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The Power of Emotion





The Power of Emotion

Part 1

To begin I'd like you to think about this. What would it be like if you somehow managed to climb to the top of a beautiful mountain but couldn't feel the exhilarating rush of excitement? What if you spent time with family or close friends, but couldn't feel the love between you? Our emotions are such a natural part of our existence that we take them for granted. They allow us to experience the textures and colors of life. Without them, we can still climb a mountain and spend time with our family and friends, but what's the point? Emotion gives meaning to our lives.

As human beings we have a wonderful capacity – the capacity to feel a myriad of emotions. From elation to sorrow, from passion to peace, from satisfied to wanting we can “feel” in ways that no other living thing can. We experience the world not through just what we think but especially through how we feel.

The power of emotion is amazing. It can enrich our lives beyond measure but when we don't use it wisely it can destroy us just as easily. Like fire, emotions can warm us or burn us. Emotions drive many of our decisions and actions, for better or worse. They build energy assets to add to our quality of life or create energy deficits that rob us of vitality. During the course of any day, we experience an emotional adventure or in some cases, a roller coaster ride.



Emotions are in fact complex which is why they are often difficult to understand. Emotions come and go very quickly in an almost endless stream of overt and subtle forms. Depending on circumstance we can feel many different emotions in just a few short minutes.

Here's an example. You're at a social gathering and someone compliments you about how great you look. You feel up-lifted and buoyant. Then, as you are scanning the room to see who you know, you catch a glimpse of someone you've had a conflict with. You instantly feel uncomfortable and resentful. Next, you engage in a conversation with a neighbor who tells you a friend is very sick. You feel shocked by this news and sink into a feeling of sadness. As you are reflecting on this bad news an old friend, someone you haven't seen in years, comes up and gives you a big hug! Your emotions quickly shift from the sadness you were just feeling to excitement and joy.

All of these emotions from sadness to joy, resentment to excitement, have taken place in a matter of minutes, each one coloring perception, adding or subtracting from the quality of the moment.

This example illustrates both the good news and bad news about the power of emotion. The good news is that we have the gift of being able to experience a complex array of feelings, which give us an extraordinary way to relate to life. The bad news is that we are often at the mercy of our emotions, experiencing them as reactions to external events rather than conscious choices. As a result most people



live on an emotional roller coaster. If we're going to have balanced, enjoyable lives we need to focus more on learning how to consciously adjust our emotions. It's not just a good thing to do. It's essential in this era of high-speed change.

Many people now believe the next frontier of human evolution is about understanding how to better use the power of emotion to enhance the quality of our life experiences, improve health and ultimately find solutions to personal and societal problems.

So what are emotions? Emotion is "energy in motion." The word itself is derived from the Latin verb meaning "to move". Emotional energy is really neutral. It adds power to your thoughts. Thought by itself doesn't consume much energy. It's our emotions that amplify thought. If you are irritated about something and then add emotional energy, the irritation becomes anger. On the other hand, if you feel benevolent toward someone and add emotional energy, the benevolence transforms into a much deeper feeling of compassion or kindness. In essence our emotions give our thoughts power.

Emotional energy works at a faster speed than the speed of thought. This is because the feeling world operates at a higher speed than the mind. Scientists have repeatedly confirmed that our emotional reactions show up in brain activity before we even have time to think. We evaluate everything emotionally *as* we perceive it. We think about it *afterward*.

At a biological level the process of *experiencing* an emotion is both



biochemical and neurological. It involves the heart, brain, nervous and hormonal systems, and sensory organs. Scientists used to think that emotions are produced only in the brain. However, sophisticated instruments now show that emotions are the product of an ongoing dialogue between the body and the brain. So it's really a combination of feeling sensations, associated mental thoughts and biochemical reactions that shape our emotional experience, in gradations from very pleasant to very painful.

In order to effectively utilize the amazing power of emotion we need to become very conscious of which emotions add quality to our lives and which ones don't. Psychologists categorize some emotions as "positive" and others as "negative". Emotions like anger, anxiety, hate, jealousy and sadness are some of the more negative emotions. Emotions like love, compassion, appreciation, care and joy would be classified as positive.

