

Mastering Emotional Pain

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Preface

Emotional pain is a given and as long as we live we will experience it. Anyone who claims to have a way of eliminating emotional pain is a charlatan, and such claims can simply be seen as a way of cashing in on a desire we all have - to not be in pain. So this short book offers just one thing - understanding. Compared with more exotic claims understanding seems a little dull, but no one should underestimate the power of understanding, it is the key to mastering emotional pain.

The word "mastering" should not be interpreted as some macho effort, an attempt to impose an iron will that denies our painful emotions. In fact, the approach taken here is quite the opposite of this - we master our painful emotions through total acceptance and an understanding of how they come about.

Unfortunately it is a fact that most people are hopelessly out of touch with their emotional states having introjected dictates from external authorities on how they should feel. We should be cheerful, enthusiastic, passionate, optimistic, loving, kind. Any attempt to override our real emotional states with these fabricated states will result in just one thing - neurosis, mental breakdown, and in extreme cases insanity. Our emotions represent our authentic response to the environment, why would we possibly want to try and override these responses? Anger, depression, hatred, envy, fear, sadness, grief, and a hundred other emotional states serve a real purpose - they tell us something is amiss. This doesn't mean we can fix the world to eliminate the emotion. We are very small and the world is very big, and so it is inevitable that circumstances will often work against us. These adverse circumstances - the death of a loved one, end of a relationship, poverty, poor health, will of necessity create painful emotions. How we deal with an emotion is the way we master it.

This guide really isn't for people who want a quick fix or are looking for some easy way to shrug off the realities of life. The understanding presented here is an outline of our situation and a few techniques are given to help with mastering emotional pain. So the work is yours, no one else cares about your emotional pain, and no one else can help you master it.

Introduction

Pain makes the world go round, or rather avoidance of pain makes the world go round. We are not talking of physical pain here, although avoidance of physical pain is also a good motivator. Emotional pain is what we are focused on in this guide - things like, fear, hatred, anger, depression, sadness, and so on. These emotions are painful because they are telling us that some basic desire is not being met, and the foundation of all desires is the desire to continue with our existence.

Pain is, by definition unpleasant, something we would rather not experience. Millions of years of evolution have produced a species that is very finely tuned to the pains associated with unfulfilled desires, and it has become a great innovator in pain avoidance and reduction. That species is us - Homo Sapiens. All creatures experience pain when their desires are not met, but we have developed a mind that is capable of anticipating pain and making plans and strategies to avoid pain. We not only want a full belly today, we want one in six months time, and if that seems threatened in any way we become anxious. So we have successfully developed not only an ability to satisfy our current desires, but also to become anxious about the possibility of future unfulfilled desires.

We have inherited brain structures from our evolutionary ancestors. The reptilian brain isn't conscious as such and can be seen as a programmed response mechanism with no or very little consciousness - at least in the way we know consciousness. Put your hand on a hot plate and with no thought at all you will pull it away. This is the reptilian brain located mainly in the brain stem. But we have also inherited a mammalian brain known as the limbic system that also operates on automatic. This part of the brain is largely responsible for the emotions, and as we've already mentioned our primary desire is the desire to survive and as such the emotions are a kind of barometer telling us how well we are doing in that respect. Finally we have the cortex, the part of the brain that is most developed in our species and it is this that allows us to consider future scenarios and plan and scheme accordingly.

Obviously the cortex has proved to be a very successful innovation since we have become the dominant species (for now anyway). But it isn't too much of an exaggeration to call the cortex a pain amplifier. We will worry and fret until some potential future threat has been eliminated. The cortex not only anticipates some adverse future event but also amplifies the pain associated with its possibility.

More than any other creature, it would seem that we are continuously driven by pain. Most mammals do not engage in the frenetic activity that is typical of human activity, as we try to plan for every eventuality. Given a full stomach most mammals lay around or play until it's time for a refill - but not human beings. We busy ourselves making sure everything will be okay in five years from now.

We can't talk of pain without mentioning pleasure - it's seeming opposite. In reality pleasure is what happens when we eliminate a pain, and since pain is simply a state of unfulfilled desire so pleasure is a temporary phenomenon associated with a satisfied desire. Pleasure is pleasurable - obviously, and is associated with the hormone and neurotransmitter dopamine. Much of life could be viewed as nothing more than a pursuit of dopamine - the hit people get from the likes of sex and heroin.

It needs to be emphasized over and over that the whole pleasure and pain drama serves one purpose - the survival of the individual, and once that is assured, procreation. Nature has programmed us this way and there is no escape. We will seek the most secure foundation for our lives possible even if it kills us, and there is an obvious irony in this. People will work until exhausted to earn enough money to acquire the resources they need - food, shelter, medical care, savings for a rainy day, and so on. Working oneself to death in order to acquire what is needed for survival has become a reality.

