, the sheer mass of the neocortex increases; with that increase comes a geometric rise in the interconnections in brain circuitry. The larger the number of such connections, the greater the range of possible responses. The neocortex allows for the subtlety and complexity of emotional life, such as the ability to have feelings *about* our feelings. There is more neocortex-to-limbic system in primates than in other species—and vastly more in humans—suggesting why we are able to display a far greater range of reactions to our emotions, and more nuance. While a rabbit or rhesus has a restricted set of typical responses to fear, the larger human neocortex allows a far more nimble repertoire—including calling 911. The more complex the social system, the more essential is such flexibility—and there is no more complex social world than our own.¹²

But these higher centers do not govern all of emotional life; in crucial matters of the heart—and most especially in emotional emergencies—they can be said to defer to the limbic system. Because so many of the brain's higher centers sprouted from or extended the scope of the limbic area, the emotional brain plays a crucial role in neural architecture. As the root from which the newer brain grew, the emotional areas are intertwined via myriad connecting circuits to all

parts of the neocortex. This gives the emotional centers immense power to influence the functioning of the rest of the brain—including its centers for thought.

2

Anatomy of an Emotional Hijacking

Life is a comedy for those who think and a tragedy for those who feel.

HORACE WALPOLE

It was a hot August afternoon in 1963, the same day that the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his “I Have a Dream” speech to a civil rights march on Washington. On that day Richard Robles, a seasoned burglar who had just been paroled from a three-year sentence for the more than one hundred break-ins he had pulled to support a heroin habit, decided to do one more. He wanted to renounce crime, Robles later claimed, but he desperately needed money for his girlfriend and their three-year-old daughter.

The apartment he broke into that day belonged to two young women, twenty-one-year-old Janice Wylie, a researcher at *Newsweek* magazine, and twenty-three-year-old Emily Hoffert, a grade-school teacher. Though Robles chose the apartment on New York’s swanky Upper East Side to burglarize because he thought no one would be there, Wylie was home. Threatening her with a knife, Robles tied her up. As he was leaving, Hoffert came home. To make good his escape, Robles began to tie her up, too.

As Robles tells the tale years later, while he was tying up Hoffert, Janice Wylie warned him he would not get away with this crime: She would remember his face and help the police track him down. Robles, who had promised himself this was to have been his last burglary, panicked at that, completely losing control. In a frenzy, he grabbed a soda bottle and clubbed the women until they were unconscious, then, awash in rage and fear, he slashed and stabbed them over and over with a kitchen knife. Looking back on that moment some twenty-five years later, Robles lamented, “I just went bananas. My head just exploded.”

To this day Robles has lots of time to regret those few minutes of rage unleashed. At this writing he is still in prison, some three decades later, for what became known as the “Career Girl Murders.”

Such emotional explosions are neural hijackings. At those moments, evidence suggests, a center in the limbic brain proclaims an emergency, recruiting the rest of the brain to its urgent agenda. The hijacking occurs in an instant, triggering this reaction crucial moments before the neocortex, the thinking brain, has had a chance to glimpse fully what is happening, let alone decide if it is a good idea. The hallmark of such a hijack is that once the moment passes, those so possessed have the sense of not knowing what came over them.

These hijacks are by no means isolated, horrific incidents that lead to brutal crimes like the Career Girl Murders. In less catastrophic form—but not necessarily less intense—they happen to us with fair frequency. Think back to the last time you “lost it,” blowing up at someone—your spouse or child, or perhaps the driver of another car—to a degree that later, with some reflection and hindsight, seemed uncalled for. In all probability, that, too, was such a hijacking, a neural takeover which, as we shall see, originates in the amygdala, a center in the limbic brain.

Not all limbic hijackings are distressing. When a joke strikes someone as so uproarious that their laughter is almost explosive, that, too, is a limbic response. It is at work also in moments of intense joy: When Dan Jansen, after several heartbreakingly failing to capture an Olympic Gold Medal for speed skating (which he had vowed to do for his dying sister), finally won the Gold in the 1,000-meter race in the 1994 Winter Olympics in Norway, his wife was so overcome by the excitement and happiness that she had to be rushed to emergency physicians at rinkside.

THE SEAT OF ALL PASSION

In humans the amygdala (from the Greek word for “almond”) is an almond-shaped cluster of interconnected structures perched above the brainstem, near the bottom of the limbic ring. There are two amygdalas, one on each side of the brain, nestled toward the side of the head. The human amygdala is relatively large compared to that in any of our closest evolutionary cousins, the primates.

The hippocampus and the amygdala were the two key parts of the primitive “nose brain” that, in evolution, gave rise to the cortex and then the neocortex. To this day these limbic structures do much or

most of the brain's learning and remembering; the amygdala is the specialist for emotional matters. If the amygdala is severed from the rest of the brain, the result is a striking inability to gauge the emotional significance of events; this condition is sometimes called "affective blindness."

Lacking emotional weight, encounters lose their hold. One young man whose amygdala had been surgically removed to control severe seizures became completely uninterested in people, preferring to sit in isolation with no human contact. While he was perfectly capable of conversation, he no longer recognized close friends, relatives, or even his mother, and remained impassive in the face of their anguish at his indifference. Without an amygdala he seemed to have lost all recognition of feeling, as well as any feeling about feelings.¹ The amygdala acts as a storehouse of emotional memory, and thus of significance itself; life without the amygdala is a life stripped of personal meanings.

More than affection is tied to the amygdala; all passion depends on it. Animals that have their amygdala removed or severed lack fear and rage, lose the urge to compete or cooperate, and no longer have any sense of their place in their kind's social order; emotion is blunted or absent. Tears, an emotional signal unique to humans, are triggered by the amygdala and a nearby structure, the cingulate gyrus; being held, stroked, or otherwise comforted soothes these same brain regions, stopping the sobs. Without an amygdala, there are no tears of sorrow to soothe.

Joseph LeDoux, a neuroscientist at the Center for Neural Science at New York University, was the first to discover the key role of the amygdala in the emotional brain.² LeDoux is part of a fresh breed of neuroscientists who draw on innovative methods and technologies that bring a previously unknown level of precision to mapping the brain at work, and so can lay bare mysteries of mind that earlier generations of scientists have found impenetrable. His findings on the circuitry of the emotional brain overthrow a long-standing notion about the limbic system, putting the amygdala at the center of the action and placing other limbic structures in very different roles.³

LeDoux's research explains how the amygdala can take control over what we do even as the thinking brain, the neocortex, is still coming to a decision.

As we shall see, the workings of the amygdala and its interplay with the neocortex are at the heart of emotional intelligence.

THE NEURAL TRIPWIRE

Most intriguing for understanding the power of emotions in mental life are those moments of impassioned action that we later regret, once the dust has settled; the question is how we so easily become so irrational. Take, for example, a young woman who drove two hours to Boston to have brunch and spend the day with her boyfriend. During brunch he gave her a present she'd been wanting for months, a hard-to-find art print brought back from Spain. But her delight dissolved the moment she suggested that after brunch they go to a matinee of a movie she'd been wanting to see and her friend stunned her by saying he couldn't spend the day with her because he had softball practice. Hurt and incredulous, she got up in tears, left the cafe, and, on impulse, threw the print in a garbage can. Months later, recounting the incident, it's not walking out she regrets, but the loss of the print.

It is in moments such as these—when impulsive feeling overrides the rational—that the newly discovered role for the amygdala is pivotal. Incoming signals from the senses let the amygdala scan every experience for trouble. This puts the amygdala in a powerful post in mental life, something like a psychological sentinel, challenging every situation, every perception, with but one kind of question in mind, the most primitive: “Is this something I hate? That hurts me? Something I fear?” If so—if the moment at hand somehow draws a “Yes”—the amygdala reacts instantaneously, like a neural tripwire, telegraphing a message of crisis to all parts of the brain.

In the brain’s architecture, the amygdala is poised something like an alarm company where operators stand ready to send out emergency calls to the fire department, police, and a neighbor whenever a home security system signals trouble.

When it sounds an alarm of, say, fear, it sends urgent messages to every major part of the brain: it triggers the secretion of the body’s fight-or-flight hormones, mobilizes the centers for movement, and activates the cardiovascular system, the muscles, and the gut.⁴ Other circuits from the amygdala signal the secretion of emergency dollops of the hormone norepinephrine to heighten the reactivity of key brain areas, including those that make the senses more alert, in effect setting the brain on edge. Additional signals from the amygdala tell the brainstem to fix the face in a fearful expression, freeze unrelated movements the muscles had underway, speed heart rate and raise blood pressure, slow breathing. Others rivet attention on the source of

the fear, and prepare the muscles to react accordingly. Simultaneously, cortical memory systems are shuffled to retrieve any knowledge relevant to the emergency at hand, taking precedence over other strands of thought.

And these are just part of a carefully coordinated array of changes the amygdala orchestrates as it commandeers areas throughout the brain (for a more detailed account, see [Appendix C](#)). The amygdala's extensive web of neural connections allows it, during an emotional emergency, to capture and drive much of the rest of the brain—including the rational mind.

THE EMOTIONAL SENTINEL

A friend tells of having been on vacation in England, and eating brunch at a canalside cafe. Taking a stroll afterward along the stone steps down to the canal, he suddenly saw a girl gazing at the water, her face frozen in fear. Before he knew quite why, he had jumped in the water—in his coat and tie. Only once he was in the water did he realize that the girl was staring in shock at a toddler who had fallen in—whom he was able to rescue.

What made him jump in the water before he knew why? The answer, very likely, was his amygdala.

In one of the most telling discoveries about emotions of the last decade, LeDoux's work revealed how the architecture of the brain gives the amygdala a privileged position as an emotional sentinel, able to hijack the brain.⁵ His research has shown that sensory signals from eye or ear travel first in the brain to the thalamus, and then—across a single synapse—to the amygdala; a second signal from the thalamus is routed to the neocortex—the thinking brain. This branching allows the amygdala to begin to respond *before* the neocortex, which mulls information through several levels of brain circuits before it fully perceives and finally initiates its more finely tailored response.

LeDoux's research is revolutionary for understanding emotional life because it is the first to work out neural pathways for feelings that bypass the neocortex. Those feelings that take the direct route through the amygdala include our most primitive and potent; this circuit does much to explain the power of emotion to overwhelm rationality.

The conventional view in neuroscience had been that the eye, ear,

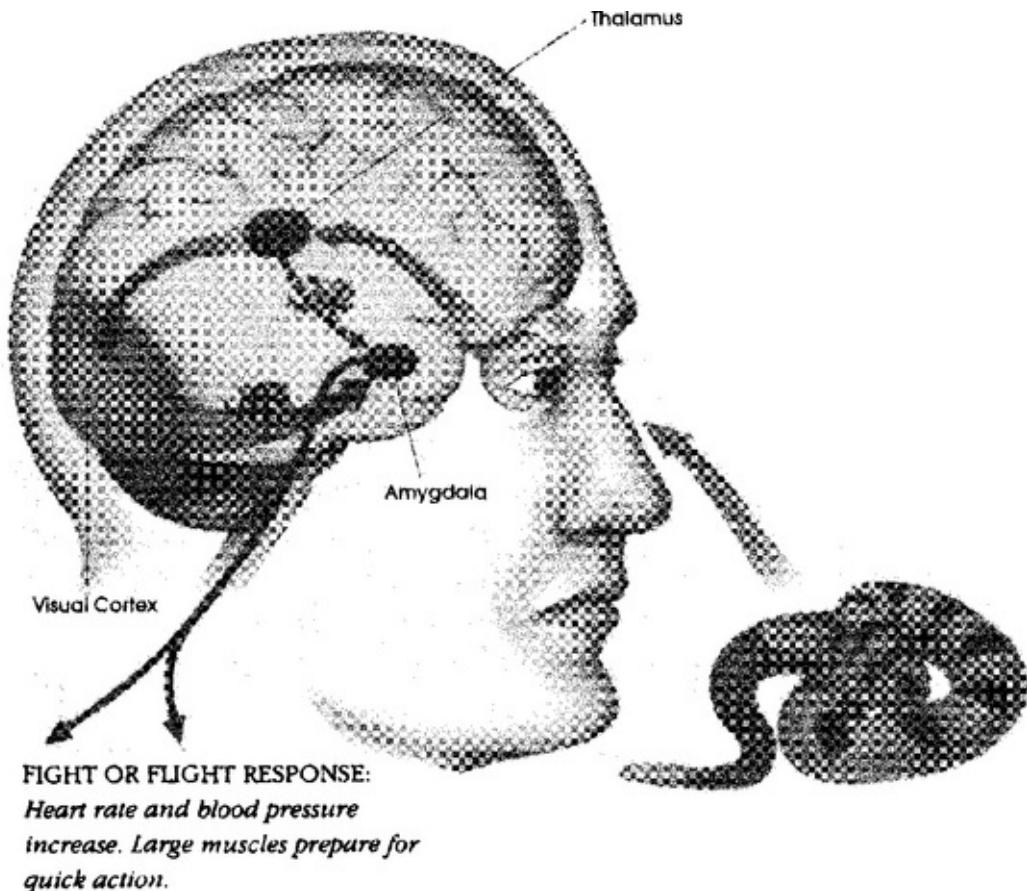
and other sensory organs transmit signals to the thalamus, and from there to sensory processing areas of the neocortex, where the signals are put together into objects as we perceive them. The signals are sorted for meanings so that the brain recognizes what each object is and what its presence means. From the neocortex, the old theory held, the signals are sent to the limbic brain, and from there the appropriate response radiates out through the brain and the rest of the body. That is the way it works much or most of the time—but LeDoux discovered a smaller bundle of neurons that leads directly from the thalamus to the amygdala, in addition to those going through the larger path of neurons to the cortex. This smaller and shorter pathway—something like a neural back alley—allows the amygdala to receive some direct inputs from the senses and start a response *before* they are fully registered by the neocortex.

This discovery overthrows the notion that the amygdala must depend entirely on signals from the neocortex to formulate its emotional reactions. The amygdala can trigger an emotional response via this emergency route even as a parallel reverberating circuit begins between the amygdala and neocortex. The amygdala can have us spring to action while the slightly slower—but more fully informed—neocortex unfolds its more refined plan for reaction.

LeDoux overturned the prevailing wisdom about the pathways traveled by emotions through his research on fear in animals. In a crucial experiment he destroyed the auditory cortex of rats, then exposed them to a tone paired with an electric shock. The rats quickly learned to fear the tone, even though the sound of the tone could not register in their neocortex. Instead, the sound took the direct route from ear to thalamus to amygdala, skipping all higher avenues. In short, the rats had learned an emotional reaction without any higher cortical involvement: The amygdala perceived, remembered, and orchestrated their fear independently.

“Anatomically the emotional system can act independently of the neocortex,” LeDoux told me. “Some emotional reactions and emotional memories can be formed without any conscious, cognitive participation at all.” The amygdala can house memories and response repertoires that we enact without quite realizing why we do so because the shortcut from thalamus to amygdala completely bypasses the neocortex. This bypass seems to allow the amygdala to be a repository for emotional impressions and memories that we have never known about in full awareness. LeDoux proposes that it is the

amygdala's subterranean role in memory that explains, for example, a startling experiment in which people acquired a preference for oddly shaped geometric figures that had been flashed at them so quickly that they had no conscious awareness of having seen them at all!⁶



A visual signal first goes from the retina to the thalamus, where it is translated into the language of the brain. Most of the message then goes to the visual cortex, where it is analyzed and assessed for meaning and appropriate response; if that response is emotional, a signal goes to the amygdala to activate the emotional centers. But a smaller portion of the original signal goes straight from the thalamus to the amygdala in a quicker transmission, allowing a faster (though less precise) response. Thus the amygdala can trigger an emotional response before the cortical centers have fully understood what is happening.

Other research has shown that in the first few milliseconds of our perceiving something we not only unconsciously comprehend what it is, but decide whether we like it or not; the “cognitive unconscious” presents our awareness with not just the identity of what we see, but an opinion about it.⁷ Our emotions have a mind of their own, one which can hold views quite independently of our rational mind.

THE SPECIALIST IN EMOTIONAL MEMORY

Those unconscious opinions are emotional memories; their storehouse is the amygdala. Research by LeDoux and other neuroscientists now seems to suggest that the hippocampus, which has long been considered the key structure of the limbic system, is more involved in registering and making sense of perceptual patterns than with emotional reactions. The hippocampus's main input is in providing a keen memory of context, vital for emotional meaning; it is the hippocampus that recognizes the differing significance of, say, a bear in the zoo versus one in your backyard.

While the hippocampus remembers the dry facts, the amygdala retains the emotional flavor that goes with those facts. If we try to pass a car on a two-lane highway and narrowly miss having a head-on collision, the hippocampus retains the specifics of the incident, like what stretch of road we were on, who was with us, what the other car looked like. But it is the amygdala that everafter will send a surge of anxiety through us whenever we try to pass a car in similar circumstances. As LeDoux put it to me, “The hippocampus is crucial in recognizing a face as that of your cousin. But it is the amygdala that adds you don’t really like her.”

The brain uses a simple but cunning method to make emotional memories register with special potency: the very same neurochemical alerting systems that prime the body to react to life-threatening emergencies by fighting or fleeing also stamp the moment in memory with vividness.⁸ Under stress (or anxiety, or presumably even the intense excitement of joy) a nerve running from the brain to the adrenal glands atop the kidneys triggers a secretion of the hormones epinephrine and norepinephrine, which surge through the body priming it for an emergency. These hormones activate receptors on the vagus nerve; while the vagus nerve carries messages from the brain to regulate the heart, it also carries signals back into the brain, triggered by epinephrine and norepinephrine. The amygdala is the main site in the brain where these signals go; they activate neurons within the amygdala to signal other brain regions to strengthen memory for what is happening.

This amygdala arousal seems to imprint in memory most moments of emotional arousal with an added degree of strength—that’s why we are more likely, for example, to remember where we went on a first date, or what we were doing when we heard the news that the space

shuttle *Challenger* had exploded. The more intense the amygdala arousal, the stronger the imprint; the experiences that scare or thrill us the most in life are among our most indelible memories. This means that, in effect, the brain has two memory systems, one for ordinary facts and one for emotionally charged ones. A special system for emotional memories makes excellent sense in evolution, of course, ensuring that animals would have particularly vivid memories of what threatens or pleases them. But emotional memories can be faulty guides to the present.

OUT-OF-DATE NEURAL ALARMS

One drawback of such neural alarms is that the urgent message the amygdala sends is sometimes, if not often, out-of-date—especially in the fluid social world we humans inhabit. As the repository for emotional memory, the amygdala scans experience, comparing what is happening now with what happened in the past. Its method of comparison is associative: when one key element of a present situation is similar to the past, it can call it a “match”—which is why this circuit is sloppy: it acts before there is full confirmation. It frantically commands that we react to the present in ways that were imprinted long ago, with thoughts, emotions, reactions learned in response to events perhaps only dimly similar, but close enough to alarm the amygdala.

Thus a former army nurse, traumatized by the relentless flood of ghastly wounds she once tended in wartime, is suddenly swept with a mix of dread, loathing, and panic—a repeat of her battlefield reaction triggered once again, years later, by the stench when she opens a closet door to find her toddler had stashed a stinking diaper there. A few spare elements of the situation is all that need seem similar to some past danger for the amygdala to trigger its emergency proclamation. The trouble is that along with the emotionally charged memories that have the power to trigger this crisis response can come equally outdated ways of responding to it.

The emotional brain’s imprecision in such moments is added to by the fact that many potent emotional memories date from the first few years of life, in the relationship between an infant and its caretakers. This is especially true for traumatic events, like beatings or outright neglect. During this early period of life other brain structures,

particularly the hippocampus, which is crucial for narrative memories, and the neocortex, seat of rational thought, have yet to become fully developed. In memory, the amygdala and hippocampus work hand-in-hand; each stores and retrieves its special information independently. While the hippocampus retrieves information, the amygdala determines if that information has any emotional valence. But the amygdala, which matures very quickly in the infant's brain, is much closer to fully formed at birth.

LeDoux turns to the role of the amygdala in childhood to support what has long been a basic tenet of psychoanalytic thought: that the interactions of life's earliest years lay down a set of emotional lessons based on the attunement and upsets in the contacts between infant and caretakers.⁹ These emotional lessons are so potent and yet so difficult to understand from the vantage point of adult life because, believes LeDoux, they are stored in the amygdala as rough, wordless blueprints for emotional life. Since these earliest emotional memories are established at a time before infants have words for their experience, when these emotional memories are triggered in later life there is no matching set of articulated thoughts about the response that takes us over. One reason we can be so baffled by our emotional outbursts, then, is that they often date from a time early in our lives when things were bewildering and we did not yet have words for comprehending events. We may have the chaotic feelings, but not the words for the memories that formed them.

WHEN EMOTIONS ARE FAST AND SLOPPY

It was somewhere around three in the morning when a huge object came crashing through the ceiling in a far corner of my bedroom, spilling the contents of the attic into the room. In a second I leapt out of bed and ran out of the room, terrified the entire ceiling would cave in. Then, realizing I was safe, I cautiously peered back in the bedroom to see what had caused all the damage—only to discover that the sound I had taken to be the ceiling caving in was actually the fall of a tall pile of boxes my wife had stacked in the corner the day before while she sorted out her closet. Nothing had fallen from the attic: there was no attic. The ceiling was intact, and so was I.

My leap from bed while half-asleep—which might have saved me from injury had it truly been the ceiling falling—illustrates the power

of the amygdala to propel us to action in emergencies, vital moments before the neocortex has time to fully register what is actually going on. The emergency route from eye or ear to thalamus to amygdala is crucial: it saves time in an emergency, when an instantaneous response is required. But this circuit from thalamus to amygdala carries only a small portion of sensory messages, with the majority taking the main route up to the neocortex. So what registers in the amygdala via this express route is, at best, a rough signal, just enough for a warning. As LeDoux points out, “You don’t need to know exactly what something is to know that it may be dangerous.”¹⁰

The direct route has a vast advantage in brain time, which is reckoned in thousandths of a second. The amygdala in a rat can begin a response to a perception in as little as twelve milliseconds—twelve thousandths of a second. The route from thalamus to neocortex to amygdala takes about twice as long. Similar measurements have yet to be made in the human brain, but the rough ratio would likely hold.

In evolutionary terms, the survival value of this direct route would have been great, allowing a quick-response option that shaves a few critical milliseconds in reaction time to dangers. Those milliseconds could well have saved the lives of our protomammalian ancestors in such numbers that this arrangement is now featured in every mammalian brain, including yours and mine. In fact, while this circuit may play a relatively limited role in human mental life, largely restricted to emotional crises, much of the mental life of birds, fish, and reptiles revolves around it, since their very survival depends on constantly scanning for predators or prey. “This primitive, minor brain system in mammals is the main brain system in non-mammals,” says LeDoux. “It offers a very rapid way to turn on emotions. But it’s a quick-and-dirty process; the cells are fast, but not very precise.”

Such imprecision in, say, a squirrel, is fine, since it leads to erring on the side of safety, springing away at the first sign of anything that might signal a looming enemy, or springing toward a hint of something edible. But in human emotional life that imprecision can have disastrous consequences for our relationships, since it means, figuratively speaking, we can spring at or away from the wrong thing—or person. (Consider, for example, the waitress who dropped a tray of six dinners when she glimpsed a woman with a huge, curly mane of red hair—exactly like the woman her ex-husband had left her for.)

Such inchoate emotional mistakes are based on feeling prior to thought. LeDoux calls it “precognitive emotion,” a reaction based on

neural bits and pieces of sensory information that have not been fully sorted out and integrated into a recognizable object. It's a very raw form of sensory information, something like a neural *Name That Tune*, where, instead of snap judgments of melody being made on the basis of just a few notes, a whole perception is grasped on the basis of the first few tentative parts. If the amygdala senses a sensory pattern of import emerging, it jumps to a conclusion, triggering its reactions before there is full confirming evidence—or any confirmation at all.

Small wonder we can have so little insight into the murk of our more explosive emotions, especially while they still hold us in thrall. The amygdala can react in a delirium of rage or fear before the cortex knows what is going on because such raw emotion is triggered independent of, and prior to, thought.

THE EMOTIONAL MANAGER

A friend's six-year-old daughter Jessica was spending her first night ever sleeping over at a playmate's, and it was unclear who was more nervous about it, mother or daughter. While the mother tried not to let Jessica see the intense anxiety she felt, her tension peaked near midnight that night, as she was getting ready for bed and heard the phone ring. Dropping her toothbrush, she raced to the phone, her heart pounding, images of Jessica in terrible distress racing through her mind.

The mother snatched the receiver, and blurted, "Jessica!" into the phone—only to hear a woman's voice say, "Oh, I think this must be a wrong number...."

At that, the mother recovered her composure, and in a polite, measured tone, asked, "What number were you calling?"

While the amygdala is at work in priming an anxious, impulsive reaction, another part of the emotional brain allows for a more fitting, corrective response. The brain's damper switch for the amygdala's surges appears to lie at the other end of a major circuit to the neocortex, in the prefrontal lobes just behind the forehead. The prefrontal cortex seems to be at work when someone is fearful or enraged, but stifles or controls the feeling in order to deal more effectively with the situation at hand, or when a reappraisal calls for a completely different response, as with the worried mother on the phone. This neocortical area of the brain brings a more analytic or

appropriate response to our emotional impulses, modulating the amygdala and other limbic areas.

Ordinarily the prefrontal areas govern our emotional reactions from the start. The largest projection of sensory information from the thalamus, remember, goes not to the amygdala, but to the neocortex and its many centers for taking in and making sense of what is being perceived; that information and our response to it is coordinated by the prefrontal lobes, the seat of planning and organizing actions toward a goal, including emotional ones. In the neocortex a cascading series of circuits registers and analyzes that information, comprehends it, and, through the prefrontal lobes, orchestrates a reaction. If in the process an emotional response is called for, the prefrontal lobes dictate it, working hand-in-hand with the amygdala and other circuits in the emotional brain.

This progression, which allows for discernment in emotional response, is the standard arrangement, with the significant exception of emotional emergencies. When an emotion triggers, within moments the prefrontal lobes perform what amounts to a risk/benefit ratio of myriad possible reactions, and bet that one of them is best.¹¹ For animals, when to attack, when to run. And for we humans ... when to attack, when to run—and also, when to placate, persuade, seek sympathy, stonewall, provoke guilt, whine, put on a facade of bravado, be contemptuous—and so on, through the whole repertoire of emotional wiles.

The neocortical response is slower in brain time than the hijack mechanism because it involves more circuitry. It can also be more judicious and considered, since more thought precedes feeling. When we register a loss and become sad, or feel happy after a triumph, or mull over something someone has said or done and then get hurt or angry, the neocortex is at work.

Just as with the amygdala, absent the workings of the prefrontal lobes, much of emotional life would fall away; lacking an understanding that something merits an emotional response, none comes. This role of the prefrontal lobes in emotions has been suspected by neurologists since the advent in the 1940s of that rather desperate—and sadly misguided—surgical “cure” for mental illness: the prefrontal lobotomy, which (often sloppily) removed part of the prefrontal lobes or otherwise cut connections between the prefrontal cortex and the lower brain. In the days before any effective medications for mental illness, the lobotomy was hailed as the answer

to grave emotional distress—sever the links between the prefrontal lobes and the rest of the brain, and patients’ distress was “relieved.” Unfortunately, the cost was that most of patients’ emotional lives seemed to vanish, too. The key circuitry had been destroyed.

Emotional hijackings presumably involve two dynamics: triggering of the amygdala and a failure to activate the neocortical processes that usually keep emotional response in balance—or a recruitment of the neocortical zones to the emotional urgency.¹² At these moments the rational mind is swamped by the emotional. One way the prefrontal cortex acts as an efficient manager of emotion—weighing reactions before acting—is by dampening the signals for activation sent out by the amygdala and other limbic centers—something like a parent who stops an impulsive child from grabbing and tells the child to ask properly (or wait) for what it wants instead.¹³

The key “off” switch for distressing emotion seems to be the left prefrontal lobe. Neuropsychologists studying moods in patients with injuries to parts of the frontal lobes have determined that one of the tasks of the left frontal lobe is to act as a neural thermostat, regulating unpleasant emotions. The right prefrontal lobes are a seat of negative feelings like fear and aggression, while the left lobes keep those raw emotions in check, probably by inhibiting the right lobe.¹⁴ In one group of stroke patients, for example, those whose lesions were in the left prefrontal cortex were prone to catastrophic worries and fears; those with lesions on the right were “unduly cheerful”; during neurological exams they joked around and were so laid back they clearly did not care how well they did.¹⁵ And then there was the case of the happy husband: a man whose right prefrontal lobe had been partially removed in surgery for a brain malformation. His wife told physicians that after the operation he underwent a dramatic personality change, becoming less easily upset and, she was happy to say, more affectionate.¹⁶

The left prefrontal lobe, in short, seems to be part of a neural circuit that can switch off, or at least dampen down, all but the strongest negative surges of emotion. If the amygdala often acts as an emergency trigger, the left prefrontal lobe appears to be part of the brain’s “off” switch for disturbing emotion: the amygdala proposes, the prefrontal lobe disposes. These prefrontal-limbic connections are crucial in mental life far beyond fine-tuning emotion; they are essential for navigating us through the decisions that matter most in life.

HARMONIZING EMOTION AND THOUGHT

The connections between the amygdala (and related limbic structures) and the neocortex are the hub of the battles or cooperative treaties struck between head and heart, thought and feeling. This circuitry explains why emotion is so crucial to effective thought, both in making wise decisions and in simply allowing us to think clearly.

Take the power of emotions to disrupt thinking itself. Neuroscientists use the term “working memory” for the capacity of attention that holds in mind the facts essential for completing a given task or problem, whether it be the ideal features one seeks in a house while touring several prospects, or the elements of a reasoning problem on a test. The prefrontal cortex is the brain region responsible for working memory.¹⁷ But circuits from the limbic brain to the prefrontal lobes mean that the signals of strong emotion—anxiety, anger, and the like—can create neural static, sabotaging the ability of the prefrontal lobe to maintain working memory. That is why when we are emotionally upset we say we “just can’t think straight”—and why continual emotional distress can create deficits in a child’s intellectual abilities, crippling the capacity to learn.

These deficits, if more subtle, are not always tapped by IQ testing, though they show up through more targeted neuropsychological measures, as well as in a child’s continual agitation and impulsivity. In one study, for example, primary school boys who had above-average IQ scores but nevertheless were doing poorly in school were found via these neuropsychological tests to have impaired frontal cortex functioning.¹⁸ They also were impulsive and anxious, often disruptive and in trouble—suggesting faulty prefrontal control over their limbic urges. Despite their intellectual potential, these are the children at highest risk for problems like academic failure, alcoholism, and criminality—not because their intellect is deficient, but because their control over their emotional life is impaired. The emotional brain, quite separate from those cortical areas tapped by IQ tests, controls rage and compassion alike. These emotional circuits are sculpted by experience throughout childhood—and we leave those experiences utterly to chance at our peril.

Consider, too, the role of emotions in even the most “rational” decision-making. In work with far-reaching implications for understanding mental life, Dr. Antonio Damasio, a neurologist at the University of Iowa College of Medicine, has made careful studies of

just what is impaired in patients with damage to the prefrontal-amygdala circuit.¹⁹ Their decision-making is terribly flawed—and yet they show no deterioration at all in IQ or any cognitive ability. Despite their intact intelligence, they make disastrous choices in business and their personal lives, and can even obsess endlessly over a decision so simple as when to make an appointment.

Dr. Damasio argues that their decisions are so bad because they have lost access to their *emotional* learning. As the meeting point between thought and emotion, the prefrontal-amygdala circuit is a crucial doorway to the repository for the likes and dislikes we acquire over the course of a lifetime. Cut off from emotional memory in the amygdala, whatever the neocortex mulls over no longer triggers the emotional reactions that have been associated with it in the past—everything takes on a gray neutrality. A stimulus, be it a favorite pet or a detested acquaintance, no longer triggers either attraction or aversion; these patients have “forgotten” all such emotional lessons because they no longer have access to where they are stored in the amygdala.

Evidence like this leads Dr. Damasio to the counter-intuitive position that feelings are typically *indispensable* for rational decisions; they point us in the proper direction, where dry logic can then be of best use. While the world often confronts us with an unwieldy array of choices (How should you invest your retirement savings? Whom should you marry?), the emotional learning that life has given us (such as the memory of a disastrous investment or a painful breakup) sends signals that streamline the decision by eliminating some options and highlighting others at the outset. In this way, Dr. Damasio argues, the emotional brain is as involved in reasoning as is the thinking brain.

The emotions, then, matter for rationality. In the dance of feeling and thought the emotional faculty guides our moment-to-moment decisions, working hand-in-hand with the rational mind, enabling—or disabling—thought itself. Likewise, the thinking brain plays an executive role in our emotions—except in those moments when emotions surge out of control and the emotional brain runs rampant.

In a sense we have two brains, two minds—and two different kinds of intelligence: rational and emotional. How we do in life is determined by both—it is not just IQ, but *emotional* intelligence that matters. Indeed, intellect cannot work at its best without emotional intelligence. Ordinarily the complementarity of limbic system and

neocortex, amygdala and prefrontal lobes, means each is a full partner in mental life. When these partners interact well, emotional intelligence rises—as does intellectual ability.

This turns the old understanding of the tension between reason and feeling on its head: it is not that we want to do away with emotion and put reason in its place, as Erasmus had it, but instead find the intelligent balance of the two. The old paradigm held an ideal of reason freed of the pull of emotion. The new paradigm urges us to harmonize head and heart. To do that well in our lives means we must first understand more exactly what it means to use emotion intelligently.

PART TWO

**THE NATURE OF
EMOTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE**

3

When Smart Is Dumb

Exactly why David Pologruto, a high-school physics teacher, was stabbed with a kitchen knife by one of his star students is still debatable. But the facts as widely reported are these:

Jason H., a sophomore and straight-A student at a Coral Springs, Florida, high school, was fixated on getting into medical school. Not just any medical school—he dreamt of Harvard. But Pologruto, his physics teacher, had given Jason an 80 on a quiz. Believing the grade—a mere B—put his dream in jeopardy, Jason took a butcher knife to school and, in a confrontation with Pologruto in the physics lab, stabbed his teacher in the collarbone before being subdued in a struggle.

A judge found Jason innocent, temporarily insane during the incident—a panel of four psychologists and psychiatrists swore he was psychotic during the fight. Jason claimed he had been planning to commit suicide because of the test score, and had gone to Pologruto to tell him he was killing himself because of the bad grade. Pologruto told a different story: “I think he tried to completely do me in with the knife” because he was infuriated over the bad grade.

After transferring to a private school, Jason graduated two years later at the top of his class. A perfect grade in regular classes would have given him a straight-A, 4.0 average, but Jason had taken enough advanced courses to raise his grade-point average to 4.614—way beyond A+. Even as Jason graduated with highest honors, his old physics teacher, David Pologruto, complained that Jason had never apologized or even taken responsibility for the attack.¹

The question is, how could someone of such obvious intelligence do something so irrational—so downright dumb? The answer: Academic intelligence has little to do with emotional life. The brightest among us can founder on the shoals of unbridled passions and unruly impulses; people with high IQs can be stunningly poor pilots of their private lives.

One of psychology’s open secrets is the relative inability of grades,

IQ, or SAT scores, despite their popular mystique, to predict unerringly who will succeed in life. To be sure, there is a relationship between IQ and life circumstances for large groups as a whole: many people with very low IQs end up in menial jobs, and those with high IQs tend to become well-paid—but by no means always.

There are widespread exceptions to the myth that IQ predicts success—many (or more) exceptions than cases that fit the rule. At best, IQ contributes about 20 percent to the factors that determine life success, which leaves 80 percent to other forces.² As one observer notes, “The vast majority of one’s ultimate niche in society is determined by non-IQ factors, ranging from social class to luck.”

Even Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, whose book *The Bell Curve* imputes a primary importance to IQ, acknowledge this; as they point out, “Perhaps a freshman with an SAT math score of 500 had better not have his heart set on being a mathematician, but if instead he wants to run his own business, become a U.S. Senator or make a million dollars, he should not put aside his dreams.... The link between test scores and those achievements is dwarfed by the totality of other characteristics that he brings to life.”³

My concern is with a key set of these “other characteristics,” *emotional intelligence*: abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and to hope. Unlike IQ, with its nearly one-hundred-year history of research with hundreds of thousands of people, emotional intelligence is a new concept. No one can yet say exactly how much of the variability from person to person in life’s course it accounts for. But what data exist suggest it can be as powerful, and at times more powerful, than IQ. And while there are those who argue that IQ cannot be changed much by experience or education, I will show in Part Five that the crucial emotional competencies can indeed be learned and improved upon by children—if we bother to teach them.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND DESTINY

I remember the fellow in my own class at Amherst College who had attained five perfect 800 scores on the SAT and other achievement tests he took before entering. Despite his formidable intellectual

abilities, he spent most of his time hanging out, staying up late, and missing classes by sleeping until noon. It took him almost ten years to finally get his degree.

IQ offers little to explain the different destinies of people with roughly equal promises, schooling, and opportunity. When ninety-five Harvard students from the classes of the 1940s—a time when people with a wider spread of IQ were at Ivy League schools than is presently the case—were followed into middle age, the men with the highest test scores in college were not particularly successful compared to their lower-scoring peers in terms of salary, productivity, or status in their field. Nor did they have the greatest life satisfaction, nor the most happiness with friendships, family, and romantic relationships.⁴

A similar follow-up in middle age was done with 450 boys, most sons of immigrants, two thirds from families on welfare, who grew up in Somerville, Massachusetts, at the time a “blighted slum” a few blocks from Harvard. A third had IQs below 90. But again IQ had little relationship to how well they had done at work or in the rest of their lives; for instance, 7 percent of men with IQs under 80 were unemployed for ten or more years, but so were 7 percent of men with IQs over 100. To be sure, there was a general link (as there always is) between IQ and socioeconomic level at age forty-seven. But childhood abilities such as being able to handle frustrations, control emotions, and get on with other people made the greater difference.⁵

Consider also data from an ongoing study of eighty-one valedictorians and salutatorians from the 1981 class in Illinois high schools. All, of course, had the highest grade-point averages in their schools. But while they continued to achieve well in college, getting excellent grades, by their late twenties they had climbed to only average levels of success. Ten years after graduating from high school, only one in four were at the highest level of young people of comparable age in their chosen profession, and many were doing much less well.

Karen Arnold, professor of education at Boston University, one of the researchers tracking the valedictorians, explains, “I think we’ve discovered the ‘dutiful’—people who know how to achieve in the system. But valedictorians struggle as surely as we all do. To know that a person is a valedictorian is to know only that he or she is exceedingly good at achievement as measured by grades. It tells you nothing about how they react to the vicissitudes of life.”⁶

And that is the problem: academic intelligence offers virtually no

preparation for the turmoil—or opportunity—life's vicissitudes bring. Yet even though a high IQ is no guarantee of prosperity, prestige, or happiness in life, our schools and our culture fixate on academic abilities, ignoring *emotional* intelligence, a set of traits—some might call it character—that also matters immensely for our personal destiny. Emotional life is a domain that, as surely as math or reading, can be handled with greater or lesser skill, and requires its unique set of competencies. And how adept a person is at those is crucial to understanding why one person thrives in life while another, of equal intellect, dead-ends: emotional aptitude is a *meta-ability*, determining how well we can use whatever other skills we have, including raw intellect.

Of course, there are many paths to success in life, and many domains in which other aptitudes are rewarded. In our increasingly knowledge-based society, technical skill is certainly one. There is a children's joke: "What do you call a nerd fifteen years from now?" The answer: "Boss." But even among "nerds" emotional intelligence offers an added edge in the workplace, as we shall see in Part Three. Much evidence testifies that people who are emotionally adept—who know and manage their own feelings well, and who read and deal effectively with other people's feelings—are at an advantage in any domain of life, whether romance and intimate relationships or picking up the unspoken rules that govern success in organizational politics. People with well-developed emotional skills are also more likely to be content and effective in their lives, mastering the habits of mind that foster their own productivity; people who cannot marshal some control over their emotional life fight inner battles that sabotage their ability for focused work and clear thought.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF INTELLIGENCE

To the casual observer, four-year-old Judy might seem a wallflower among her more gregarious playmates. She hangs back from the action at playtime, staying on the margins of games rather than plunging into the center. But Judy is actually a keen observer of the social politics of her preschool classroom, perhaps the most sophisticated of her playmates in her insights into the tides of feeling within the others.

Her sophistication is not apparent until Judy's teacher gathers the

four-year-olds around to play what they call the Classroom Game. The Classroom Game—a dollhouse replica of Judy’s own preschool classroom, with stick figures who have for heads small photos of the students and teachers—is a test of social perceptiveness. When Judy’s teacher asks her to put each girl and boy in the part of the room they like to play in most—the art corner, the blocks corner, and so on—Judy does so with complete accuracy. And when asked to put each boy and girl with the children they like to play with most, Judy shows she can match best friends for the entire class.

Judy’s accuracy reveals that she has a perfect social map of her class, a level of perceptiveness exceptional for a four-year-old. These are the skills that, in later life, might allow Judy to blossom into a star in any of the fields where “people skills” count, from sales and management to diplomacy.

That Judy’s social brilliance was spotted at all, let alone this early, was due to her being a student at the Eliot-Pearson Preschool on the campus of Tufts University, where Project Spectrum, a curriculum that intentionally cultivates a variety of kinds of intelligence, was then being developed. Project Spectrum recognizes that the human repertoire of abilities goes far beyond the three R’s, the narrow band of word-and-number skills that schools traditionally focus on. It acknowledges that capacities such as Judy’s social perceptiveness are talents that an education can nurture rather than ignore or even frustrate. By encouraging children to develop a full range of the abilities that they will actually draw on to succeed, or use simply to be fulfilled in what they do, school becomes an education in life skills.

The guiding visionary behind Project Spectrum is Howard Gardner, a psychologist at the Harvard School of Education.⁷ “The time has come,” Gardner told me, “to broaden our notion of the spectrum of talents. The single most important contribution education can make to a child’s development is to help him toward a field where his talents best suit him, where he will be satisfied and competent. We’ve completely lost sight of that. Instead we subject everyone to an education where, if you succeed, you will be best suited to be a college professor. And we evaluate everyone along the way according to whether they meet that narrow standard of success. We should spend less time ranking children and more time helping them to identify their natural competencies and gifts, and cultivate those. There are hundreds and hundreds of ways to succeed, and many, many different abilities that will help you get there.”⁸

If anyone sees the limits of the old ways of thinking about intelligence, it is Gardner. He points out that the glory days of the IQ tests began during World War I, when two million American men were sorted out through the first mass paper-and-pencil form of the IQ test, freshly developed by Lewis Terman, a psychologist at Stanford. This led to decades of what Gardner calls the “IQ way of thinking”: “that people are either smart or not, are born that way, that there’s nothing much you can do about it, and that tests can tell you if you are one of the smart ones or not. The SAT test for college admissions is based on the same notion of a single kind of aptitude that determines your future. This way of thinking permeates society.”

Gardner’s influential 1983 book *Frames of Mind* was a manifesto refuting the IQ view; it proposed that there was not just one, monolithic kind of intelligence that was crucial for life success, but rather a wide spectrum of intelligences, with seven key varieties. His list includes the two standard academic kinds, verbal and mathematical-logical alacrity, but it goes on to include the spatial capacity seen in, say, an outstanding artist or architect; the kinesthetic genius displayed in the physical fluidity and grace of a Martha Graham or Magic Johnson; and the musical gifts of a Mozart or YoYo Ma. Rounding out the list are two faces of what Gardner calls “the personal intelligences”: interpersonal skills, like those of a great therapist such as Carl Rogers or a world-class leader such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and the “intrapsychic” capacity that could emerge, on the one hand, in the brilliant insights of Sigmund Freud, or, with less fanfare, in the inner contentment that arises from attuning one’s life to be in keeping with one’s true feelings.

The operative word in this view of intelligences is *multiple*: Gardner’s model pushes way beyond the standard concept of IQ as a single, immutable factor. It recognizes that the tests that tyrannized us as we went through school—from the achievement tests that sorted us out into those who would be shunted toward technical schools and those destined for college, to the SATs that determined what, if any, college we would be allowed to attend—are based on a limited notion of intelligence, one out of touch with the true range of skills and abilities that matter for life over and beyond IQ.

Gardner acknowledges that seven is an arbitrary figure for the variety of intelligences; there is no magic number to the multiplicity of human talents. At one point, Gardner and his research colleagues had stretched these seven to a list of twenty different varieties of

intelligence. Interpersonal intelligence, for example, broke down into four distinct abilities: leadership, the ability to nurture relationships and keep friends, the ability to resolve conflicts, and skill at the kind of social analysis that four-year-old Judy excels at.

This multifaceted view of intelligence offers a richer picture of a child's ability and potential for success than the standard IQ. When Spectrum students were evaluated on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale—once the gold standard of IQ tests—and again by a battery designed to measure Gardner's spectrum of intelligences, there was no significant relationship between children's scores on the two tests.⁹ The five children with the highest IQs (from 125 to 133) showed a variety of profiles on the ten strengths measured by the Spectrum test. For example, of the five "smartest" children according to the IQ tests, one was strong in three areas, three had strengths in two areas, and one "smart" child had just one Spectrum strength. Those strengths were scattered: four of these children's strengths were in music, two in the visual arts, one in social understanding, one in logic, two in language. None of the five high-IQ kids were strong in movement, numbers, or mechanics; movement and numbers were actually weak spots for two of these five.

Gardner's conclusion was that "the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale did not predict successful performance across or on a consistent subset of Spectrum activities." On the other hand, the Spectrum scores give parents and teachers clear guidance about the realms that these children will take a spontaneous interest in, and where they will do well enough to develop the passions that could one day lead beyond proficiency to mastery.

Gardner's thinking about the multiplicity of intelligence continues to evolve. Some ten years after he first published his theory, Gardner gave these nutshell summaries of the personal intelligences:

Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand other people: what motivates them, how they work, how to work cooperatively with them. Successful salespeople, politicians, teachers, clinicians, and religious leaders are all likely to be individuals with high degrees of interpersonal intelligence. *Intrapersonal* intelligence ... is a correlative ability, turned inward. It is a capacity to form an accurate, veridical model of oneself and to be able to use that model to operate effectively in life.¹⁰

In another rendering, Gardner noted that the core of interpersonal intelligence includes the "capacities to discern and respond

appropriately to the moods, temperaments, motivations, and desires of other people.” In intrapersonal intelligence, the key to self-knowledge, he included “access to one’s own feelings and the ability to discriminate among them and draw upon them to guide behavior.”¹¹

SPOCK VS. DATA: WHEN COGNITION IS NOT ENOUGH

There is one dimension of personal intelligence that is broadly pointed to, but little explored, in Gardner’s elaborations: the role of emotions. Perhaps this is so because, as Gardner suggested to me, his work is so strongly informed by a cognitive-science model of mind. Thus his view of these intelligences emphasizes cognition—the *understanding* of oneself and of others in motives, in habits of working, and in putting that insight into use in conducting one’s own life and getting along with others. But like the kinesthetic realm, where physical brilliance manifests itself nonverbally, the realm of the emotions extends, too, beyond the reach of language and cognition.

While there is ample room in Gardner’s descriptions of the personal intelligences for insight into the play of emotions and mastery in managing them, Gardner and those who work with him have not pursued in great detail the role of *feeling* in these intelligences, focusing more on cognitions *about* feeling. This focus, perhaps unintentionally, leaves unexplored the rich sea of emotions that makes the inner life and relationships so complex, so compelling, and so often puzzling. And it leaves yet to be plumbed both the sense in which there is intelligence *in* the emotions and the sense in which intelligence can be brought *to* emotions.

Gardner’s emphasis on the cognitive elements in the personal intelligences reflects the zeitgeist of psychology that has shaped his views. Psychology’s overemphasis on cognition even in the realm of emotion is, in part, due to a quirk in the history of that science. During the middle decades of this century academic psychology was dominated by behaviorists in the mold of B. F. Skinner, who felt that only behavior that could be seen objectively, from the outside, could be studied with scientific accuracy. The behaviorists ruled all inner life, including emotions, out-of-bounds for science.

Then, with the coming in the late 1960s of the “cognitive revolution,” the focus of psychological science turned to how the

mind registers and stores information, and the nature of intelligence. But emotions were still off-limits. Conventional wisdom among cognitive scientists held that intelligence entails a cold, hard-nosed processing of fact. It is hyperrational, rather like *Star Treks* Mr. Spock, the archetype of dry information bytes unmuddied by feeling, embodying the idea that emotions have no place in intelligence and only muddle our picture of mental life.

The cognitive scientists who embraced this view have been seduced by the computer as the operative model of mind, forgetting that, in reality, the brain's wetware is awash in a messy, pulsating puddle of neurochemicals, nothing like the sanitized, orderly silicon that has spawned the guiding metaphor for mind. The predominant models among cognitive scientists of how the mind processes information have lacked an acknowledgment that rationality is guided by—and can be swamped by—feeling. The cognitive model is, in this regard, an impoverished view of the mind, one that fails to explain the Sturm und Drang of feelings that brings flavor to the intellect. In order to persist in this view, cognitive scientists themselves have had to ignore the relevance for their models of mind of their personal hopes and fears, their marital squabbles and professional jealousies—the wash of feeling that gives life its flavor and its urgencies, and which in every moment biases exactly how (and how well or poorly) information is processed.

The lopsided scientific vision of an emotionally flat mental life—which has guided the last eighty years of research on intelligence—is gradually changing as psychology has begun to recognize the essential role of feeling in thinking. Rather like the Spockish character Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, psychology is coming to appreciate the power and virtues of emotions in mental life, as well as their dangers. After all, as Data sees (to his own dismay, could he feel dismay), his cool logic fails to bring the right *human* solution. Our humanity is most evident in our feelings; Data seeks to feel, knowing that something essential is missing. He wants friendship, loyalty; like the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*, he lacks a heart. Lacking the lyrical sense that feeling brings, Data can play music or write poetry with technical virtuosity, but not feel its passion. The lesson of Data's yearning for yearning itself is that the higher values of the human heart—faith, hope, devotion, love—are missing entirely from the coldly cognitive view. Emotions enrich; a model of mind that leaves them out is impoverished.

When I asked Gardner about his emphasis on thoughts about feelings, or metacognition, more than on emotions themselves, he acknowledged that he tended to view intelligence in a cognitive way, but told me, “When I first wrote about the personal intelligences, I was talking about emotion, especially in my notion of intrapersonal intelligence—one component is emotionally tuning in to yourself. It’s the visceral-feeling signals you get that are essential for interpersonal intelligence. But as it has developed in practice, the theory of multiple intelligence has evolved to focus more on metacognition”—that is, awareness of one’s mental processes—“rather than on the full range of emotional abilities.”

Even so, Gardner appreciates how crucial these emotional and relationship abilities are in the rough-and-tumble of life. He points out that “many people with IQs of 160 work for people with IQs of 100, if the former have poor intrapersonal intelligence and the latter have a high one. And in the day-to-day world no intelligence is more important than the interpersonal. If you don’t have it, you’ll make poor choices about who to marry, what job to take, and so on. We need to train children in the personal intelligences in school.”

CAN EMOTIONS BE INTELLIGENT?

To get a fuller understanding of just what such training might be like, we must turn to other theorists who agree with Gardner’s view—most notably psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer. They have mapped in great detail the ways in which we can bring intelligence to our emotions.¹² This endeavor is not new; over the years even the most ardent theorists of IQ have occasionally tried to bring emotions within the domain of intelligence, rather than seeing “emotion” and “intelligence” as an inherent contradiction in terms. Thus E. L. Thorndike, an eminent psychologist who was also influential in popularizing the notion of IQ in the 1920s and 1930s, proposed in a *Harper’s Magazine* article that one aspect of emotional intelligence, “social” intelligence—the ability to understand others and “act wisely in human relations”—was itself an aspect of a person’s IQ. Other psychologists of the time took a more cynical view of social intelligence, seeing it in terms of skills for manipulating other people —getting them to do what you want, whether they want to or not. But neither of these formulations of social intelligence held much sway

with theorists of IQ, and by 1960 an influential textbook on intelligence tests pronounced social intelligence a “useless” concept.

But personal intelligence would not be ignored, mainly because it makes both intuitive and common sense. For example, when Yale psychologist Robert Sternberg asked people to describe an “intelligent person,” practical people skills were among the main traits listed. More systematic research by Sternberg led him back to Thorndike’s conclusion: that social intelligence is both distinct from academic abilities and a key part of what makes people do well in the practicalities of life. Among the practical intelligences that are, for instance, so highly valued in the workplace is the kind of sensitivity that allows effective managers to pick up tacit messages.¹³

In recent years a growing group of psychologists has come to similar conclusions, agreeing with Gardner that the old concepts of IQ revolved around a narrow band of linguistic and math skills, and that doing well on IQ tests was most directly a predictor of success in the classroom or as a professor but less and less so as life’s paths diverged from academe. These psychologists—Sternberg and Salovey among them—have taken a wider view of intelligence, trying to reinvent it in terms of what it takes to lead life successfully. And that line of enquiry leads back to an appreciation of just how crucial “personal” or emotional intelligence is.

Salovey, with his colleague John Mayer, offered an elaborated definition of emotional intelligence, expanding these abilities into five main domains:¹⁴

1. *Knowing one’s emotions.* Self-awareness—recognizing a feeling *as it happens*—is the keystone of emotional intelligence. As we will see in [Chapter 4](#), the ability to monitor feelings from moment to moment is crucial to psychological insight and self-understanding. An inability to notice our true feelings leaves us at their mercy. People with greater certainty about their feelings are better pilots of their lives, having a surer sense of how they really feel about personal decisions from whom to marry to what job to take.

2. *Managing emotions.* Handling feelings so they are appropriate is an ability that builds on self-awareness. [Chapter 5](#) will examine the capacity to soothe oneself, to shake off rampant anxiety, gloom, or irritability—and the consequences of failure at this basic emotional skill. People who are poor in this ability are constantly battling feelings of distress, while those who excel in it can bounce back far

more quickly from life's setbacks and upsets.

3. *Motivating oneself*. As [Chapter 6](#) will show, marshaling emotions in the service of a goal is essential for paying attention, for self-motivation and mastery, and for creativity. Emotional self-control—delaying gratification and stifling impulsiveness—underlies accomplishment of every sort. And being able to get into the “flow” state enables outstanding performance of all kinds. People who have this skill tend to be more highly productive and effective in whatever they undertake.

4. *Recognizing emotions in others*. Empathy, another ability that builds on emotional self-awareness, is the fundamental “people skill.” [Chapter 7](#) will investigate the roots of empathy, the social cost of being emotionally tone-deaf, and the reason empathy kindles altruism. People who are empathic are more attuned to the subtle social signals that indicate what others need or want. This makes them better at callings such as the caring professions, teaching, sales, and management.

5. *Handling relationships*. The art of relationships is, in large part, skill in managing emotions in others. [Chapter 8](#) looks at social competence and incompetence, and the specific skills involved. These are the abilities that undergird popularity, leadership, and interpersonal effectiveness. People who excel in these skills do well at anything that relies on interacting smoothly with others; they are social stars.

Of course, people differ in their abilities in each of these domains; some of us may be quite adept at handling, say, our own anxiety, but relatively inept at soothing someone else's upsets. The underlying basis for our level of ability is, no doubt, neural, but as we will see, the brain is remarkably plastic, constantly learning. Lapses in emotional skills can be remedied: to a great extent each of these domains represents a body of habit and response that, with the right effort, can be improved on.

IQ AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: PURE TYPES

IQ and emotional intelligence are not opposing competencies, but rather separate ones. We all mix intellect and emotional acuity; people with a high IQ but low emotional intelligence (or low IQ and

high emotional intelligence) are, despite the stereotypes, relatively rare. Indeed, there is a slight correlation between IQ and some aspects of emotional intelligence—though small enough to make clear these are largely independent entities.

Unlike the familiar tests for IQ, there is, as yet, no single paper-and-pencil test that yields an “emotional intelligence score” and there may never be one. Although there is ample research on each of its components, some of them, such as empathy, are best tested by sampling a person’s actual ability at the task—for example, by having them read a person’s feelings from a video of their facial expressions. Still, using a measure for what he calls “ego resilience” which is quite similar to emotional intelligence (it includes the main social and emotional competences), Jack Block, a psychologist at the University of California at Berkeley, has made a comparison of two theoretical pure types: people high in IQ versus people high in emotional aptitudes.¹⁵ The differences are telling.

The high-IQ pure type (that is, setting aside emotional intelligence) is almost a caricature of the intellectual, adept in the realm of mind but inept in the personal world. The profiles differ slightly for men and women. The high-IQ male is typified—no surprise—by a wide range of intellectual interests and abilities. He is ambitious and productive, predictable and dogged, and untroubled by concerns about himself. He also tends to be critical and condescending, fastidious and inhibited, uneasy with sexuality and sensual experience, unexpressive and detached, and emotionally bland and cold.

By contrast, men who are high in emotional intelligence are socially poised, outgoing and cheerful, not prone to fearfulness or worried rumination. They have a notable capacity for commitment to people or causes, for taking responsibility, and for having an ethical outlook; they are sympathetic and caring in their relationships. Their emotional life is rich, but appropriate; they are comfortable with themselves, others, and the social universe they live in.

Purely high-IQ women have the expected intellectual confidence, are fluent in expressing their thoughts, value intellectual matters, and have a wide range of intellectual and aesthetic interests. They also tend to be introspective, prone to anxiety, rumination, and guilt, and hesitate to express their anger openly (though they do so indirectly).

Emotionally intelligent women, by contrast, tend to be assertive and express their feelings directly, and to feel positive about themselves;

life holds meaning for them. Like the men, they are outgoing and gregarious, and express their feelings appropriately (rather than, say, in outbursts they later regret); they adapt well to stress. Their social poise lets them easily reach out to new people; they are comfortable enough with themselves to be playful, spontaneous, and open to sensual experience. Unlike the women purely high in IQ, they rarely feel anxious or guilty, or sink into rumination.

These portraits, of course, are extremes—all of us mix IQ and emotional intelligence in varying degrees. But they offer an instructive look at what each of these dimensions adds separately to a person's qualities. To the degree a person has both cognitive and emotional intelligence, these pictures merge. Still, of the two, emotional intelligence adds far more of the qualities that make us more fully human.

4

Know Thyself

A belligerent samurai, an old Japanese tale goes, once challenged a Zen master to explain the concept of heaven and hell. But the monk replied with scorn, “You’re nothing but a lout—I can’t waste my time with the likes of you!”

His very honor attacked, the samurai flew into a rage and, pulling his sword from its scabbard, yelled, “I could kill you for your impertinence.” “That,” the monk calmly replied, “is hell.”

Startled at seeing the truth in what the master pointed out about the fury that had him in its grip, the samurai calmed down, sheathed his sword, and bowed, thanking the monk for the insight.

“And that,” said the monk, “is heaven.”

The sudden awakening of the samurai to his own agitated state illustrates the crucial difference between being caught up in a feeling and becoming aware that you are being swept away by it. Socrates’s injunction “Know thyself” speaks to this keystone of emotional intelligence: awareness of one’s own feelings as they occur.

It might seem at first glance that our feelings are obvious; more thoughtful reflection reminds us of times we have been all too oblivious to what we really felt about something, or awoke to these feelings late in the game. Psychologists use the rather ponderous term *metacognition* to refer to an awareness of thought process, and *metamood* to mean awareness of one’s own emotions. I prefer the term *self-awareness*, in the sense of an ongoing attention to one’s internal states.¹ In this self-reflexive awareness mind observes and investigates experience itself, including the emotions.²

This quality of awareness is akin to what Freud described as an “evenly hovering attention,” and which he commended to those who would do psychoanalysis. Such attention takes in whatever passes through awareness with impartiality, as an interested yet unreactive witness. Some psychoanalysts call it the “observing ego,” the capacity of self-awareness that allows the analyst to monitor his own reactions to what the patient is saying, and which the process of free

association nurtures in the patient.³

Such self-awareness would seem to require an activated neocortex, particularly the language areas, attuned to identify and name the emotions being aroused. Self-awareness is not an attention that gets carried away by emotions, overreacting and amplifying what is perceived. Rather, it is a neutral mode that maintains self-reflectiveness even amidst turbulent emotions. William Styron seems to be describing something like this faculty of mind in writing of his deep depression, telling of a sense “of being accompanied by a second self—a wraithlike observer who, not sharing the dementia of his double, is able to watch with dispassionate curiosity as his companion struggles.”⁴

At its best, self-observation allows just such an equanimous awareness of passionate or turbulent feelings. At a minimum, it manifests itself simply as a slight stepping-back from experience, a parallel stream of consciousness that is “meta”: hovering above or beside the main flow, aware of what is happening rather than being immersed and lost in it. It is the difference between, for example, being murderously enraged at someone and having the self-reflexive thought “This is anger I’m feeling” even as you are enraged. In terms of the neural mechanics of awareness, this subtle shift in mental activity presumably signals that neocortical circuits are actively monitoring the emotion, a first step in gaining some control. This awareness of emotions is the fundamental emotional competence on which others, such as emotional self-control, build.

Self-awareness, in short, means being “aware of both our mood and our thoughts about that mood,” in the words of John Mayer, a University of New Hampshire psychologist who, with Yale’s Peter Salovey, is a coformulator of the theory of emotional intelligence.⁵ Self-awareness can be a nonreactive, nonjudgmental attention to inner states. But Mayer finds that this sensibility also can be less equanimous; typical thoughts bespeaking emotional self-awareness include “I shouldn’t feel this way,” “I’m thinking good things to cheer up,” and, for a more restricted self-awareness, the fleeting thought “Don’t think about it” in reaction to something highly upsetting.

Although there is a logical distinction between being aware of feelings and acting to change them, Mayer finds that for all practical purposes the two usually go hand-in-hand: to recognize a foul mood is to want to get out of it. This recognition, however, is distinct from the efforts we make to keep from acting on an emotional impulse. When

we say “Stop that!” to a child whose anger has led him to hit a playmate, we may stop the hitting, but the anger still simmers. The child’s thoughts are still fixated on the trigger for the anger—“But he stole my toy!”—and the anger continues unabated. Self-awareness has a more powerful effect on strong, aversive feelings: the realization “This is anger I’m feeling” offers a greater degree of freedom—not just the option not to act on it, but the added option to try to let go of it.

Mayer finds that people tend to fall into distinctive styles for attending to and dealing with their emotions:⁶

- *Self-aware.* Aware of their moods as they are having them, these people understandably have some sophistication about their emotional lives. Their clarity about emotions may undergird other personality traits: they are autonomous and sure of their own boundaries, are in good psychological health, and tend to have a positive outlook on life. When they get into a bad mood, they don’t ruminate and obsess about it, and are able to get out of it sooner. In short, their mindfulness helps them manage their emotions.

- *Engulfed.* These are people who often feel swamped by their emotions and helpless to escape them, as though their moods have taken charge. They are mercurial and not very aware of their feelings, so that they are lost in them rather than having some perspective. As a result, they do little to try to escape bad moods, feeling that they have no control over their emotional life. They often feel overwhelmed and emotionally out of control.

- *Accepting.* While these people are often clear about what they are feeling, they also tend to be accepting of their moods, and so don’t try to change them. There seem to be two branches of the accepting type: those who are usually in good moods and so have little motivation to change them, and people who, despite their clarity about their moods, are susceptible to bad ones but accept them with a laissez-faire attitude, doing nothing to change them despite their distress—a pattern found among, say, depressed people who are resigned to their despair.

THE PASSIONATE AND THE INDIFFERENT

Imagine for a moment that you’re on an airplane flying from New York to San Francisco. It’s been a smooth flight, but as you approach

the Rockies the pilot's voice comes over the plane intercom. "Ladies and gentlemen, there's some turbulence ahead. Please return to your seats and fasten your seatbelts." And then the plane hits the turbulence, which is rougher than you've ever endured—the airplane is tossed up and down and side to side like a beach ball in the waves.

The question is, what do you do? Are you the kind of person who buries yourself in your book or magazine, or continues watching the movie, tuning out the turbulence? Or are you likely to take out the emergency card and review the precautions, or watch the flight attendants to see if they show signs of panic, or strain to hear the engines to see if there's anything worrisome?

Which of these responses comes more naturally to us is a sign of our favored attentional stance under duress. The airplane scenario itself is an item from a psychological test developed by Suzanne Miller, a psychologist at Temple University, to assess whether people tend to be vigilant, attending carefully to every detail of a distressing predicament, or, in contrast, deal with such anxious moments by trying to distract themselves. These two attentional stances toward distress have very different consequences for how people experience their own emotional reactions. Those who tune in under duress can, by the very act of attending so carefully, unwittingly amplify the magnitude of their own reactions—especially if their tuning in is devoid of the equanimity of self-awareness. The result is that their emotions seem all the more intense. Those who tune out, who distract themselves, notice less about their own reactions, and so minimize the experience of their emotional response, if not the size of the response itself.

At the extremes, this means that for some people emotional awareness is overwhelming, while for others it barely exists. Consider the college student who, one evening, spotted a fire that had broken out in his dorm, went to get a fire extinguisher, and put the fire out. Nothing unusual—except that on his way to get the extinguisher and then on the way back to the fire, he walked instead of running. The reason? He didn't feel there was any urgency.

This story was told to me by Edward Diener, a University of Illinois at Urbana psychologist who has been studying the *intensity* with which people experience their emotions.⁷ The college student stood out in his collection of case studies as one of the least intense Diener had ever encountered. He was, essentially, a man without passions, someone who goes through life feeling little or nothing, even about an

emergency like a fire.

By contrast, consider a woman at the opposite end of Diener's spectrum. When she once lost her favorite pen, she was distraught for days. Another time she was so thrilled on seeing an ad for a big sale on women's shoes at an expensive store that she dropped what she was doing, hopped in her car, and drove three hours to the store in Chicago.

Diener finds that women, in general, feel both positive and negative emotions more strongly than do men. And, sex differences aside, emotional life is richer for those who notice more. For one thing, this enhanced emotional sensitivity means that for such people the least provocation unleashes emotional storms, whether heavenly or hellish, while those at the other extreme barely experience any feeling even under the most dire circumstances.

THE MAN WITHOUT FEELINGS

Gary infuriated his fiancée, Ellen, because even though he was intelligent, thoughtful, and a successful surgeon, Gary was emotionally flat, completely unresponsive to any and all shows of feeling. While Gary could speak brilliantly of science and art, when it came to his feelings—even for Ellen—he fell silent. Try as she might to elicit some passion from him, Gary was impassive, oblivious. “I don’t naturally express my feelings,” Gary told the therapist he saw at Ellen’s insistence. When it came to emotional life, he added, “I don’t know what to talk about; I have no strong feelings, either positive or negative.”

