

# **Emotional Intelligence: Mastering the Language of Emotions**

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**Spring 2001**

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*This is a translation of chapter 22,  
Metamanagement Volume III, Granica, 2001.*

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*This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.*

**Rumi**  
**The Guest House**

The intelligence quotient (IQ) is a value used to express the apparent relative intelligence of a person. It's obtained by dividing a person's mental age – determined by a standardized examination – by his or her chronological age, and multiplying the result by 100. For example, if somebody is 15 years old and her test indicates a mental age of 20, her IQ will be  $(20/15) \times 100 = 133.33$ . An IQ over 100 indicates that the subject has a mental age greater than his or her chronological age; an IQ below 100 indicates the contrary.

The examinations used to determine IQ focus exclusively on intellectual or academic intelligence, without considering emotional intelligence in any way. Nevertheless, the measurement of emotional intelligence (EI) seems to be far more significant than IQ in predicting whether we'll be successful and satisfied in life. But the study of emotional maturity has received far less attention than that of intellectual maturity. As a result, standardized measurements make it possible to determine the latter much easier than the former. In turn, our collective educational efforts address an area of low leverage (IQ) and ignore the area capable of substantially modifying behavior and developing consciousness (EI). As the saying goes, "You get what you measure."

In this chapter I attempt to correct this confusion between the measurable (the intellect) and the important (the emotion). To do this, it's first necessary to define "intellect," "emotion" and "intelligence."

**Intellect** is the aspect of the mind concerning cognitive processes such as memory, imagination, conceptualization, reasoning, (logical) comprehension and (rational) evaluation.

**Emotion**, as we saw in the previous chapter, is a systemic state of a person which includes physiological, mental, instinctual and behavioral aspects.

**Intelligence** is the capacity to distinguish elements within a given domain and effectively operate based upon those distinctions. For example, a person able to distinguish between simple and compound interest is *financially more intelligent* than someone who can't. This intelligence allows the former to better evaluate investments.

**Emotional intelligence**, according Daniel Goleman's<sup>i</sup> definition, is "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and our relationships."<sup>ii</sup> Peter Salovey and John Mayer, psychologists at Yale University who helped pioneer this field, defined emotional intelligence in 1990 as "being able to monitor and regulate one's own and other's feelings, and to use feelings to guide thought and action."<sup>iii</sup>

The model of emotional intelligence we use is founded on five basic emotional competencies applicable to ourselves and others: awareness, acceptance, regulation, analysis and expression.

Before we learn to "read and write" (comprehend and express) the language of emotions, we first need to learn the emotional alphabet; i.e., learn to recognize and discriminate between the fundamental emotions, and understand both their internal logic and the way they interplay.

The following is a list of basic emotions, their generative histories, the impulses they awaken, the opportunities they open and the dangers that lie within. After establishing this foundation, I'll offer a methodology for developing emotional intelligence.

### **Pleasure, pain, love**

Each emotion occurs along the spectrum from pleasure to pain. There are no good or bad emotions: any emotion can be an opportunity for growth or a source of suffering. Happiness and effectiveness in life don't depend as much on the specific emotion we experience, as it does on the capacity we have to intelligently develop that emotion. Nevertheless, the notion of good and bad emotions is commonplace. This is because humans, like all living entities, have an instinctive attachment to pleasure and an instinctive aversion to pain. But, as any fish caught on a hook will testify, the momentary pleasure of eating the bait doesn't necessarily lead to survival. Likewise, sometimes the sweetest emotions can trap us in terribly negative moods.

All emotions are based on some form of love, interest or evaluation. Love is the principal source of pleasure and pain. If something is insignificant to us, we won't feel emotion for it; when something is significant, it'll catalyze a strong emotional reaction in us. Pleasure is always the pleasure of having or attaining something which we love or desire; pain is always the pain of not having or losing that which we love or desire. Lamentably, it's impossible to choose which emotions to feel and which to repress. Emotions come "as a

package.” The option we have is to choose the intensity with which we’re willing to experience *each and every* emotion.

