



ARE
UNEXPRESSED
EMOTIONS
RUINING YOUR
HEALTH?



water for health

Redeeming Emotions: the Hidden Pathway to Health

“For a hundred years or more, every textbook of psychology and psychotherapy has advised that some method of talking about distressing feelings can resolve them. However, as we’ve seen, the experience of trauma itself gets in the way of being able to do that... I am continually impressed by how difficult it is for people who have gone through the unspeakable to convey the essence of their experience. It is so much easier for them to talk about what has been done to them-to tell a story of victimisation and revenge-than to notice, feel, and put into words the reality of their internal experience. Our scans had revealed how their dread persisted and could be triggered by multiple aspects of daily experience. They had not integrated their experience into the ongoing stream of their life. They continued to be “there” and did not know how to be “here”- fully alive in the present.”

BESSEL A. VAN DER KOLK, THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE

“Unexpressed emotions tend to stay in the body like small ticking time bombs-they are illnesses in incubation.”

MARILYN VAN M. DERBUR, MISS AMERICA BY DAY

A Not Yet Complete Humanity

In our post-Enlightenment Western society, most of us are accustomed to view the world and ourselves through a lense that divides all things into categories, places names and labels on everything, and if I may add, gives us a false sense of power and control over our world. After centuries of separating, categorising and reducing everything in the world to concepts and ideas that we feel are more acceptable for a modern mind that no longer has any place for childlike wonder, curiosity and mystery (the very things that have made all progress and development possible so far) our current outlook allows for very little nuance and for dealing with the true complexity of things.

But we must admit that this approach works for us: it enables us to keep various aspects of life in their respective compartments - we are professional at work, emotional at home, spiritual at church, and sexual in the bedroom. We keep everything neatly organised, like tools in a toolbox, and, mostly unbeknownst to our conscious mind of course, we keep the darker, less desirable components of our inner being in another, darker box with a heavier lid - this is where our ‘shadow’ hides. Needless to say, the modern mind cannot comprehend the existence of the forces that make up the shadow, and so, it keeps it almost entirely suppressed and out of reach. We will discuss this concept at a later stage, so we must put it aside for now.

I feel it is important to know that our current modern outlook has indeed been designed in a process of rebellion against the forces that dominated humanity during earlier, darker times. We all know that certain phenomenons were more prevalent in people and communities during the ‘dark age’ stage of the world’s development; namely, the childlike openness to mysticism, religion and the general reverence for any higher authority and things which could not be immediately understood or explained. Those phenomenons which I believe spring out of real and legitimate aspects of the human being, were, at the time, the only ‘tools’ available to study and process life with. And so, fear and superstition ruled. Reasoning was scoffed upon. Intellect was persecuted.

But this does not make those aspects of the inner being inferior or bad. (I am referring to those ‘places’ in the inner being where childlike wonder and awe

originates and where, of course, there is always a risk of that fear and superstition which is nothing more than a product of their shadow side - and may I point out that every aspect of our inner being carries its respective 'shadow', whether we like it or not).

Before I go on, I feel that I need to apologise for the broad strokes and the sweeping generalisations which I employ as I am pointing these facts out; I do it for the sole reason of comparing those old and outdated realities to the world we live in today. Certainly, there is much more detail, nuance and depth in everything but what I am addressing here is the difference between the aspects of the structure of man's inner being, that different cultures have drawn from and emphasised on through the ages. We must therefore bypass some of these concepts and press on towards the main subject of this writing; we cannot linger on the margins.

Barbaric Destruction

Returning to that comparison, I believe that it is now clear to us how the intellect- and reason-based outlook we today take for granted and tend to automatically embrace as our complete reality, is utilised in the same manner with which things like religion and superstition were once employed. Scoffing at the ignorance of the past, we discard their ways, suppress vital parts of our inner beings in the process (namely, things like the sources for wonder and awe I attempted to address above), and pick up new 'tools' which we go on to engage life with.

And so, instead of building upon the heritage of those archaic, 'incomplete' humans that we imagine when we think of our forefathers (and that they were in many ways but, I daresay, not much more than us today) we destroy those old foundations and go on to lay new ones...

But it is evident that this approach is once again incomplete. It is once again lacking wholeness. It is once again utterly barbaric in the blind destruction of what is; utterly proud and blinded to its own ignorance. It is, I dare suggest, as primitive and brutal - and, disturbingly, in a very 'dark age' way - in the ferocity with which 'reason' is used against mystery and against any spiritual and holistic view that attempts to grasp the deeper connections between the various aspects of life. It is indeed ironic that the new and 'better' ways of seeing the world should be as barbaric as the very thing it has been created to fight against - the primitive brutality and the ignorance of people. The evidence for true progress is therefore, surprisingly lacking. Instead of the gradual, organic growth that humanity needs, we simply have one system replacing another; we have long cycles of inner (and sadly often, external) war, where one aspect of inner life defeats another and begins thriving at its expense - only to repeat the same cycle later).

