

author of *The Teachings of Don Juan*, whose teacher suggested he spend as long as necessary on a porch until he found 'his' spot. Castaneda spent hours roaming and crawling around the porch and finally came upon a spot in which he sat and became instantly transported to a state of Grace. We have by no means been as dedicated as Castaneda; most of my people found their spot for the day within five minutes. However, the principle of *finding what suits one* remains the same.

People in the group are also encouraged to experiment with variables such as seating arrangements. They are told to feel free to move furniture - or anything - about to create new environments for the group. We each bring a dish of food for the entire group for lunch each week. My first thought was to tell some people to bring cheese, some fruit, some meat, etc. I then realized it would be more in keeping with the spirit of the group to see what would happen without imposing a

structure on this situation beforehand; if everyone brought cheese one day we'd see what it was like to have a meal composed totally of different kinds of cheeses, and perhaps have a very novel and enjoyable experience we might have missed otherwise.

Thus, what I'm attempting to do in the group is to create an atmosphere of experimentation with all aspects of the group: setting, food, and of course, the psychological work itself. As in my individual therapy sessions, when I work bioenergetically with people in this group I don't tell them how they should be - that they should have particular kinds of feelings or that they should strive to have a 'bioenergetically perfect' body. I do suggest that they try out new ways of breathing, expressing, and simply being in the world. Thus the background environment of the group and the work itself reflect a spirit of freedom and experimentation that I regard as vital for new learning to occur.

Jerome Liss

Emotions and The Life Energy

To clear stuck reactions by means of the 'rising and subsiding' of emotional discharge has the following consequences:

1. Several consecutive feelings may be discharged, rather than just one feeling.
2. Unpleasurable distress transforms into pleasurable warmth.
3. The person's life energy intensifies. These dramatic effects are based on direct observation of the emotional discharge process.

Emotions Discharge in Sequence

When I began to conduct encounter groups several years ago, I was surprised by the following occurrence: A person in an intense emotional discharge often undergoes *a sequence of different emotions* rather than just a single emotion. For example, one very pent-up man began to bang the pillows and scream, 'I want you, Mama!' He showed rage for about twelve seconds. The emotion then changed, however, as he picked up the pillow, crushed it to his chest, and cried out desperately and repeatedly, 'Mama, I need you to be with me!' The sight was heart-rending and lasted about a minute. Then he cried softly, still holding tight to the pillow, and gently rocked it. Rage transformed into desperate crying and then into soft, warm sobbing. I remembered this incident because it was the first time I saw an emotion so dramatically change quality by means of discharge.

Distress Transforms Into Warmth

Another change in this man's emotional discharge surprised me still further. After gently sobbing and nuzzling the pillow for about twenty seconds, he peeked up at the group, gave a sheepish smile, and said, 'I guess you're never too old for Mama,' and he then began to laugh uproariously, the laughter spreading throughout the group. I was astounded by the power and depth of his laughter. Before this episode the man had not even smiled, and even afterwards, though he was more relaxed, he never again reached such deep and resounding laughter to come from the bottom of his belly as he did at the moment of discharge. The notion that laughter and tears have a great deal in common is known to many. But it was not until this instance of deep emotional discharge that I actually experienced this truth first-hand. The sound of this man's convulsive laughter vibrated at the same rate as his previous convulsive crying, and the laughter came from the same deep belly position as the cry. The process of deep emotional release does not just tap off the distress, but actually transforms the pain into pleasure and warmth. Writers like Kahlil Gibran have said our joy can emerge if only we stay open to our true suffering. I realized I had never seen such emotional changes because never before had I seen the full, unfettered emotional discharge.

From Anger to Fear To Sobbing to Relaxation

Since then I have seen many emotional transformations. For example, anger may change into fear. A young woman pushed her partner and shouted, 'I'll get you back!' She then stood stock still, eyes wide open, mouth agape, and began to tremble. Her breath was short and panting, as if she were out of wind, and her breath sounds trembled with all her body. Her hands dropped to her sides and she seemed startled and paralyzed. She later said something seemed to be coming at her for saying, 'I'll get you back!'

She explained in subdued and controlled tones that neither anger, nor even intense assertiveness were permitted in her 'typical home life'. And of course she had never before given in to fear.

I held her about the shoulders and said she could talk out whatever was coming to mind if she wanted to. Hardly a word came out before she began to tremble again, this time more intensely, and then she sobbed. Afterwards she asked to hold on to another group member and sat quietly for about fifteen minutes, apparently in a state of relaxation and rest. The anger and its transformation into panic were new experiences for her, and so was the relief.

Although there are frequent patterns of emotional transformation, there are no absolute rules. Vindictive hate can turn into scornful and mocking laughter on the one hand, or into grievous beseeching, such as, 'Won't you help me?', on the other. In one instance a warm embrace between two people turned into bitter resentment for one partner, who later said she felt, 'I wanted to get away and couldn't do it because you were holding me down'. Her partner, perplexed and hurt, explained, 'I felt you tighten up, I sensed something was wrong, so I was frightened and held on to you tighter'. Other instances: Laughter turns into fear, shame for receiving attention into warm enjoyment, open resentment into warmth and appreciation, sadness and hurt into anger and indignation.