By honoring any emotion, whether pleasurable or painful, we’re fundamentally honoring ourselves and our own love. By rejecting any emotion, we reject ourselves and our own love. By respecting emotions, we open up an opportunity to live with intensity; by rejecting emotions (usually through fear of loss, pain and suffering), we block our chances of living with passion. If we want to avoid feeling intense pain, we have to restrict ourselves from feeling intense love and thereby condemn ourselves not to feel intense joy.

### **Pain and suffering**

“Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional,” suggests a popular phrase. The human being is finite and lives amongst impermanent objects which are subject to constant change. Given these circumstances, it’s impossible not to ever experience the pain of loss: from the loss of kindergarten friends when beginning grade school, to the loss of coworkers when retiring; from the loss baby teeth at age seven, to the loss of health at seventy. As humans, we’re subject to universal impermanence; the most permanent characteristic of our reality is impermanence itself.

Everything that exists is in a continuous process of change and transformation. Moment to moment, situations appear and disappear; beings are born and die. Each person, like all life, is born, lives in a state of constant change and dies. As a result, any attachment or significant relationship implies a certain quota of pain. We know that at the end of a project, our team will split up; that at the end of our career, we’ll leave our work; that at the end of our life we’ll abandon everything and everyone. This existential condition of ours, as the only beings conscious of our finitude, can’t but cause sadness and fear.

There’s a Zen story that concerns the inevitability of loss. A feudal Japanese lord asked a Zen monk to compose a celebratory poem for his son’s birthday. During the ceremony, the monk requested to speak, faced the lord and his son and recited: “The grandfather die, the father dies, the son dies.” The lord indignantly exploded: “What type of celebratory poem is that!? I requested something cheerful, which reflects the good that life has to offer, not poetic misery.” The monk replied: “My dear sir, this is the best that life has to offer.” “What are you saying?!” exclaimed the lord, furiously. “Perchance you would prefer a different order?” concluded the monk, looking at him with a compassionate smile.

Suffering is the defensive reaction that closes the heart in the face of pain. We don’t suffer for the loss of a loved object; this loss generates a sadness that honors and deepens the love. We suffer for the loss of love. It’s from identifying love with the loved object that we feel despair and suffering. Working through the sorrow and integrating the pain softens the heart, making it even more tender still. Through this compassionate maturity, we can find an even deeper love, a love that transcends all limits of space and time. If we lack a transcendent context with which to interpret and hold pain, we usually close ourselves off to the experience, clinging to the past and fearing the future.



The inability to accept pain is the basis of excessively avoiding risk. Whereas prudence and precaution are positive uses of fear, timidity and cowardice are negative manifestations of fear. When we know ourselves as incapable of handling losses and pain, we act too cautiously, generally causing more suffering than we had hoped to avoid. At work, for example, courage is required in order to undertake new business. The spirit of business is based upon the ability to face challenges; i.e., on the capacity to assume the risk of losing something valuable. Courage is also required to embark upon a friendship or loving relationship. Every contact with another human being is an opportunity to feel pleasure and pain. If we don't know how to handle the pain, we'll likely flee from it, simultaneously leaving behind the potential for pleasure and love.

The inability to accept pain is also the basis of emotional repression and unconsciousness. Given that risk is a fundamental condition of existence, it's impossible not to experience emotions like fear or sorrow. The only way not to consciously feel them is by exiling them from our awareness. But unconscious thoughts and feelings are like an internal infection: invisible and lethal. Emotional unconsciousness manifests in two ways: through stoic indifference (the robot) or passionate explosion (the bomb).

Despite seeming to be polar opposites, these two patterns of behavior are elements of the same system. Like a kettle without an escape valve, the stoic accumulates pressure until reaching the "breaking point"; then explodes or implodes. Once through the crisis, the stoic feels ashamed and generally is even more committed to rigidly avoiding emotions. What the stoic (like an alcoholic or drug addict) doesn't understand is that it's impossible not to feel what one feels; the only options are to either work with emotions or exile them from awareness. The latter though, only reignites the cycle of repression and explosion.