As a result of this ever-present external conflict between various generations of humanity, and therefore, between various aspects of our own inner beings (for I do believe

that this is how it plays out: in my work, I have witness a staggering consistency in the differences between the inner beings - especially in terms of capacities and resources - of two men of different generations, like a father and his son).

If we take a more honest approach, then, and look at the bigger picture in terms of not only the external but also internal development of humanity, we would hopefully admit that we have not so much as 'arrived' at the end of the journey to development, progress and fulfilment, but are simply going through one of its stages. This would in turn produce the humility needed for a clear view of ourselves and the world; and if we are brutally honest with ourselves we would be forced to admit that it is this very humility that is missing from our daily lives and interaction with the world. Yet, once we have regained it, we would be free to explore, and see things as they truly are, not as we have defined them to be in our attempts to shut down the more childlike parts of our inner being. We would then beware of everything that has so far been harmful to humanity, as indeed we must.

We must beware of blind, dogmatic beliefs - besides the feelings of pride and superiority they can produce, it is often the case that deep spiritual truths are allowed to remain purely spiritual and therefore, of no real use to us in the more immediate, tangible, practical aspects of life...

We must also beware of intellectual pride and the 'knowledge' we seemingly possess, about the world and everything in it - for, much like the blind adherence to dogmas, the emphasis on cognitive, cerebral type of knowledge can produce a type of arrogance that few other things in the world can surpass.

I think that both extremes are dangerous, for both extremes produce division, persecution, and pain. And I firmly believe that both extremes can be found within the same being: we all have them within ourselves...

"The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is, because man is disunited with himself."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON, NATURE

The murderous pride of the Dark Age-fanatic who believes he possesses the current knowledge (we must remember that religion was the science of that day) and wields it as a weapon against others, is not at all different than the religious zeal with which 'modern' people are attacking their fellow humans on a daily basis today, even to the point of being murderously violent to them - all the while feeling morally and intellectually (and, yes, even 'scientifically') justified!

A House Divided

I would observe that this lack of inner unity I speak of, allows most modern humans the luxury to address problems in different aspects of the being in ways that keeps those aspects divided and isolated from one another. If we take an honest inventory of ourselves, we might find that we are indeed using this approach on a daily basis - and if I may add, often with a cold, calculating offhandedness and a staggering lack of curiosity, as we go about our day. We throw ourselves at the world, attempting to 'gain' it and ensure that we have enough money, security and peace as we can - and neither of those things are. We treat those aspects of our inner- and outer beings as if they are not in fact interconnected and do not in fact depend on one another, and we use things such as religion (or spirituality, organised or not) and science to address them in a way that keeps them safely tucked into their separate compartments, away from one another and in order that we can safely manage.

We visit a therapist for our 'mental health' and see a priest for the spiritual. We seek pleasure and pursue experiences that make us feel good emotionally - and of course, one of the dark sides of that is that we consume endless entertainment which we need in order to numb and suppress any unwanted emotion that might dare come too close to the surface.

When we feel unwell in the body, we often get only the body examined, and let the rest of our being stay separated from the dealings with our 'health'...

Such is the current order of things.

Under this system of compartmentalising, many things work very well; other things do not work at all.

Human wellbeing is certainly among the things that do not. The body cannot be divorced from the inner being and treated as an individual entity - at least not to the staggering degree to which it is done in our world today.

“The maintenance of a facade predisposes a person to somatic illness because it imposes a constant stress upon the body. One tries to be what one isn’t, which deforms the personality and the body. When the deformation (stress) persists long enough, the internal structure of the body breaks down.”

ALEXANDER LOWEN, THE VOICE OF THE BODY

According to my personal observation, one particularly harmful aspect of this approach is the general attitude toward emotions and the still largely prevalent ignorance in regards to their effect on the body. Through that lens, many of us perceive emotions as ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ and as a result, employ much of their energy in pursuit of the positive and suppression of the negative. We can all understand this, of course: after all, who would want to entertain emotions that, if freely expressed in the heat of the moment, could result in conflict and even in causing harm to others? Clearly, to just ‘express’ oneself in front of others without caring about how they might perceive it, is not the way forward. I would absolutely agree, of course; I am by no means making a case for such madness here. What I am describing is a need that is twofold:

Firstly, we need to allow for at least some flexibility in the way we are seeing emotions and their effect on everything that we do and everything that we are.

