

One of the difficulties the self-help genre creates is that there is a mentality of trying to get rid of negative emotions and attempt to have more of the good emotions. It is a faulty and dangerous perception to hold.

There is no such thing as a good or bad emotion. All emotions play a vital role in human experience. For example, anger which is typically perceived as something negative, can in fact be a great motivational impetus that provides the energy for change.

When I decided to do a degree in psychology, I entered the course with revenge and anger in my heart. I wanted to show someone who told me that I would never make anything of myself, that she was in error. A significant portion of why I was successful academically was because I was angry. I used the anger and worked it constructively in my favour.

However, it is not accurate to say that emotions can be problematic and then turn into acute suffering. The change into suffering is typically bought about because our emotions are stuck in psyche and body and have become ingrained. Emotions, are meant to flow in and out of experience unhindered. When they get stuck they really can cause havoc. For example, anger can quickly turn into an out of control rage if not handled well. See this article which explains the difference between anger and rage <https://edwardtraversa.com/differences-between-anger-and-rage/>.

When there is a space which allows our emotions to flow then we are functioning at much higher levels as human beings. By flow I am not referring to the psychological state of flow. I am using the word more in the sense that there is a general ease in life and in doing so we approach our potential.

The sad state of affairs is that when it comes to handling emotions we are very poor at it in general. The milieu surrounding emotions is such that many myths abound. For example, a common myth is that when anger is present as stuckness, that we should then hit pillows or a punching bag. There may be some brief initial relief from the anger experience, but eventually it makes the person more prone to violence.

This is due to how our brains work and importantly how neural pathways are formed and maintained in the brain. The rule of thumb is that the more something is repeated the more ingrained the pattern becomes in our brain. The old saying violence begets violence has much merit.

Additionally, the initial brief relief sometimes experienced when hitting a pillow or using similar techniques is because of the exercise involved. For example, if we punch a boxing

bag even for a brief period there is exercise involved usually at high intensity. A better technique is to go for a long meditative walk, where we gain the benefit of exercise as well as teaching the brain to respond differently to anger. Or we could meditate or do something constructive. This helps the brain form different neural pathways which consolidate over time.

I cannot stress enough the importance of inner work and dealing with our emotions. Ideally, we should be fully in contact with our emotions. In no way does this imply being overwhelmed by them. Rather, we embrace our emotions as they occur in real time. It is an acceptance of the emotion as it is unhindered. The emotion can pass through us, rather than us getting caught up in the emotion.

One of the keys is to notice that emotions are constantly in flux and change rather quickly over time. A mindfulness practice can help greatly in this regard as can learning to observe ourselves. <https://edwardtraversa.com/the-art-of-observation/> Another useful method is called focussing.

The following exercise based on focussing can teach us to contact our emotions more fully.

- Try and recall a time where you were particularly angry in your life until that anger is fully present again. Now notice your body where is your anger located in your body? Is it in your shoulders, neck, stomach, chest or head etc.?
- Is the area that anger is appearing in your body, large or small? For example, if it is appearing in your stomach, does it cover the whole stomach, or just a section of it?
- Where is it exactly? Centre of stomach, left or right, above or below?
- What does it feel like? Is it a burning sensation, tightness, shakiness etc.?
- And while all this is going on you have images and voices going on in your head. What are the images? What is the conversation going on in your head? In which voice is the conversation spoken in?
- We should also notice that while anger is located in a part of our body it seems to spread and affect our entire being. In addition, we should note the presence of other emotions and do a similar exercise. For example, is there sadness behind the eyes? Is there disappointment, embarrassment, or guilt? Where in the body are these emotions and what do they feel like?
- Now notice how each emotion is in constant state of change.
- Notice that from moment to moment the intensity changes, sometimes more intense, sometimes less intense, sometimes it seems to grow other times it seems to diminish. Notice the small shifts in where it appears in your body. Notice the changes in images and internal dialogue.

The thing you are doing when you are contacting emotions in this manner is twofold. First, it greatly enhances our internal connections to the emotions. Secondly a new manner of experiencing emotions is being learnt. The latter helps form new neural pathways if practiced enough. It is this new process of bringing attention to our emotions and learning to see that they are constantly in a state of flux that ultimately can allow for freedom to appear in life.

People will typically try this once and twice and then wonder why there is not a change. Just to be perfectly clear the cultivation of this type of awareness can take many months and sometimes years to form. We must develop tenacity and persistence in the way we practice these techniques.

If we do stick at it, then the most likely result is that emotions become lighter and a certain ease begins to appear in life. We are less likely to indulge in drama, more capable of forming deep human connections.



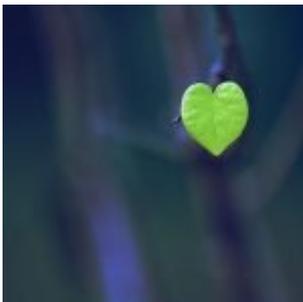
Being Spiritual is Being
Lovey-Dovey



Dissipating Anger via Prayer



Against Meditation



A Quick Exercise on the Impermanence of Anger