The way to avoid suffering and maintain healthy control over emotions is to welcome the pain. Instead of defending ourselves from it, we can accept it, knowing that if we receive it honorably, it becomes a source of learning and growth in life.

### **Basic emotional vocabulary**

The basic pairs of emotions are: joy and sadness, enthusiasm and fear, gratitude and anger, pride 1 (behavior) and guilt, pride 2 (identity) and shame, pleasure and desire, wonder and boredom. Each of these emotions has a *generative interpretation*: a series of observed facts and thoughts out of which it arose. In order to understand an emotion we need to understand its genesis in observations and interpretations. These perceptions and thoughts may be flawed; therefore, to determine the validity of an emotion – as a basis for action – we need to first analyze it. Otherwise, we can easily fall into any of the cognitive distortions described at the end of the previous chapter.

When we experience a valid emotion – that is, based upon well-founded opinions – we incur an "emotional debt." As David Viscott<sup>IV</sup> writes, to "settle it" requires a "payment" in terms of *effective action*. Upon paying – by consciously responding to the emotion's demands and impulses – we receive a *benefit for responding*: we learn the lesson and continue on with life. But if we refuse to pay, relegating the emotion to the unconscious,



we have to face *the cost of not responding*: the debt begins to accumulate “interest” and grows exponentially. If the debt exceeds a certain level, we fall into emotional “bankruptcy”: an intractable, *negative mood*. Each emotion has a specific demand, relative to its situation of origin. By healthily resolving the challenge, our emotion flows, and we recover a state of inner peace and the intensity of living with an open heart. If the challenge is repressed or avoided, the emotion stagnates and we slip into a negative mood.

Each emotion offers an *opportunity for transcendence*. At the level of objective, manifest reality, it’s impossible to avoid or transcend the bitter aftertaste of life, as, “everything changes and nothing remains the same.” Yet at the essential level of consciousness, it’s possible to go beyond this limitation. For example, even if we know that we’ll lose the conditional happiness of having something, we can maintain the essential happiness of being and existing. Or even if we feel the conditional fear that our abilities aren’t sufficient for our challenges, we can feel our own essential confidence and a commitment to doing the best we can.

The degree of attachment to pleasurable emotions is directly proportional to the impossibility of enjoying them. If we’re attached to the pride of being seen as infallible, we’ll live terrified of committing an error and try to avoid any situation that might threaten our image of infallibility. This terror can’t but embitter the flavor of such pride. If we’re deeply attached to the pleasure of winning, we’ll live terrified of losing and try to avoid any situation that would put our winnings at risk. This terror can’t but dampen the thrill of winning. As the famous psychologist Jacques Lacan pointed out, “it’s impossible to truly enjoy what one has (as this enjoyment is always darkened by the chance of loss); it’s only possible to truly enjoy that which one is.”



<b>Title</b>	<b>Negative mood (unconditional)</b>	<b>Painful emotion (conditional)</b>	<b>Pleasurable emotion (conditional)</b>	<b>Essential state (unconditional)</b>
<b>Archetypes</b>	<b>Depression, alienation</b>	<b>Dissatisfaction, displeasure</b>	<b>Satisfaction, pleasure</b>	<b>Inner peace, love</b>
<b>B a s i c  E m o t i o n s</b>	Melancholy, misery	Sadness, unhappiness	Joy, happiness	Happiness, compassion
	Anxiety, phobia	Fear, terror	Enthusiasm, expectation	Passion, confidence
	Resentment, hatred	Anger, fury	Gratitude recognition	Grace, power
	Remorse, self-hatred	Guilt, self-anger	Pride (1), Self-recognition	Dignity, innocence
	Inferiority, timidity	Shame, embarrassment	Pride (2), self-esteem	Courage, composure
	Anxiety, repulsion	Desire, rejection	Pleasure, relief	Abundance, acceptance
	Apathy, listlessness	Boredom, indifference	Wonder, surprise	Reverence, equanimity

**Table 1. Basic emotions**

In the first row, underneath the column titles, lie the archetypes: the emotions of dissatisfaction and satisfaction with their negative moods – depression and alienation – and their essential states, inner peace and love. Thereafter, the basic emotions are laid out, with their corresponding negative mood and essential state. These basic emotions constitute the minimum set of distinctions necessary to understand the human emotional life. We will analyze these one by one.