Secondly, once we have started to see how powerful unexpressed emotions are, we need to start becoming familiar with our history of trauma and unexpressed emotions (and I am one-hundred percent confident that every single human being has those) and slowly begin to be willing to become aware of the deeper underlying reality that we carry within us wherever we go.

“As long as you keep secrets and suppress information, you are fundamentally at war with yourself. Hiding your core feelings takes an enormous amount of energy, it saps your motivation to pursue worthwhile goals, and it leaves you feeling bored and shut down. Meanwhile, stress hormones keep flooding your body, leading to headaches, muscle aches, problems with your bowels or sexual functions- and irrational behaviors that may embarrass you and hurt the people around you. Only after you identify the source of these responses can you start using your feelings as signals of problems that require your urgent attention.”

BESSEL A. VAN DER KOLK, THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE

Only after we become willing to face that which we have been carrying around for so long, and after a reasonable amount of expression, portion by portion, of the old, pent-up emotions and an adoption of a renewed lifestyle of expression, we might be able to gain the health and wellbeing that we might still be looking to fix with medications - as helpful as they can be at times.

My work with men over the last decade, as well as my own inner journey with integrating emotions back into my life (which, I hasten to add, has resulted not only in inner changes but also in many unexpected blessing to my health in so many ways - the complete disappearance of the heavy depression I lived with for years, along with of the mysterious chronic chest-pain; there were also enormous improvements in regards to the back-pain I've lived with since my teens; not to mention things like the complete normalisation of my chronically high blood pressure) has given me much hope.

(visit this [link](#) to see a spontaneous and quite intense, but hopefully useful, video on depression which I recorded in my car immediately after a particularly taxing but rewarding session)

Through years of experience, I have found that the 'divided house' that every modern person's inner being represents to some degree, can indeed be taken on a journey of renovation, and those divided places within can indeed be re-integrated - which always results in a healthier, fuller, more life.

In regards to the practicality of this process, I would have to note that, if there is one missing link in most forms of inner healing available today, it lies in the hidden emotional underworld. That is of course understandable; for all our wonderful prosperity and progress, it certainly seems like Western society has created a world that produces emotional suppression - and this suppression is, quite literally, destroying us from inside out.

A study produced by the Harvard School of Public Health and the University of Rochester in 2013* showed that people who suppressed their emotions had an increased risk of premature death - by more than 30%. But this was not all. Those same people who risked premature death by suppressing their emotions, increased their risk of being diagnosed with cancer by 70%.

Seventy percent.

But I do not seriously believe that we need scientific study and data to be convinced of the harmful effects that unexpressed emotions have on the human being. I would go as far as to say that most of us know this already - albeit on a deeper, subconscious level, perhaps. And of course, most of us - whether they know that or not - do not like living with depression or all the other diseases related to lack of emotional freedom.

Having emerged from a particularly intense and educating decade-long personal journey which main focus was regaining long-lost emotional abilities, and having spent the following years working with men and gaining experience in that field, I have come to believe that there's a widespread need for two fundamental aspects of this process that are still largely missing from our society today:

The first need is a necessity of a process through which buried, unexpressed emotions that are still lingering in the body of the individual, are addressed and incrementally dealt with.

The second need is the necessity for a subsequent incorporation of newly-gained expressive abilities into the lifestyle of the individual (those are the abilities that tend to emerge once the old 'baggage' of suppressed historic emotions has been removed - needless to say, most of the time this takes place in small steps; though

they are certainly moments when a 'surge' might be experienced). This process typically takes place after the first has begun, and then, once both are in motion, follows the first one closely, moving side by side with it.

Emotions Permeate our Whole Being

I am aware that most people who read this would probably agree that a 'holistic' approach is what we need in order to be healthier in every way. However, I think that simply taking our emotions seriously (and, God forbid, creating another compartment for them in our already fragmented lives) would not be enough.

We need to know that emotions (whether they are 'negative' as in anger or grief we had not been free to express growing up, or 'positive' as in joy, fulfilment and pleasure that we could not express due to unfulfilled desires, unplayed games and undeveloped skills) have already had a very strong effect in our formation as the human being we currently are.

We must at least consider that every emotion we had not been free to fully express and feel, is like another scar, another wrinkle, on the fabric of our soul.

"Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways."

SIGMUND FREUD

Unaccessed and unexpressed past emotions permeate everything.