Ellen was not alone in being frustrated by Gary’s aloofness; as he confided to his therapist, he was unable to speak openly about his feelings with anyone in his life. The reason: He did not know what he felt in the first place. So far as he could tell, he had no angers, no sadnesses, no joys.⁸

As his own therapist observes, this emotional blankness makes Gary and others like him colorless, bland: “They bore everybody. That’s why their wives send them into treatment.” Gary’s emotional flatness exemplifies what psychiatrists call *alexithymia*, from the Greek *a*-for “lack,” *lexis* for “word,” and *thymos* for “emotion.” Such people lack words for their feelings. Indeed, they seem to lack feelings altogether, although this may actually be because of their inability to *express*

emotion rather than from an absence of emotion altogether. Such people were first noticed by psychoanalysts puzzled by a class of patients who were untreatable by that method because they reported no feelings, no fantasies, and colorless dreams—in short, no inner emotional life to talk about at all.⁹ The clinical features that mark alexithymics include having difficulty describing feelings—their own or anyone else's—and a sharply limited emotional vocabulary.¹⁰ What's more, they have trouble discriminating among emotions as well as between emotion and bodily sensation, so that they might tell of having butterflies in the stomach, palpitations, sweating, and dizziness—but they would not know they are feeling anxious.

“They give the impression of being different, alien beings, having come from an entirely different world, living in the midst of a society which is dominated by feelings,” is the description given by Dr. Peter Sifneos, the Harvard psychiatrist who in 1972 coined the term *alexithymia*.¹¹ Alexithymics rarely cry, for example, but if they do their tears are copious. Still, they are bewildered if asked what the tears are all about. One patient with alexithymia was so upset after seeing a movie about a woman with eight children who was dying of cancer that she cried herself to sleep. When her therapist suggested that perhaps she was upset because the movie reminded her of her own mother, who was in actuality dying of cancer, the woman sat motionless, bewildered and silent. When her therapist then asked her how she felt at that moment, she said she felt “awful,” but couldn't clarify her feelings beyond that. And, she added, from time to time she found herself crying, but never knew exactly what she was crying about.¹²

And that is the nub of the problem. It is not that alexithymics never feel, but that they are unable to know—and especially unable to put into words—precisely what their feelings are. They are utterly lacking in the fundamental skill of emotional intelligence, self-awareness—knowing what we are feeling as emotions roil within us. Alexithymics belie the common-sense notion that it is perfectly self-evident what we are feeling: they haven't a clue. When something—or more likely, someone—does move them to feeling, they find the experience baffling and overwhelming, something to avoid at all costs. Feelings come to them, when they come at all, as a befuddling bundle of distress; as the patient who cried at the movie put it, they feel “awful,” but can't say exactly which *kind* of awful it is they feel.

This basic confusion about feelings often seems to lead them to

complain of vague medical problems when they are actually experiencing emotional distress—a phenomenon known in psychiatry as *somaticizing*, mistaking an emotional ache for a physical one (and different from a psychosomatic disease, in which emotional problems cause genuine medical ones). Indeed, much of the psychiatric interest in alexithymics is in weeding them out from among those who come to doctors seeking help, for they are prone to lengthy—and fruitless—pursuit of a medical diagnosis and treatment for what is actually an emotional problem.

While no one can as yet say for sure what causes alexithymia, Dr. Sifneos proposes a disconnection between the limbic system and the neocortex, particularly its verbal centers, which fits well with what we are learning about the emotional brain. Patients with severe seizures who had that connection surgically severed to relieve their symptoms, notes Sifneos, became emotionally flat, like people with alexithymia, unable to put their feelings into words and suddenly devoid of fantasy life. In short, though the circuits of the emotional brain may react with feelings, the neocortex is not able to sort out these feelings and add the nuance of language to them. As Henry Roth observed in his novel *Call It Sleep* about this power of language, “If you could put words to what you felt, it was yours.” The corollary, of course, is the alexithymic’s dilemma: having no words for feelings means not making the feelings your own.

IN PRAISE OF GUT FEELING

Elliot’s tumor, growing just behind his forehead, was the size of a small orange; surgery removed it completely. Although the surgery was declared a success, afterward people who knew him well said that Elliot was no longer Elliot—he had undergone a drastic personality change. Once a successful corporate lawyer, Elliot could no longer hold a job. His wife left him. Squandering his savings in fruitless investments, he was reduced to living in a spare bedroom at his brother’s home.

There was a puzzling pattern to Elliot’s problem. Intellectually he was as bright as ever, but he used his time terribly, getting lost in minor details; he seemed to have lost all sense of priority. Reprimands made no difference; he was fired from a succession of legal jobs. Though extensive intellectual tests found nothing wrong with Elliot’s

mental faculties, he went to see a neurologist anyway, hoping that discovery of a neurological problem might get him the disability benefits to which he felt he was entitled. Otherwise the conclusion seemed to be that he was just a malingerer.

Antonio Damasio, the neurologist Elliot consulted, was struck by one element missing from Elliot's mental repertoire: though nothing was wrong with his logic, memory, attention, or any other cognitive ability, Elliot was virtually oblivious to his feelings about what had happened to him.¹³ Most strikingly, Elliot could narrate the tragic events of his life with complete dispassion, as though he were an onlooker to the losses and failures of his past—without a note of regret or sadness, frustration or anger at life's unfairness. His own tragedy brought him no pain; Damasio felt more upset by Elliot's story than did Elliot himself.

The source of this emotional unawareness, Damasio concluded, was the removal, along with the brain tumor, of part of Elliot's prefrontal lobes. In effect, the surgery had severed ties between the lower centers of the emotional brain, especially the amygdala and related circuits, and the thinking abilities of the neocortex. Elliot's thinking had become computerlike, able to make every step in the calculus of a decision, but unable to assign *values* to differing possibilities. Every option was neutral. And that overly dispassionate reasoning, suspected Damasio, was the core of Elliot's problem: too little awareness of his own feelings about things made Elliot's reasoning faulty.

The handicap showed up even in mundane decisions. When Damasio tried to choose a time and date for the next appointment with Elliot, the result was a muddle of indecisiveness: Elliot could find arguments for and against every date and time that Damasio proposed, but could not choose among them. At the rational level, there were perfectly good reasons for objecting to or accepting virtually every possible time for the appointment. But Elliot lacked any sense of how *he felt* about any of the times. Lacking that awareness of his own feelings, he had no preferences at all.

One lesson from Elliot's indecisiveness is the crucial role of feeling in navigating the endless stream of life's personal decisions. While strong feelings can create havoc in reasoning, the *lack* of awareness of feeling can also be ruinous, especially in weighing the decisions on which our destiny largely depends: what career to pursue, whether to stay with a secure job or switch to one that is riskier but more

interesting, whom to date or marry, where to live, which apartment to rent or house to buy—and on and on through life. Such decisions cannot be made well through sheer rationality; they require gut feeling, and the emotional wisdom garnered through past experiences. Formal logic alone can never work as the basis for deciding whom to marry or trust or even what job to take; these are realms where reason without feeling is blind.

The intuitive signals that guide us in these moments come in the form of limbic-driven surges from the viscera that Damasio calls “somatic markers”—literally, gut feelings. The somatic marker is a kind of automatic alarm, typically calling attention to a potential danger from a given course of action. More often than not these markers steer us *away* from some choice that experience warns us against, though they can also alert us to a golden opportunity. We usually do not, at that moment, recall what specific experiences formed this negative feeling; all we need is the signal that a given potential course of action could be disastrous. Whenever such a gut feeling rises up, we can immediately drop or pursue that avenue of consideration with greater confidence, and so pare down our array of choices to a more manageable decision matrix. The key to sounder personal decision-making, in short: being attuned to our feelings.

PLUMBING THE UNCONSCIOUS

Elliot’s emotional vacuity suggests that there may be a spectrum of people’s ability to sense their emotions as they have them. By the logic of neuroscience, if the absence of a neural circuit leads to a deficit in an ability, then the relative strength or weakness of that same circuit in people whose brains are intact should lead to comparable levels of competence in that same ability. In terms of the role of prefrontal circuits in emotional attunement, this suggests that for neurological reasons some of us may more easily detect the stirring of fear or joy than do others, and so be more emotionally self-aware.

It may be that a talent for psychological introspection hinges on this same circuitry. Some of us are naturally more attuned to the emotional mind’s special symbolic modes: metaphor and simile, along with poetry, song, and fable, are all cast in the language of the heart. So too are dreams and myths, in which loose associations determine

the flow of narrative, abiding by the logic of the emotional mind. Those who have a natural attunement to their own heart's voice—the language of emotion—are sure to be more adept at articulating its messages, whether as a novelist, songwriter, or psychotherapist. This inner attunement should make them more gifted in giving voice to the “wisdom of the unconscious”—the felt meanings of our dreams and fantasies, the symbols that embody our deepest wishes.

Self-awareness is fundamental to psychological insight; this is the faculty that much of psychotherapy means to strengthen. Indeed, Howard Gardner’s model for intrapsychic intelligence is Sigmund Freud, the great mapper of the psyche’s secret dynamics. As Freud made clear, much of emotional life is unconscious; feelings that stir within us do not always cross the threshold into awareness. Empirical verification of this psychological axiom comes, for instance, from experiments on unconscious emotions, such as the remarkable finding that people form definite likings for things they do not even realize they have seen before. Any emotion can be—and often is—unconscious.

The physiological beginnings of an emotion typically occur before a person is consciously aware of the feeling itself. For example, when people who fear snakes are shown pictures of snakes, sensors on their skin will detect sweat breaking out, a sign of anxiety, though they say they do not feel any fear. The sweat shows up in such people even when the picture of a snake is presented so rapidly that they have no conscious idea of what, exactly, they just saw, let alone that they are beginning to get anxious. As such preconscious emotional stirrings continue to build, they eventually become strong enough to break into awareness. Thus there are two levels of emotion, conscious and unconscious. The moment of an emotion coming into awareness marks its registering as such in the frontal cortex.¹⁴

Emotions that simmer beneath the threshold of awareness can have a powerful impact on how we perceive and react, even though we have no idea they are at work. Take someone who is annoyed by a rude encounter early in the day, and then is peevish for hours afterward, taking affront where none is intended and snapping at people for no real reason. He may well be oblivious to his continuing irritability and will be surprised if someone calls attention to it, though it stews just out of his awareness and dictates his curt replies. But once that reaction is brought into awareness—once it registers in the cortex—he can evaluate things anew, decide to shrug off the

feelings left earlier in the day, and change his outlook and mood. In this way emotional self-awareness is the building block of the next fundamental of emotional intelligence: being able to shake off a bad mood.

5

Passion's Slaves

*Thou hast been ...
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Has taken with equal thanks Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, aye, in my heart of hearts
As I do thee....*

—HAMLET TO HIS FRIEND HORATIO

A sense of self-mastery, of being able to withstand the emotional storms that the buffeting of Fortune brings rather than being “passion’s slave,” has been praised as a virtue since the time of Plato. The ancient Greek word for it was *sophrosyne*, “care and intelligence in conducting one’s life; a tempered balance and wisdom,” as Page DuBois, a Greek scholar, translates it. The Romans and the early Christian church called it *temperantia*, temperance, the restraining of emotional excess. The goal is balance, not emotional suppression: every feeling has its value and significance. A life without passion would be a dull wasteland of neutrality, cut off and isolated from the richness of life itself. But, as Aristotle observed, what is wanted is *appropriate* emotion, feeling proportionate to circumstance. When emotions are too muted they create dullness and distance; when out of control, too extreme and persistent, they become pathological, as in immobilizing depression, overwhelming anxiety, raging anger, manic agitation.

Indeed, keeping our distressing emotions in check is the key to emotional well-being; extremes—emotions that wax too intensely or for too long—undermine our stability. Of course, it is not that we should feel only one kind of emotion; being happy all the time somehow suggests the blandness of those smiley-face badges that had a faddish moment in the 1970s. There is much to be said for the constructive contribution of suffering to creative and spiritual life; suffering can temper the soul.

Downs as well as ups spice life, but need to be in balance. In the calculus of the heart it is the ratio of positive to negative emotions that determines the sense of well-being—at least that is the verdict from studies of mood in which hundreds of men and women have carried beepers that reminded them at random times to record their emotions at that moment.¹ It is not that people need to avoid unpleasant feelings to feel content, but rather that stormy feelings not go unchecked, displacing all pleasant moods. People who have strong episodes of anger or depression can still feel a sense of well-being if they have a countervailing set of equally joyous or happy times. These studies also affirm the independence of emotional from academic intelligence, finding little or no relationship between grades or IQ and people's emotional well-being.

Just as there is a steady murmur of background thoughts in the mind, there is a constant emotional hum; beep someone at six A.M. or seven P.M. and he will always be in some mood or other. Of course, on any two mornings someone can have very different moods; but when people's moods are averaged over weeks or months, they tend to reflect that person's overall sense of well-being. It turns out that for most people, extremely intense feelings are relatively rare; most of us fall into the gray middle range, with mild bumps in our emotional roller coaster.

Still, managing our emotions is something of a full-time job: much of what we do—especially in our free time—is an attempt to manage mood. Everything from reading a novel or watching television to the activities and companions we choose can be a way to make ourselves feel better. The art of soothing ourselves is a fundamental life skill; some psychoanalytic thinkers, such as John Bowlby and D. W. Winnicott, see this as one of the most essential of all psychic tools. The theory holds that emotionally sound infants learn to soothe themselves by treating themselves as their caretakers have treated them, leaving them less vulnerable to the upheavals of the emotional brain.

As we have seen, the design of the brain means that we very often have little or no control over *when* we are swept by emotion, nor over *what* emotion it will be. But we can have some say in *how long* an emotion will last. The issue arises not with garden-variety sadness, worry, or anger; normally such moods pass with time and patience. But when these emotions are of great intensity and linger past an

appropriate point, they shade over into their distressing extremes—chronic anxiety, uncontrollable rage, depression. And, at their most severe and intractable, medication, psychotherapy, or both may be needed to lift them.

In these times, one sign of the capacity for emotional self-regulation may be recognizing when chronic agitation of the emotional brain is too strong to be overcome without pharmacologic help. For example, two thirds of those who suffer from manic-depression have never been treated for the disorder. But lithium or newer medications can thwart the characteristic cycle of paralyzing depression alternating with manic episodes that mix chaotic elation and grandiosity with irritation and rage. One problem with manic-depression is that while people are in the throes of mania they often feel so overly confident that they see no need for help of any kind despite the disastrous decisions they are making. In such severe emotional disorders psychiatric medication offers a tool for managing life better.

But when it comes to vanquishing the more usual range of bad moods, we are left to our own devices. Unfortunately, those devices are not always effective—at least such is the conclusion reached by Diane Tice, a psychologist at Case Western Reserve University, who asked more than four hundred men and women about the strategies they used to escape foul moods, and how successful those tactics were for them.²

Not everyone agrees with the philosophical premise that bad moods should be changed; there are, Tice found, “mood purists,” the 5 percent or so of people who said they never try to change a mood since, in their view, all emotions are “natural” and should be experienced just as they present themselves, no matter how dispiriting. And then there were those who regularly sought to get into unpleasant moods for pragmatic reasons: physicians who needed to be somber to give patients bad news; social activists who nurtured their outrage at injustice so as to be more effective in battling it; even a young man who told of working up his anger to help his little brother with playground bullies. And some people were positively Machiavellian about manipulating moods—witness the bill collectors who purposely worked themselves into a rage in order to be all the firmer with deadbeats.³ But these rare purposive cultivations of unpleasantness aside, most everyone complained of being at the mercy of their moods. People’s track records at shaking bad moods were decidedly mixed.

THE ANATOMY OF RAGE

Say someone in another car cuts dangerously close to you as you are driving on the freeway. If your reflexive thought is “That son of a bitch!” it matters immensely for the trajectory of rage whether that thought is followed by more thoughts of outrage and revenge: “He could have hit me! That bastard—I can’t let him get away with that!” Your knuckles whiten as you tighten your hold on the steering wheel, a surrogate for strangling his throat. Your body mobilizes to fight, not run—leaving you trembling, beads of sweat on your forehead, your heart pounding, the muscles in your face locked in a scowl. You want to kill the guy. Then, should a car behind you honk because you have slowed down after the close call, you are apt to explode in rage at that driver too. Such is the stuff of hypertension, reckless driving, even freeway shootings.

Contrast that sequence of building rage with a more charitable line of thought toward the driver who cut you off: “Maybe he didn’t see me, or maybe he had some good reason for driving so carelessly, such as a medical emergency.” That line of possibility tempers anger with mercy, or at least an open mind, short-circuiting the buildup of rage. The problem, as Aristotle’s challenge to have only *appropriate* anger reminds us, is that more often than not our anger surges out of control. Benjamin Franklin put it well: “Anger is never without a reason, but seldom a good one.”

There are, of course, different kinds of anger. The amygdala may well be a main source of the sudden spark of rage we feel at the driver whose carelessness endangers us. But the other end of the emotional circuitry, the neocortex, most likely foments more calculated angers, such as cool-headed revenge or outrage at unfairness or injustice. Such thoughtful angers are those most likely, as Franklin put it, to “have good reasons” or seem to.

Of all the moods that people want to escape, rage seems to be the most intransigent; Tice found anger is the mood people are worst at controlling. Indeed, anger is the most seductive of the negative emotions; the self-righteous inner monologue that propels it along fills the mind with the most convincing arguments for venting rage. Unlike sadness, anger is energizing, even exhilarating. Anger’s seductive, persuasive power may in itself explain why some views about it are so common: that anger is uncontrollable, or that, at any rate, it *should not* be controlled, and that venting anger in “catharsis” is all to the

good. A contrasting view, perhaps a reaction against the bleak picture of these other two, holds that anger can be prevented entirely. But a careful reading of research findings suggests that all these common attitudes toward anger are misguided, if not outright myths.⁴

The train of angry thoughts that stokes anger is also potentially the key to one of the most powerful ways to defuse anger: undermining the convictions that are fueling the anger in the first place. The longer we ruminate about what has made us angry, the more “good reasons” and self-justifications for being angry we can invent. Brooding fuels anger’s flames. But seeing things differently douses those flames. Tice found that reframing a situation more positively was one of the most potent ways to put anger to rest.

The Rage “Rush”

That finding squares well with the conclusions of University of Alabama psychologist Dolf Zillmann, who, in a lengthy series of careful experiments, has taken precise measure of anger and the anatomy of rage.⁵ Given the roots of anger in the fight wing of the fight-or-flight response, it is no surprise that Zillmann finds that a universal trigger for anger is the sense of being endangered. Endangerment can be signaled not just by an outright physical threat but also, as is more often the case, by a symbolic threat to self-esteem or dignity: being treated unjustly or rudely, being insulted or demeaned, being frustrated in pursuing an important goal. These perceptions act as the instigating trigger for a limbic surge that has a dual effect on the brain. One part of that surge is a release of catecholamines, which generate a quick, episodic rush of energy, enough for “one course of vigorous action,” as Zillmann puts it, “such as in fight or flight.” This energy surge lasts for minutes, during which it readies the body for a good fight or a quick flight, depending on how the emotional brain sizes up the opposition.

Meanwhile, another amygdala-driven ripple through the adrenocortical branch of the nervous system creates a general tonic background of action readiness, which lasts much longer than the catecholamine energy surge. This generalized adrenal and cortical excitation can last for hours and even days, keeping the emotional brain in special readiness for arousal, and becoming a foundation on which subsequent reactions can build with particular quickness. In general, the hair-trigger condition created by adrenocortical arousal

explains why people are so much more prone to anger if they have already been provoked or slightly irritated by something else. Stress of all sorts creates adrenocortical arousal, lowering the threshold for what provokes anger. Thus someone who has had a hard day at work is especially vulnerable to becoming enraged later at home by something—the kids being too noisy or messy, say—that under other circumstances would not be powerful enough to trigger an emotional hijacking.

Zillmann comes to these insights on anger through careful experimentation. In a typical study, for example, he had a confederate provoke men and women who had volunteered by making snide remarks about them. The volunteers then watched a pleasant or upsetting film. Later the volunteers were given the chance to retaliate against the confederate by giving an evaluation they thought would be used in a decision whether or not to hire him. The intensity of their retaliation was directly proportional to how aroused they had gotten from the film they had just watched; they were angrier after seeing the unpleasant film, and gave the worst ratings.

Anger Builds on Anger

Zillmann's studies seem to explain the dynamic at work in a familiar domestic drama I witnessed one day while shopping. Down the supermarket aisle drifted the emphatic, measured tones of a young mother to her son, about three: "Put ... it ... back!"

"But I *want* it!" he whined, clinging more tightly to a Ninja Turtles cereal box.

"Put it back!" Louder, her anger taking over.

At that moment the baby in her shopping cart seat dropped the jar of jelly she had been mouthing. When it shattered on the floor the mother yelled, "That's it!" and, in a fury, slapped the baby, grabbed the three-year-old's box and slammed it onto the nearest shelf, scooped him up by the waist, and rushed down the aisle, the shopping cart careening perilously in front, the baby now crying, her son, his legs dangling, protesting, "Put me *down*, put me *down*!"

Zillmann has found that when the body is already in a state of edginess, like the mother's, and something triggers an emotional hijacking, the subsequent emotion, whether anger or anxiety, is of especially great intensity. This dynamic is at work when someone becomes enraged. Zillmann sees escalating anger as "a sequence of

provocations, each triggering an excitatory reaction that dissipates slowly.” In this sequence every successive anger-provoking thought or perception becomes a minitrigger for amygdala-driven surges of catecholamines, each building on the hormonal momentum of those that went before. A second comes before the first has subsided, and a third on top of those, and so on; each wave rides the tails of those before, quickly escalating the body’s level of physiological arousal. A thought that comes later in this buildup triggers a far greater intensity of anger than one that comes at the beginning. Anger builds on anger; the emotional brain heats up. By then rage, unhampered by reason, easily erupts in violence.

At this point people are unforgiving and beyond being reasoned with; their thoughts revolve around revenge and reprisal, oblivious to what the consequences may be. This high level of excitation, Zillmann says, “fosters an illusion of power and invulnerability that may inspire and facilitate aggression” as the enraged person, “failing cognitive guidance,” falls back on the most primitive of responses. The limbic urge is ascendant; the rawest lessons of life’s brutality become guides to action.

Balm for Anger

Given this analysis of the anatomy of rage, Zillmann sees two main ways of intervening. One way of defusing anger is to seize on and challenge the thoughts that trigger the surges of anger, since it is the original appraisal of an interaction that confirms and encourages the first burst of anger, and the subsequent reappraisals that fan the flames. Timing matters; the earlier in the anger cycle the more effective. Indeed, anger can be completely short-circuited if the mitigating information comes before the anger is acted on.

The power of understanding to deflate anger is clear from another of Zillmann’s experiments, in which a rude assistant (a confederate) insulted and provoked volunteers who were riding an exercise bike. When the volunteers were given the chance to retaliate against the rude experimenter (again, by giving a bad evaluation they thought would be used in weighing his candidacy for a job) they did so with an angry glee. But in one version of the experiment another confederate entered after the volunteers had been provoked, and just before the chance to retaliate; she told the provocative experimenter he had a phone call down the hall. As he left he made a snide remark

to her too. But she took it in good spirits, explaining after he left that he was under terrible pressures, upset about his upcoming graduate orals. After that the irate volunteers, when offered the chance to retaliate against the rude fellow, chose not to; instead they expressed compassion for his plight.

Such mitigating information allows a reappraisal of the anger-provoking events. But there is a specific window of opportunity for this de-escalation. Zillmann finds it works well at moderate levels of anger; at high levels of rage it makes no difference because of what he calls “cognitive incapacitation”—in other words, people can no longer think straight. When people were already highly enraged, they dismissed the mitigating information with “That’s just too bad!” or “the strongest vulgarities the English language has to offer,” as Zillmann put it with delicacy.

Cooling Down

Once when I was about 13, in an angry fit, I walked out of the house vowing I would never return. It was a beautiful summer day, and I walked far along lovely lanes, till gradually the stillness and beauty calmed and soothed me, and after some hours I returned repentant and almost melted. Since then when I am angry, I do this if I can, and find it the best cure.

The account is by a subject in one of the very first scientific studies of anger, done in 1899.⁶ It still stands as a model of the second way of de-escalating anger: cooling off physiologically by waiting out the adrenal surge in a setting where there are not likely to be further triggers for rage. In an argument, for instance, that means getting away from the other person for the time being. During the cooling-off period, the angered person can put the brakes on the cycle of escalating hostile thought by seeking out distractions. Distraction, Zillmann finds, is a highly powerful mood-altering device, for a simple reason: It’s hard to stay angry when we’re having a pleasant time. The trick, of course, is to get anger to cool to the point where someone can *have* a pleasant time in the first place.

Zillmann’s analysis of the ways anger escalates and de-escalates explains many of Diane Tice’s findings about the strategies people commonly say they use to ease anger. One such fairly effective strategy is going off to be alone while cooling down. A large proportion of men translate this into going for a drive—a finding that

gives one pause when driving (and, Tice told me, inspired her to drive more defensively). Perhaps a safer alternative is going for a long walk; active exercise also helps with anger. So do relaxation methods such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation, perhaps because they change the body's physiology from the high arousal of anger to a low-arousal state, and perhaps too because they distract from whatever triggered the anger. Active exercise may cool anger for something of the same reason: after high levels of physiological activation during the exercise, the body rebounds to a low level once it stops.

But a cooling-down period will not work if that time is used to pursue the train of anger-inducing thought, since each such thought is in itself a minor trigger for more cascades of anger. The power of distraction is that it stops that angry train of thought. In her survey of people's strategies for handling anger, Tice found that distractions by and large help calm anger: TV, movies, reading, and the like all interfere with the angry thoughts that stoke rage. But, Tice found, indulging in treats such as shopping for oneself and eating do not have much effect; it is all too easy to continue with an indignant train of thought while cruising a shopping mall or devouring a piece of chocolate cake.

To these strategies add those developed by Redford Williams, a psychiatrist at Duke University who sought to help hostile people, who are at higher risk for heart disease, to control their irritability.⁷ One of his recommendations is to use self-awareness to catch cynical or hostile thoughts as they arise, and write them down. Once angry thoughts are captured this way, they can be challenged and reappraised, though, as Zillmann found, this approach works better before anger has escalated to rage.

The Ventilation Fallacy

As I settle into a New York City cab, a young man crossing the street stops in front of the cab to wait for traffic to clear. The driver, impatient to start, honks, motioning for the young man to move out of the way. The reply is a scowl and an obscene gesture.

“You son of a bitch!” the driver yells, making threatening lunges with the cab by hitting the accelerator and brake at the same time. At this lethal threat, the young man sullenly moves aside, barely, and smacks his fist against the cab as it inches by into traffic. At this, the driver shouts a foul litany of expletives at the man.

As we move along the driver, still visibly agitated, tells me, “You can’t take any shit from anyone. You gotta yell back—at least it makes you feel better!”

Catharsis—giving vent to rage—is sometimes extolled as a way of handling anger. The popular theory holds that “it makes you feel better.” But, as Zillmann’s findings suggest, there is an argument against catharsis. It has been made since the 1950s, when psychologists started to test the effects of catharsis experimentally and, time after time, found that giving vent to anger did little or nothing to dispel it (though, because of the seductive nature of anger, it may *feel* satisfying).⁸ There may be some specific conditions under which lashing out in anger does work: when it is expressed directly to the person who is its target, when it restores a sense of control or rights an injustice, or when it inflicts “appropriate harm” on the other person and gets him to change some grievous activity without retaliating. But because of the incendiary nature of anger, this may be easier to say than to do.⁹

Tice found that ventilating anger is one of the worst ways to cool down: outbursts of rage typically pump up the emotional brain’s arousal, leaving people feeling more angry, not less. Tice found that when people told of times they had taken their rage out on the person who provoked it, the net effect was to prolong the mood rather than end it. Far more effective was when people first cooled down, and then, in a more constructive or assertive manner, confronted the person to settle their dispute. As I once heard Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan teacher, reply when asked how best to handle anger: “Don’t suppress it. But don’t act on it.”

SOOTHING ANXIETY: WHAT, ME WORRY?

Oh, no! The muffler sounds bad.... What if I have to take it to the shop?... I can’t afford the expense.... I’d have to draw the money from Jamie’s college fund.... What if I can’t afford his tuition?... That bad school report last week.... What if his grades go down and he can’t get into college?... Muffler sounds bad....

And so the worrying mind spins on in an endless loop of low-grade melodrama, one set of concerns leading on to the next and back again. The above specimen is offered by Lizabeth Roemer and Thomas Borkovec, Pennsylvania State University psychologists, whose

research on worrying—the heart of all anxiety—has raised the topic from neurotic’s art to science.¹⁰ There is, of course, no hitch when worry works; by mulling over a problem—that is, employing constructive reflection, which can look like worrying—a solution can appear. Indeed, the reaction that underlies worry is the vigilance for potential danger that has, no doubt, been essential for survival over the course of evolution. When fear triggers the emotional brain, part of the resulting anxiety fixates attention on the threat at hand, forcing the mind to obsess about how to handle it and ignore anything else for the time being. Worry is, in a sense, a rehearsal of what might go wrong and how to deal with it; the task of worrying is to come up with positive solutions for life’s perils by anticipating dangers before they arise.

The difficulty is with chronic, repetitive worries, the kind that recycle on and on and never get any nearer a positive solution. A close analysis of chronic worry suggests that it has all the attributes of a low-grade emotional hijacking: the worries seem to come from nowhere, are uncontrollable, generate a steady hum of anxiety, are impervious to reason, and lock the worrier into a single, inflexible view of the worrisome topic. When this same cycle of worry intensifies and persists, it shades over the line into full-blown neural hijackings, the anxiety disorders: phobias, obsessions and compulsions, panic attacks. In each of these disorders worry fixates in a distinct fashion; for the phobic, anxieties rivet on the feared situation; for the obsessive, they fixate on preventing some feared calamity; in panic attacks, the worries can focus on a fear of dying or on the prospect of having the attack itself.

In all these conditions the common denominator is worry run amok. For example, a woman being treated for obsessive-compulsive disorder had a series of rituals that took most of her waking hours: forty-five-minute showers several times daily, washing her hands for five minutes twenty or more times a day. She would not sit down unless she first swabbed the seat with rubbing alcohol to sterilize it. Nor would she touch a child or an animal—both were “too dirty.” All these compulsions were stirred by her underlying morbid fear of germs; she worried constantly that without her washing and sterilizing she would catch a disease and die.¹¹

A woman being treated for “generalized anxiety disorder”—the psychiatric nomenclature for being a constant worrier—responded to the request to worry aloud for one minute this way:

I might not do this right. This may be so artificial that it won't be an indication of the real thing and we need to get at the real thing.... Because if we don't get at the real thing, I won't get well. And if I don't get well I'll never be happy.¹²

In this virtuoso display of worrying about worrying, the very request to worry for one minute had, within a few short seconds, escalated to contemplation of a lifelong catastrophe: "I'll never be happy." Worries typically follow such lines, a narrative to oneself that jumps from concern to concern and more often than not includes catastrophizing, imagining some terrible tragedy. Worries are almost always expressed in the mind's ear, not its eye—that is, in words, not images—a fact that has significance for controlling worry.

Borkovec and his colleagues began to study worrying *per se* when they were trying to come up with a treatment for insomnia. Anxiety, other researchers have observed, comes in two forms: *cognitive*, or worrisome thoughts, and *somatic*, the physiological symptoms of anxiety, such as sweating, a racing heart, or muscle tension. The main trouble with insomniacs, Borkovec found, was not the somatic arousal. What kept them up were intrusive thoughts. They were chronic worriers, and could not stop worrying, no matter how sleepy they were. The one thing that worked in helping them get to sleep was getting their minds off their worries, focusing instead on the sensations produced by a relaxation method. In short, the worries could be stopped by shifting attention away.

Most worriers, however, can't seem to do this. The reason, Borkovec believes, has to do with a partial payoff from worrying that is highly reinforcing to the habit. There is, it seems, something positive in worries: worries are ways to deal with potential threats, with dangers that may come one's way. The work of worrying—when it succeeds—is to rehearse what those dangers are, and to reflect on ways to deal with them. But worry doesn't work all that well. New solutions and fresh ways of seeing a problem do not typically come from worrying, especially chronic worry. Instead of coming up with solutions to these potential problems, worriers typically simply ruminate on the danger itself, immersing themselves in a low-key way in the dread associated with it while staying in the same rut of thought. Chronic worriers worry about a wide range of things, most of which have almost no chance of happening; they read dangers into life's journey that others never notice.

Yet chronic worriers tell Borkovec that worrying helps them, and

that their worries are self-perpetuating, an endless loop of angst-ridden thought. Why should worry become what seems to amount to a mental addiction? Oddly, as Borkovec points out, the worry habit is reinforcing in the same sense that superstitions are. Since people worry about many things that have a very low probability of actually occurring—a loved one dying in a plane crash, going bankrupt, and the like—there is, to the primitive limbic brain at least, something magical about it. Like an amulet that wards off some anticipated evil, the worry psychologically gets the credit for preventing the danger it obsesses about.

The Work of Worrying

She had moved to Los Angeles from the Midwest, lured by a job with a publisher. But the publisher was bought by another soon after, and she was left without a job. Turning to freelance writing, an erratic marketplace, she found herself either swamped with work or unable to pay her rent. She often had to ration phone calls, and for the first time was without health insurance. This lack of coverage was particularly distressing: she found herself catastrophizing about her health, sure every headache signaled a brain tumor, picturing herself in an accident whenever she had to drive somewhere. She often found herself lost in a long reverie of worry, a medley of distress. But, she said, she found her worries almost addictive.

Borkovec discovered another unexpected benefit to worrying. While people are immersed in their worried thoughts, they do not seem to notice the subjective sensations of the anxiety those worries stir—the speedy heartbeat, the beads of sweat, the shakiness—and as the worry proceeds it actually seems to suppress some of that anxiety, at least as reflected in heart rate. The sequence presumably goes something like this: The worrier notices something that triggers the image of some potential threat or danger; that imagined catastrophe in turn triggers a mild attack of anxiety. The worrier then plunges into a long series of distressed thoughts, each of which primes yet another topic for worry; as attention continues to be carried along by this train of worry, focusing on these very thoughts takes the mind off the original catastrophic image that triggered the anxiety. Images, Borkovec found, are more powerful triggers for physiological anxiety than are thoughts, so immersion in thoughts, to the exclusion of catastrophic images, partially alleviates the experience of being anxious. And, to that extent, the worry is also reinforced, as a halfway antidote to the

very anxiety it evoked.

But chronic worries are self-defeating too in that they take the form of stereotyped, rigid ideas, not creative breakthroughs that actually move toward solving the problem. This rigidity shows up not just in the manifest content of worried thought, which simply repeats more or less the same ideas over and over. But at a neurological level there seems to be a cortical rigidity, a deficit in the emotional brain's ability to respond flexibly to changing circumstance. In short, chronic worry works in some ways, but not in other, more consequential ones: it eases some anxiety, but never solves the problem.

The one thing that chronic worriers cannot do is follow the advice they are most often given: "Just stop worrying" (or, worse, "Don't worry—be happy"). Since chronic worries seem to be low-grade amygdala episodes, they come unbidden. And, by their very nature, they persist once they arise in the mind. But after much experimentation, Borkovec discovered some simple steps that can help even the most chronic worrier control the habit.

The first step is self-awareness, catching the worrisome episodes as near their beginning as possible—ideally, as soon as or just after the fleeting catastrophic image triggers the worry-anxiety cycle. Borkovec trains people in this approach by first teaching them to monitor cues for anxiety, especially learning to identify situations that trigger worry, or the fleeting thoughts and images that initiate the worry, as well as the accompanying sensations of anxiety in the body. With practice, people can identify the worries at an earlier and earlier point in the anxiety spiral. People also learn relaxation methods that they can apply at the moment they recognize the worry beginning, and practice the relaxation method daily so they will be able to use it on the spot, when they need it the most.

The relaxation method, though, is not enough in itself. Worriers also need to actively challenge the worrisome thoughts; failing this, the worry spiral will keep coming back. So the next step is to take a critical stance toward their assumptions: Is it very probable that the dreaded event will occur? Is it necessarily the case that there is only one or no alternative to letting it happen? Are there constructive steps to be taken? Does it really help to run through these same anxious thoughts over and over?

This combination of mindfulness and healthy skepticism would, presumably, act as a brake on the neural activation that underlies low-grade anxiety. Actively generating such thoughts may prime the

circuitry that can inhibit the limbic driving of worry; at the same time, actively inducing a relaxed state counters the signals for anxiety the emotional brain is sending throughout the body.

Indeed, Borkovec points out, these strategies establish a train of mental activity that is incompatible with worry. When a worry is allowed to repeat over and over unchallenged, it gains in persuasive power; challenging it by contemplating a range of equally plausible points of view keeps the one worried thought from being naively taken as true. Even some people whose worrying is serious enough to qualify for a psychiatric diagnosis have been relieved of the worrying habit this way.

On the other hand, for people with worries so severe they have flowered into phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or panic disorder, it may be prudent—indeed, a sign of self-awareness—to turn to medication to interrupt the cycle. A retraining of the emotional circuitry through therapy is still called for, however, in order to lessen the likelihood that anxiety disorders will recur when medication is stopped.¹³

MANAGING MELANCHOLY

The single mood people generally put most effort into shaking is sadness; Diane Tice found that people are most inventive when it comes to trying to escape the blues. Of course, not all sadness should be escaped; melancholy, like every other mood, has its benefits. The sadness that a loss brings has certain invariable effects: it closes down our interest in diversions and pleasures, fixes attention on what has been lost, and saps our energy for starting new endeavors—at least for the time being. In short, it enforces a kind of reflective retreat from life’s busy pursuits, and leaves us in a suspended state to mourn the loss, mull over its meaning, and, finally, make the psychological adjustments and new plans that will allow our lives to continue.

Bereavement is useful; full-blown depression is not. William Styron renders an eloquent description of “the many dreadful manifestations of the disease,” among them self-hatred, a sense of worthlessness, a “dank joylessness” with “gloom crowding in on me, a sense of dread and alienation and, above all, a stifling anxiety.”¹⁴ Then there are the intellectual marks: “confusion, failure of mental focus and lapse of memories,” and, at a later stage, his mind “dominated by anarchic

distortions,” and “a sense that my thought processes were engulfed by a toxic and unnameable tide that obliterated any enjoyable response to the living world.” There are the physical effects: sleeplessness, feeling as listless as a zombie, “a kind of numbness, an enervation, but more particularly an odd fragility,” along with a “fidgety restlessness.” Then there is the loss of pleasure: “Food, like everything else within the scope of sensation, was utterly without savor.” Finally, there was the vanishing of hope as the “gray drizzle of horror” took on a despair so palpable it was like physical pain, a pain so unendurable that suicide seemed a solution.

In such major depression, life is paralyzed; no new beginnings emerge. The very symptoms of depression bespeak a life on hold. For Styron, no medication or therapy helped; it was the passing of time and the refuge of a hospital that finally cleared away the despondency. But for most people, especially those with less severe cases, psychotherapy can help, as can medication—Prozac is the treatment of the hour, but there are more than a dozen other compounds offering some help, especially for major depression.

My focus here is the far more common sadness that at its upper limits becomes, technically speaking, a “subclinical depression”—that is, ordinary melancholy. This is a range of despondency that people can handle on their own, if they have the internal resources. Unfortunately, some of the strategies most often resorted to can backfire, leaving people feeling worse than before. One such strategy is simply staying alone, which is often appealing when people are feeling down; more often than not, however, it only adds a sense of loneliness and isolation to the sadness. That may partly explain why Tice found the most popular tactic for battling depression is socializing—going out to eat, to a ballgame or movie; in short, doing something with friends or family. That works well if the net effect is to get the person’s mind off his sadness. But it simply prolongs the mood if he uses the occasion just to mull over what put him in the funk.

Indeed, one of the main determinants of whether a depressed mood will persist or lift is the degree to which people ruminate. Worrying about what’s depressing us, it seems, makes the depression all the more intense and prolonged. In depression, worry takes several forms, all focusing on some aspect of the depression itself—how tired we feel, how little energy or motivation we have, for instance, or how little work we’re getting done. Typically none of this reflection is

accompanied by any concrete course of action that might alleviate the problem. Other common worries include “isolating yourself and thinking about how terrible you feel, worrying that your spouse might reject you because you are depressed, and wondering whether you are going to have another sleepless night,” says Stanford psychologist Susan Nolen-Hoeksma, who has studied rumination in depressed people.¹⁵

Depressed people sometimes justify this kind of rumination by saying they are trying to “understand themselves better”; in fact, they are priming the feelings of sadness without taking any steps that might actually lift their mood. Thus in therapy it might be perfectly helpful to reflect deeply on the causes of a depression, if that leads to insights or actions that will change the conditions that cause it. But a passive immersion in the sadness simply makes it worse.

Rumination can also make the depression stronger by creating conditions that are, well, more depressing. Nolen-Hoeksma gives the example of a saleswoman who gets depressed and spends so many hours worrying about it that she doesn’t get around to important sales calls. Her sales then decline, making her feel like a failure, which feeds her depression. But if she reacted to depression by trying to distract herself, she might well plunge into the sales calls as a way to get her mind off the sadness. Sales would be less likely to decline, and the very experience of making a sale might bolster her self-confidence, lessening the depression somewhat.

Women, Nolen-Hoeksma finds, are far more prone to ruminate when they are depressed than are men. This, she proposes, may at least partly explain the fact that women are diagnosed with depression twice as often as are men. Of course, other factors may come into play, such as women being more open to disclosing their distress or having more in their lives to be depressed about. And men may drown their depression in alcoholism, for which their rate is about twice that of women.

Cognitive therapy aimed at changing these thought patterns has been found in some studies to be on a par with medication for treating mild clinical depression, and superior to medication in preventing the return of mild depression. Two strategies are particularly effective in the battle.¹⁶ One is to learn to challenge the thoughts at the center of rumination—to question their validity and think of more positive alternatives. The other is to purposely schedule pleasant, distracting events.

One reason distraction works is that depressing thoughts are automatic, intruding on one's state of mind unbidden. Even when depressed people try to suppress their depressing thoughts, they often cannot come up with better alternatives; once the depressive tide of thought has started, it has a powerful magnetic effect on the train of association. For example, when depressed people were asked to unscramble jumbled six-word sentences, they were much better at figuring out the depressing messages ("The future looks very dismal") than the upbeat ones ("The future looks very bright").¹⁷

The tendency for depression to perpetuate itself shades even the kinds of distractions people choose. When depressed people were given a list of upbeat or ponderous ways to get their minds off something sad, such as the funeral of a friend, they picked more of the melancholy activities. Richard Wenzlaff, the University of Texas psychologist who did these studies, concludes that people who are already depressed need to make a special effort to get their attention on something that is completely upbeat, being careful not to inadvertently choose something—a tearjerker movie, a tragic novel—that will drag their mood down again.

Mood-lifters

Imagine that you're driving on an unfamiliar, steep, and winding road through fog. Suddenly a car pulls out of a driveway only a few feet in front of you, too close for you to stop in time. Your foot slams the brake to the floor and you go into a skid, your car sliding into the side of the other one. You see that the car is full of youngsters, a carpool on the way to preschool—just before the explosion of glass shattering and metal bending into metal. Then, out of the sudden silence after the collision, you hear a chorus of crying. You manage to run to the other car, and see that one of the children is lying motionless. You are flooded with remorse and sadness over this tragedy....

Such heart-wrenching scenarios were used to get volunteers upset in one of Wenzlaff's experiments. The volunteers then tried to keep the scene out of their minds while they jotted notes about the stream of their thoughts for nine minutes. Each time the thought of the disturbing scene intruded into their minds, they made a check mark as they wrote. While most people thought about the upsetting scene less and less as time went on, those volunteers who were more depressed actually showed a pronounced *increase* in intruding thoughts of the

scene as time passed, and even made oblique references to it in the thoughts that were supposed to be distractions from it.

What's more, the depression-prone volunteers used other distressing thoughts to distract themselves. As Wenzlaff told me, "Thoughts are associated in the mind not just by content, but by mood. People have what amounts to a set of bad-mood thoughts that come to mind more readily when they are feeling down. People who get depressed easily tend to create very strong networks of association between these thoughts, so that it is harder to suppress them once some kind of bad mood is evoked. Ironically, depressed people seem to use one depressing topic to get their minds off another, which only stirs more negative emotions."

Crying, one theory holds, may be nature's way of lowering levels of the brain chemicals that prime distress. While crying can sometimes break a spell of sadness, it can also leave the person still obsessing about the reasons for despair. The idea of a "good cry" is misleading: crying that reinforces rumination only prolongs the misery. Distractions break the chain of sadness-maintaining thinking; one of the leading theories of why electroconvulsive therapy is effective for the most severe depressions is that it causes a loss of short-term memory—patients feel better because they can't remember why they were so sad. At any rate, to shake garden-variety sadness, Diane Tice found, many people reported turning to distractions such as reading, TV and movies, video games and puzzles, sleeping, and daydreams such as planning a fantasy vacation. Wenzlaff would add that the most effective distractions are ones that will shift your mood—an exciting sporting event, a funny movie, an uplifting book. (A note of caution here: Some distractors in themselves can perpetuate depression. Studies of heavy TV watchers have found that, after watching TV, they are generally more depressed than before they started!)

Aerobic exercise, Tice found, is one of the more effective tactics for lifting mild depression, as well as other bad moods. But the caveat here is that the mood-lifting benefits of exercise work best for the lazy, those who usually do not work out very much. For those with a daily exercise routine, whatever mood-changing benefits it offers were probably strongest when they first took up the exercise habit. In fact, for habitual exercisers there is a reverse effect on mood: they start to feel bad on those days when they skip their workout. Exercise seems to work well because it changes the physiological state the mood evokes: depression is a low-arousal state, and aerobics pitches the

body into high arousal. By the same token, relaxation techniques, which put the body into a low-arousal state, work well for anxiety, a high-arousal state, but not so well for depression. Each of these approaches seems to work to break the cycle of depression or anxiety because it pitches the brain into a level of activity incompatible with the emotional state that has had it in its grip.

Cheering oneself up through treats and sensual pleasures was another fairly popular antidote to the blues. Common ways people soothed themselves when depressed ranged from taking hot baths or eating favorite foods, to listening to music or having sex. Buying oneself a gift or treat to get out of a bad mood was particularly popular among women, as was shopping in general, even if only window-shopping. Among those in college, Tice found that eating was three times as common a strategy for soothing sadness among women than men; men, on the other hand, were five times as likely to turn to drinking or drugs when they felt down. The trouble with overeating or alcohol as antidotes, of course, is that they can easily backfire: eating to excess brings regret; alcohol is a central nervous system depressant, and so only adds to the effects of depression itself.

A more constructive approach to mood-lifting, Tice reports, is engineering a small triumph or easy success: tackling some long-delayed chore around the house or getting to some other duty they've been wanting to clear up. By the same token, lifts to self-image also were cheering, even if only in the form of getting dressed up or putting on makeup.

One of the most potent—and, outside therapy, little used—antidotes to depression is seeing things differently, or *cognitive refraining*. It is natural to bemoan the end of a relationship and to wallow in self-pitying thoughts such as the conviction that “this means I’ll always be alone,” but it’s sure to thicken the sense of despair. However, stepping back and thinking about the ways the relationship wasn’t so great, and ways you and your partner were mismatched—in other words, seeing the loss differently, in a more positive light—is an antidote to the sadness. By the same token, cancer patients, no matter how serious their condition, were in better moods if they were able to bring to mind another patient who was in even worse shape (“I’m not so bad off—at least I can walk”); those who compared themselves to healthy people were the most depressed.¹⁸ Such downward comparisons are surprisingly cheering: suddenly what had seemed quite dispiriting doesn’t look all that bad.

Another effective depression-lifter is helping others in need. Since depression feeds on ruminations and preoccupations with the self, helping others lifts us out of those preoccupations as we empathize with people in pain of their own. Throwing oneself into volunteer work—coaching Little League, being a Big Brother, feeding the homeless—was one of the most powerful mood-changers in Tice’s study. But it was also one of the rarest.

Finally, at least some people are able to find relief from their melancholy in turning to a transcendent power. Tice told me, “Praying, if you’re very religious, works for all moods, especially depression.”

REPRESSORS: UPBEAT DENIAL

“He kicked his roommate in the stomach ...” the sentence begins. It ends, “... but he meant to turn on the light.”

That transformation of an act of aggression into an innocent, if slightly implausible, mistake is repression captured *in vivo*. It was composed by a college student who had volunteered for a study of *repressors*, people who habitually and automatically seem to blot emotional disturbance from their awareness. The beginning fragment “He kicked his roommate in the stomach ...” was given to this student as part of a sentence-completion test. Other tests showed that this small act of mental avoidance was part of a larger pattern in his life, a pattern of tuning out most emotional upset.¹⁹ While at first researchers saw repressors as a prime example of the inability to feel emotion—cousins of alexithymics, perhaps—current thinking sees them as quite proficient in regulating emotion. They have become so adept at buffering themselves against negative feelings, it seems, that they are not even aware of the negativity. Rather than calling them repressors, as has been the custom among researchers, a more apt term might be *unflappables*.

Much of this research, done principally by Daniel Weinberger, a psychologist now at Case Western Reserve University, shows that while such people may seem calm and imperturbable, they can sometimes seethe with physiological upsets they are oblivious to. During the sentence-completion test, volunteers were also being monitored for their level of physiological arousal. The repressors’ veneer of calm was belied by the agitation of their bodies: when faced

with the sentence about the violent roommate and others like it, they gave all the signs of anxiety, such as a racing heart, sweating, and climbing blood pressure. Yet when asked, they said they felt perfectly calm.

This continual tuning-out of emotions such as anger and anxiety is not uncommon: about one person in six shows the pattern, according to Weinberger. In theory, children might learn to become unflappable in any of several ways. One might be as a strategy for surviving a troubling situation such as having an alcoholic parent in a family where the problem itself is denied. Another might be having a parent or parents who are themselves repressors and so pass on the example of perennial cheerfulness or a stiff upper lip in the face of disturbing feelings. Or the trait may simply be inherited temperament. While no one can say as yet just how such a pattern begins in life, by the time repressors reach adulthood they are cool and collected under duress.

The question remains, of course, as to just how calm and cool they actually are. Can they really be unaware of the physical signs of distressing emotions, or are they simply feigning calm? The answer to that has come from clever research by Richard Davidson, a University of Wisconsin psychologist and an early collaborator with Weinberger. Davidson had people with the unflappable pattern free-associate to a list of words, most neutral, but several with hostile or sexual meanings that stir anxiety in almost everyone. And, as their bodily reactions revealed, they had all the physiological signs of distress in response to the loaded words, even though the words they associated to almost always showed an attempt to sanitize the upsetting words by linking them to an innocent one. If the first word was "hate," the response might be "love."

Davidson's study took advantage of the fact that (in right-handed people) a key center for processing negative emotion is in the right half of the brain, while the center for speaking is in the left. Once the right hemisphere recognizes that a word is upsetting, it transmits that information across the corpus callosum, the great divide between the brain's halves, to the speech center, and a word is spoken in response. Using an intricate arrangement of lenses, Davidson was able to display a word so that it was seen in only half of the visual field. Because of the neural wiring of the visual system, if the display was to the left half of the visual field, it was recognized first by the right half of the brain, with its sensitivity to distress. If the display was to the right half of the visual field, the signal went to the left side of the brain

without being assessed for upset.

When the words were presented to the right hemisphere, there was a lag in the time it took the unflappables to utter a response—but only if the word they were responding to was one of the upsetting ones. They had *no* time lag in the speed of their associations to *neutral* words. The lag showed up *only* when the words were presented to the right hemisphere, not to the left. In short, their unflappableness seems due to a neural mechanism that slows or interferes with the transfer of upsetting information. The implication is that they are *not* faking their lack of awareness about how upset they are; their brain is keeping that information from them. More precisely, the layer of mellow feeling that covers over such disturbing perceptions may well be due to the workings of the left prefrontal lobe. To his surprise, when Davidson measured activity levels in their prefrontal lobes, they had a decided predominance of activity on the left—the center for good feeling—and less on the right, the center for negativity.

These people “present themselves in a positive light, with an upbeat mood,” Davidson told me. “They deny that stress is upsetting them and show a pattern of left frontal activation while just sitting at rest that is associated with positive feelings. This brain activity may be the key to their positive claims, despite the underlying physiological arousal that looks like distress.” Davidson’s theory is that, in terms of brain activity, it is energy-demanding work to experience distressing realities in a positive light. The increased physiological arousal may be due to the sustained attempt by the neural circuitry to maintain positive feelings or to suppress or inhibit any negative ones.

In short, unflappableness is a kind of upbeat denial, a positive dissociation—and, possibly, a clue to neural mechanisms at play in the more severe dissociative states that can occur in, say, post-traumatic stress disorder. When it is simply involved in equanimity, says Davidson, “it seems to be a successful strategy for emotional self-regulation” though with an unknown cost to self-awareness.

6

The Master Aptitude

Just once in my life have I been paralyzed by fear. The occasion was a calculus exam during my freshman year in college for which I somehow had managed not to study. I still remember the room I marched to that spring morning with feelings of doom and foreboding heavy in my heart. I had been in that lecture hall for many classes. This morning, though, I noticed nothing through the windows and did not see the hall at all. My gaze shrank to the patch of floor directly in front of me as I made my way to a seat near the door. As I opened the blue cover of my exam book, there was the thump in my ears of heartbeat, there was the taste of anxiety in the pit of my stomach.

I looked at the exam questions once, quickly. Hopeless. For an hour I stared at that page, my mind racing over the consequences I would suffer. The same thoughts repeated themselves over and over, a tape loop of fear and trembling. I sat motionless, like an animal frozen in mid-move by curare. What strikes me most about that dreadful moment was how constricted my mind became. I did not spend the hour in a desperate attempt to patch together some semblance of answers to the test. I did not daydream. I simply sat fixated on my terror, waiting for the ordeal to finish.¹

That narrative of an ordeal by terror is my own; it is to this day for me the most convincing evidence of the devastating impact of emotional distress on mental clarity. I now see that my ordeal was most likely a testament to the power of the emotional brain to overpower, even paralyze, the thinking brain.

The extent to which emotional upsets can interfere with mental life is no news to teachers. Students who are anxious, angry, or depressed don't learn; people who are caught in these states do not take in information efficiently or deal with it well. As we saw in [Chapter 5](#), powerful negative emotions twist attention toward their own preoccupations, interfering with the attempt to focus elsewhere. Indeed, one of the signs that feelings have veered over the line into the pathological is that they are so intrusive they overwhelm all other thought, continually sabotaging attempts to pay attention to whatever other task is at hand. For the person going through an upsetting divorce—or the child whose parents are—the mind does not stay long

on the comparatively trivial routines of the work or school day; for the clinically depressed, thoughts of self-pity and despair, hopelessness and helplessness, override all others.

When emotions overwhelm concentration, what is being swamped is the mental capacity cognitive scientists call “working memory,” the ability to hold in mind all information relevant to the task at hand. What occupies working memory can be as mundane as the digits that compose a telephone number or as complicated as the intricate plot lines a novelist is trying to weave together. Working memory is an executive function par excellence in mental life, making possible all other intellectual efforts, from speaking a sentence to tackling a knotty logical proposition.² The prefrontal cortex executes working memory—and, remember, is where feelings and emotions meet.³ When the limbic circuitry that converges on the prefrontal cortex is in the thrall of emotional distress, one cost is in the effectiveness of working memory: we can’t think straight, as I discovered during that dread calculus exam.

On the other hand, consider the role of positive motivation—the marshaling of feelings like enthusiasm and confidence to enhance achievement. Studies of Olympic athletes, world-class musicians, and chess grand masters find their unifying trait is the ability to motivate themselves to pursue relentless training routines.⁴ And, with a steady rise in the degree of excellence required to be a world-class performer, these rigorous training routines now increasingly must begin in childhood. At the 1992 Olympics, twelve-year-old members of the Chinese diving team had put in as many total lifetime practice dives as had members of the American team in their early twenties—the Chinese divers started their rigorous training at age four. Likewise, the best violin virtuosos of the twentieth century began studying their instrument at around age five; international chess champions started on the game at an average age of seven, while those who rose only to national prominence started at ten. Starting earlier offers a lifetime edge: the top violin students at the best music academy in Berlin, all in their early twenties, had put in ten thousand total hours’ lifetime practice, while the second-tier students averaged around seventy-five hundred hours.

What seems to set apart those at the very top of competitive pursuits from others of roughly equal ability is the degree to which, beginning early in life, they can pursue an arduous practice routine for years and years. And that doggedness depends on emotional traits

—enthusiasm and persistence in the face of setbacks—above all else.

The added payoff for life success from motivation, apart from other innate abilities, can be seen in the remarkable performance of Asian students in American schools and professions. One thorough review of the evidence suggests that Asian-American children may have an average IQ advantage over whites of just two or three points.⁵ Yet on the basis of the professions, such as law and medicine, that many Asian-Americans end up in, as a group they behave as though their IQ were much higher—the equivalent of an IQ of 110 for Japanese-Americans and of 120 for Chinese-Americans.⁶ The reason seems to be that from the earliest years of school, Asian children work harder than whites. Sanford Dorenbusch, a Stanford sociologist who studied more than ten thousand high-school students, found that Asian-Americans spent 40 percent more time doing homework than did other students. “While most American parents are willing to accept a child’s weak areas and emphasize the strengths, for Asians, the attitude is that if you’re not doing well, the answer is to study later at night, and if you still don’t do well, to get up and study earlier in the morning. They believe that anyone can do well in school with the right effort.” In short, a strong cultural work ethic translates into higher motivation, zeal, and persistence—an emotional edge.

To the degree that our emotions get in the way of or enhance our ability to think and plan, to pursue training for a distant goal, to solve problems and the like, they define the limits of our capacity to use our innate mental abilities, and so determine how we do in life. And to the degree to which we are motivated by feelings of enthusiasm and pleasure in what we do—or even by an optimal degree of anxiety—they propel us to accomplishment. It is in this sense that emotional intelligence is a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them.

IMPULSE CONTROL: THE MARSHMALLOW TEST

Just imagine you’re four years old, and someone makes the following proposal: If you’ll wait until after he runs an errand, you can have two marshmallows for a treat. If you can’t wait until then, you can have only one—but you can have it right now. It is a challenge sure to try the soul of any four-year-old, a microcosm of the eternal battle between impulse and restraint, id and ego, desire and self-control,

gratification and delay. Which of these choices a child makes is a telling test; it offers a quick reading not just of character, but of the trajectory that child will probably take through life.

There is perhaps no psychological skill more fundamental than resisting impulse. It is the root of all emotional self-control, since all emotions, by their very nature, lead to one or another impulse to act. The root meaning of the word *emotion*, remember, is “to move.” The capacity to resist that impulse to act, to squelch the incipient movement, most likely translates at the level of brain function into inhibition of limbic signals to the motor cortex, though such an interpretation must remain speculative for now.

At any rate, a remarkable study in which the marshmallow challenge was posed to four-year-olds shows just how fundamental is the ability to restrain the emotions and so delay impulse. Begun by psychologist Walter Mischel during the 1960s at a preschool on the Stanford University campus and involving mainly children of Stanford faculty, graduate students, and other employees, the study tracked down the four-year-olds as they were graduating from high school.⁷

Some four-year-olds were able to wait what must surely have seemed an endless fifteen to twenty minutes for the experimenter to return. To sustain themselves in their struggle they covered their eyes so they wouldn’t have to stare at temptation, or rested their heads in their arms, talked to themselves, sang, played games with their hands and feet, even tried to go to sleep. These plucky preschoolers got the two-marshmallow reward. But others, more impulsive, grabbed the one marshmallow, almost always within seconds of the experimenter’s leaving the room on his “errand.”

The diagnostic power of how this moment of impulse was handled became clear some twelve to fourteen years later, when these same children were tracked down as adolescents. The emotional and social difference between the grab-the-marshmallow preschoolers and their gratification-delaying peers was dramatic. Those who had resisted temptation at four were now, as adolescents, more socially competent: personally effective, self-assertive, and better able to cope with the frustrations of life. They were less likely to go to pieces, freeze, or regress under stress, or become rattled and disorganized when pressured; they embraced challenges and pursued them instead of giving up even in the face of difficulties; they were self-reliant and confident, trustworthy and dependable; and they took initiative and plunged into projects. And, more than a decade later, they were still

able to delay gratification in pursuit of their goals.

The third or so who grabbed for the marshmallow, however, tended to have fewer of these qualities, and shared instead a relatively more troubled psychological portrait. In adolescence they were more likely to be seen as shying away from social contacts; to be stubborn and indecisive; to be easily upset by frustrations; to think of themselves as “bad” or unworthy; to regress or become immobilized by stress; to be mistrustful and resentful about not “getting enough”; to be prone to jealousy and envy; to overreact to irritations with a sharp temper, so provoking arguments and fights. And, after all those years, they still were unable to put off gratification.

What shows up in a small way early in life blossoms into a wide range of social and emotional competences as life goes on. The capacity to impose a delay on impulse is at the root of a plethora of efforts, from staying on a diet to pursuing a medical degree. Some children, even at four, had mastered the basics: they were able to read the social situation as one where delay was beneficial, to pry their attention from focusing on the temptation at hand, and to distract themselves while maintaining the necessary perseverance toward their goal—the two marshmallows.

Even more surprising, when the tested children were evaluated again as they were finishing high school, those who had waited patiently at four were far superior *as students* to those who had acted on whim. According to their parents’ evaluations, they were more academically competent: better able to put their ideas into words, to use and respond to reason, to concentrate, to make plans and follow through on them, and more eager to learn. Most astonishingly, they had dramatically higher scores on their SAT tests. The third of children who at four grabbed for the marshmallow most eagerly had an average verbal score of 524 and quantitative (or “math”) score of 528; the third who waited longest had average scores of 610 and 652, respectively—a 210-point difference in total score.⁸

At age four, how children do on this test of delay of gratification is twice as powerful a predictor of what their SAT scores will be as is IQ at age four; IQ becomes a stronger predictor of SAT only after children learn to read.⁹ This suggests that the ability to delay gratification contributes powerfully to intellectual potential quite apart from IQ itself. (Poor impulse control in childhood is also a powerful predictor of later delinquency, again more so than IQ.¹⁰) As we shall see in Part Five, while some argue that IQ cannot be changed

and so represents an unbendable limitation on a child's life potential, there is ample evidence that emotional skills such as impulse control and accurately reading a social situation *can* be learned.

What Walter Mischel, who did the study, describes with the rather infelicitous phrase "goal-directed self-imposed delay of gratification" is perhaps the essence of emotional self-regulation: the ability to deny impulse in the service of a goal, whether it be building a business, solving an algebraic equation, or pursuing the Stanley Cup. His finding underscores the role of emotional intelligence as a meta-ability, determining how well or how poorly people are able to use their other mental capacities.

FOUL MOODS, FOULED THINKING

I worry about my son. He just started playing on the varsity football team, so he's bound to get an injury sometime. It's so nerve-wracking to watch him play that I've stopped going to his games. I'm sure my son must be disappointed that I'm not watching him play, but it's simply too much for me to take.

The speaker is in therapy for anxiety; she realizes that her worry is interfering with leading the kind of life she would like.¹¹ But when it comes time to make a simple decision, such as whether to watch her son play football, her mind floods with thoughts of disaster. She is not free to choose; her worries overwhelm her reason.

As we have seen, worry is the nub of anxiety's damaging effect on mental performance of all kind. Worry, of course, is in one sense a useful response gone awry—an overly zealous mental preparation for an anticipated threat. But such mental rehearsal is disastrous cognitive static when it becomes trapped in a stale routine that captures attention, intruding on all other attempts to focus elsewhere.

Anxiety undermines the intellect. In a complex, intellectually demanding, and high-pressure task such as that of air traffic controllers, for example, having chronically high anxiety is an almost sure predictor that a person will eventually fail in training or in the field. The anxious are more likely to fail even given superior scores on intelligence tests, as a study of 1,790 students in training for air traffic control posts discovered.¹² Anxiety also sabotages academic performance of all kinds: 126 different studies of more than 36,000 people found that the more prone to worries a person is, the poorer

their academic performance, no matter how measured—grades on tests, grade-point average, or achievement tests.¹³

When people who are prone to worry are asked to perform a cognitive task such as sorting ambiguous objects into one of two categories, and narrate what is going through their mind as they do so, it is the negative thoughts—“I won’t be able to do this,” “I’m just no good at this kind of test,” and the like—that are found to most directly disrupt their decision-making. Indeed, when a comparison group of nonworriers was asked to worry on purpose for fifteen minutes, their ability to do the same task deteriorated sharply. And when the worriers were given a fifteen-minute relaxation session—which reduced their level of worrying—before trying the task, they had no problem with it.¹⁴

Test anxiety was first studied scientifically in the 1960s by Richard Alpert, who confessed to me that his interest was piqued because as a student his nerves often made him do poorly on tests, while his colleague, Ralph Haber, found that the pressure before an exam actually helped him to do better.¹⁵ Their research, among other studies, showed that there are two kinds of anxious students: those whose anxiety undoes their academic performance, and those who are able to do well despite the stress—or, perhaps, because of it.¹⁶ The irony of test anxiety is that the very apprehension about doing well on the test that, ideally, can motivate students like Haber to study hard in preparation and so do well can sabotage success in others. For people who are too anxious, like Alpert, the pretest apprehension interferes with the clear thinking and memory necessary to study effectively, while during the test it disrupts the mental clarity essential for doing well.

The number of worries that people report while taking a test directly predicts how poorly they will do on it.¹⁷ The mental resources expended on one cognitive task—the worrying—simply detract from the resources available for processing other information; if we are preoccupied by worries that we’re going to flunk the test we’re taking, we have that much less attention to expend on figuring out the answers. Our worries become self-fulfilling prophecies, propelling us toward the very disaster they predict.

People who are adept at harnessing their emotions, on the other hand, can use anticipatory anxiety—about an upcoming speech or test, say—to motivate themselves to prepare well for it, thereby doing well. The classical literature in psychology describes the relationship

between anxiety and performance, including mental performance, in terms of an upside-down U. At the peak of the inverted U is the optimal relationship between anxiety and performance, with a modicum of nerves propelling outstanding achievement. But too little anxiety—the first side of the U—brings about apathy or too little motivation to try hard enough to do well, while too much anxiety—the other side of the U—sabotages any attempt to do well.