### 1a. Joy

**Generative interpretation.** Joy, like sadness, is based on the facticity (the inevitable facts) of life. We feel joy when we believe that something “good” has happened, or surely will happen; i.e., when we obtain something desired or achieve a longed-for result. Examples would be a team successfully finishing a project, or an individual learning about an upcoming salary increase.

**Effective action.** Joy calls for celebration, appreciation and a rejoicing of the achievement. For example, the team can take time to celebrate, recognizing their joint efforts; or, one could go out with family or friends to commemorate a raise. (See the final section about appreciation in Chapter 17, Volume 2, “Multi-dimensional Communication.”)

**Benefit for responding.** When we allow ourselves to celebrate we’re able to enjoy the good things in life with greater intensity. At the individual level, recognizing achievement allows one to close a chapter in life and prepare for the next. At the collective level, commemorating has an additional binding effect. It rewards people for the work they’ve done and prepares them to experience, with equanimity, that which awaits them in the future.

**Cost of not responding.** If we don’t allow celebration, we may fall into stoicism. We subsequently experience difficulty in not only sharing joy, but also difficulty in sharing any emotions whatsoever. By not commemorating, we usually stay attached to the achievement and, convinced that joy arises out of ephemeral situations, we fear losing it.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This comes about once we find the essential joy of *being* (instead of the limited joy of *having*) and discover the unconditional *happiness* that eternally exists in the most intimate fibers of every human heart.

### 1b. Sadness

**Generative interpretation.** We feel sad when we believe that something “bad” has happened, or certainly will happen; i.e., losing something of value or not obtaining a desired result. For example, a team loses a contract they were striving for or someone finds out that the factory in which she works is closing.

**Effective action.** Sadness calls for sorrow, an admission of the loss, and mourning. For example, team members can take time to experience the pain and close the wound, recognizing their efforts and the way in which they worked together. Within this space it’s possible to learn about any mistakes made and prepare not to repeat them.

**Benefit for responding.** When we allow ourselves to experience pain, we can shoulder the loss and recover a sensation of inner peace. This, in turn, prepares us to face the future with confidence and equanimity. In working through the pain, we release the loved object (always a conditional and transitory existence) and



incorporate a loving bond to our own unconditional existence, in all its purity. For example, by mourning by the death of a loved friend, we let go of the person who no longer is, but permanently incorporate into our heart the love that we felt, currently feel and will feel about that person. This is how it's possible to continue loving and increasingly appreciating someone who has moved on.

Sadness is the manifestation of love in the face of a loss. Thus, working through the pain in all its magnitude creates self-confidence. We come to know that difficulties can lead to pain, but that that pain is only a (transitory) reflection of our (permanent) love. In turn, we develop a greater capacity to assume risks and confront the consequent losses.

**Cost of not responding.** By not allowing ourselves to feel sadness we repress our love. This leads to giving up feeling every other emotion, becoming less human each time. Stoicism settles in, and we may experience difficulties with all emotions, our own and those of others. If we're incapable of working through losses by deeply experiencing the sadness, the pain turns into suffering. By clinging to a past never to return, we can't detach from the lost object and we shut out future possibilities. The heart turns inward to protect itself, closing off the outside world, and we become scared of experiencing intimacy or love. It becomes hard to appreciate anything, out of fear of losing it. Melancholy and misery slip into our being as permanent, negative moods. We feel hopeless and pessimistic about life and, therefore, have little energy to undertake any restorative actions.