It might seem that we are slaves of our survival and procreation drives, and indeed we are. However we can moderate the effects of these tyrants through understanding them and acquiring a few basic practices. We are not talking about anything "spiritual" here, merely the intelligent regulation of our drivers and an understanding of the effects they have on us. This understanding goes a long way and can transform a life of anxiety and misery into one of calm acquiesce - and the word acquiesce is very important. Don't think for a minute that we are talking of some macho effort to modify our emotional states or deny our desires - we most definitely are not. Such courses of action usually result in even more anxiety and possibly mental illness.

It was Socrates who insisted that we should "know ourselves" and while we seem to know an awful lot about the physical world, economics, biology, and the like, at an individual level we all seem to be almost wholly ignorant of our own psychology. While we may be passionate about football, making money, our family, a career, and any number of other things that consume our attention, the proper role for our passion is that of acquiring self knowledge. Nothing is more important.

We are born screaming and nature has no interest in us other than as vehicles for the continuation of the species. It is up to us to consciously take something from life that is our own, and not simply be blind slaves of nature. Effort, knowledge, and persistence are required, but once the journey is started there is no turning back. And this last statement is a health warning, as well as a simple statement about the nature of this work.

Survival

We all want to survive, and no matter how much complaining we might do we continue to eat, seek medical help if necessary, and make efforts to acquire the resources we need to continue with life. We also feel the incessant drive to procreate, and even if we don't want kids the sex drive is always making itself felt. This is what nature wants from us - to survive and procreate. It isn't any accident that the human life span is just long enough to procreate and rear kids, after which there is a steady decline in health and ability.

The drive to continue with our existence is what defines us, coloring almost everything we do in life. We go to work, seek a social context, try to maintain our health, all in the name of continued survival. For most of us this effort to persist in existing involves strife, possible conflict, and anxiety.

Evolution has kitted us out to be superb survival machines, both individually and as a species. But this fine tuning comes at a price - very high levels of vigilance that cause stress and anxiety. Our mind is not only looking for current threats, but for any adverse circumstances that might manifest in the future. All of this is stressful. And to cap it all we seem to be the only species that is cognizant of our own mortality. In fact, the sense of being someone, of being a person, can be seen as nature's

crowning glory, at least as far as survival is concerned. We are not only driven by the same instinct as every other creature to preserve our existence, but we also want to persist as a person.

Nature can be seen as a survival optimization machine. Biologists call the ability to survive, survival fitness. This is important because it drives almost everything. Your moods, emotions, ambitions, desires, are all governed at a fundamental level by your survival fitness at any moment in time, and we shouldn't forget that survival is a competitive game both between species and within a species. Its an unfortunate fact that survival is often enhanced through behaviors that are seen as negative. Cheating, lying, violence and threats of violence, are essential ingredients in the struggle for survival fitness. Obviously these behaviors are stressful for those on the receiving end, and possibly for those enacting them.

While survival of the individual involves competitive behaviors, this becomes even more amplified when we consider reproduction. The drive to find sexual partners involves its own set of anxieties since this too is a competitive process. A great deal of our behavior is controlled by subconscious drivers with the simple aim of finding the best reproductive mates. It is well documented that women will often dress in a more revealing manner during ovulation. They are not aware of their behavior, but ovulation is the best time to conceive, even if they don't want children. Men will often unconsciously exaggerate their status and earning power, driven by similar subconscious forces. Women often judge a man on his resourcefulness and resources. Adolescents and people in their twenties and thirties (and beyond) are almost wholly driven to reproduce and find the best mating partner, hence the angst and distress that often surrounds the dating and mating process.

If we are going to get to the root causes of emotional pain we have to understand the desires that drive us and the effect of not being able to satisfy these desires. An unsatisfied desire is always painful, obvious examples being the desire for food, sex, company, shelter.

The bottom line in all of this is that the survival and reproductive drives are at the root of our emotional states and behavior.

Desire

Given that the root desires are those of survival and procreation it is quite easy to see other desires as growing from these roots. We want to survive as an individual and this creates desires for food, money, power, shelter, physical well-being. Procreation creates its own desires - to be attractive, fit, secure, desirable, socially acceptable. For many people these desires pretty much define their world. Pursuit of money, physical attractiveness, security, power, will define the boundary of all the striving and efforts they make in life.

On the surface this all seems innocent enough, but survival and procreation are not innocent games. All kinds of undesirable behavior are associated with these activities and people on the receiving end of such behavior will often experience emotional pain. These behaviors become amplified through our reflective consciousness, our ability to plan, scheme, and exaggerate our real needs.