A mildly elated state—*hypomania*, as it is technically called—seems optimal for writers and others in creative callings that demand fluidity and imaginative diversity of thought; it is somewhere toward the peak of that inverted U. But let that euphoria get out of control to become outright mania, as in the mood swings of manic-depressives, and the agitation undermines the ability to think cohesively enough to write well, even though ideas flow freely—indeed, much too freely to pursue any one of them far enough to produce a finished product.

Good moods, while they last, enhance the ability to think flexibly and with more complexity, thus making it easier to find solutions to problems, whether intellectual or interpersonal. This suggests that one way to help someone think through a problem is to tell them a joke. Laughing, like elation, seems to help people think more broadly and associate more freely, noticing relationships that might have eluded them otherwise—a mental skill important not just in creativity, but in recognizing complex relationships and foreseeing the consequences of a given decision.

The intellectual benefits of a good laugh are most striking when it comes to solving a problem that demands a creative solution. One study found that people who had just watched a video of television bloopers were better at solving a puzzle long used by psychologists to test creative thinking.¹⁸ In the test people are given a candle, matches, and a box of tacks and asked to attach the candle to a corkboard wall so it will burn without dripping wax on the floor. Most people given this problem fall into “functional fixedness,” thinking about using the objects in the most conventional ways. But those who had just watched the funny film, compared to others who had watched a film on math or who exercised, were more likely to see an alternative use for the box holding the tacks, and so come up with the creative solution: tack the box to the wall and use it as a candleholder.

Even mild mood changes can sway thinking. In making plans or decisions people in good moods have a perceptual bias that leads them to be more expansive and positive in their thinking. This is

partly because memory is state-specific, so that while in a good mood we remember more positive events; as we think over the pros and cons of a course of action while feeling pleasant, memory biases our weighing of evidence in a positive direction, making us more likely to do something slightly adventurous or risky, for example.

By the same token, being in a foul mood biases memory in a negative direction, making us more likely to contract into a fearful, overly cautious decision. Emotions out of control impede the intellect. But, as we saw in [Chapter 5](#), we can bring out-of-control emotions back into line; this emotional competence is the master aptitude, facilitating all other kinds of intelligence. Consider some cases in point: the benefits of hope and optimism, and those soaring moments when people outdo themselves.

PANDORA'S BOX AND POLLYANNA: THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

College students were posed the following hypothetical situation:

Although you set your goal of getting a B, when your first exam score, worth 30% of your final grade is returned, you have received a D. It is now one week after you have learned about the D grade. What do you do?¹⁹

Hope made all the difference. The response by students with high levels of hope was to work harder and think of a range of things they might try that could bolster their final grade. Students with moderate levels of hope thought of several ways they might up their grade, but had far less determination to pursue them. And, understandably, students with low levels of hope gave up on both counts, demoralized.

The question is not just theoretical, however. When C. R. Snyder, the University of Kansas psychologist who did this study, compared the actual academic achievement of freshman students high and low on hope, he discovered that hope was a better predictor of their first-semester grades than were their scores on the SAT, a test supposedly able to predict how students will fare in college (and highly correlated with IQ). Again, given roughly the same range of intellectual abilities, emotional aptitudes make the critical difference.

Snyder's explanation: "Students with high hope set themselves higher goals and know how to work hard to attain them. When you

compare students of equivalent intellectual aptitude on their academic achievements, what sets them apart is hope.”²⁰

As the familiar legend has it, Pandora, a princess of ancient Greece, was given a gift, a mysterious box, by gods jealous of her beauty. She was told she must never open the gift. But one day, overcome by curiosity and temptation, Pandora lifted the lid to peek in, letting loose in the world the grand afflictions—disease, malaise, madness. But a compassionate god let her close the box just in time to capture the one antidote that makes life’s misery bearable: hope.

Hope, modern researchers are finding, does more than offer a bit of solace amid affliction; it plays a surprisingly potent role in life, offering an advantage in realms as diverse as school achievement and bearing up in onerous jobs. Hope, in a technical sense, is more than the sunny view that everything will turn out all right. Snyder defines it with more specificity as “believing you have both the will and the way to accomplish your goals, whatever they may be.”

People tend to differ in the general degree to which they have hope in this sense. Some typically think of themselves as able to get out of a jam or find ways to solve problems, while others simply do not see themselves as having the energy, ability, or means to accomplish their goals. People with high levels of hope, Snyder finds, share certain traits, among them being able to motivate themselves, feeling resourceful enough to find ways to accomplish their objectives, reassuring themselves when in a tight spot that things will get better, being flexible enough to find different ways to get to their goals or to switch goals if one becomes impossible, and having the sense to break down a formidable task into smaller, manageable pieces.

From the perspective of emotional intelligence, having hope means that one will not give in to overwhelming anxiety, a defeatist attitude, or depression in the face of difficult challenges or setbacks. Indeed, people who are hopeful evidence less depression than others as they maneuver through life in pursuit of their goals, are less anxious in general, and have fewer emotional distresses.

OPTIMISM: THE GREAT MOTIVATOR

Americans who follow swimming had high hopes for Matt Biondi, a member of the U.S. Olympic Team in 1988. Some sportswriters were touting Biondi as likely to match Mark Spitz’s 1972 feat of taking

seven gold medals. But Biondi finished a heartbreakin third in his first event, the 200-meter freestyle. In his next event, the 100-meter butterfly, Biondi was inched out for the gold by another swimmer who made a greater effort in the last meter.

Sportscasters speculated that the defeats would dispirit Biondi in his successive events. But Biondi rebounded from defeat and took a gold medal in his next five events. One viewer who was not surprised by Biondi's comeback was Martin Seligman, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, who had tested Biondi for optimism earlier that year. In an experiment done with Seligman, the swimming coach told Biondi during a special event meant to showcase Biondi's best performance that he had a worse time than was actually the case. Despite the downbeat feedback, when Biondi was asked to rest and try again, his performance—actually already very good—was even better. But when other team members who were given a false bad time—and whose test scores showed they were pessimistic—tried again, they did even worse the second time.²¹

Optimism, like hope, means having a strong expectation that, in general, things will turn out all right in life, despite setbacks and frustrations. From the standpoint of emotional intelligence, optimism is an attitude that buffers people against falling into apathy, hopelessness, or depression in the face of tough going. And, as with hope, its near cousin, optimism pays dividends in life (providing, of course, it is a realistic optimism; a too-naive optimism can be disastrous).²²

Seligman defines optimism in terms of how people explain to themselves their successes and failures. People who are optimistic see a failure as due to something that can be changed so that they can succeed next time around, while pessimists take the blame for failure, ascribing it to some lasting characteristic they are helpless to change. These differing explanations have profound implications for how people respond to life. For example, in reaction to a disappointment such as being turned down for a job, optimists tend to respond actively and hopefully, by formulating a plan of action, say, or seeking out help and advice; they see the setback as something that can be remedied. Pessimists, by contrast, react to such setbacks by assuming there is nothing they can do to make things go better the next time, and so do nothing about the problem; they see the setback as due to some personal deficit that will always plague them.

As with hope, optimism predicts academic success. In a study of five

hundred members of the incoming freshman class of 1984 at the University of Pennsylvania, the students' scores on a test of optimism were a better predictor of their actual grades freshman year than were their SAT scores or their high-school grades. Said Seligman, who studied them, "College entrance exams measure talent, while explanatory style tells you who gives up. It is the combination of reasonable talent and the ability to keep going in the face of defeat that leads to success. What's missing in tests of ability is motivation. What you need to know about someone is whether they will keep going when things get frustrating. My hunch is that for a given level of intelligence, your actual achievement is a function not just of talent, but also of the capacity to stand defeat."²³

One of the most telling demonstrations of the power of optimism to motivate people is a study Seligman did of insurance salesmen with the MetLife company. Being able to take a rejection with grace is essential in sales of all kinds, especially with a product like insurance, where the ratio of noes to yeses can be so discouragingly high. For this reason, about three quarters of insurance salesmen quit in their first three years. Seligman found that new salesmen who were by nature optimists sold 37 percent more insurance in their first two years on the job than did pessimists. And during the first year the pessimists quit at twice the rate of the optimists.

What's more, Seligman persuaded MetLife to hire a special group of applicants who scored high on a test for optimism but failed the normal screening tests (which compared a range of their attitudes to a standard profile based on answers from agents who have been successful). This special group outsold the pessimists by 21 percent in their first year, and 57 percent in the second.

Just why optimism makes such a difference in sales success speaks to the sense in which it is an emotionally intelligent attitude. Each no a salesperson gets is a small defeat. The emotional reaction to that defeat is crucial to the ability to marshal enough motivation to continue. As the noes mount up, morale can deteriorate, making it harder and harder to pick up the phone for the next call. Such rejection is especially hard to take for a pessimist, who interprets it as meaning, "I'm a failure at this; I'll never make a sale"—an interpretation that is sure to trigger apathy and defeatism, if not depression. Optimists, on the other hand, tell themselves, "I'm using the wrong approach," or "That last person was just in a bad mood." By seeing not themselves but something in the situation as the reason

for their failure, they can change their approach in the next call. While the pessimist's mental set leads to despair, the optimist's spawns hope.

One source of a positive or negative outlook may well be inborn temperament; some people by nature tend one way or the other. But as we shall also see in [Chapter 14](#), temperament can be tempered by experience. Optimism and hope—like helplessness and despair—can be learned. Underlying both is an outlook psychologists call *self-efficacy*, the belief that one has mastery over the events of one's life and can meet challenges as they come up. Developing a competency of any kind strengthens the sense of self-efficacy, making a person more willing to take risks and seek out more demanding challenges. And surmounting those challenges in turn increases the sense of self-efficacy. This attitude makes people more likely to make the best use of whatever skills they may have—or to do what it takes to develop them.

Albert Bandura, a Stanford psychologist who has done much of the research on self-efficacy, sums it up well: "People's beliefs about their abilities have a profound effect on those abilities. Ability is not a fixed property; there is a huge variability in how you perform. People who have a sense of self-efficacy bounce back from failures; they approach things in terms of how to handle them rather than worrying about what can go wrong."²⁴

FLOW: THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF EXCELLENCE

A composer describes those moments when his work is at its best:

You yourself are in an ecstatic state to such a point that you feel as though you almost don't exist. I've experienced this time and again. My hand seems devoid of myself, and I have nothing to do with what is happening. I just sit there watching in a state of awe and wonderment. And it just flows out by itself.²⁵

His description is remarkably similar to those of hundreds of diverse men and women—rock climbers, chess champions, surgeons, basketball players, engineers, managers, even filing clerks—when they tell of a time they outdid themselves in some favored activity. The state they describe is called "flow" by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the University of Chicago psychologist who has collected such accounts of

peak performance during two decades of research.²⁶ Athletes know this state of grace as “the zone,” where excellence becomes effortless, crowd and competitors disappearing into a blissful, steady absorption in the moment. Diane Roffe-Steinrotter, who captured a gold medal in skiing at the 1994 Winter Olympics, said after she finished her turn at ski racing that she remembered nothing about it but being immersed in relaxation: “I felt like a waterfall.”²⁷

Being able to enter flow is emotional intelligence at its best; flow represents perhaps the ultimate in harnessing the emotions in the service of performance and learning. In flow the emotions are not just contained and channeled, but positive, energized, and aligned with the task at hand. To be caught in the ennui of depression or the agitation of anxiety is to be barred from flow. Yet flow (or a milder microflow) is an experience almost everyone enters from time to time, particularly when performing at their peak or stretching beyond their former limits. It is perhaps best captured by ecstatic lovemaking, the merging of two into a fluidly harmonious one.

That experience is a glorious one: the hallmark of flow is a feeling of spontaneous joy, even rapture. Because flow feels so good, it is intrinsically rewarding. It is a state in which people become utterly absorbed in what they are doing, paying undivided attention to the task, their awareness merged with their actions. Indeed, it interrupts flow to reflect too much on what is happening—the very thought “I’m doing this wonderfully” can break the feeling of flow. Attention becomes so focused that people are aware only of the narrow range of perception related to the immediate task, losing track of time and space. A surgeon, for example, recalled a challenging operation during which he was in flow; when he completed the surgery he noticed some rubble on the floor of the operating room and asked what had happened. He was amazed to hear that while he was so intent on the surgery part of the ceiling had caved in—he hadn’t noticed at all.

Flow is a state of self-forgetfulness, the opposite of rumination and worry: instead of being lost in nervous preoccupation, people in flow are so absorbed in the task at hand that they lose all self-consciousness, dropping the small preoccupations—health, bills, even doing well—of daily life. In this sense moments of flow are egoless. Paradoxically, people in flow exhibit a masterly control of what they are doing, their responses perfectly attuned to the changing demands of the task. And although people perform at their peak while in flow, they are unconcerned with how they are doing, with thoughts of

success or failure—the sheer pleasure of the act itself is what motivates them.

There are several ways to enter flow. One is to intentionally focus a sharp attention on the task at hand; a highly concentrated state is the essence of flow. There seems to be a feedback loop at the gateway to this zone: it can require considerable effort to get calm and focused enough to begin the task—this first step takes some discipline. But once focus starts to lock in, it takes on a force of its own, both offering relief from emotional turbulence and making the task effortless.

Entry to this zone can also occur when people find a task they are skilled at, and engage in it at a level that slightly taxes their ability. As Csikszentmihalyi told me, “People seem to concentrate best when the demands on them are a bit greater than usual, and they are able to give more than usual. If there is too little demand on them, people are bored. If there is too much for them to handle, they get anxious. Flow occurs in that delicate zone between boredom and anxiety.”²⁸

The spontaneous pleasure, grace, and effectiveness that characterize flow are incompatible with emotional hijackings, in which limbic surges capture the rest of the brain. The quality of attention in flow is relaxed yet highly focused. It is a concentration very different from straining to pay attention when we are tired or bored, or when our focus is under siege from intrusive feelings such as anxiety or anger.

Flow is a state devoid of emotional static, save for a compelling, highly motivating feeling of mild ecstasy. That ecstasy seems to be a by-product of the attentional focus that is a prerequisite of flow. Indeed, the classic literature of contemplative traditions describes states of absorption that are experienced as pure bliss: flow induced by nothing more than intense concentration.

Watching someone in flow gives the impression that the difficult is easy; peak performance appears natural and ordinary. This impression parallels what is going on within the brain, where a similar paradox is repeated: the most challenging tasks are done with a minimum expenditure of mental energy. In flow the brain is in a “cool” state, its arousal and inhibition of neural circuitry attuned to the demand of the moment. When people are engaged in activities that effortlessly capture and hold their attention, their brain “quiets down” in the sense that there is a lessening of cortical arousal.²⁹ That discovery is remarkable, given that flow allows people to tackle the most challenging tasks in a given domain, whether playing against a chess master or solving a complex mathematical problem. The expectation

would be that such challenging tasks would require *more* cortical activity, not less. But a key to flow is that it occurs only within reach of the summit of ability, where skills are well-rehearsed and neural circuits are most efficient.

A strained concentration—a focus fueled by worry—produces increased cortical activation. But the zone of flow and optimal performance seems to be an oasis of cortical efficiency, with a bare minimum of mental energy expended. That makes sense, perhaps, in terms of the skilled practice that allows people to get into flow: having mastered the moves of a task, whether a physical one such as rock climbing or a mental one such as computer programming, means that the brain can be more efficient in performing them. Well-practiced moves require much less brain effort than do ones just being learned, or those that are still too hard. Likewise, when the brain is working less efficiently because of fatigue or nervousness, as happens at the end of a long, stressful day, there is a blurring of the precision of cortical effort, with too many superfluous areas being activated—a neural state experienced as being highly distracted.³⁰ The same happens in boredom. But when the brain is operating at peak efficiency, as in flow, there is a precise relation between the active areas and the demands of the task. In this state even hard work can seem refreshing or replenishing rather than draining.

LEARNING AND FLOW: A NEW MODEL FOR EDUCATION

Because flow emerges in the zone in which an activity challenges people to the fullest of their capacities, as their skills increase it takes a heightened challenge to get into flow. If a task is too simple, it is boring; if too challenging, the result is anxiety rather than flow. It can be argued that mastery in a craft or skill is spurred on by the experience of flow—that the motivation to get better and better at something, be it playing the violin, dancing, or gene-splicing, is at least in part to stay in flow while doing it. Indeed, in a study of two hundred artists eighteen years after they left art school, Csikszentmihalyi found that it was those who in their student days had savored the sheer joy of painting itself who had become serious painters. Those who had been motivated in art school by dreams of fame and wealth for the most part drifted away from art after graduating.

Csikszentmihalyi concludes: “Painters must want to paint above all else. If the artist in front of the canvas begins to wonder how much he will sell it for, or what the critics will think of it, he won’t be able to pursue original avenues. Creative achievements depend on single-minded immersion.”³¹

Just as flow is a prerequisite for mastery in a craft, profession, or art, so too with learning. Students who get into flow as they study do better, quite apart from their potential as measured by achievement tests. Students in a special Chicago high school for the sciences—all of whom had scored in the top 5 percent on a test of math proficiency—were rated by their math teachers as high or low achievers. Then the way these students spent their time was monitored, each student carrying a beeper that signaled them at random times during the day to write down what they were doing and what their mood was. Not surprisingly, the low achievers spent only about fifteen hours a week studying at home, much less than the twenty-seven hours a week of homework done by their high-achieving peers. The low achievers spent most of the hours during which they were not studying in socializing, hanging out with friends and family.

When their moods were analyzed, a telling finding emerged. Both the high and low achievers spent a great deal of time during the week being bored by activities, such as TV watching, that posed no challenge to their abilities. Such, after all, is the lot of teenagers. But the key difference was in their experience of studying. For the high achievers, studying gave them the pleasing, absorbing challenge of flow 40 percent of the hours they spent at it. But for the low achievers, studying produced flow only 16 percent of the time; more often than not, it yielded anxiety, with the demands outreaching their abilities. The low achievers found pleasure and flow in socializing, not in studying. In short, students who achieve up to the level of their academic potential and beyond are more often drawn to study because it puts them in flow. Sadly, the low achievers, by failing to hone the skills that would get them in flow, both forfeit the enjoyment of study and run the risk of limiting the level of intellectual tasks that will be enjoyable to them in the future.³²

Howard Gardner, the Harvard psychologist who developed the theory of multiple intelligences, sees flow, and the positive states that typify it, as part of the healthiest way to teach children, motivating them from inside rather than by threat or promise of reward. “We should use kids’ positive states to draw them into learning in the

domains where they can develop competencies,” Gardner proposed to me. “Flow is an internal state that signifies a kid is engaged in a task that’s right. You have to find something you like and stick to it. It’s when kids get bored in school that they fight and act up, and when they’re overwhelmed by a challenge that they get anxious about their schoolwork. But you learn at your best when you have something you care about and you can get pleasure from being engaged in.”

The strategy used in many of the schools that are putting Gardner’s model of multiple intelligences into practice revolves around identifying a child’s profile of natural competencies and playing to the strengths as well as trying to shore up the weaknesses. A child who is naturally talented in music or movement, for example, will enter flow more easily in that domain than in those where she is less able. Knowing a child’s profile can help a teacher fine-tune the way a topic is presented to a child and offer lessons at the level—from remedial to highly advanced—that is most likely to provide an optimal challenge. Doing this makes learning more pleasurable, neither fearsome nor a bore. “The hope is that when kids gain flow from learning, they will be emboldened to take on challenges in new areas,” says Gardner, adding that experience suggests this is the case.

More generally, the flow model suggests that achieving mastery of any skill or body of knowledge should ideally happen naturally, as the child is drawn to the areas that spontaneously engage her—that, in essence, she loves. That initial passion can be the seed for high levels of attainment, as the child comes to realize that pursuing the field—whether it be dance, math, or music—is a source of the joy of flow. And since it takes pushing the limits of one’s ability to sustain flow, that becomes a prime motivator for getting better and better; it makes the child happy. This, of course, is a more positive model of learning and education than most of us encountered in school. Who does not recall school at least in part as endless dreary hours of boredom punctuated by moments of high anxiety? Pursuing flow through learning is a more humane, natural, and very likely more effective way to marshal emotions in the service of education.

That speaks to the more general sense in which channeling emotions toward a productive end is a master aptitude. Whether it be in controlling impulse and putting off gratification, regulating our moods so they facilitate rather than impede thinking, motivating ourselves to persist and try, try again in the face of setbacks, or finding ways to enter flow and so perform more effectively—all

bespeak the power of emotion to guide effective effort.

7

The Roots of Empathy

Back to Gary, the brilliant but alexithymic surgeon who so distressed his fiancée, Ellen, by being oblivious not only to his own feelings but to hers as well. Like most alexithymics, he lacked empathy as well as insight. If Ellen spoke of feeling down, Gary failed to sympathize; if she spoke of love, he changed the subject. Gary would make “helpful” critiques of things Ellen did, not realizing these criticisms made her feel attacked, not helped.

Empathy builds on self-awareness; the more open we are to our own emotions, the more skilled we will be in reading feelings.¹ Alexithymics like Gary, who have no idea what they feel themselves, are at a complete loss when it comes to knowing what anyone else around them is feeling. They are emotionally tone-deaf. The emotional notes and chords that weave through people’s words and actions—the telling tone of voice or shift in posture, the eloquent silence or telltale tremble—go by unnoted.

Confused about their own feelings, alexithymics are equally bewildered when other people express their feelings to them. This failure to register another’s feelings is a major deficit in emotional intelligence, and a tragic failing in what it means to be human. For all rapport, the root of caring, stems from emotional attunement, from the capacity for empathy.

That capacity—the ability to know how another feels—comes into play in a vast array of life arenas, from sales and management to romance and parenting, to compassion and political action. The absence of empathy is also telling. Its lack is seen in criminal psychopaths, rapists, and child molesters.

People’s emotions are rarely put into words; far more often they are expressed through other cues. The key to intuiting another’s feelings is in the ability to read nonverbal channels: tone of voice, gesture, facial expression, and the like. Perhaps the largest body of research on people’s ability to read such nonverbal messages is by Robert Rosenthal, a Harvard psychologist, and his students. Rosenthal

devised a test of empathy, the PONS (Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity), a series of videotapes of a young woman expressing feelings ranging from loathing to motherly love.² The scenes span the spectrum from a jealous rage to asking forgiveness, from a show of gratitude to a seduction. The video has been edited so that in each portrayal one or more channels of nonverbal communication are systematically blanked out; in addition to having the words muffled, for example, in some scenes all other cues but the facial expression are blocked. In others, only the body movements are shown, and so on, through the main nonverbal channels of communication, so that viewers have to detect emotion from one or another specific nonverbal cue.

In tests with over seven thousand people in the United States and eighteen other countries, the benefits of being able to read feelings from nonverbal cues included being better adjusted emotionally, more popular, more outgoing, and—perhaps not surprisingly—more sensitive. In general, women are better than men at this kind of empathy. And people whose performance improved over the course of the forty-five-minute test—a sign that they have a talent for picking up empathy skills—also had better relationships with the opposite sex. Empathy, it should be no surprise to learn, helps with romantic life.

In keeping with findings about other elements of emotional intelligence, there was only an incidental relationship between scores on this measure of empathic acuity and SAT or IQ scores or school achievement tests. Empathy's independence from academic intelligence has been found too in testing with a version of the PONS designed for children. In tests with 1,011 children, those who showed an aptitude for reading feelings nonverbally were among the most popular in their schools, the most emotionally stable.³ They also did better in school, even though, on average, their IQs were not higher than those of children who were less skilled at reading nonverbal messages—suggesting that mastering this empathic ability smooths the way for classroom effectiveness (or simply makes teachers like them more).

Just as the mode of the rational mind is words, the mode of the emotions is nonverbal. Indeed, when a person's words disagree with what is conveyed via his tone of voice, gesture, or other nonverbal channel, the emotional truth is in *how* he says something rather than in *what* he says. One rule of thumb used in communications research is that 90 percent or more of an emotional message is nonverbal. And such messages—anxiety in someone's tone of voice, irritation in the

quickness of a gesture—are almost always taken in unconsciously, without paying specific attention to the nature of the message, but simply tacitly receiving it and responding. The skills that allow us to do this well or poorly are also, for the most part, learned tacitly.

HOW EMPATHY UNFOLDS

The moment Hope, just nine months old, saw another baby fall, tears welled up in her own eyes and she crawled off to be comforted by her mother, as though it were she who had been hurt. And fifteen-month-old Michael went to get his own teddy bear for his crying friend Paul; when Paul kept crying, Michael retrieved Paul's security blanket for him. Both these small acts of sympathy and caring were observed by mothers trained to record such incidents of empathy in action.⁴ The results of the study suggest that the roots of empathy can be traced to infancy. Virtually from the day they are born infants are upset when they hear another infant crying—a response some see as the earliest precursor of empathy.⁵

Developmental psychologists have found that infants feel sympathetic distress even before they fully realize that they exist apart from other people. Even a few months after birth, infants react to a disturbance in those around them as though it were their own, crying when they see another child's tears. By one year or so, they start to realize the misery is not their own but someone else's, though they still seem confused over what to do about it. In research by Martin L. Hoffman at New York University, for example, a one-year-old brought his own mother over to comfort a crying friend, ignoring the friend's mother, who was also in the room. This confusion is seen too when one-year-olds imitate the distress of someone else, possibly to better comprehend what they are feeling; for example, if another baby hurts her fingers, a one-year-old might put her own fingers in her mouth to see if she hurts, too. On seeing his mother cry, one baby wiped his own eyes, though they had no tears.

Such *motor mimicry*, as it is called, is the original technical sense of the word *empathy* as it was first used in the 1920s by E. B. Titchener, an American psychologist. This sense is slightly different from its original introduction into English from the Greek *empatheia*, "feeling into," a term used initially by theoreticians of aesthetics for the ability to perceive the subjective experience of another person. Titchener's

theory was that empathy stemmed from a sort of physical imitation of the distress of another, which then evokes the same feelings in oneself. He sought a word that would be distinct from *sympathy*, which can be felt for the general plight of another with no sharing whatever of what that other person is feeling.

Motor mimicry fades from toddlers' repertoire at around two and a half years, at which point they realize that someone else's pain is different from their own, and are better able to comfort them. A typical incident, from a mother's diary:

A neighbor's baby cries ... and Jenny approaches and tries to give him some cookies. She follows him around and begins to whimper to herself. She then tries to stroke his hair, but he pulls away.... He calms down, but Jenny still looks worried. She continues to bring him toys and to pat his head and shoulders.⁶

At this point in their development toddlers begin to diverge from one another in their overall sensitivity to other people's emotional upsets, with some, like Jenny, keenly aware and others tuning out. A series of studies by Marian Radke-Yarrow and Carolyn Zahn-Waxler at the National Institute of Mental Health showed that a large part of this difference in empathic concern had to do with how parents disciplined their children. Children, they found, were more empathic when the discipline included calling strong attention to the distress their misbehavior caused someone else: "Look how sad you've made her feel" instead of "That was naughty." They found too that children's empathy is also shaped by seeing how others react when someone else is distressed; by imitating what they see, children develop a repertoire of empathic response, especially in helping other people who are distressed.

THE WELL-ATTUNED CHILD

Sarah was twenty-five when she gave birth to twin boys, Mark and Fred. Mark, she felt, was more like herself; Fred was more like his father. That perception may have been the seed of a telling but subtle difference in how she treated each boy. When the boys were just three months old, Sarah would often try to catch Fred's gaze, and when he would avert his face, she would try to catch his eye again; Fred would respond by turning away more emphatically. Once she would look

away, Fred would look back at her, and the cycle of pursuit and aversion would begin again—often leaving Fred in tears. But with Mark, Sarah virtually never tried to impose eye contact as she did with Fred. Instead Mark could break off eye contact whenever he wanted, and she would not pursue.

A small act, but telling. A year later, Fred was noticeably more fearful and dependent than Mark; one way he showed his fearfulness was by breaking off eye contact with other people, as he had done with his mother at three months, turning his face down and away. Mark, on the other hand, looked people straight in the eye; when he wanted to break off contact, he'd turn his head slightly upward and to the side, with a winning smile.

The twins and their mother were observed so minutely when they took part in research by Daniel Stern, a psychiatrist then at Cornell University School of Medicine.⁷ Stern is fascinated by the small, repeated exchanges that take place between parent and child; he believes that the most basic lessons of emotional life are laid down in these intimate moments. Of all such moments, the most critical are those that let the child know her emotions are met with empathy, accepted, and reciprocated, in a process Stern calls *attunement*. The twins' mother was attuned with Mark, but out of emotional sync with Fred. Stern contends that the countless repeated moments of attunement or misattunement between parent and child shape the emotional expectations adults bring to their close relationships—perhaps far more than the more dramatic events of childhood.

Attunement occurs tacitly, as part of the rhythm of relationship. Stern has studied it with microscopic precision through videotaping hours of mothers with their infants. He finds that through attunement mothers let their infants know they have a sense of what the infant is feeling. A baby squeals with delight, for example, and the mother affirms that delight by giving the baby a gentle shake, cooing, or matching the pitch of her voice to the baby's squeal. Or a baby shakes his rattle, and she gives him a quick shimmy in response. In such an interaction the affirming message is in the mother more or less matching the baby's level of excitement. Such small attunements give an infant the reassuring feeling of being emotionally connected, a message that Stern finds mothers send about once a minute when they interact with their babies.

Attunement is very different from simple imitation. “If you just imitate a baby,” Stern told me, “that only shows you know what he

did, not how he felt. To let him know you sense how he feels, you have to play back his inner feelings in another way. Then the baby knows he is understood.”

Making love is perhaps the closest approximation in adult life to this intimate attunement between infant and mother. Lovemaking, Stern writes, “involves the experience of sensing the other’s subjective state: shared desire, aligned intentions, and mutual states of simultaneously shifting arousal,” with lovers responding to each other in a synchrony that gives the tacit sense of deep rapport.⁸ Lovemaking is, at its best, an act of mutual empathy; at its worst it lacks any such emotional mutuality.

THE COSTS OF MISATTUNEMENT

Stern holds that from repeated attunements an infant begins to develop a sense that other people can and will share in her feelings. This sense seems to emerge at around eight months, when infants begin to realize they are separate from others, and continues to be shaped by intimate relationships throughout life. When parents are misattuned to a child it is deeply upsetting. In one experiment, Stern had mothers deliberately over- or underrespond to their infants, rather than matching them in an attuned way; the infants responded with immediate dismay and distress.

Prolonged absence of attunement between parent and child takes a tremendous emotional toll on the child. When a parent consistently fails to show any empathy with a particular range of emotion in the child—joys, tears, needing to cuddle—the child begins to avoid expressing, and perhaps even feeling, those same emotions. In this way, presumably, entire ranges of emotion can begin to be obliterated from the repertoire for intimate relations, especially if through childhood those feelings continue to be covertly or overtly discouraged.

By the same token, children can come to favor an unfortunate range of emotion, depending on which moods are reciprocated. Even infants “catch” moods: Three-month-old babies of depressed mothers, for example, mirrored their mothers’ moods while playing with them, displaying more feelings of anger and sadness, and much less spontaneous curiosity and interest, compared to infants whose mothers were not depressed.⁹

One mother in Stern's study consistently underreacted to her baby's level of activity; eventually her baby learned to be passive. "An infant treated that way learns, when I get excited I can't get my mother to be equally excited, so I may as well not try at all," Stern contends. But there is hope in "reparative" relationships: "Relationships throughout life—with friends or relatives, for example, or in psychotherapy—continually reshape your working model of relationships. An imbalance at one point can be corrected later; it's an ongoing, lifelong process."

Indeed, several theories of psychoanalysis see the therapeutic relationship as providing just such an emotional corrective, a reparative experience of attunement. *Mirroring* is the term used by some psychoanalytic thinkers for the therapist's reflecting back to the client an understanding of his inner state, just as an attuned mother does with her infant. The emotional synchrony is unstated and outside conscious awareness, though a patient may bask in the sense of being deeply acknowledged and understood.

The lifetime emotional costs of lack of attunement in childhood can be great—and not just for the child. A study of criminals who committed the cruelest and most violent crimes found that the one characteristic of their early lives that set them apart from other criminals was that they had been shuttled from foster home to foster home, or raised in orphanages—life histories that suggest emotional neglect and little opportunity for attunement.¹⁰

While emotional neglect seems to dull empathy, there is a paradoxical result from intense, sustained emotional abuse, including cruel, sadistic threats, humiliations, and plain meanness. Children who endure such abuse can become hyperalert to the emotions of those around them, in what amounts to a post-traumatic vigilance to cues that have signaled threat. Such an obsessive preoccupation with the feelings of others is typical of psychologically abused children who in adulthood suffer the mercurial, intense emotional ups and downs that are sometimes diagnosed as "borderline personality disorder." Many such people are gifted at sensing what others around them are feeling, and it is quite common for them to report having suffered emotional abuse in childhood.¹¹

THE NEUROLOGY OF EMPATHY

As is so often the case in neurology, reports of quirky and bizarre cases were among the early clues to the brain basis of empathy. A 1975 report, for instance, reviewed several cases in which patients with certain lesions in the right area of the frontal lobes had a curious deficit: they were unable to understand the emotional message in people's tone of voice, though they were perfectly able to understand their words. A sarcastic "Thanks," a grateful "Thanks," and an angry "Thanks" all had the same neutral meaning for them. By contrast, a 1979 report spoke of patients with injuries in other parts of the right hemisphere who had a very different gap in their emotional perception. These patients were unable to express their own emotions through their tone of voice or by gesture. They knew what they felt, but they simply could not convey it. All these cortical brain regions, the various authors noted, had strong connections to the limbic system.

These studies were reviewed as background to a seminal paper by Leslie Brothers, a psychiatrist at the California Institute of Technology, on the biology of empathy.¹² Reviewing both neurological findings and comparative studies with animals, Brothers points to the amygdala and its connections to the association area of the visual cortex as part of the key brain circuitry underlying empathy.

Much of the relevant neurological research is from work with animals, especially nonhuman primates. That such primates display empathy—or "emotional communication," as Brothers prefers to say—is clear not just from anecdotal accounts, but also from studies such as the following: Rhesus monkeys were trained first to fear a certain tone by hearing it while they received an electric shock. Then they learned to avoid the electric shock by pushing a lever whenever they heard the tone. Next, pairs of these monkeys were put in separate cages, their only communication being through closed-circuit TV, which allowed them to see pictures of the face of the other monkey. The first monkey, but not the second, then heard the dreaded tone sound, which brought a look of fear to its face. At that moment, the second monkey, seeing fear on the face of the first, pushed the lever that prevented the shock—an act of empathy, if not of altruism.

Having established that nonhuman primates do indeed read emotions from the faces of their peers, researchers gently inserted long, fine-tipped electrodes into the brains of monkeys. These electrodes allowed the recording of activity in a single neuron.

Electrodes tapping neurons in the visual cortex and in the amygdala showed that when one monkey saw the face of another, that information led to a neuron firing first in the visual cortex, then in the amygdala. This pathway, of course, is a standard route for information that is emotionally arousing. But what is surprising about results from such studies is that they have also identified neurons in the visual cortex that seem to fire *only* in response to specific facial expressions or gestures, such as a threatening opening of the mouth, a fearful grimace, or a docile crouch. These neurons are distinct from others in the same region that recognize familiar faces. This would seem to mean that the brain is designed from the beginning to respond to specific emotional expressions—that is, empathy is a given of biology.

Another line of evidence for the key role of the amygdala-cortical pathway in reading and responding to emotions, Brothers suggests, is research in which monkeys in the wild had the connections to and from the amygdala and cortex severed. When they were released back to their troops, these monkeys were able to contend with ordinary tasks such as feeding themselves and climbing trees. But the unfortunate monkeys had lost all sense of how to respond emotionally to other monkeys in their band. Even when one made a friendly approach, they would run away, and eventually lived as isolates, shunning contact with their own troop.

The very regions of the cortex where the emotion-specific neurons concentrate are also, Brothers notes, those with the heaviest connection to the amygdala; reading emotion involves the amygdala-cortical circuitry, which has a key role in orchestrating the appropriate responses. “The survival value of such a system is obvious” for nonhuman primates, notes Brothers. “The perception of another individual’s approach should give rise to a specific pattern of [physiological response]—and very quickly—tailored to whether the intent is to bite, to have a quiet grooming session, or to copulate.”¹³

A similar physiological basis for empathy in us humans is suggested in research by Robert Levenson, a University of California at Berkeley psychologist who has studied married couples trying to guess what their partner is feeling during a heated discussion.¹⁴ His method is simple: the couple is videotaped and their physiological responses measured while talking over some troubling issue in their marriage—how to discipline the kids, spending habits, and the like. Each partner reviews the tape and narrates what he or she was feeling from moment to moment. Then the partner reviews the tape a second time,

now trying to read the *other's* feelings.

The most empathic accuracy occurred in those husbands and wives *whose own physiology tracked that of the spouse* they were watching. That is, when their partner had an elevated sweat response, so did they; when their partner had a drop in heart rate, their heart slowed. In short, their body mimicked the subtle, moment-to-moment physical reactions of their spouse. If the viewer's physiological patterns simply repeated their own during the original interaction, they were very poor at surmising what their partner was feeling. Only when their bodies were in synch was there empathy.

This suggests that when the emotional brain is driving the body with a strong reaction—the heat of anger, say—there can be little or no empathy. Empathy requires enough calm and receptivity so that the subtle signals of feeling from another person can be received and mimicked by one's own emotional brain.

EMPATHY AND ETHICS: THE ROOTS OF ALTRUISM

“Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee” is one of the most famous lines in English literature. John Donne’s sentiment speaks to the heart of the link between empathy and caring: another’s pain is one’s own. To feel with another is to care. In this sense, the opposite of *empathy* is *antipathy*. The empathic attitude is engaged again and again in moral judgments, for moral dilemmas involve potential victims: Should you lie to keep from hurting a friend’s feelings? Should you keep a promise to visit a sick friend or accept a last-minute invitation to a dinner party instead? When should a life-support system be kept going for someone who would otherwise die?

These moral questions are posed by the empathy researcher Martin Hoffman, who argues that the roots of morality are to be found in empathy, since it is empathizing with the potential victims—someone in pain, danger, or deprivation, say—and so sharing their distress that moves people to act to help them.¹⁵ Beyond this immediate link between empathy and altruism in personal encounters, Hoffman proposes that the same capacity for empathic affect, for putting oneself in another’s place, leads people to follow certain moral principles.

Hoffman sees a natural progression in empathy from infancy onward. As we have seen, at one year of age a child feels in distress

herself when she sees another fall and start to cry; her rapport is so strong and immediate that she puts her thumb in her mouth and buries her head in her mother's lap, as if she herself were hurt. After the first year, when infants become more aware that they are distinct from others, they actively try to soothe another crying infant, offering them their teddy bears, for example. As early as the age of two, children begin to realize that someone else's feelings differ from their own, and so they become more sensitive to cues revealing what another actually feels; at this point they might, for example, recognize that another child's pride might mean that the best way to help them deal with their tears is not to call undue attention to them.

By late childhood the most advanced level of empathy emerges, as children are able to understand distress beyond the immediate situation, and to see that someone's condition or station in life may be a source of chronic distress. At this point they can feel for the plight of an entire group, such as the poor, the oppressed, the outcast. That understanding, in adolescence, can buttress moral convictions centered on wanting to alleviate misfortune and injustice.

Empathy underlies many facets of moral judgment and action. One is "empathic anger," which John Stuart Mill described as "the natural feeling of retaliation ... rendered by intellect and sympathy applicable to ... those hurts which wound us through wounding others"; Mill dubbed this the "guardian of justice." Another instance in which empathy leads to moral action is when a bystander is moved to intervene on behalf of a victim; the research shows that the more empathy a bystander feels for the victim, the more likely it is that she will intervene. There is some evidence that the level of empathy people feel shades their moral judgments as well. For example, studies in Germany and the United States found that the more empathic people are, the more they favor the moral principle that resources should be allocated according to people's need.¹⁶

LIFE WITHOUT EMPATHY: THE MIND OF THE MOLESTER, THE MORALS OF THE SOCIOPATH

Eric Eckardt was involved in an infamous crime: the bodyguard of skater Tonya Harding, Eckardt had arranged to have thugs attack Nancy Kerrigan, Harding's archrival for the 1994 women's Olympic figure skating gold medal. In the attack, Kerrigan's knee was battered,

sidelining her during crucial training months. But when Eckardt saw the image of a sobbing Kerrigan on television, he had a sudden rush of remorse, and sought out a friend to bare his secret, beginning the sequence that led to the arrest of the attackers. Such is the power of empathy.

But it is typically, and tragically, lacking in those who commit the most mean-spirited of crimes. A psychological fault line is common to rapists, child molesters, and many perpetrators of family violence alike: they are incapable of empathy. This inability to feel their victims' pain allows them to tell themselves lies that encourage their crime. For rapists, the lies include "Women really want to be raped" or "If she resists, she's just playing hard to get"; for molesters, "I'm not hurting the child, just showing love" or "This is just another form of affection"; for physically abusive parents, "This is just good discipline." These self-justifications are all collected from what people being treated for these problems say they have told themselves as they were brutalizing their victims, or preparing to do so.

The blotting out of empathy as these people inflict damage on victims is almost always part of an emotional cycle that precipitates their cruel acts. Witness the emotional sequence that typically leads to a sex crime such as child molestation.¹⁷ The cycle begins with the molester feeling upset: angry, depressed, lonely. These sentiments might be triggered by, say, watching happy couples on TV, and then feeling depressed about being alone. The molester then seeks solace in a favored fantasy, typically about a warm friendship with a child; the fantasy becomes sexual and ends in masturbation. Afterward, the molester feels a temporary relief from the sadness, but the relief is short-lived; the depression and loneliness return even more strongly. The molester begins to think about acting out the fantasy, telling himself justifications like "I'm not doing any real harm if the child is not physically hurt" and "If a child really didn't want to have sex with me, she could stop it."

At this point the molester is seeing the child through the lens of the perverted fantasy, not with empathy for what a real child would feel in the situation. That emotional detachment characterizes everything that follows, from the ensuing plan to get a child alone, to the careful rehearsal of what will happen, and then the execution of the plan. All of it is pursued as though the child involved had no feelings of her own; instead the molester projects on her the cooperative attitude of the child in his fantasy. Her feelings—revulsion, fear, disgust—do not

register. If they did, it would “ruin” things for the molester.

This utter lack of empathy for their victims is one of the main focuses of new treatments being devised for child molesters and other such offenders. In one of the most promising treatment programs, the offenders read heart-wrenching accounts of crimes like their own, told from the victim’s perspective. They also watch videotapes of victims tearfully telling what it was like to be molested. The offenders then write about their own offense from the victim’s point of view, imagining what the victim felt. They read this account to a therapy group, and try to answer questions about the assault from the victim’s perspective. Finally, the offender goes through a simulated reenactment of the crime, this time playing the role of the victim.

William Pithers, the Vermont prison psychologist who developed this perspective-taking therapy, told me, “Empathy with the victim shifts perception so that the denial of pain, even in one’s fantasies, is difficult” and so strengthens the men’s motivation to fight their perverse sexual urges. Sex offenders who have been through the program in prison had only half the rate of subsequent offenses after release compared to those who had no such treatment. Without this initial empathy-inspired motivation, none of the rest of treatment will work.

While there may be some small hope for instilling a sense of empathy in offenders such as child molesters, there is much less for another criminal type, the psychopath (more recently called the *sociopath* as a psychiatric diagnosis). Psychopaths are notorious for being both charming and completely without remorse for even the most cruel and heartless acts. Psychopathy, the incapacity to feel empathy or compassion of any sort, or the least twinge of conscience, is one of the more perplexing of emotional defects. The heart of the psychopath’s coldness seems to lie in an inability to make anything more than the shallowest of emotional connections. The crudest of criminals, such as sadistic serial killers who delight in the suffering of their victims before they die, are the epitome of psychopathy.¹⁸

Psychopaths are also glib liars, willing to say anything to get what they want, and they manipulate their victims’ emotions with the same cynicism. Consider the performance of Faro, a seventeen-year-old member of a Los Angeles gang who crippled a mother and her baby in a drive-by shooting, which he described with more pride than remorse. Driving in a car with Leon Bing, who was writing a book about the Los Angeles gangs the Crips and the Bloods, Faro wants to

show off. Faro tells Bing he's "gonna look crazy" at the "two dudes" in the next car. As Bing recounts the exchange:

The driver, sensing that someone is looking at him, glances over at my car. His eyes connect with Faro's, widen for an instant. Then he breaks the contact, looks down, looks away. And there is no mistaking what I saw there in his eyes: It was fear.

Faro demonstrates the look he flashed at the next car for Bing:

He looks straight at me and everything about his face shifts and changes, as if by some trick of time-lapse photography. It becomes a nightmare face, and it is a scary thing to see. It tells you that if you return his stare, if you challenge this kid, you'd better be able to stand your ground. His look tells you that he doesn't care about anything, not your life and not his.¹⁹

Of course, in behavior as complex as crime, there are many plausible explanations that do not evoke a biological basis. One might be that a perverse kind of emotional skill—intimidating other people—has survival value in violent neighborhoods, as might turning to crime; in these cases too much empathy might be counterproductive. Indeed, an opportunistic lack of empathy may be a "virtue" in many roles in life, from "bad cop" police interrogator to corporate raider. Men who have been torturers for terrorist states, for example, describe how they learned to dissociate from the feelings of their victims in order to do their "job." There are many routes to manipulativeness.

One of the more ominous ways this absence of empathy may display itself was discovered by accident in a study of the most vicious of wife batterers. The research revealed a physiological anomaly among many of the most violent husbands, who regularly beat up their wives or threaten them with knives or guns: the husbands do so in a cold, calculating state rather than while being carried away by the heat of fury.²⁰ As their anger mounts, the anomaly emerges: their heart rate *drops*, instead of climbing higher, as is ordinarily the case with mounting fury. This means they are growing physiologically calmer, even as they get more belligerent and abusive. Their violence appears to be a calculated act of terrorism, a method for controlling their wives by instilling fear.

These coolly brutal husbands are a breed apart from most other men who batter their wives. For one, they are far more likely to be violent outside the marriage as well, getting into bar fights and

battling with coworkers and other family members. And while most men who become violent with their wives do so impulsively, out of rage after feeling rejected or jealous, or out of fear of abandonment, these calculating batterers will strike out at their wives seemingly for no reason at all—and once they start, nothing she does, including trying to leave, seems to restrain their violence.

Some researchers who study criminal psychopaths suspect their cold manipulativeness, such absence of empathy or caring, can sometimes stem from a neural defect.* A possible physiological basis of heartless psychopathy has been shown in two ways, both of which suggest the involvement of neural pathways to the limbic brain. In one, people's brain waves are measured as they try to decipher words that have been scrambled. The words are flashed very quickly, for just a tenth of a second or so. Most people react differently to emotional words such as *kill* than to neutral words such as *chair*: they can decide more quickly if the emotional word was scrambled, and their brains show a distinctive wave pattern in response to the emotional words, but not the neutral ones. But psychopaths have neither of these responses: their brains do not show the distinctive pattern in response to the emotional words, and they do not respond more quickly to them, suggesting a disruption in circuits between the verbal cortex, which recognizes the word, and the limbic brain, which attaches feeling to it.

Robert Hare, the University of British Columbia psychologist who has done this research, interprets these results as meaning that psychopaths have a shallow understanding of emotional words, a reflection of their more general shallowness in the affective realm. The callousness of psychopaths, Hare believes, is based in part on another physiological pattern he discovered in earlier research, one that also suggests an irregularity in the workings of the amygdala and related circuits: psychopaths about to receive an electrical shock show no sign of the fear response that is normal in people about to experience pain.²¹ Because the prospect of pain does not trigger a surge of anxiety, Hare contends that psychopaths lack concern about future punishment for what they do. And because they themselves do not feel fear, they have no empathy—or compassion—for the fear and pain of their victims.

* A note of caution: If there are biological patterns at play in some kinds of criminality—such as a neural defect in empathy—that does not argue that all criminals are biologically flawed, or that there is some biological marker for crime. A controversy has raged on this issue, and

the best consensus is that there is no such biological marker, and certainly no “criminal gene.” Even if there is a biological basis for a lack of empathy in some cases, that does not mean all who have it will drift to crime; most will not. A lack of empathy should be factored in with all the other psychological, economic, and social forces that contribute to a vector toward criminality.

8

The Social Arts

As so often happens to five-year-olds with younger siblings, Len has lost all patience with Jay, his two-and-a-half-year-old brother, who is making a mess of the Lego blocks they've been playing with. Carried away by a wave of rage, Len bites Jay, who breaks into tears. Their mother, hearing Jay's pained yelp, bustles over and scolds Len, ordering him to put away those objects of contention, the Lego blocks. At this—what surely must seem a gross miscarriage of justice—Len bursts out crying. Still peeved, his mother refuses to console him.

But Len is proffered comfort from an unlikely source: Jay, who, although the original injured party, is now so concerned by his older brother's tears that he undertakes a campaign to calm Len down. The exchange goes something like this:¹

“Len, don’t,” Jay implores. “Stop crying, mate. Stop it crying.”

But Len still cries. His direct plea a failure, Jay beseeches their mother on Len’s behalf: “Len crying, Mummy! Len crying. Look. Me show you. Len crying.”

And then, turning to Len, Jay adopts a mothering mode, patting his weeping brother as he reassures him in soothing tones, “Look, Len. No go on crying.”

Len’s sobs continue, despite the comforting. So Jay turns to another tactic, lending a helping hand in putting away the Lego blocks in their bag, with a friendly, “Ah, Len. I put it back for Lennie, hey?”

Even so, the tears continue. The ever-ingenuous Jay tries yet another strategy, distraction. Showing his brother a toy car, Jay tries to draw his attention away from the minor tragedy that has just befallen him. “There’s this man in here. What’s this, Len? What’s this, Len?”

Len takes no interest. He’s inconsolable; his tears know no end. Losing her patience with him, his mother resorts to that classic parental threat, “Do you want me to smack you?” to which Len responds with a wavering, “No.”

“Then just stop it, please,” says his mother firmly, if a bit exasperatedly.

Through his sobs, Len manages a pathetic, gasping, “I’m trying to.” Which prompts Jay’s final stratagem: borrowing his mother’s firmness and voice of authority, he threatens, “Stop crying, Len. Smack your bottom!”

This microdrama reveals the remarkable emotional sophistication that a toddler of just thirty months can bring to bear in trying to manage someone else’s emotions. In his urgent attempts to soothe his brother, Jay is able to draw on a large repertoire of tactics, ranging from a simple plea, to seeking an ally in his mother (no help, she), to physically comforting him, to lending a helping hand, to distraction, threats, and direct commands. No doubt Jay relies on an arsenal that has been tried with him in his own moments of distress. No matter. What counts is that he can readily put them to use in a pinch even at this very young age.

Of course, as every parent of young children knows, Jay’s display of empathy and soothing is by no means universal. It is perhaps as likely that a child his age will see a sibling’s upset as a chance for vengeance, and so do whatever it takes to make the upset even worse. The same skills can be used to tease or torment a sibling. But even that mean-spiritedness bespeaks the emergence of a crucial emotional aptitude: the ability to know another’s feelings and to act in a way that further shapes those feelings. Being able to manage emotions in someone else is the core of the art of handling relationships.

To manifest such interpersonal power, toddlers must first reach a benchmark of self-control, the beginnings of the capacity to damp down their own anger and distress, their impulses and excitement—even if that ability usually falters. Attunement to others demands a modicum of calm in oneself. Tentative signs of this ability to manage their own emotions emerge around this same period: toddlers begin to be able to wait without wailing, to argue or cajole to get their way rather than using brute force—even if they don’t always choose to use this ability. Patience emerges as an alternative to tantrums, at least occasionally. And signs of empathy emerge by age two; it was Jay’s empathy, the root of compassion, that drove him to try so hard to cheer up his sobbing brother, Len. Thus handling emotions in someone else—the fine art of relationships—requires the ripeness of two other emotional skills, self-management and empathy.

With this base, the “people skills” ripen. These are the social competences that make for effectiveness in dealings with others; deficits here lead to ineptness in the social world or repeated

interpersonal disasters. Indeed, it is precisely the lack of these skills that can cause even the intellectually brightest to founder in their relationships, coming off as arrogant, obnoxious, or insensitive. These social abilities allow one to shape an encounter, to mobilize and inspire others, to thrive in intimate relationships, to persuade and influence, to put others at ease.

SHOW SOME EMOTION

One key social competence is how well or poorly people express their own feelings. Paul Ekman uses the term *display rules* for the social consensus about which feelings can be properly shown when. Cultures sometimes vary tremendously in this regard. For example, Ekman and colleagues in Japan studied the facial reactions of students to a horrific film about ritual circumcisions of teenage Aborigines. When the Japanese students watched the film with an authority figure present, their faces showed only the slightest hints of reaction. But when they thought they were alone (though they were being taped by a secret camera) their faces twisted into vivid mixes of anguished distress, dread, and disgust.

There are several basic kinds of display rules.² One is *minimizing* the show of emotion—this is the Japanese norm for feelings of distress in the presence of someone in authority, which the students were following when they masked their upset with a poker face. Another is *exaggerating* what one feels by magnifying the emotional expression; this is the ploy used by the six-year-old who dramatically twists her face into a pathetic frown, lips quivering, as she runs to complain to her mother about being teased by her older brother. A third is *substituting* one feeling for another; this comes into play in some Asian cultures where it is impolite to say no, and positive (but false) assurances are given instead. How well one employs these strategies, and knows when to do so, is one factor in emotional intelligence.

We learn these display rules very early, partly by explicit instruction. An education in display rules is imparted when we instruct a child not to seem disappointed, but to smile and say thank you instead, when Grandpa has given a dreadful but well-meant birthday present. This education in display rules, though, is more often through modeling: children learn to do what they see done. In educating the sentiments, emotions are both the medium and the

message. If a child is told to “smile and say thank you” by a parent who is, at that moment, harsh, demanding, and cold—who hisses the message instead of warmly whispering it—the child is more likely to learn a very different lesson, and in fact respond to Grandpa with a frown and a curt, flat “Thank you.” The effect on Grandpa is very different: in the first case he’s happy (though misled); in the second he’s hurt by the mixed message.

Emotional displays, of course, have immediate consequences in the impact they make on the person who receives them. The rule being learned by the child is something like, “Mask your real feelings when they will hurt someone you love; substitute a phony, but less hurtful feeling instead.” Such rules for expressing emotions are more than part of the lexicon of social propriety; they dictate how our own feelings impact on everyone else. To follow these rules well is to have optimal impact; to do so poorly is to foment emotional havoc.

Actors, of course, are artists of the emotional display; their expressiveness is what evokes response in their audience. And, no doubt, some of us come into life as natural actors. But partly because the lessons we learn about display rules vary according to the models we’ve had, people differ greatly in their adeptness.

EXPRESSIVENESS AND EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

It was early in the Vietnam War, and an American platoon was hunkered down in some rice paddies, in the heat of a firefight with the Vietcong. Suddenly a line of six monks started walking along the elevated berms that separated paddy from paddy. Perfectly calm and poised, the monks walked directly toward the line of fire.

“They didn’t look right, they didn’t look left. They walked straight through,” recalls David Busch, one of the American soldiers. “It was really strange, because nobody shot at ‘em. And after they walked over the berm, suddenly all the fight was out of me. It just didn’t feel like I wanted to do this anymore, at least not that day. It must have been that way for everybody, because everybody quit. We just stopped fighting.”³

The power of the monks’ quietly courageous calm to pacify soldiers in the heat of battle illustrates a basic principle of social life: Emotions are contagious. To be sure, this tale marks an extreme. Most emotional contagion is far more subtle, part of a tacit exchange that

happens in every encounter. We transmit and catch moods from each other in what amounts to a subterranean economy of the psyche in which some encounters are toxic, some nourishing. This emotional exchange is typically at a subtle, almost imperceptible level; the way a salesperson says thank you can leave us feeling ignored, resented, or genuinely welcomed and appreciated. We catch feelings from one another as though they were some kind of social virus.

We send emotional signals in every encounter, and those signals affect those we are with. The more adroit we are socially, the better we control the signals we send; the reserve of polite society is, after all, simply a means to ensure that no disturbing emotional leakage will unsettle the encounter (a social rule that, when brought into the domain of intimate relationships, is stifling). Emotional intelligence includes managing this exchange; “popular” and “charming” are terms we use for people whom we like to be with because their emotional skills make us feel good. People who are able to help others soothe their feelings have an especially valued social commodity; they are the souls others turn to when in greatest emotional need. We are all part of each other’s tool kit for emotional change, for better or for worse.

Consider a remarkable demonstration of the subtlety with which emotions pass from one person to another. In a simple experiment two volunteers filled out a checklist about their moods at the moment, then simply sat facing each other quietly while waiting for an experimenter to return to the room. Two minutes later she came back and asked them to fill out a mood checklist again. The pairs were purposely composed of one partner who was highly expressive of emotion and one who was deadpan. Invariably the mood of the one who was more expressive of emotions had been transferred to the more passive partner.⁴

How does this magical transmission occur? The most likely answer is that we unconsciously imitate the emotions we see displayed by someone else, through an out-of-awareness motor mimicry of their facial expression, gestures, tone of voice, and other nonverbal markers of emotion. Through this imitation people re-create in themselves the mood of the other person—a low-key version of the Stanislavsky method, in which actors recall gestures, movements, and other expressions of an emotion they have felt strongly in the past in order to evoke those feelings once again.

The day-to-day imitation of feeling is ordinarily quite subtle. Ulf

Dimberg, a Swedish researcher at the University of Uppsala, found that when people view a smiling or angry face, their own faces show evidence of that same mood through slight changes in the facial muscles. The changes are evident through electronic sensors but are typically not visible to the naked eye.

When two people interact, the direction of mood transfer is from the one who is more forceful in expressing feelings to the one who is more passive. But some people are particularly susceptible to emotional contagion; their innate sensitivity makes their autonomic nervous system (a marker of emotional activity) more easily triggered. This lability seems to make them more impressionable; sentimental commercials can move them to tears, while a quick chat with someone who is feeling cheerful can buoy them (it also may make them more empathic, since they are more readily moved by someone else's feelings).

John Cacioppo, the social psychophysologist at Ohio State University who has studied this subtle emotional exchange, observes, "Just seeing someone express an emotion can evoke that mood, whether you realize you mimic the facial expression or not. This happens to us all the time—there's a dance, a synchrony, a transmission of emotions. This mood synchrony determines whether you feel an interaction went well or not."

The degree of emotional rapport people feel in an encounter is mirrored by how tightly orchestrated their physical movements are as they talk—an index of closeness that is typically out of awareness. One person nods just as the other makes a point, or both shift in their chairs at the same moment, or one leans forward as the other moves back. The orchestration can be as subtle as both people rocking in swivel chairs at the same rhythm. Just as Daniel Stern found in watching the synchrony between attuned mothers and their infants, the same reciprocity links the movements of people who feel emotional rapport.

This synchrony seems to facilitate the sending and receiving of moods, even if the moods are negative. For example, in one study of physical synchrony, women who were depressed came to a laboratory with their romantic partners, and discussed a problem in their relationship. The more synchrony between the partners at the nonverbal level, the worse the depressed women's partners felt after the discussion—they had caught their girlfriends' bad moods.⁵ In short, whether people feel upbeat or down, the more physically

attuned their encounter, the more similar their moods will become.

The synchrony between teachers and students indicates how much rapport they feel; studies in classrooms show that the closer the movement coordination between teacher and student, the more they felt friendly, happy, enthused, interested, and easygoing while interacting. In general, a high level of synchrony in an interaction means the people involved like each other. Frank Bernieri, the Oregon State University psychologist who did these studies, told me, “How awkward or comfortable you feel with someone is at some level physical. You need to have compatible timing, to coordinate your movements, to feel comfortable. Synchrony reflects the depth of engagement between the partners; if you’re highly engaged, your moods begin to mesh, whether positive or negative.”

In short, coordination of moods is the essence of rapport, the adult version of the attunement a mother has with her infant. One determinant of interpersonal effectiveness, Cacioppo proposes, is how deftly people carry out this emotional synchrony. If they are adept at attuning to people’s moods, or can easily bring others under the sway of their own, then their interactions will go more smoothly at the emotional level. The mark of a powerful leader or performer is being able to move an audience of thousands in this way. By the same token, Cacioppo points out that people who are poor at receiving and sending emotions are prone to problems in their relationships, since people often feel uncomfortable with them, even if they can’t articulate just why this is so.

Setting the emotional tone of an interaction is, in a sense, a sign of dominance at a deep and intimate level: it means driving the emotional state of the other person. This power to determine emotion is akin to what is called in biology a *Zeitgeber* (literally, “time-grabber”), a process (such as the day-night cycle or the monthly phases of the moon) that entrains biological rhythms. For a couple dancing, the music is a bodily zeitgeber. When it comes to personal encounters, the person who has the more forceful expressivity—or the most power—is typically the one whose emotions entrain the other. Dominant partners talk more, while the subordinate partner watches the other’s face more—a setup for the transmission of affect. By the same token, the forcefulness of a good speaker—a politician or an evangelist, say—works to entrain the emotions of the audience.⁶ That is what we mean by, “He had them in the palm of his hand.” Emotional entrainment is the heart of influence.

THE RUDIMENTS OF SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

It's recess at a preschool, and a band of boys is running across the grass. Reggie trips, hurts his knee, and starts crying, but the other boys keep right on running—save for Roger, who stops. As Reggie's sobs subside Roger reaches down and rubs his own knee, calling out, “I hurt my knee, too!”

Roger is cited as having exemplary interpersonal intelligence by Thomas Hatch, a colleague of Howard Gardner at Spectrum, the school based on the concept of multiple intelligences.⁷ Roger, it seems, is unusually adept at recognizing the feelings of his playmates and making rapid, smooth connections with them. It was only Roger who noticed Reggie's plight and pain, and only Roger who tried to provide some solace, even if all he could offer was rubbing his own knee. This small gesture bespeaks a talent for rapport, an emotional skill essential for the preservation of close relationships, whether in a marriage, a friendship, or a business partnership. Such skills in preschoolers are the buds of talents that ripen through life.

Roger's talent represents one of four separate abilities that Hatch and Gardner identify as components of interpersonal intelligence:

- *Organizing groups*—the essential skill of the leader, this involves initiating and coordinating the efforts of a network of people. This is the talent seen in theater directors or producers, in military officers, and in effective heads of organizations and units of all kinds. On the playground, this is the child who takes the lead in deciding what everyone will play, or becomes team captain.
- *Negotiating solutions*—the talent of the mediator, preventing conflicts or resolving those that flare up. People who have this ability excel in deal-making, in arbitrating or mediating disputes; they might have a career in diplomacy, in arbitration or law, or as middlemen or managers of takeovers. These are the kids who settle arguments on the playing field.
- *Personal connection*—Roger's talent, that of empathy and connecting. This makes it easy to enter into an encounter or to recognize and respond fittingly to people's feelings and concerns—the art of relationship. Such people make good “team players,” dependable spouses, good friends or business partners; in the business world they do well as salespeople or managers, or can be excellent teachers. Children like Roger get along well with virtually everyone

else, easily enter into playing with them, and are happy doing so. These children tend to be best at reading emotions from facial expressions and are most liked by their classmates.

- *Social analysis*—being able to detect and have insights about people’s feelings, motives, and concerns. This knowledge of how others feel can lead to an easy intimacy or sense of rapport. At its best, this ability makes one a competent therapist or counselor—or, if combined with some literary talent, a gifted novelist or dramatist.

Taken together, these skills are the stuff of interpersonal polish, the necessary ingredients for charm, social success, even charisma. Those who are adept in social intelligence can connect with people quite smoothly, be astute in reading their reactions and feelings, lead and organize, and handle the disputes that are bound to flare up in any human activity. They are the natural leaders, the people who can express the unspoken collective sentiment and articulate it so as to guide a group toward its goals. They are the kind of people others like to be with because they are emotionally nourishing—they leave other people in a good mood, and evoke the comment, “What a pleasure to be around someone like that.”

These interpersonal abilities build on other emotional intelligences. People who make an excellent social impression, for example, are adept at monitoring their own expression of emotion, are keenly attuned to the ways others are reacting, and so are able to continually fine-tune their social performance, adjusting it to make sure they are having the desired effect. In that sense, they are like skilled actors.

However, if these interpersonal abilities are not balanced by an astute sense of one’s own needs and feelings and how to fulfill them, they can lead to a hollow social success—a popularity won at the cost of one’s true satisfaction. Such is the argument of Mark Snyder, a University of Minnesota psychologist who has studied people whose social skills make them first-rate social chameleons, champions at making a good impression.⁸ Their psychological credo might well be a remark by W. H. Auden, who said that his private image of himself “is very different from the image which I try to create in the minds of others in order that they may love me.” That trade-off can be made if social skills outstrip the ability to know and honor one’s own feelings: in order to be loved—or at least liked—the social chameleon will seem to be whatever those he is with seem to want. The sign that someone falls into this pattern, Snyder finds, is that they make an

excellent impression, yet have few stable or satisfying intimate relationships. A more healthy pattern, of course, is to balance being true to oneself with social skills, using them with integrity.

Social chameleons, though, don't mind in the least saying one thing and doing another, if that will win them social approval. They simply live with the discrepancy between their public face and their private reality. Helena Deutsch, a psychoanalyst, called such people the "as-if personality," shifting personas with remarkable plasticity as they pick up signals from those around them. "For some people," Snyder told me, "the public and private person meshes well, while for others there seems to be only a kaleidoscope of changing appearances. They are like Woody Allen's character Zelig, madly trying to fit in with whomever they are with."

Such people try to scan someone for a hint as to what is wanted from them before they make a response, rather than simply saying what they truly feel. To get along and be liked, they are willing to make people they dislike think they are friendly with them. And they use their social abilities to mold their actions as disparate social situations demand, so that they may act like very different people depending on whom they are with, swinging from bubbly sociability, say, to reserved withdrawal. To be sure, to the extent that these traits lead to effective impression management, they are highly prized in certain professions, notably acting, trial law, sales, diplomacy, and politics.

Another, perhaps more crucial kind of self-monitoring seems to make the difference between those who end up as anchorless social chameleons, trying to impress everyone, and those who can use their social polish more in keeping with their true feelings. That is the capacity to be true, as the saying has it, "to thine own self," which allows acting in accord with one's deepest feelings and values no matter what the social consequences. Such emotional integrity could well lead to, say, deliberately provoking a confrontation in order to cut through duplicity or denial—a clearing of the air that a social chameleon would never attempt.