If we sufficiently detest sadness and decide to avoid it at all costs, we can fall into an absolute emotional frigidity. *For those whom nothing matters, nothing can hurt.* Many people choose to shut down their heart and not feel love – to not commit existentially to anything – as this allows them to avoid the pain. Nevertheless, the closing of emotional meaning leads to depression and an overwhelming sensation of a hollow, cold emptiness in life.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This occurs upon encountering the essential and indestructible love of *being*, which surpasses any conditional attachment to *having* objects and ephemeral relationships. We come to understand personal pain as a manifestation of the essential tenderness and vulnerability of the human heart; to discover the *compassion* that embraces the pain of every human being through the very transience of manifest objects.

There is a millenarian story that illustrates the birth of this compassion within a human. A young woman had experienced a series of tragedies. First her husband and another close family member died. All that remained for her was her only son. Then he was stricken with illness and died as well. Wailing in grief, she carried the body of her dead child everywhere asking for help, for medicine, to bring him back to life, but of course, no one could help her. Finally someone directed her to a wise master who was teaching in a nearby forest grove. She approached the master, crying with grief, and said, "Great teacher, master, please bring my boy back to life." The master replied, "I will do so, but first you must do something for me. You must go into the village and get me a handful of mustard seed and from this I will fashion a medicine for your child. There is one more thing. The mustard seed must come from a home where no one has lost a child or a relative, a spouse or a friend."

The young woman ran into the village and entered into the first house begging for mustard seed. “Please, please, may I have some?” And the people seeing grief responded immediately. But then she asked, “Has anyone in this home died? Has a mother or daughter or father or son?” They answered, “Yes. We had a death just last year.” So she ran off and entered the next house. Again they offered her mustard seed and again she asked, “Has anyone here died?” This time it was the maiden aunt. And at the next house it was the young daughter who had died. And so it went house after house in the village. There was no household she could find which had not known death.

Finally the young woman sat down in her sorrow and realized that what had happened to her and to her child happens to everyone, that all who are born will also die. She carried the body of her dead son back to the forest where he was buried with all proper rites. She then bowed to the master and asked him for teachings that would bring her wisdom and refuge in this realm of birth and death. When she took these teachings deeply to heart, she found universal compassion for the human condition. She thus became a great source of love and wisdom for all of those around her.

## **2a. Enthusiasm**

**Generative interpretation.** Enthusiasm, like fear, is based on the contingencies (possible – although not necessary – events) of life. We feel enthusiastic when we believe that the possibility exists, that something “good” will happen, or has happened, without knowing for sure; i.e., we’ll attain something we desire or achieve a longed-for result. For example, someone thinks that an upcoming interview may result in more interesting and better paying work; or, somebody else doesn’t know for sure if her offer will be accepted by the client, but nonetheless believes she has a good chance of getting the contract.

**Effective action.** Enthusiasm calls for effort, preparation and the use of energy to achieve the desired objective. For example, someone might dedicate himself to preparing a résumé, calling his references, and then making the necessary requests and proposals to be considered an interesting candidate by the potential employer.

**Benefit for responding.** By channeling enthusiasm through concrete actions, we increase the possibility of achieving our objectives. But beyond the final result, the process of acting congruently with our values and goals is an experience of personal integrity. Whether we succeed or fail, we know that we’ve done the best we could; thus, we operate with a feeling of inner peace.

**Cost of not responding.** When we choose not to act upon our enthusiasm, we tend to suffer from anxiety and a feeling of being out of control. We feel at the mercy of events we can’t change. We have difficulty in calmly and gracefully handling processes, as we don’t know how to effectively channel our ambition. We feel excessive attachment and fear of “losing” the opportunity, without knowing what to do to better our chances of taking advantage of it. Instead of developing the intelligence necessary to address risks, we develop an aversion to them and, therefore, to possibilities.



**Opportunity for transcendence.** This becomes possible once we find the essential enthusiasm of *being* authentic and integrally responsible for our life, instead of the ephemeral enthusiasm of *obtaining* desired results. We discover this unconditional passion, which arises naturally, through the very fact of being alive and feeling powerful.