We can easily tell the difference between positive and negative emotions in our body. Anxiety and anger can tighten our necks and shoulders; fear can be a churning in the stomach. By contrast, love, appreciation, compassion and kindness relax us, allowing our body's communication systems to flow with greater harmony and efficiency.

This is not to say that some emotions are bad. All of our emotions play an important part in how we experience life. They are like the colors on an artist's palette that we use to paint our picture of life. We are not advocating repressing our emotions, never feeling sad or frustrated. We are simply noting that some emotions are more



beneficial for us in the long run than others.

You can think of emotions like food. Many people devote a lot of attention to discerning what to eat. We watch our calories, our intake of fatty foods, salt, sugar and so on. Some foods taste great but need to be eaten in moderation. For example, chocolate cake is certainly not bad but if that's all you ate for a week you can bet that your body would notice and there would be consequences.

It's the same with our emotions. We also have an *emotional diet*; the emotions we allow ourselves to experience with regularity. We have the ability to choose what we want to experience in our feeling world just like we do when we choose the food we eat.

If we want to live on a diet of negative emotions – angry at other people and the world, down on ourselves and anxious about everything – we can. Again, the body will notice and there will be a consequence affecting our mental and physical health and the overall quality of our lives. On the other hand if we choose to feel appreciation, care and joy more often it would have a different, more beneficial effect. The power of emotion is to be respected as it has a lot to do with everything from how well we perform, how we relate to others and even our health.

Part 2

Let's look at how emotions affect the body. Here's an interesting fact. A cascade of 1,400 different biochemicals is released by the body as



soon as it senses a stressful emotion. These hormones and neurotransmitters affect how you perceive and feel. Negative emotions keep your system bathed in stress hormones, which speeds up your biochemical aging clock, draining emotional buoyancy and physical vitality.

We are of course going to feel negative stressful emotions. We need them to warn us of impending danger or when something needs our attention. It's when we let them become a habit that they lead to many psychological and biochemical problems, such as anxiety disorders, depression and heart problems. In fact, researchers have found that emotional stress is one of the strongest risk factors for heart disease and sudden cardiac arrest, as much or more so than smoking or a sedentary life style.

One hormone to pay close attention to is adrenaline. Strong emotions, like anger or fear, release a lot of adrenaline into your system. Adrenaline gives you a boost, like a cup of coffee. This can be useful in some situations, but too much adrenaline can lead to high blood pressure and burnout.

Another hormone that gets released when we are feeling stressful, negative emotions is cortisol. Cortisol is a necessary hormone. If it didn't naturally peak about 7:00 A.M., you might not wake up on time for work. However, when you chronically produce more than you need, it can lead to a host of problems. Over time, excessive levels of cortisol can cause loss of bone mass and osteoporosis, ulcers, redistribution of fat to the waist and hips, and fat buildup in the



arteries. Negative emotions fuel higher cortisol levels. This means that every time you are anxious or angry, or even rehash a stressful situation, your brain signals your glands to pump more and more cortisol into your system.

The evidence is clear – experiencing a steady diet of negative emotions has a detrimental effect on our health. But, there's another side to this story. The power of emotion can also be used in ways that improve our health not to mention our enjoyment of life. Positive emotions have an “undoing effect” on negative emotions. They loosen the hold that negative emotions gain on your brain and body.

When you are feeling emotions like appreciation or care your body produces biochemicals that are regenerative and beneficial. One of these is a hormone called DHEA. DHEA is the most prolific hormone in the human body and has been called “the anti-aging hormone” because it's plentiful in young people. When you produce large quantities of DHEA, you feel vitalized and this hormone offsets the production of the stress hormone cortisol. Positive emotions increase production of DHEA, which promotes emotional vitality and slows aging.

Experiencing positive emotions on demand in today's stressful world is certainly not easy, but new understanding supported by advanced scientific research is now offering solutions to this challenge.

For the last 30 years researcher Doc Childre has been developing an inner technology that is especially useful for regulating emotions.



The core of Doc's system focuses on the heart, both energetically and physically, as a powerful source of intelligence.

