

EMOTIONAL THERAPY MEANS EMOTIONAL DISCHARGE

When I began to conduct encounter groups several years ago I was quite struck by the following type of occurrence which cropped up again and again: A person undergoing an intense emotional discharge would often go through a sequence of different emotions rather than manifest a single emotion. For example, one man who was very pent-up began to bang the pillows and scream 'I want you, Mama!' For about twelve seconds he seemed to manifest rage. The quality of the emotional discharge then altered, however, and he picked up the pillow, crushed it to his chest and cried out desperately and repeatedly, 'I needed you to be with me!' The sight was heart-rending and lasted about a minute. At the end of the time he was crying softly, still holding tight to the pillow, but now rocking it gently. In other words, the rage transformed into desperate crying which was then released and yet again transformed into soft, warm sobbing.

I remembered clearly this first incident because I was surprised at how totally an emotion can change its quality when it is fully discharged. I remember then thinking that in this man's pent-up state there was a vague quality of grief as well as his more marked irritability. This was shown in the drooping of his facial expression and slow, heavy movements of his limbs. Also, even in his initial rage, there may have been (on looking back) a quality of grief and helplessness behind the manifest anger. But this underlying grief could only emerge after the initial outpouring of anger.

Emotional Distress Transforms into Warmth

Then occurred another transformation of this man's emotional discharge that surprised me still further. First, I noticed his deep convulsive crying had been played out and transformed into gentle sobbing. He seemed quite comfortable as he hugged the pillow and nuzzled his face into it. After about 20 seconds of this, he peeked up at the group, gave a sheepish smile and said, 'I guess you're never too old for Mama,' and he laughed uproariously. Most of the group laughed too but I was again struck by the power and depth of his laughter. We've all heard the notion that laughter and tears have a great deal in common. But it was only in this instance of the man's deep emotional discharge that I actually experienced this profound truth for the first time. I noticed that the rate of his convulsive laughter was just about the same as the rate of his previous convulsive crying. The sound of the laughter seemed to come from that same deep belly position where previously he had seemed to cry from.

The two things that struck me most about this episode were: first, that an emotion can so completely transform itself, such as from this man's initial rage to the deep, convulsive grief; and second, and I believe this is even more noteworthy, that the quality of the emotion can so deeply change from one of unpleasure and grief to one of pleasure and laughter. In other words, the process of deep emotional release does not just tap off the distress feeling, but actually transforms that feeling into pleasure and warmth. Again,

until that time, this had only been an old adage bandied about, and found in such writers as Kahil Givran, that our joy can emerge if we stay open to our true suffering. Now suddenly this alchemy of emotional release, this change of the lead of distress into the gold of joy, was happening before my very eyes. I realised then, too, that I had never seen this magic of healing before because never before had I seen such full, unfettered emotional discharge.

The Freedom to Heal

Since that time I have seen similar episodes of emotional discharge, and many different ones. I have learned a great deal about emotions. Nevertheless my experience and knowledge is infinitesimal, and the experience and knowledge of the many people in our society whose work is not in the lines of emotional healing is still more restricted. Therefore, the main conclusion is that we, the people of our civilisation, are extremely ignorant as to the nature of our emotional life. Until we do gain a deeper understanding of our emotional selves, I believe it is essential that we acknowledge this true ignorance and avoid any wholesale prescriptions, political or therapeutic, which are meant to make our society happy.

Emotional Release Nurtures One's Impulses

I would like to set out several implications based on these observations of emotional transformation. The first thing is that to release a blocked emotion does not only release the feeling at the moment, and does not only open that emotional channel for further emotional experiences which is an obvious deduction from learning theory, but the release of the emotion also unblocks the underlying impulse. The sequence of transforming emotions are all manifestations of a single, continuous impulse. A single continuous impulse is a single continuous outpouring of energy which can transform itself from emotion to emotion, and can also transform itself into thought and action. In other words, the unblocking of emotions through their full release allows an arousal and playing out of a person's vital energy. This deduction, that full emotional discharge opens up and makes available the body's vital energies, is confirmed by a report spontaneously offered by many people who undergo emotional discharge therapy: 'I have more energy.' It is as if dissolving the cloak of emotional suppression rips away the death shrouds that have covered over our vital energy. The positive outcome of this enhanced energy includes greater ability for sustained physical activity, for mental concentration, and for both subtle and large-scale emotional responsiveness.

However, just as those who arouse the body's deeper vital energies through yoga meditation are forewarned of the dangers and entreated to use caution and obtain helpful guidance, a person who come into greater touch with his vital energies through deep emotional discharge therapy must also keep in mind the dangers and risks. Once the energies begin to come, they may come on very strongly. The main thing is everything happens more intensely. So a person who has been nursing a stifled cry could go into a period of deep sporadic crying. A person previously 'nervous' when confronted with new people or difficult tasks may now experience the deeper panic that was previously warded off. If the deeper panic, or any acute distress, can be undergone and discharged, then the person will feel released and better able to cope than ever before. If the emotion again gets stuck, as it was prone to do in the past, then the distress of the constantly pent-up and held up feeling will also be more anguishing than ever before.

To Rest the Baby Energy

Another danger, one which is more subtle and should be identified correctly in order to be coped with, is the fact that this new release of energy might require more frequent periods of rest for it to be replenished. I call this new energy 'the baby energy' because of its freshness and vigour whereby the world is experienced with a warmth and vividness that had been lost since infancy. However, just as a baby must take more frequent rests than an adult to replenish its vital energy supplies, so must a person who is tapping these infantile energy sources also take more frequent rests. In my own case, during the period that I have undergone a great deal of deep emotional discharge, whether or not it was part and parcel of psychotherapy, I have needed an hour of complete rest every four hours of the day. When I did not obtain this rest and would continue to try to cope with flagging energy, I would experience periods of extremely deep anguish. At first I did not recognise the necessity of frequent rest and so was perplexed by the oncoming of anguish that followed on the heels of so much incredible warmth and joy.

I would like to explain why the need to rest must often be mechanically remembered and carried out in the early stages of emotional discharge therapy: in my own case and a number of others, the depletion of energy after a number of hours of strong and active assertiveness is experienced as agitation and discomfort. Many people, myself included, have typically taken the body experience of agitation as a signal for further activity. The reason for this is that the agitation momentarily leaves when one becomes more active, while the agitation actually increases if one tries to rest through it. However, increased agitation while resting must be gone through for a person to reach a deeper state of relaxation which is self-nourishing. Once the deeper, self-nourishing relaxation is entered, sometimes with sleep, the reservoirs of energy are replenished and one or two hours later the person is on the go again with renewed vigour.

To become more active rather than rest when one feels agitated is the usual way we use activity to mask our feelings of distress. Bodily activity can always cloak over and supersede feelings of emotional distress at the moment, but the activity depletes further the already scanty energy supply. The sign of this is that one feels still worse when one stops doing things and takes stock.

I believe this is what happens when a person becomes manic depressive. The agitation during the mania period prevents rest, and the person, misreading his own body signs, takes agitation as the one for more activity rather than for repose. Thus the 'high' energy of the mania becomes depleted and the person wears himself out to become depressed.

Not only is body rest needed to replenish a 'high energy' flow, but mental or psychic or spiritual rest is also required. Hence some form of verbal psychotherapy is needed to help a person sort out his agitating thoughts as he attempts to rest.

REFERENCE:

Gibran, Kahil. **The Prophet**. Heinemann, London 1926