

Negative Emotion

First an extract from one of Dr Roles's papers on negative emotion:

As soon as we begin to escape for short periods from the sad world of Repetition, we begin also to taste a new emotion which changes our attitude to everything. But we also find ourselves amazed and perplexed by the speed with which the good thoughts and feelings and physical wellbeing inevitably evaporate, leaving us just where we were before, with the added frustration of the sense of failure. But when we realise that the cause of this lies not in personal failure but in the structure and chemistry of the human machine and begin to understand the mechanism, we cease to accuse ourselves and then we find that escape is not so difficult as it seems. The difficulty is due to ignorance, and new scientific discoveries throughout the world are supplying the facts which were missing in the 1930's when we used to hear Mr. Ouspensky say things like this:

To begin with, in the Emotional Centre there is no natural negative part. The greater part of negative emotions are artificial and are based on thinking and instinctive processes which are quite unrelated to them but are transformed by imagination and identification... All these emotions really come from... changes in inner organs and tissues.... External events and inner realisations do not produce emotions; they produce inner reflexes [which are interpreted by us as sensations and emotions]. (P.D.O. 4th Psychological Lecture)

The new knowledge which is now becoming established proves these 'inner reflexes' to be electrochemical changes. And it links together the nervous activity of the forebrain, with the hormones of the endocrine glands, and the DNA molecule ('genetic constitution') in the nucleus of every cell of every organ in the body. [FCR 65/30]

Dr Roles goes on to quote further from the same Psychological Lecture:

Positive emotions such as 'love', 'hope', 'faith', in the sense in which they are usually understood, i.e. as permanent emotions, are impossible for a man in the *ordinary* state of consciousness. These emotions require higher states of consciousness; they require inner unity, self-consciousness, permanent 'I' and will. *Positive emotions are emotions which cannot become negative.* But all our pleasant emotions such as joy, sympathy, affection, self confidence can, at any moment, turn into boredom, irritation, envy, fear and so on. Love can turn into jealousy or fear of losing what one loves, or into anger and hatred; hope can turn into day-dreaming and the expectation of impossible things, and faith can turn into superstition and a weak acceptance of comforting nonsense.

Even such emotions as a purely intellectual emotion, i.e. the desire for knowledge, or an aesthetic emotion, i.e. a feeling of beauty or harmony, if they become mixed with identification, immediately unite with emotions of a negative kind such as self-pride, vanity, selfishness, conceit and so on.

So we can say without any possibility of mistake that [*in the ordinary state of consciousness*] we can have no positive emotions. At the same time, in actual fact, we have no negative emotions which exist without imagination and identification. Of course it cannot be denied that, besides the many and varied kinds of physical suffering which belong to the instinctive centre, man has many kinds of mental suffering which belong to the emotional centre. He has many sorrows, griefs, fears, apprehensions and so on which cannot be avoided and are as closely connected

with man's life as illness, pain and death. But these mental sufferings are very different from negative emotions which are based on imagination and identification.

These negative emotions are a terrible phenomenon. They occupy an enormous place in our life. Of many people it is possible to say that all their lives are regulated and controlled, and in the end ruined, by *negative emotions*. At the same time, negative emotions do not play any useful part at all in our lives. They do not help our orientation, they do not give us any knowledge, they do not guide us in any sensible manner. On the contrary, they spoil all our pleasures, they make life a burden to us and they very effectively prevent our possible development *because there is nothing more mechanical in our life than negative emotions*.

Negative emotions can never come under our control. People who think they can control their negative emotions and manifest them when they want to simply deceive themselves. Negative emotions depend on identification; if identification is destroyed in some particular case, they disappear. The strangest and most fantastic fact about negative emotions is that people actually worship them.

I think that, for an ordinary mechanical man, the most difficult thing to realize is that his own and other people's negative emotions have no value whatever and *do not contain anything noble, anything beautiful or anything strong*. In reality negative emotions contain nothing but weakness and very often the beginning of hysteria, insanity or crime.

[PD Ouspensky, 4th Psychological Lecture]

Work on negative emotions was a key part of Mr Ouspensky's system, especially for the more advanced students. The first stage was to try not to express negative emotions. Then, after much inner work, the aim was not to have them. The following account from one of Mr Ouspensky's students describes the method:

"I remember a conversation about changing negative emotion into positive emotion of years ago. It was at a meeting at which Mr. Ouspensky said that by that time we had the right not to have negative emotion. He said that up to then all we could hope to do was not to express it, but from then on we must learn not to have it. He gave a method which was very practical.

As soon as one was threatened with negativeness, we must summon to our minds everything we had heard about negativeness which kept us as we were; that we would never change so long as we kept on having it; that it wasted the precious energy of emotion which we needed above all for growth and understanding; that it was an enormous price to pay for a few moments indulgence in it; that it made the shape of our lives and prevented even ordinary good things happening and ruined relationships, etc., etc. And to add to the catalogue anything real and useful we found in our experience.

The reason I am writing about this is because it works in the most amazing way. I had an extraordinary experience of this soon after he spoke of it. I felt mounting up in me a wave of very intense negative emotion—quite justifiably, from the ordinary point of view. I remembered what he had said, and I made real and active in me all I knew of negativeness, its effects and the System teaching about it. (Mr. O. had said: 'Do it quick, quick...')