THE MAKING OF A SOCIAL INCOMPETENT

There was no doubt Cecil was bright; he was a college-trained expert in foreign languages, superb at translating. But there were crucial

ways in which he was completely inept. Cecil seemed to lack the simplest social skills. He would muff a casual conversation over coffee, and fumble when having to pass the time of day; in short, he seemed incapable of the most routine social exchange. Because his lack of social grace was most profound when he was around women, Cecil came to therapy wondering if perhaps he had “homosexual tendencies of an underlying nature,” as he put it, though he had no such fantasies.

The real problem, Cecil confided to his therapist, was that he feared that nothing he could say would be of any interest to anybody. This underlying fear only compounded a profound paucity of social graces. His nervousness during encounters led him to snicker and laugh at the most awkward moments, even though he failed to laugh when someone said something genuinely funny. Cecil’s awkwardness, he confided to his therapist, went back to childhood; all his life he had felt socially at ease only when he was with his older brother, who somehow helped ease things for him. But once he left home, his ineptitude was overwhelming; he was socially paralyzed.

The tale is told by Lakin Phillips, a psychologist at George Washington University, who proposes that Cecil’s plight stems from a failure to learn in childhood the most elementary lessons of social interaction:

What could Cecil have been taught earlier? To speak directly to others when spoken to; to initiate social contact, not always wait for others; to carry on a conversation, not simply fall back on yes or no or other one-word replies; to express gratitude toward others, to let another person walk before one in passing through a door; to wait until one is served something ... to thank others, to say “please,” to share, and all the other elementary interactions we begin to teach children from age 2 onward.⁹

Whether Cecil’s deficiency was due to another’s failure to teach him such rudiments of social civility or to his own inability to learn is unclear. But whatever its roots, Cecil’s story is instructive because it points up the crucial nature of the countless lessons children get in interaction synchrony and the unspoken rules of social harmony. The net effect of failing to follow these rules is to create waves, to make those around us uncomfortable. The function of these rules, of course, is to keep everyone involved in a social exchange at ease; awkwardness spawns anxiety. People who lack these skills are inept not just at social niceties, but at handling the emotions of those they

encounter; they inevitably leave disturbance in their wake.

We all have known Cecils, people with an annoying lack of social graces—people who don’t seem to know when to end a conversation or phone call and who keep on talking, oblivious to all cues and hints to say good-bye; people whose conversation centers on themselves all the time, without the least interest in anyone else, and who ignore tentative attempts to refocus on another topic; people who intrude or ask “nosy” questions. These derailments of a smooth social trajectory all bespeak a deficit in the rudimentary building blocks of interaction.

Psychologists have coined the term *dyssemia* (from the Greek *dys-* for “difficulty” and *semes* for “signal”) for what amounts to a learning disability in the realm of nonverbal messages; about one in ten children has one or more problems in this realm.¹⁰ The problem can be in a poor sense of personal space, so that a child stands too close while talking or spreads their belongings into other people’s territory; in interpreting or using body language poorly; in misinterpreting or misusing facial expressions by, say, failing to make eye contact; or in a poor sense of prosody, the emotional quality of speech, so that they talk too shrilly or flatly.

Much research has focused on spotting children who show signs of social deficiency, children whose awkwardness makes them neglected or rejected by their playmates. Apart from children who are spurned because they are bullies, those whom other children avoid are invariably deficient in the rudiments of face-to-face interaction, particularly the unspoken rules that govern encounters. If children do poorly in language, people assume they are not very bright or poorly educated; but when they do poorly in the nonverbal rules of interaction, people—especially playmates—see them as “strange,” and avoid them. These are the children who don’t know how to join a game gracefully, who touch others in ways that make for discomfort rather than camaraderie—in short, who are “off.” They are children who have failed to master the silent language of emotion, and who unwittingly send messages that create uneasiness.

As Stephen Nowicki, an Emory University psychologist who studies children’s nonverbal abilities, put it, “Children who can’t read or express emotions well constantly feel frustrated. In essence, they don’t understand what’s going on. This kind of communication is a constant subtext of everything you do; you can’t stop showing your facial expression or posture, or hide your tone of voice. If you make mistakes in what emotional messages you send, you constantly

experience that people react to you in funny ways—you get rebuffed and don't know why. If you're thinking you're acting happy but actually seem too hyper or angry, you find other kids getting angry at you in turn, and you don't realize why. Such kids end up feeling no sense of control over how other people treat them, that their actions have no impact on what happens to them. It leaves them feeling powerless, depressed, and apathetic.”

Apart from becoming social isolates, such children also suffer academically. The classroom, of course, is as much a social situation as an academic one; the socially awkward child is as likely to misread and misrespond to a teacher as to another child. The resulting anxiety and bewilderment can themselves interfere with their ability to learn effectively. Indeed, as tests of children's nonverbal sensitivity have shown, those who misread emotional cues tend to do poorly in school compared to their academic potential as reflected in IQ tests.¹¹

“WE HATE YOU”: AT THE THRESHOLD

Social ineptitude is perhaps most painful and explicit when it comes to one of the more perilous moments in the life of a young child: being on the edge of a group at play you want to join. It is a moment of peril, one when being liked or hated, belonging or not, is made all too public. For that reason that crucial moment has been the subject of intense scrutiny by students of child development, revealing a stark contrast in approach strategies used by popular children and by social outcasts. The findings highlight just how crucial it is for social competence to notice, interpret, and respond to emotional and interpersonal cues. While it is poignant to see a child hover on the edge of others at play, wanting to join in but being left out, it is a universal predicament. Even the most popular children are sometimes rejected—a study of second and third graders found that 26 percent of the time the most well liked children were rebuffed when they tried to enter a group already at play.

Young children are brutally candid about the emotional judgment implicit in such rejections. Witness the following dialogue from four-year-olds in a preschool.¹² Linda wants to join Barbara, Nancy, and Bill, who are playing with toy animals and building blocks. She watches for a minute, then makes her approach, sitting next to Barbara and starting to play with the animals. Barbara turns to her

and says, “You can’t play!”

“Yes, I can,” Linda counters. “I can have some animals, too.”

“No, you can’t,” Barbara says bluntly. “We don’t like you today.”

When Bill protests on Linda’s behalf, Nancy joins the attack: “We hate her today.”

Because of the danger of being told, either explicitly or implicitly, “We hate you,” all children are understandably cautious on the threshold of approaching a group. That anxiety, of course, is probably not much different from that felt by a grown-up at a cocktail party with strangers who hangs back from a happily chatting group who seem to be intimate friends. Because this moment at the threshold of a group is so momentous for a child, it is also, as one researcher put it, “highly diagnostic ... quickly revealing differences in social skillfulness.”¹³

Typically, newcomers simply watch for a time, then join in very tentatively at first, being more assertive only in very cautious steps. What matters most for whether a child is accepted or not is how well he or she is able to enter into the group’s frame of reference, sensing what kind of play is in flow, what out of place.

The two cardinal sins that almost always lead to rejection are trying to take the lead too soon and being out of synch with the frame of reference. But this is exactly what unpopular children tend to do: they push their way into a group, trying to change the subject too abruptly or too soon, or offering their own opinions, or simply disagreeing with the others right away—all apparent attempts to draw attention to themselves. Paradoxically, this results in their being ignored or rejected. By contrast, popular children spend time observing the group to understand what’s going on before entering in, and then do something that shows they accept it; they wait to have their status in the group confirmed before taking initiative in suggesting what the group should do.

Let’s return to Roger, the four-year-old whom Thomas Hatch spotted exhibiting a high level of interpersonal intelligence.¹⁴ Roger’s tactic for entering a group was first to observe, then to imitate what another child was doing, and finally to talk to the child and fully join the activity—a winning strategy. Roger’s skill was shown, for instance, when he and Warren were playing at putting “bombs” (actually pebbles) in their socks. Warren asks Roger if he wants to be in a helicopter or an airplane. Roger asks, before committing himself, “Are you in a helicopter?”

This seemingly innocuous moment reveals sensitivity to others' concerns, and the ability to act on that knowledge in a way that maintains the connection. Hatch comments about Roger, "He 'checks in' with his playmate so that they and their play remain connected. I have watched many other children who simply get in their own helicopters or planes and, literally and figuratively, fly away from each other."

EMOTIONAL BRILLIANCE: A CASE REPORT

If the test of social skill is the ability to calm distressing emotions in others, then handling someone at the peak of rage is perhaps the ultimate measure of mastery. The data on self-regulation of anger and emotional contagion suggest that one effective strategy might be to distract the angry person, empathize with his feelings and perspective, and then draw him into an alternative focus, one that attunes him with a more positive range of feeling—a kind of emotional judo.

Such refined skill in the fine art of emotional influence is perhaps best exemplified by a story told by an old friend, the late Terry Dobson, who in the 1950s was one of the first Americans ever to study the martial art aikido in Japan. One afternoon he was riding home on a suburban Tokyo train when a huge, bellicose, and very drunk and begrimed laborer got on. The man, staggering, began terrorizing the passengers: screaming curses, he took a swing at a woman holding a baby, sending her sprawling in the laps of an elderly couple, who then jumped up and joined a stampede to the other end of the car. The drunk, taking a few other swings (and, in his rage, missing), grabbed the metal pole in the middle of the car with a roar and tried to tear it out of its socket.

At that point Terry, who was in peak physical condition from daily eight-hour aikido workouts, felt called upon to intervene, lest someone get seriously hurt. But he recalled the words of his teacher: "Aikido is the art of reconciliation. Whoever has the mind to fight has broken his connection with the universe. If you try to dominate people you are already defeated. We study how to resolve conflict, not how to start it."

Indeed, Terry had agreed upon beginning lessons with his teacher never to pick a fight, and to use his martial-arts skills only in defense. Now, at last, he saw his chance to test his aikido abilities in real life,

in what was clearly a legitimate opportunity. So, as all the other passengers sat frozen in their seats, Terry stood up, slowly and with deliberation.

Seeing him, the drunk roared, “Aha! A foreigner! You need a lesson in Japanese manners!” and began gathering himself to take on Terry.

But just as the drunk was on the verge of making his move, someone gave an earsplitting, oddly joyous shout: “Hey!”

The shout had the cheery tone of someone who has suddenly come upon a fond friend. The drunk, surprised, spun around to see a tiny Japanese man, probably in his seventies, sitting there in a kimono. The old man beamed with delight at the drunk, and beckoned him over with a light wave of his hand and a lilting “C’mere.”

The drunk strode over with a belligerent, “Why the hell should I talk to you?” Meanwhile, Terry was ready to fell the drunk in a moment if he made the least violent move.

“What’cha been drinking?” the old man asked, his eyes beaming at the drunken laborer.

“I been drinking sake, and it’s none of your business,” the drunk bellowed.

“Oh, that’s wonderful, absolutely wonderful,” the old man replied in a warm tone. “You see, I love sake, too. Every night, me and my wife (she’s seventy-six, you know), we warm up a little bottle of sake and take it out into the garden, and we sit on an old wooden bench ...” He continued on about the persimmon tree in his backyard, the fortunes of his garden, enjoying sake in the evening.

The drunk’s face began to soften as he listened to the old man; his fists unclenched. “Yeah ... I love persimmons, too ...,” he said, his voice trailing off.

“Yes,” the old man replied in a sprightly voice, “and I’m sure you have a wonderful wife.”

“No,” said the laborer. “My wife died....” Sobbing, he launched into a sad tale of losing his wife, his home, his job, of being ashamed of himself.

Just then the train came to Terry’s stop, and as he was getting off he turned to hear the old man invite the drunk to join him and tell him all about it, and to see the drunk sprawl along the seat, his head in the old man’s lap.

That is emotional brilliance.

PART THREE

**EMOTIONAL
INTELLIGENCE
APPLIED**

9

Intimate Enemies

To love and to work, Sigmund Freud once remarked to his disciple Erik Erikson, are the twin capacities that mark full maturity. If that is the case, then maturity may be an endangered way station in life—and current trends in marriage and divorce make emotional intelligence more crucial than ever.

Consider divorce rates. The rate *per year* of divorces has more or less leveled off. But there is another way of calculating divorce rates, one that suggests a perilous climb: looking at the odds that a given newly married couple will have their marriage *eventually* end in divorce. Although the overall rate of divorce has stopped climbing, the *risk* of divorce has been shifting to newlyweds.

The shift gets clearer in comparing divorce rates for couples wed in a given year. For American marriages that began in 1890, about 10 percent ended in divorce. For those wed in 1920, the rate was about 18 percent; for couples married in 1950, 30 percent. Couples that were newly wed in 1970 had a fifty-fifty chance of splitting up or staying together. And for married couples starting out in 1990, the likelihood that the marriage would end in divorce was projected to be close to a staggering 67 percent!¹ If the estimate holds, just three in ten of recent newlyweds can count on staying married to their new partner.

It can be argued that much of this rise is due not so much to a decline in emotional intelligence as to the steady erosion of social pressures—the stigma surrounding divorce, or the economic dependence of wives on their husbands—that used to keep couples together in even the most miserable of matches. But if social pressures are no longer the glue that holds a marriage together, then the emotional forces between wife and husband are that much more crucial if their union is to survive.

These ties between husband and wife—and the emotional fault lines that can break them apart—have been assayed in recent years with a precision never seen before. Perhaps the biggest breakthrough in

understanding what holds a marriage together or tears it apart has come from the use of sophisticated physiological measures that allow the moment-to-moment tracking of the emotional nuances of a couple's encounter. Scientists are now able to detect a husband's otherwise invisible adrenaline surges and jumps in blood pressure, and to observe fleeting but telling microemotions as they flit across a wife's face. These physiological measures reveal a hidden biological subtext to a couple's difficulties, a critical level of emotional reality that is typically imperceptible to or disregarded by the couple themselves. These measures lay bare the emotional forces that hold a relationship together or destroy it. The fault lines have their earliest beginnings in the differences between the emotional worlds of girls and boys.

HIS MARRIAGE AND HERS: CHILDHOOD ROOTS

As I was entering a restaurant on a recent evening, a young man stalked out the door, his face set in an expression both stony and sullen. Close on his heels a young woman came running, her fists desperately pummeling his back while she yelled, “Goddamn you! Come back here and be nice to me!” That poignant, impossibly self-contradictory plea aimed at a retreating back epitomizes the pattern most commonly seen in couples whose relationship is distressed: She seeks to engage, he withdraws. Marital therapists have long noted that by the time a couple finds their way to the therapy office they are in this pattern of engage-withdraw, with his complaint about her “unreasonable” demands and outbursts, and her lamenting his indifference to what she is saying.

This marital endgame reflects the fact that there are, in effect, two emotional realities in a couple, his and hers. The roots of these emotional differences, while they may be partly biological, also can be traced back to childhood, and to the separate emotional worlds boys and girls inhabit while growing up. There is a vast amount of research on these separate worlds, their barriers reinforced not just by the different games boys and girls prefer, but by young children’s fear of being teased for having a “girlfriend” or “boyfriend.”² One study of children’s friendships found that three-year-olds say about half their friends are of the opposite sex; for five-year-olds it’s about 20 percent, and by age seven almost no boys or girls say they have a best friend of

the opposite sex.³ These separate social universes intersect little until teenagers start dating.

Meanwhile, boys and girls are taught very different lessons about handling emotions. Parents, in general, discuss emotions—with the exception of anger—more with their daughters than their sons.⁴ Girls are exposed to more information about emotions than are boys: when parents make up stories to tell their preschool children, they use more emotion words when talking to daughters than to sons; when mothers play with their infants, they display a wider range of emotions to daughters than to sons; when mothers talk to daughters about feelings, they discuss in more detail the emotional state itself than they do with their sons—though with the sons they go into more detail about the causes and consequences of emotions like anger (probably as a cautionary tale).

Leslie Brody and Judith Hall, who have summarized the research on differences in emotions between the sexes, propose that because girls develop facility with language more quickly than do boys, this leads them to be more experienced at articulating their feelings and more skilled than boys at using words to explore and substitute for emotional reactions such as physical fights; in contrast, they note, “boys, for whom the verbalization of affects is de-emphasized, may become largely unconscious of their emotional states, both in themselves and in others.”⁵

At age ten, roughly the same percent of girls as boys are overtly aggressive, given to open confrontation when angered. But by age thirteen, a telling difference between the sexes emerges: Girls become more adept than boys at artful aggressive tactics like ostracism, vicious gossip, and indirect vendettas. Boys, by and large, simply continue being confrontational when angered, oblivious to these more covert strategies.⁶ This is just one of many ways that boys—and later, men—are less sophisticated than the opposite sex in the byways of emotional life.

When girls play together, they do so in small, intimate groups, with an emphasis on minimizing hostility and maximizing cooperation, while boys’ games are in larger groups, with an emphasis on competition. One key difference can be seen in what happens when games boys or girls are playing get disrupted by someone getting hurt. If a boy who has gotten hurt gets upset, he is expected to get out of the way and stop crying so the game can go on. If the same happens among a group of girls who are playing, the game stops while everyone

gathers around to help the girl who is crying. This difference between boys and girls at play epitomizes what Harvard's Carol Gilligan points to as a key disparity between the sexes: boys take pride in a lone, tough-minded independence and autonomy, while girls see themselves as part of a web of connectedness. Thus boys are threatened by anything that might challenge their independence, while girls are more threatened by a rupture in their relationships. And, as Deborah Tannen has pointed out in her book *You Just Don't Understand*, these differing perspectives mean that men and women want and expect very different things out of a conversation, with men content to talk about "things," while women seek emotional connection.

In short, these contrasts in schooling in the emotions foster very different skills, with girls becoming "adept at reading both verbal and nonverbal emotional signals, at expressing and communicating their feelings," and boys becoming adept at "minimizing emotions having to do with vulnerability, guilt, fear and hurt".⁷ Evidence for these different stances is very strong in the scientific literature. Hundreds of studies have found, for example, that on average women are more empathic than men, at least as measured by the ability to read someone else's unstated feelings from facial expression, tone of voice, and other nonverbal cues. Likewise, it is generally easier to read feelings from a woman's face than a man's; while there is no difference in facial expressiveness among very young boys and girls, as they go through the elementary-school grades boys become less expressive, girls more so. This may partly reflect another key difference: women, on average, experience the entire range of emotions with greater intensity and more volatility than men—in this sense, women *are* more "emotional" than men.⁸

All of this means that, in general, women come into a marriage groomed for the role of emotional manager, while men arrive with much less appreciation of the importance of this task for helping a relationship survive. Indeed, the most important element for women—but not for men—in satisfaction with their relationship reported in a study of 264 couples was the sense that the couple has "good communication."⁹ Ted Huston, a psychologist at the University of Texas who has studied couples in depth, observes, "For the wives, intimacy means talking things over, especially talking about the relationship itself. The men, by and large, don't understand what the wives want from them. They say, 'I want to do things with her, and all she wants to do is talk.' " During courtship, Huston found, men were

much more willing to spend time talking in ways that suited the wish for intimacy of their wives-to-be. But once married, as time went on the men—especially in more traditional couples—spent less and less time talking in this way with their wives, finding a sense of closeness simply in doing things like gardening together rather than talking things over.

This growing silence on the part of husbands may be partly due to the fact that, if anything, men are a bit Pollyannaish about the state of their marriage, while their wives are attuned to the trouble spots: in one study of marriages, men had a rosier view than their wives of just about everything in their relationship—lovemaking, finances, ties with in-laws, how well they listened to each other, how much their flaws mattered.¹⁰ Wives, in general, are more vocal about their complaints than are their husbands, particularly among unhappy couples. Combine men's rosy view of marriage with their aversion to emotional confrontations, and it is clear why wives so often complain that their husbands try to wiggle out of discussing the troubling things about their relationship. (Of course this gender difference is a generalization, and is not true in every case; a psychiatrist friend complained that in his marriage his wife is reluctant to discuss emotional matters between them, and he is the one who is left to bring them up.)

The slowness of men to bring up problems in a relationship is no doubt compounded by their relative lack of skill when it comes to reading facial expressions of emotions. Women, for example, are more sensitive to a sad expression on a man's face than are men in detecting sadness from a woman's expression.¹¹ Thus a woman has to be all the sadder for a man to notice her feelings in the first place, let alone for him to raise the question of what is making her so sad.

Consider the implications of this emotional gender gap for how couples handle the grievances and disagreements that any intimate relationship inevitably spawns. In fact, specific issues such as how often a couple has sex, how to discipline the children, or how much debt and savings a couple feels comfortable with are not what make or break a marriage. Rather, it is *how* a couple discusses such sore points that matters more for the fate of their marriage. Simply having reached an agreement about *how to disagree* is key to marital survival; men and women have to overcome the innate gender differences in approaching rocky emotions. Failing this, couples are vulnerable to emotional rifts that eventually can tear their relationship apart. As we

shall see, these rifts are far more likely to develop if one or both partners have certain deficits in emotional intelligence.

MARITAL FAULT LINE

Fred: Did you pick up my dry cleaning?

Ingrid: (In a mocking tone) “Did you pick up my dry cleaning.” Pick up your own damn dry cleaning. What am I, your maid?

Fred: Hardly. If you were a maid, at least you’d know how to clean.

If this were dialogue from a sitcom, it might be amusing. But this painfully caustic interchange was between a couple who (perhaps not surprisingly) divorced within the next few years.¹² Their encounter took place in a laboratory run by John Gottman, a University of Washington psychologist who has done perhaps the most detailed analysis ever of the emotional glue that binds couples together and the corrosive feelings that can destroy marriages.¹³ In his laboratory, couples’ conversations are videotaped and then subjected to hours of microanalysis designed to reveal the subterranean emotional currents at play. This mapping of the fault lines that may lead a couple to divorce makes a convincing case for the crucial role of emotional intelligence in the survival of a marriage.

During the last two decades Gottman has tracked the ups and downs of more than two hundred couples, some just newlyweds, others married for decades. Gottman has charted the emotional ecology of marriage with such precision that, in one study, he was able to predict which couples seen in his lab (like Fred and Ingrid, whose discussion of getting the dry cleaning was so acrimonious) would divorce within three years with *94 percent accuracy*, a precision unheard of in marital studies!

The power of Gottman’s analysis comes from his painstaking method and the thoroughness of his probes. While the couples talk, sensors record the slightest flux in their physiology; a second-by-second analysis of their facial expressions (using the system for reading emotions developed by Paul Ekman) detects the most fleeting and subtle nuance of feeling. After their session, each partner comes separately to the lab and watches a videotape of the conversation, and narrates his or her secret thoughts during the heated moments of the exchange. The result is akin to an emotional X-ray of the marriage.

An early warning signal that a marriage is in danger, Gottman finds, is harsh criticism. In a healthy marriage husband and wife feel free to voice a complaint. But too often in the heat of anger complaints are expressed in a destructive fashion, as an attack on the spouse's character. For example, Pamela and her daughter went shoe shopping while her husband, Tom, went to a bookstore. They agreed to meet in front of the post office in an hour, and then go to a matinee. Pamela was prompt, but there was no sign of Tom. "Where is he? The movie starts in ten minutes," Pamela complained to her daughter. "If there's a way for your father to screw something up, he will."

When Tom showed up ten minutes later, happy about having run into a friend and apologizing for being late, Pamela lashed out with sarcasm: "That's okay—it gave us a chance to discuss your amazing ability to screw up every single plan we make. You're so thoughtless and self-centered!"

Pamela's complaint is more than that: it is a character assassination, a critique of the person, not the deed. In fact, Tom had apologized. But for this lapse Pamela brands him as "thoughtless and self-centered." Most couples have moments like this from time to time, where a complaint about something a partner has done is voiced as an attack against the person rather than the deed. But these harsh personal criticisms have a far more corrosive emotional impact than do more reasoned complaints. And such attacks, perhaps understandably, become more likely the more a husband or wife feels their complaints go unheard or ignored.

The differences between complaints and personal criticisms are simple. In a complaint, a wife states specifically what is upsetting her, and criticizes her husband's *action*, not her husband, saying how it made her feel: "When you forgot to pick up my clothes at the cleaner's it made me feel like you don't care about me." It is an expression of basic emotional intelligence: assertive, not belligerent or passive. But in a personal criticism she uses the specific grievance to launch a global attack on her husband: "You're always so selfish and uncaring. It just proves I can't trust you to do anything right." This kind of criticism leaves the person on the receiving end feeling ashamed, disliked, blamed, and defective—all of which are more likely to lead to a defensive response than to steps to improve things.

All the more so when the criticism comes laden with contempt, a particularly destructive emotion. Contempt comes easily with anger; it is usually expressed not just in the words used, but also in a tone of

voice and an angry expression. Its most obvious form, of course, is mockery or insult—“jerk,” “bitch,” “wimp.” But just as hurtful is the body language that conveys contempt, particularly the sneer or curled lip that are the universal facial signals for disgust, or a rolling of the eyes, as if to say, “Oh, brother!”

Contempt’s facial signature is a contraction of the “dimpler,” the muscle that pulls the corners of the mouth to the side (usually the left) while the eyes roll upward. When one spouse flashes this expression, the other, in a tacit emotional exchange, registers a jump in heart rate of two or three beats per minute. This hidden conversation takes its toll; if a husband shows contempt regularly, Gottman found, his wife will be more prone to a range of health problems, from frequent colds and flus to bladder and yeast infections, as well as gastrointestinal symptoms. And when a wife’s face shows disgust, a near cousin of contempt, four or more times within a fifteen-minute conversation, it is a silent sign that the couple is likely to separate within four years.

Of course, an occasional show of contempt or disgust will not undo a marriage. Rather, such emotional volleys are akin to smoking and high cholesterol as risk factors for heart disease—the more intense and prolonged, the greater the danger. On the road to divorce, one of these factors predicts the next, in an escalating scale of misery. Habitual criticism and contempt or disgust are danger signs because they indicate that a husband or wife has made a silent judgment for the worse about their partner. In his or her thoughts, the spouse is the subject of constant condemnation. Such negative and hostile thinking leads naturally to attacks that make the partner on the receiving end defensive—or ready to counterattack in return.

The two arms of the fight-or-flight response each represent ways a spouse can respond to an attack. The most obvious is to fight back, lashing out in anger. That route typically ends in a fruitless shouting match. But the alternative response, fleeing, can be more pernicious, particularly when the “flight” is a retreat into stony silence.

Stonewalling is the ultimate defense. The stonewaller just goes blank, in effect withdrawing from the conversation by responding with a stony expression and silence. Stonewalling sends a powerful, unnerving message, something like a combination of icy distance, superiority, and distaste. Stonewalling showed up mainly in marriages that were heading for trouble; in 85 percent of these cases it was the husband who stonewalled in response to a wife who attacked with

criticism and contempt.¹⁴ As a habitual response stonewalling is devastating to the health of a relationship: it cuts off all possibility of working out disagreements.

TOXIC THOUGHTS

The children are being rambunctious, and Martin, their father, is getting annoyed. He turns to his wife, Melanie, and says in a sharp tone, “Dear, don’t you think the kids could quiet down?”

His actual thought: “She’s too easy on the kids.”

Melanie, responding to his ire, feels a surge of anger. Her face grows taut, her brows knit in a frown, and she replies, “The kids are having a good time. Anyhow, they’ll be going up to bed soon.”

Her thought: “There he goes again, complaining all the time.”

Martin now is visibly enraged. He leans forward menacingly, his fists clenched, as he says in an annoyed tone, “Should I put them to bed now?”

His thought: “She opposes me in everything. I’d better take over.”

Melanie, suddenly frightened by Martin’s wrath, says meekly, “No, I’ll put them to bed right away.”

Her thought: “He’s getting out of control—he could hurt the kids. I’d better give in.”

These parallel conversations—the spoken and the silent—are reported by Aaron Beck, the founder of cognitive therapy, as an example of the kinds of thinking that can poison a marriage.¹⁵ The real emotional exchange between Melanie and Martin is shaped by their thoughts, and those thoughts, in turn, are determined by another, deeper layer, which Beck calls “automatic thoughts”— fleeting, background assumptions about oneself and the people in one’s life that reflect our deepest emotional attitudes. For Melanie the background thought is something like, “He’s always bullying me with his anger.” For Martin, the key thought is, “She has no right to treat me like this.” Melanie feels like an innocent victim in their marriage, and Martin feels righteous indignation at what he feels is unjust treatment.

Thoughts of being an innocent victim or of righteous indignation are typical of partners in troubled marriages, continually fueling anger and hurt.¹⁶ Once distressing thoughts such as righteous indignation become automatic, they are self-confirming: the partner who feels

victimized is constantly scanning everything his partner does that might confirm the view that she is victimizing him, ignoring or discounting any acts of kindness on her part that would question or disconfirm that view.

These thoughts are powerful; they trip the neural alarm system. Once the husband's thought of being victimized triggers an emotional hijacking, he will for the time being easily call to mind and ruminate on a list of grievances that remind him of the ways she victimizes him, while not recalling anything she may have done in their entire relationship that would disconfirm the view that he is an innocent victim. It puts his spouse in a no-win situation: even things she does that are intentionally kind can be reinterpreted when viewed through such a negative lens and dismissed as feeble attempts to deny she is a victimizer.

Partners who are free of such distress-triggering views can entertain a more benign interpretation of what is going on in the same situations, and so are less likely to have such a hijacking, or if they do, tend to recover from it more readily. The general template for thoughts that maintain or alleviate distress follows the pattern outlined in [Chapter 6](#) by psychologist Martin Seligman for pessimistic and optimistic outlooks. The pessimistic view is that the partner is inherently flawed in a way that cannot change and that guarantees misery: "He's selfish and self-absorbed; that's the way he was brought up and that's the way he will always be; he expects me to wait on him hand and foot and he couldn't care less about how I feel." The contrasting optimistic view would be something like: "He's being demanding now, but he's been thoughtful in the past; maybe he's in a bad mood—I wonder if something's bothering him about his work." This is a view that does not write off the husband (or the marriage) as irredeemably damaged and hopeless. Instead it sees a bad moment as due to circumstances that can change. The first attitude brings continual distress; the second soothes.

Partners who take the pessimistic stance are extremely prone to emotional hijackings; they get angry, hurt, or otherwise distressed by things their spouses do, and they stay disturbed once the episode begins. Their internal distress and pessimistic attitude, of course, makes it far more likely they will resort to criticism and contempt in confronting the partner, which in turn heightens the likelihood of defensiveness and stonewalling.

Perhaps the most virulent of such toxic thoughts are found in

husbands who are physically violent to their wives. A study of violent husbands by psychologists at Indiana University found that these men think like schoolyard bullies: they read hostile intent into even neutral actions by their wives, and use this misreading to justify to themselves their own violence (men who are sexually aggressive with dates do something similar, viewing the women with suspicion and so disregarding their objections).¹⁷ As we saw in [Chapter 7](#), such men are particularly threatened by perceived slights, rejection, or public embarrassment by their wives. A typical scenario that triggers thoughts “justifying” violence in wife-batterers: “You are at a social gathering and you notice that for the past half hour your wife has been talking and laughing with the same attractive man. He seems to be flirting with her.” When these men perceive their wives as doing something suggesting rejection or abandonment, their reactions run to indignation and outrage. Presumably, automatic thoughts like “She’s going to leave me” are triggers for an emotional hijacking in which battering husbands respond impulsively, as the researchers put it, with “incompetent behavioral responses”—they become violent.¹⁸

FLOODING THE SWAMPING OF A MARRIAGE

The net effect of these distressing attitudes is to create incessant crisis, since they trigger emotional hijackings more often and make it harder to recover from the resulting hurt and rage. Gottman uses the apt term *flooding* for this susceptibility to frequent emotional distress; flooded husbands or wives are so overwhelmed by their partner’s negativity and their own reaction to it that they are swamped by dreadful, out-of-control feelings. People who are flooded cannot hear without distortion or respond with clear-headedness; they find it hard to organize their thinking, and they fall back on primitive reactions. They just want things to stop, or want to run or, sometimes, to strike back. Flooding is a self-perpetuating emotional hijacking.

Some people have high thresholds for flooding, easily enduring anger and contempt, while others may be triggered the moment their spouse makes a mild criticism. The technical description of flooding is in terms of heart rate rise from calm levels.¹⁹ At rest, women’s heart rates are about 82 beats per minute, men’s about 72 (the specific heart rate varies mainly according to a person’s body size). Flooding begins at about 10 beats per minute above a person’s resting rate; if

the heart rate reaches 100 beats per minute (as it easily can do during moments of rage or tears), then the body is pumping adrenaline and other hormones that keep the distress high for some time. The moment of emotional hijacking is apparent from the heart rate: it can jump 10, 20, or even as many as 30 beats per minute within the space of a single heartbeat. Muscles tense; it can seem hard to breathe. There is a swamp of toxic feelings, an unpleasant wash of fear and anger that seems inescapable and, subjectively, takes “forever” to get over. At this point—full hijacking—a person’s emotions are so intense, their perspective so narrow, and their thinking so confused that there is no hope of taking the other’s viewpoint or settling things in a reasonable way.

Of course, most husbands and wives have such intense moments from time to time when they fight—it’s only natural. The problem for a marriage begins when one or another spouse feels flooded almost continually. Then the partner feels overwhelmed by the other partner, is always on guard for an emotional assault or injustice, becomes hypervigilant for any sign of attack, insult, or grievance, and is sure to overreact to even the least sign. If a husband is in such a state, his wife saying, “Honey, we’ve got to talk,” can elicit the reactive thought, “She’s picking a fight again,” and so trigger flooding. It becomes harder and harder to recover from the physiological arousal, which in turn makes it easier for innocuous exchanges to be seen in a sinister light, triggering flooding all over again.

This is perhaps the most dangerous turning point for marriage, a catastrophic shift in the relationship. The flooded partner has come to think the worst of the spouse virtually all the time, reading everything she does in a negative light. Small issues become major battles; feelings are hurt continually. With time, the partner who is being flooded starts to see any and all problems in the marriage as severe and impossible to fix, since the flooding itself sabotages any attempt to work things out. As this continues it begins to seem useless to talk things over, and the partners try to soothe their troubled feelings on their own. They start leading parallel lives, essentially living in isolation from each other, and feel alone within the marriage. All too often, Gottman finds, the next step is divorce.

In this trajectory toward divorce the tragic consequences of deficits in emotional competences are self-evident. As a couple gets caught in the reverberating cycle of criticism and contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling, distressing thoughts and emotional flooding, the cycle

itself reflects a disintegration of emotional self-awareness and self-control, of empathy and the abilities to soothe each other and oneself.

MEN: THE VULNERABLE SEX

Back to gender differences in emotional life, which prove to be a hidden spur to marital meltdowns. Consider this finding: Even after thirty-five or more years of marriage, there is a basic distinction between husbands and wives in how they regard emotional encounters. Women, on average, do not mind plunging into the unpleasantness of a marital squabble nearly so much as do the men in their lives. That conclusion, reached in a study by Robert Levenson at the University of California at Berkeley, is based on the testimony of 151 couples, all in long-lasting marriages. Levenson found that husbands uniformly found it unpleasant, even aversive, to become upset during a marital disagreement, while their wives did not mind it much.²⁰

Husbands are prone to flooding at a lower intensity of negativity than are their wives; more men than women react to their spouse's criticism with flooding. Once flooded, husbands secrete more adrenaline into their bloodstream, and the adrenaline flow is triggered by lower levels of negativity on their wife's part; it takes husbands longer to recover physiologically from flooding.²¹ This suggests the possibility that the stoic, Clint Eastwood type of male imperturbability may represent a defense against feeling emotionally overwhelmed.

The reason men are so likely to stonewall, Gottman proposes, is to protect themselves from flooding; his research showed that once they began stonewalling, their heart rates dropped by about ten beats per minute, bringing a subjective sense of relief. But—and here's a paradox—once the men started stonewalling, it was the wives whose heart rate shot up to levels signaling high distress. This limbic tango, with each sex seeking comfort in opposing gambits, leads to a very different stance toward emotional confrontations: men want to avoid them as fervently as their wives feel compelled to seek them.

Just as men are far more likely to be stonewallers, so the women are more likely to criticize their husbands.²² This asymmetry arises as a result of wives pursuing their role as emotional managers. As they try to bring up and resolve disagreements and grievances, their husbands are more reluctant to engage in what are bound to be

heated discussions. As the wife sees her husband withdraw from engagement, she ups the volume and intensity of her complaint, starting to criticize him. As he becomes defensive or stonewalls in return, she feels frustrated and angry, and so adds contempt to underscore the strength of her frustration. As her husband finds himself the object of his wife's criticism and contempt, he begins to fall into the innocent-victim or righteous-indignation thoughts that more and more easily trigger flooding. To protect himself from flooding, he becomes more and more defensive or simply stonewalls altogether. But when husbands stonewall, remember, it triggers flooding in their wives, who feel completely stymied. And as the cycle of marital fights escalates it all too easily can spin out of control.

HIS AND HERS: MARITAL ADVICE

Given the grim potential outcome of the differences in how men and women deal with distressing feelings in their relationship, what can couples do to protect the love and affection they feel for each other—in short, what protects a marriage? On the basis of watching interaction in the couples whose marriages have continued to thrive over the years, marital researchers offer specific advice for men and for women, and some general words for both.

Men and women, in general, need different emotional fine-tuning. For men, the advice is not to sidestep conflict, but to realize that when their wife brings up some grievance or disagreement, she may be doing it as an act of love, trying to keep the relationship healthy and on course (although there may well be other motives for a wife's hostility). When grievances simmer, they build and build in intensity until there's an explosion; when they are aired and worked out, it takes the pressure off. But husbands need to realize that anger or discontent is not synonymous with personal attack—their wives' emotions are often simply underliners, emphasizing the strength of her feelings about the matter.

Men also need to be on guard against short-circuiting the discussion by offering a practical solution too early on—it's typically more important to a wife that she feel her husband hears her complaint and empathizes with her *feelings* about the matter (though he need not agree with her). She may hear his offering advice as a way of dismissing her feelings as inconsequential. Husbands who are able to

stay with their wives through the heat of anger, rather than dismissing their complaints as petty, help their wives feel heard and respected. Most especially, wives want to have their feelings acknowledged and respected as valid, even if their husbands disagree. More often than not, when a wife feels her view is heard and her feelings registered, she calms down.

As for women, the advice is quite parallel. Since a major problem for men is that their wives are too intense in voicing complaints, wives need to make a purposeful effort to be careful not to attack their husbands—to complain about what they did, but not criticize them as a person or express contempt. Complaints are not attacks on character, but rather a clear statement that a particular action is distressing. An angry personal attack will almost certainly lead to a husband's getting defensive or stonewalling, which will be all the more frustrating, and only escalate the fight. It helps, too, if a wife's complaints are put in the larger context of reassuring her husband of her love for him.

THE GOOD FIGHT

The morning paper offers an object lesson in how not to resolve differences in a marriage. Marlene Lenick had a dispute with her husband, Michael: he wanted to watch the Dallas Cowboys-Philadelphia Eagles game, she wanted to watch the news. As he settled down to watch the game, Mrs. Lenick told him that she had "had enough of that football," went into the bedroom to fetch a .38 caliber handgun, and shot him twice as he sat watching the game in the den. Mrs. Lenick was charged with aggravated assault and freed on a \$50,000 bond; Mr. Lenick was listed in good condition, recovering from the bullets that grazed his abdomen and tunneled through his left shoulder blade and neck.²³

While few marital fights are that violent—or that costly—they offer a prime chance to bring emotional intelligence to marriage. For example, couples in marriages that last tend to stick to one topic, and to give each partner the chance to state their point of view at the outset.²⁴ But these couples go one important step further: they show each other that they are being listened to. Since feeling heard is often exactly what the aggrieved partner really is after, emotionally an act of empathy is a masterly tension reducer.

Most notably missing in couples who eventually divorce are attempts by either partner in an argument to de-escalate the tension. The presence or absence of ways to repair a rift is a crucial difference between the fights of couples who have a healthy marriage and those of couples who eventually end up divorcing.²⁵ The repair mechanisms that keep an argument from escalating into a dire explosion are simple moves such as keeping the discussion on track, empathizing, and tension reduction. These basic moves are like an emotional thermostat, preventing the feelings being expressed from boiling over and overwhelming the partners' ability to focus on the issue at hand.

One overall strategy for making a marriage work is not to concentrate on the specific issues—childrearing, sex, money, housework—that couples fight about, but rather to cultivate a couple's shared emotional intelligence, thereby improving the chances of working things out. A handful of emotional competences—mainly being able to calm down (and calm your partner), empathy, and listening well—can make it more likely a couple will settle their disagreements effectively. These make possible healthy disagreements, the “good fights” that allow a marriage to flourish and which overcome the negativities that, if left to grow, can destroy a marriage.²⁶

Of course, none of these emotional habits changes overnight; it takes persistence and vigilance at the very least. Couples will be able to make the key changes in direct proportion to how motivated they are to try. Many or most emotional responses triggered so easily in marriage have been sculpted since childhood, first learned in our most intimate relationships or modeled for us by our parents, and then brought to marriage fully formed. And so we are primed for certain emotional habits—overreacting to perceived slights, say, or shutting down at the first sign of a confrontation—even though we may have sworn that we would not act like our parents.

Calming Down

Every strong emotion has at its root an impulse to action; managing those impulses is basic to emotional intelligence. This can be particularly difficult, though, in love relationships, where we have so much at stake. The reactions triggered here touch on some of our deepest needs—to be loved and feel respected, fears of abandonment or of being emotionally deprived. Small wonder we can act in a

marital fight as though our very survival were at stake.

Even so, nothing gets resolved positively when husband or wife is in the midst of an emotional hijacking. One key marital competence is for partners to learn to soothe their own distressed feelings. Essentially, this means mastering the ability to recover quickly from the flooding caused by an emotional hijacking. Because the ability to hear, think, and speak with clarity dissolves during such an emotional peak, calming down is an immensely constructive step, without which there can be no further progress in settling what's at issue.

Ambitious couples can learn to monitor their pulse rates every five minutes or so during a troubling encounter, feeling the pulse at the carotid artery a few inches below the earlobe and jaw (people who do aerobic workouts learn to do this easily).²⁷ Counting the pulse for fifteen seconds and multiplying by four gives the pulse rate in beats per minute. Doing so while feeling calm gives a baseline; if the pulse rate rises more than, say, ten beats per minute above that level, it signals the beginning of flooding. If the pulse climbs this much, a couple needs a twenty-minute break from each other to cool down before resuming the discussion. Although a five-minute break may feel long enough, the actual physiological recovery time is more gradual. As we saw in [Chapter 5](#), residual anger triggers more anger; the longer wait gives the body more time to recover from the earlier arousal.

For couples who, understandably, find it awkward to monitor heart rate during a fight, it is simpler to have a prestated agreement that allows one or another partner to call the time-out at the first signs of flooding in either partner. During that time-out period, cooling down can be helped along by engaging in a relaxation technique or aerobic exercise (or any of the other methods we explored in [Chapter 5](#)) that might help the partners recover from the emotional hijacking.

Detoxifying Self-talk

Because flooding is triggered by negative thoughts about the partner, it helps if a husband or wife who is being upset by such harsh judgments tackles them head-on. Sentiments like “I’m not going to take this anymore” or “I don’t deserve this kind of treatment” are innocent-victim or righteous-indignation slogans. As cognitive therapist Aaron Beck points out, by catching these thoughts and challenging them—rather than simply being enraged or hurt by them

—a husband or wife can begin to become free of their hold.²⁸

This requires monitoring such thoughts, realizing that one does not have to believe them, and making the intentional effort to bring to mind evidence or perspectives that put them in question. For example, a wife who feels in the heat of the moment that “he doesn’t care about my needs—he’s always so selfish” might challenge the thought by reminding herself of a number of things her husband has done that are, in fact, thoughtful. This allows her to reframe the thought as: “Well, he does show he cares about me sometimes, even though what he just did was thoughtless and upsetting to me.” The latter formulation opens the possibility of change and a positive resolution; the former only foments anger and hurt.

Nondefensive Listening and Speaking

He: “You’re shouting!”

She: “Of course I’m shouting—you haven’t heard a word I’m saying. You just don’t listen!”

Listening is a skill that keeps couples together. Even in the heat of an argument, when both are seized by emotional hijackings, one or the other, and sometimes both, can manage to listen past the anger, and hear and respond to a partner’s reparative gesture. Couples headed for divorce, though, get absorbed in the anger and fixated on the specifics of the issue at hand, not managing to hear—let alone return—any peace offerings that might be implicit in what their partner is saying. Defensiveness in a listener takes the form of ignoring or immediately rebutting the spouse’s complaint, reacting to it as though it were an attack rather than an attempt to change behavior. Of course, in an argument what one spouse says is often in the form of an attack, or is said with such strong negativity that it is hard to hear anything other than an attack.

Even in the worst case, it’s possible for a couple to purposely edit what they hear, ignoring the hostile and negative parts of the exchange—the nasty tone, the insult, the contemptuous criticism—to hear the main message. For this feat it helps if partners can remember to see each other’s negativity as an implicit statement of how important the issue is to them—a demand for attention to be paid. Then if she yells, “Will you *stop* interrupting me, for crissake!” he might be more able to say, without reacting overtly to her hostility, “Okay, go ahead and finish.”

The most powerful form of nondefensive listening, of course, is empathy: actually hearing the feelings *behind* what is being said. As we saw in [Chapter 7](#), for one partner in a couple to truly empathize with the other demands that his own emotional reactions calm down to the point where he is receptive enough for his own physiology to be able to mirror the feelings of his partner. Without this physiological attunement, a partner's sense of what the other is feeling is likely to be entirely off base. Empathy deteriorates when one's own feelings are so strong that they allow no physiological harmonizing, but simply override everything else.

One method for effective emotional listening, called “mirroring,” is commonly used in marital therapy. When one partner makes a complaint, the other repeats it back in her own words, trying to capture not just the thought, but also the feelings that go with it. The partner mirroring checks with the other to be sure the restatement is on target, and if not, tries again until it is right—something that seems simple, but is surprisingly tricky in execution.²⁹ The effect of being mirrored accurately is not just feeling understood, but having the added sense of being in emotional attunement. That in itself can sometimes disarm an imminent attack, and goes far toward keeping discussions of grievances from escalating into fights.

The art of nondefensive speaking for couples centers around keeping what is said to a specific complaint rather than escalating to a personal attack. Psychologist Haim Ginott, the grandfather of effective-communication programs, recommended that the best formula for a complaint is “XYZ”: “When you did X, it made me feel Y, and I’d rather you did Z instead.” For example: “When you didn’t call to tell me you were going to be late for our dinner appointment, I felt unappreciated and angry. I wish you’d call to let me know you’ll be late” instead of “You’re a thoughtless, self-centered bastard,” which is how the issue is all too often put in couples’ fights. In short, open communication has no bullying, threats, or insults. Nor does it allow for any of the innumerable forms of defensiveness—excuses, denying responsibility, counterattacking with a criticism, and the like. Here again empathy is a potent tool.

Finally, respect and love disarm hostility in marriage, as elsewhere in life. One powerful way to de-escalate a fight is to let your partner know that you can see things from the other perspective, and that this point of view may have validity, even if you do not agree with it yourself. Another is to take responsibility or even apologize if you see

you are in the wrong. At a minimum, validation means at least conveying that you are listening, and can acknowledge the emotions being expressed, even if you can't go along with the argument: "I see you're upset." And at other times, when there is no fight going on, validation takes the form of compliments, finding something you genuinely appreciate and voicing some praise. Validation, of course, is a way to help soothe your spouse, or to build up emotional capital in the form of positive feelings.

Practicing

Because these maneuvers are to be called upon during the heat of confrontation, when emotional arousal is sure to be high, they have to be overlearned if they are to be accessible when needed most. This is because the emotional brain engages those response routines that were learned earliest in life during repeated moments of anger and hurt, and so become dominant. Memory and response being emotion-specific, in such moments reactions associated with calmer times are less easy to remember and act on. If a more productive emotional response is unfamiliar or not well practiced, it is extremely difficult to try it while upset. But if a response is practiced so that it has become automatic, it has a better chance of finding expression during emotional crisis. For these reasons, the above strategies need to be tried out and rehearsed during encounters that are not stressful, as well as in the heat of battle, if they are to have a chance to become an acquired first response (or at least a not-too-belated second response) in the repertoire of the emotional circuitry. In essence, these antidotes to marital disintegration are a small remedial education in emotional intelligence.

10

Managing with Heart

Melburn McBroom was a domineering boss, with a temper that intimidated those who worked with him. That fact might have passed unremarked had McBroom worked in an office or factory. But McBroom was an airline pilot.

One day in 1978 McBroom's plane was approaching Portland, Oregon, when he noticed a problem with the landing gear. So McBroom went into a holding pattern, circling the field at a high altitude while he fiddled with the mechanism.

As McBroom obsessed about the landing gear, the plane's fuel gauges steadily approached the empty level. But his copilots were so fearful of McBroom's wrath that they said nothing, even as disaster loomed. The plane crashed, killing ten people.

Today the story of that crash is told as a cautionary tale in the safety training of airline pilots.¹ In 80 percent of airline crashes, pilots make mistakes that could have been prevented, particularly if the crew worked together more harmoniously. Teamwork, open lines of communication, cooperation, listening, and speaking one's mind—rudiments of social intelligence—are now emphasized in training pilots, along with technical prowess.

The cockpit is a microcosm of any working organization. But lacking the dramatic reality check of an airplane crash, the destructive effects of miserable morale, intimidated workers, or arrogant bosses—or any of the dozens of other permutations of emotional deficiencies in the workplace—can go largely unnoticed by those outside the immediate scene. But the costs can be read in signs such as decreased productivity, an increase in missed deadlines, mistakes and mishaps, and an exodus of employees to more congenial settings. There is, inevitably, a cost to the bottom line from low levels of emotional intelligence on the job. When it is rampant, companies can crash and burn.

The cost-effectiveness of emotional intelligence is a relatively new idea for business, one some managers may find hard to accept. A

study of 250 executives found that most felt their work demanded “their heads but not their hearts.” Many said they feared that feeling empathy or compassion for those they worked with would put them in conflict with their organizational goals. One felt the idea of sensing the feelings of those who worked for him was absurd—it would, he said, “be impossible to deal with people.” Others protested that if they were not emotionally aloof they would be unable to make the “hard” decisions that business requires—although the likelihood is that they would deliver those decisions more humanely.²

That study was done in the 1970s, when the business environment was very different. My argument is that such attitudes are outmoded, a luxury of a former day; a new competitive reality is putting emotional intelligence at a premium in the workplace and in the marketplace. As Shoshana Zuboff, a psychologist at Harvard Business School, pointed out to me, “corporations have gone through a radical revolution within this century, and with this has come a corresponding transformation of the emotional landscape. There was a long period of managerial domination of the corporate hierarchy when the manipulative, jungle-fighter boss was rewarded. But that rigid hierarchy started breaking down in the 1980s under the twin pressures of globalization and information technology. The jungle fighter symbolizes where the corporation has been; the virtuoso in interpersonal skills is the corporate future.”³

Some of the reasons are patently obvious—imagine the consequences for a working group when someone is unable to keep from exploding in anger or has no sensitivity about what the people around him are feeling. All the deleterious effects of agitation on thinking reviewed in [Chapter 6](#) operate in the workplace too: When emotionally upset, people cannot remember, attend, learn, or make decisions clearly. As one management consultant put it, “Stress makes people stupid.”

On the positive side, imagine the benefits for work of being skilled in the basic emotional competences—being attuned to the feelings of those we deal with, being able to handle disagreements so they do not escalate, having the ability to get into flow states while doing our work. Leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading people to work toward a common goal. And, in terms of managing our own career, there may be nothing more essential than recognizing our deepest feelings about what we do—and what changes might make us more truly satisfied with our work.

Some of the less obvious reasons emotional aptitudes are moving to the forefront of business skills reflect sweeping changes in the workplace. Let me make my point by tracking the difference three applications of emotional intelligence make: being able to air grievances as helpful critiques, creating an atmosphere in which diversity is valued rather than a source of friction, and networking effectively.

CRITICISM IS JOB ONE

He was a seasoned engineer, heading a software development project, presenting the result of months of work by his team to the company's vice president for product development. The men and women who had worked long days week after week were there with him, proud to present the fruit of their hard labor. But as the engineer finished his presentation, the vice president turned to him and asked sarcastically, "How long have you been out of graduate school? These specifications are ridiculous. They have no chance of getting past my desk."

The engineer, utterly embarrassed and deflated, sat glumly through the rest of the meeting, reduced to silence. The men and women on his team made a few desultory—and some hostile—remarks in defense of their effort. The vice president was then called away and the meeting broke up abruptly, leaving a residue of bitterness and anger.

For the next two weeks the engineer was obsessed by the vice president's remarks. Dispirited and depressed, he was convinced he would never get another assignment of importance at the company, and was thinking of leaving, even though he enjoyed his work there.

Finally the engineer went to see the vice president, reminding him of the meeting, his critical remarks, and their demoralizing effect. Then he made a carefully worded inquiry: "I'm a little confused by what you were trying to accomplish. I assume you were not just trying to embarrass me—did you have some other goal in mind?"

The vice president was astonished—he had no idea that his remark, which he meant as a throwaway line, had been so devastating. In fact, he thought the software plan was promising, but needed more work—he hadn't meant to dismiss it as utterly worthless at all. He simply had not realized, he said, how poorly he had put his reaction, nor that he had hurt anyone's feelings. And, belatedly, he apologized.⁴

It's a question of feedback, really, of people getting the information essential to keep their efforts on track. In its original sense in systems theory, *feedback* meant the exchange of data about how one part of a

system is working, with the understanding that one part affects all others in the system, so that any part heading off course could be changed for the better. In a company everyone is part of the system, and so feedback is the lifeblood of the organization—the exchange of information that lets people know if the job they are doing is going well or needs to be fine-tuned, upgraded, or redirected entirely. Without feedback people are in the dark; they have no idea how they stand with their boss, with their peers, or in terms of what is expected of them, and any problems will only get worse as time passes.

In a sense, criticism is one of the most important tasks a manager has. Yet it's also one of the most dreaded and put off. And, like the sarcastic vice president, too many managers have poorly mastered the crucial art of feedback. This deficiency has a great cost: just as the emotional health of a couple depends on how well they air their grievances, so do the effectiveness, satisfaction, and productivity of people at work depend on how they are told about nagging problems. Indeed, how criticisms are given and received goes a long way in determining how satisfied people are with their work, with those they work with, and with those to whom they are responsible.

The Worst Way to Motivate Someone

The emotional vicissitudes at work in marriage also operate in the workplace, where they take similar forms. Criticisms are voiced as personal attacks rather than complaints that can be acted upon; there are ad hominem charges with dollops of disgust, sarcasm, and contempt; both give rise to defensiveness and dodging of responsibility and, finally, to stonewalling or the embittered passive resistance that comes from feeling unfairly treated. Indeed, one of the more common forms of destructive criticism in the workplace, says one business consultant, is a blanket, generalized statement like "You're screwing up," delivered in a harsh, sarcastic, angry tone, providing neither a chance to respond nor any suggestion of how to do things better. It leaves the person receiving it feeling helpless and angry. From the vantage point of emotional intelligence, such criticism displays an ignorance of the feelings it will trigger in those who receive it, and the devastating effect those feelings will have on their motivation, energy, and confidence in doing their work.

This destructive dynamic showed up in a survey of managers who were asked to think back to times they blew up at employees and, in

the heat of the moment, made a personal attack.⁵ The angry attacks had effects much like they would in a married couple: the employees who received them reacted most often by becoming defensive, making excuses, or evading responsibility. Or they stonewalled—that is, tried to avoid all contact with the manager who blew up at them. If they had been subjected to the same emotional microscope that John Gottman used with married couples, these embittered employees would no doubt have been shown to be thinking the thoughts of innocent victimhood or righteous indignation typical of husbands or wives who feel unfairly attacked. If their physiology were measured, they would probably also display the flooding that reinforces such thoughts. And yet the managers were only further annoyed and provoked by these responses, suggesting the beginning of a cycle that, in the business world, ends in the employee quitting or being fired—the business equivalent of a divorce.

Indeed, in a study of 108 managers and white-collar workers, inept criticism was ahead of mistrust, personality struggles, and disputes over power and pay as a reason for conflict on the job.⁶ An experiment done at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute shows just how damaging to working relationships a cutting criticism can be. In a simulation, volunteers were given the task of creating an ad for a new shampoo. Another volunteer (a confederate) supposedly judged the proposed ads; volunteers actually received one of two prearranged criticisms. One critique was considerate and specific. But the other included threats and blamed the person's innate deficiencies, with remarks like, "Didn't even try; can't seem to do anything right" and "Maybe it's just lack of talent. I'd try to get someone else to do it."

Understandably, those who were attacked became tense and angry and antagonistic, saying they would refuse to collaborate or cooperate on future projects with the person who gave the criticism. Many indicated they would want to avoid contact altogether—in other words, they felt like stonewalling. The harsh criticism made those who received it so demoralized that they no longer tried as hard at their work and, perhaps most damaging, said they no longer felt capable of doing well. The personal attack was devastating to their morale.

Many managers are too willing to criticize, but frugal with praise, leaving their employees feeling that they only hear about how they're doing when they make a mistake. This propensity to criticism is compounded by managers who delay giving any feedback at all for

long periods. “Most problems in an employee’s performance are not sudden; they develop slowly over time,” J. R. Larson, a University of Illinois at Urbana psychologist, notes. “When the boss fails to let his feelings be known promptly, it leads to his frustration building up slowly. Then, one day, he blows up about it. If the criticism had been given earlier on, the employee would have been able to correct the problem. Too often people criticize only when things boil over, when they get too angry to contain themselves. And that’s when they give the criticism in the worst way, in a tone of biting sarcasm, calling to mind a long list of grievances they had kept to themselves, or making threats. Such attacks backfire. They are received as an affront, so the recipient becomes angry in return. It’s the worst way to motivate someone.”

The Artful Critique

Consider the alternative.

An artful critique can be one of the most helpful messages a manager can send. For example, what the contemptuous vice president could have told the software engineer—but did not—was something like: “The main difficulty at this stage is that your plan will take too long and so escalate costs. I’d like you to think more about your proposal, especially the design specifications for software development, to see if you can figure out a way to do the same job more quickly.” Such a message has the opposite impact of destructive criticism: instead of creating helplessness, anger, and rebellion, it holds out the hope of doing better and suggests the beginning of a plan for doing so.

An artful critique focuses on what a person has done and can do rather than reading a mark of character into a job poorly done. As Larson observes, “A character attack—calling someone stupid or incompetent—misses the point. You immediately put him on the defensive, so that he’s no longer receptive to what you have to tell him about how to do things better.” That advice, of course, is precisely the same as for married couples airing their grievances.

And, in terms of motivation, when people believe that their failures are due to some unchangeable deficit in themselves, they lose hope and stop trying. The basic belief that leads to optimism, remember, is that setbacks or failures are due to circumstances that we can do something about to change them for the better.

Harry Levinson, a psychoanalyst turned corporate consultant, gives the following advice on the art of the critique, which is intricately entwined with the art of praise:

- *Be specific.* Pick a significant incident, an event that illustrates a key problem that needs changing or a pattern of deficiency, such as the inability to do certain parts of a job well. It demoralizes people just to hear that they are doing “something” wrong without knowing what the specifics are so they can change. Focus on the specifics, saying what the person did well, what was done poorly, and how it could be changed. Don’t beat around the bush or be oblique or evasive; it will muddy the real message. This, of course, is akin to the advice to couples about the “XYZ” statement of a grievance: say exactly what the problem is, what’s wrong with it or how it makes you feel, and what could be changed.

“Specificity,” Levinson points out, “is just as important for praise as for criticism. I won’t say that vague praise has no effect at all, but it doesn’t have much, and you can’t learn from it.”⁷

- *Offer a solution.* The critique, like all useful feedback, should point to a way to fix the problem. Otherwise it leaves the recipient frustrated, demoralized, or demotivated. The critique may open the door to possibilities and alternatives that the person did not realize were there, or simply sensitize her to deficiencies that need attention—but should include suggestions about how to take care of these problems.

- *Be present.* Critiques, like praise, are most effective face to face and in private. People who are uncomfortable giving a criticism—or offering praise—are likely to ease the burden on themselves by doing it at a distance, such as in a memo. But this makes the communication too impersonal, and robs the person receiving it of an opportunity for a response or clarification.

- *Be sensitive.* This is a call for empathy, for being attuned to the impact of what you say and how you say it on the person at the receiving end. Managers who have little empathy, Levinson points out, are most prone to giving feedback in a hurtful fashion, such as the withering put-down. The net effect of such criticism is destructive: instead of opening the way for a corrective, it creates an emotional backlash of resentment, bitterness, defensiveness, and distance.

Levinson also offers some emotional counsel for those at the

receiving end of criticism. One is to see the criticism as valuable information about how to do better, not as a personal attack. Another is to watch for the impulse toward defensiveness instead of taking responsibility. And, if it gets too upsetting, ask to resume the meeting later, after a period to absorb the difficult message and cool down a bit. Finally, he advises people to see criticism as an opportunity to work together with the critic to solve the problem, not as an adversarial situation. All this sage advice, of course, directly echoes suggestions for married couples trying to handle their complaints without doing permanent damage to their relationship. As with marriage, so with work.

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

Sylvia Skeeter, a former army captain in her thirties, was a shift manager at a Denny's restaurant in Columbia, South Carolina. One slow afternoon a group of black customers—a minister, an assistant pastor, and two visiting gospel singers—came in for a meal, and sat and sat while the waitresses ignored them. The waitresses, recalls Skeeter, “would kind of glare, with their hands on their hips, and then they'd go back to talking among themselves, like a black person standing five feet away didn't exist.”

Skeeter, indignant, confronted the waitresses, and complained to the manager, who shrugged off their actions, saying, “That's how they were raised, and there's nothing I can do about it.” Skeeter quit on the spot; she is black.

If that had been an isolated incident, this moment of blatant prejudice might have passed unnoticed. But Sylvia Skeeter was one of hundreds of people who came forward to testify to a widespread pattern of antiblack prejudice throughout the Denny's restaurant chain, a pattern that resulted in a \$54 million settlement of a class-action suit on behalf of thousands of black customers who had suffered such indignities.

The plaintiffs included a detail of seven African-American Secret Service agents who sat waiting for an hour for their breakfast while their white colleagues at the next table were served promptly—as they were all on their way to provide security for a visit by President Clinton to the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. They also included a black girl with paralyzed legs in Tampa, Florida, who sat in

her wheelchair for two hours waiting for her food late one night after a prom. The pattern of discrimination, the class-action suit held, was due to the widespread assumption throughout the Denny's chain—particularly at the level of district and branch manager—that black customers were bad for business. Today, largely as a result of the suit and publicity surrounding it, the Denny's chain is making amends to the black community. And every employee, especially managers, must attend sessions on the advantages of a multiracial clientele.

Such seminars have become a staple of in-house training in companies throughout America, with the growing realization by managers that even if people bring prejudices to work with them, they must learn to act as though they have none. The reasons, over and above human decency, are pragmatic. One is the shifting face of the workforce, as white males, who used to be the dominant group, are becoming a minority. A survey of several hundred American companies found that more than three quarters of new employees were nonwhite—a demographic shift that is also reflected to a large extent in the changing pool of customers.⁸ Another reason is the increasing need for international companies to have employees who not only put any bias aside to appreciate people from diverse cultures (and markets) but also turn that appreciation to competitive advantage. A third motivation is the potential fruit of diversity, in terms of heightened collective creativity and entrepreneurial energy.

All this means the culture of an organization must change to foster tolerance, even if individual biases remain. But how can a company do this? The sad fact is that the panoply of one-day, one-video, or single-weekend “diversity training” courses do not really seem to budge the biases of those employees who come to them with deep prejudice against one or another group, whether it be whites biased against blacks, blacks against Asians, or Asians resenting Hispanics. Indeed, the net effect of inept diversity courses—those that raise false expectations by promising too much, or simply create an atmosphere of confrontation instead of understanding—can be to heighten the tensions that divide groups in the workplace, calling even greater attention to these differences. To understand what *can* be done, it helps to first understand the nature of prejudice itself.

The Roots of Prejudice

Dr. Vamik Volkan is a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia now,

but he remembers what it was like growing up in a Turkish family on the island of Cyprus, then bitterly contested between Turks and Greeks. As a boy Volkán heard rumors that the local Greek priest's cincture had a knot for each Turkish child he had strangled, and remembers the tone of dismay in which he was told how his Greek neighbors ate pigs, whose meat was considered too filthy to eat in his own Turkish culture. Now, as a student of ethnic conflict, Volkán points to such childhood memories to show how hatreds between groups are kept alive over the years, as each new generation is steeped in hostile biases like these.⁹ The psychological price of loyalty to one's own group can be antipathy toward another, especially when there is a long history of enmity between the groups.

Prejudices are a kind of emotional learning that occurs early in life, making these reactions especially hard to eradicate entirely, even in people who as adults feel it is wrong to hold them. “The emotions of prejudice are formed in childhood, while the beliefs that are used to justify it come later,” explained Thomas Pettigrew, a social psychologist at the University of California at Santa Cruz, who has studied prejudice for decades. “Later in life you may want to change your prejudice, but it is far easier to change your intellectual beliefs than your deep feelings. Many Southerners have confessed to me, for instance, that even though in their minds they no longer feel prejudice against blacks, they feel squeamish when they shake hands with a black. The feelings are left over from what they learned in their families as children.”¹⁰

The power of the stereotypes that buttress prejudice comes in part from a more neutral dynamic in the mind that makes stereotypes of all kinds self-confirming.¹¹ People remember more readily instances that support the stereotype while tending to discount instances that challenge it. On meeting at a party an emotionally open and warm Englishman who disconfirms the stereotype of the cold, reserved Briton, for example, people can tell themselves that he’s just unusual, or “he’s been drinking.”

The tenacity of subtle biases may explain why, while over the last forty years or so racial attitudes of American whites toward blacks have become increasingly more tolerant, more subtle forms of bias persist: people disavow racist attitudes while still acting with covert bias.¹² When asked, such people say they feel no bigotry, but in ambiguous situations still act in a biased way—though they give a rationale other than prejudice. Such bias can take the form, say, of a

white senior manager—who believes he has no prejudices—rejecting a black job applicant, ostensibly not because of his race but because his education and experience “are not quite right” for the job, while hiring a white applicant with about the same background. Or it might take the form of giving a briefing and helpful tips to a white salesman about to make a call, but somehow neglecting to do the same for a black or Hispanic salesman.