## **2b. Fear**

**Generative interpretation.** We feel scared when we think the possibility exists that something “bad” will happen, or has happened; i.e., that we’ll lose something that we value, or not achieve a desired result. For example, the contract that the company had with a big client is being submitted for revision; or, we learn that an accident occurred in the factory and possibly coworkers have been hurt.

**Effective action.** Fear calls for action, preparation and the use of energy to protect what we appreciate and value. It also invites us to investigate unfamiliar areas and take any appropriate precautionary measures. For example, dedicating ourselves to preparing the best offer possible and doing whatever’s necessary to renew the client’s contract; or, personally going to the plant to find out what happened, and taking all possible measures to minimize the damage.

**Benefit for responding.** By channeling fear through specific actions, we can lessen the probability of that which we fear actually occurring. Beyond the final result, though, to act according to our values and objectives is an experience of personal integrity. No matter the outcome, we’ve done the best we could, and know it. This leads to a feeling of inner peace from which we can accept the possibility of loss and prepare to confront it.

**Cost of not responding.** When we don’t act on our fears, we often suffer anxiety and feel out of control. We become victims, seemingly powerless against our circumstances, yet forgetting our capacity to respond. Although we can’t alter events, we may forget that we *are* always able to influence the physical, mental and emotional effects which events have on us. We feel impotent to the threat of losing what we value. Averse to the stress and nervousness as much as the risk, we may develop phobias and distress. If we’re living with constant worry and insecurity, we can become listless and too weak to protect that which matters to us. We may become rigid and reject bad news, attacking the messengers without realizing that this only feeds our isolation and lack of contact with reality.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This occurs when we find the essential confidence of *being* who we are (able to face the difficulties and losses that life inevitably brings), instead of the ephemeral security of *obtaining and maintaining* everything we want. We discover that which is ever-permanent and constantly recreating itself, beyond the impermanence of material objects.



### 3a. Gratitude

**Generative interpretation.** Gratitude is a combination of joy (or enthusiasm) and the feeling that someone has done something positive for us which they needn't have done. Gratitude arises when we believe that another went unnecessarily out of his or her way to do something, which in turn, enabled us to attain (joy) or potentially attain (enthusiasm) something we appreciate. For example, a supplier offers an unexpected discount or delivers before the agreed upon time.

**Effective action.** Gratitude calls for thankfulness and appreciation, an esteemed recognition of the other's efforts for having gone "above and beyond the call of duty." When grateful, we feel compelled to communicate our satisfaction and compensate the person whose actions we so appreciate. For example, one might call the supplier and thank them for the discount or early delivery and then send a thank-you note expressing an intention to increase business in the future.

**Benefit for responding.** When we openly recognize and show gratitude for another's efforts, we leverage the ensuing positive energy to improve the task and the relationship. This rewards and encourages the other's good behavior. By thanking someone and doing whatever is required to settle our debt of gratitude, we're also acting in congruence with our values, which leads to an increased feeling of integrity.

**Cost of not responding.** By not being thankful, we miss the opportunity to use the positive energy of the happy occasion. This repressed gratitude can lead to a feeling of pending debt and even, paradoxically, resentment toward the other. Additionally it's possible that the other will resent not being recognized for his or her action, efforts and generosity.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This arises by connecting with the essential gratitude of *being*. We learn to live in gratitude for the ever-present miracle of life and the world which embraces it. Father Steindl-Rast,<sup>v</sup> a Jesuit monk, emphatically sustains that gratitude is the heart of all prayer. In the same vein, Ticht Nhat Hanh,<sup>vi</sup> a Vietnamese monk, believes that the greatest miracle isn't that Jesus walked on water, but that each of us walks on this earth. As we develop this "awareness of the miracle of being," we live in the spirit of gratitude.