Power

Survival fitness and reproductive capability can be seen as a form of power - the power to exist and procreate. We may not realize it, but our whole life is concerned with power, and in everyday life the dynamics of power can be summed up in this unpleasant little sentence:

The greater your power the less power others will feel they have. The more power others have the less power you will feel you have.

So when your neighbor suddenly turns up in a top of the range Mercedes and parks it next to your twenty year old clapped out Fiat you are very likely to feel some diminishing of power. If the situation was reversed it would be your neighbor feeling a diminished power. Life is full of such dynamics. If your peer at work gets the promotion you wanted you may well feel diminished by it, and what is more you will probably experience hatred or envy toward this person. All that is happening in both these situations is that one person is demonstrating their superior survival fitness over another. It's the same when we see fit, attractive people in glossy magazines. They are not only demonstrating their superior survival fitness, but depending on context, may also be displaying their superior reproductive superiority. Attractive models are used to advertise cosmetics, clothes, and any other item that is sold on its ability to increase reproductive attractiveness.

Along with these increases and decreases of relative power come positive and negative emotions respectively. Poor health is clearly a diminishing of power, as is poverty, loneliness, but the comparative nature of power also means we feel diminished if our peers demonstrate a power (wealth for example) that we cannot emulate.

Various philosophers have talked extensively about the power dynamics of life, from Cicero who used the ancient term *conatus* to represent survival power, through to Spinoza who built a substantial work called *The Ethics* around this notion, through to Nietzsche who used the term *will-to-power*, and contemporary philosophers and psychologists who talk of evolutionary psychology and life being a power battleground. Until a hundred years ago psychology was seen as a part of philosophy, it was only with the advent of characters such as Freud that psychology became a discipline in its own right.

It would seem that survival and reproductive power completely define the way life functions. Even a group of trees of a given species will attempt to kill any sapling that is not of that species by strangling its root system. A newly arrived dominant male lion will commit infanticide and kill all the cubs that are not its own. Human beings not only compete for power at an individual level, but the insanity is taken further through rivalry between abstractions that people identify with - football teams, corporations, nations, religions. There are overwhelming opportunities here for all the emotions to become excited, and many of them will be painful.

- The Roller Coaster

Enhanced survival and reproductive power creates pleasant emotions, whereas any diminishing of power creates painful emotions. It would seem that the only way to ensure constant pleasure would be to ensure constantly increasing power, but it should be fairly obvious that this is not possible. Even the most attractive, wealthy individual will experience times when their power is

diminished - their fortune falls in value at times, they become ill, someone overtakes them in the power game.

The reality of the power game is that it is a roller-coaster, and the old adage of "the higher we rise the further we fall" does have some truth to it. So none is immune from diminishing power, and as such will be subject to the negative emotions with their associated pains. Remember - pain is simply the body detecting a diminishing of its power, either absolute or relative. We are fine tuned to maximize our power as far as we can, and any diminishing invokes pain which in turn is a motivator to try and correct the situation. We are driven by pain whether we like it or not.

Pleasure and Pain

Increasing power is pleasurable and diminishing power is painful. The important concept to grasp here is that a constant level of power is neither pleasurable or painful, we need to see increases or decreases to experience pleasure or pain respectively. If a million dollars lands unexpectedly in your bank account you are quite likely to experience pleasure - it's an increase in survival fitness, in power. But give it a year or so and the excitement and pleasure derived from this unexpected windfall will diminish - you will simply experience a new stasis. To get the same excitement you will need another million dollars to drop into your bank account, or maybe it would need five million. Only an increase in power will deliver pleasure. The converse applies to diminished power and pain. If you had a million dollars in your bank account and then find that you have been defrauded and lost all of it except for a hundred thousand dollars, you will almost certainly experience pain manifest as anger, fear, depression. But sooner or later you will become accustomed to your new stasis and will only once again experience pain if the hundred thousand becomes ten thousand.

Pleasure is addictive, and at a physical level we are all dopamine addicts. Junkies get it through drug abuse, although they need ever increasing fixes to get the pleasurable kick they crave. Businessmen crave the next bigger deal, speed addicts want the next faster vehicle, followers of fashion want the next more fashionable fashion, vanity demands more alluring cosmetics, and so on. However, behind this drive for pleasure is an existing state of pain. Unfulfilled desires are painful, and all desires are concerned with power. This pain causes us to strive to acquire the thing that will resolve the pain. Vanity is a state of insecurity and vain people desperately seek the next product (an item of clothing, a new cosmetic, plastic surgery) that will relieve them of this pain. No one would go to the trouble of doing anything unless it was driven by a desire, and desires are a state of lack, of want. This sense of lack is painful, a state of diminished power, and since all we really want is survival and reproductive power, so we make the effort to resolve the pain.

