

## Feeling the Force of Life

C. Uhl

I am emotionally challenged. I admit it. I suppose I could attribute my emotional limitations to the fact that I am an American male or I could trace it to my Catholic upbringing. But rather than playing the victim, I find it more interesting these days to simply pay attention to what I am feeling. Doing this, I have come to suspect that I actually do have emotions—lots of them. It is just that I have blockages that make it difficult for me to feel what I am feeling.

So, now, I do exercises—I think of it as building emotional “muscle.” For example, I pause several times each day and ask myself, “What am I feeling right now in this moment? When I first began this practice, I would go immediately to my head and try to “think” myself to an answer. In this case, I was reporting on my feelings rather than having them.

Confusing our thoughts about a feeling with actually having the feeling is common in our culture. If you are curious to experience the difference, pause now and bring your awareness to your breath and then, when you are ready, bring your attention to your gut and sense what you are actually feeling in your gut right now. What are the actual body sensations down there in your gut? As you do this, notice when you are thinking instead of feeling and then come back to just feeling, noting any sensations in your gut. Then, when you are ready, move to your chest, and with curiosity, begin to note any body sensations in your chest. Continue in this way, bringing your awareness to your throat. The rationale here is simple: We have our feelings in our body—in our gut, chest, throat, and so forth. When we are able to sense how we feel in these places, we can then get in touch with our emotions.

I have come to realize that whatever I am feeling—whatever emotions arise—I don’t need to brace myself against them. Instead, I can choose to simply accept them. Indeed, our feelings are legitimate for the simple and obvious reason that they are ours! Tragically, when we criticize ourselves for having certain feelings, we begin to shut down emotionally and this creates a barrier between ourselves and our life force. This is how we become disconnected from ourselves and each other.

In this vein Ingrid Bacci (author of The Art of Effortless Living) points out: “Our world is a mess because too many of us have lost touch with the art of caring. We need to learn how to care, and there is only one way to begin doing that: to practice experiencing our feelings.”

Yes, feelings allow us to feel; they are the life force acting within us. When emotional energy isn’t expressed, it creates blockages in the body. These “blocked” places can be thought of as “energy cysts.” For example, suppose you were conditioned as a child to believe that it is never OK to express anger. As a result, today, each time anger arises, all the physiological responses to anger—i.e., increased heart rate, release of stress hormones, muscles tensing, adrenaline pumping—never get fully discharged; instead they get lodged in your body.

Given enough time, the suppression of emotion can change one’s very posture, not to mention one’s health. If, on the other hand, we have the wherewithal to simply let the energy that is emotion flow through us cleanly, as animals do, we are able to complete the arousal response and come to genuine rest.

In sum, the key to emotional health, I am coming to see, is to discover and remove blockages. The more we are able to let emotion flow through us the fewer blockages we have. And in the end, as Bacci points out, the biggest blockage we have

“is our own fear of ourselves—our fear of feeling... When we learn not to fear our life force, it eventually becomes a beautiful, exotic friend instead of a fearful foe.”