Over the past twenty years, neurocardiologists have decisively established that the heart is not just a muscle. It's also a sensory organ and a sophisticated information processing center. The heart actually has its own nervous system which gives it the ability to sense, learn, remember and make functional decisions independent of the brain. In fact the heart sends powerful messages to the brain and the rest of the body in four different ways – neurologically, bio-physically, hormonally and energetically.

In the early 90's researchers at the Institute of HeartMath revealed a critical link between emotions and the heart. Their results clearly showed that the heart is part of the emotional system and that the heart plays an important role in how we feel and think.

An important breakthrough came when scientists found that emotions are reflected in the patterns of our heart rhythms. For example, negative emotions such as, irritation, frustration and anger lead to a disordered and *incoherent* pattern. On the other hand, positive emotions like appreciation, care, compassion and love lead to a more ordered and coherent heart rhythm pattern. The brain monitors and responds to these heart rhythms. As we change them we trigger different emotional responses. In other words an incoherent heart rhythm can trigger a feeling of anger or anxiety while a coherent



rhythm can activate more pleasurable emotions like care, appreciation or love.

Once the influence of heart rhythms on the brain had been scientifically documented the HeartMath team went on to develop techniques that could shift them, from chaotic to coherent. These techniques were incorporated in learning materials, training programs and software which teach people how to use the heart to manage the emotions. Case studies, using these heart-based methods were done with thousands of people in multi-national corporations and other large organizations and the results showed significant, lasting changes in emotional behavior.

This work further confirmed and demonstrated that as we learn how to shift our heart rhythms we have a much greater ability to change our emotional state. We can start calling the shots on what emotion we want to feel rather than simply having emotional reactions, positive or negative. We can build new emotional habits and start to change our emotional diet.

We certainly understand that it can be difficult to arrest negative emotions. There are so many things that can easily trigger them. We have learned however that by using the power of the heart, people can neutralize a lot of undesirable feelings and increase the amount of time spent experiencing positive emotions. Every small effort made is an important step towards making the most of the power of emotion.

Part 3



With a little practice, using the HeartMath techniques, you can learn how to engage the power of the heart, shift heart rhythms and change how you are feeling. Here are a few simple techniques to get you started.

An important first step is to become more aware of how you feel. Many people go through the whole day registering emotions only on a surface level unaware of the emotional under currents affecting them.

In order to gain new insight about your emotions you need to become more aware of what's going on in your *feeling world*. This isn't hard to do but it does require slowing down from time-to-time and taking stock. Try this. Periodically throughout the day simply pause and notice how you feel. It takes only a few seconds to ask, "What am I feeling right now?" Don't judge whatever you are feeling; just observe what's flowing through your emotions. You'll discover new things about your emotional patterns and what things trigger less desirable emotions. This new emotional self-awareness provides the foundation for learning what needs to be shifted.

To help with this try the *Notice and Ease* technique.

Notice and Ease is the basic tool for identifying and neutralizing unwanted emotions. You can learn to release a lot of disturbed feelings and stop their energy drain by doing the following simple steps:

- First, notice and admit what you are feeling. This requires slowing down and taking stock.



- Next, try to name the feeling – is it anxious, depressed, frustrated and so on.
- Lastly, tell yourself to *ease* as you gently focus in your heart, relax and ease the stressful emotion out. Just feel as if the unwanted emotion is leaving your system. Don't force it, just ease it out.

Here's another effective technique you can use – the Quick Coherence Technique. It's one of the easiest to learn and apply. This is a universally applicable tool for shifting moods and attitudes fast. Although some emotions can be hard to shift in the moment this technique will help you stay more emotionally balanced and build new emotional habits. Quick Coherence creates more coherent heart rhythms and takes the fire out of negative emotions so they have less fuel. Here's how to do it.

- First, shift your focus to the center of your chest, the area around your heart.
- Next, pretend you're breathing through this area for 10 seconds or more. To make this easier, place your hand over your heart. PAUSE when you inhale imagine your breath coming in through your hand. Exhale, and imagine your breath going out through your hand.
- Now, while focusing in the area of the heart, recall a positive,



fun feeling or time in your life and try to recall the feeling experience associated with it. Examples to use could include a place, an event, or a time with a special person, or maybe your pet, when you really felt good. The important thing is that you *feel* the emotion associated with the event you choose. A visual memory without the feeling connected to it, won't work nearly as well.