Such is our life, we wake every morning with the single aim of relieving pain through the acquisition of power - financial, physical, reproductive. Unfortunately this craving for power, and with it the attendant pains, leads to aberrant and damaging behaviors. An insecure person may seek to address their sense of lack through the domination of others. Insecure people are always dangerous and best avoided - they will do anything to assuage their pain. Another person might find that alcohol frees them from their pains for a while, or maybe endless sexual conquests.

The behavior of groups can be even more extreme than that of individuals, and it is well understood that crowds as a collective entity have no conscience. Genocide is the perfect example of one group getting its power by causing the ultimate diminishing of power of another group through murder. In Rwanda eight hundred thousand people were massacred in the space of two months by opposing tribes - the cruelty and pain was beyond measure. Even football crowds will collectively go on the rampage to assert their power.

Pleasure comes from the satisfaction of a desire. Pleasures are usually short lived and tend to be quickly forgotten as we strive to address the next desire that comes into focus. The classic example of course is hunger. If we have known hunger for a few days (fasting say), that period will have been accompanied by a constant sense of lack, the burning desire for food. When we eat, the pleasure will probably be quite intense, but short lived - maybe fifteen minutes or so. It's the same with sex, with getting a much desired promotion. There is a fundamental imbalance here which reinforces even more the fact that it is pain that motivates nearly all our actions. The pains are often long-lived and can be very intense. Pleasures on the other hand tend to be short-lived and somewhat less intense. The pain associated with losing a loved one is immeasurably greater than the pleasure of eating a tasty meal for example. Aristotle was wholly correct when he said " The prudent man pursues freedom from pain, not pleasure." And it was Epicurus who said that pleasure is simply the absence of pain.

Understanding the nature of power and how it brings about pain and pleasure is key to understanding the emotions, and crucial in our efforts to moderate the destructive power they can have in our lives.

A quick recap might be in order before we move on to the emotions proper:

- All life is driven to survive and reproduce, at the level of the individual and the species.
- Survival and reproductive fitness is power.
- When power is diminished it causes pain, and when it is enhanced it is called pleasure.
- Pleasure only comes about through an **increase** in power, and pain only comes about through a **decrease** of power.
- It is desires with their associated sense of lack and pain that motive us. A satisfied desire brings a temporary feeling of pleasure.

Emotions

We censor nothing as much as we do our emotions. Millennia of indoctrination from religious and spiritual folk have told us that hatred, envy, anger, pride, and even sorrow, are bad things. The result is that we find it hard to be honest about our emotional states even though they are as natural as changes in the weather. We will necessarily feel anger toward someone or something that has resulted in our power being diminished, but with indoctrination from the people who influence us (parents, peers, religious figures, society at large) it might not be possible for us to honestly acknowledge how we actually feel.

Our emotions are natural phenomena in exactly the same way as water flows downhill and on a hot, humid day we might get a thunderstorm. The primary role for the emotions, something we share with many animals, is to give us a rapid response to a situation. For example, the nerve in a rat's nose are connected directly to its emotional brain, the limbic system. If it smells a cat it will immediately experience fear and scurry away. If it smells food it will immediately experience pleasure and go seek it out. Our emotional system is more sophisticated, but nonetheless it operates with great speed to give us an immediate heads up. If you look at your bank statement and it shows you have substantially more money than you expected, the effect will be immediate - a sense of excitement and pleasure. Look at the window and see someone running a key down the side of your new motor car and the anger will be immediate. To pretend we don't react in these ways is invite anxiety and neurosis.

Mind and Body

Most people think the emotions are in the mind - they are not, they are in the body. This fact is something of great importance and is the key to dealing effectively with our emotional states, and particularly painful emotions. I don't intend to get into the perennial body and mind debate, but the approach taken here will be that our bodily state is mirrored by the thoughts we have, and are in fact fully synchronized. So if someone pushes in front of us in a queue there is an immediate bodily reaction and with it hostile thoughts toward this person. The bodily reaction is the emotional state and it comes from the fast processing that takes place in the emotional brain. But we also had to mentally cognize what was happening with the idea that someone was pushing in.

Another example might clarify. Say we suddenly would like a cup of coffee. What comes first the thought of coffee or the body's desire for coffee? The answer is that they both happen at the same time - the idea of the coffee accompanies the desire for coffee, or if you prefer, the desire for coffee accompanies the thought of it.

You might object that just yesterday you was thinking of someone you once knew who had died and you were feeling sad. Your claim might be that the thoughts had created the sadness. But it could equally be claimed that you were in a diminished state and the sad thoughts had accompanied it. Neither is correct, the reality is that both accompany each other. And so there is some truth to the claim that sad thoughts can be lifted, to some extent at least, through physical activity. It isn't advisable to think that using physical activity to lift the mood is a cure-all. Doing something like this doesn't bring about any kind of understanding, and it is understanding that is our most potent tool for dealing with the emotions. Neither is it useful to believe that having "positive" thoughts might bring about a change of mood. These things work to some extent but they are nothing more than sticking-plasters that might be hiding something nasty below.