Zero Tolerance for Intolerance

If people’s long-held biases cannot be so easily weeded out, what *can* be changed is what they *do* about them. At Denny’s, for example, waitresses or branch managers who took it upon themselves to discriminate against blacks were seldom, if ever, challenged. Instead, some managers seem to have encouraged them, at least tacitly, to discriminate, even suggesting policies such as demanding payment for meals in advance from black customers only, denying blacks widely advertised free birthday meals, or locking the doors and claiming to be closed if a group of black customers was coming. As John P. Relman, an attorney who sued Denny’s on behalf of the black Secret Service agents, put it, “Denny’s management closed their eyes to what the field staff was doing. There must have been some message ... which freed up the inhibitions of local managers to act on their racist impulses.”¹³

But everything we know about the roots of prejudice and how to fight it effectively suggests that precisely this attitude—turning a blind eye to acts of bias—allows discrimination to thrive. To do nothing, in this context, is an act of consequence in itself, letting the virus of prejudice spread unopposed. More to the point than diversity training courses—or perhaps essential to their having much effect—is that the norms of a group be decisively changed by taking an active stance against any acts of discrimination, from the top echelons of management on down. Biases may not budge, but acts of prejudice can be quashed, if the climate is changed. As an IBM executive put it, “We don’t tolerate slights or insults in any way; respect for the individual is central to IBM’s culture.”¹⁴

If research on prejudice has any lesson for making a corporate culture more tolerant, it is to encourage people to speak out against even low-key acts of discrimination or harassment—offensive jokes, say, or the posting of girlie calendars demeaning to women

coworkers. One study found that when people in a group heard someone make ethnic slurs, it led others to do the same. The simple act of naming bias as such or objecting to it on the spot establishes a social atmosphere that discourages it; saying nothing serves to condone it.¹⁵ In this endeavor, those in positions of authority play a pivotal role: their failure to condemn acts of bias sends the tacit message that such acts are okay. Following through with action such as a reprimand sends a powerful message that bias is not trivial, but has real—and negative—consequences.

Here too the skills of emotional intelligence are an advantage, especially in having the social knack to know not just when but *how* to speak up productively against bias. Such feedback should be couched with all the finesse of an effective criticism, so it can be heard without defensiveness. If managers and coworkers do this naturally, or learn to do so, bias incidents are more likely to fall away.

The more effective diversity training courses set a new, organizationwide, explicit ground rule that makes bias in any form out-of-bounds, and so encourages people who have been silent witnesses and bystanders to voice their discomforts and objections. Another active ingredient in diversity courses is perspective-taking, a stance that encourages empathy and tolerance. To the degree that people come to understand the pain of those who feel discriminated against, they are more likely to speak out against it.

In short, it is more practical to try to suppress the expression of bias rather than trying to eliminate the attitude itself; stereotypes change very slowly, if at all. Simply putting people of different groups together does little or nothing to lower intolerance, as witness cases of school desegregation in which intergroup hostility rose rather than decreased. For the plethora of diversity training programs that are sweeping through the corporate world, this means a realistic goal is to change the *norms* of a group for showing prejudice or harassing; such programs can do much to raise into the collective awareness the idea that bigotry or harassment are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. But to expect that such a program will uproot deeply held prejudices is unrealistic.

Still, since prejudices are a variety of emotional learning, relearning *is* possible—though it takes time and should not be expected as the outcome of a one-time diversity training workshop. What can make a difference, though, is sustained camaraderie and daily efforts toward a common goal by people of different backgrounds. The lesson here is

from school desegregation: when groups fail to mix socially, instead forming hostile cliques, the negative stereotypes intensify. But when students have worked together as equals to attain a common goal, as on sports teams or in bands, their stereotypes break down—as can happen naturally in the workplace, when people work together as peers over the years.¹⁶

But to stop at battling prejudice in the workplace is to miss a greater opportunity: taking advantage of the creative and entrepreneurial possibilities that a diverse workforce can offer. As we shall see, a working group of varied strengths and perspectives, if it can operate in harmony, is likely to come to better, more creative, and more effective solutions than those same people working in isolation.

ORGANIZATIONAL SAVVY AND THE GROUP IQ

By the end of the century, a third of the American workforce will be “knowledge workers,” people whose productivity is marked by adding value to information—whether as market analysts, writers, or computer programmers. Peter Drucker, the eminent business maven who coined the term “knowledge worker,” points out that such workers’ expertise is highly specialized, and that their productivity depends on their efforts being coordinated as part of an organizational team: writers are not publishers; computer programmers are not software distributors. While people have always worked in tandem, notes Drucker, with knowledge work, “teams become the work unit rather than the individual himself.”¹⁷ And that suggests why emotional intelligence, the skills that help people harmonize, should become increasingly valued as a workplace asset in the years to come.

Perhaps the most rudimentary form of organizational teamwork is the meeting, that inescapable part of an executive’s lot—in a boardroom, on a conference call, in someone’s office. Meetings—bodies in the same room—are but the most obvious, and a somewhat antiquated, example of the sense in which work is shared. Electronic networks, e-mail, teleconferences, work teams, informal networks, and the like are emerging as new functional entities in organizations. To the degree that the explicit hierarchy as mapped on an organizational chart is the skeleton of an organization, these human touchpoints are its central nervous system.

Whenever people come together to collaborate, whether it be in an

executive planning meeting or as a team working toward a shared product, there is a very real sense in which they have a group IQ, the sum total of the talents and skills of all those involved. And how well they accomplish their task will be determined by how high that IQ is. The single most important element in group intelligence, it turns out, is not the average IQ in the academic sense, but rather in terms of emotional intelligence. The key to a high group IQ is social harmony. It is this ability to harmonize that, all other things being equal, will make one group especially talented, productive, and successful, and another—with members whose talent and skill are equal in other regards—do poorly.

The idea that there is a group intelligence at all comes from Robert Sternberg, the Yale psychologist, and Wendy Williams, a graduate student, who were seeking to understand why some groups are far more effective than others.¹⁸ After all, when people come together to work as a group, each brings certain talents—say, a high verbal fluency, creativity, empathy, or technical expertise. While a group can be no “smarter” than the sum total of all these specific strengths, it can be much dumber if its internal workings don’t allow people to share their talents. This maxim became evident when Sternberg and Williams recruited people to take part in groups that were given the creative challenge of coming up with an effective advertising campaign for a fictitious sweetener that showed promise as a sugar substitute.

One surprise was that people who were *too* eager to take part were a drag on the group, lowering its overall performance; these eager beavers were too controlling or domineering. Such people seemed to lack a basic element of social intelligence, the ability to recognize what is apt and what inappropriate in give-and-take. Another negative was having deadweight, members who did not participate.

The single most important factor in maximizing the excellence of a group’s product was the degree to which the members were able to create a state of internal harmony, which lets them take advantage of the full talent of their members. The overall performance of harmonious groups was helped by having a member who was particularly talented; groups with more friction were far less able to capitalize on having members of great ability. In groups where there are high levels of emotional and social static—whether it be from fear or anger, from rivalries or resentments—people cannot offer their best. But harmony allows a group to take maximum advantage of its

most creative and talented members' abilities.

While the moral of this tale is quite clear for, say, work teams, it has a more general implication for anyone who works within an organization. Many things people do at work depend on their ability to call on a loose network of fellow workers; different tasks can mean calling on different members of the network. In effect, this creates the chance for ad hoc groups, each with a membership tailored to offer an optimal array of talents, expertise, and placement. Just how well people can "work" a network—in effect, make it into a temporary, ad hoc team—is a crucial factor in on-the-job success.

Consider, for example, a study of star performers at Bell Labs, the world-famous scientific think tank near Princeton. The labs are peopled by engineers and scientists who are all at the top on academic IQ tests. But within this pool of talent, some emerge as stars, while others are only average in their output. What makes the difference between stars and the others is not their academic IQ, but their *emotional* IQ. They are better able to motivate themselves, and better able to work their informal networks into ad hoc teams.

The "stars" were studied in one division at the labs, a unit that creates and designs the electronic switches that control telephone systems—a highly sophisticated and demanding piece of electronic engineering.¹⁹ Because the work is beyond the capacity of any one person to tackle, it is done in teams that can range from just 5 or so engineers to 150. No single engineer knows enough to do the job alone; getting things done demands tapping other people's expertise. To find out what made the difference between those who were highly productive and those who were only average, Robert Kelley and Janet Caplan had managers and peers nominate the 10 to 15 percent of engineers who stood out as stars.

When they compared the stars with everyone else, the most dramatic finding, at first, was the paucity of differences between the two groups. "Based on a wide range of cognitive and social measures, from standard tests for IQ to personality inventories, there's little meaningful difference in innate abilities," Kelley and Caplan wrote in the *Harvard Business Review*. "As it develops, academic talent was not a good predictor of on-the-job productivity," nor was IQ.

But after detailed interviews, the critical differences emerged in the internal and interpersonal strategies "stars" used to get their work done. One of the most important turned out to be a rapport with a network of key people. Things go more smoothly for the standouts

because they put time into cultivating good relationships with people whose services might be needed in a crunch as part of an instant ad hoc team to solve a problem or handle a crisis. “A middle performer at Bell Labs talked about being stumped by a technical problem,” Kelley and Caplan observed. “He painstakingly called various technical gurus and then waited, wasting valuable time while calls went unreturned and e-mail messages unanswered. Star performers, however, rarely face such situations because they do the work of building reliable networks before they actually need them. When they call someone for advice, stars almost always get a faster answer.”

Informal networks are especially critical for handling unanticipated problems. “The formal organization is set up to handle easily anticipated problems,” one study of these networks observes. “But when unexpected problems arise, the informal organization kicks in. Its complex web of social ties form every time colleagues communicate, and solidify over time into surprisingly stable networks. Highly adaptive, informal networks move diagonally and elliptically, skipping entire functions to get things done.”²⁰

The analysis of informal networks shows that just because people work together day to day they will not necessarily trust each other with sensitive information (such as a desire to change jobs, or resentment about how a manager or peer behaves), nor turn to them in crisis. Indeed, a more sophisticated view of informal networks shows that there are at least three varieties: communications webs—who talks to whom; expertise networks, based on which people are turned to for advice; and trust networks. Being a main node in the expertise network means someone will have a reputation for technical excellence, which often leads to a promotion. But there is virtually no relationship between being an expert and being seen as someone people can trust with their secrets, doubts, and vulnerabilities. A petty office tyrant or micromanager may be high on expertise, but will be so low on trust that it will undermine their ability to manage, and effectively exclude them from informal networks. The stars of an organization are often those who have thick connections on all networks, whether communications, expertise, or trust.

Beyond a mastery of these essential networks, other forms of organizational savvy the Bell Labs stars had mastered included effectively coordinating their efforts in teamwork; being leaders in building consensus; being able to see things from the perspective of others, such as customers or others on a work team; persuasiveness;

and promoting cooperation while avoiding conflicts. While all of these rely on social skills, the stars also displayed another kind of knack: taking initiative—being self-motivated enough to take on responsibilities above and beyond their stated job—and self-management in the sense of regulating their time and work commitments well. All such skills, of course, are aspects of emotional intelligence.

There are strong signs that what is true at Bell Labs augurs for the future of all corporate life, a tomorrow where the basic skills of emotional intelligence will be ever more important, in teamwork, in cooperation, in helping people learn together how to work more effectively. As knowledge-based services and intellectual capital become more central to corporations, improving the way people work together will be a major way to leverage intellectual capital, making a critical competitive difference. To thrive, if not survive, corporations would do well to boost their collective emotional intelligence.

Mind and Medicine

“Who taught you all this, Doctor?”

The reply came promptly:

“Suffering.”

—ALBERT CAMUS, *The Plague*

A vague ache in my groin sent me to my doctor. Nothing seemed unusual until he looked at the results of a urine test. I had traces of blood in my urine.

“I want you to go to the hospital and get some tests ... kidney function, cytology ...,” he said in a businesslike tone.

I don’t know what he said next. My mind seemed to freeze at the word *cytology*. Cancer.

I have a foggy memory of his explaining to me when and where to go for diagnostic tests. It was the simplest instruction, but I had to ask him to repeat it three or four times. *Cytology*—my mind would not leave the word. That one word made me feel as though I had just been mugged at my own front door.

Why should I have reacted so strongly? My doctor was just being thorough and competent, checking the limbs in a diagnostic decision tree. There was a tiny likelihood that cancer was the problem. But this rational analysis was irrelevant at that moment. In the land of the sick, emotions reign supreme; fear is a thought away. We can be so emotionally fragile while we are ailing because our mental well-being is based in part on the illusion of invulnerability. Sickness—especially a severe illness—bursts that illusion, attacking the premise that our private world is safe and secure. Suddenly we feel weak, helpless, and vulnerable.

The problem is when medical personnel ignore how patients are reacting *emotionally*, even while attending to their physical condition. This inattention to the emotional reality of illness neglects a growing body of evidence showing that people’s emotional states can play a sometimes significant role in their vulnerability to disease and in the

course of their recovery. Modern medical care too often lacks emotional intelligence.

For the patient, any encounter with a nurse or physician can be a chance for reassuring information, comfort, and solace—or, if handled unfortunately, an invitation to despair. But too often medical caregivers are rushed or indifferent to patients' distress. To be sure, there are compassionate nurses and physicians who take the time to reassure and inform as well as administer medically. But the trend is toward a professional universe in which institutional imperatives can leave medical staff oblivious to the vulnerabilities of patients, or feeling too pressed to do anything about them. With the hard realities of a medical system increasingly timed by accountants, things seem to be getting worse.

Beyond the humanitarian argument for physicians to offer care along with cure, there are other compelling reasons to consider the psychological and social reality of patients as being within the medical realm rather than separate from it. By now a scientific case can be made that there is a margin of *medical* effectiveness, both in prevention and treatment, that can be gained by treating people's emotional state along with their medical condition. Not in every case or every condition, of course. But looking at data from hundreds and hundreds of cases, there is on average enough increment of medical benefit to suggest that an *emotional* intervention should be a standard part of medical care for the range of serious disease.

Historically, medicine in modern society has defined its mission in terms of curing *disease*—the medical disorder—while overlooking *illness*—the patient's experience of disease. Patients, by going along with this view of their problem, join a quiet conspiracy to ignore how they are reacting emotionally to their medical problems—or to dismiss those reactions as irrelevant to the course of the problem itself. That attitude is reinforced by a medical model that dismisses entirely the idea that mind influences body in any consequential way.

Yet there is an equally unproductive ideology in the other direction: the notion that people can cure themselves of even the most pernicious disease simply by making themselves happy or thinking positive thoughts, or that they are somehow to blame for having gotten sick in the first place. The result of this attitude-will-cure-all rhetoric has been to create widespread confusion and misunderstanding about the extent to which illness can be affected by the mind, and, perhaps worse, sometimes to make people feel guilty

for having a disease, as though it were a sign of some moral lapse or spiritual unworthiness.

The truth lies somewhere between these extremes. By sorting through the scientific data, my aim is to clarify the contradictions and replace the nonsense with a clearer understanding of the degree to which our emotions—and emotional intelligence—play a part in health and disease.

THE BODY'S MIND: HOW EMOTIONS MATTER FOR HEALTH

In 1974 a finding in a laboratory at the School of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Rochester, rewrote biology's map of the body: Robert Ader, a psychologist, discovered that the immune system, like the brain, could learn. His result was a shock; the prevailing wisdom in medicine had been that only the brain and central nervous system could respond to experience by changing how they behaved. Ader's finding led to the investigation of what are turning out to be myriad ways the central nervous system and the immune system communicate—biological pathways that make the mind, the emotions, and the body not separate, but intimately entwined.

In his experiment white rats had been given a medication that artificially suppressed the quantity of disease-fighting T cells circulating in their blood. Each time they received the medication, they ate it along with saccharin-laced water. But Ader discovered that giving the rats the saccharin-flavored water alone, without the suppressive medication, still resulted in a lowering of the T-cell count—to the point that some of the rats were getting sick and dying. Their immune system had learned to suppress T cells in response to the flavored water. That just should not have happened, according to the best scientific understanding at the time.

The immune system is the “body’s brain,” as neuroscientist Francisco Varela, at Paris’s Ecole Polytechnique, puts it, defining the body’s own sense of self—of what belongs within it and what does not.¹ Immune cells travel in the bloodstream throughout the entire body, contacting virtually every other cell. Those cells they recognize, they leave alone; those they fail to recognize, they attack. The attack either defends us against viruses, bacteria, and cancer or, if the immune cells misidentify some of the body’s own cells, creates an autoimmune disease such as allergy or lupus. Until the day Ader made

his serendipitous discovery, every anatomist, every physician, and every biologist believed that the brain (along with its extensions throughout the body via the central nervous system) and the immune system were separate entities, neither able to influence the operation of the other. There was no pathway that could connect the brain centers monitoring what the rat tasted with the areas of bone marrow that manufacture T cells. Or so it had been thought for a century.

Over the years since then, Ader's modest discovery has forced a new look at the links between the immune system and the central nervous system. The field that studies this, psychoneuroimmunology, or PNI, is now a leading-edge medical science. Its very name acknowledges the links: *psycho*, or "mind"; *neuro*, for the neuroendocrine system (which subsumes the nervous system and hormone systems); and *immunology*, for the immune system.

A network of researchers is finding that the chemical messengers that operate most extensively in both brain and immune system are those that are most dense in neural areas that regulate emotion.² Some of the strongest evidence for a direct physical pathway allowing emotions to impact the immune system has come from David Felten, a colleague of Ader's. Felten began by noting that emotions have a powerful effect on the autonomic nervous system, which regulates everything from how much insulin is secreted to blood-pressure levels. Felten, working with his wife, Suzanne, and other colleagues, then detected a meeting point where the autonomic nervous system directly talks to lymphocytes and macrophages, cells of the immune system.³

In electron-microscope studies, they found synapselike contacts where the nerve terminals of the autonomic system have endings that directly abut these immune cells. This physical contact point allows the nerve cells to release neurotransmitters to regulate the immune cells; indeed, they signal back and forth. The finding is revolutionary. No one had suspected that immune cells could be targets of messages from the nerves.

To test how important these nerve endings were in the workings of the immune system, Felten went a step further. In experiments with animals he removed some nerves from lymph nodes and spleen—where immune cells are stored or made—and then used viruses to challenge the immune system. The result: a huge drop in immune response to the virus. His conclusion is that without those nerve endings the immune system simply does not respond as it should to

the challenge of an invading virus or bacterium. In short, the nervous system not only connects to the immune system, but is essential for proper immune function.

Another key pathway linking emotions and the immune system is via the influence of the hormones released under stress. The catecholamines (epinephrine and norepinephrine—otherwise known as adrenaline and noradrenaline), cortisol and prolactin, and the natural opiates beta-endorphin and enkephalin are all released during stress arousal. Each has a strong impact on immune cells. While the relationships are complex, the main influence is that while these hormones surge through the body, the immune cells are hampered in their function: stress suppresses immune resistance, at least temporarily, presumably in a conservation of energy that puts a priority on the more immediate emergency, which is more pressing for survival. But if stress is constant and intense, that suppression may become long-lasting.⁴

Microbiologists and other scientists are finding more and more such connections between the brain and the cardiovascular and immune systems—having first had to accept the once-radical notion that they exist at all.⁵

TOXIC EMOTIONS: THE CLINICAL DATA

Despite such evidence, many or most physicians are still skeptical that emotions matter clinically. One reason is that while many studies have found stress and negative emotions to weaken the effectiveness of various immune cells, it is not always clear that the range of these changes is great enough to make a *medical* difference.

Even so, an increasing number of physicians acknowledge the place of emotions in medicine. For instance, Dr. Camran Nezhat, an eminent gynecological laparoscopic surgeon at Stanford University, says, “If someone scheduled for surgery tells me she’s panicked that day and does not want to go through with it, I cancel the surgery.” Nezhat explains, “Every surgeon knows that people who are extremely scared do terribly in surgery. They bleed too much, they have more infections and complications. They have a harder time recovering. It’s much better if they are calm.”

The reason is straightforward: panic and anxiety hike blood pressure, and veins distended by pressure bleed more profusely when

cut by the surgeon's knife. Excess bleeding is one of the most troublesome surgical complications, one that can sometimes lead to death.

Beyond such medical anecdotes, evidence for the *clinical* importance of emotions has been mounting steadily. Perhaps the most compelling data on the medical significance of emotion come from a mass analysis combining results from 101 smaller studies into a single larger one of several thousand men and women. The study confirms that perturbing emotions are bad for health—to a degree.⁶ People who experienced chronic anxiety, long periods of sadness and pessimism, unremitting tension or incessant hostility, relentless cynicism or suspiciousness, were found to have *double* the risk of disease—including asthma, arthritis, headaches, peptic ulcers, and heart disease (each representative of major, broad categories of disease). This order of magnitude makes distressing emotions as toxic a risk factor as, say, smoking or high cholesterol are for heart disease—in other words, a major threat to health.

To be sure, this is a broad statistical link, and by no means indicates that everyone who has such chronic feelings will thus more easily fall prey to a disease. But the evidence for a potent role for emotion in disease is far more extensive than this one study of studies indicates. Taking a more detailed look at the data for specific emotions, especially the big three—anger, anxiety, and depression—makes clearer some specific ways that feelings have medical significance, even if the biological mechanisms by which such emotions have their effect are yet to be fully understood.⁷

When Anger Is Suicidal

A while back, the man said, a bump on the side of his car led to a fruitless and frustrating journey. After endless insurance company red tape and auto body shops that did more damage, he still owed \$800. And it wasn't even his fault. He was so fed up that whenever he got into the car he was overcome with disgust. He finally sold the car in frustration. Years later the memories still made the man livid with outrage.

This bitter memory was brought to mind purposely, as part of a study of anger in heart patients at Stanford University Medical School. All the patients in the study had, like this embittered man, suffered a first heart attack, and the question was whether anger might have a significant impact of some kind on their heart function. The effect was

striking: while the patients recounted incidents that made them mad, the pumping efficiency of their hearts dropped by five percentage points.⁸ Some of the patients showed a drop in pumping efficiency of 7 percent or greater—a range that cardiologists regard as a sign of a myocardial ischemia, a dangerous drop in blood flow to the heart itself.

The drop in pumping efficiency was not seen with other distressing feelings, such as anxiety, nor during physical exertion; anger seems to be the one emotion that does most harm to the heart. While recalling the upsetting incident, the patients said they were only about half as mad as they had been while it was happening, suggesting that their hearts would have been even more greatly hampered during an actual angry encounter.

This finding is part of a larger network of evidence emerging from dozens of studies pointing to the power of anger to damage the heart.⁹ The old idea has not held up that a hurried, high-pressure Type-A personality is at great risk from heart disease, but from that failed theory has emerged a new finding: it is hostility that puts people at risk.

Much of the data on hostility has come from research by Dr. Redford Williams at Duke University.¹⁰ For example, Williams found that those physicians who had had the highest scores on a test of hostility while still in medical school were seven times as likely to have died by the age of fifty as were those with low hostility scores—being prone to anger was a stronger predictor of dying young than were other risk factors such as smoking, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. And findings by a colleague, Dr. John Barefoot at the University of North Carolina, show that in heart patients undergoing angiography, in which a tube is inserted into the coronary artery to measure lesions, scores on a test of hostility correlate with the extent and severity of coronary artery disease.

Of course, no one is saying that anger alone causes coronary artery disease; it is one of several interacting factors. As Peter Kaufman, acting chief of the Behavioral Medicine Branch of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, explained to me, “We can’t yet sort out whether anger and hostility play a causal role in the early development of coronary artery disease, or whether it intensifies the problem once heart disease has begun, or both. But take a twenty-year-old who repeatedly gets angry. Each episode of anger adds an additional stress to the heart by increasing his heart rate and blood

pressure. When that is repeated over and over again, it can do damage,” especially because the turbulence of blood flowing through the coronary artery with each heartbeat “can cause microtears in the vessel, where plaque develops. If your heart rate is faster and blood pressure is higher because you’re habitually angry, then over thirty years that may lead to a faster buildup of plaque, and so lead to coronary artery disease.”¹¹

Once heart disease develops, the mechanisms triggered by anger affect the very efficiency of the heart as a pump, as was shown in the study of angry memories in heart patients. The net effect is to make anger particularly lethal in those who already have heart disease. For instance, a Stanford University Medical School study of 1,012 men and women who suffered from a first heart attack and then were followed for up to eight years showed that those men who were most aggressive and hostile at the outset suffered the highest rate of second heart attacks.¹² There were similar results in a Yale School of Medicine study of 929 men who had survived heart attacks and were tracked for up to ten years.¹³ Those who had been rated as easily roused to anger were three times more likely to die of cardiac arrest than those who were more even-tempered. If they also had high cholesterol levels, the added risk from anger was five times higher.

The Yale researchers point out that it may not be anger alone that heightens the risk of death from heart disease, but rather intense negative emotionality of any kind that regularly sends surges of stress hormones through the body. But overall, the strongest scientific links between emotions and heart disease are to anger: a Harvard Medical School study asked more than fifteen hundred men and women who had suffered heart attacks to describe their emotional state in the hours before the attack. Being angry more than doubled the risk of cardiac arrest in people who already had heart disease; the heightened risk lasted for about two hours after the anger was aroused.¹⁴

These findings do not mean that people should try to suppress anger when it is appropriate. Indeed, there is evidence that trying to completely suppress such feelings in the heat of the moment actually results in magnifying the body’s agitation and may raise blood pressure.¹⁵ On the other hand, as we saw in [Chapter 5](#), the net effect of ventilating anger every time it is felt is simply to feed it, making it a more likely response to any annoying situation. Williams resolves this paradox by concluding that whether anger is expressed or not is less important than whether it is chronic. An occasional display of

hostility is not dangerous to health; the problem arises when hostility becomes so constant as to define an antagonistic personal style—one marked by repeated feelings of mistrust and cynicism and the propensity to snide comments and put-downs, as well as more obvious bouts of temper and rage.¹⁶

The hopeful news is that chronic anger need not be a death sentence: hostility is a habit that can change. One group of heart-attack patients at Stanford University Medical School was enrolled in a program designed to help them soften the attitudes that gave them a short temper. This anger-control training resulted in a second-heart-attack rate 44 percent lower than for those who had not tried to change their hostility.¹⁷ A program designed by Williams has had similar beneficial results.¹⁸ Like the Stanford program, it teaches basic elements of emotional intelligence, particularly mindfulness of anger as it begins to stir, the ability to regulate it once it has begun, and empathy. Patients are asked to jot down cynical or hostile thoughts as they notice them. If the thoughts persist, they try to short-circuit them by saying (or thinking), “Stop!” And they are encouraged to purposely substitute reasonable thoughts for cynical, mistrustful ones during trying situations—for instance, if an elevator is delayed, to search for a benign reason rather than harbor anger against some imagined thoughtless person who may be responsible for the delay. For frustrating encounters, they learn the ability to see things from the other person’s perspective—empathy is a balm for anger.

As Williams told me, “The antidote to hostility is to develop a more trusting heart. All it takes is the right motivation. When people see that their hostility can lead to an early grave, they are ready to try.”

Stress: Anxiety Out of Proportion and Out of Place

I just feel anxious and tense all the time. It all started in high school. I was a straight-A student, and I worried constantly about my grades, whether the other kids and the teachers liked me, being prompt for classes—things like that. There was a lot of pressure from my parents to do well in school and to be a good role model.... I guess I just caved in to all that pressure, because my stomach problems began in my sophomore year of high school. Since that time, I’ve had to be really careful about drinking caffeine and eating spicy meals. I notice that when I’m feeling worried or tense my stomach will flare up, and since I’m usually worried about something, I’m always nauseous.¹⁹

Anxiety—the distress evoked by life's pressures—is perhaps the emotion with the greatest weight of scientific evidence connecting it to the onset of sickness and course of recovery. When anxiety helps us prepare to deal with some danger (a presumed utility in evolution), then it has served us well. But in modern life anxiety is more often out of proportion and out of place—distress comes in the face of situations that we must live with or that are conjured by the mind, not real dangers we need to confront. Repeated bouts of anxiety signal high levels of stress. The woman whose constant worrying primes her gastrointestinal trouble is a textbook example of how anxiety and stress exacerbate medical problems.

In a 1993 review in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* of extensive research on the stress-disease link, Yale psychologist Bruce McEwen noted a broad spectrum of effects: compromising immune function to the point that it can speed the metastasis of cancer; increasing vulnerability to viral infections; exacerbating plaque formation leading to atherosclerosis and blood clotting leading to myocardial infarction; accelerating the onset of Type I diabetes and the course of Type II diabetes; and worsening or triggering an asthma attack.²⁰ Stress can also lead to ulceration of the gastrointestinal tract, triggering symptoms in ulcerative colitis and in inflammatory bowel disease. The brain itself is susceptible to the long-term effects of sustained stress, including damage to the hippocampus, and so to memory. In general, says McEwen, “evidence is mounting that the nervous system is subject to ‘wear and tear’ as a result of stressful experiences.”²¹

Particularly compelling evidence for the medical impact from distress has come from studies with infectious diseases such as colds, the flu, and herpes. We are continually exposed to such viruses, but ordinarily our immune system fights them off—except that under emotional stress those defenses more often fail. In experiments in which the robustness of the immune system has been assayed directly, stress and anxiety have been found to weaken it, but in most such results it is unclear whether the range of immune weakening is of clinical significance—that is, great enough to open the way to disease.²² For that reason stronger scientific links of stress and anxiety to medical vulnerability come from prospective studies: those that start with healthy people and monitor first a heightening of distress followed by a weakening of the immune system and the onset of illness.

In one of the most scientifically compelling studies, Sheldon Cohen, a psychologist at Carnegie-Mellon University, working with scientists at a specialized colds research unit in Sheffield, England, carefully assessed how much stress people were feeling in their lives, and then systematically exposed them to a cold virus. Not everyone so exposed actually comes down with a cold; a robust immune system can—and constantly does—resist the cold virus. Cohen found that the more stress in their lives, the more likely people were to catch cold. Among those with little stress, 27 percent came down with a cold after being exposed to the virus; among those with the most stressful lives, 47 percent got the cold—direct evidence that stress itself weakens the immune system.²³ (While this may be one of those scientific results that confirms what everyone has observed or suspected all along, it is considered a landmark finding because of its scientific rigor.)

Likewise, married couples who for three months kept daily checklists of hassles and upsetting events such as marital fights showed a strong pattern: three or four days after an especially intense batch of upsets, they came down with a cold or upper-respiratory infection. That lag period is precisely the incubation time for many common cold viruses, suggesting that being exposed while they were most worried and upset made them especially vulnerable.²⁴

The same stress-infection pattern holds for the herpes virus—both the type that causes cold sores on the lip and the type that causes genital lesions. Once people have been exposed to the herpes virus, it stays latent in the body, flaring up from time to time. The activity of the herpes virus can be tracked by levels of antibodies to it in the blood. Using this measure, reactivation of the herpes virus has been found in medical students undergoing year-end exams, in recently separated women, and among people under constant pressure from caring for a family member with Alzheimer's disease.²⁵

The toll of anxiety is not just that it lowers the immune response; other research is showing adverse effects on the cardiovascular system. While chronic hostility and repeated episodes of anger seem to put men at greatest risk for heart disease, the more deadly emotion in women may be anxiety and fear. In research at Stanford University School of Medicine with more than a thousand men and women who had suffered a first heart attack, those women who went on to suffer a second heart attack were marked by high levels of fearfulness and anxiety. In many cases the fearfulness took the form of crippling phobias: after their first heart attack the patients stopped driving, quit

their jobs, or avoided going out.²⁶

The insidious physical effects of mental stress and anxiety—the kind produced by high-pressure jobs, or high-pressure lives such as that of a single mother juggling day care and a job—are being pinpointed at an anatomically fine-grained level. For example, Stephen Manuck, a University of Pittsburgh psychologist, put thirty volunteers through a rigorous, anxiety-riddled ordeal in a laboratory while he monitored the men's blood, assaying a substance secreted by blood platelets called adenosine triphosphate, or ATP, which can trigger blood-vessel changes that may lead to heart attacks and strokes. While the volunteers were under the intense stress, their ATP levels rose sharply, as did their heart rate and blood pressure.

Understandably, health risks seem greatest for those whose jobs are high in “strain”: having high-pressure performance demands while having little or no control over how to get the job done (a predicament that gives bus drivers, for instance, a high rate of hypertension). For example, in a study of 569 patients with colorectal cancer and a matched comparison group, those who said that in the previous ten years they had experienced severe on-the-job aggravation were five and a half times more likely to have developed the cancer compared to those with no such stress in their lives.²⁷

Because the medical toll of distress is so broad, relaxation techniques—which directly counter the physiological arousal of stress—are being used clinically to ease the symptoms of a wide variety of chronic illnesses. These include cardiovascular disease, some types of diabetes, arthritis, asthma, gastrointestinal disorders, and chronic pain, to name a few. To the degree any symptoms are worsened by stress and emotional distress, helping patients become more relaxed and able to handle their turbulent feelings can often offer some reprieve.²⁸

The Medical Costs of Depression

She had been diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer, a return and spread of the malignancy several years after what she had thought was successful surgery for the disease. Her doctor could no longer talk of a cure, and the chemotherapy, at best, might offer just a few more months of life. Understandably, she was depressed—so much so that whenever she went to her oncologist, she found herself at some point bursting out into tears. Her oncologist's response each time: asking her to leave the

office immediately.

Apart from the hurtfulness of the oncologist's coldness, did it matter medically that he would not deal with his patient's constant sadness? By the time a disease has become so virulent, it would be unlikely that any emotion would have an appreciable effect on its progress. While the woman's depression most certainly dimmed the quality of her final months, the medical evidence that melancholy might affect the course of cancer is as yet mixed.²⁹ But cancer aside, a smattering of studies suggest a role for depression in many other medical conditions, especially in worsening a sickness once it has begun. The evidence is mounting that for patients with serious disease who are depressed, it would pay medically to treat their depression too.

One complication in treating depression in medical patients is that its symptoms, including loss of appetite and lethargy, are easily mistaken for signs of other diseases, particularly by physicians with little training in psychiatric diagnosis. That inability to diagnose depression may itself add to the problem, since it means that a patient's depression—like that of the weepy breast-cancer patient—goes unnoticed and untreated. And that failure to diagnose and treat may add to the risk of death in severe disease.

For instance, of 100 patients who received bone marrow transplants, 12 of the 13 who had been depressed died within the first year of the transplant, while 34 of the remaining 87 were still alive two years later.³⁰ And in patients with chronic kidney failure who were receiving dialysis, those who were diagnosed with major depression were most likely to die within the following two years; depression was a stronger predictor of death than any medical sign.³¹ Here the route connecting emotion to medical status was not biological but attitudinal: The depressed patients were much worse about complying with their medical regimens—cheating on their diets, for example, which put them at higher risk.

Heart disease too seems to be exacerbated by depression. In a study of 2,832 middle-aged men and women tracked for twelve years, those who felt a sense of nagging despair and hopelessness had a heightened rate of death from heart disease.³² And for the 3 percent or so who were most severely depressed, the death rate from heart disease, compared to the rate for those with no feelings of depression, was four times greater.

Depression seems to pose a particularly grave medical risk for heart

attack survivors.³³ In a study of patients in a Montreal hospital who were discharged after being treated for a first heart attack, depressed patients had a sharply higher risk of dying within the following six months. Among the one in eight patients who were seriously depressed, the death rate was five times higher than for others with comparable disease—an effect as great as that of major medical risks for cardiac death, such as left ventricular dysfunction or a history of previous heart attacks. Among the possible mechanisms that might explain why depression so greatly increases the odds of a later heart attack are its effects on heart rate variability, increasing the risk of fatal arrhythmias.

Depression has also been found to complicate recovery from hip fracture. In a study of elderly women with hip fracture, several thousand were given psychiatric evaluations on their admission to the hospital. Those who were depressed on admission stayed an average of eight days longer than those with comparable injury but no depression, and were only a third as likely ever to walk again. But depressed women who had psychiatric help for their depression along with other medical care needed less physical therapy to walk again and had fewer rehospitalizations over the three months after their return home from the hospital.

Likewise, in a study of patients whose condition was so dire that they were among the top 10 percent of those using medical services—often because of having multiple illnesses, such as both heart disease and diabetes—about one in six had serious depression. When these patients were treated for the problem, the number of days per year that they were disabled dropped from 79 to 51 for those who had major depression, and from 62 days per year to just 18 in those who had been treated for mild depression.³⁴

THE MEDICAL BENEFITS OF POSITIVE FEELINGS

The cumulative evidence for adverse medical effects from anger, anxiety, and depression, then, is compelling. Both anger and anxiety, when chronic, can make people more susceptible to a range of disease. And while depression may not make people more vulnerable to becoming ill, it does seem to impede medical recovery and heighten the risk of death, especially with more frail patients with severe conditions.

But if chronic emotional distress in its many forms is toxic, the opposite range of emotion can be tonic—to a degree. This by no means says that positive emotion is curative, or that laughter or happiness alone will turn the course of a serious disease. The edge positive emotions offer seems subtle, but, by using studies with large numbers of people, can be teased out of the mass of complex variables that affect the course of disease.

The Price of Pessimism—and Advantages of Optimism

As with depression, there are medical costs to pessimism—and corresponding benefits from optimism. For example, 122 men who had their first heart attack were evaluated on their degree of optimism or pessimism. Eight years later, of the 25 most pessimistic men, 21 had died; of the 25 most optimistic, just 6 had died. Their mental outlook proved a better predictor of survival than any medical risk factor, including the amount of damage to the heart in the first attack, artery blockage, cholesterol level, or blood pressure. And in other research, patients going into artery bypass surgery who were more optimistic had a much faster recovery and fewer medical complications during and after surgery than did more pessimistic patients.³⁵

Like its near cousin optimism, hope has healing power. People who have a great deal of hopefulness are, understandably, better able to bear up under trying circumstances, including medical difficulties. In a study of people paralyzed from spinal injuries, those who had more hope were able to gain greater levels of physical mobility compared to other patients with similar degrees of injury, but who felt less hopeful. Hope is especially telling in paralysis from spinal injury, since this medical tragedy typically involves a man who is paralyzed in his twenties by an accident and will remain so for the rest of his life. How he reacts emotionally will have broad consequences for the degree to which he will make the efforts that might bring him greater physical and social functioning.³⁶

Just why an optimistic or pessimistic outlook should have health consequences is open to any of several explanations. One theory proposes that pessimism leads to depression, which in turn interferes with the resistance of the immune system to tumors and infection—an unproven speculation at present. Or it may be that pessimists neglect themselves—some studies have found that pessimists smoke and drink

more, and exercise less, than optimists, and are generally much more careless about their health habits. Or it may one day turn out that the physiology of hopefulness is itself somehow helpful biologically to the body's fight against disease.

With a Little Help From My Friends: The Medical Value of Relationships

Add the sounds of silence to the list of emotional risks to health—and close emotional ties to the list of protective factors. Studies done over two decades involving more than thirty-seven thousand people show that social isolation—the sense that you have nobody with whom you can share your private feelings or have close contact—doubles the chances of sickness or death.³⁷ Isolation itself, a 1987 report in *Science* concluded, “is as significant to mortality rates as smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, and lack of physical exercise.” Indeed, smoking increases mortality risk by a factor of just 1.6, while social isolation does so by a factor of 2.0, making it a greater health risk.³⁸

Isolation is harder on men than on women. Isolated men were two to three times more likely to die as were men with close social ties; for isolated women, the risk was one and a half times greater than for more socially connected women. The difference between men and women in the impact of isolation may be because women’s relationships tend to be emotionally closer than men’s; a few strands of such social ties for a woman may be more comforting than the same small number of friendships for a man.

Of course, solitude is not the same as isolation; many people who live on their own or see few friends are content and healthy. Rather, it is the subjective sense of being cut off from people and having no one to turn to that is the medical risk. This finding is ominous in light of the increasing isolation bred by solitary TV-watching and the falling away of social habits such as clubs and visits in modern urban societies, and suggests an added value to self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous as surrogate communities.

The power of isolation as a mortality risk factor—and the healing power of close ties—can be seen in the study of one hundred bone marrow transplant patients.³⁹ Among patients who felt they had strong emotional support from their spouse, family, or friends, 54 percent survived the transplants after two years, versus just 20

percent among those who reported little such support. Similarly, elderly people who suffer heart attacks, but have two or more people in their lives they can rely on for emotional support, are more than twice as likely to survive longer than a year after an attack than are those people with no such support.⁴⁰

Perhaps the most telling testimony to the healing potency of emotional ties is a Swedish study published in 1993.⁴¹ All the men living in the Swedish city of Göteborg who were born in 1933 were offered a free medical exam; seven years later the 752 men who had come for the exam were contacted again. Of these, 41 had died in the intervening years.

Men who had originally reported being under intense emotional stress had a death rate three times greater than those who said their lives were calm and placid. The emotional distress was due to events such as serious financial trouble, feeling insecure at work or being forced out of a job, being the object of a legal action, or going through a divorce. Having had three or more of these troubles within the year before the exam was a stronger predictor of dying within the ensuing seven years than were medical indicators such as high blood pressure, high concentrations of blood triglycerides, or high serum cholesterol levels.

Yet among men who said they had a dependable web of intimacy—a wife, close friends, and the like—*there was no relationship whatever* between high stress levels and death rate. Having people to turn to and talk with, people who could offer solace, help, and suggestions, protected them from the deadly impact of life's rigors and trauma.

The quality of relationships as well as their sheer number seems key to buffering stress. Negative relationships take their own toll. Marital arguments, for example, have a negative impact on the immune system.⁴² One study of college roommates found that the more they disliked each other, the more susceptible they were to colds and the flu, and the more frequently they went to doctors. John Cacioppo, the Ohio State University psychologist who did the roommate study, told me, “It’s the most important relationships in your life, the people you see day in and day out, that seem to be crucial for your health. And the more significant the relationship is in your life, the more it matters for your health.”⁴³

The Healing Power of Emotional Support

In *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*, Robin advises a young follower: “Tell us thy troubles and speak freely. A flow of words doth ever ease the heart of sorrows; it is like opening the waste where the mill dam is overfull.” This bit of folk wisdom has great merit; unburdening a troubled heart appears to be good medicine. The scientific corroboration of Robin’s advice comes from James Pennebaker, a Southern Methodist University psychologist, who has shown in a series of experiments that getting people to talk about the thoughts that trouble them most has a beneficial medical effect.⁴⁴ His method is remarkably simple: he asks people to write, for fifteen to twenty minutes a day over five or so days, about, for example, “the most traumatic experience of your entire life,” or some pressing worry of the moment. What people write can be kept entirely to themselves if they like.

The net effect of this confessional is striking: enhanced immune function, significant drops in health-center visits in the following six months, fewer days missed from work, and even improved liver enzyme function. Moreover, those whose writing showed most evidence of turbulent feelings had the greatest improvements in their immune function. A specific pattern emerged as the “healthiest” way to ventilate troubling feelings: at first expressing a high level of sadness, anxiety, anger—whatever troubling feelings the topic brought up; then, over the course of the next several days weaving a narrative, finding some meaning in the trauma or travail.

That process, of course, seems akin to what happens when people explore such troubles in psychotherapy. Indeed, Pennebaker’s findings suggest one reason why other studies show medical patients given psychotherapy in addition to surgery or medical treatment often fare better *medically* than do those who receive medical treatment alone.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most powerful demonstration of the clinical power of emotional support was in groups at Stanford University Medical School for women with advanced metastatic breast cancer. After an initial treatment, often including surgery, these women’s cancer had returned and was spreading through their bodies. It was only a matter of time, clinically speaking, until the spreading cancer killed them. Dr. David Spiegel, who conducted the study, was himself stunned by the findings, as was the medical community: women with advanced breast cancer who went to weekly meetings with others survived *twice as long* as did women with the same disease who faced it on their own.⁴⁶

All the women received standard medical care; the only difference

was that some also went to the groups, where they were able to unburden themselves with others who understood what they faced and were willing to listen to their fears, their pain, and their anger. Often this was the only place where the women could be open about these emotions, because other people in their lives dreaded talking with them about the cancer and their imminent death. Women who attended the groups lived for thirty-seven additional months, on average, while those with the disease who did not go to the groups died, on average, in nineteen months—a gain in life expectancy for such patients beyond the reach of any medication or other medical treatment. As Dr. Jimmie Holland, the chief psychiatric oncologist at Sloan-Kettering Memorial Hospital, a cancer treatment center in New York City, put it to me, “Every cancer patient should be in a group like this.” Indeed, if it had been a new drug that produced the extended life expectancy, pharmaceutical companies would be battling to produce it.

BRINGING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TO MEDICAL CARE

The day a routine checkup spotted some blood in my urine, my doctor sent me for a diagnostic test in which I was injected with a radioactive dye. I lay on a table while an overhead X-ray machine took successive images of the dye’s progression through my kidneys and bladder. I had company for the test: a close friend, a physician himself, happened to be visiting for a few days and offered to come to the hospital with me. He sat in the room while the X-ray machine, on an automated track, rotated for new camera angles, whirred and clicked; rotated, whirred, clicked.

The test took an hour and a half. At the very end a kidney specialist hurried into the room, quickly introduced himself, and disappeared to scan the X-rays. He didn’t return to tell me what they showed.

As we were leaving the exam room my friend and I passed the nephrologist. Feeling shaken and somewhat dazed by the test, I did not have the presence of mind to ask the one question that had been on my mind all morning. But my companion, the physician, did: “Doctor,” he said, “my friend’s father died of bladder cancer. He’s anxious to know if you saw any signs of cancer in the X-rays.”

“No abnormalities,” was the curt reply as the nephrologist hurried on to his next appointment.

My inability to ask the single question I cared about most is repeated a thousand times each day in hospitals and clinics everywhere. A study of patients in physicians' waiting rooms found that each had an average of three or more questions in mind to ask the physician they were about to see. But when the patients left the physician's office, an average of only one and a half of those questions had been answered.⁴⁷ This finding speaks to one of the many ways patients' emotional needs are unmet by today's medicine. Unanswered questions feed uncertainty, fear, catastrophizing. And they lead patients to balk at going along with treatment regimes they don't fully understand.

There are many ways medicine can expand its view of health to include the emotional realities of illness. For one, patients could routinely be offered fuller information essential to the decisions they must make about their own medical care; some services now offer any caller a state-of-the-art computer search of the medical literature on what ails them, so that patients can be more equal partners with their physicians in making informed decisions.⁴⁸ Another approach is programs that, in a few minutes' time, teach patients to be effective questioners with their physicians, so that when they have three questions in mind as they wait for the doctor, they will come out of the office with three answers.⁴⁹

Moments when patients face surgery or invasive and painful tests are fraught with anxiety—and are a prime opportunity to deal with the emotional dimension. Some hospitals have developed presurgery instruction for patients that help them assuage their fears and handle their discomforts—for example, by teaching patients relaxation techniques, answering their questions well in advance of surgery, and telling them several days ahead of surgery precisely what they are likely to experience during their recovery. The result: patients recover from surgery an average of two to three days sooner.⁵⁰

Being a hospital patient can be a tremendously lonely, helpless experience. But some hospitals have begun to design rooms so that family members can stay with patients, cooking and caring for them as they would at home—a progressive step that, ironically, is routine throughout the Third World.⁵¹

Relaxation training can help patients deal with some of the distress their symptoms bring, as well as with the emotions that may be triggering or exacerbating their symptoms. An exemplary model is Jon Kabat-Zinn's Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of

Massachusetts Medical Center, which offers a ten-week course in mindfulness and yoga to patients; the emphasis is on being mindful of emotional episodes as they are happening, and on cultivating a daily practice that offers deep relaxation. Hospitals have made instructional tapes from the course available over patients' television sets—a far better emotional diet for the bedridden than the usual fare, soap operas.⁵²

Relaxation and yoga are also at the core of the innovative program for treating heart disease developed by Dr. Dean Ornish.⁵³ After a year of this program, which included a low-fat diet, patients whose heart disease was severe enough to warrant a coronary bypass actually reversed the buildup of artery-clogging plaque. Ornish tells me that relaxation training is one of the most important parts of the program. Like Kabat-Zinn's, it takes advantage of what Dr. Herbert Benson calls the "relaxation response," the physiological opposite of the stress arousal that contributes to such a wide spectrum of medical problems.

Finally, there is the added medical value of an empathic physician or nurse, attuned to patients, able to listen and be heard. This means fostering "relationship-centered care," recognizing that the relationship between physician and patient is itself a factor of significance. Such relationships would be fostered more readily if medical education included some basic tools of emotional intelligence, especially self-awareness and the arts of empathy and listening.⁵⁴

TOWARD A MEDICINE THAT CARES

Such steps are a beginning. But for medicine to enlarge its vision to embrace the impact of emotions, two large implications of the scientific findings must be taken to heart:

1. *Helping people better manage their upsetting feelings—anger, anxiety, depression, pessimism, and loneliness—is a form of disease prevention.* Since the data show that the toxicity of these emotions, when chronic, is on a par with smoking cigarettes, helping people handle them better could potentially have a medical payoff as great as getting heavy smokers to quit. One way to do this that could have broad public-health effects would be to impart most basic emotional intelligence skills to children, so that they become lifelong habits.

Another high-payoff preventive strategy would be to teach emotion management to people reaching retirement age, since emotional well-being is one factor that determines whether an older person declines rapidly or thrives. A third target group might be so-called at-risk populations—the very poor, single working mothers, residents of high-crime neighborhoods, and the like—who live under extraordinary pressure day in and day out, and so might do better medically with help in handling the emotional toll of these stresses.

2. Many patients can benefit measurably when their psychological needs are attended to along with their purely medical ones. While it is a step toward more humane care when a physician or nurse offers a distressed patient comfort and consolation, more can be done. But emotional care is an opportunity too often lost in the way medicine is practiced today; it is a blind spot for medicine. Despite mounting data on the medical usefulness of attending to emotional needs, as well as supporting evidence for connections between the brain's emotional center and the immune system, many physicians remain skeptical that their patients' emotions matter clinically, dismissing the evidence for this as trivial and anecdotal, as "fringe," or, worse, as the exaggerations of a self-promoting few.

Though more and more patients seek a more humane medicine, it is becoming endangered. Of course, there remain dedicated nurses and physicians who give their patients tender, sensitive care. But the changing culture of medicine itself, as it becomes more responsive to the imperatives of business, is making such care increasingly difficult to find.

On the other hand, there may be a business advantage to humane medicine: treating emotional distress in patients, early evidence suggests, can save money—especially to the extent that it prevents or delays the onset of sickness, or helps patients heal more quickly. In a study of elderly patients with hip fracture at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine in New York City and at Northwestern University, patients who received therapy for depression in addition to normal orthopedic care left the hospital an average of two days earlier; total savings for the hundred or so patients was \$97,361 in medical costs.⁵⁵

Such care also makes patients more satisfied with their physicians and medical treatment. In the emerging medical marketplace, where patients often have the option to choose between competing health

plans, satisfaction levels will no doubt enter the equation of these very personal decisions—souring experiences can lead patients to go elsewhere for care, while pleasing ones translate into loyalty.

Finally, medical ethics may demand such an approach. An editorial in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, commenting on a report that depression increases fivefold the likelihood of dying after being treated for a heart attack, notes: “[T]he clear demonstration that psychological factors like depression and social isolation distinguish the coronary heart disease patients at highest risk means it would be unethical not to start trying to treat these factors.”⁵⁶

If the findings on emotions and health mean anything, it is that medical care that neglects how people *feel as* they battle a chronic or severe disease is no longer adequate. It is time for medicine to take more methodical advantage of the link between emotion and health. What is now the exception could—and should—be part of the mainstream, so that a more caring medicine is available to us all. At the least it would make medicine more humane. And, for some, it could speed the course of recovery. “Compassion,” as one patient put it in an open letter to his surgeon, “is not mere hand holding. It is good medicine.”⁵⁷

PART FOUR

**WINDOWS
OF
OPPORTUNITY**

12

The Family Crucible

It's a low-key family tragedy. Carl and Ann are showing their daughter Leslie, just five, how to play a brand-new video game. But as Leslie starts to play, her parents' overly eager attempts to "help" her just seem to get in the way. Contradictory orders fly in every direction.

"To the right, to the right—stop. Stop. Stop!" Ann, the mother, urges, her voice growing more intent and anxious as Leslie, sucking on her lip and staring wide-eyed at the video screen, struggles to follow these directives.

"See, you're not lined up ... put it to the left! To the left!" Carl, the girl's father, brusquely orders.

Meanwhile Ann, her eyes rolling upward in frustration, yells over his advice, "Stop! Stop!"

Leslie, unable to please either her father or her mother, contorts her jaw in tension and blinks as her eyes fill with tears.

Her parents start bickering, ignoring Leslie's tears. "She's not moving the stick *that* much!" Ann tells Carl, exasperated.

As the tears start rolling down Leslie's cheeks, neither parent makes any move that indicates they notice or care. As Leslie raises her hand to wipe her eyes, her father snaps, "Okay, put your hand back on the stick ... you wanna get ready to shoot. Okay, put it over!" And her mother barks, "Okay, move it just a teeny bit!"

But by now Leslie is sobbing softly, alone with her anguish.

At such moments children learn deep lessons. For Leslie one conclusion from this painful exchange might well be that neither her parents, nor anyone else, for that matter, cares about her feelings.¹ When similar moments are repeated countless times over the course of childhood they impart some of the most fundamental emotional messages of a lifetime—lessons that can determine a life course. Family life is our first school for emotional learning; in this intimate cauldron we learn how to feel about ourselves and how others will react to our feelings; how to think about these feelings and what

choices we have in reacting; how to read and express hopes and fears. This emotional schooling operates not just through the things that parents say and do directly to children, but also in the models they offer for handling their own feelings and those that pass between husband and wife. Some parents are gifted emotional teachers, others atrocious.

There are hundreds of studies showing that how parents treat their children—whether with harsh discipline or empathic understanding, with indifference or warmth, and so on—has deep and lasting consequences for the child's emotional life. Only recently, though, have there been hard data showing that having emotionally intelligent parents is itself of enormous benefit to a child. The ways a couple handles the feelings between them—in addition to their direct dealings with a child—impart powerful lessons to their children, who are astute learners, attuned to the subtlest emotional exchanges in the family. When research teams led by Carole Hooven and John Gottman at the University of Washington did a microanalysis of interactions in couples on how the partners handled their children, they found that those couples who were more emotionally competent in the marriage were also the most effective in helping their children with their emotional ups and downs.²

The families were first seen when one of their children was just five years old, and again when the child had reached nine. In addition to observing the parents talk with each other, the research team also watched families (including Leslie's) as the father or mother tried to show their young child how to operate a new video game—a seemingly innocuous interaction, but quite telling about the emotional currents that run between parent and child.

Some mothers and fathers were like Ann and Carl: overbearing, losing patience with their child's ineptness, raising their voices in disgust or exasperation, some even putting their child down as "stupid"—in short, falling prey to the same tendencies toward contempt and disgust that eat away at a marriage. Others, however, were patient with their child's errors, helping the child figure the game out in his or her own way rather than imposing the parents' will. The video game session was a surprisingly powerful barometer of the parents' emotional style.

The three most common emotionally inept parenting styles proved to be:

- *Ignoring feelings altogether.* Such parents treat a child's emotional upset as trivial or a bother, something they should wait to blow over. They fail to use emotional moments as a chance to get closer to the child or to help the child learn lessons in emotional competence.

- *Being too laissez-faire.* These parents notice how a child feels, but hold that however a child handles the emotional storm is fine—even, say, hitting. Like those who ignore a child's feelings, these parents rarely step in to try to show their child an alternative emotional response. They try to soothe all upsets, and will, for instance, use bargaining and bribes to get their child to stop being sad or angry.

- *Being contemptuous, showing no respect for how the child feels.* Such parents are typically disapproving, harsh in both their criticisms and their punishments. They might, for instance, forbid any display of the child's anger at all, and become punitive at the least sign of irritability. These are the parents who angrily yell at a child who is trying to tell his side of the story, "Don't you talk back to me!"

Finally, there are parents who seize the opportunity of a child's upset to act as what amounts to an emotional coach or mentor. They take their child's feelings seriously enough to try to understand exactly what is upsetting them ("Are you angry because Tommy hurt your feelings?") and to help the child find positive ways to soothe their feelings ("Instead of hitting him, why don't you find a toy to play with on your own until you feel like playing with him again?").

In order for parents to be effective coaches in this way, they must have a fairly good grasp of the rudiments of emotional intelligence themselves. One of the basic emotional lessons for a child, for example, is how to distinguish among feelings; a father who is too tuned out of, say, his own sadness cannot help his son understand the difference between grieving over a loss, feeling sad in a sad movie, and the sadness that arises when something bad happens to someone the child cares about. Beyond this distinction, there are more sophisticated insights, such as that anger is so often prompted by first feeling hurt.

As children grow the specific emotional lessons they are ready for—and in need of—shift. As we saw in [Chapter 7](#) the lessons in empathy begin in infancy, with parents who attune to their baby's feelings. Though some emotional skills are honed with friends through the years, emotionally adept parents can do much to help their children

with each of the basics of emotional intelligence: learning how to recognize, manage, and harness their feelings; empathizing; and handling the feelings that arise in their relationships.

The impact on children of such parenting is extraordinarily sweeping.³ The University of Washington team found that when parents are emotionally adept, compared to those who handle feelings poorly, their children—understandably—get along better with, show more affection toward, and have less tension around their parents. But beyond that, these children also are better at handling their own emotions, are more effective at soothing themselves when upset, and get upset less often. The children are also more relaxed *biologically*, with lower levels of stress hormones and other physiological indicators of emotional arousal (a pattern that, if sustained through life, might well augur better physical health, as we saw in [Chapter 11](#)). Other advantages are social: these children are more popular with and are better-liked by their peers, and are seen by their teachers as more socially skilled. Their parents and teachers alike rate these children as having fewer behavioral problems such as rudeness or aggressiveness. Finally, the benefits are cognitive; these children can pay attention better, and so are more effective learners. Holding IQ constant, the five-year-olds whose parents were good coaches had higher achievement scores in math and reading when they reached third grade (a powerful argument for teaching emotional skills to help prepare children for learning as well as life). Thus the payoff for children whose parents are emotionally adept is a surprising—almost astounding—range of advantages across, and beyond, the spectrum of emotional intelligence.

HEART START

The impact of parenting on emotional competence starts in the cradle. Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, the eminent Harvard pediatrician, has a simple diagnostic test of a baby's basic outlook toward life. He offers two blocks to an eight-month-old, and then shows the baby how he wants her to put the two blocks together. A baby who is hopeful about life, who has confidence in her own abilities, says Brazelton,

will pick up one block, mouth it, rub it in her hair, drop it over the side of the table, watching to see whether you will retrieve it for her. When you do, she finally

completes the requested task—place the two blocks together. Then she looks up at you with a bright-eyed look of expectancy that says, “Tell me how great I am!”⁴

Babies like these have gotten a goodly dose of approval and encouragement from the adults in their lives; they expect to succeed in life’s little challenges. By contrast, babies who come from homes too bleak, chaotic, or neglectful go about the same small task in a way that signals they already expect to fail. It is not that these babies fail to bring the blocks together; they understand the instruction and have the coordination to comply. But even when they do, reports Brazelton, their demeanor is “hangdog,” a look that says, “I’m no good. See, I’ve failed.” Such children are likely to go through life with a defeatist outlook, expecting no encouragement or interest from teachers, finding school joyless, perhaps eventually dropping out.

The difference between the two outlooks—children who are confident and optimistic versus those who expect to fail—starts to take shape in the first few years of life. Parents, says Brazelton, “need to understand how their actions can help generate the confidence, the curiosity, the pleasure in learning and the understanding of limits” that help children succeed in life. His advice is informed by a growing body of evidence showing that success in school depends to a surprising extent on emotional characteristics formed in the years before a child enters school. As we saw in [Chapter 6](#), for example, the ability of four-year-olds to control the impulse to grab for a marshmallow predicted a 210-point advantage in their SAT scores fourteen years later.

The first opportunity for shaping the ingredients of emotional intelligence is in the earliest years, though these capacities continue to form throughout the school years. The emotional abilities children acquire in later life build on those of the earliest years. And these abilities, as we saw in [Chapter 6](#), are the essential foundation for all learning. A report from the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs makes the point that school success is not predicted by a child’s fund of facts or a precocious ability to read so much as by emotional and social measures: being self-assured and interested; knowing what kind of behavior is expected and how to rein in the impulse to misbehave; being able to wait, to follow directions, and to turn to teachers for help; and expressing needs while getting along with other children.⁵

Almost all students who do poorly in school, says the report, lack

one or more of these elements of emotional intelligence (regardless of whether they also have cognitive difficulties such as learning disabilities). The magnitude of the problem is not minor; in some states close to one in five children have to repeat first grade, and then as the years go on fall further behind their peers, becoming increasingly discouraged, resentful, and disruptive.

A child's readiness for school depends on the most basic of all knowledge, *how* to learn. The report lists the seven key ingredients of this crucial capacity—all related to emotional intelligence:⁶

1. *Confidence*. A sense of control and mastery of one's body, behavior, and world; the child's sense that he is more likely than not to succeed at what he undertakes, and that adults will be helpful.
2. *Curiosity*. The sense that finding out about things is positive and leads to pleasure.
3. *Intentionality*. The wish and capacity to have an impact, and to act upon that with persistence. This is related to a sense of competence, of being effective.
4. *Self-control*. The ability to modulate and control one's own actions in age-appropriate ways; a sense of inner control.
5. *Relatedness*. The ability to engage with others based on the sense of being understood by and understanding others.
6. *Capacity to communicate*. The wish and ability to verbally exchange ideas, feelings, and concepts with others. This is related to a sense of trust in others and of pleasure in engaging with others, including adults.
7. *Cooperativeness*. The ability to balance one's own needs with those of others in group activity.

Whether or not a child arrives at school on the first day of kindergarten with these capabilities depends greatly on how much her parents—and preschool teachers—have given her the kind of care that amounts to a “Heart Start,” the emotional equivalent of the Head Start programs.

GETTING THE EMOTIONAL BASICS

Say a two-month-old baby wakes up at 3 A.M. and starts crying. Her mother comes in and, for the next half hour, the baby contentedly

nurses in her mother's arms while her mother gazes at her affectionately, telling her that she's happy to see her, even in the middle of the night. The baby, content in her mother's love, drifts back to sleep.

Now say another two-month-old baby, who also awoke crying in the wee hours, is met instead by a mother who is tense and irritable, having fallen asleep just an hour before after a fight with her husband. The baby starts to tense up the moment his mother abruptly picks him up, telling him, "Just be quiet—I can't stand one more thing! Come on, let's get it over with." As the baby nurses his mother stares stonily ahead, not looking at him, reviewing her fight with his father, getting more agitated herself as she mulls it over. The baby, sensing her tension, squirms, stiffens, and stops nursing. "That's all you want?" his mother says. "Then don't eat." With the same abruptness she puts him back in his crib and stalks out, letting him cry until he falls back to sleep, exhausted.

The two scenarios are presented by the report from the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs as examples of the kinds of interaction that, if repeated over and over, instill very different feelings in a toddler about himself and his closest relationships.⁷ The first baby is learning that people can be trusted to notice her needs and counted on to help, and that she can be effective in getting help; the second is finding that no one really cares, that people can't be counted on, and that his efforts to get solace will meet with failure. Of course, most babies get at least a taste of both kinds of interaction. But to the degree that one or the other is typical of how parents treat a child over the years, basic emotional lessons will be imparted about how secure a child is in the world, how effective he feels, and how dependable others are. Erik Erikson put it in terms of whether a child comes to feel a "basic trust" or a basic mistrust.

Such emotional learning begins in life's earliest moments, and continues throughout childhood. All the small exchanges between parent and child have an emotional subtext, and in the repetition of these messages over the years children form the core of their emotional outlook and capabilities. A little girl who finds a puzzle frustrating and asks her busy mother to help gets one message if the reply is the mother's clear pleasure at the request, and quite another if it's a curt "Don't bother me—I've got important work to do." When such encounters become typical of child and parent, they mold the child's emotional expectations about relationships, outlooks that will

flavor her functioning in all realms of life, for better or worse.

The risks are greatest for those children whose parents are grossly inept—immature, abusing drugs, depressed or chronically angry, or simply aimless and living chaotic lives. Such parents are far less likely to give adequate care, let alone attune to their toddler's emotional needs. Simple neglect, studies find, can be more damaging than outright abuse.⁸ A survey of maltreated children found the neglected youngsters doing the worst of all: they were the most anxious, inattentive, and apathetic, alternately aggressive and withdrawn. The rate for having to repeat first grade among them was 65 percent.

The first three or four years of life are a period when the toddler's brain grows to about two thirds its full size, and evolves in complexity at a greater rate than it ever will again. During this period key kinds of learning take place more readily than later in life—emotional learning foremost among them. During this time severe stress can impair the brain's learning centers (and so be damaging to the intellect). Though as we shall see, this can be remedied to some extent by experiences later in life, the impact of this early learning is profound. As one report sums up the key emotional lesson of life's first four years, the lasting consequences are great:

A child who cannot focus his attention, who is suspicious rather than trusting, sad or angry rather than optimistic, destructive rather than respectful and one who is overcome with anxiety, preoccupied with frightening fantasy and feels generally unhappy about himself—such a child has little opportunity at all, let alone equal opportunity, to claim the possibilities of the world as his own.⁹

HOW TO RAISE A BULLY

Much can be learned about the lifelong effects of emotionally inept parenting—particularly its role in making children aggressive—from longitudinal studies such as one of 870 children from upstate New York who were followed from the time they were eight until they were thirty.¹⁰ The most belligerent among the children—those quickest to start fights and who habitually used force to get their way—were the most likely to have dropped out of school and, by age thirty, to have a record for crimes of violence. They also seemed to be handing down their propensity to violence: their children were, in grade school, just like the troublemakers their delinquent parent had

been.

There is a lesson in how aggressiveness is passed from generation to generation. Any inherited propensities aside, the troublemakers as grownups acted in a way that made family life a school for aggression. As children, the troublemakers had parents who disciplined them with arbitrary, relentless severity; as parents they repeated the pattern. This was true whether it had been the father or the mother who had been identified in childhood as highly aggressive. Aggressive little girls grew up to be just as arbitrary and harshly punitive when they became mothers as the aggressive boys were as fathers. And while they punished their children with special severity, they otherwise took little interest in their children's lives, in effect ignoring them much of the time. At the same time the parents offered these children a vivid—and violent—example of aggressiveness, a model the children took with them to school and to the playground, and followed throughout life. The parents were not necessarily mean-spirited, nor did they fail to wish the best for their children; rather, they seemed to be simply repeating the style of parenting that had been modeled for them by their own parents.