You can use the Quick Coherence technique about any time or anywhere. It creates changes in your heart rhythms sending powerful signals to the brain that can change how you're feeling. It's especially useful when you start to feel an emotion like irritation or frustration. Doing the Quick Coherence at the onset of the less intense negative emotions can keep them from escalating into something worse. This technique is also very useful after you've had an emotional blow up to bring yourself back to balance more quickly.

Just shift your attention to the heart area, breathe through this area, and activate a positive emotion.

Sometimes emotions just won't shift quickly. They can be coming from long-standing issues or things that have a lot of significance for you. When this happens try another HeartMath technique, Heart Soak.

The goal with this technique is to soak and relax any disturbed or perplexing feelings in the compassion of your heart. This exercise allows the power of the heart to do its work. By holding your attention in the area of the heart and just relaxing and soaking your emotions



for a while you can balance and sooth the nervous and hormonal systems. It helps to take the significance out of things and allows for new perspectives to emerge.

You know about soaking, whether it's dirty dishes, clothes, silverware, anything. You can take a stain that won't come out and soak it overnight in a solvent, making the cleaning job a lot easier because the initial density has been taken out. Your emotional problems can be dealt with in the same way when approached from the heart.

Here's how to do it. When feeling upset or disturbed:

- Focus your attention in the area of the heart.
- Then feel as if you are taking the uncomfortable emotions into the heart and just "soak" them there for a few minutes.
- Next, try to feel compassion for yourself until you begin to feel a release.
- After soaking for a while gently begin to ease the disturbed emotions out letting the heart do the work for you.
- As the mind wanders and you start to want to replay the uncomfortable feelings or begin to re-live the experience that triggered them just re-focus your attention in the heart, relax and remember to have compassion for yourself.



Soaking in the heart is a gentle process. Don't look too hard for something to change. Depending on how charged the emotions are it may take a little time and you may need to do this technique more than once. If the uncomfortable feeling comes up throughout the day just gently repeat the process. In time you will experience an emotional shift.

Use Notice and Ease, Quick Coherence and Heart Soak individually or in combination when you find yourself feeling tense, edgy, overwhelmed, worried, angry, anxious, or bored. After you get the hang of it you can begin to take on long standing emotional issues that are more deeply rooted. Every effort yields new freedom and allows you to freely experience more rewarding emotions like love, care and appreciation. Your *emotional diet* changes and this will give you much greater power to manifest goals while increasing enjoyment and fulfillment in your life.

So in summary, we have an amazing gift – the ability to experience emotions.

The power of emotion can enrich our lives beyond measure, but it can destroy us just as easily. Understanding the power of our emotions is essential in order to have a fulfilling, healthy life.

No emotion is bad but some are classified as negative and some positive – some take away from the quality of life and some add quality.



You have an emotional diet and you have choice over this diet. If you choose to feel a lot of negative emotions like anger and overwhelm you will flood your body with excess hormones like adrenaline and cortisol that harm you. When you experience positive emotions like care and appreciation you can increase beneficial hormones like DHEA that revitalize you.

New research has shown that the heart can send powerful commands to the brain that help to regulate our emotions and create new emotional patterns. A key lies in learning how to change our heart rhythms from chaotic to coherent.

Observing our emotions and then practicing simple heart-based techniques like Notice and Ease, Quick Coherence and Heart Soak help to change our heart rhythms and give us a new ability to reduce negative emotions and replace them with ones that are more positive.

Emotions don't have to be a mystery and looking at them does not have to be an uncomfortable process. With a little courage, which comes from the heart, you can embark on an adventure – the exploration of the power of emotion. Add some genuine effort, which also comes from the heart, to replacing less desirable emotions with ones that serve you and things will start to change quickly. The process gets easier and easier, you accumulate more power as you go and soon start to *feel* the rewards of your sincere efforts in very tangible ways.



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