They have not just had an effect upon our 'mind' as we were growing up and experiencing the good, the bad, and the unfulfilled, as all of us have done. Those emotions, some long repressed and forgotten, some in a daily struggle of being suppressed or misdirected (and therefore, expressed in a wrong or harmful manner) have had a deeply transformative effect upon our brain, our body, our ability to feel and to be connected to others, and also - I believe this purely on the basis on personal experience - upon our very face.

In other words, emotions do not simply influence the way we feel, the way we function physically and the way we look; they form all of these things and shape those feelings, qualities and abilities to a degree that is, in my experience, far greater than what most of us have been led to believe. In short, our emotional abilities (or the lack thereof) make us more fully human and more fully who we are - and of course, as we all know, as a result of the pain which we have all suffered to a lesser or a greater degree, the opposite is also true: we become less of the human we have had the potential to become, and less of that which makes us uniquely 'us'.

If we decide to employ pure logic and look into that argument, I would suggest that it boils down to this:

One cannot have large portions of one's inner being (i.e. certain emotions and one's ability to feel them) suppressed and therefore separated from the 'surface' of one's being (i.e. the conscious mind and the senses), without having one's whole being, including that 'surface' affected by this.

Have you looked into the face of a person who has grown up in an emotionally repressed family? I have, many times in the past...as many times as I walked past the bathroom mirror.

It has been said that the eyes are the window of the soul; and I would add that not only the eyes, but also the face and the body: the way we walk, speak, carry ourselves and relate to others - these things are all 'windows' to our true condition. But I would also add that this condition - the collection of all the little ways in which our inner self has been wounded, scarred, misshapen and deformed - is not the deepest part of us at all: it is what is preventing that deepest part from being manifest in us. That self, the truest, most beautiful part of us, is easily seen in the eyes of children but is dimmed and darkened in adults.

“Beneath the surface of the protective parts of trauma survivors there exists an undamaged essence, a Self that is confident, curious, and calm, a Self that has been sheltered from destruction by the various protectors that have emerged in their efforts to ensure survival. Once those protectors trust that it is safe to separate, the Self will spontaneously emerge, and the parts can be enlisted in the healing process”

BESSEL A. VAN DER KOLK, THE BODY KEEPS THE SCORE

I call that self the ‘heart’ and by that I do not mean the emotions. Unlike the divided modern view of humanity and the world (the popular ‘mind versus heart’ notion is an idea derived from ancient Greece) there is another view of the human being - one that makes much more sense in my opinion. The ancient Hebrew concept of ‘heart’ portrays it as being our deepest self, our innermost being that is undivided and whole, including our emotions and (wonder of wonders) our reason as well!

I do of course realise that this is not a popular idea, and I hasten to add that I am not trying to convert you to Judaism; I myself am not a Jew. But, purely through experience, I have found that there are ways in which things work and ways in which they do not; and so, I am simply trying to give you a different perspective.

For I would say that, through such a holistic lens, everything about the inner world of humanity, although still incredibly complex and difficult to fully comprehend, makes sense. Indeed, from that viewpoint, there is no longer a human problem which is purely ‘mental’, solely ‘physical’ or entirely ‘emotional’: these things are true in themselves but they exist interwoven together in a complex web that makes up the fabric of our inner being.

And if there is one single thread of that fabric which is most ignored, shunned, repressed, and avoided, that is the terrifying, potent, frightening but life-giving reality of human emotions.

This is the hidden key to wellbeing. This is what holds the mental, the spiritual, and yes, the physical, together, held tightly in perfect balance and harmony. And of course, this is what disrupts that balance and wreaks havoc in the internal world in a way that makes external, consciously-perceived problems and traumas, pale in comparison.

Without addressing that, and without bravely diving into the subterranean world of the emotions that we all carry in a repressed, forgotten, misshapen form, we have no hope for true, holistic health. Instead, we would waste a lifetime suppressing the emotions that are simply symptoms of a deeper problem, screaming for our attention. If we continue to ignore their voice, we would keep avoiding the very reality that, although immensely terrible, hides in itself the pathway to our healing.

And if we do not discover that path and take it, we would waste precious time and effort trying to heal ourselves with all the other means available to us - as useful as they might be at certain times. We would remain fragmented inside; we would remain 'broken-hearted'.

But this is no way to live.

Our hearts deserve true life. Our thoughts deserve clarity. Our bodies deserve the sensations of peace and pleasure they have been made for.

Choose life. Choose the truth that is inside you, however painful it might be. Then you will fully live.

You have been made for life.

With respect,

George Stoimenov
Eastbourne, East Sussex

www.trainingformen.co.uk

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* 'Emotions Suppression and Mortality Risk over a 12-Year Follow-Up'



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