In this model for violence, these children were disciplined capriciously: if their parents were in a bad mood, they would be severely punished; if their parents were in a good mood, they could get away with mayhem at home. Thus punishment came not so much because of what the child had done, but by virtue of how the parent felt. This is a recipe for feelings of worthlessness and helplessness, and for the sense that threats are everywhere and may strike at any time. Seen in light of the home life that spawns it, such children's combative and defiant posture toward the world at large makes a certain sense, unfortunate though it remains. What is disheartening is how early these dispiriting lessons can be learned, and how grim the costs for a child's emotional life can be.

ABUSE: THE EXTINCTION OF EMPATHY

In the rough-and-tumble play of the day-care center, Martin, just two and a half, brushed up against a little girl, who, inexplicably, broke out crying. Martin reached for her hand, but as the sobbing girl moved away, Martin slapped her on the arm.

As her tears continued Martin looked away and yelled, “Cut it out! *Cut it out!*” over and over, each time faster and louder.

When Martin then made another attempt to pat her, again she resisted. This time Martin bared his teeth like a snarling dog, hissing at the sobbing girl.

Once more Martin started patting the crying girl, but the pats on the back quickly turned into pounding, and Martin went on hitting and hitting the poor little girl despite her screams.

That disturbing encounter testifies to how abuse—being beaten repeatedly, at the whim of a parent’s moods—warps a child’s natural bent toward empathy.¹¹ Martin’s bizarre, almost brutal response to his playmate’s distress is typical of children like him, who have themselves been the victims of beatings and other physical abuse since their infancy. The response stands in stark contrast to toddlers’ usual sympathetic entreaties and attempts to console a crying playmate, reviewed in [Chapter 7](#). Martin’s violent response to distress at the day-care center may well mirror the lessons he learned at home about tears and anguish: crying is met at first with a peremptory consoling gesture, but if it continues, the progression is from nasty looks and shouts, to hitting, to outright beating. Perhaps most troubling, Martin already seems to lack the most primitive sort of empathy, the instinct to stop aggression against someone who is hurt. At two and a half he displays the budding moral impulses of a cruel and sadistic brute.

Martin’s meanness in place of empathy is typical of other children like him who are already, at their tender age, scarred by severe physical and emotional abuse at home. Martin was part of a group of nine such toddlers, ages one to three, witnessed in a two-hour observation at his day-care center. The abused toddlers were compared with nine others at the day-care center from equally impoverished, high-stress homes, but who were not physically abused. The differences in how the two groups of toddlers reacted when another child was hurt or upset were stark. Of twenty-three such incidents, five of the nine nonabused toddlers responded to the distress of a child nearby with concern, sadness, or empathy. But in the twenty-seven instances where the abused children could have done so, not one showed the least concern; instead they reacted to a crying child with expressions of fear, anger, or, like Martin, a physical attack.

One abused little girl, for instance, made a ferocious, threatening face at another who had broken out into tears. One-year-old Thomas, another of the abused children, froze in terror when he heard a child

crying across the room; he sat completely still, his face full of fear, back stiffly straight, his tension increasing as the crying continued—as though bracing for an attack himself. And twenty-eight-month-old Kate, also abused, was almost sadistic: picking on Joey, a smaller infant, she knocked him to the ground with her feet, and as he lay there looked tenderly at him and began patting him gently on the back—only to intensify the pats into hitting him harder and harder, ignoring his misery. She kept swinging away at him, leaning in to slug him six or seven times more, until he crawled away.

These children, of course, treat others as they themselves have been treated. And the callousness of these abused children is simply a more extreme version of that seen in children whose parents are critical, threatening, and harsh in their punishments. Such children also tend to lack concern when playmates get hurt or cry; they seem to represent one end of a continuum of coldness that peaks with the brutality of the abused children. As they go on through life, they are, as a group, more likely to have cognitive difficulties in learning, more likely to be aggressive and unpopular with their peers (small wonder, if their preschool toughness is a harbinger of the future), more prone to depression, and, as adults, more likely to get into trouble with the law and commit more crimes of violence.¹²

This failure of empathy is sometimes, if not often, repeated over generations, with brutal parents having themselves been brutalized by their own parents in childhood.¹³ It stands in dramatic contrast to the empathy ordinarily displayed by children of parents who are nurturing, encouraging their toddlers to show concern for others and to understand how meanness makes other children feel. Lacking such lessons in empathy, these children seem not to learn it at all.

What is perhaps most troubling about the abused toddlers is how early they seem to have learned to respond like miniature versions of their own abusive parents. But given the physical beatings they received as a sometimes daily diet, the emotional lessons are all too clear. Remember that it is in moments when passions run high or a crisis is upon us that the primitive proclivities of the brain's limbic centers take on a more dominant role. At such moments the habits the emotional brain has learned over and over will dominate, for better or worse.

Seeing how the brain itself is shaped by brutality—or by love—suggests that childhood represents a special window of opportunity for emotional lessons. These battered children have had an early and

steady diet of trauma. Perhaps the most instructive paradigm for understanding the emotional learning such abused children have undergone is in seeing how trauma can leave a lasting imprint on the brain—and how even these savage imprints can be mended.

Trauma and Emotional Relearning

Som Chit, a Cambodian refugee, balked when her three sons asked her to buy them toy AK-47 machine guns. Her sons—ages six, nine, and eleven—wanted the toy guns to play the game some of the kids at their school called Purdy. In the game, Purdy, the villain, uses a submachine gun to massacre a group of children, then turns it on himself. Sometimes, though, the children have it end differently: it is they who kill Purdy.

Purdy was the macabre reenactment by some of the survivors of the catastrophic events of February 17, 1989, at Cleveland Elementary School in Stockton, California. There, during the school's late-morning recess for first, second, and third graders, Patrick Purdy—who had himself attended those grades at Cleveland Elementary some twenty years earlier—stood at the playground's edge and fired wave after wave of 7.22 mm bullets at the hundreds of children at play. For seven minutes Purdy sprayed bullets toward the playground, then put a pistol to his head and shot himself. When the police arrived they found five children dying, twenty-nine wounded.

In ensuing months, the Purdy game spontaneously appeared in the play of boys and girls at Cleveland Elementary, one of many signs that those seven minutes and their aftermath were seared into the children's memory. When I visited the school, just a short bike ride from the neighborhood near the University of the Pacific where I myself had grown up, it was five months after Purdy had turned that recess into a nightmare. His presence was still palpable, even though the most horrific of the grisly remnants of the shooting—swarms of bullet holes, pools of blood, bits of flesh, skin, and scalp—were gone by the morning after the shooting, washed away and painted over.

By then the deepest scars at Cleveland Elementary were not to the building but to the psyches of the children and staff there, who were trying to carry on with life as usual.¹ Perhaps most striking was how the memory of those few minutes was revived again and again by any small detail that was similar in the least. A teacher told me, for

example, that a wave of fright swept through the school with the announcement that St. Patrick's Day was coming; a number of the children somehow got the idea that the day was to honor the killer, Patrick Purdy.

"Whenever we hear an ambulance on its way to the rest home down the street, everything halts," another teacher told me. "The kids all listen to see if it will stop here or go on." For several weeks many children were terrified of the mirrors in the restrooms; a rumor swept the school that "Bloody Virgin Mary," some kind of fantasied monster, lurked there. Weeks after the shooting a frantic girl came running up to the school's principal, Pat Busher, yelling, "I hear shots! I hear shots!" The sound was from the swinging chain on a tetherball pole.

Many children became hypervigilant, as though continually on guard against a repetition of the terror; some boys and girls would hover at recess next to the classroom doors, not daring to venture out to the playground where the killings had occurred. Others would only play in small groups, posting a designated child as lookout. Many continued for months to avoid the "evil" areas, where children had died.

The memories lived on, too, as disturbing dreams, intruding into the children's unguarded minds as they slept. Apart from nightmares repeating the shooting itself in some way, children were flooded with anxiety dreams that left them apprehensive that they too would die soon. Some children tried to sleep with their eyes open so they wouldn't dream.

All of these reactions are well known to psychiatrists as among the key symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. At the core of such trauma, says Dr. Spencer Eth, a child psychiatrist who specializes in PTSD in children, is "the intrusive memory of the central violent action: the final blow with a fist, the plunge of a knife, the blast of a shotgun. The memories are intense perceptual experiences—the sight, sound, and smell of gunfire; the screams or sudden silence of the victim; the splash of blood; the police sirens."

These vivid, terrifying moments, neuroscientists now say, become memories emblazoned in the emotional circuitry. The symptoms are, in effect, signs of an overaroused amygdala impelling the vivid memories of a traumatic moment to continue to intrude on awareness. As such, the traumatic memories become mental hair triggers, ready to sound an alarm at the least hint that the dread moment is about to happen once again. This hair-trigger phenomenon is a hallmark of

emotional trauma of all kinds, including suffering repeated physical abuse in childhood.

Any traumatizing event can implant such trigger memories in the amygdala: a fire or an auto accident, being in a natural catastrophe such as an earthquake or a hurricane, being raped or mugged. Hundreds of thousands of people each year endure such disasters, and many or most come away with the kind of emotional wounding that leaves its imprint on the brain.

Violent acts are more pernicious than natural catastrophes such as a hurricane because, unlike victims of a natural disaster, victims of violence feel themselves to have been intentionally selected as the target of malevolence. That fact shatters assumptions about the trustworthiness of people and the safety of the interpersonal world, an assumption natural catastrophes leave untouched. Within an instant, the social world becomes a dangerous place, one in which people are potential threats to your safety.

Human cruelties stamp their victims' memories with a template that regards with fear anything vaguely similar to the assault itself. A man who was struck on the back of his head, never seeing his attacker, was so frightened afterward that he would try to walk down the street directly in front of an old lady to feel safe from being hit on the head again.² A woman who was mugged by a man who got on an elevator with her and forced her out at knifepoint to an unoccupied floor was fearful for weeks of going into not just elevators, but also the subway or any other enclosed space where she might feel trapped; she ran from her bank when she saw a man put his hand in his jacket as the mugger had done.

The imprint of horror in memory—and the resulting hypervigilance—can last a lifetime, as a study of Holocaust survivors found. Close to fifty years after they had endured semistarvation, the slaughter of their loved ones, and constant terror in Nazi death camps, the haunting memories were still alive. A third said they felt generally fearful. Nearly three quarters said they still became anxious at reminders of the Nazi persecution, such as the sight of a uniform, a knock at the door, dogs barking, or smoke rising from a chimney. About 60 percent said they thought about the Holocaust almost daily, even after a half century; of those with active symptoms, as many as eight in ten still suffered from repeated nightmares. As one survivor said, “If you’ve been through Auschwitz and you don’t have nightmares, then you’re not normal.”

HORROR FROZEN IN MEMORY

The words of a forty-eight-year-old Vietnam vet, some twenty-four years after enduring a horrifying moment in a faraway land:

I can't get the memories out of my mind! The images come flooding back in vivid detail, triggered by the most inconsequential things, like a door slamming, the sight of an Oriental woman, the touch of a bamboo mat, or the smell of stir-fried pork. Last night I went to bed, was having a good sleep for a change. Then in the early morning a storm front passed through and there was a bolt of crackling thunder. I awoke instantly, frozen in fear. I am right back in Vietnam, in the middle of the monsoon season at my guard post. I am sure I'll get hit in the next volley and convinced I will die. My hands are freezing, yet sweat pours from my entire body. I feel each hair on the back of my neck standing on end. I can't catch my breath and my heart is pounding. I smell a damp sulfur smell. Suddenly I see what's left of my buddy Troy ... on a bamboo platter, sent back to our camp by the Vietcong.... The next bolt of lightning and clap of thunder makes me jump so much that I fall to the floor.³

This horrible memory, vividly fresh and detailed though more than two decades old, still holds the power to induce the same fear in this ex-soldier that he felt on that fateful day. PTSD represents a perilous lowering of the neural setpoint for alarm, leaving the person to react to life's ordinary moments as though they were emergencies. The hijacking circuit discussed in [Chapter 2](#) seems critical in leaving such a powerful brand on memory: the more brutal, shocking, and horrendous the events that trigger the amygdala hijacking, the more indelible the memory. The neural basis for these memories appears to be a sweeping alteration in the chemistry of the brain set in motion by a single instance of overwhelming terror.⁴ While the PTSD findings are typically based on the impact of a single episode, similar results can come from cruelties inflicted over a period of years, as is the case with children who are sexually, physically, or emotionally abused.

The most detailed work on these brain changes is being done at the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a network of research sites based at Veterans' Administration hospitals where there are large pools of those who suffer from PTSD among the veterans of Vietnam and other wars. It is from studies on vets such as these that most of our knowledge of PTSD has come. But these insights apply as well to children who have suffered severe emotional trauma, such as those at Cleveland Elementary.

"Victims of a devastating trauma may never be the same biologically," Dr. Dennis Charney told me.⁵ A Yale psychiatrist, Charney is director of clinical neuroscience at the National Center. "It does not matter if it was the incessant terror of combat, torture, or repeated abuse in childhood, or a one-time experience, like being trapped in a hurricane or nearly dying in an auto accident. All uncontrollable stress can have the same biological impact."

The operative word is *uncontrollable*. If people feel there is something they can do in a catastrophic situation, some control they can exert, no matter how minor, they fare far better emotionally than do those who feel utterly helpless. The element of helplessness is what makes a given event *subjectively* overwhelming. As Dr. John Krystal, director of the center's Laboratory of Clinical Psychopharmacology, told me, "Say someone being attacked with a knife knows how to defend himself and takes action, while another person in the same predicament thinks, 'I'm dead.' The helpless person is the one more susceptible to PTSD afterward. It's the feeling that your life is in danger *and there's nothing you can do to escape it*—that's the moment the brain change begins."

Helplessness as the wild card in triggering PTSD has been shown in dozens of studies on pairs of laboratory rats, each in a different cage, each being given mild—but, to a rat, very stressful—electric shocks of identical severity. Only one rat has a lever in its cage; when the rat pushes the lever, the shock stops for both cages. Over days and weeks, both rats get precisely the same amount of shock. But the rat with the power to turn the shocks off comes through without lasting signs of stress. It is only in the helpless one of the pair that the stress-induced brain changes occur.⁶ For a child being shot at on a playground, seeing his playmates bleeding and dying—or for a teacher there, unable to stop the carnage—that helplessness must have been palpable.

PTSD AS A LIMBIC DISORDER

It had been months since a huge earthquake shook her out of bed and sent her yelling in panic through the darkened house to find her four-year-old son. They huddled for hours in the Los Angeles night cold under a protective doorway, pinned there without food, water, or light while wave after wave of aftershocks tumbled the ground

beneath them. Now, months later, she had largely recovered from the ready panic that gripped her for the first few days afterward, when a door slamming could start her shivering with fear. The one lingering symptom was her inability to sleep, a problem that struck only on those nights her husband was away—as he had been the night of the quake.

The main symptoms of such learned fearfulness—including the most intense kind, PTSD—can be accounted for by changes in the limbic circuitry focusing on the amygdala.⁷ Some of the key changes are in the locus ceruleus, a structure that regulates the brain's secretion of two substances called *catecholamines*: adrenaline and noradrenaline. These neurochemicals mobilize the body for an emergency; the same catecholamine surge stamps memories with special strength. In PTSD this system becomes hyperreactive, secreting extra-large doses of these brain chemicals in response to situations that hold little or no threat but somehow are reminders of the original trauma, like the children at Cleveland Elementary School who panicked when they heard an ambulance siren similar to those they had heard at their school after the shooting.

The locus ceruleus and the amygdala are closely linked, along with other limbic structures such as the hippocampus and hypothalamus; the circuitry for the catecholamines extends into the cortex. Changes in these circuits are thought to underlie PTSD symptoms, which include anxiety, fear, hypervigilance, being easily upset and aroused, readiness for fight or flight, and the indelible encoding of intense emotional memories.⁸ Vietnam vets with PTSD, one study found, had 40 percent fewer catecholamine-stopping receptors than did men without the symptoms—suggesting that their brains had undergone a lasting change, with their catecholamine secretion poorly controlled.⁹

Other changes occur in the circuit linking the limbic brain with the pituitary gland, which regulates release of CRF, the main stress hormone the body secretes to mobilize the emergency fight-or-flight response. The changes lead this hormone to be oversecreted—particularly in the amygdala, hippocampus, and locus ceruleus—alerting the body for an emergency that is not there in reality.¹⁰

As Dr. Charles Nemeroff, a Duke University psychiatrist, told me, “Too much CRF makes you overreact. For example, if you’re a Vietnam vet with PTSD and a car backfires at the mall parking lot, it is the triggering of CRF that floods you with the same feelings as in the original trauma: you start sweating, you’re scared, you have chills

and the shakes, you may have flashbacks. In people who hypersecrete CRF, the startle response is overactive. For example, if you sneak up behind most people and suddenly clap your hands, you'll see a startled jump the first time, but not by the third or fourth repetition. But people with too much CRF don't habituate: they'll respond as much to the fourth clap as to the first.”¹¹

A third set of changes occurs in the brain's opioid system, which secretes endorphins to blunt the feeling of pain. It also becomes hyperactive. This neural circuit again involves the amygdala, this time in concert with a region in the cerebral cortex. The opioids are brain chemicals that are powerful numbing agents, like opium and other narcotics that are chemical cousins. When experiencing high levels of opioids (“the brain's own morphine”), people have a heightened tolerance for pain—an effect that has been noted by battlefield surgeons, who found severely wounded soldiers needed lower doses of narcotics to handle their pain than did civilians with far less serious injuries.

Something similar seems to occur in PTSD.¹² Endorphin changes add a new dimension to the neural mix triggered by reexposure to trauma: a *numbing* of certain feelings. This appears to explain a set of “negative” psychological symptoms long noted in PTSD: anhedonia (the inability to feel pleasure) and a general emotional numbness, a sense of being cut off from life or from concern about others’ feelings. Those close to such people may experience this indifference as a lack of empathy. Another possible effect may be dissociation, including the inability to remember crucial minutes, hours, or even days of the traumatic event.

The neural changes of PTSD also seem to make a person more susceptible to further traumatizing. A number of studies with animals have found that when they were exposed even to *mild* stress when young, they were far more vulnerable than unstressed animals to trauma-induced brain changes later in life (suggesting the urgent need to treat children with PTSD). This seems a reason that, exposed to the same catastrophe, one person goes on to develop PTSD and another does not: the amygdala is primed to find danger, and when life presents it once again with real danger, its alarm rises to a higher pitch.

All these neural changes offer short-term advantages for dealing with the grim and dire emergencies that prompt them. Under duress, it is adaptive to be highly vigilant, aroused, ready for anything,

impervious to pain, the body primed for sustained physical demands, and—for the moment—indifferent to what might otherwise be intensely disturbing events. These short-term advantages, however, become lasting problems when the brain changes so that they become predispositions, like a car stuck in perpetual high gear. When the amygdala and its connected brain regions take on a new setpoint during a moment of intense trauma, this change in excitability—this heightened readiness to trigger a neural hijacking—means all of life is on the verge of becoming an emergency, and even an innocent moment is susceptible to an explosion of fear run amok.

EMOTIONAL RELEARNING

Such traumatic memories seem to remain as fixtures in brain function because they interfere with subsequent learning—specifically, with relearning a more normal response to those traumatizing events. In acquired fear such as PTSD, the mechanisms of learning and memory have gone awry; again, it is the amygdala that is key among the brain regions involved. But in overcoming the learned fear, the neocortex is critical.

Fear conditioning is the name psychologists use for the process whereby something that is not in the least threatening becomes dreaded as it is associated in someone's mind with something frightening. When such frights are induced in laboratory animals, Charney notes, the fears can last for years.¹³ The key region of the brain that learns, retains, and acts on this fearful response is the circuit between the thalamus, amygdala, and prefrontal lobe—the pathway of neural hijacking.

Ordinarily, when someone learns to be frightened by something through fear conditioning, the fear subsides with time. This seems to happen through a natural relearning, as the feared object is encountered again in the absence of anything truly scary. Thus a child who acquires a fear of dogs because of being chased by a snarling German shepherd gradually and naturally loses that fear if, say, she moves next door to someone who owns a friendly shepherd, and spends time playing with the dog.

In PTSD spontaneous relearning fails to occur. Charney proposes that this may be due to the brain changes of PTSD, which are so strong that, in effect, the amygdala hijacking occurs every time

something even vaguely reminiscent of the original trauma comes along, strengthening the fear pathway. This means that there is never a time when what is feared is paired with a feeling of calm—the amygdala never relearns a more mild reaction. “Extinction” of the fear, he observes, “appears to involve an active learning process,” which is itself impaired in people with PTSD, “leading to the abnormal persistence of emotional memories.”¹⁴

But given the right experiences, even PTSD can lift; strong emotional memories, and the patterns of thought and reaction that they trigger, *can* change with time. This relearning, Charney proposes, is cortical. The original fear ingrained in the amygdala does not go away completely; rather, the prefrontal cortex actively suppresses the amygdala’s command to the rest of the brain to respond with fear.

“The question is, how quickly do you let go of learned fear?” asks Richard Davidson, the University of Wisconsin psychologist who discovered the role of the left prefrontal cortex as a damper on distress. In a laboratory experiment in which people first learned an aversion to a loud noise—a paradigm for learned fear, and a lower-key parallel of PTSD—Davidson found that people who had more activity in the left prefrontal cortex got over the acquired fear more quickly, again suggesting a cortical role in letting go of learned distress.¹⁵

REEDUCATING THE EMOTIONAL BRAIN

One of the more encouraging findings about PTSD came from a study of Holocaust survivors, about three quarters of whom were found to have active PTSD symptoms even a half century later. The positive finding was that a quarter of the survivors who once had been troubled by such symptoms no longer had them; somehow the natural events of their lives had counteracted the problem. Those who still had the symptoms showed evidence of the catecholamine-related brain changes typical of PTSD—but those who had recovered had no such changes.¹⁶ This finding, and others like it, hold out the promise that the brain changes in PTSD are not indelible, and that people can recover from even the most dire emotional imprinting—in short, that the emotional circuitry can be reeducated. The good news, then, is that traumas as profound as those causing PTSD can heal, and that the route to such healing is through relearning.

One way this emotional healing seems to occur spontaneously—at least in children—is through such games as Purdy. These games, played over and over again, let children relive a trauma safely, as play. This allows two avenues for healing: on the one hand, the memory repeats in a context of low anxiety, desensitizing it and allowing a nontraumatized set of responses to become associated with it. Another route to healing is that, in their minds, children can magically give the tragedy another, better outcome: sometimes in playing Purdy, the children kill him, boosting their sense of mastery over that traumatic moment of helplessness.

Games like Purdy are predictable in younger children who have been through such overwhelming violence. These macabre games in traumatized children were first noted by Dr. Lenore Terr, a child psychiatrist in San Francisco.¹⁷ She found such games among children in Chowchilla, California—just a little over an hour down the Central Valley from Stockton, where Purdy wreaked such havoc—who in 1973 had been kidnapped as they rode a bus home from a summer day camp. The kidnappers buried the bus, children and all, in an ordeal that lasted twenty-seven hours.

Five years later Terr found the kidnapping still being reenacted in the victims' games. Girls, for example, played symbolic kidnapping games with their Barbie dolls. One girl, who had hated the feeling of other children's urine on her skin as they lay huddled together in terror, washed her Barbie over and over again. Another played Traveling Barbie, in which Barbie travels somewhere—it doesn't matter where—and returns safely, which is the point of the game. A third girl's favorite was a scenario in which the doll is stuck in a hole and suffocates.

While adults who have been through overwhelming trauma can suffer a psychic numbing, blocking out memory of or feeling about the catastrophe, children's psyches often handle it differently. They less often become numb to the trauma, Terr believes, because they use fantasy, play, and daydreams to recall and rethink their ordeals. Such voluntary replays of trauma seem to head off the need for damming them up in potent memories that can later burst through as flashbacks. If the trauma is minor, such as going to the dentist for a filling, just once or twice may be enough. But if it's overwhelming, a child needs endless repetitions, replaying the trauma over and over again in a grim, monotonous ritual.

One way to get at the picture frozen in the amygdala is through art,

which itself is a medium of the unconscious. The emotional brain is highly attuned to symbolic meanings and to the mode Freud called the “primary process”: the messages of metaphor, story, myth, the arts. This avenue is often used in treating traumatized children. Sometimes art can open the way for children to talk about a moment of horror that they would not dare speak of otherwise.

Spencer Eth, the Los Angeles child psychiatrist who specializes in treating such children, tells of a five-year-old boy who had been kidnapped with his mother by her ex-lover. The man brought them to a motel room, where he ordered the boy to hide under a blanket while he beat the mother to death. The boy was, understandably, reluctant to talk with Eth about the mayhem he had heard and seen while underneath the blanket. So Eth asked him to draw a picture—any picture.

The drawing was of a race-car driver who had a strikingly large pair of eyes, Eth recalls. The huge eyes Eth took to refer to the boy’s own daring in peeking at the killer. Such hidden references to the traumatic scene almost always appear in the artwork of traumatized children; Eth has made having such children draw a picture the opening gambit in therapy. The potent memories that preoccupy them intrude in their art just as in their thoughts. Beyond that, the act of drawing is itself therapeutic, beginning the process of mastering the trauma.

EMOTIONAL RELEARNING AND RECOVERY FROM TRAUMA

Irene had gone on a date that ended in attempted rape. Though she had fought off the attacker, he continued to plague her: harassing her with obscene phone calls, making threats of violence, calling in the middle of the night, stalking her and watching her every move. Once, when she tried to get the police to help, they dismissed her problem as trivial, since “nothing had really happened.” By the time she came for therapy Irene had symptoms of PTSD, had given up socializing at all, and felt a prisoner in her own house.

Irene’s case is cited by Dr. Judith Lewis Herman, a Harvard psychiatrist whose groundbreaking work outlines the steps to recovery from trauma. Herman sees three stages: attaining a sense of safety, remembering the details of the trauma and mourning the loss it has brought, and finally reestablishing a normal life. There is a biological

logic to the ordering of these steps, as we shall see: this sequence seems to reflect how the emotional brain learns once again that life need not be regarded as an emergency about to happen.

The first step, regaining a sense of safety, presumably translates to finding ways to calm the too-fearful, too easily triggered emotional circuits enough to allow relearning.¹⁸ Often this begins with helping patients understand that their jumpiness and nightmares, hypervigilance and panics, are part of the symptoms of PTSD. This understanding makes the symptoms themselves less frightening.

Another early step is to help patients regain some sense of control over what is happening to them, a direct unlearning of the lesson of helplessness that the trauma itself imparted. Irene, for example, mobilized her friends and family to form a buffer between her and her stalker, and was able to get the police to intervene.

The sense in which PTSD patients feel “unsafe” goes beyond fears that dangers lurk around them; their insecurity begins more intimately, in the feeling that they have no control over what is happening in their body and to their emotions. This is understandable, given the hair trigger for emotional hijacking that PTSD creates by hypersensitizing the amygdala circuitry.

Medication offers one way to restore patients’ sense that they need not be so at the mercy of the emotional alarms that flood them with inexplicable anxiety, keep them sleepless, or pepper their sleep with nightmares. Pharmacologists are hoping one day to tailor medications that will target precisely the effects of PTSD on the amygdala and connected neurotransmitter circuits. For now, though, there are medications that counter only some of these changes, notably the antidepressants that act on the serotonin system, and beta-blockers like propranolol, which block the activation of the sympathetic nervous system. Patients also may learn relaxation techniques that give them the ability to counter their edginess and nervousness. A physiological calm opens a window for helping the brutalized emotional circuitry rediscover that life is not a threat and for giving back to patients some of the sense of security they had in their lives before the trauma happened.

Another step in healing involves retelling and reconstructing the story of the trauma in the harbor of that safety, allowing the emotional circuitry to acquire a new, more realistic understanding of and response to the traumatic memory and its triggers. As patients retell the horrific details of the trauma, the memory starts to be

transformed, both in its emotional meaning and in its effects on the emotional brain. The pace of this retelling is delicate; ideally it mimics the pace that occurs naturally in those people who are able to recover from trauma without suffering PTSD. In these cases there often seems to be an inner clock that “doses” people with intrusive memories that relive the trauma, intercut with weeks or months when they remember hardly anything of the horrible events.¹⁹

This alternation of reimmersion and respite seems to allow for a spontaneous review of the trauma and relearning of emotional response to it. For those whose PTSD is more intractable, says Herman, retelling their tale can sometimes trigger overwhelming fears, in which case the therapist should ease the pace to keep the patient’s reactions within a bearable range, one that will not disrupt the relearning.

The therapist encourages the patient to retell the traumatic events as vividly as possible, like a horror home video, retrieving every sordid detail. This includes not just the specifics of what they saw, heard, smelled, and felt, but also their reactions—the dread, disgust, nausea. The goal here is to put the entire memory into words, which means capturing parts of the memory that may have been dissociated and so are absent from conscious recall. By putting sensory details and feelings into words, presumably memories are brought more under control of the neocortex, where the reactions they kindle can be rendered more understandable and so more manageable. The emotional relearning at this point is largely accomplished through reliving the events and their emotions, but this time in surroundings of safety and security, in the company of a trusted therapist. This begins to impart a telling lesson to the emotional circuitry—that security, rather than unremitting terror, can be experienced in tandem with the trauma memories.

The five-year-old who drew the picture of the giant eyes after he witnessed the grisly murder of his mother did not make any more drawings after that first one; instead he and his therapist, Spencer Eth, played games, creating a bond of rapport. Only slowly did he begin to retell the story of the murder, at first in a stereotyped way, reciting each detail exactly the same in each telling. Gradually, though, his narrative became more open and free-flowing, his body less tense as he told it. At the same time his nightmares of the scene came less often, an indication, says Eth, of some “trauma mastery.” Gradually their talk moved away from the fears left by the trauma to more of

what was happening in the boy's day-to-day life as he adjusted to a new home with his father. And finally the boy was able to talk just about his daily life as the hold of the trauma faded.

Finally, Herman finds that patients need to mourn the loss the trauma brought—whether an injury, the death of a loved one or a rupture in a relationship, regret over some step not taken to save someone, or just the shattering of confidence that people can be trusted. The mourning that ensues while retelling such painful events serves a crucial purpose: it marks the ability to let go of the trauma itself to some degree. It means that instead of being perpetually captured by this moment in the past, patients can start to look ahead, even to hope, and to rebuild a new life free of the trauma's grip. It is as if the constant recycling and reliving of the trauma's terror by the emotional circuitry were a spell that could finally be lifted. Every siren need not bring a flood of fear; every sound in the night need not compel a flashback to terror.

Aftereffects or occasional recurrences of symptoms often persist, says Herman, but there are specific signs that the trauma has largely been overcome. These include reducing the physiological symptoms to a manageable level, and being able to bear the feelings associated with memories of the trauma. Especially significant is no longer having trauma memories erupt at uncontrollable moments, but rather being able to revisit them voluntarily, like any other memory—and, perhaps more important, to put them aside like any other memory. Finally, it means rebuilding a new life, with strong, trusting relationships and a belief system that finds meaning even in a world where such injustice can happen.²⁰ All of these together are markers of success in reeducating the emotional brain.

PSYCHOTHERAPY AS AN EMOTIONAL TUTORIAL

Fortunately, the catastrophic moments in which traumatic memories are emblazoned are rare during the course of life for most of us. But the same circuitry that can be seen so boldly imprinting traumatic memories is presumably at work in life's quieter moments, too. The more ordinary travails of childhood, such as being chronically ignored and deprived of attention or tenderness by one's parents, abandonment or loss, or social rejection may never reach the fever pitch of trauma, but they surely leave their imprint on the emotional

brain, creating distortions—and tears and rages—in intimate relationships later in life. If PTSD can be healed, so can the more muted emotional scars that so many of us bear; that is the task of psychotherapy. And, in general, it is in learning to deal skillfully with these loaded reactions that emotional intelligence comes into play.

The dynamic between the amygdala and the more fully informed reactions of the prefrontal cortex may offer a neuroanatomical model for how psychotherapy reshapes deep, maladaptive emotional patterns. As Joseph LeDoux, the neuroscientist who discovered the amygdala's hair-trigger role in emotional outbursts, conjectures, "Once your emotional system learns something, it seems you never let it go. What therapy does is teach you to control it—it teaches your neocortex how to inhibit your amygdala. The propensity to act is suppressed, while your basic emotion about it remains in a subdued form."

Given the brain architecture that underlies emotional relearning, what seems to remain, even after successful psychotherapy, is a vestigial reaction, a remnant of the original sensitivity or fear at the root of a troubling emotional pattern.²¹ The prefrontal cortex can refine or put the brakes on the amygdala's impulse to rampage, but cannot keep it from reacting in the first place. Thus while we cannot decide *when* we have our emotional outbursts, we have more control over *how long* they last. A quicker recovery time from such outbursts may well be one mark of emotional maturity.

Over the course of therapy, what seems to change in the main are the *responses* that people make once an emotional reaction is triggered—but the tendency for the reaction to be triggered in the first place does not disappear entirely. Evidence for this comes from a series of studies of psychotherapy conducted by Lester Luborsky and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania.²² They analyzed the main relationship conflicts that brought dozens of patients into psychotherapy—issues such as a deep craving to be accepted or find intimacy, or a fear of being a failure or being overly dependent. They then carefully analyzed the typical (always self-defeating) responses the patients made when these wishes and fears were activated in their relationships—responses such as being too demanding, which created a backlash of anger or coldness in the other person, or withdrawing in self-defense from an anticipated slight, leaving the other person miffed by the seeming rebuff. During such ill-fated encounters, the patients, understandably, felt flooded by upsetting feelings—

hopelessness and sadness, resentment and anger, tension and fear, guilt and self-blame, and so on. Whatever the specific pattern of the patient, it seemed to show up in most every important relationship, whether with a spouse or lover, a child or parent, or peers and bosses at work.

Over the course of long-term therapy, however, these patients made two kinds of changes: their emotional reaction to the triggering events became less distressing, even calm or bemused, and their overt responses became more effective in getting what they truly wanted from the relationship. What did not change, however, was their underlying wish or fear, and the initial twinge of feeling. By the time the patients had but a few sessions left in therapy, the encounters they told about showed they had only half as many negative emotional reactions compared to when they first started therapy, and were twice as likely to get the positive response they deeply desired from the other person. But what did not change at all was the particular sensitivity at the root of these needs.

In brain terms, we can speculate, the limbic circuitry would send alarm signals in response to cues of a feared event, but the prefrontal cortex and related zones would have learned a new, more healthy response. In short, emotional lessons—even the most deeply implanted habits of the heart learned in childhood—can be reshaped. Emotional learning is lifelong.

Temperament Is Not Destiny

So much for altering emotional patterns that have been learned. But what about those responses that are givens of our genetic endowment—what of changing the habitual reactions of people who by nature are, say, highly volatile, or painfully shy? This range of the emotional compass falls under the sweep of temperament, the background murmur of feelings that mark our basic disposition. Temperament can be defined in terms of the moods that typify our emotional life. To some degree we each have such a favored emotional range; temperament is a given at birth, part of the genetic lottery that has compelling force in the unfolding of life. Every parent has seen this: from birth a child will be calm and placid or testy and difficult. The question is whether such a biologically determined emotional set can be changed by experience. Does our biology fix our emotional destiny, or can even an innately shy child grow into a more confident adult?

The clearest answer to this question comes from the work of Jerome Kagan, the eminent developmental psychologist at Harvard University.¹ Kagan posits that there are at least four temperamental types—timid, bold, upbeat, and melancholy—and that each is due to a different pattern of brain activity. There are likely innumerable differences in temperamental endowment, each based in innate differences in emotional circuitry; for any given emotion people can differ in how easily it triggers, how long it lasts, how intense it becomes. Kagan's work concentrates on one of these patterns: the dimension of temperament that runs from boldness to timidity.

For decades mothers have been bringing their infants and toddlers to Kagan's Laboratory for Child Development on the fourteenth floor of Harvard's William James Hall to take part in his studies of child development. It was there that Kagan and his coresearchers noticed early signs of shyness in a group of twenty-one-month-old toddlers brought for experimental observations. In free play with other toddlers, some were bubbly and spontaneous, playing with other babies without the least hesitation. Others, though, were uncertain

and hesitant, hanging back, clinging to their mothers, quietly watching the others at play. Almost four years later, when these same children were in kindergarten, Kagan's group observed them again. Over the intervening years none of the outgoing children had become timid, while two thirds of the timid ones were still reticent.

Kagan finds that children who are overly sensitive and fearful grow into shy and timorous adults; from birth about 15 to 20 percent of children are "behaviorally inhibited," as he calls them. As infants, these children are timid about anything unfamiliar. This makes them finicky about eating new foods, reluctant to approach new animals or places, and shy around strangers. It also renders them sensitive in other ways—for example, prone to guilt and self-reproach. These are the children who become paralyzingly anxious in social situations: in class and on the playground, when meeting new people, whenever the social spotlight shines on them. As adults, they are prone to be wallflowers, and morbidly afraid of having to give a speech or perform in public.

Tom, one of the boys in Kagan's study, is typical of the shy type. At every measurement through childhood—two, five, and seven years of age—Tom was among the most timid children. When interviewed at thirteen, Tom was tense and stiff, biting his lip and wringing his hands, his face impassive, breaking into a tight smile only when talking about his girlfriend; his answers were short, his manner subdued.² Throughout the middle years of childhood, until about age eleven, Tom remembers being painfully shy, breaking into a sweat whenever he had to approach playmates. He was also troubled by intense fears: of his house burning down, of diving into a swimming pool, of being alone in the dark. In frequent nightmares, he was attacked by monsters. Though he has felt less shy in the last two years or so, he still feels some anxiety around other children, and his worries now center on doing well at school, even though he is in the top 5 percent of his class. The son of a scientist, Tom finds a career in that field appealing, since its relative solitude fits his introverted inclinations.

By contrast, Ralph was one of the boldest and most outgoing children at every age. Always relaxed and talkative, at thirteen he sat back at ease in his chair, had no nervous mannerisms, and spoke in a confident, friendly tone, as though the interviewer were a peer—though the difference in their ages was twenty-five years. During childhood he had only two short-lived fears—one of dogs, after a big

dog jumped on him at age three, and another of flying, when he heard about plane crashes at age seven. Sociable and popular, Ralph has never thought of himself as shy.

The timid children seem to come into life with a neural circuitry that makes them more reactive to even mild stress—from birth, their hearts beat faster than other infants’ in response to strange or novel situations. At twenty-one months, when the reticent toddlers were holding back from playing, heart rate monitors showed that their hearts were racing with anxiety. That easily aroused anxiety seems to underlie their lifelong timidity: they treat any new person or situation as though it were a potential threat. Perhaps as a result, middle-aged women who remember having been especially shy in childhood, when compared with their more outgoing peers, tend to go through life with more fears, worries, and guilt, and to suffer more from stress-related problems such as migraine headaches, irritable bowel, and other stomach problems.³

THE NEUROCHEMISTRY OF TIMIDITY

The difference between cautious Tom and bold Ralph, Kagan believes, lies in the excitability of a neural circuit centered on the amygdala. Kagan proposes that people like Tom, who are prone to fearfulness, are born with a neurochemistry that makes this circuit easily aroused, and so they avoid the unfamiliar, shy away from uncertainty, and suffer anxiety. Those who, like Ralph, have a nervous system calibrated with a much higher threshold for amygdala arousal, are less easily frightened, more naturally outgoing, and eager to explore new places and meet new people.

An early clue to which pattern a child has inherited is how difficult and irritable she is as an infant, and how distressed she becomes when confronted with something or someone unfamiliar. While about one in five infants falls into the timid category, about two in five have the bold temperament—at least at birth.

Part of Kagan’s evidence comes from observations of cats that are unusually timid. About one in seven housecats has a pattern of fearfulness akin to the timid children’s: they draw away from novelty (instead of exhibiting a cat’s legendary curiosity), they are reluctant to explore new territory, and they attack only the smallest rodents, being too timid to take on larger ones that their more courageous feline

peers would pursue with gusto. Direct brain probes have found that portions of the amygdala are unusually excitable in these timid cats, especially when, for instance, they hear a threatening howl from another cat.

The cats' timidity blossoms at about one month of age, which is the point when their amygdala matures enough to take control of the brain circuitry to approach or avoid. One month in kitten brain maturation is akin to eight months in a human infant; it is at eight or nine months, Kagan notes, that "stranger" fear appears in babies—if the baby's mother leaves a room and there is a stranger present, the result is tears. Timid children, Kagan postulates, may have inherited chronically high levels of norepinephrine or other brain chemicals that activate the amygdala and so create a low threshold of excitability, making the amygdala more easily triggered.

One sign of this heightened sensitivity is that, for example, when young men and women who were quite shy in childhood are measured in a laboratory while exposed to stresses such as harsh smells, their heart rate stays elevated much longer than for their more outgoing peers—a sign that surging norepinephrine is keeping their amygdala excited and, through connected neural circuits, their sympathetic nervous system aroused.⁴ Kagan finds that timid children have higher levels of reactivity across the range of sympathetic nervous system indices, from higher resting blood pressure and greater dilation of the pupils, to higher levels of norepinephrine markers in their urine.

Silence is another barometer of timidity. Whenever Kagan's team observed shy and bold children in a natural setting—in their kindergarten classes, with other children they did not know, or talking with an interviewer—the timid children talked less. One timid kindergartener would say nothing when other children spoke to her, and spent most of her day just watching the others play. Kagan speculates that a timid silence in the face of novelty or a perceived threat is a sign of the activity of a neural circuit running between the forebrain, the amygdala, and nearby limbic structures that control the ability to vocalize (these same circuits make us "choke up" under stress).

These sensitive children are at high risk for developing an anxiety disorder such as panic attacks, starting as early as sixth or seventh grade. In one study of 754 boys and girls in those grades, 44 were found to have already suffered at least one episode of panic, or to

have had several preliminary symptoms. These anxiety episodes were usually triggered by the ordinary alarms of early adolescence, such as a first date or a big exam—alarms that most children handle without developing more serious problems. But teenagers who were timid by temperament and who had been unusually frightened by new situations got panic symptoms such as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, or a choking feeling, along with the feeling that something horrible was going to happen to them, like going crazy or dying. The researchers believe that while the episodes were not significant enough to rate the psychiatric diagnosis “panic disorder,” they signal that these teenagers would be at greater risk for developing the disorder as the years went on; many adults who suffer panic attacks say the attacks began during their teen years.⁵

The onset of the anxiety attacks was closely tied to puberty. Girls with few signs of puberty reported no such attacks, but of those who had gone through puberty about 8 percent said they had experienced panic. Once they have had such an attack, they are prone to developing the dread of a recurrence that leads people with panic disorder to shrink from life.

NOTHING BOTHERS ME: THE CHEERFUL TEMPERAMENT

In the 1920s, as a young woman, my aunt June left her home in Kansas City and ventured on her own to Shanghai—a dangerous journey for a solitary woman in those years. There June met and married a British detective in the colonial police force of that international center of commerce and intrigue. When the Japanese captured Shanghai at the outset of World War II, my aunt and her husband were interned in the prison camp depicted in the book and movie *Empire of the Sun*. After surviving five horrific years in the prison camp, she and her husband had, literally, lost everything. Penniless, they were repatriated to British Columbia.

I remember as a child first meeting June, an ebullient elderly woman whose life had followed a remarkable course. In her later years she suffered a stroke that left her partly paralyzed; after a slow and arduous recovery she was able to walk again, but with a limp. In those years I remember going for an outing with June, then in her seventies. Somehow she wandered off, and after several minutes I heard a feeble yell—June crying for help. She had fallen and could

not get up on her own. I rushed to help her up, and as I did so, instead of complaining or lamenting she laughed at her predicament. Her only comment was a lighthearted “Well, at least I can walk again.”

By nature, some people’s emotions seem, like my aunt’s, to gravitate toward the positive pole; these people are naturally upbeat and easygoing, while others are dour and melancholy. This dimension of temperament—ebullience at one end, melancholy at the other—seems linked to the relative activity of the right and left prefrontal areas, the upper poles of the emotional brain. That insight has emerged largely from the work of Richard Davidson, a University of Wisconsin psychologist. He discovered that people who have greater activity in the left frontal lobe, compared to the right, are by temperament cheerful; they typically take delight in people and in what life presents them with, bouncing back from setbacks as my aunt June did. But those with relatively greater activity on the right side are given to negativity and sour moods, and are easily fazed by life’s difficulties; in a sense, they seem to suffer because they cannot turn off their worries and depressions.

In one of Davidson’s experiments volunteers with the most pronounced activity in the left frontal areas were compared with the fifteen who showed most activity on the right. Those with marked right frontal activity showed a distinctive pattern of negativity on a personality test: they fit the caricature portrayed by Woody Allen’s comedy roles, the alarmist who sees catastrophe in the smallest thing—prone to funks and moodiness, and suspicious of a world they saw as fraught with overwhelming difficulties and lurking dangers. By contrast to their melancholy counterparts, those with stronger left frontal activity saw the world very differently. Sociable and cheerful, they typically felt a sense of enjoyment, were frequently in good moods, had a strong sense of self-confidence, and felt rewardingly engaged in life. Their scores on psychological tests suggested a lower lifetime risk for depression and other emotional disorders.⁶

People who have a history of clinical depression, Davidson found, had lower levels of brain activity in the left frontal lobe, and more on the right, than did people who had never been depressed. He found the same pattern in patients newly diagnosed with depression. Davidson speculates that people who overcome depression have learned to increase the level of activity in their left prefrontal lobe—a speculation awaiting experimental testing.

Though his research is on the 30 percent or so of people at the

extremes, just about anyone can be classified by their brain wave patterns as tending toward one or the other type, says Davidson. The contrast in temperament between the morose and the cheerful shows up in many ways, large and small. For example, in one experiment volunteers watched short film clips. Some were amusing—a gorilla taking a bath, a puppy at play. Others, like an instructional film for nurses featuring grisly details of surgery, were quite distressing. The right-hemisphere, somber folks found the happy movies only mildly amusing, but they felt extreme fear and disgust in reaction to the surgical blood and gore. The cheerful group had minimal reactions to the surgery; their strongest reactions were of delight when they saw the upbeat films.

Thus we seem by temperament primed to respond to life in either a negative or a positive emotional register. The tendency toward a melancholy or upbeat temperament—like that toward timidity or boldness—emerges within the first year of life, a fact that strongly suggests it too is genetically determined. Like most of the brain, the frontal lobes are still maturing in the first few months of life, and so their activity cannot be reliably measured until the age of ten months or so. But in infants that young, Davidson found that the activity level of the frontal lobes predicted whether they would cry when their mothers left the room. The correlation was virtually 100 percent: of dozens of infants tested this way, every infant who cried had more brain activity on the right side, while those who did not had more activity on the left.

Still, even if this basic dimension of temperament is laid down from birth, or very nearly from birth, those of us who have the morose pattern are not necessarily doomed to go through life brooding and crotchety. The emotional lessons of childhood can have a profound impact on temperament, either amplifying or muting an innate predisposition. The great plasticity of the brain in childhood means that experiences during those years can have a lasting impact on the sculpting of neural pathways for the rest of life. Perhaps the best illustration of the kinds of experiences that can alter temperament for the better is in an observation that emerged from Kagan's research with timid children.

TAMING THE OVEREXCITABLE AMYGDALA

The encouraging news from Kagan's studies is that not all fearful infants grow up hanging back from life—temperament is not destiny. The overexcitable amygdala can be tamed, with the right experiences. What makes the difference are the emotional lessons and responses children learn as they grow. For the timid child, what matters at the outset is how they are treated by their parents, and so how they learn to handle their natural timidity. Those parents who engineer gradual emboldening experiences for their children offer them what may be a lifelong corrective to their fearfulness.

About one in three infants who come into the world with all the signs of an overexcitable amygdala have lost their timidity by the time they reach kindergarten.⁷ From observations of these once-fearful children at home, it is clear that parents, and especially mothers, play a major role in whether an innately timid child grows bolder with time or continues to shy away from novelty and become upset by challenge. Kagan's research team found that some of the mothers held to the philosophy that they should protect their timid toddlers from whatever was upsetting; others felt that it was more important to help their timid child learn how to cope with these upsetting moments, and so adapt to life's small struggles. The protective belief seems to have abetted the fearfulness, probably by depriving the youngsters of opportunities for learning how to overcome their fears. The "learn to adapt" philosophy of childrearing seems to have helped fearful children become braver.

Observations in the homes when the babies were about six months old found that the protective mothers, trying to soothe their infants, picked them up and held them when they fretted or cried, and did so longer than those mothers who tried to help their infants learn to master these moments of upset. The ratio of times the infants were held when calm and when upset showed that the protective mothers held their infants much longer during the upsets than the calm periods.

Another difference emerged when the infants were around one year old: the protective mothers were more lenient and indirect in setting limits for their toddlers when they were doing something that might be harmful, such as mouthing an object they might swallow. The other mothers, by contrast, were emphatic, setting firm limits, giving direct commands, blocking the child's actions, insisting on obedience.

Why should firmness lead to a reduction in fearfulness? Kagan speculates that there is something learned when a baby has his steady

crawl toward what seems to him an intriguing object (but to his mother a dangerous one) interrupted by her warning, “Get away from that!” The infant is suddenly forced to deal with a mild uncertainty. The repetition of this challenge hundreds and hundreds of times during the first year of life gives the infant continual rehearsals, in small doses, of meeting the unexpected in life. For fearful children that is precisely the encounter that has to be mastered, and manageable doses are just right for learning the lesson. When the encounter takes place with parents who, though loving, do not rush to pick up and soothe the toddler over every little upset, he gradually learns to manage such moments on his own. By age two, when these formerly fearful toddlers are brought back to Kagan’s laboratory, they are far less likely to break out into tears when a stranger frowns at them, or an experimenter puts a blood-pressure cuff around their arm.

Kagan’s conclusion: “It appears that mothers who protect their high[ly] reactive infants from frustration and anxiety in the hope of effecting a benevolent outcome seem to exacerbate the infant’s uncertainty and produce the opposite effect.”⁸ In other words, the protective strategy backfires by depriving timid toddlers of the very opportunity to learn to calm themselves in the face of the unfamiliar, and so gain some small mastery of their fears. At the neurological level, presumably, this means their prefrontal circuits missed the chance to learn alternate responses to knee-jerk fear; instead, their tendency for unbridled fearfulness may have been strengthened simply through repetition.

In contrast, as Kagan told me, “Those children who had become less timid by kindergarten seem to have had parents who put gentle pressure on them to be more outgoing. Although this temperamental trait seems slightly harder than others to change—probably because of its physiological basis—no human quality is beyond change.”

Throughout childhood some timid children grow bolder as experience continues to mold the key neural circuitry. One of the signs that a timid child will be more likely to overcome this natural inhibition is having a higher level of social competence: being cooperative and getting along with other children; being empathic, prone to giving and sharing, and considerate; and being able to develop close friendships. These traits marked a group of children first identified as having a timid temperament at age four, who shook it off by the time they were ten years old.⁹

By contrast, those timid four-year-olds whose temperament changed

little over the same six years tended to be less able emotionally: crying and falling apart under stress more easily; being emotionally inappropriate; being fearful, sulky, or whiny; overreacting to minor frustration with anger; having trouble delaying gratification; being overly sensitive to criticism, or mistrustful. These emotional lapses are, of course, likely to mean their relationships with other children will be troubled, should they be able to overcome their initial reluctance to engage.

By contrast, it is easy to see why the more emotionally competent—though shy by temperament—children spontaneously outgrew their timidity. Being more socially skilled, they were far more likely to have a succession of positive experiences with other children. Even if they were tentative about, say, speaking to a new playmate, once the ice was broken they were able to shine socially. The regular repetition of such social success over many years would naturally tend to make the timid more sure of themselves.

These advances toward boldness are encouraging; they suggest that even innate emotional patterns can change to some degree. A child who comes into the world easily frightened can learn to be calmer, or even outgoing, in the face of the unfamiliar. Fearfulness—or any other temperament—may be part of the biological givens of our emotional lives, but we are not necessarily limited to a specific emotional menu by our inherited traits. There is a range of possibility even within genetic constraints. As behavioral geneticists observe, genes alone do not determine behavior; our environment, especially what we experience and learn as we grow, shapes how a temperamental predisposition expresses itself as life unfolds. Our emotional capacities are not a given; with the right learning, they can be improved. The reasons for this lie in how the human brain matures.

CHILDHOOD: A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

The human brain is by no means fully formed at birth. It continues to shape itself through life, with the most intense growth occurring during childhood. Children are born with many more neurons than their mature brain will retain; through a process known as “pruning” the brain actually loses the neuronal connections that are less used, and forms strong connections in those synaptic circuits that have been utilized the most. Pruning, by doing away with extraneous synapses,

improves the signal-to-noise ratio in the brain by removing the cause of the “noise.” This process is constant and quick; synaptic connections can form in a matter of hours or days. Experience, particularly in childhood, sculpts the brain.

The classic demonstration of the impact of experience on brain growth was by Nobel Prize-winners Thorsten Wiesel and David Hubel, both neuroscientists.¹⁰ They showed that in cats and monkeys, there was a critical period during the first few months of life for the development of the synapses that carry signals from the eye to the visual cortex, where those signals are interpreted. If one eye was kept closed during that period, the number of synapses from that eye to the visual cortex dwindled away, while those from the open eye multiplied. If after the critical period ended the closed eye was reopened, the animal was functionally blind in that eye. Although nothing was wrong with the eye itself, there were too few circuits to the visual cortex for signals from that eye to be interpreted.

In humans the corresponding critical period for vision lasts for the first six years of life. During this time normal seeing stimulates the formation of increasingly complex neural circuitry for vision that begins in the eye and ends in the visual cortex. If a child’s eye is taped closed for even a few weeks, it can produce a measurable deficit in the visual capacity of that eye. If a child has had one eye closed for several months during this period, and later has it restored, that eye’s vision for detail will be impaired.

A vivid demonstration of the impact of experience on the developing brain is in studies of “rich” and “poor” rats.¹¹ The “rich” rats lived in small groups in cages with plenty of rat diversions such as ladders and treadmills. The “poor” rats lived in cages that were similar but barren and lacking diversions. Over a period of months the neocortices of the rich rats developed far more complex networks of synaptic circuits interconnecting the neurons; the poor rats’ neuronal circuitry was sparse by comparison. The difference was so great that the rich rats’ brains were heavier, and, perhaps not surprisingly, they were far smarter at solving mazes than the poor rats. Similar experiments with monkeys show these differences between those “rich” and “poor” in experience, and the same effect is sure to occur in humans.

Psychotherapy—that is, systematic emotional relearning—stands as a case in point for the way experience can both change emotional patterns and shape the brain. The most dramatic demonstration comes

from a study of people being treated for obsessive-compulsive disorder.¹² One of the more common compulsions is hand washing, which can be done so often, even hundreds of times in a day, that the person's skin cracks. PET scan studies show that obsessive-compulsives have greater than normal activity in the prefrontal lobes.¹³

Half of the patients in the study received the standard drug treatment, fluoxetine (better known by the brand name Prozac), and half got behavior therapy. During the therapy they were systematically exposed to the object of their obsession or compulsion without performing it; patients with hand-washing compulsions were put at a sink, but not allowed to wash. At the same time they learned to question the fears and dreads that spurred them on—for example, that failure to wash would mean they would get a disease and die. Gradually, through months of such sessions, the compulsions faded, just as they did with the medication.

The remarkable finding, though, was a PET scan test showing that the behavior therapy patients had as significant a decrease in the activity of a key part of the emotional brain, the caudate nucleus, as did the patients successfully treated with the drug fluoxetine. Their experience had changed brain function—and relieved symptoms—as effectively as the medication!

CRUCIAL WINDOWS

Of all species we humans take the longest for our brains to fully mature. While each area of the brain develops at a different rate during childhood, the onset of puberty marks one of the most sweeping periods of pruning throughout the brain. Several brain areas critical for emotional life are among the slowest to mature. While the sensory areas mature during early childhood, and the limbic system by puberty, the frontal lobes—seat of emotional self-control, understanding, and artful response—continue to develop into late adolescence, until somewhere between sixteen and eighteen years of age.¹⁴

The habits of emotional management that are repeated over and over again during childhood and the teenage years will themselves help mold this circuitry. This makes childhood a crucial window of opportunity for shaping lifelong emotional propensities; habits

acquired in childhood become set in the basic synaptic wiring of neural architecture, and are harder to change later in life. Given the importance of the prefrontal lobes for managing emotion, the very long window for synaptic sculpting in this brain region may well mean that, in the grand design of the brain, a child's experiences over the years can mold lasting connections in the regulatory circuitry of the emotional brain. As we have seen, critical experiences include how dependable and responsive to the child's needs parents are, the opportunities and guidance a child has in learning to handle her own distress and control impulse, and practice in empathy. By the same token, neglect or abuse, the misattunement of a self-absorbed or indifferent parent, or brutal discipline can leave their imprint on the emotional circuitry.¹⁵

One of the most essential emotional lessons, first learned in infancy and refined throughout childhood, is how to soothe oneself when upset. For very young infants, soothing comes from caretakers: a mother hears her infant crying, picks him up, holds and rocks him until he calms down. This biological attunement, some theorists propose, helps the child begin to learn how to do the same for himself.¹⁶ During a critical period between ten and eighteen months, the orbitofrontal area of the prefrontal cortex is rapidly forming the connections with the limbic brain that will make it a key on/off switch for distress. The infant who through countless episodes of being soothed is helped along in learning how to calm down, the speculation goes, will have stronger connections in this circuit for controlling distress, and so throughout life will be better at soothing himself when upset.

To be sure, the art of soothing oneself is mastered over many years, and with new means, as brain maturation offers a child progressively more sophisticated emotional tools. Remember, the frontal lobes, so important for regulating limbic impulse, mature into adolescence.¹⁷ Another key circuit that continues to shape itself through childhood centers on the vagus nerve, which at one end regulates the heart and other parts of the body, and at the other sends signals to the amygdala via other circuits, prompting it to secrete the catecholamines, which prime the fight-or-flight response. A University of Washington team that assessed the impact of childrearing discovered that emotionally adept parenting led to a change for the better in vagus-nerve function.

As John Gottman, the psychologist who led the research, explained, "Parents modify their children's vagal tone"—a measure of how easily

triggered the vagus nerve is—“by coaching them emotionally: talking to children about their feelings and how to understand them, not being critical and judgmental, problem-solving about emotional predicaments, coaching them on what to do, like alternatives to hitting, or to withdrawing when you’re sad.” When parents did this well, children were better able to suppress the vagal activity that keeps the amygdala priming the body with fight-or-flight hormones—and so were better behaved.

It stands to reason that the key skills of emotional intelligence each have critical periods extending over several years in childhood. Each period represents a window for helping that child instill beneficial emotional habits or, if missed, to make it that much harder to offer corrective lessons later in life. The massive sculpting and pruning of neural circuits in childhood may be an underlying reason why early emotional hardships and trauma have such enduring and pervasive effects in adulthood. It may explain, too, why psychotherapy can often take so long to affect some of these patterns—and why, as we’ve seen, even after therapy those patterns tend to remain as underlying propensities, though with an overlay of new insights and relearned responses.

To be sure, the brain remains plastic throughout life, though not to the spectacular extent seen in childhood. All learning implies a change in the brain, a strengthening of synaptic connection. The brain changes in the patients with obsessive-compulsive disorder show that emotional habits are malleable throughout life, with some sustained effort, even at the neural level. What happens with the brain in PTSD (or in therapy, for that matter) is an analog of the effects all repeated or intense emotional experiences bring, for better or for worse.

Some of the most telling of such lessons come from parent to child. There are very different emotional habits instilled by parents whose attunement means an infant’s emotional needs are acknowledged and met or whose discipline includes empathy, on the one hand, or self-absorbed parents who ignore a child’s distress or who discipline capriciously by yelling and hitting. Much psychotherapy is, in a sense, a remedial tutorial for what was skewed or missed completely earlier in life. But why not do what we can to prevent that need, by giving children the nurturing and guidance that cultivates the essential emotional skills in the first place?

PART FIVE

**EMOTIONAL
LITERACY**

The Cost of Emotional Illiteracy

It began as a small dispute, but had escalated. Ian Moore, a senior at Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn, and Tyrone Sinkler, a junior, had had a falling-out with a buddy, fifteen-year-old Khalil Sumpter. Then they had started picking on him and making threats. Now it exploded.

Khalil, scared that Ian and Tyrone were going to beat him up, brought a .38 caliber pistol to school one morning, and, fifteen feet from a school guard, shot both boys to death at point-blank range in the school's hallway.

The incident, chilling as it is, can be read as yet another sign of a desperate need for lessons in handling emotions, settling disagreements peaceably, and just plain getting along. Educators, long disturbed by schoolchildren's lagging scores in math and reading, are realizing there is a different and more alarming deficiency: emotional illiteracy.¹ And while laudable efforts are being made to raise academic standards, this new and troubling deficiency is not being addressed in the standard school curriculum. As one Brooklyn teacher put it, the present emphasis in schools suggests that "we care more about how well schoolchildren can read and write than whether they'll be alive next week."

Signs of the deficiency can be seen in violent incidents such as the shooting of Ian and Tyrone, growing ever more common in American schools. But these are more than isolated events; the heightening of the turmoil of adolescence and troubles of childhood can be read for the United States—a bellwether of world trends—in statistics such as these:²

In 1990, compared to the previous two decades, the United States saw the highest juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes ever; teen arrests for forcible rape had doubled; teen murder rates quadrupled, mostly due to an increase in shootings.³ During those same two decades, the suicide rate for teenagers tripled, as did the number of children under fourteen who are murder victims.⁴

More, and younger, teenage girls are getting pregnant. As of 1993 the birthrate among girls ten to fourteen has risen steadily for five years in a row—some call it “babies having babies”—as has the proportion of unwanted teen pregnancies and peer pressure to have sex. Rates of venereal disease among teenagers have tripled over the last three decades.⁵

While these figures are discouraging, if the focus is on African-American youth, especially in the inner city, they are utterly bleak—all the rates are higher by far, sometimes doubled, sometimes tripled or higher. For example, heroin and cocaine use among white youth climbed about 300 percent over the two decades before the 1990s; for African-American youth it jumped to a staggering *13 times* the rate of twenty years before.⁶

The most common cause of disability among teenagers is mental illness. Symptoms of depression, whether major or minor, affect up to one third of teenagers; for girls, the incidence of depression doubles at puberty. The frequency of eating disorders in teenage girls has skyrocketed.⁷

Finally, unless things change, the long-term prospects for today’s children marrying and having a fruitful, stable life together are growing more dismal with each generation. As we saw in [Chapter 9](#), while during the 1970s and 1980s the divorce rate was around 50 percent, as we entered the 1990s the rate among newlyweds predicted that two out of three marriages of young people would end in divorce.

AN EMOTIONAL MALAISE

These alarming statistics are like the canary in the coal miner’s tunnel whose death warns of too little oxygen. Beyond such sobering numbers, the plight of today’s children can be seen at more subtle levels, in day-to-day problems that have not yet blossomed into outright crises. Perhaps the most telling data of all—a direct barometer of dropping levels of emotional competence—are from a national sample of American children, ages seven to sixteen, comparing their emotional condition in the mid-1970s and at the end of the 1980s.⁸ Based on parents’ and teachers’ assessments, there was a steady worsening. No one problem stood out; all indicators simply crept steadily in the wrong direction. Children, on average, were doing more poorly in these specific ways:

- *Withdrawal or social problems*: preferring to be alone; being secretive; sulking a lot; lacking energy; feeling unhappy; being overly dependent
- *Anxious and depressed*: being lonely; having many fears and worries; needing to be perfect; feeling unloved; feeling nervous or sad and depressed
- *Attention or thinking problems*: unable to pay attention or sit still; daydreaming; acting without thinking; being too nervous to concentrate; doing poorly on schoolwork; unable to get mind off thoughts
- *Delinquent or aggressive*: hanging around kids who get in trouble; lying and cheating; arguing a lot; being mean to other people; demanding attention; destroying other people's things; disobeying at home and at school; being stubborn and moody; talking too much; teasing a lot; having a hot temper

While any of these problems in isolation raises no eyebrows, taken as a group they are barometers of a sea change, a new kind of toxicity seeping into and poisoning the very experience of childhood, signifying sweeping deficits in emotional competences. This emotional malaise seems to be a universal price of modern life for children. While Americans often decry their problems as particularly bad compared to other cultures', studies around the world have found rates on a par with or worse than in the United States. For example, in the 1980s teachers and parents in the Netherlands, China, and Germany rated children at about the same level of problems as were found for American children in 1976. And some countries had children in worse shape than current U.S. levels, including Australia, France, and Thailand. But this may not remain true for long. The larger forces that propel the downward spiral in emotional competence seem to be picking up speed in the United States relative to many other developed nations.⁹

No children, rich or poor, are exempt from risk; these problems are universal, occurring in all ethnic, racial, and income groups. Thus while children in poverty have the worst record on indices of emotional skills, their *rate* of deterioration over the decades was no worse than for middle-class children or for wealthy children: all show the same steady slide. There has also been a corresponding threefold rise in the number of children who have gotten psychological help

(perhaps a good sign, signaling that help is more available), as well as a near doubling of the number of children who have enough emotional problems that they *should* get such help but have not (a bad sign)—from about 9 percent in 1976 to 18 percent in 1989.

Urie Bronfenbrenner, the eminent Cornell University developmental psychologist who did an international comparison of children's well-being, says: "In the absence of good support systems, external stresses have become so great that even strong families are falling apart. The hecticness, instability, and inconsistency of daily family life are rampant in all segments of our society, including the well-educated and well-to-do. What is at stake is nothing less than the next generation, particularly males, who in growing up are especially vulnerable to such disruptive forces as the devastating effects of divorce, poverty, and unemployment. The status of American children and families is as desperate as ever.... We are depriving millions of children of their competence and moral character."¹⁰

This is not just an American phenomenon but a global one, with worldwide competition to drive down labor costs creating economic forces that press on the family. These are times of financially besieged families in which both parents work long hours, so that children are left to their own devices or the TV baby-sits; when more children than ever grow up in poverty; when the one-parent family is becoming ever more commonplace; when more infants and toddlers are left in day care so poorly run that it amounts to neglect. All this means, even for well-intentioned parents, the erosion of the countless small, nourishing exchanges between parent and child that build emotional competences.