The key to understanding and handling our emotional states is to focus on the body and its state.

Passivity

If our emotions are nothing more than reactions to events taking place around us then they can quite accurately be classified as passive. This is how the term passions originated - a passive response to the world around us. It would be foolish to think we can somehow avoid these passivities since they are as natural as the weather, but once they have arisen we can become active. The notion of being active is key to understanding all this. To be active means we act from our own initiative. Nothing in nature requires that we understand or observe our emotions. We can live a life simply bouncing around from one reaction or passivity to another and serve nature's purpose - to survive and reproduce. Mastering painful emotions is something we do for our own benefit.

To be active implies effort on our part, and indeed effort is required. The alternative is to be a slave of our emotional states. If things go reasonably well our states might not be too troublesome, but if life presents difficulties and maybe even tragic circumstances then a life lived passively is probably going to be fairly unpleasant. But there is something much deeper here. It is not in the nature of any creature to do a thing unless it is pleasurable. Becoming active through observation and understanding is a pleasurable activity, and by now you will know that pleasure is caused by an increase in power. By not being passive puppets we become more powerful, developing a capability that lies dormant in most people. But here is the big difference between passive and active power. Passive power in the form of advantageous events is not our own, it is accidental and can easily be destroyed by a change in circumstances. Active power belongs to us and no matter how things unfold in life it is a power we can always employ.

To be wholly passive means that when we are sad we are the sadness, or when excited we are the excitement. It is the life of a dog with no active inner initiatives. We only have to observe someone consumed by rage to realize there is no one in there other than the rage - it consumes the person. Same with sadness, envy, hatred, fear.

We cannot avoid the arising of emotions, but we can use those emotional states to understand our own nature, and there is great power in that.

Love and Hate

It is the nature of our existence and that of all sentient creatures that events and things either enhance or reduce our power in life. Now the notion of love has taken on all kinds of glorified and elaborate meanings and romantic love particularly has been placed on a pedestal. Spiritual and religious folk have also embellished the idea of love and it is not uncommon to find people fluffing up their egos with the notion that they are loving people. So let's state a down to earth practical definition of love:

When something brings about an increase in power and hence the experience of pleasure a person will love it.

I'm sorry to be so brutal about the nature of love but we need something we can work with, not some ego enhancing fluffy notion that has no practical utility. Statements such as "God is love", "love is all you need", "practice loving kindness", and so on do nothing to help us deal with life other perhaps making us feel all warm for a few minutes.

This idea that love is something we feel toward something that enhances our power is embedded in many of the uses of the word love. I love my motorbike, I love cheesecake, I love spring, I love ... anything that enhances my power and brings me pleasure. You would certainly not love something that created pain. It would be an unusual person who claimed they loved being burgled, or having toothache, or being told they are ugly. The truth of the fact that love is associated with an increase of power (the power to survive and procreate) is staring us in the face, but many people hang on to the notion that it is something divine or to be held in great reverence.

In reality there are two kinds of love. The first kind is the one we encounter in ordinary life. Some accidental encounter or good fortune brings about an increase in power. This is a passivity, and whether we love, hate, or are indifferent will depend wholly on circumstances beyond our control. Passive love obviously extends to our relationships with others. If someone likes the things you like and hence reinforces your power you will love them. We might love our family members because they enhance our power in life, and from the perspective of evolutionary psychology we love any person or thing that enhances the opportunity to perpetuate our genetic line - this latter being called sex. But there is another kind of love and it comes from our own activity. We might learn to love playing the piano, or dancing, or anything that involves effort on our part. Active love usually involves the effort associated with learning a skill and then the experience of power that comes from having mastered the skill. Real self-knowledge belongs to this category - the pleasure and power associated with understanding ourselves and how the world affects us.

Hatred is the opposite of love and is the result of something diminishing our power. The word hatred is used in a slightly unusual sense here. It can range from a mild feeling of irritation to a full blown desire to destroy. Hatred is also something we can feel toward inanimate objects as well and people.

As with all passive emotions hatred is mechanical and because we are small things in a big universe there are many opportunities for us to hate. The general perception seems to be that hate is pathological. It isn't it is just a natural outcome form the experience of adverse circumstances. So let's give a non-pathological definition of hatred:

When something brings about a decrease of power and hence the experience of pain we will hate it.