### 3b. Anger

**Generative interpretation.** Anger is a combination of sadness or fear and the feeling that someone has done something to us they shouldn't have, transgressing or violating certain important limits of ours. We become angry when we think that somebody behaved inappropriately (according to our parameters) and, as a result, we've suffered (sadness) or we might suffer (fear) the loss of something we value. For example, a supplier didn't deliver the product on time and now the project is delayed; or, an employee didn't respect security procedures, thereby endangering her own life and the lives of her coworkers.



**Effective action.** Anger calls for a productive complaint, an effort to reestablish the violated boundaries and a repairing or protecting of the valued object. Appropriately channeling anger means asking for the damage to be repaired, or compensation, as well as a recommitment to respect the breached limits. Additionally, anger can be leveraged as an opportunity for us to learn, thus changing the process or system so as to avoid reoccurrence. For example, one might call the supplier and demand delivery, complain to the person responsible, ask what can be done to improve the situation, and then take the necessary measures to minimize the damage. Or, in the case of the employee, clearly inform her of what happened and establish a firm agreement for the future, with serious consequences should it not be fulfilled; also, it may be necessary for her to apologize to her coworkers and recommit to acting responsibly.

**Benefit for responding.** Honorably professing our anger reestablishes our personal integrity and limits. Defending that which we value brings about feelings of inner peace and self-confidence. By complaining, we increase the probability of repairing or limiting the damage, and reduce the chances it'll happen again. This generates an inner security of knowing that we can autonomously respond to the challenges brought about by others. Even though we can't repair the damage or obtain from the other a commitment to respect the limits (these are conditional goals, as they depend on factors that exceed personal control), we can find solace in having done everything possible to respect our values.

**Cost of not responding.** If we don't resolve a frustration or irritation, we can slip into resentment, rancor and hatred, and feel vulnerable, insecure, and at the mercy of other people. We may have difficulties in calmly and gracefully handling problems; at times we may act submissively, other times we may explode at the person we perceive to have caused the injury, even if they don't have anything to do with it. We may end up living with a permanent bitterness and indignation, feeling like an innocent victim "abused" by others.

In order to avoid slipping into anger, we may renounce our ethics or personal limits, yet simultaneously abandoning our morality as well. Thoughts like, "If nothing's important to me, and everything's OK, there's no reason to get angry" are clear signs of moral unconsciousness. (See Chapter 24, "Values and Virtues.") Alternatively, we can decide to close our heart to love, as I described in the section on sadness. *For those whom nothing hurts, nothing can anger.* As I already explained, this path unflinchingly leads to depression and the loss of existential meaning.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This arises when we find the essential confidence of *being* capable of establishing limits and maintaining our values, instead of the flimsy security offered by *not feeling* a violation or attack by others. This peace and unconditional power arises naturally by accepting that we're defined by our actions and not by the actions of others. We come to compassionately understand that, in the end, everyone is doing the best he or she can (within the limitations of their mental models).

#### **4a. Pride 1 (behavior)**

**Generative interpretation.** Pride is gratitude toward oneself. We feel proud when we believe we did something we didn't have to which created, or may create, something of value for someone else or ourselves. For example, we did a favor for a coworker, helping her finish a project; or, we completed a personal training program and are ready to run a marathon.

**Effective action.** Pride calls for self-recognition for the effort and for having acted according to our values. For example, a team might take the time to celebrate having delivered extraordinary efforts to help a client through recent hardships.

**Benefit for responding.** By recognizing our own effort, we take advantage of the positive energy to improve our well-being and effectiveness with the task. Self-recognition encourages our best behavior, that which is congruent with our integrity and values.

**Cost of not responding.** When we don't allow ourselves to feel proud and recognize ourselves for our good behavior (perhaps thinking that pride is something bad), we lose the opportunity to reward ourselves for extremely valid reasons. If we don't acknowledge our own efforts, then likely any recognition we receive from others won't truly reach us. We can even end up living with a permanent feeling of dissatisfaction. This, in turn, can lead to destructive perfectionism or developing a ferocious and constant internal critic.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This arises once we encounter the essential pride of *being* which underlies the contingent pride of *achieving*. We learn to live in peace, recognizing that although we can't control the results in life, our dignity solely depends on behavior that, by definition, is always under our voluntary control.