If families no longer function effectively to put all our children on a firm footing for life, what are we to do? A more careful look at the mechanics of specific problems suggests how given deficits in emotional or social competences lay the foundation for grave problems—and how well-aimed correctives or preventives could keep more children on track.

TAMING AGGRESSION

In my elementary school the tough kid was Jimmy, a fourth grader when I was in first grade. He was the kid who would steal your lunch money, take your bike, slug you as soon as talk to you. Jimmy was the

classic bully, starting fights with the least provocation, or none at all. We all stood in awe of Jimmy—and we all stood at a distance. Everyone hated and feared Jimmy; no one would play with him. It was as though everywhere he went on the playground an invisible bodyguard cleared kids out of his way.

Kids like Jimmy are clearly troubled. But what may be less obvious is that being so flagrantly aggressive in childhood is a mark of emotional and other troubles to come. Jimmy was in jail for assault by the time he reached sixteen.

The lifelong legacy of childhood aggressiveness in kids like Jimmy has emerged from many studies.¹¹ As we have seen, the family life of such aggressive children typically includes parents who alternate neglect with harsh and capricious punishments, a pattern that, perhaps understandably, makes the children a bit paranoid or combative.

Not all angry children are bullies; some are withdrawn social outcasts who overreact to being teased or to what they perceive as slights or unfairness. But the one perceptual flaw that unites such children is that they perceive slights where none were intended, imagining their peers to be more hostile toward them than they actually are. This leads them to misperceive neutral acts as threatening ones—an innocent bump is seen as a vendetta—and to attack in return. That, of course, leads other children to shun them, isolating them further. Such angry, isolated children are highly sensitive to injustices and being treated unfairly. They typically see themselves as victims and can recite a list of instances when, say, teachers blamed them for doing something when in fact they were innocent. Another trait of such children is that once they are in the heat of anger they can think of only one way to react: by lashing out.

These perceptual biases can be seen at work in an experiment in which bullies are paired with a more peaceable child to watch videos. In one video, a boy drops his books when another knocks into him, and children standing nearby laugh; the boy who dropped the books gets angry and tries to hit one of those who laughed. When the boys who watched the video talk about it afterward, the bully always sees the boy who struck out as justified. Even more telling, when they have to rate how aggressive the boys were during their discussion of the video, the bullies see the boy who knocked into the other as more combative, and the anger of the boy who struck out as justified.¹²

This jump to judgment testifies to a deep perceptual bias in people

who are unusually aggressive: they act on the basis of the assumption of hostility or threat, paying too little attention to what is actually going on. Once they assume threat, they leapfrog to action. For instance, if an aggressive boy is playing checkers with another who moves a piece out of turn, he'll interpret the move as "cheating" without pausing to find out if it had been an innocent mistake. His presumption is of malevolence rather than innocence; his reaction is automatic hostility. Along with the knee-jerk perception of a hostile act is entwined an equally automatic aggression; instead of, say, pointing out to the other boy that he made a mistake, he will jump to accusation, yelling, hitting. And the more such children do this, the more automatic aggression becomes for them, and the more the repertoire of alternatives—politeness, joking—shrinks.

Such children are emotionally vulnerable in the sense that they have a low threshold for upset, getting peeved more often by more things; once upset, their thinking is muddled, so that they see benign acts as hostile and fall back on their overlearned habit of striking out.¹³

These perceptual biases toward hostility are already in place by the early grades. While most children, and especially boys, are rambunctious in kindergarten and first grade, the more aggressive children fail to learn a modicum of self-control by second grade. Where other children have started to learn negotiation and compromise for playground disagreements, the bullies rely more and more on force and bluster. They pay a social price: within two or three hours of a first playground contact with a bully, other children already say they dislike him.¹⁴

But studies that have followed children from the preschool years into the teenage ones find that up to half of first graders who are disruptive, unable to get along with other kids, disobedient with their parents, and resistant with teachers will become delinquents in their teen years.¹⁵ Of course, not all such aggressive children are on the trajectory that leads to violence and criminality in later life. But of all children, these are the ones most at risk for eventually committing violent crimes.

The drift toward crime shows up surprisingly early in these children's lives. When children in a Montreal kindergarten were rated for hostility and troublemaking, those highest at age five already had far greater evidence of delinquency just five to eight years later, in their early teens. They were about three times as likely as other

children to admit they had beaten up someone who had not done anything to them, to have shoplifted, to have used a weapon in a fight, to have broken into or stolen parts from a car, and to have been drunk—and all this before they reached fourteen years of age.¹⁶

The prototypical pathway to violence and criminality starts with children who are aggressive and hard to handle in first and second grade.¹⁷ Typically, from the earliest school years their poor impulse control also contributes to their being poor students, seen as, and seeing themselves as, “dumb”—a judgment confirmed by their being shunted to special-education classes (and though such children may have a higher rate of “hyperactivity” or learning disorders, by no means all do). Children who on entering school already have learned in their homes a “coercive” style—that is, bullying—are also written off by their teachers, who have to spend too much time keeping the children in line. The defiance of classroom rules that comes naturally to these children means that they waste time that would otherwise be used in learning; their destined academic failure is usually obvious by about third grade. While boys on a trajectory toward delinquency tend to have lower IQ scores than their peers, their impulsivity is more directly at cause: impulsivity in ten-year-old boys is almost three times as powerful a predictor of their later delinquency as is their IQ.¹⁸

By fourth or fifth grade these kids—by now seen as bullies or just “difficult”—are rejected by their peers and are unable to make friends easily, if at all, and have become academic failures. Feeling themselves friendless, they gravitate to other social outcasts. Between grade four and grade nine they commit themselves to their outcast group and a life of defying the law: they show a fivefold increase in their truancy, drinking, and drug taking, with the biggest boost between seventh and eighth grade. By the middle-school years, they are joined by another type of “late starters,” who are attracted to their defiant style; these late starters are often youngsters who are completely unsupervised at home and have started roaming the streets on their own in grade school. In the high-school years this outcast group typically drops out of school in a drift toward delinquency, engaging in petty crimes such as shoplifting, theft, and drug dealing.

(A telling difference emerges in this trajectory between boys and girls. A study of fourth-grade girls who were “bad”—getting in trouble with teachers and breaking rules, but not unpopular with their peers—found that 40 percent had a child by the time they finished the

high-school years.¹⁹ That was three times the average pregnancy rate for girls in their schools. In other words, antisocial teenage girls don't get violent—they get pregnant.)

There is, of course, no single pathway to violence and criminality, and many other factors can put a child at risk: being born in a high-crime neighborhood where they are exposed to more temptations to crime and violence, coming from a family under high levels of stress, or living in poverty. But none of these factors makes a life of violent crime inevitable. All things being equal, the psychological forces at work in aggressive children greatly intensify the likelihood of their ending up as violent criminals. As Gerald Patterson, a psychologist who has closely followed the careers of hundreds of boys into young adulthood, puts it, “the anti-social acts of a five-year-old may be prototypic of the acts of the delinquent adolescent.”²⁰

SCHOOL FOR BULLIES

The bent of mind that aggressive children take with them through life is one that almost ensures they will end up in trouble. A study of juvenile offenders convicted of violent crimes and of aggressive high-school students found a common mind-set: When they have difficulties with someone, they immediately see the other person in an antagonistic way, jumping to conclusions about the other person's hostility toward them without seeking any further information or trying to think of a peaceful way to settle their differences. At the same time, the negative consequence of a violent solution—a fight, typically—never crosses their mind. Their aggressive bent is justified in their mind by beliefs like, “It's okay to hit someone if you just go crazy from anger”; “If you back down from a fight everyone will think you're a coward”; and “People who get beaten up badly don't really suffer that much.”²¹

But timely help can change these attitudes and stop a child's trajectory toward delinquency; several experimental programs have had some success in helping such aggressive kids learn to control their antisocial bent before it leads to more serious trouble. One, at Duke University, worked with anger-ridden grade-school troublemakers in training sessions for forty minutes twice a week for six to twelve weeks. The boys were taught, for example, to see how some of the social cues they interpreted as hostile were in fact neutral or friendly.

They learned to take the perspective of other children, to get a sense of how they were being seen and of what other children might be thinking and feeling in the encounters that had gotten them so angry. They also got direct training in anger control through enacting scenes, such as being teased, that might lead them to lose their temper. One of the key skills for anger control was monitoring their feelings—becoming aware of their body's sensations, such as flushing or muscle tensing, as they were getting angry, and to take those feelings as a cue to stop and consider what to do next rather than strike out impulsively.

John Lochman, a Duke University psychologist who was one of the designers of the program, told me, “They’ll discuss situations they’ve been in recently, like being bumped in the hallway when they think it was on purpose. The kids will talk about how they might have handled it. One kid said, for example, that he just stared at the boy who bumped him and told him not to do it again, and walked away. That put him in the position of exerting some control and keeping his self-esteem, without starting a fight.”

This appeals; many such aggressive boys are unhappy that they lose their temper so easily, and so are receptive to learning to control it. In the heat of the moment, of course, such cool-headed responses as walking away or counting to ten so the impulse to hit will pass before reacting are not automatic; the boys practice such alternatives in role-playing scenes such as getting on a bus where other kids are taunting them. That way they can try out friendly responses that preserve their dignity while giving them an alternative to hitting, crying, or running away in shame.

Three years after the boys had been through the training, Lochman compared these boys with others who had been just as aggressive, but did not have the benefit of the anger-control sessions. He found that, in adolescence, the boys who graduated from the program were much less disruptive in class, had more positive feelings about themselves, and were less likely to drink or take drugs. And the longer they had been in the program, the less aggressive they were as teenagers.

PREVENTING DEPRESSION

Dana, sixteen, had always seemed to get along. But now, suddenly, she just could not relate with other girls, and, more troubling for her, she could not find a way to hold on

to boyfriends, even though she slept with them. Morose and constantly fatigued, Dana lost interest in eating, in having fun of any kind; she said she felt hopeless and helpless to do anything to escape her mood, and was thinking of suicide.

The drop into depression had been triggered by her most recent breakup. She said she didn't know how to go out with a boy without getting sexually involved right away—even if she was uncomfortable about it—and that she did not know how to end a relationship even if it was unsatisfying. She went to bed with boys, she said, when all she really wanted to do was get to know them better.

She had just moved to a new school, and felt shy and anxious about making friends with girls there. For instance, she held back from starting conversations, only talking once someone spoke to her. She felt unable to let them know what she was like, and didn't even feel she knew what to say after "Hello, how are you?"²²

Dana went for therapy to an experimental program for depressed adolescents at Columbia University. Her treatment focused on helping her learn how to handle her relationships better: how to develop a friendship, how to feel more confident with other teens, how to assert limits on sexual closeness, how to be intimate, how to express her feelings. In essence, it was a remedial tutorial in some of the most basic emotional skills. And it worked; her depression lifted.

Particularly in young people, problems in relationships are a trigger for depression. The difficulty is as often in children's relationships with their parents as it is with their peers. Depressed children and teenagers are frequently unable or unwilling to talk about their sadness. They seem unable to label their feelings accurately, showing instead a sullen irritability, impatience, crankiness, and anger—especially toward their parents. This, in turn, makes it harder for their parents to offer the emotional support and guidance the depressed child actually needs, setting in motion a downward spiral that typically ends in constant arguments and alienation.

A new look at the causes of depression in the young pinpoints deficits in two areas of emotional competence: relationship skills, on the one hand, and a depression-promoting way of interpreting setbacks, on the other. While some of the tendency to depression almost certainly is due to genetic destiny, some of that tendency seems due to reversible, pessimistic habits of thought that predispose children to react to life's small defeats—a bad grade, arguments with parents, a social rejection—by becoming depressed. And there is evidence to suggest that the predisposition to depression, whatever its basis, is becoming ever more widespread among the young.

A COST OF MODERNITY: RISING RATES OF DEPRESSION

These millennial years are ushering in an Age of Melancholy, just as the twentieth century became an Age of Anxiety. International data show what seems to be a modern epidemic of depression, one that is spreading side by side with the adoption throughout the world of modern ways. Each successive generation worldwide since the opening of the century has lived with a higher risk than their parents of suffering a major depression—not just sadness, but a paralyzing listlessness, dejection, and self-pity, and an overwhelming hopelessness—over the course of life.²³ And those episodes are beginning at earlier and earlier ages. Childhood depression, once virtually unknown (or, at least, unrecognized) is emerging as a fixture of the modern scene.

Although the likelihood of becoming depressed rises with age, the greatest increases are among young people. For those born after 1955 the likelihood they will suffer a major depression at some point in life is, in many countries, three times or more greater than for their grandparents. Among Americans born before 1905, the rate of those having a major depression over a lifetime was just 1 percent; for those born since 1955, by age twenty-four about 6 percent had become depressed. For those born between 1945 and 1954, the chances of having had a major depression before age thirty-four are ten times greater than for those born between 1905 and 1914.²⁴ And for each generation the onset of a person's first episode of depression has tended to occur at an ever-earlier age.

A worldwide study of more than thirty-nine thousand people found the same trend in Puerto Rico, Canada, Italy, Germany, France, Taiwan, Lebanon, and New Zealand. In Beirut, the rise of depression tracked political events closely, the upward trends rocketing during periods of civil war. In Germany, for those born before 1914 the rate of depression by age thirty-five is 4 percent; for those born in the decade before 1944 it is 14 percent at age thirty-five. Worldwide, generations that came of age during politically troubled times had higher rates of depression, though the overall upward trend holds apart from any political events.

The lowering into childhood of the age when people first experience depression also seems to hold worldwide. When I asked experts to hazard a guess as to why, there were several theories.

Dr. Frederick Goodwin, then director of the National Institute of

Mental Health, speculated, “There’s been a tremendous erosion of the nuclear family—a doubling of the divorce rate, a drop in parents’ time available to children, and an increase in mobility. You don’t grow up knowing your extended family much anymore. The losses of these stable sources of self-identification mean a greater susceptibility to depression.”

Dr. David Kupfer, chairman of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh medical school, pointed to another trend: “With the spread of industrialization after World War II, in a sense nobody was home anymore. In more and more families there has been growing parental indifference to children’s needs as they grow up. This is not a direct cause of depression, but it sets up a vulnerability. Early emotional stressors may affect neuron development, which can lead to a depression when you are under great stress even decades later.”

Martin Seligman, the University of Pennsylvania psychologist, proposed: “For the last thirty or forty years we’ve seen the ascendancy of individualism and a waning of larger beliefs in religion, and in supports from the community and extended family. That means a loss of resources that can buffer you against setbacks and failures. To the extent you see a failure as something that is lasting and which you magnify to taint everything in your life, you are prone to let a momentary defeat become a lasting source of hopelessness. But if you have a larger perspective, like a belief in God and an afterlife, and you lose your job, it’s just a temporary defeat.”

Whatever the cause, depression in the young is a pressing problem. In the United States, estimates vary widely for how many children and teens are depressed in any given year, as opposed to vulnerability over their lifetime. Some epidemiological studies using strict criteria —the official diagnostic symptoms for depression—have found that for boys and girls between ten and thirteen the rate of major depression over the course of a year is as high as 8 or 9 percent, though other studies place it at about half that rate (and some as low as about 2 percent). At puberty, some data suggest, the rate nearly doubles for girls; up to 16 percent of girls between fourteen and sixteen suffer a bout of depression, while the rate is unchanged for boys.²⁵

THE COURSE OF DEPRESSION IN THE YOUNG

That depression should not just be treated, but *prevented*, in children is clear from an alarming discovery: Even mild episodes of depression in a child can augur more severe episodes later in life.²⁶ This challenges the old assumption that depression in childhood does not matter in the long run, since children supposedly “grow out of it.” Of course, every child gets sad from time to time; childhood and adolescence are, like adulthood, times of occasional disappointments and losses large and small with the attendant grief. The need for prevention is not for these times, but for those children for whom sadness spirals downward into a gloom that leaves them despairing, irritable, and withdrawn—a far more severe melancholy.

Among children whose depression was severe enough that they were referred for treatment, three quarters had a subsequent episode of severe depression, according to data collected by Maria Kovacs, a psychologist at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic in Pittsburgh.²⁷ Kovacs studied children diagnosed with depression when they were as young as eight years old, assessing them every few years until some were as old as twenty-four.

The children with major depression had episodes lasting about eleven months on average, though in one in six of them it persisted for as long as eighteen months. Mild depression, which began as early as age five in some children, was less incapacitating but lasted far longer—an average of about four years. And, Kovacs found, children who have a minor depression are more likely to have it intensify into major depression—a so-called double depression. Those who develop double depression are much more prone to suffer recurring episodes as the years go on. As children who had an episode of depression grew into adolescence and early adulthood, they suffered from depression or manic-depressive disorder, on average, one year in three.

The cost to children goes beyond the suffering caused by depression itself. Kovacs told me, “Kids learn social skills in their peer relations—for example, what to do if you want something and aren’t getting it, seeing how other children handle the situation and then trying it yourself. But depressed kids are likely to be among the neglected children in a school, the ones other kids don’t play with much.”²⁸

The sullenness or sadness such children feel leads them to avoid initiating social contacts, or to look away when another child is trying to engage them—a social signal the other child only takes as a rebuff; the end result is that depressed children end up rejected or neglected on the playground. This lacuna in their interpersonal experience

means they miss out on what they would normally learn in the rough-and-tumble of play, and so can leave them social and emotional laggards, with much catching up to do after the depression lifts.²⁹ Indeed, when depressed children have been compared to those without depression, they have been found to be more socially inept, to have fewer friends, to be less preferred than others as playmates, to be less liked, and to have more troubled relationships with other children.

Another cost to these children is doing poorly in school; depression interferes with their memory and concentration, making it harder to pay attention in class and retain what is taught. A child who feels no joy in anything will find it hard to marshal the energy to master challenging lessons, let alone experience flow in learning. Understandably, the longer children in Kovacs's study were depressed, the more their grades dropped and the poorer they did on achievement tests, so that they were more likely to be held back in school. In fact, there was a direct correlation between the length of time a child had been depressed and his grade-point average, with a steady plummet over the course of the episode. All of this academic rough going, of course, compounds the depression. As Kovacs observes, "Imagine you're already feeling depressed, and you start flunking out of school, and you sit home by yourself instead of playing with other kids."

DEPRESSIONOGENIC WAYS OF THOUGHT

Just as with adults, pessimistic ways of interpreting life's defeats seem to feed the sense of helplessness and hopelessness at the heart of children's depression. That people who are *already* depressed think in these ways has long been known. What has only recently emerged, though, is that children who are most prone to melancholy tend toward this pessimistic outlook *before* they become depressed. This insight suggests a window of opportunity for inoculating them against depression before it strikes.

One line of evidence comes from studies of children's beliefs about their own ability to control what happens in their lives—for example, being able to change things for the better. This is assessed by children's ratings of themselves in such terms as "When I have problems at home I'm better than most kids at helping to solve the

problems” and “When I work hard I get good grades.” Children who say none of these positive descriptions fits them have little sense that they can do anything to change things; this sense of helplessness is highest in those children who are most depressed.³⁰

A telling study looked at fifth and sixth graders in the few days after they received report cards. As we all remember, report cards are one of the greatest sources of elation and despair in childhood. But researchers find a marked consequence in how children assess their role when they get a worse grade than they expected. Those who see a bad grade as due to some personal flaw (“I’m stupid”) feel more depressed than those who explain it away in terms of something they could change (“If I work harder on my math homework I’ll get a better grade”).³¹

Researchers identified a group of third, fourth, and fifth graders whom classmates had rejected, and tracked which ones continued to be social outcasts in their new classes the following year. How the children explained the rejection to themselves seemed crucial to whether they became depressed. Those who saw their rejection as due to some flaw in themselves grew more depressed. But the optimists, who felt that they could do something to change things for the better, were not especially depressed despite the continuing rejection.³² And in a study of children making the notoriously stressful transition to seventh grade, those who had the pessimistic attitude responded to high levels of hassles at school and to any additional stress at home by becoming depressed.³³

The most direct evidence that a pessimistic outlook makes children highly susceptible to depression comes from a five-year study of children beginning when they were in third grade.³⁴ Among the younger children, the strongest predictor that they would become depressed was a pessimistic outlook coupled with a major blow such as parents divorcing or a death in the family, which left the child upset, unsettled, and, presumably, with parents less able to offer a nurturing buffer. As the children grew through the elementary-school years, there was a telling shift in their thinking about the good and bad events of their lives, with the children increasingly ascribing them to their own traits: “I’m getting good grades because I’m smart”; “I don’t have many friends because I’m no fun.” This shift seems to set in gradually over the third to fifth grades. As this happens those children who develop a pessimistic outlook—attributing the setbacks in their lives to some dire flaw in themselves—begin to fall prey to depressed

moods in reaction to setbacks. What's more, the experience of depression itself seems to reinforce these pessimistic ways of thinking, so that even after the depression lifts, the child is left with what amounts to an emotional scar, a set of convictions fed by the depression and solidified in the mind: that he can't do well in school, is unlikable, and can do nothing to escape his own brooding moods. These fixed ideas can make the child all the more vulnerable to another depression down the road.

SHORT-CIRCUITING DEPRESSION

The good news: there is every sign that teaching children more productive ways of looking at their difficulties lowers their risk of depression.* In a study of one Oregon high school, about one in four students had what psychologists call a “low-level depression,” not severe enough to say it was beyond ordinary unhappiness as yet.³⁵ Some may have been in the early weeks or months of what was to become a depression.

In a special after-school class seventy-five of the mildly depressed students learned to challenge the thinking patterns associated with depression, to become more adept at making friends, to get along better with their parents, and to engage in more social activities they found pleasant. By the end of the eight-week program, 55 percent of the students had recovered from their mild depression, while only about a quarter of equally depressed students who were not in the program had begun to pull out of their depression. A year later a quarter of those in the comparison group had gone on to fall into a major depression, as opposed to only 14 percent of students in the depression-prevention program. Though they lasted just eight sessions, the classes seemed to have cut the risk of depression in half.³⁶

Similarly promising findings came from a special once-a-week class given to ten- to thirteen-year-old youngsters at odds with their parents and showing some signs of depression. In after-school sessions they learned some basic emotional skills, including handling disagreements, thinking before acting, and, perhaps most important, challenging the pessimistic beliefs associated with depression—for example, resolving to study harder after doing poorly on an exam instead of thinking, “I’m just not smart enough.”

"What a child learns in these classes is that moods like anxiety, sadness, and anger don't just descend on you without your having any control over them, but that you can change the way you feel by what you think," points out psychologist Martin Seligman, one of the developers of the twelve-week program. Because disputing the depressing thoughts vanquishes the gathering mood of gloom, Seligman added, "it's an instant reinforcer that becomes a habit."

Again the special sessions lowered depression rates by one half—and did so as long as two years later. A year after the classes ended, just 8 percent of those who participated scored at a moderate-to-severe level on a test of depression, versus 29 percent of children in a comparison group. And after two years, about 20 percent of those in the course were showing some signs of at least mild depression, compared to 44 percent of those in the comparison group.

Learning these emotional skills at the cusp of adolescence may be especially helpful, Seligman observes, "These kids seem to be better at handling the routine teenage agonies of rejection. They seem to have learned this at a crucial window for risk of depression, just as they enter the teen years. And the lesson seems to persist and grow a bit stronger over the course of the years after they learn it, suggesting the kids are actually using it in their day-to-day lives."

Other experts on childhood depression applaud the new programs. "If you want to make a real difference for psychiatric illness like depression, you have to do something before the kids get sick in the first place," Kovacs commented. "The real solution is a psychological inoculation."

EATING DISORDERS

During my days as a graduate student in clinical psychology in the late 1960s, I knew two women who suffered from eating disorders, though I realized this only after many years had passed. One was a brilliant graduate student in mathematics at Harvard, a friend from my undergraduate days; the other was on the staff at M.I.T. The mathematician, though skeletally thin, simply could not bring herself to eat; food, she said, repulsed her. The librarian had an ample figure and was given to bingeing on ice cream, Sara Lee carrot cake, and other desserts; then—as she once confided with some embarrassment—she would secretly go off to the bathroom and make herself vomit.

Today the mathematician would be diagnosed with anorexia nervosa, the librarian with bulimia.

In those years there were no such labels. Clinicians were just beginning to comment on the problem; Hilda Bruch, the pioneer in this movement, published her seminal article on eating disorders in 1969.³⁷ Bruch, puzzled by women who were starving themselves to death, proposed that one of the several underlying causes lay in an inability to label and respond appropriately to bodily urges—notably, of course, hunger. Since then the clinical literature on eating disorders has mushroomed, with a multitude of hypotheses about the causes, ranging from ever-younger girls feeling compelled to compete with unattainably high standards of female beauty, to intrusive mothers who enmesh their daughters in a controlling web of guilt and blame.

Most of these hypotheses suffered from one great drawback: they were extrapolations from observations made during therapy. Far more desirable, from a scientific viewpoint, are studies of large groups of people over a period of several years, to see who among them eventually comes down with the problem. That kind of study allows a clean comparison that can tell, for example, if having controlling parents predisposes a girl to eating disorders. Beyond that, it can identify the cluster of conditions that leads to the problem, and distinguish them from conditions that might seem to be a cause, but which actually are found as often in people without the problem as in those who come for treatment.

When just such a study was done with more than nine hundred girls in the seventh through tenth grades, emotional deficits—particularly a failure to tell distressing feelings from one another and to control them—were found to be key among the factors leading to eating disorders.³⁸ Even by tenth grade, there were sixty-one girls in this affluent, suburban Minneapolis high school who already had serious symptoms of anorexia or bulimia. The greater the problem, the more the girls reacted to setbacks, difficulties, and minor annoyances with intense negative feelings that they could not soothe, and the less their awareness of what, exactly, they were feeling. When these two emotional tendencies were coupled with being highly dissatisfied with their body, then the outcome was anorexia or bulimia. Overly controlling parents were found not to play a prime role in causing eating disorders. (As Bruch herself had warned, theories based on hindsight were unlikely to be accurate; for example, parents can easily become intensely controlling *in response* to their daughter's eating

disorder, out of desperation to help her.) Also judged irrelevant were such popular explanations as fear of sexuality, early onset of puberty, and low self-esteem.

Instead, the causal chain this prospective study revealed began with the effects on young girls of growing up in a society preoccupied with unnatural thinness as a sign of female beauty. Well in advance of adolescence, girls are already self-conscious about their weight. One six-year-old, for example, broke into tears when her mother asked her to go for a swim, saying she'd look fat in a swimsuit. In fact, says her pediatrician, who tells the story, her weight was normal for her height.³⁹ In one study of 271 young teenagers, half the girls thought they were too fat, even though the vast majority of them were normal in weight. But the Minneapolis study showed that an obsession with being overweight is not in and of itself sufficient to explain why some girls go on to develop eating disorders.

Some obese people are unable to tell the difference between being scared, angry, and hungry, and so lump all those feelings together as signifying hunger, which leads them to overeat whenever they feel upset.⁴⁰ Something similar seems to be happening in these girls. Gloria Leon, the University of Minnesota psychologist who did the study of young girls and eating disorders, observed that these girls "have poor awareness of their feelings and body signals; that was the strongest single predictor that they would go on to develop an eating disorder within the next two years. Most children learn to distinguish among their sensations, to tell if they're feeling bored, angry, depressed, or hungry—it's a basic part of emotional learning. But these girls have trouble distinguishing among their most basic feelings. They may have a problem with their boyfriend, and not be sure whether they're angry, or anxious, or depressed—they just experience a diffuse emotional storm that they do not know how to deal with effectively. Instead they learn to make themselves feel better by eating; that can become a strongly entrenched emotional habit."

But when this habit for soothing themselves interacts with the pressures girls feel to stay thin, the way is paved for eating disorders to develop. "At first she might start with binge eating," Leon observes. "But to stay thin she may turn to vomiting or laxatives, or intense physical exertion to undo the weight gain from overeating. Another avenue this struggle to handle emotional confusion can take is for the girl not to eat at all—it can be a way to feel you have at least some

control over these overwhelming feelings.”

The combination of poor inner awareness and weak social skills means that these girls, when upset by friends or parents, fail to act effectively to soothe either the relationship or their own distress. Instead their upset triggers the eating disorder, whether it be that of bulimia or anorexia, or simply binge eating. Effective treatments for such girls, Leon believes, need to include some remedial instruction in the emotional skills they lack. “Clinicians find,” she told me, “that if you address the deficits therapy works better. These girls need to learn to identify their feelings and learn ways to soothe themselves or handle their relationships better, without turning to their maladaptive eating habits to do the job.”

ONLY THE LONELY: DROPOUTS

It’s a grade-school drama: Ben, a fourth grader with few friends, has just heard from his one buddy, Jason, that they aren’t going to play together this lunch period—Jason wants to play with another boy, Chad, instead. Ben, crushed, hangs his head and cries. After his sobs subside, Ben goes over to the lunch table where Jason and Chad are eating.

“I hate your guts!” Ben yells at Jason.

“Why?” Jason asks.

“Because you lied,” Ben says, his tone accusatory. “You said this whole week that you were gonna play with me and you lied.”

Ben then stalks off to his empty table, crying quietly. Jason and Chad go over to him and try to talk to him, but Ben puts his fingers in his ears, determinedly ignoring them, and runs out of the lunchroom to hide behind the school Dumpster. A group of girls who have witnessed the exchange try to play a peacemaker role, finding Ben and telling him that Jason is willing to play with him too. But Ben will have none of it, and tells them to leave him alone. He nurses his wounds, sulking and sobbing, defiantly alone.⁴¹

A poignant moment, to be sure; the feeling of being rejected and friendless is one most everyone goes through at some point in childhood or adolescence. But what is most telling about Ben’s reaction is his failure to respond to Jason’s efforts to repair their friendship, a stance that extends his plight when it might have ended. Such an inability to seize key cues is typical of children who are

unpopular; as we saw in [Chapter 8](#), socially rejected children typically are poor at reading emotional and social signals; even when they do read such signals, they may have limited repertoires for response.

Dropping out of school is a particular risk for children who are social rejects. The dropout rate for children who are rejected by their peers is between two and eight times greater than for children who have friends. One study found, for example, that about 25 percent of children who were unpopular in elementary school had dropped out before completing high school, compared to a general rate of 8 percent.⁴² Small wonder: imagine spending thirty hours a week in a place where no one likes you.

Two kinds of emotional proclivities lead children to end up as social outcasts. As we have seen, one is the propensity to angry outbursts and to perceive hostility even where none is intended. The second is being timid, anxious, and socially shy. But over and above these temperamental factors, it is children who are “off”—whose awkwardness repeatedly makes people uncomfortable—who tend to be shunted aside.

One way these children are “off” is in the emotional signals they send. When grade schoolers with few friends were asked to match an emotion such as disgust or anger with faces that displayed a range of emotions, they made far more mismatches than did children who were popular. When kindergarteners were asked to explain ways they might make friends with someone or keep from having a fight, it was the unpopular children—the ones others shied away from playing with—who came up with self-defeating answers (“Punch him” for what to do when both children wanted the same toy, for example), or vague appeals for help from a grown-up. And when teenagers were asked to role-play being sad, angry, or mischievous, the more unpopular among them gave the least convincing performances. It is perhaps no surprise that such children come to feel that they are helpless to do any better at making friends; their social incompetence becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead of learning new approaches to making friends, they simply keep doing the same things that have not worked for them in the past, or come up with even more inept responses.⁴³

In the lottery of liking, these children fall short on key emotional criteria: they are not seen as fun to be with, and they don’t know how to make another child feel good. Observations of unpopular children at play show, for example, that they are much more likely than others

to cheat, sulk, quit when losing, or show off and brag about winning. Of course, most children want to win at a game—but win or lose, most children are able to contain their emotional reaction so that it does not undermine the relationship with the friend they play games with.

While children who are socially tone-deaf—who continually have trouble reading and responding to emotions—end up as social isolates, this does not apply, of course, to children who go through a temporary period of feeling left out. But for those who are continually excluded and rejected, their painful outcast status clings to them as they continue their school years. The consequences of ending up at the social margins are potentially great as a child continues on into adulthood. For one, it is in the cauldron of close friendships and the tumult of play that children refine the social and emotional skills that they will bring to relationships later in life. Children who are excluded from this realm of learning are, inevitably, disadvantaged.

Understandably, those who are rejected report great anxiety and many worries, as well as being depressed and lonely. In fact, how popular a child was in third grade has been shown to be a better predictor of mental-health problems at age eighteen than anything else—teachers’ and nurses’ ratings, school performance and IQ, even scores on psychological tests.⁴⁴ And, as we have seen, in later stages of life people who have few friends and are chronically lonely are at greater risk for medical diseases and an early death.

As psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan pointed out, we learn how to negotiate intimate relations—to work out differences and share our deepest feelings—in our first close friendships with same-sex chums. But children who are socially rejected are only half as likely as their peers to have a best friend during the crucial years of elementary school, and so miss out on one of the essential chances for emotional growth.⁴⁵ One friend can make the difference—even when all others turn their backs (and even when that friendship is not all that solid).

COACHING FOR FRIENDSHIP

There is hope for rejected children, despite their ineptness. Steven Asher, a University of Illinois psychologist, has designed a series of “friendship coaching” sessions for unpopular children that has shown some success.⁴⁶ Identifying third and fourth graders who were the

least liked in their classes, Asher gave them six sessions in how to “make playing games more fun” through being “friendly, fun, and nice.” To avoid stigma, the children were told that they were acting as “consultants” to the coach, who was trying to learn what kinds of things make it more enjoyable to play games.

The children were coached to act in ways Asher had found typical of more popular children. For example, they were encouraged to think of alternative suggestions and compromises (rather than fighting) if they disagree about the rules; to remember to talk with and ask questions about the other child while they play; to listen and look at the other child to see how he’s doing; to say something nice when the other person does well; to smile and offer help or suggestions and encouragement. The children also tried out these basic social amenities while playing games such as Pick-up Sticks with a classmate, and were coached afterward on how well they did. This minicourse in getting along had a remarkable effect: a year later the children who were coached—all of whom were selected because they were the least-liked in their class—were now solidly in the middle of classroom popularity. None were social stars, but none were rejects.

Similar results have been found by Stephen Nowicki, an Emory University psychologist.⁴⁷ His program trains social outcasts to hone their ability to read and respond appropriately to other children’s feelings. The children, for example, are videotaped while practicing expression of feelings such as happiness and sadness, and are coached to improve their emotional expressiveness. They then try out their newly honed skills with a child they want to make friends with.

Such programs have reported a 50 to 60 percent success rate in raising the popularity of rejected children. These programs (at least as presently designed) seem to work best for third and fourth graders rather than children in higher grades, and to be more helpful for socially inept children than for highly aggressive ones. But that is all a matter for fine-tuning; the hopeful sign is that many or most rejected children can be brought into the circle of friendship with some basic emotional coaching.

DRINKING AND DRUGS: ADDICTION AS SELF-MEDICATION

Students at the local campus call it *drinking to black*—bingeing on beer to the point of passing out. One of the techniques: attach a funnel to a

garden hose, so that a can of beer can be downed in about ten seconds. The method is not an isolated oddity. One survey found that two fifths of male college students down seven or more drinks at a time, while 11 percent call themselves “heavy drinkers.” Another term, of course, might be “alcoholics.”⁴⁸ About half of college men and almost 40 percent of women have at least two binge-drinking episodes in a month.⁴⁹

While in the United States use of most drugs among young people generally tapered off in the 1980s, there is a steady trend toward more alcohol use at ever-younger ages. A 1993 survey found that 35 percent of college women said they drank to get drunk, while just 10 percent did so in 1977; overall, one in three students drinks to get drunk. That poses other risks: 90 percent of all rapes reported on college campuses happened when either the assailant or the victim—or both—had been drinking.⁵⁰ Alcohol-related accidents are the leading cause of death among young people between fifteen and twenty-four.⁵¹

Experimentation with drugs and alcohol might seem a rite of passage for adolescents, but this first taste can have long-lasting results for some. For most alcoholics and drug abusers, the beginnings of addiction can be traced to their teen years, though few of those who so experiment end up as alcoholics or drug abusers. By the time students leave high school, over 90 percent have tried alcohol, yet only about 14 percent eventually become alcoholics; of the millions of Americans who experimented with cocaine, fewer than 5 percent became addicted.⁵² What makes the difference?

To be sure, those living in high-crime neighborhoods, where crack is sold on the corner and the drug dealer is the most prominent local model of economic success, are most at risk for substance abuse. Some may end up addicted through becoming small-time dealers themselves, others simply because of the easy access or a peer culture that glamorizes drugs—a factor that heightens the risk of drug use in any neighborhood, even (and perhaps especially) the most well-off. But still the question remains, of the pool of those exposed to these lures and pressures, and who go on to experiment, which ones are most likely to end up with a lasting habit?

One current scientific theory is that those who stay with the habit, becoming increasingly dependent on alcohol or drugs, are using these substances as a medication of sorts, a way to soothe feelings of anxiety, anger, or depression. Through their early experimentation

they hit upon a chemical fix, a way to calm the feelings of anxiety or melancholy that have tormented them. Thus of several hundred seventh- and eighth-grade students tracked for two years, it was those who reported higher levels of emotional distress who subsequently went on to have the highest rates of substance abuse.⁵³ This may explain why so many young people are able to experiment with drugs and drinking without becoming addicted, while others become dependent almost from the start: those most vulnerable to addiction seem to find in the drug or alcohol an instant way to soothe emotions that have distressed them for years.

As Ralph Tarter, a psychologist at the Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic in Pittsburgh, put it, “For people who are biologically predisposed, the first drink or dose of a drug is immensely reinforcing, in a way others just don’t experience. Many recovering drug abusers tell me, ‘The moment I took my first drug, I felt normal for the first time.’ It stabilizes them physiologically, at least in the short term.”⁵⁴ That, of course, is the devil’s bargain of addiction: a short-term good feeling in exchange for the steady meltdown of one’s life.

Certain emotional patterns seem to make people more likely to find emotional relief in one substance rather than another. For example, there are two emotional pathways to alcoholism. One starts with someone who was high-strung and anxious in childhood, who typically discovers as a teenager that alcohol will calm the anxiety. Very often they are children—usually sons—of alcoholics who themselves have turned to alcohol to soothe their nerves. One biological marker for this pattern is undersecretion of GABA, a neurotransmitter that regulates anxiety—too little GABA is experienced as a high level of tension. One study found that sons of alcoholic fathers had low levels of GABA and were highly anxious, but when they drank alcohol, their GABA levels rose as their anxiety fell.⁵⁵ These sons of alcoholics drink to ease their tension, finding in alcohol a relaxation that they could not seem to get otherwise. Such people may be vulnerable to abusing sedatives as well as alcohol for the same anxiety-reduction effect.

A neuropsychological study of sons of alcoholics who at age twelve showed signs of anxiety such as a heightened heart rate in response to stress, as well as impulsivity, found the boys also had poor frontal lobe functioning.⁵⁶ Thus the brain areas that might have helped ease their anxiety or control their impulsiveness brought them less help than in other boys. And since the pre-frontal lobes also handle

working memory—which holds in mind the consequences of various routes of action while making a decision—their deficit could support a slide into alcoholism by helping them ignore the long-term drawbacks of drinking, even as they found an immediate sedation from anxiety through alcohol.

This craving for calm seems to be an emotional marker of a genetic susceptibility to alcoholism. A study of thirteen hundred relatives of alcoholics found that the children of alcoholics who were most at risk for becoming alcoholics themselves were those who reported having chronically high levels of anxiety. Indeed, the researchers concluded that alcoholism develops in such people as “self-medication of anxiety symptoms.”⁵⁷

A second emotional pathway to alcoholism comes from a high level of agitation, impulsivity, and boredom. This pattern shows up in infancy as being restless, cranky, and hard to handle, in grade school as having the “fidgets,” hyperactivity, and getting into trouble, a propensity that, as we have seen, can push such children to seek out friends on the fringe—sometimes leading to a criminal career or the diagnosis of “antisocial personality disorder.” Such people (and they are mainly men) have as their main emotional complaint agitation; their main weakness is unrestrained impulsivity; their usual reaction to boredom—which they often feel—is an impulsive search for risk and excitement. As adults, people with this pattern (which may be tied to deficiencies in two other neurotransmitters, serotonin and MAO) find that alcohol can soothe their agitation. And the fact that they can’t stand monotony makes them ready to try anything; coupled with their general impulsivity, it makes them prone to abusing an almost random list of drugs besides alcohol.⁵⁸

While depression can drive some to drink, the metabolic effects of alcohol often simply worsen the depression after a short lift. People who turn to alcohol as an emotional palliative do so much more often to calm anxiety than for depression; an entirely different class of drugs soothes the feelings of people who are depressed—at least temporarily. Feeling chronically unhappy puts people at greater risk for addiction to stimulants such as cocaine, which provide a direct antidote to feeling depressed. One study found that more than half the patients being treated at a clinic for cocaine addiction would have been diagnosed with severe depression before they started their habit, and the deeper the preceding depression, the stronger the habit.⁵⁹

Chronic anger may lead to still another kind of susceptibility. In a

study of four hundred patients being treated for addiction to heroin and other opioids, the most striking emotional pattern was a lifelong difficulty handling anger and a quickness to rage. Some of the patients themselves said that with opiates they finally felt normal and relaxed.⁶⁰

Though the predisposition to substance abuse may, in many cases, be brain-based, the feelings that drive people to “self-medicate” themselves through drink or drugs can be handled without recourse to medication, as Alcoholics Anonymous and other recovery programs have demonstrated for decades. Acquiring the ability to handle those feelings—soothing anxiety, lifting depression, calming rage—removes the impetus to use drugs or alcohol in the first place. These basic emotional skills are taught remedially in treatment programs for drug and alcohol abuse. It would be far better, of course, if they were learned early in life, well before the habit became established.

NO MORE WARS: A FINAL COMMON PREVENTIVE PATHWAY

Over the last decade or so “wars” have been proclaimed, in turn, on teen pregnancy, dropping out, drugs, and most recently violence. The trouble with such campaigns, though, is that they come too late, after the targeted problem has reached epidemic proportions and taken firm root in the lives of the young. They are crisis intervention, the equivalent of solving a problem by sending an ambulance to the rescue rather than giving an inoculation that would ward off the disease in the first place. Instead of more such “wars,” what we need is to follow the logic of prevention, offering our children the skills for facing life that will increase their chances of avoiding any and all of these fates.⁶¹

My focus on the place of emotional and social deficits is not to deny the role of other risk factors, such as growing up in a fragmented, abusive, or chaotic family, or in an impoverished, crime- and drug-ridden neighborhood. Poverty itself delivers emotional blows to children: poorer children at age five are already more fearful, anxious, and sad than their better-off peers, and have more behavior problems such as frequent tantrums and destroying things, a trend that continues through the teen years. The press of poverty corrodes family life too: there tend to be fewer expressions of parental warmth, more depression in mothers (who are often single and jobless), and a

greater reliance on harsh punishments such as yelling, hitting, and physical threats.⁶²

But there is a role that emotional competence plays over and above family and economic forces—it may be decisive in determining the extent to which any given child or teenager is undone by these hardships or finds a core of resilience to survive them. Long-term studies of hundreds of children brought up in poverty, in abusive families, or by a parent with severe mental illness show that those who are resilient even in the face of the most grinding hardships tend to share key emotional skills.⁶³ These include a winning sociability that draws people to them, self-confidence, an optimistic persistence in the face of failure and frustration, the ability to recover quickly from upsets, and an easygoing nature.

But the vast majority of children face such difficulties without these advantages. Of course, many of these skills are innate, the luck of genes—but even qualities of temperament can change for the better, as we saw in [Chapter 14](#). One line of intervention, of course, is political and economic, alleviating the poverty and other social conditions that breed these problems. But apart from these tactics (which seem to move ever lower on the social agenda) there is much that can be offered to children to help them grapple better with such debilitating hardships.

Take the case of emotional disorders, afflictions that about one in two Americans experiences over the course of life. A study of a representative sample of 8,098 Americans found that 48 percent suffered from at least one psychiatric problem during their lifetime.⁶⁴ Most severely affected were the 14 percent of people who developed three or more psychiatric problems at once. This group was the most troubled, accounting for 60 percent of all psychiatric disorders occurring at any one time, and 90 percent of the most severe and disabling ones. While they need intensive care now, the optimal approach would be, wherever possible, to prevent these problems in the first place. To be sure, not every mental disorder can be prevented—but there are some, and perhaps many, that can. Ronald Kessler, the University of Michigan sociologist who did the study, told me, “We need to intervene early in life. Take a young girl who has a social phobia in the sixth grade, and starts drinking in junior high school to handle her social anxieties. By her late twenties, when she shows up in our study, she’s still fearful, has become both an alcohol and drug abuser, and is depressed because her life is so messed up. The big

question is, what could we have done early in her life to have headed off the whole downward spiral?"

The same holds, of course, for dropping out or violence, or most of the litany of perils faced by young people today. Educational programs to prevent one or another specific problem such as drug use and violence have proliferated wildly in the last decade or so, creating a mini-industry within the education marketplace. But many of them—including many of the most slickly marketed and most widely used—have proven to be ineffective. A few, to the chagrin of educators, even seemed to increase the likelihood of the problems they were meant to head off, particularly drug abuse and teen sex.

Information Is Not Enough

An instructive case in point is sexual abuse of children. As of 1993, about two hundred thousand substantiated cases were reported annually in the United States, with that number growing by about 10 percent per year. And while estimates vary widely, most experts agree that between 20 and 30 percent of girls and about half that number of boys are victims of some form of sexual abuse by age seventeen (the figures rise or fall depending on how sexual abuse is defined, among other factors).⁶⁵ There is no single profile of a child who is particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, but most feel unprotected, unable to resist on their own, and isolated by what has happened to them.

With these risks in mind, many schools have begun to offer programs to prevent sexual abuse. Most such programs are tightly focused on basic information about sexual abuse, teaching kids, for example, to know the difference between “good” and “bad” touching, alerting them to the dangers, and encouraging them to tell an adult if anything untoward happens to them. But a national survey of two thousand children found that this basic training was little better than nothing—or actually worse than nothing—in helping children do something to prevent being victimized, whether by a school bully or a potential child molester.⁶⁶ Worse, the children who had only such basic programs and who had subsequently become victims of sexual assault were actually *half* as likely to report it afterward than were children who had had no programs at all.

By contrast, children given more comprehensive training—including related emotional and social competences—were better able

to protect themselves against the threat of being victimized: they were far more likely to demand to be left alone, to yell or fight back, to threaten to tell, and to actually tell if something bad did happen to them. This last benefit—reporting the abuse—is preventive in a telling sense: many child molesters victimize hundreds of children. A study of child molesters in their forties found that, on average, they had one victim a month since their teenage years. A report on a bus driver and a high-school computer teacher reveals they molested about three hundred children each year between them—yet not one of the children reported the sexual abuse; the abuse came to light only after one of the boys who had been abused by the teacher started to sexually abuse his sister.⁶⁷

Those children who got the more comprehensive programs were three times more likely than those in minimal programs to report abuse. What worked so well? These programs were not one-shot topics, but were given at different levels several times over the course of a child's school career, as part of health or sex education. They enlisted parents to deliver the message to the child along with what was taught in school (children whose parents did this were the very best at resisting threats of sexual abuse).

Beyond that, social and emotional competences made the difference. It is not enough for a child simply to know about “good” and “bad” touching; children need the self-awareness to know when a situation *feels* wrong or distressing long before the touching begins. This entails not just self-awareness, but also enough self-confidence and assertiveness to trust and act on those feelings of distress, even in the face of an adult who may be trying to reassure her that “it’s okay.” And then a child needs a repertoire of ways to disrupt what is about to happen—everything from running away to threatening to tell. For these reasons, the better programs teach children to stand up for what they want, to assert their rights rather than be passive, to know what their boundaries are and defend them.

The most effective programs, then, supplemented the basic sexual-abuse information with essential emotional and social skills. These programs taught children to find ways to solve interpersonal conflicts more positively, to have more self-confidence, not to blame themselves if something happened, and to feel they had a network of support in teachers and parents whom they could turn to. And if something bad did happen to them, they were far more likely to tell.

The Active Ingredients

Such findings have led to a reenvisioning of what the ingredients of an optimal prevention program should be, based on those that impartial evaluations showed to be truly effective. In a five-year project sponsored by the W. T. Grant Foundation, a consortium of researchers studied this landscape and distilled the active ingredients that seemed crucial to the success of those programs that worked.⁶⁸ The list of key skills the consortium concluded should be covered, no matter what specific problem it is designed to prevent, reads like the ingredients of emotional intelligence (see [Appendix D](#) for the full list).⁶⁹

The emotional skills include self-awareness; identifying, expressing, and managing feelings; impulse control and delaying gratification; and handling stress and anxiety. A key ability in impulse control is knowing the difference between feelings and actions, and learning to make better emotional decisions by first controlling the impulse to act, then identifying alternative actions and their consequences before acting. Many competences are interpersonal: reading social and emotional cues, listening, being able to resist negative influences, taking others' perspectives, and understanding what behavior is acceptable in a situation.

These are among the core emotional and social skills for life, and include at least partial remedies for most, if not all, of the difficulties I have discussed in this chapter. The choice of specific problems these skills might inoculate against is nearly arbitrary—similar cases for the role of emotional and social competences could have been made for, say, unwanted teen pregnancy or teen suicide.

To be sure, the causes of all such problems are complex, interweaving differing ratios of biological destiny, family dynamics, the politics of poverty, and the culture of the streets. No single kind of intervention, including one targeting emotions, can claim to do the whole job. But to the degree emotional deficits add to a child's risk—and we have seen that they add a great deal—attention must be paid to emotional remedies, not to the exclusion of other answers, but along with them. The next question is, what would an education in the emotions look like?

* In children, unlike adults, medication is not a clear alternative to therapy or preventive education for treating depression; children metabolize medications differently than do adults. Tricyclic antidepressants, often successful with adults, have failed in controlled studies with

children to prove better than an inactive placebo drug. Newer depression medications, including Prozac, are as yet untested for use in children. And desipramine, one of the most common (and safest) tricyclics used with adults, has, at this writing, become the focus of FDA scrutiny as a possible cause of death in children.

16

Schooling the Emotions

The main hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth.

—ERASMUS

It's a strange roll call, going around the circle of fifteen fifth graders sitting Indian-style on the floor. As a teacher calls their names the students respond not with the vacant "Here" standard in schools, but instead call out a number that indicates how they feel; one means low spirits, ten high energy.

Today spirits are high:

"Jessica."

"Ten: I'm jazzed, it's Friday."

"Patrick."

"Nine: excited, a little nervous."

"Nicole."

"Ten: peaceful, happy ..."

It's a class in Self Science at the Nueva School, a school retrofitted into what used to be the grand manse of the Crocker family, the dynasty that founded one of San Francisco's biggest banks. Now the building, which resembles a miniature version of the San Francisco Opera House, houses a private school that offers what may be a model course in emotional intelligence.

The subject in Self Science is feelings—your own and those that erupt in relationships. The topic, by its very nature, demands that teachers and students focus on the emotional fabric of a child's life—a focus that is determinedly ignored in almost every other classroom in America. The strategy here includes using the tensions and traumas of children's lives as the topic of the day. Teachers speak to real issues—hurt over being left out, envy, disagreements that could escalate into a schoolyard battle. As Karen Stone McCown, developer of the Self Science Curriculum and founder of Nueva, put it, "Learning doesn't take place in isolation from kids' feelings. Being emotionally literate is as important for learning as instruction in math and reading."¹

Self Science is a pioneer, an early harbinger of an idea that is spreading to schools coast to coast.* Names for these classes range from “social development” to “life skills” to “social and emotional learning.” Some, referring to Howard Gardner’s idea of multiple intelligences, use the term “personal intelligences.” The common thread is the goal of raising the level of social and emotional competence in children as a part of their regular education—not just something taught remedially to children who are faltering and identified as “troubled,” but a set of skills and understandings essential for every child.

The emotional-literacy courses have some remote roots in the affective-education movement of the 1960s. The thinking then was that psychological and motivational lessons were more deeply learned if they involved an immediate experience of what was being taught conceptually. The emotional-literacy movement, though, turns the term *affective education* inside out—instead of using affect to educate, it educates affect itself.

More immediately, many of these courses and the momentum for their spread come from an ongoing series of school-based prevention programs, each targeting a specific problem: teen smoking, drug abuse, pregnancy, dropping out, and most recently violence. As we saw in the last chapter, the W. T. Grant Consortium’s study of prevention programs found they are far more effective when they teach a core of emotional and social competences, such as impulse control, managing anger, and finding creative solutions to social predicaments. From this principle a new generation of interventions has emerged.

As we saw in [Chapter 15](#), interventions designed to target the specific deficits in emotional and social skills that undergird problems such as aggression or depression can be highly effective as buffers for children. But those well-designed interventions, in the main, have been run by research psychologists as experiments. The next step is to take the lessons learned from such highly focused programs and generalize them as a preventive measure for the entire school population, taught by ordinary teachers.

This more sophisticated and more effective approach to prevention includes information about problems such as AIDS, drugs, and the like, at the points in youngsters’ lives when they are beginning to face them. But its main, ongoing subject is the core competence that is brought to bear on any of these specific dilemmas: emotional

intelligence.

This new departure in bringing emotional literacy into schools makes emotions and social life themselves topics, rather than treating these most compelling facets of a child's day as irrelevant intrusions or, when they lead to eruptions, relegating them to occasional disciplinary trips to the guidance counselor or the principal's office.

The classes themselves may at first glance seem uneventful, much less a solution to the dramatic problems they address. But that is largely because, like good childrearing at home, the lessons imparted are small but telling, delivered regularly and over a sustained period of years. That is how emotional learning becomes ingrained; as experiences are repeated over and over, the brain reflects them as strengthened pathways, neural habits to apply in times of duress, frustration, hurt. And while the everyday substance of emotional literacy classes may look mundane, the outcome—decent human beings—is more critical to our future than ever.

A LESSON IN COOPERATION

Compare a moment from a class in Self Science with the classroom experiences you can recall.

A fifth-grade group is about to play the Cooperation Squares game, in which the students team up to put together a series of square-shaped jigsaw puzzles. The catch: their teamwork is all in silence, with no gesturing allowed.

The teacher, Jo-An Vargo, divides the class into three groups, each assigned to a different table. Three observers, each familiar with the game, get an evaluation sheet to assess, for example, who in the group takes the lead in organizing, who is a clown, who disrupts.

The students dump the pieces of the puzzles on the table and go to work. Within a minute or so it's clear that one group is surprisingly efficient as a team; they finish in just a few minutes. A second group of four is engaged in solitary, parallel efforts, each working separately on their own puzzle, but getting nowhere. Then they slowly start to work collectively to assemble their first square, and continue to work as a unit until all the puzzles are solved.

But the third group still struggles, with only one puzzle nearing completion, and even that looking more like a trapezoid than a square. Sean, Fairlie, and Rahman have yet to find the smooth

coordination that the other two groups fell into. They are clearly frustrated, frantically scanning the pieces on the table, seizing on likely possibilities and putting them near the partly finished squares, only to be disappointed by the lack of fit.

The tension breaks a bit when Rahman takes two of the pieces and puts them in front of his eyes like a mask; his partners giggle. This will prove to be a pivotal moment in the day's lesson.

Jo-An Vargo, the teacher, offers some encouragement: "Those of you who have finished can give one specific hint to those who are still working."

Dagan moseys over to the still-struggling group, points to two pieces that jut out from the square, and suggests, "You've got to move those two pieces around." Suddenly Rahman, his wide face furrowed in concentration, grasps the new gestalt, and the pieces quickly fall into place on the first puzzle, then the others. There's spontaneous applause as the last piece falls into place on the third group's final puzzle.

A POINT OF CONTENTION

But as the class goes on to mull over the object lessons in teamwork they've received, there is another, more intense interchange. Rahman, tall and with a shock of bushy black hair cut into a longish crew cut, and Tucker, the group's observer, are locked in contentious discussion over the rule that you can't gesture. Tucker, his blond hair neatly combed except for a cowlick, wears a baggy blue T-shirt emblazoned with the motto "Be Responsible," which somehow underscores his official role.

"You can *too* offer a piece—that's not gesturing," Tucker says to Rahman in an emphatic, argumentative tone.

"But that *is* gesturing," Rahman insists, vehement.

Vargo notices the heightened volume and increasingly aggressive staccato of the exchange, and gravitates to their table. This is a critical incident, a spontaneous exchange of heated feeling; it is in moments such as this that the lessons already learned will pay off, and new ones can be taught most profitably. And, as every good teacher knows, the lessons applied in such electric moments will last in students' memories.

"This isn't a criticism—you cooperated very well—but Tucker, try

to say what you mean in a tone of voice that doesn't sound so critical," Vargo coaches.

Tucker, his voice calmer now, says to Rahman, "You can just put a piece where you think it goes, give someone what you think they need, without gesturing. Just offering."

Rahman responds in an angry tone, "You could have just gone like this"—he scratches his head to illustrate an innocent movement—"and he'd say 'No gesturing!'"

There is clearly more to Rahman's ire than this dispute about what does or does not constitute a gesture. His eyes constantly go to the evaluation sheet Tucker has filled out, which—though it has not yet been mentioned—has actually provoked the tension between Tucker and Rahman. On the evaluation sheet Tucker has listed Rahman's name in the blank for "Who is disruptive?"

Vargo, noticing Rahman looking at the offending form, hazards a guess, saying to Tucker, "He's feeling that you used a negative word—*disruptive*—about him. What did you mean?"

"I didn't mean it was a *bad* kind of disruption," says Tucker, now conciliatory.

Rahman isn't buying it, but his voice is calmer, too: "That's a little farfetched, if you ask me."

Vargo emphasizes a positive way of seeing it. "Tucker is trying to say that what could be considered disruptive could also be part of lightening things up during a frustrating time."

"But," Rahman protests, now more matter-of-fact, "*disruptive* is like when we're all concentrating hard on something and if I went like this"—he makes a ridiculous, clowning expression, his eyes bulging, cheeks puffed out—"that would be disruptive."

Vargo tries more emotional coaching, telling Tucker, "In trying to help, you didn't mean he was disruptive in a bad way. But you send a different message in how you're talking about it. Rahman is needing you to hear and accept his feelings. Rahman was saying that having negative words like *disruptive feels* unfair. He doesn't like being called that."

Then, to Rahman, she adds, "I appreciate the way you're being assertive in talking with Tucker. You're not attacking. But it's not pleasant to have a label like *disruptive* put on you. When you put those pieces up to your eyes it seems like you were feeling frustrated and wanted to lighten things up. But Tucker called it disruptive because he didn't understand your intent. Is that right?"

Both boys nod assent as the other students finish clearing away the puzzles. This small classroom melodrama is reaching its finale. “Do you feel better?” Vargo asks. “Or is this still distressing?”

“Yeah, I feel okay,” says Rahman, his voice softer now that he feels heard and understood. Tucker nods, too, smiling. The boys, noticing that everyone else has already left for the next class, turn in unison and dash out together.

POSTMORTEM: A FIGHT THAT DID NOT BREAK OUT

As a new group starts to find their chairs, Vargo dissects what has just transpired. The heated exchange and its cooling-down draw on what the boys have been learning about conflict resolution. What typically escalates to conflict begins, as Vargo puts it, with “not communicating, making assumptions, and jumping to conclusions, sending a ‘hard’ message in ways that make it tough for people to hear what you’re saying.”

Students in Self Science learn that the point is not to avoid conflict completely, but to resolve disagreement and resentment before it spirals into an out-and-out fight. There are signs of these earlier lessons in how Tucker and Rahman handled the dispute. Both, for example, made some effort to express their point of view in a way that would not accelerate the conflict. This assertiveness (as distinct from aggression or passivity) is taught at Nueva from third grade on. It emphasizes expressing feelings forthrightly, but in a way that will not spiral into aggression. While at the beginning of their dispute neither boy was looking at the other, as it went on they began to show signs of “active listening,” facing each other, making eye contact, and sending the silent cues that let a speaker know that he is being heard.

By putting these tools into action, helped along by some coaching, “assertiveness” and “active listening” for these boys become more than just empty phrases on a quiz—they become ways of reacting the boys can draw on at those moments when they need them most urgently.

Mastery in the emotional domain is especially difficult because skills need to be acquired when people are usually least able to take in new information and learn new habits of response—when they are upset. Coaching in these moments helps. “Anyone, adult or fifth

grader, needs some help being a self-observer when they're so upset," Vargo points out. "Your heart is pounding, your hands are sweaty, you're jittery, and you're trying to listen clearly while keeping your own self-control to get through it without screaming, blaming, or clamping up in defensiveness."

For anyone familiar with the rough-and-tumble of fifth-grade boys, what may be most remarkable is that both Tucker and Rahman tried to assert their views without resorting to blaming, name-calling, or yelling. Neither let their feelings escalate to a contemptuous "f--- you!" or a fistfight, nor cut off the other by stalking out of the room. What could have been the seed of a full-fledged battle instead heightened the boys' mastery of the nuances of conflict resolution. How differently it all could have gone in other circumstances. Youngsters daily come to blows—and even worse—over less.

CONCERNs OF THE DAY

At the traditional circle that opens each class in Self Science, the numbers are not always so high as they were today. When they are low—the ones, twos, or threes that indicate feeling terrible—it opens the way for someone to ask, "Do you want to talk about why you feel that way?" And, if the student wants (no one is pressured to talk about things they don't want to), it allows the airing of whatever is so troubling—and the chance to consider creative options for handling it.

The troubles that emerge vary with the grade level. In the lower grades typical ones are teasing, feeling left out, fears. Around sixth grade a new set of concerns emerges—hurt feelings about not being asked on a date, or being left out; friends who are immature; the painful predicaments of the young ("Big kids are picking on me"; "My friends are smoking, and they're always trying to get me to try, too").

These are the topics of gripping import in a child's life, which are aired on the periphery of school—at lunch, on the bus to school, at a friend's house—if at all. More often than not, these are the troubles that children keep to themselves, obsessing about them alone at night, having no one to mull them over with. In Self Science they can become topics of the day.

Each of these discussions is potential grist for the explicit goal of Self Science, which is illuminating the child's sense of self and relationships with others. While the course has a lesson plan, it is

flexible so that when moments such as the conflict between Rahman and Tucker occur they can be capitalized on. The issues that students bring up provide the living examples to which students and teachers alike can apply the skills they are learning, such as the conflict-resolution methods that cooled down the heat between the two boys.

THE ABC'S OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

In use for close to twenty years, the Self Science curriculum stands as a model for the teaching of emotional intelligence. The lessons sometimes are surprisingly sophisticated; as Nueva's director, Karen Stone McCown, told me, "When we teach about anger, we help kids understand that it is almost always a secondary reaction and to look for what's underneath—are you hurt? jealous? Our kids learn that you always have choices about how you respond to emotion, and the more ways you know to respond to an emotion, the richer your life can be."

A list of the contents of Self Science is an almost point-for-point match with the ingredients of emotional intelligence—and with the core skills recommended as primary prevention for the range of pitfalls threatening children (see [Appendix E](#) for the full list).² The topics taught include self-awareness, in the sense of recognizing feelings and building a vocabulary for them, and seeing the links between thoughts, feelings, and reactions; knowing if thoughts or feelings are ruling a decision; seeing the consequences of alternative choices; and applying these insights to decisions about such issues as drugs, smoking, and sex. Self-awareness also takes the form of recognizing your strengths and weaknesses, and seeing yourself in a positive but realistic light (and so avoiding a common pitfall of the self-esteem movement).

Another emphasis is managing emotions: realizing what is behind a feeling (for example, the hurt that triggers anger), and learning ways to handle anxieties, anger, and sadness. Still another emphasis is on taking responsibility for decisions and actions, and following through on commitments.

A key social ability is empathy, understanding others' feelings and taking their perspective, and respecting differences in how people feel about things. Relationships are a major focus, including learning to be a good listener and question-asker; distinguishing between what someone says or does and your own reactions and judgments; being

assertive rather than angry or passive; and learning the arts of cooperation, conflict resolution, and negotiating compromise.

There are no grades given in Self Science; life itself is the final exam. But at the end of the eighth grade, as students are about to leave Nueva for high school, each is given a Socratic examination, an oral test in Self Science. One question from a recent final: “Describe an appropriate response to help a friend solve a conflict over someone pressuring them to try drugs, or over a friend who likes to tease.” Or, “What are some healthy ways to deal with stress, anger, and fear?”

Were he alive today, Aristotle, so concerned with emotional skillfulness, might well approve.

EMOTIONAL LITERACY IN THE INNER CITY

Skeptics understandably will ask if a course like Self Science could work in a less privileged setting, or if it is only possible in a small private school like Nueva, where every child is, in some respect, gifted. In short, can emotional competence be taught where it may be most urgently needed, in the gritty chaos of an inner-city public school? One answer is to visit the Augusta Lewis Troup Middle School in New Haven, which is as far from the Nueva School socially and economically as it is geographically.

To be sure, the atmosphere at Troup has much of the same excitement about learning—the school is also known as the Troup Magnet Academy of Science and is one of two such schools in the district that are designed to draw fifth- to eighth-grade students from all over New Haven to an enriched science curriculum. Students there can ask questions about the physics of outer space through a satellite-dish hookup to astronauts in Houston or program their computers to play music. But despite these academic amenities, as in many cities, white flight to the New Haven suburbs and to private schools has left Troup’s enrollment about 95 percent black and Hispanic.

Just a few short blocks from the Yale campus—and again a distant universe—Troup is in a decaying working-class neighborhood that, in the 1950s, had twenty thousand people employed in nearby factories, from Olin Brass Mills to Winchester Arms. Today that job base has shrunk to under three thousand, shrinking with it the economic horizons of the families who live there. New Haven, like so many other New England manufacturing cities, has sunk into a pit of

poverty, drugs, and violence.

It was in response to the urgencies of this urban nightmare that in the 1980s a group of Yale psychologists and educators designed the Social Competence Program, a set of courses that covers virtually the same terrain as the Nueva School's Self Science curriculum. But at Troup the connection to the topics is often more direct and raw. It is no mere academic exercise when, in the eighth-grade sex education class, students learn how personal decision-making can help them avoid diseases such as AIDS. New Haven has the highest proportion of women with AIDS in the United States; a number of the mothers who send their children to Troup have the disease—and so do some of the students there. Despite the enriched curriculum, students at Troup struggle with all the problems of the inner city; many children have home situations so chaotic, if not horrific, they just cannot manage to get to school some days.