We hate a thing because it causes pain. You will certainly hate a thief, someone who insults you (diminishes your power), people who oppose your own ideology, an opposing football team (particularly if they win), adverse financial circumstances. The hatred between people, and between groups based on abstractions (nation, religion etc) is wholly mechanical and often results in acts of revenge or other ways to damage the object of hate. Life is full of hatred, although few would admit it. Each person sees themselves as the center of the universe and anything that gets in the way of the quest for unlimited power will be hated. Hatred is always passive. There is no way to experience hatred as a result of our own efforts.

There are many flavors of hatred including envy, anger, schadenfreude, seeing something as despicable, jealousy. The very act of striving involves coming up against people and circumstances that stand in the way of fulfilling our desires, and as such we will hate these obstacles.

Anger

Anger is easy to understand. Having said that hatred, in all its levels of intensity, is always directed toward something that has diminished our power, anger is simply the desire to remove or destroy the thing that is causing a reduction in power. Say you are caught in a traffic jam and you desperately need to be on time at an important meeting - you will hate the traffic jam because it is diminishing your power, and you may get angry with it. Perhaps you get angry with the vehicle immediately in front of you because the driver doesn't always inch forward when he should. Road rage is the classic example of someone wanting to destroy the thing they hate. Someone jumps the queue and pushes in front of you - they are diminishing your power and if you are at boiling point you may just hit the horn or even get out your vehicle and hurl abuse at the person that has pushed in.

Hatred and anger account for a great deal of the suffering in the world. Unfortunately it's an inevitable phenomenon, always arising when our power is diminished in some way. Nations can hate each other, so can religious factions, football supporters, neighbors. I once witnessed a brutal brawl between two neighbors who were competing in a flower growing contest. Each suspected the other was poisoning their plants - in other words, they felt diminished in power by the prospect that their efforts were being sabotaged. One day this hatred spilled over into uncontrollable anger and a vicious brawl ensued. Each was trying to destroy the cause of their hatred to the point that the ground became covered in blood as they lost teeth, smashed each others' heads on the floor and without intervention it could have been a serious incident. Similar confrontations take place in bars and nightclubs as men particularly strut their stuff to attract females. Should one man be seen to be attracting the attention more than another a brawl is likely to take place. In this case the power that is being diminished relates to procreation.

Anger is most intense in people who are insecure and desperately need external approval. An insecure person will hate anyone that interferes with their need for approval, and become angry. As with the traffic jam, anger can be vented toward anything that is power diminishing, that stands in the way of satisfying a desire. There was once a video circulating that showed an office worker suddenly stand up, grab his computer, and hurl it across the room. Clearly he was frustrated by it, which in turn led to hatred and ultimately the expression of his anger.

Most people see hatred and anger as things that should not happen, while in reality they are as natural as a summer storm. Both these emotions are a state of pain, most people would not choose to feel hatred or anger, but pain is a large part of our lives, we just need to learn how to deal with it.

Envy

Envy is a form of hatred where we feel diminished by someone's good fortune and experience pleasure when things go wrong for them. The reason we might feel diminished by someone's good fortune is that we want what they have got because we believe it confers some kind of power. The envy a person might feel when their neighbor draws up in a top of the range, brand new Mercedes, comes about because the Mercedes is a symbol of power and survival fitness and the envious neighbor wants that power. Or maybe a work colleague gets praise from the boss for their work. Peers will feel envious for the power that this praise confers.

To a large extent envy makes the world go round. It motivates people to compete and strive. Like other forms of hatred envy is painful, the result of an unsatisfied desire. And let's remind ourselves that this is all about survival and procreation fitness.

It is not uncommon for an envious person to try to destroy the thing that confers power on another. The envious neighbor might sneak out one night and run a key down the side of the new Mercedes next door, or the envious employee might sabotage the work of a peer that has attracted praise from the boss.

A good deal of social interaction is concerned with envy. People will boast about almost anything that they believe gives them power - vacations, a new home, expensive restaurants, designer labelled cloths, a more prestigious job. This boasting has the single aim of creating pain in those on the receiving end of the boast. The boaster probably does not consciously understand why they are boasting but at an instinctive level they will. Most social interaction is a power play, and enhancing one's own power through boasting while causing a diminished state in others is a major part of the game.

The other side of the envy coin is the delight in the misfortunes of others. We don't experience this pleasure if a person has not caused us to previously envy them, but we will certainly feel it if they have. So if the neighbor with the new Mercedes has an accident that seriously damages the car the envious neighbor will take pleasure in this. None of this is pleasant but it does happen to be true and it reinforces the fact that dealing with our emotional pain requires great inner honesty.

Envy conforms well with the unpleasant aphorism given earlier in this book:

The greater your power the less power others will feel they have. The more power others have the less power you will feel you have.

Envy is so pervasive that it affects every area of life. One child becomes envious of the attention another is getting, a follower of a spiritual guru may feel envy at the recognition another follower gets, a particularly attractive person may be envied by others that are seeking attention from potential sexual partners - it's endless.