I can still remember the extraordinary change in me. It was physical as well as emotional and mental. The physical feeling was like the feeling of warmth creeping up quickly over one when one has been very cold and gets into a hot bath; exactly like this, all over me. And then the marvellous relief of being rid of this really violent (and reasonable and justifiable) indignation

and anger, and at the same time a sort of joyful understanding of the person who had caused it and no particle of resentment. It was absolutely wonderful."

While this approach does sometimes work, it more frequently seems to result in suppression of negative emotions which later resurface either as an explosion of negativity (the triad of destruction) or, worse, in a hidden form of revenge, deceitfulness or manipulateness (the triad of crime). Those familiar with the six triads will remember that Mr Ouspensky described the triad of crime as 'that triad which must not come near our work' as it threatens the survival of a Fourth Way School.

The Direct Path approach avoids this problem of suppression by welcoming negative emotions rather than trying to get rid of them. The first step on the Direct Path is the understanding that we are universal, unlimited Consciousness and that the separate self we imagine ourselves to be is illusory. Negative emotions revolve around the belief in being a separate self. They contain two components – a story and feeling. We address the story component by self-enquiry. What is this 'I' around whom the story revolves? It can only be the separate self, wanting what is not present, or wanting what *is* present to disappear. As we said in the previous paper, all that is needed is to remind it that happiness lies in the opposite direction. Each time the separate self is clearly seen for what it is and is allowed to dissolve in the light of Awareness, it becomes weaker.

But dismantling the story does not remove the 'feeling' component which can live on in the body long after we realise our true nature and after the story has been forgotten:

The body is a warehouse in which all our hurts, rejections, failures, fears and resentments are stored, long after thinking has forgotten them. These are laid down in the body, layer upon layer. In fact, these old feelings have colonized the body to such an extent that the body is, for most of us, a dense network of tensions and contractions.

It is these layers of tension and contraction that obscure the natural transparency and openness of the body and give the impression that a separate, inside self is in residence.

Like piles of old papers in the basement they have become faded and unrecognizable. They have long since lost the associations which once rendered them meaningful and are now experienced as a slumbering mass of incomprehensible feelings.

These may be dormant much of the time but may also be triggered for irrational reasons at unexpected times, and betray in us, over and over again, the residues of a separate inside self.

[Rupert Spira, *Presence* Vol 1, p103]

It is not a sign of failure on the spiritual path when these feelings come to the surface. They are the residues of the separate self lingering on in the body and their appearance is a side-effect of our understanding and practice. Trying to get rid of them only strengthens them; instead, the Direct Path approach is to welcome them. Here is Rupert's explanation, this time using a different metaphor:

Imagine a deep, dark well in whose depths a number of creatures live in a state of slumber. At noon every day, when the sun is directly above the well, these creatures wake briefly and rise to the surface towards the light. As the sun passes, darkness again fills the well and the creatures return to their previous slumber at the bottom.

The sun, in this metaphor, is Consciousness. The well is the apparent person and the creatures are all the dark, uncomfortable feelings that you describe.

Under normal circumstances, the purpose of most of our activities is to avoid having to feel such feelings. However, as we begin to take our stand as Awareness, these habitual strategies of denial and avoidance are revealed. ...

As we take our stand as Awareness we find that we no longer have any agenda with the mind, body or world. For this reason these dark feelings are now free to surface unsuppressed and to be fully felt.

These feelings are the old residues of ignorance at the level of the body. They are habits of feeling which result from our old identification with the body, that is, from taking ourselves to be a limited entity. Although it takes a moment to see that we are the clear space of Awareness, it takes time for the body and the mind to become realigned with this knowing.

If we subscribe to these feelings we immediately become an apparent person again. However, we should not resist these feelings with will-power or discipline. In fact these feelings want us to get busy with them, avoiding them, getting rid of them, suppressing them, whatever....because it is precisely this activity of avoidance that keeps them alive.

There is only one thing these feelings cannot stand and that is being clearly seen for what they are.

Having understood this, there is no need to be moved by them. Welcome them lovingly into yourself. Allow them to arise, to display themselves fully, to recount their old story and to vanish in their own time. Remain knowingly your Self, Awareness, throughout.

These feelings rely on our having an agenda with them. Every time they are met with our welcoming openness, as opposed to our resistance, we rob them of their power over us. That is, we rob them of their apparent power to veil Presence. In time their ferocity will diminish because they are based on an old story that is no longer believed - the old story of a separate entity.

However, it is important to be sure that there is no agenda with them, that we are not welcoming them in order to get rid of them.

Once it has been clearly seen that the separate entity around whom these feelings revolve is utterly non-existent, their heart has, as it were, been removed. Only waves of innocuous bodily sensations remain.

In due course those feelings that were dependent for their existence upon the belief in a separate entity will die down. They die of clear seeing and neglect.

Once the mind and body are no longer presided over by the apparent separate entity, they gradually return to their natural state of openness, transparency, sensitivity, availability and love.

[http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/welcoming_uncomfortable_feelings_1_oasg_52]

Contemplation

If we replace the impulse to avoid uncomfortable feelings with a desire to face and explore them deeply, we find, at their heart, exactly what we were seeking by trying to avoid them.

[Rupert Spira]