As in all New Haven schools, the most prominent sign that greets a visitor is in the familiar form of a yellow diamond-shaped traffic sign, but reads "Drug-Free Zone." At the door is Mary Ellen Collins, the school's facilitator—an all-purpose ombudsman who sees to special problems as they surface, and whose role includes helping teachers with the demands of the social competence curriculum. If a teacher is unsure of how to teach a lesson, Collins will come to the class to show how.

"I taught in this school for twenty years," Collins says, greeting me. "Look at this neighborhood—I can't see only teaching academic skills anymore, with the problems these kids face just in living. Take the kids here who are struggling because they have AIDS themselves or it's in their homes—I'm not sure they'd say it during the discussion on AIDS, but once a kid knows a teacher will listen to an emotional problem, not just academic ones, the avenue is open to have that conversation."

On the third floor of the old brick school Joyce Andrews is leading her fifth graders through the social competence class they get three times a week. Andrews, like all the other fifth-grade teachers, went to a special summer course in how to teach it, but her exuberance suggests the topics in social competence come naturally to her.

Today's lesson is on identifying feelings; being able to name feelings, and so better distinguish between them, is a key emotional skill. Last night's assignment was to bring in pictures of a person's face from a magazine, name which emotion the face displays, and

explain how to tell the person has those feelings. After collecting the assignment, Andrews lists the feelings on the board—sadness, worry, excitement, happiness, and so on—and launches into a fast-paced repartee with the eighteen students who managed to get to school that day. Sitting in four-desk clusters, the students excitedly raise their hands high, straining to catch her eye so they can give their answer.

As she adds *frustrated* to the list on the board, Andrews asks, “How many people ever felt frustrated?” Every hand goes up.

“How do you feel when you’re frustrated?”

The answers come in a cascade: “Tired.” “Confused.” “You can’t think right.” “Anxious.”

As *aggravated* is added to the list, Joyce says, “I know that one—when does a teacher feel aggravated?”

“When everyone is talking,” a girl offers, smiling.

Without missing a beat, Andrews passes out a mimeographed worksheet. In one column are faces of boys and girls, each displaying one of the six basic emotions—happy, sad, angry, surprised, afraid, disgusted—and a description of the facial muscle activity underlying each, for example:

AFRAID:

- The mouth is open and drawn back.
- The eyes are open and the inner corners go up.
- The eyebrows are raised and drawn together.
- There are wrinkles in the middle of the forehead.³

While they read through the sheet, expressions of fear, anger, surprise, or disgust float over the faces of the kids in Andrews’s class as they imitate the pictures and follow the facial-muscle recipes for each emotion. This lesson comes straight from Paul Ekman’s research on facial expression; as such, it is taught in most every college introductory psychology course—and rarely, if ever, in grade school. This elementary lesson in connecting a name with a feeling, and the feeling with the facial expression that matches it, might seem so obvious that it need not be taught at all. Yet it may serve as an antidote to surprisingly common lapses in emotional literacy. Schoolyard bullies, remember, often strike out in anger because they misinterpret neutral messages and expressions as hostile, and girls

who develop eating disorders fail to distinguish anger from anxiety from hunger.

EMOTIONAL LITERACY IN DISGUISE

With the curriculum already besieged by a proliferation of new topics and agendas, some teachers who understandably feel overburdened resist taking extra time from the basics for yet another course. So an emerging strategy in emotional education is not to create a new class, but to blend lessons on feelings and relationships with other topics already taught. Emotional lessons can merge naturally into reading and writing, health, science, social studies, and other standard courses as well. While in the New Haven schools Life Skills is a separate topic in some grades, in other years the social development curriculum blends into courses such as reading or health. Some of the lessons are even taught as part of math class—notably basic study skills such as how to put aside distractions, motivate yourself to study, and manage your impulses so you can attend to learning.

Some programs in emotional and social skills take no curriculum or class time as a separate subject at all, but instead infiltrate their lessons into the very fabric of school life. One model for this approach—essentially, an invisible emotional and social competence course—is the Child Development Project, created by a team directed by psychologist Eric Schaps. The project, based in Oakland, California, is currently being tried in a handful of schools across the nation, most in neighborhoods that share many of the troubles of New Haven's decaying core.⁴

The project offers a prepackaged set of materials that fit into existing courses. Thus first graders in their reading class get a story, "Frog and Toad Are Friends," in which Frog, eager to play with his hibernating friend Toad, plays a trick on him to get him up early. The story is used as a platform for a class discussion about friendship, and issues such as how people feel when someone plays a trick on them. A succession of adventures brings up topics such as self-consciousness, being aware of a friend's needs, what it feels like to be teased, and sharing feelings with friends. A set curriculum plan offers increasingly sophisticated stories as children go through the elementary and middle-school grades, giving teachers entry points to discuss topics such as empathy, perspective-taking, and caring.

Another way emotional lessons are woven into the fabric of existing school life is through helping teachers rethink how to discipline students who misbehave. The assumption in the Child Development program is that such moments are ripe opportunities to teach children skills that are lacking—impulse control, explaining their feelings, resolving conflicts—and that there are better ways to discipline than coercion. A teacher seeing three first graders pushing to be the first in the lunchroom line might suggest that they each guess a number, and let the winner go first. The immediate lesson is that there are impartial, fair ways to settle such pint-size disputes, while the deeper teaching is that disputes can be negotiated. And since that is an approach those children can take with them to settle other similar disputes (“Me first!” is, after all, epidemic in lower grades—if not through much of life, in one form or another) it has a more positive message than the ubiquitous, authoritarian “Stop that!”

THE EMOTIONAL TIMETABLE

“My friends Alice and Lynn won’t play with me.”

That poignant grievance is from a third-grade girl at John Muir Elementary School in Seattle. The anonymous sender put it in the “mailbox” in her classroom—actually a specially painted cardboard box—where she and her classmates are encouraged to write in their complaints and problems so the whole class can talk about them and try to think of ways to deal with them. The discussion will not mention the names of those involved; instead the teacher points out that all children share such problems from time to time, and they all need to learn how to handle them. As they talk about how it feels to be left out, or what they might do to be included, they have the chance to try out new solutions to these quandaries—a corrective for the one-track thinking that sees conflict as the only route to solving disagreements.

The mailbox allows flexibility as to exactly which crises and issues will become the subject of the class, for a too-rigid agenda can be out of step with the fluid realities of childhood. As children change and grow the preoccupation of the hour changes accordingly. To be most effective, emotional lessons must be pegged to the development of the child, and repeated at different ages in ways that fit a child’s changing understanding and challenges.

One question is how early to begin. Some say the first few years of life are none too soon. The Harvard pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton proposes that many parents can benefit from being coached as emotional mentors to their infants and toddlers, as some home-visit programs do. A strong argument can be made for emphasizing social and emotional skills more systematically in preschool programs such as Head Start; as we saw in [Chapter 12](#), children's readiness to learn depends to a large extent on acquiring some of these basic emotional skills. The preschool years are crucial ones for laying foundation skills, and there is some evidence that Head Start, when run well (an important caveat), can have beneficial long-term emotional and social effects on the lives of its graduates even into their early adult years—fewer drug problems and arrests, better marriages, greater earning power.⁵

Such interventions work best when they track the emotional timetable of development.⁶ As the wail of newborns testifies, babies have intense feelings from the moment they are born. But the newborn's brain is far from fully mature; as we saw in [Chapter 15](#), only as its nervous system reaches final development—a process that unfolds according to an innate biological clock over the entire course of childhood and into early adolescence—will the child's emotions ripen completely. The newborn's repertoire of feeling is primitive compared to the emotional range of a five-year-old, which, in turn, is lacking when measured against the fullness of feelings of a teenager. Indeed, adults all too readily fall into the trap of expecting children to have reached a maturity far beyond their years, forgetting that each emotion has its preprogrammed moment of appearance in a child's growth. A four-year-old's braggadocio, for example, might bring a parent's reprimand—and yet the self-consciousness that can breed humility typically does not emerge until age five or so.

The timetable for emotional growth is intertwined with allied lines of development, particularly for cognition, on the one hand, and brain and biological maturation, on the other. As we have seen, emotional capacities such as empathy and emotional self-regulation start to build virtually from infancy. The kindergarten year marks a peak ripening of the “social emotions”—feelings such as insecurity and humility, jealousy and envy, pride and confidence—all of which require the capacity for comparing oneself with others. The five-year-old, on entering the wider social world of school, enters too the world of social comparison. It is not just the external shift that elicits these

comparisons, but also the emergence of a cognitive skill: being able to compare oneself to others on particular qualities, whether popularity, attractiveness, or skateboarding talents. This is the age when, for example, having an older sister who gets straight A's can make the younger sister start to think of herself as "dumb" by comparison.

Dr. David Hamburg, a psychiatrist and president of the Carnegie Corporation, which has evaluated some pioneering emotional-education programs, sees the years of transition into grade school and then again into junior high or middle school as marking two crucial points in a child's adjustment.⁷ From ages six to eleven, says Hamburg, "school is a crucible and a defining experience that will heavily influence children's adolescence and beyond. A child's sense of self-worth depends substantially on his or her ability to achieve in school. A child who fails in school sets in motion the self-defeating attitudes that can dim prospects for an entire lifespan." Among the essentials for profiting from school, Hamburg notes, are an ability "to postpone gratification, to be socially responsible in appropriate ways, to maintain control over their emotions, and to have an optimistic outlook"—in other words, emotional intelligence.⁸

Puberty—because it is a time of extraordinary change in the child's biology, thinking capacities, and brain functioning—is also a crucial time for emotional and social lessons. As for the teen years, Hamburg observes that "most adolescents are ten to fifteen years old when they are exposed to sexuality, alcohol and drugs, smoking," and other temptations.⁹

The transition to middle school or junior high marks an end to childhood, and is itself a formidable emotional challenge. All other problems aside, as they enter this new school arrangement virtually all students have a dip in self-confidence and a jump in self-consciousness; their very notions of themselves are rocky and in tumult. One of the greatest specific blows is in "social self-esteem"—students' confidence that they can make and keep friends. It is at this juncture, Hamburg points out, that it helps immensely to buttress boys' and girls' abilities to build close relationships and navigate crises in friendships, and to nurture their self-confidence.

Hamburg notes that as students are entering middle school, just on the cusp of adolescence, there is something different about those who have had emotional literacy classes: they find the new pressures of peer politics, the upping of academic demands, and the temptations to smoke and use drugs less troubling than do their peers. They have

mastered emotional abilities that, at least for the short term, inoculate them against the turmoil and pressures they are about to face.

TIMING IS ALL

As developmental psychologists and others map the growth of emotions, they are able to be more specific about just what lessons children should be learning at each point in the unfolding of emotional intelligence, what the lasting deficits are likely to be for those who fail to master the right competences at the appointed time, and what remedial experiences might make up for what was missed.

In the New Haven program, for example, children in the youngest grades get basic lessons in self-awareness, relationships, and decision-making. In first grade students sit in a circle and roll the “feelings cube,” which has words such as *sad* or *excited* on each side. At their turn, they describe a time they had that feeling, an exercise that gives them more certainty in tying feelings to words and helps with empathy as they hear others having the same feelings as themselves.

By fourth and fifth grade, as peer relationships take on an immense importance in their lives, they get lessons that help their friendships work better: empathy, impulse control, and anger management. The Life Skills class on reading emotions from facial expressions that the Troup school fifth graders were trying, for example, is essentially about empathizing. For impulse control, there is a “stoplight” poster displayed prominently, with six steps:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Red light | 1. Stop, calm down, and think before you act. |
| Yellow light | 2. Say the problem and how you feel.
3. Set a positive goal.
4. Think of lots of solutions.
5. Think ahead to the consequences. |
| Green Light | 6. Go ahead and try the best plan. |

The stoplight notion is regularly invoked when a child, for example, is about to strike out in anger, or withdraw into a huff at some slight, or burst into tears at being teased, and offers a concrete set of steps

for dealing with these loaded moments in a more measured way. Beyond the management of feelings, it points a way to more effective action. And, as a habitual way of handling the unruly emotional impulse—to think before acting from feelings—it can evolve into a basic strategy for dealing with the risks of adolescence and beyond.

In sixth grade the lessons relate more directly to the temptations and pressures for sex, drugs, or drinking that begin to enter children's lives. By ninth grade, as teenagers are confronted with more ambiguous social realities, the ability to take multiple perspectives—your own as well as those of others involved—is emphasized. "If a kid is mad because he saw his girlfriend talking with another guy," says one of the New Haven teachers, "he'd be encouraged to consider what might be going on from their point of view, too, rather than just plunge into a confrontation."

EMOTIONAL LITERACY AS PREVENTION

Some of the most effective programs in emotional literacy were developed as a response to a specific problem, notably violence. One of the fastest-growing of these prevention-inspired emotional literacy courses is the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, in several hundred New York City public schools and schools across the country. The conflict-resolution course focuses on how to settle schoolyard arguments that can escalate into incidents like the hallway shooting of Ian Moore and Tyrone Sinkler by their classmate at Jefferson High School.

Linda Lantieri, the founder of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program and director of the Manhattan-based national center for the approach, sees it as having a mission far beyond just preventing fights. She says, "The program shows students that they have many choices for dealing with conflict besides passivity or aggression. We show them the futility of violence while replacing it with concrete skills. Kids learn to stand up for their rights without resorting to violence."¹⁰

In one exercise, students think of a single realistic step, no matter how small, that might have helped settle some conflict they have had. In another students enact a scene in which a big sister trying to do her homework gets fed up with her younger sister's loud rap tape. In

frustration the older sister turns off the tape despite the younger one's protests. The class brainstorms ways they might work out the problem that would satisfy both sisters.

One key to the success of the conflict-resolution program is extending it beyond the classroom to the playground and cafeteria, where tempers are more likely to explode. To that end, some students are trained as mediators, a role that can begin in the latter years of elementary school. When tension erupts, students can seek out a mediator to help them settle it. The schoolyard mediators learn to handle fights, taunts and threats, interracial incidents, and the other potentially incendiary incidents of school life.

The mediators learn to phrase their statements in ways that make both parties feel the mediator is impartial. Their tactics include sitting down with those involved and getting them to listen to the other person without interruptions or insults. They have each party calm down and state their position, then have each paraphrase what's been said so it's clear they've really heard. Then they all try to think of solutions that both sides can live with; the settlements are often in the form of a signed agreement.

Beyond the mediation of a given dispute, the program teaches students to think differently about disagreements in the first place. As Angel Perez, trained as a mediator while in grade school, put it, the program "changed my way of thinking. I used to think, hey, if somebody picks on me, if somebody does something to me, the only thing was to fight, do something to get back at them. Since I had this program, I've had a more positive way of thinking. If something's done negative to me, I don't try to do the negative thing back—I try to solve the problem." And he has found himself spreading the approach in his community.

While the focus of Resolving Conflict Creatively is on preventing violence, Lantieri sees it as having a wider mission. Her view is that the skills needed to head off violence cannot be separated from the full spectrum of emotional competence—that, for example, knowing what you are feeling or how to handle impulse or grief is as important for violence prevention as is managing anger. Much of the training has to do with emotional basics such as recognizing an expanded range of feelings and being able to put names to them, and empathizing. When she describes the evaluation results of her program's effects, Lantieri points with as much pride to the increase in "caring among the kids" as to the drops in fights, put-downs, and

name-calling.

A similar convergence on emotional literacy occurred with a consortium of psychologists trying to find ways to help youngsters on a trajectory toward a life marked by crime and violence. Dozens of studies of such boys—as we saw in [Chapter 15](#)—yielded a clear sense of the path most take, starting from impulsiveness and a quickness to anger in their earliest school years, through becoming social rejects by the end of grade school, to bonding with a circle of others like themselves and beginning crime sprees in the middle-school years. By early adulthood, a large portion of these boys have acquired police records and a readiness for violence.

When it came to designing interventions that might help such boys get off this road to violence and crime, the result was, once again, an emotional-literacy program.¹¹ One of these, developed by Carol Kusche along with Mark Greenberg at the University of Washington, is the PATHS curriculum (PATHS is the acronym for Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies). While those at risk for a trajectory toward crime and violence are most in need of these lessons, the course is given to all those in a class, avoiding any stigmatizing of a more troubled subgroup.

Still, the lessons are useful for all children. These include, for example, learning in the earliest school years to control their impulses; lacking this ability, children have special trouble paying attention to what is being taught and so fall behind in their learning and grades. Another is recognizing their feelings; the PATHS curriculum has fifty lessons on different emotions, teaching the most basic, such as happiness and anger, to the youngest children, and later touching on more complicated feelings such as jealousy, pride, and guilt. The emotional-awareness lessons include how to monitor what they and those around them are feeling, and—most important for those prone to aggression—how to recognize when someone is actually hostile, as opposed to when the attribution of hostility comes from oneself.

One of the most important lessons, of course, is anger management. The basic premise children learn about anger (and all other emotions as well) is that “all feelings are okay to have,” but some reactions are okay and others not. Here one of the tools for teaching self-control is the same “stoplight” exercise used in the New Haven course. Other units help children with their friendships, a counter to the social rejections that can help propel a child toward delinquency.

RETHINKING SCHOOLS: TEACHING BY BEING, COMMUNITIES THAT CARE

As family life no longer offers growing numbers of children a sure footing in life, schools are left as the one place communities can turn to for correctives to children's deficiencies in emotional and social competence. That is not to say that schools alone can stand in for all the social institutions that too often are in or nearing collapse. But since virtually every child goes to school (at least at the outset), it offers a place to reach children with basic lessons for living that they may never get otherwise. Emotional literacy implies an expanded mandate for schools, taking up the slack for failing families in socializing children. This daunting task requires two major changes: that teachers go beyond their traditional mission and that people in the community become more involved with schools.

Whether or not there is a class explicitly devoted to emotional literacy may matter far less than *how* these lessons are taught. There is perhaps no subject where the quality of the teacher matters so much, since how a teacher handles her class is in itself a model, a de facto lesson in emotional competence—or the lack thereof. Whenever a teacher responds to one student, twenty or thirty others learn a lesson.

There is a self-selection in the kind of teacher who gravitates to courses such as these, because not everyone is suited by temperament. To begin with, teachers need to be comfortable talking about feelings; not every teacher is at ease doing so or wants to be. There is little or nothing in the standard education of teachers that prepares them for this kind of teaching. For these reasons, emotional literacy programs typically give prospective teachers several weeks of special training in the approach.

While many teachers may be reluctant at the outset to tackle a topic that seems so foreign to their training and routines, there is evidence that once they are willing to try it, most will be pleased rather than put off. In the New Haven schools, when teachers first learned that they would be trained to teach the new emotional literacy courses, 31 percent said they were reluctant to do so. After a year of teaching the courses, more than 90 percent said they were pleased by them, and wanted to teach them again the following year.

AN EXPANDED MISSION FOR SCHOOLS

Beyond teacher training, emotional literacy expands our vision of the task of schools themselves, making them more explicitly society's agent for seeing that children learn these essential lessons for life—a return to a classic role for education. This larger design requires, apart from any specifics of curriculum, using opportunities in and out of class to help students turn moments of personal crisis into lessons in emotional competence. It also works best when the lessons at school are coordinated with what goes on in children's homes. Many emotional literacy programs include special classes for parents to teach them about what their children are learning, not just to complement what is imparted at school, but to help parents who feel the need to deal more effectively with their children's emotional life.

That way, children get consistent messages about emotional competence in all parts of their lives. In the New Haven schools, says Tim Shriver, director of the Social Competence Program, "if kids get into a beef in the cafeteria, they'll be sent to a peer mediator, who sits down with them and works through their conflict with the same perspective-taking technique they learned in class. Coaches will use the technique to handle conflicts on the playing field. We hold classes for parents in using these methods with kids at home."

Such parallel lines of reinforcement of these emotional lessons—not just in the classroom, but also on the playground; not just in the school, but also in the home—is optimal. That means weaving the school, the parents, and the community together more tightly. It increases the likelihood that what children learned in emotional literacy classes will not stay behind at school, but will be tested, practiced, and sharpened in the actual challenges of life.

Another way in which this focus reshapes schools is in building a campus culture that makes it a "caring community," a place where students feel respected, cared about, and bonded to classmates, teachers, and the school itself.¹² For example, schools in areas such as New Haven, where families are disintegrating at a high rate, offer a range of programs that recruit caring people in the community to get engaged with students whose home life is shaky at best. In the New Haven schools, responsible adults volunteer as mentors, regular companions for students who are foundering and who have few, if any, stable and nurturing adults in their home life.

In short, the optimal design of emotional literacy programs is to begin early, be age-appropriate, run throughout the school years, and intertwine efforts at school, at home, and in the community.

Even though much of this fits neatly into existing parts of the school day, these programs are a major change in any curriculum. It would be naive not to anticipate hurdles in getting such programs into schools. Many parents may feel that the topic itself is too personal a domain for the schools, that such things are best left to parents (an argument that gains credibility to the extent that parents actually *do* address these topics—and is less convincing when they fail to). Teachers may be reluctant to yield yet another part of the school day to topics that seem so unrelated to the academic basics; some teachers may be too uncomfortable with the topics to teach them, and all will need special training to do so. Some children, too, will resist, especially to the extent that these classes are out of synch with their actual concerns, or feel like intrusive impositions on their privacy. And then there is the dilemma of maintaining high quality, and ensuring that slick education marketers do not peddle ineptly designed emotional-competence programs that repeat the disasters of, say, ill-conceived courses on drugs or teen pregnancy.

Given all this, why should we bother to try?

DOES EMOTIONAL LITERACY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

It's every teacher's nightmare: one day Tim Shriver opened the local paper to read that Lamont, one of his favorite former students, had been shot nine times on a New Haven street, and was in critical condition. "Lamont had been one of the school leaders, a huge—six foot two—and hugely popular linebacker, always smiling," recalls Shriver. "Back then Lamont had enjoyed coming to a leadership club I led, where we would toss around ideas in a problem-solving model known as SOCS."

The acronym is for Situation, Options, Consequence, Solutions—a four-step method: say what the situation is and how it makes you feel; think about your options for solving the problem and what their consequences might be; pick a solution and execute it—a grown-up version of the stoplight method. Lamont, Shriver added, loved brainstorming imaginative but potentially effective ways to handle the pressing dilemmas of high-school life, such as problems with girlfriends and how to avoid fights.

But those few lessons seemed to have failed him after high school. Drifting on the streets in a sea of poverty, drugs, and guns, Lamont at

twenty-six lay in a hospital bed, shrouded in bandages, his body riddled with bullet holes. Rushing to the hospital, Shriver found Lamont barely able to talk, his mother and girlfriend huddled over him. Seeing his former teacher, Lamont motioned him to the bedside, and as Shriver leaned over to hear, whispered, “Shrive, when I get out of here, I’m gonna use the SOCS method.”

Lamont went through Hillhouse High in the years before the social-development course was given there. Would his life have turned out differently had he benefited from such an education throughout his school years, as children in New Haven public schools do now? The signs point to a possible yes, though no one can ever say for sure.

As Tim Shriver put it, “One thing is clear: the proving ground for social problem-solving is not just the classroom, but the cafeteria, the streets, home.” Consider testimony from teachers in the New Haven program. One recounts how a former student, still single, visited and said that she almost certainly would have been an unwed mother by now “if she hadn’t learned to stand up for her rights during our Social Development classes.”¹³ Another teacher recalls how a student’s relationship with her mother was so poor that their talks continually ended up as screaming matches; after the girl learned about calming down and thinking before reacting, the mother told her teacher that they could now talk without going “off the deep end.” At the Troup school, a sixth grader passed a note to the teacher of her Social Development class; her best friend, the note said, was pregnant, had no one to talk to about what to do, and was planning suicide—but she knew the teacher would care.

A revealing moment came when I was observing a seventh-grade class in social development in the New Haven Schools, and the teacher asked for “someone to tell me about a disagreement they’ve had recently that ended in a good way.”

A plumpish twelve-year-old girl shot up her hand: “This girl was supposed to be my friend and someone said she wanted to fight me. They told me she was going to get me in a corner after school.”

But instead of confronting the other girl in anger, she applied an approach encouraged in the class—finding out what is going on before jumping to conclusions: “So I went to the girl and I asked why she said that stuff. And she said she never did. So we never had a fight.”

The story seems innocuous enough. Except that the girl who tells the tale had already been expelled from another school for fighting. In

the past she attacked first, asked questions later—or not at all. For her to engage a seeming adversary in a constructive way rather than immediately wading into an angry confrontational is a small but real victory.

Perhaps the most telling sign of the impact of such emotional literacy classes are the data shared with me by the principal of this twelve-year-old's school. An unbendable rule there is that children caught fighting are suspended. But as the emotional literacy classes have been phased in over the years there has been a steady drop in the number of suspensions. "Last year," says the principal, "there were 106 suspensions. So far this year—we're up to March—there have been only 26."

These are concrete benefits. But apart from such anecdotes of lives bettered or saved, there is the empirical question of how much emotional literacy classes really matter to those who go through them. The data suggest that although such courses do not change anyone overnight, as children advance through the curriculum from grade to grade, there are discernible improvements in the tone of a school and the outlook—and level of emotional competence—of the girls and boys who take them.

There have been a handful of objective evaluations, the best of which compare students in these courses with equivalent students not taking them, with independent observers rating the children's behavior. Another method is to track changes in the same students before and after the courses based on objective measures of their behavior, such as the number of schoolyard fights or suspensions. Pooling such assessments reveals a widespread benefit for children's emotional and social competence, for their behavior in and out of the classroom, and for their ability to learn (see [Appendix F](#) for details):

EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS

- Improvement in recognizing and naming own emotions
- Better able to understand the causes of feelings
- Recognizing the difference between feelings and actions

MANAGING EMOTIONS

- Better frustration tolerance and anger management

- Fewer verbal put-downs, fights, and classroom disruptions
- Better able to express anger appropriately, without fighting
- Fewer suspensions and expulsions
- Less aggressive or self-destructive behavior
- More positive feelings about self, school, and family
- Better at handling stress
- Less loneliness and social anxiety

HARNESSING EMOTIONS PRODUCTIVELY

- More responsible
- Better able to focus on the task at hand and pay attention
- Less impulsive; more self-control
- Improved scores on achievement tests

EMPATHY: READING EMOTIONS

- Better able to take another person's perspective
- Improved empathy and sensitivity to others' feelings
- Better at listening to others

HANDLING RELATIONSHIPS

- Increased ability to analyze and understand relationships
- Better at resolving conflicts and negotiating disagreements
- Better at solving problems in relationships
- More assertive and skilled at communicating
- More popular and outgoing; friendly and involved with peers
- More sought out by peers
- More concerned and considerate
- More "pro-social" and harmonious in groups
- More sharing, cooperation, and helpfulness
- More democratic in dealing with others

One item on this list demands special attention: emotional literacy programs improve children's *academic* achievement scores and school

performance. This is not an isolated finding; it recurs again and again in such studies. In a time when too many children lack the capacity to handle their upsets, to listen or focus, to rein in impulse, to feel responsible for their work or care about learning, anything that will buttress these skills will help in their education. In this sense, emotional literacy enhances schools' ability to teach. Even in a time of back-to-basics and budget cuts, there is an argument to be made that these programs help reverse a tide of educational decline and strengthen schools in accomplishing their main mission, and so are well worth the investment.

Beyond these educational advantages, the courses seem to help children better fulfill their roles in life, becoming better friends, students, sons and daughters—and in the future are more likely to be better husbands and wives, workers and bosses, parents, and citizens. While not every boy and girl will acquire these skills with equal sureness, to the degree they do we are all the better for it. “A rising tide lifts all boats,” as Tim Shriver put it. “It’s not just the kids with problems, but all kids who can benefit from these skills; these are an inoculation for life.”

CHARACTER, MORALITY, AMD THE ARTS Of DEMOCRACY

There is an old-fashioned word for the body of skills that emotional intelligence represents: *character*. Character, writes Amitai Etzioni, the George Washington University social theorist, is “the psychological muscle that moral conduct requires.”¹⁴ And philosopher John Dewey saw that a moral education is most potent when lessons are taught to children in the course of real events, not just as abstract lessons—the mode of emotional literacy.¹⁵

If character development is a foundation of democratic societies, consider some of the ways emotional intelligence buttresses this foundation. The bedrock of character is self-discipline; the virtuous life, as philosophers since Aristotle have observed, is based on self-control. A related keystone of character is being able to motivate and guide oneself, whether in doing homework, finishing a job, or getting up in the morning. And, as we have seen, the ability to defer gratification and to control and channel one’s urges to act is a basic emotional skill, one that in a former day was called will. “We need to be in control of ourselves—our appetites, our passions—to do right by

others,” notes Thomas Lickona, writing about character education.¹⁶ “It takes will to keep emotion under the control of reason.”

Being able to put aside one’s self-centered focus and impulses has social benefits: it opens the way to empathy, to real listening, to taking another person’s perspective. Empathy, as we have seen, leads to caring, altruism, and compassion. Seeing things from another’s perspective breaks down biased stereotypes, and so breeds tolerance and acceptance of differences. These capacities are ever more called on in our increasingly pluralistic society, allowing people to live together in mutual respect and creating the possibility of productive public discourse. These are basic arts of democracy.¹⁷

Schools, notes Etzioni, have a central role in cultivating character by inculcating self-discipline and empathy, which in turn enable true commitment to civic and moral values.¹⁸ In doing so, it is not enough to lecture children about values: they need to practice them, which happens as children build the essential emotional and social skills. In this sense, emotional literacy goes hand in hand with education for character, for moral development, and for citizenship.

A LAST WORD

As I complete this book some troubling newspaper items catch my eye. One announces that guns have become the number-one cause of death in America, edging out auto accidents. The second says that last year murder rates rose by 3 percent.¹⁹ Particularly disturbing is the prediction in that second article, by a criminologist, that we are in a lull before a “crime storm” to come in the next decade. The reason he gives is that murders by teenagers as young as fourteen and fifteen are on the rise, and that age group represents the crest of a mini baby boom. In the next decade this group will become eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds, the age at which violent crimes peak in the course of a criminal career. The harbingers are on the horizon: A third article says that in the four years between 1988 and 1992 Justice Department figures show a 68 percent jump in the number of juveniles charged with murder, aggravated assault, robbery, and forcible rape, with aggravated assault alone up 80 percent.²⁰

These teenagers are the first generation to have not just guns but automatic weaponry easily available to them, just as their parents’ generation was the first to have wide access to drugs. The toting of

guns by teenagers means that disagreements that in a former day would have led to fistfights can readily lead to shootings instead. And, as another expert points out, these teenagers “just aren’t very good at avoiding disputes.”

One reason they are so poor at this basic life skill, of course, is that as a society we have not bothered to make sure every child is taught the essentials of handling anger or resolving conflicts positively—nor have we bothered to teach empathy, impulse control, or any of the other fundamentals of emotional competence. By leaving the emotional lessons children learn to chance, we risk largely wasting the window of opportunity presented by the slow maturation of the brain to help children cultivate a healthy emotional repertoire.

Despite high interest in emotional literacy among some educators, these courses are as yet rare; most teachers, principals, and parents simply do not know they exist. The best models are largely outside the education mainstream, in a handful of private schools and a few hundred public schools. Of course no program, including this one, is an answer to every problem. But given the crises we find ourselves and our children facing, and given the quantum of hope held out by courses in emotional literacy, we must ask ourselves: Shouldn’t we be teaching these most essential skills for life to every child—now more than ever?

And if not now, when?

* For more information on emotional literacy courses: The Collaborative for the Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, Department of Psychology (M/C 285), University of Illinois at Chicago, 1007 West Harrison St., Chicago, IL 60606-7137.

APPENDIX A

What Is Emotion?

A word about what I refer to under the rubric *emotion*, a term whose precise meaning psychologists and philosophers have quibbled over for more than a century. In its most literal sense, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *emotion* as “any agitation or disturbance of mind, feeling, passion; any vehement or excited mental state.” I take *emotion* to refer to a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological and biological states, and range of propensities to act. There are hundreds of emotions, along with their blends, variations, mutations, and nuances. Indeed, there are many more subtleties of emotion than we have words for.

Researchers continue to argue over precisely which emotions can be considered primary—the blue, red, and yellow of feeling from which all blends come—or even if there are such primary emotions at all. Some theorists propose basic families, though not all agree on them. The main candidates and some of the members of their families:

- *Anger*: fury, outrage, resentment, wrath, exasperation, indignation, vexation, acrimony, animosity, annoyance, irritability, hostility, and, perhaps at the extreme, pathological hatred and violence
- *Sadness*: grief, sorrow, cheerlessness, gloom, melancholy, self-pity, loneliness, dejection, despair, and, when pathological, severe depression
- *Fear*: anxiety, apprehension, nervousness, concern, consternation, misgiving, wariness, qualm, edginess, dread, fright, terror; as a psychopathology, phobia and panic
- *Enjoyment*: happiness, joy, relief, contentment, bliss, delight, amusement, pride, sensual pleasure, thrill, rapture, gratification, satisfaction, euphoria, whimsy, ecstasy, and at the far edge, mania
- *Love*: acceptance, friendliness, trust, kindness, affinity, devotion, adoration, infatuation, *agape*
- *Surprise*: shock, astonishment, amazement, wonder
- *Disgust*: contempt, disdain, scorn, abhorrence, aversion, distaste,

revulsion

- *Shame*: guilt, embarrassment, chagrin, remorse, humiliation, regret, mortification, and contrition

To be sure, this list does not resolve every question about how to categorize emotion. For example, what about blends such as jealousy, a variant of anger that also melds sadness and fear? And what of the virtues, such as hope and faith, courage and forgiveness, certainty and equanimity? Or some of the classic vices, feelings such as doubt, complacency, sloth, and torpor—or boredom? There are no clear answers; the scientific debate on how to classify emotions continues.

The argument for there being a handful of core emotions hinges to some extent on the discovery by Paul Ekman, at the University of California at San Francisco, that specific facial expressions for four of them (fear, anger, sadness, enjoyment) are recognized by people in cultures around the world, including preliterate peoples presumably untainted by exposure to cinema or television—suggesting their universality. Ekman showed facial photos portraying expressions with technical precision to people in cultures as remote as the Fore of New Guinea, an isolated Stone Age tribe in the remote highlands, and found people everywhere recognized the same basic emotions. This universality of facial expressions for emotion was probably first noted by Darwin, who saw it as evidence the forces of evolution had stamped these signals in our central nervous system.

In seeking basic principles, I follow Ekman and others in thinking of emotions in terms of families or dimensions, taking the main families—anger, sadness, fear, enjoyment, love, shame, and so on—as cases in point for the endless nuances of our emotional life. Each of these families has a basic emotional nucleus at its core, with its relatives rippling out from there in countless mutations. In the outer ripples are *moods*, which, technically speaking, are more muted and last far longer than an emotion (while it's relatively rare to be in the full heat of anger all day, for example, it is not that rare to be in a grumpy, irritable mood, in which shorter bouts of anger are easily triggered). Beyond moods are *temperaments*, the readiness to evoke a given emotion or mood that makes people melancholy, timid, or cheery. And still beyond such emotional dispositions are the outright *disorders of emotion* such as clinical depression or unremitting anxiety, in which someone feels perpetually trapped in a toxic state.

APPENDIX B

Hallmarks of the Emotional Mind

Only in recent years has there emerged a scientific model of the emotional mind that explains how so much of what we do can be emotionally driven—how we can be so reasonable at one moment and so irrational the next—and the sense in which emotions have their own reasons and their own logic. Perhaps the two best assessments of the emotional mind are offered independently by Paul Ekman, head of the Human Interaction Laboratory at the University of California, San Francisco, and by Seymour Epstein, a clinical psychologist at the University of Massachusetts.¹ While Ekman and Epstein have each weighed different scientific evidence, together they offer a basic list of the qualities that distinguish emotions from the rest of mental life.²

A Quick but Sloppy Response

The emotional mind is far quicker than the rational mind, springing into action without pausing even a moment to consider what it is doing. Its quickness precludes the deliberate, analytic reflection that is the hallmark of the thinking mind. In evolution this quickness most likely revolved around that most basic decision, what to pay attention to, and, once vigilant while, say, confronting another animal, making split-second decisions like, Do I eat this, or does it eat me? Those organisms that had to pause too long to reflect on these answers were unlikely to have many progeny to pass on their slower-acting genes.

Actions that spring from the emotional mind carry a particularly strong sense of certainty, a by-product of a streamlined, simplified way of looking at things that can be absolutely bewildering to the rational mind. When the dust settles, or even in mid-response, we find ourselves thinking, “What did I do that for?”—a sign that the rational mind is awakening to the moment, but not with the rapidity of the emotional mind.

Since the interval between what triggers an emotion and its eruption can be virtually instantaneous, the mechanism that appraises

perception must be capable of great speed, even in brain time, which is reckoned in thousandths of a second. This appraisal of the need to act needs to be automatic, so rapid that it never enters conscious awareness.³ This quick-and-dirty variety of emotional response sweeps over us virtually before we quite know what is happening.

This rapid mode of perception sacrifices accuracy for speed, relying on first impressions, reacting to the overall picture or the most striking aspects. It takes things in at once, as a whole, reacting without taking the time for thoughtful analysis. Vivid elements can determine that impression, outweighing a careful evaluation of the details. The great advantage is that the emotional mind can read an emotional reality (he's angry with me; she's lying; this is making him sad) in an instant, making the intuitive snap judgments that tell us who to be wary of, who to trust, who's in distress. The emotional mind is our radar for danger; if we (or our forebears in evolution) waited for the rational mind to make some of these judgments, we might not only be wrong—we might be dead. The drawback is that these impressions and intuitive judgments, because they are made in the snap of a finger, may be mistaken or misguided.

Paul Ekman proposes that this quickness, in which emotions can overtake us before we are quite aware they have started, is essential to their being so highly adaptive: they mobilize us to respond to urgent events without wasting time pondering whether to react or how to respond. Using the system he developed for detecting emotions from subtle changes in facial expression, Ekman can track microemotions that flit across the face in less than a half second. Ekman and his collaborators have discovered that emotional expressions begin to show up in changes in facial musculature within a few thousandths of a second after the event that triggers the reaction, and that the physiological changes typical of a given emotion—like shunting blood flow and increasing heart rate—also take only fractions of a second to begin. This swiftness is particularly true of intense emotion, like fear of a sudden threat.

Ekman argues that, technically speaking, the full heat of emotion is very brief, lasting just seconds rather than minutes, hours, or days. His reasoning is that it would be maladaptive for an emotion to capture the brain and body for a long time regardless of changing circumstance. If the emotions caused by a single event invariably continued to dominate us after it had passed, and regardless of what else was happening around us, then our feelings would be poor guides

to action. For emotions to last longer the trigger must be sustained, in effect continually evoking the emotion, as when the loss of a loved one keeps us mourning. When feelings persist for hours, it is usually as moods, a muted form. Moods set an affective tone, but they are not such strong shapers of how we perceive and act as is the high heat of full emotion.

First Feelings, Second Thoughts

Because it takes the rational mind a moment or two longer to register and respond than it does the emotional mind, the “first impulse” in an emotional situation is the heart’s, not the head’s. There is also a second kind of emotional reaction, slower than the quick-response, which simmers and brews first in our thoughts before it leads to feeling. This second pathway to triggering emotions is more deliberate, and we are typically quite aware of the thoughts that lead to it. In this kind of emotional reaction there is a more extended appraisal; our thoughts—cognition—play the key role in determining what emotions will be roused. Once we make an appraisal—“that taxi driver is cheating me” or “this baby is adorable,” a fitting emotional response follows. In this slower sequence, more fully articulated thought precedes feeling. More complicated emotions, like embarrassment or apprehension over an upcoming exam, follow this slower route, taking seconds or minutes to unfold—these are emotions that follow from thoughts.

By contrast, in the fast-response sequence feeling seems to precede or be simultaneous with thought. This rapid-fire emotional reaction takes over in situations that have the urgency of primal survival. This is the power of such rapid decisions: they mobilize us in an instant to rise to an emergency. Our most intense feelings are involuntary reactions; we cannot decide when they will erupt. “Love,” wrote Stendhal, “is like a fever that comes and goes independently of the will.” Not just love, but our angers and fears, as well, sweep over us, seeming to happen to us rather than being our choice. For that reason they can offer an alibi: “It is the fact that *we cannot choose the emotions which we have*,” notes Ekman, that allows people to explain away their actions by saying they were in the grip of emotion.⁴

Just as there are quick and slow paths to emotion—one through immediate perception and the other through reflective thought—there are also emotions which come bidden. One example is intentionally

manipulated feeling, the actors' stock-in-trade, like the tears that come when sad memories are intentionally milked for their effect. But actors are simply more skilled than the rest of us at the intentional use of the second pathway to emotion, feeling via thinking. While we cannot easily change what specific emotions a certain kind of thought will trigger, we very often can, and do, choose what to think about. Just as a sexual fantasy can lead to sexual feelings, so can happy memories cheer us up, or melancholy thoughts make us reflective.

But the rational mind usually does not decide what emotions we "should" have. Instead, our feelings typically come to us as a *fait accompli*. What the rational mind can ordinarily control is the *course* of those reactions. A few exceptions aside, we do not decide *when* to be mad, sad, and so on.

A Symbolic, Childlike Reality

The logic of the emotional mind is *associative*; it takes elements that symbolize a reality, or trigger a memory of it, to be the same as that reality. That is why similes, metaphors, and images speak directly to the emotional mind, as do the arts—novels, film, poetry, song, theater, opera. Great spiritual teachers, like Buddha and Jesus, have touched their disciples' hearts by speaking in the language of emotion, teaching in parables, fables, and stories. Indeed, religious symbol and ritual makes little sense from the rational point of view; it is couched in the vernacular of the heart.

This logic of the heart—of the emotional mind—is well-described by Freud in his concept of "primary process" thought; it is the logic of religion and poetry, psychosis and children, dream and myth (as Joseph Campbell put it, "Dreams are private myths; myths are shared dreams"). The primary process is the key that unlocks the meanings of works like James Joyce's *Ulysses*: In primary process thought, loose associations determine the flow of a narrative; one object symbolizes another; one feeling displaces another and stands for it; wholes are condensed into parts. There is no time, no laws of cause-and-effect. Indeed, there is no such thing as "No" in the primary process; anything is possible. The psychoanalytic method is in part the art of deciphering and unraveling these substitutions in meaning.

If the emotional mind follows this logic and its rules, with one element standing for another, things need not necessarily be defined by their objective identity: what matters is how they are *perceived*;

things are as they seem. What something reminds us of can be far more important than what it “is.” Indeed, in emotional life, identities can be like a hologram in the sense that a single part evokes a whole. As Seymour Epstein points out, while the rational mind makes logical connections between causes and effects, the emotional mind is indiscriminate, connecting things that merely have similar striking features.⁵

There are many ways in which the emotional mind is childlike, the more so the stronger the emotion grows. One way is *categorical* thinking, where everything is in black and white, with no shades of gray; someone who is mortified about a faux pas might have the immediate thought, “I *always* say the wrong thing.” Another sign of this childlike mode is *personalized* thinking, with events perceived with a bias centering on oneself, like the driver who, after an accident, explained that “the telephone pole came straight at me.”

This childlike mode is *self-confirming*, suppressing or ignoring memories or facts that would undermine its beliefs and seizing on those that support it. The beliefs of the rational mind are tentative; new evidence can disconfirm one belief and replace it with a new one —it reasons by objective evidence. The emotional mind, however, takes its beliefs to be absolutely true, and so discounts any evidence to the contrary. That is why it is so hard to reason with someone who is emotionally upset: no matter the soundness of your argument from a logical point of view, it carries no weight if it is out of keeping with the emotional conviction of the moment. Feelings are self-justifying, with a set of perceptions and “proofs” all their own.

The Past Imposed on the Present

When some feature of an event seems similar to an emotionally charged memory from the past, the emotional mind responds by triggering the feelings that went with the remembered event. The emotional mind reacts to the present *as though it were the past*.⁶ The trouble is that, especially when the appraisal is fast and automatic, we may not realize that what was once the case is no longer so. Someone who has learned, through painful childhood beatings, to react to an angry scowl with intense fear and loathing will have that reaction to some degree even as an adult, when the scowl carries no such threat.

If the feelings are strong, then the reaction that is triggered is obvious. But if the feelings are vague or subtle, we may not quite

realize the emotional reaction we are having, even though it is subtly coloring how we react to the moment. Thoughts and reactions at this moment will take on the coloration of thoughts and reactions then, even though it may seem that the reaction is due solely to the circumstance of the moment. Our emotional mind will harness the rational mind to its purposes, so we come up with explanations for our feelings and reactions—rationalizations—justifying them in terms of the present moment, without realizing the influence of the emotional memory. In that sense, we can have no idea of what is actually going on, though we may have the conviction of certainty that we know exactly what is happening. At such moments the emotional mind has entrained the rational mind, putting it to its own uses.

State-specific Reality

The working of the emotional mind is to a large degree *state-specific*, dictated by the particular feeling ascendant at a given moment. How we think and act when we are feeling romantic is entirely different from how we behave when enraged or dejected; in the mechanics of emotion, each feeling has its own distinct repertoire of thought, reactions, even memories. These state-specific repertoires become most predominant in moments of intense emotion.

One sign that such a repertoire is active is selective memory. Part of the mind's response to an emotional situation is to reshuffle memory and options for action so that those most relevant are at the top of the hierarchy and so more readily enacted. And, as we have seen, each major emotion has its hallmark biological signature, a pattern of sweeping changes that entrain the body as that emotion becomes ascendant, and a unique set of cues the body automatically sends out when in its grip.⁷

APPENDIX C

The Neural Circuitry of Fear

The amygdala is central to fear. When a rare brain disease destroyed the amygdala (but no other brain structures) in the patient neurologists call “S.M.,” fear disappeared from her mental repertoire. She became unable to identify looks of fear on other people’s faces, nor to make such an expression herself. As her neurologist put it, “If someone put a gun to S.M.’s head, she would know intellectually to be afraid but she would not feel afraid as you or I would.”

Neuroscientists have mapped the circuitry for fear in perhaps finest detail, though at the present state of this art the full circuitry for none of the emotions is completely surveyed. Fear is an apt case in point for understanding the neural dynamics of emotion. Fear, in evolution, has a special prominence: perhaps more than any other emotion it is crucial for survival. Of course in modern times misplaced fears are the bane of daily life, leaving us suffering from frets, angst, and garden variety worries—or at pathological extreme, from panic attacks, phobias, or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Say you’re alone one night at home, reading a book, when suddenly you hear a crash in another room. What happens in your brain over the next moments offers a window into the neural circuitry of fear, and the role of the amygdala as an alarm system. The first brain circuit involved simply takes in that sound as raw physical waves and transforms them into the language of the brain to startle you into alertness. This circuit goes from the ear to the brainstem and then to the thalamus. From there two branches separate: a smaller bundle of projections leads to the amygdala and the nearby hippocampus; the other, larger pathway leads to the auditory cortex in the temporal lobe, where sounds are sorted out and comprehended.

The hippocampus, a key storage site for memory, quickly sorts that “crash” against other similar sounds you’ve heard, to see if it is familiar—is this “crash” one that you immediately recognize? Meanwhile the auditory cortex is doing a more sophisticated analysis of the sound to try to understand its source—is it the cat? A shutter

banging in the wind? A prowler? The auditory cortex comes up with its hypothesis—it might be the cat knocking a lamp off the table, say, but it might also be a prowler—and sends that message to the amygdala and hippocampus, which quickly compare it to similar memories.

If the conclusion is reassuring (it's only the shutter that bangs whenever it gets too windy) then the general alert does not escalate to the next level. But if you are still unsure, another coil of circuitry reverberating between amygdala, hippocampus, and the prefrontal cortex further heightens your uncertainty and fixates your attention, making you even more concerned about identifying the source of the sound. If no satisfying answer comes from this further keen analysis, the amygdala triggers an alarm, its central area activating the hypothalamus, the brainstem, and the autonomic nervous system.

The superb architecture of the amygdala as a central alarm system for the brain becomes evident in this moment of apprehension and subliminal anxiety. The several bundles of neurons in the amygdala each have a distinct set of projections with receptors primed for different neurotransmitters, something like those home alarm companies where operators stand at the ready to send out calls to the local fire department, police, and a neighbor whenever a home security system signals trouble.

Different parts of the amygdala receive differing information. To the amygdala's lateral nucleus come projections from the thalamus and auditory and visual cortices. Smells, via the olfactory bulb, come to the corticomedial area of the amygdala, and tastes and messages from the viscera go to the central area. These incoming signals make the amygdala a continual sentinel, scrutinizing every sensory experience.

From the amygdala projections extend out to every major part of the brain. From the central and medial areas a branch goes to the areas of the hypothalamus that secrete the body's emergency-response substance, corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH), which mobilizes the fight-or-flight reaction via a cascade of other hormones. The amygdala's basal area sends out branches to the corpus striatum, linking into the brain's system for movement. And, via the nearby central nucleus, the amygdala sends signals to the autonomic nervous system via the medulla, activating a wide range of far-flung responses in the cardiovascular system, the muscles, and the gut.

From the amygdala's basolateral area, arms go to the cingulate cortex and to the fibers known as the "central gray," cells that

regulate the large muscles of the skeleton. It is these cells that make a dog snarl or that arch the back of a cat threatening an interloper on its territory. In humans these same circuits tighten the muscles of the vocal cords, creating the high-pitched voice of fright.

Still another pathway from the amygdala leads to the locus ceruleus in the brainstem, which in turn manufactures norepinephrine (also called “noradrenaline”) and disperses it throughout the brain. The net effect of norepinephrine is to heighten the overall reactivity of the brain areas that receive it, making the sensory circuits more sensitive. Norepinephrine suffuses the cortex, the brainstem, and the limbic system itself, in essence setting the brain on edge. Now even the ordinary creaking of the house can send a tremor of fear coursing through you. Most of these changes go on outside awareness, so that you are not yet aware you feel fear.

But as you begin to actually feel fear—that is, as the anxiety that had been unconscious pierces awareness—the amygdala seamlessly commands a wide-ranging response. It signals cells in the brainstem to put a fearful expression on your face, make you edgy and easily startled, freeze unrelated movements your muscles had underway, speed your heart rate and raise your blood pressure, and slow your breathing (you may notice yourself suddenly holding your breath when you first feel fearful, all the better to hear more clearly what it is you are fearful of). That is only one part of a wide, carefully coordinated array of changes the amygdala and connected areas orchestrate as they commandeer the brain in a crisis.

Meanwhile the amygdala, along with the interconnected hippocampus, directs the cells that send key neurotransmitters, for example, to trigger releases of dopamine that lead to the riveting of attention on the source of your fear—the strange sounds—and put your muscles at readiness to react accordingly. At the same time the amygdala signals sensory areas for vision and attention, making sure that the eyes seek out whatever is most relevant to the emergency at hand. Simultaneously cortical memory systems are reshuffled so that knowledge and memories most relevant to the particular emotional urgency will be most readily recalled, taking precedence over other less relevant strands of thought.

Once these signals have been sent, you are pitched into full-fledged fear: you become aware of the characteristic tightness in your gut, your speeding heart, the tightening of the muscles around your neck and shoulders or the trembling of your limbs; your body freezes in

place as you strain your attention to hear any further sounds, and your mind races with possible lurking dangers and ways to respond. This entire sequence—from surprise to uncertainty to apprehension to fear—can be telescoped within a second or so. (For more information, see Jerome Kagan, *Galen's Prophecy*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.)

APPENDIX D

W. T. Grant Consortium: Active Ingredients of Prevention Programs

Key ingredients of effective programs include:

EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Identifying and labeling feelings
- Expressing feelings
- Assessing the intensity of feelings
- Managing feelings
- Delaying gratification
- Controlling impulses
- Reducing stress
- Knowing the difference between feelings and actions

COGNITIVE SKILLS

- Self-talk—conducting an “inner dialogue” as a way to cope with a topic or challenge or reinforce one’s own behavior
- Reading and interpreting social cues—for example, recognizing social influences on behavior and seeing oneself in the perspective of the larger community
- Using steps for problem-solving and decision-making—for instance, controlling impulses, setting goals, identifying alternative actions, anticipating consequences • Understanding the perspective of others
- Understanding behavioral norms (what is and is not acceptable behavior)
- A positive attitude toward life
- Self-awareness—for example, developing realistic expectations about oneself

BEHAVIORAL SKILLS

- Nonverbal—communicating through eye contact, facial expressiveness, tone of voice, gestures, and so on
- Verbal—making clear requests, responding effectively to criticism, resisting negative influences, listening to others, helping others, participating in positive peer groups

SOURCE: W. T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, “Drug and Alcohol Prevention Curricula,” in J. David Hawkins et al., *Communities That Care* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

APPENDIX E

The Self Science Curriculum

Main components:

- *Self-awareness*: observing yourself and recognizing your feelings; building a vocabulary for feelings; knowing the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and reactions
- *Personal decision-making*: examining your actions and knowing their consequences; knowing if thought or feeling is ruling a decision; applying these insights to issues such as sex and drugs
- *Managing feelings*: monitoring “self-talk” to catch negative messages such as internal put-downs; realizing what is behind a feeling (e.g., the hurt that underlies anger); finding ways to handle fears and anxieties, anger, and sadness
- *Handling stress*: learning the value of exercise, guided imagery, relaxation methods
- *Empathy*: understanding others’ feelings and concerns and taking their perspective; appreciating the differences in how people feel about things
- *Communications*: talking about feelings effectively: becoming a good listener and question-asker; distinguishing between what someone does or says and your own reactions or judgments about it; sending “I” messages instead of blame
- *Self-disclosure*: valuing openness and building trust in a relationship; knowing when it’s safe to risk talking about your private feelings
- *Insight*: identifying patterns in your emotional life and reactions; recognizing similar patterns in others
- *Self-acceptance*: feeling pride and seeing yourself in a positive light; recognizing your strengths and weaknesses; being able to laugh at yourself
- *Personal responsibility*: taking responsibility; recognizing the consequences of your decisions and actions, accepting your feelings and moods, following through on commitments (e.g., to studying)

- *Assertiveness*: stating your concerns and feelings without anger or passivity
- *Group dynamics*: cooperation; knowing when and how to lead, when to follow
- *Conflict resolution*: how to fight fair with other kids, with parents, with teachers; the win/win model for negotiating compromise

SOURCE: Karen F. Stone and Harold Q. Dillehunt, *Self Science: The Subject Is Me* (Santa Monica: Goodyear Publishing Co., 1978).

APPENDIX F

Social and Emotional Learning: Results

Child Development Project

Eric Schaps, Development Studies Center, Oakland, California.

Evaluation in schools in Northern California, grades K-6; rating by independent observers, comparing with control schools.

RESULTS:

- more responsible
- more assertive
- more popular and outgoing
- more pro-social and helpful
- better understanding of others
- more considerate, concerned
- more pro-social strategies for interpersonal problem-solving
- more harmonious
- more “democratic”
- better conflict-resolution skills

SOURCES: E. Schaps and V. Battistich, “Promoting Health Development Through School-Based Prevention: New Approaches,” *OSAP Prevention Monograph, no. 8: Preventing Adolescent Drug Use: From Theory to Practice*. Eric Gopelrud (ed.), Rockville, MD: Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1991.

D. Solomon, M. Watson, V. Battistich, E. Schaps, and K. Delucchi, “Creating a Caring Community: Educational Practices That Promote Children’s Prosocial Development,” in F. K. Oser, A. Dick, and J.-L. Patry, eds., *Effective and Responsible Teaching: The New Synthesis* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

Paths

Mark Greenberg, Fast Track Project, University of Washington.

Evaluated in schools in Seattle, grades 1–5; ratings by teachers, comparing matched control students among 1) regular students, 2) deaf students, 3) special-education students.

RESULTS:

- Improvement in social cognitive skills
- Improvement in emotion, recognition, and understanding
- Better self-control
- Better planning for solving cognitive tasks
- More thinking before acting
- More effective conflict resolution
- More positive classroom atmosphere

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS:

Improved classroom behavior on:

- Frustration tolerance
- Assertive social skills
- Task orientation
- Peer skills
- Sharing
- Sociability
- Self-control

IMPROVED EMOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING:

- Recognition
- Labeling
- Decreases in self-reports of sadness and depression
- Decrease in anxiety and withdrawal

SOURCES: Conduct Problems Research Group, “A Developmental and Clinical Model for the Prevention of Conduct Disorder: The Fast Track

Program," *Development and Psychopathology* 4 (1992).

M. T. Greenberg and C. A. Kusche, *Promoting Social and Emotional Development in Deaf Children: The PATHS Project* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993).

M. T. Greenberg, C. A. Kusche, E. T. Cook, and J. P. Quamma, "Promoting Emotional Competence in School-Aged Children: The Effects of the PATHS Curriculum," *Development and Psychopathology* 7 (1995).

Seattle Social Development Project

J. David Hawkins, Social Development Research Group, University of Washington

Evaluated in Seattle elementary and middle schools by independent testing and objective standards, in comparison to nonprogram schools.

RESULTS:

- More positive attachment to family and school
- Boys less aggressive, girls less self-destructive
- Fewer suspensions and expulsions among low-achieving students
- Less drug-use initiation
- Less delinquency
- Better scores on standardized achievement tests

SOURCES: E. Schaps and V. Battistich, "Promoting Health Development Through School-Based Prevention: New Approaches," *OSAP Prevention Monograph, no. 8: Preventing Adolescent Drug Use: From Theory to Practice*. Eric Gopelrud (ed.), Rockville, MD: Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1991.

J. D. Hawkins et al., "The Seattle Social Development Project," in J. McCord and R. Tremblay, eds., *The Prevention of Antisocial Behavior in Children* (New York: Guilford, 1992).

J. D. Hawkins, E. Von Cleve, and R. F. Catalano, "Reducing Early Childhood Aggression: Results of a Primary Prevention Program," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 30, 2 (1991), pp. 208-17.

J. A. O'Donnell, J. D. Hawkins, R. F. Catalano, R. D. Abbott, and L.

E. Day, "Preventing School Failure, Drug Use, and Delinquency Among Low-Income Children: Effects of a Long-Term Prevention Project in Elementary Schools," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 65 (1994).

Yale-New Haven Social Competence Promotion Program

Roger Weissberg, University of Illinois at Chicago

Evaluated in New Haven Public Schools, grades 5–8, by independent observations and student and teacher reports, compared with control group.

RESULTS:

- Improved problem-solving skills
- More involvement with peers
- Better impulse control
- Improved behavior
- Improved interpersonal effectiveness and popularity
- Enhanced coping skills
- More skill in handling interpersonal problems
- Better coping with anxiety
- Less delinquent behaviors
- Better conflict-resolution skills

SOURCES: M. J. Elias and R. P. Weissberg, "School-Based Social Competence Promotion as a Primary Prevention Strategy: A Tale of Two Projects," *Prevention in Human Services* 7, 1 (1990), pp. 177–200.

M. Caplan, R. P. Weissberg, J. S. Grober, P. J. Sivo, K. Grady, and C. Jacoby, "Social Competence Promotion with Inner-City and Suburban Young Adolescents: Effects of Social Adjustment and Alcohol Use," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 60, 1 (1992), pp. 56–63.

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program

Linda Lantieri, National Center for Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (an initiative of Educators for Social Responsibility), New York City

Evaluated in New York City schools, grades K-12, by teachers' ratings, pre- and post-program.

RESULTS:

- Less violence in class
- Fewer verbal put-downs in class
- More-caring atmosphere
- More willingness to cooperate
- More empathy
- Improved communication skills

SOURCE: Metis Associates, Inc., *The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program: 1988–1989. Summary of Significant Findings of RCCP New York Site* (New York: Metis Associates, May 1990).

The Improving Social Awareness-Social Problem Solving Project

Maurice Elias, Rutgers University

Evaluated in New Jersey schools, grades K-6, by teacher ratings, peer assessments, and school records, compared to nonparticipants.

RESULTS:

- More sensitive to others' feelings
- Better understanding of the consequences of their behavior
- Increased ability to "size up" interpersonal situations and plan appropriate actions
- Higher self-esteem
- More prosocial behavior
- Sought out by peers for help
- Better handled the transition to middle school
- Less antisocial, self-destructive, and socially disordered behavior, even when followed up into high school
- Improved learning-to-learn skills
- Better self-control, social awareness, and social decision-making in and out of the classroom

SOURCES: M. J. Elias, M. A. Gara, T. F. Schuyler, L. R. Branden-Muller, and M. A. Sayette, "The Promotion of Social Competence: Longitudinal Study of a Preventive School-Based Program," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 61 (1991), pp. 409–17.

M. J. Elias and J. Clabby, *Building Social Problem Solving Skills: Guidelines From a School-Based Program* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

Resources

The first edition of this book could not have had a page like this directing readers who want more information to the best resources—in 1995 there were virtually no resources anywhere on emotional intelligence, while today they seem to be proliferating wildly. The mere existence of this page in itself signifies how much this field has advanced. For more in-depth access to tools and research findings, practical resources, and key people in this field, I recommend the following organizations, websites, and books. (I've tried to include only books I'm familiar with that are based on sound research, but my failure to include a book does not mean it cannot be helpful or may not be sound.)

EDUCATION

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, seeks to enhance children's success in school and life by promoting evidence-based social, emotional, and academic learning as an essential part of education from preschool through high school. Website: www.casel.org.

The Center for Social and Emotional Education (CSEE), at Teachers College, Columbia University, is an educational and professional development organization dedicated to supporting effective social emotional learning, teaching, and leadership in schools. Website: www.CSEE.net.

Some Model SEL Programs

Responsive Classroom: <http://responsiveclassroom.org/>

Developmental Studies Center: <http://www.devstu.org/>

Educators for Social Responsibility:

<http://www.esrnational.org/home.htm>

Search Institute: <http://www.search-institute.org/>

Social Development Research Group:

<http://depts.washington.edu/sdrg/index.html>

Learning Standards. For a model statewide policy setting detailed educational standards in social and emotional learning, see the work of the Illinois State Board of Education. This state-of-the-art, developmentally appropriate formulation could be adopted by any educational system seeking to offer SEL to its children. Website: www.isbe.net/ils/social_emotional/standards.htm.

Recommended Books

Bar-On, Reuven, J. G. Maree, and M. J. Elias, eds. *Educating People to Be Emotionally Intelligent*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2005.

Cohen, Jonathan, ed. *Educating Minds and Hearts: Social Emotional Learning and the Passage into Adolescence*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1999.

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-based Social and Emotional Learning Programs*. Chicago: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003.

Elias, Maurice J., A. Arnold, and C. S. Hussey, eds. *EQ + IQ = Best Leadership Practices for Caring and Successful Schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2003.

Elias, Maurice, et al. *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1997.

Haynes, Norris, Michael Ben-Avie, and Jacque Ensign. *How Social and Emotional Development Add Up: Getting Results in Math and Science Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2003.

Lantieri, Linda, and Janet Patti. *Waging Peace in Our Schools*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

Novick, B., J. S. Kress, and Maurice Elias. *Building Learning Communities with Character: How to Integrate Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2002.

Patti, Janet, and J. Tobin. *Smart School Leaders: Leading with Emotional Intelligence*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt, 2003.

Salovey, Peter, and David Sluyter, eds. *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence: Educational Implications*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

Zins, Joseph, Roger Weissberg, Margaret Wang, and Herbert Walberg. *Building Academic Success on Social and Emotional Learning: What Does the Research Say?* New York: Teachers College Press, 2004.

ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE

The Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations is based in the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, Rutgers University. Director: Cary Cherniss. Website: www.eiconsortium.org.

Recommended Books

Ashkanasy, Neal, Wilfred Zerbe, and Charmine Hartel. *Managing Emotions in the Workplace*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002.

Boyatzis, Richard, and Annie McKee. *Resonant Leadership: Inspiring Yourself and Others Through Mindfulness, Hope, and Compassion*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2005.

Caruso, David R., and Peter Salovey. *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager: How to Develop the Four Key Skills of Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Cherniss, Cary, and Daniel Goleman, eds. *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace: How to Select For, Measure, and Improve Emotional Intelligence in Individuals, Groups, and Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Druskat, Vanessa, Fabio Sala, and Gerald Mount, eds. *linking Emotional Intelligence and Performance at Work: Current Research Evidence*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005.

Fineman, Stephen, ed. *Emotion in Organizations*, 2nd ed. London: Sage

Publications, 2000.

Frost, Peter J., *Toxic Emotions at Work: How Compassionate Managers Handle Pain and Conflict*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2003.

Riggio, Ronald, Susan E. Murphy, and Francis Pirozzolo. *Multiple Intelligences and Leadership*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002.

PARENTING

Recommended Books

Elias, Maurice, Steven E. Tobias, and Brian S. Friedlander, *Emotionally Intelligent Parenting: How to Raise a Self-disciplined, Responsible, Socially Skilled Child*. New York: Harmony Books, 1999.

Elias, Maurice, Steven E. Tobias, and Brian S. Friedlander. *Raising Emotionally Intelligent Teenagers*. New York: Harmony Books, 2000.

Gottman, John. *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998.

Schure, Myrna. *Raising a Thinking Child*. New York: Pocket Books, 1994.

GENERAL

6 Seconds is a nonprofit organization that supports emotional intelligence in schools, businesses, and families, with an international scope. It is an excellent source for information on resources, articles, and conferences. Website: www.6seconds.org.

Recommended Books

Bar-On, Reuven, and Parker, James D. A., eds. *Handbook of Emotional Intelligence*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Barrett, Lisa Feldman, and Peter Salovey. *The Wisdom of Feeling: Psychological Processes in Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Guilford Press, 2002.

Geher, G., ed. *Measuring Emotional Intelligence: Common Ground and*

Controversy. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2004.

Salovey, Peter, Marc A. Brackett, and John D. Mayer. *Emotional Intelligence: Key Readings on the Mayer and Salovey Model*. Port Chester, NY: DUDE Publishing, 2004.

Williams, Virginia, and Redford Williams. *Lifeskills*. New York: Times Books, 1997.

A Thoughtful Critique:

Matthews, Gerald, Moshe Zeidner, and Richard D. Roberts. *Emotional Intelligence: Science and Myth*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

For Tara, wellspring of emotional wisdom

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I first heard the phrase “emotional literacy” from Eileen Rockefeller Growald, then the founder and president of the Institute for the Advancement of Health. It was this casual conversation that piqued my interest and framed the investigations that finally became this book.

Support from the Fetzer Institute has allowed me the luxury of time to explore more fully what “emotional literacy” might mean, and I am grateful for the crucial early encouragement of Rob Lehman, president of the Institute, and an ongoing collaboration with David Sluyter, program director there. It was Rob Lehman who, early on in my explorations, urged me to write a book about emotional literacy.

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