Hope and Fear

Hope and fear are two sides of the same coin. The natural response to fear is to hope that the cause of the fear goes away. A person may fear losing their job and hope that the threat blows over, or someone may have been diagnosed with a serious illness and hope that they pull through. There is no hope without fear.

We fear the things that threaten to diminish our power in some way, either our survival or procreation prospects. As usual it's all about power, and to indulge in hope is an attempt to increase our power once it has been threatened.

Hope is a natural response to a threatening situation, but the very act of hoping often serves to amplify our fears. Someone who is facing financial difficulty may begin to hope that they win the lottery, that they can get a promotion, or that Great Aunt Gertrude will help them out. Either way the very act of hoping brings the fear into sharper focus. A situation like this is one that is thrust upon us, but people will often create situations that invoke fear and hope. If a person decides to bet the farm on a risky business venture there will be plenty of hope and fear. As such unnecessary ambitions are a needless cause of hope and fear, and along with these emotions comes anxiety and stress. Our contemporary society is addicted to ambition and this is one of the reasons people lead such stressful lives.

Our existence is plagued by a background mood of fear - fear of loss, of death, of poverty, of poor health. This is why selling hope is such a profitable line of business - religions, spiritual gurus, self-help gurus, politicians. So, if you want to make a million sell hope, there is no bigger market.

Self Hatred

Self-hatred is the most pernicious type of pain, resulting as always from a diminishing of power. A person hates themselves when they believe that they are the cause of pain. People don't formulate it like this, but thoughts such as "I always screw things up", "I'm a loser", "I'm not attractive", all have the same dynamic - they represent a belief that we are inadequate in some way and that the inadequacy makes us unfit for life, and as such we become our own source of pain.

Self-hatred has many causes, not least some reinforcing negative message from influencers - parents, teachers, peers, religion. Shame, guilt, and remorse are specific examples of self-hatred, but the disease has a much broader scope.

- Shame

Shame is a surprisingly common emotion. In some nations and religions it is an epidemic. It turns out that shame is a very powerful way to control people. If someone fears the widespread disapproval of others because of something they have done they will probably feel shame. It's a state of diminished power - no one wants to be an outcast with no supporting group of people around them.

The key to understanding shame is the notion of disapproval accompanied by the idea that the person experiencing shame is inadequate in some way. Transgressed religious and moral norms are often the cause of shame, with the belief that should an act become common knowledge the person would be shunned by those around them. As such a person hates themselves for doing something that would bring disapproval.

If a person is heavily influenced by the approval of others so they will be more susceptible to shame. A person who does not give a damn about the opinions of others would be largely shameless.

The self-hatred aspect of shame is precisely the effect that those doing the shaming want. Self-hatred is a state of severely diminished power - the very effect the shaming is supposed to have. Throughout the ages shame has been used as a mechanism of control, one of the best examples being the shaming of sex by the Roman Catholic Church.

- Guilt and Remorse

The two monsters called guilt and remorse are very similar emotions. Both rest on the notion that an individual has free will and that things could have been different than they are. I don't want to stray too far into the arguments around free will, but as a very brief summary on the topic we can say that free will is the belief that things can happen without an associated cause. So if someone decides to buy ice cream, the believers in free will would admit to no cause for such a decision. If we believe there was a cause for the decision then we cannot believe in free will - things that are caused are not free.

Guilt and remorse are entirely predicated on the notion that when we do something that causes remorse we had free will and could have done otherwise. If there is no free will there can be no praise or blame for past actions - we just do as circumstances dictated at the time. To deal effectively with two emotions we need a deep understanding of our slavery to circumstances, and this is not an invitation to reckless actions.

Remorse doesn't just relate to actions against others that we might regret it saturates our beliefs about how all manner of things might have unfolded. People often look back and think "if only" I had pursued that business opportunity, or married the other person, or not smoked, or ... almost every decisive event that has happened in life. All of this is imagination and nothing more than a means of making ourselves feel bad - of invoking self-hate for making bad decisions and diminishing our own power. A zen master summed the whole thing very nicely when he said:

Every decision you make will be a mistake.

There you go. Even if you had done everything differently you would still be looking back full of remorse that you hadn't done otherwise.

Depression

Depression is to be “de-pressed” - to be pressed down. Sometimes depression is caused by chemical imbalances and even food allergies, but as I've said many times in this document the emotions are in the body, and so whether the cause of depression is a gluten intolerance or adverse circumstances the effect is the same, it is the body that is depressed.

More than any other emotion, depression is an all-consuming state of diminished power. Circumstances can certainly bring this about - poverty, loss of a loved one, illness. But unlike emotions such as anger, fear, and envy, depression is an overall sense of being diminished, and it is extremely difficult to deal with and possibly beyond the scope of this book.