To Rest the Baby Energy

After emotional discharge a person frequently needs to rest, especially if the discharge is intense or if there is an underlying fatigue. This rest is unusually nourishing because discharge brings full relaxation. The person then arises bright-eyed and with a new spurt of energy which lasts for several hours. 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. Thus, just as a baby takes more frequent rests than an adult to replenish its vital energy supplies, so must a person who taps these infantile energy sources.

Sometimes the need to rest must be mechanically remembered. 'I get jittery,' or 'I've got to do something'. Agitation breeds activity, but the body energies are still depleted. To rest means tolerating an initial agitation, but when relaxation follows, the rest is nourishing. People who are manic-depressive often deplete their energies during the manic 'high' period by failing to get sufficient rest. They then suffer from the 'low' of depression until adequate rest replenishes their energy supplies.

The Life Energy Intensifies

Immediately after emotional discharge, or else following a period of rest, there is a sudden resurgence of energy: 'the baby energy'. The person looks refreshed, alert, responsive. His thinking is clear, positive and productive. He often reports spontaneously, 'I feel great!' It is as if his previous 'stuck feeling' was dampening his entire energy system. The discharge of emotions frees the underlying body energies so as to bring a sudden tide of renewal and vigor. The 'impulse' to live returns with a new strength through this revitalization process. When the storehouse of stuck feelings is tapped again and again, such as through intensive body-oriented therapy. A person's energy supplies seem permanently raised: 'I need less sleep and I always feel better,' is a frequently reported outcome.

Transformation Through Emotional Discharge

The following account demonstrates many typical features of body-oriented emotional discharge therapy.

I was feeling heavy in the throat and a tightness in my chest. Somehow it seemed connected to my brother's death. Dr. R.R. asked me how the rest of my body felt. I told him, 'Numb, uncomfortable. Like I'd

like to jump out of my own skin'. He then said gently, 'Stay with the feelings'. I began to cry a bit but I needed deeper release. I took Dr. R's hands, put one over my throat and the other on top of my chest. And with that I burst out crying. I had a quick, vivid flash of seeing my brother in the coffin, but I couldn't hold on to it, or perhaps didn't want to, it was just too strong. I noticed as I cried the sudden warmth which came into my body from my chest and also my belly. It was actually pleasure, even though I was crying about my brother's death. I noticed my whole body felt warm and tingly. Especially my skin, it had this gentle buzzing feeling. I felt warm and relaxed all over. I didn't need the pressure of Dr. R's hands any more, so I moved his hands away and just rested, and began to remember the times when my brother was alive, and how we enjoyed doing things together. The memories no longer bothered me. I was able to appreciate the ties which held us together.

The patient reported that after the session he walked the two miles home instead of taking the subway and the following day this 'new strength' continued.

What does this account demonstrate?

1. A stuck reaction is linked to body tensions, in this instance, heaviness in the throat and tightness in the chest.
2. The stuck feeling is linked to a memory - the brother's death. Actually, it may be linked to many memories, which can be elicited by merely asking the person, 'Are there other memories that seem connected?'
3. In the 'pre-discharge state', the entire body is somewhat uncomfortable, often 'numb', 'cold' or 'uneasy'. Most people, however, just notice the local areas of tension and avoid awareness of the more total and disquieting 'emptiness'.
4. Attention to body discomfort can initiate the evocation or 'rising' phase of emotional discharge. The patient began to cry.
5. Gentle body touch, especially on the areas of discomfort, will intensify the discharge: He cried more deeply when the doctor's hands touched his throat and chest.
6. During emotional discharge, memories or relevant visual images may

suddenly appear with great vividness: 'I had a quick, vivid flash of seeing my brother in the coffin'.

7. To *hold* the memory or image intensifies the discharge. In this case, it was 'too wrong' and the image disappeared.

8. Emotional distress when fully discharged is not unpleasant, but actually may be very pleasurable - the transformation of distress to warmth. At this point the patient felt 'warm and tingly' all over. He also felt relaxed (after the crying).

9. After discharge, continued body comfort is sometimes desired and sometimes not; in this case, it was no longer desired and the patient removed the doctor's hands.

10. After full discharge, a wave of positive feelings ensues, often associated with positive thoughts: The patient remembered pleasurable times when the brother was alive, and felt 'appreciation' for the relationship.

11. Subsequent to emotional discharge positive energies regenerate: In this case it was both immediate (the walk home), and lasted into the next day (the 'new strength' continued).

1. Gibran, Kahlil. *The Prophet*, Heinemann, London, 1926. p.36.

*Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.
And the selfsame well from which your laughter
rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.
And how else can it be?
The deeper that sorrow carves into your being,
the more joy you can contain.
Is not the cup that holds your wine the very
cup that was burned in the potter's oven?*

*Some of you say, 'Joy is greater than sorrow,'
and others say, 'Nay, sorrow is the greater'.
But I say unto you, they are inseparable.
Together they come, and when one sits alone
with you at your board, remember that the other
is asleep upon your bed.*

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