Ambitions

Every desire is accompanied by an ambition. While a desire is simply a state of lack and pain, the ambition is an imagined outcome that satisfies the desire. It is the ambitions that create anxiety and stress since there is an implicit comparison between where we might be here and now and the fulfillment of the ambition at some future time. Someone who decides to diet in order to lose weight will usually have an ambition to achieve some lower weight. Such a desire is an attempt to improve power through greater sexual attractiveness or maybe through the belief that shedding some weight improves survival. Either way the desire is accompanied by some ambition that is usually framed in terms of a target weight. We do this with ambitions to achieve a certain level of financial status, acquiring skills, acquisition of material goods (motor car, property), travel, and even so called spiritual ambitions such as enlightenment and inner peace. All these things create a tension between the here and now and some imagined future state, and this tension causes anxiety.

Our ego is the planner and schemer, and it shouldn't be too surprising to see that the scope of our ambitions is a measure of ego., which in turn is simply driven by the desire for survival and procreation power. A person driven by many ambitions is in a state of constant pain, and so it makes sense to moderate the ambitions where possible. We cannot have ambition without anxiety, and if we want to reduce anxiety we need to moderate our ambitions.

There is a link here with the dynamics of hope and fear. Every ambition is a state of hope - the hope that some perceived good will come about. But hope is just the other side of fear - the fear that some unsatisfactory state persists or that the ambition will not be realized. All-in-all excessive ambition is a sure route to misery and stress, not least because life takes no account of our ambitions and many of them will not be realized.

We cannot go through life without some level of ambition. The simple act of cooking a meal is based on the ambition that hunger will be satisfied, but we can control excessive ambition and lead a more peaceful life.

Method

Hopefully you can see that the emotions, in all their variety, are nothing more than a barometer that informs how well we are doing. Many of the emotions are painful, and they need to be to get us to do something about a threatening situation. Pleasant emotions are almost always associated with the satisfaction of a desire or with something that enhances our power. The pleasant emotions look after themselves to a large extent, but the painful emotions require that we have some effective way of dealing with them. Many situations that evoke a painful emotion cannot be directly addressed - the grief of losing a loved one, financial hardship, illness.

Since the emotions are held in the body this is where we start with our method of dealing with painful emotions. Many people are hopelessly out of touch with their emotional nature, not least because they live in their imagination instead of reality. Programming that comes from influencers (parents, teachers, peers, religion) often means that we are reluctant to accept our emotions as they really are. An unusual level of inner honesty is required to deal effectively with our painful emotions, the alternative being that we escape into denial.

If we are willing to be honest about our emotional state the next task is to observe it. In practical terms this means sensing the tensions and posture in the body. Observation is not quite as simple as it sounds. There is an overwhelming temptation to judge our emotional state (it's bad to be envious for example), and to try to modify it. We are so conditioned that any "negative" emotional state is usually seen as some kind of flaw and so we judge it accordingly and try as hard as we can to modify it. With time however we can come to view our emotional states with a level of impartiality, and with this impartiality comes a level of release from them.

So, once we have accurately sensed an emotion and can observe it without judgment, we can then apply understanding. Much of what has been said is about understanding the emotions - that they are painful or pleasant depending on whether our power is enhanced or diminished. This understanding is much more powerful than you might imagine, having the power to liberate us from the consuming nature of many emotions.

Finally, there is one very important fact that needs to be added. Understanding our emotions, both pleasant and painful, becomes a pleasurable activity. Why? Because we develop a power within us that helps us in life, and it is a power that is not dependent on external circumstances.

Practice

The understanding provided in this short document should help people deal with their painful emotions to some extent. A full set of detailed practices can be found on my [Patreon](#) channel, but here are some outlines.

1. Start to become familiar with your bodily state by moving the attention around your body in a systematic manner - feet, legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, chest, hands, arms, neck, face, head. Do it for at least a few minutes and preferably for 10 or 20 minutes. Many people have difficulty sensing their body, but practice will help.
2. Ask yourself on a frequent basis how you feel. In fact the most important question you can ask about yourself is - how am I feeling right now? If you have gained some sense of your bodily state with its tensions, you should be able to feel the emotion in your body.
3. Observe your emotional state through the body and do not try to censor or judge. If you feel

hateful toward someone then acknowledge the state.

4. Whatever state you find yourself in may be difficult to bear, but just sit with it. The emotions only have so much energy and placing the attention on them will cause them to diminish.
5. Finally, analyze the emotion - what caused the increase or decrease of power, in other words what caused the emotion?

There are many potholes and nuances associated with this practice and if you want feedback and more details then please subscribe to [Patreon](#), it's a safe environment where many people share their experiences.