#### **4b. Guilt**

**Generative interpretation.** Guilt is anger directed towards oneself. We feel guilty when we believe that we did something we shouldn't have and, consequently, we or someone else suffered, or may suffer, the loss of something valuable. Guilt is always based on the judgment that we transgressed our own limits, and caused unwanted consequences. For example, we didn't fulfill a commitment to complete a project on time, or broke a diet by eating too much.

**Effective action.** Guilt calls for an apology and a request for pardon from the person we've hurt (even if that person is oneself). These actions represent an effort to reestablish the violated limits and minimize the damage caused. As I explained in Chapter 16, Volume 2, "Recommitment Conversations," an apology necessarily implies an offer for reparations or compensation and a recommitment. Additionally, we can use the situation as an opportunity to learn, changing the process or system, so as to avoid any recurrence. For example, we could call the client and apologize for the delay, and then take all necessary measures to limit the damage and avoid repeating the situation. Or, in the case of the diet, we might analyze the conditions that lead to the breach and recommit to oneself to avoid them in the future.



Guilt is indispensable for motivating us to address a problem, but beyond resolving the operational component, guilt is also necessary for taking responsibility of the emotional component. As detailed in Chapter 18, Volume 2, “Forgiveness,” we recover our emotional integrity through two processes: requesting forgiveness and pardoning ourselves.

**Benefit for responding.** By offering an apology and asking for pardon, we restore our integrity and acknowledge once again our commitment to our values. By ethically acting to resolve the transgression and its consequences, we recuperate our feeling of inner peace and dignity. When we apologize, we’re less likely to seriously damage the task, the relationship and people, thus minimizing the chances for recurrence. This generates an inner confidence, as we know that we have the capacity to repair mistakes and recover our dignity.

**Cost of not responding.** When we don’t work through guilt, we fall into remorse, self-hatred and a pessimistic attitude about ourselves. We become trapped in the belief that *we are* (we were and we always will be) “bad,” instead of believing that *we behaved* poorly and that we can repair the mistake. We’re left with feelings of indignity, self-rancor and self-contempt. We may behave defensively and attack anyone that points out our errors and inconsistencies. This internal insecurity infects those around us, making it seriously difficult to admit and correct mistakes. We thus live with anxiety and fear of our “badness” being “discovered,” acting hypocritically, lying and falling ever deeper into a well of self-contempt.

The reifying belief – “I’m bad” – extended to others who – “are bad” – solidifies judgments into unproductive and untrue characterizations. (See Chapter 10, Volume 2, “Observations and Opinions.”) Instead of recognizing that behavior is something that the other (like ourselves) can change, we operate convinced that actions (of the other, like our own) follow from unalterable characteristics of the personality. This impedes any problem resolution and leaves separation from the other as the only visible escape.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This arises when we find the essential confidence of *being* capable of acting with dignity and maintaining our values, instead of the feeble security of *not committing* mistakes, errors or transgressions. Our own peace and unconditional innocence arises naturally out of knowing that we always deserve forgiveness; because fundamentally, we’re always doing the best we can, given the circumstances and our degree of awareness. This self-compassion also softens our judgments of others, allowing a more sympathetic attitude toward others’ errors and transgressions. By recognizing our own innocence and potential unconsciousness, we discover the context of essential innocence within, which embraces the transgressions of others.

It’s senseless to get upset with the wolf because he eats the sheep. The wolf does what his instincts command of him. Neither is it necessary to get upset with the wolf in order to take action against his excess killing. One can reinforce the defenses around the sheep, and even hunt the wolf without getting angry with him. Likewise, Lao Tzu invites to us to consider how understanding and compassion can dilute and even dissolve anger. Imagine that you’re in a boat in the middle of the river, offers the Chinese sage. Another boat approaches quickly and smashes into your boat, dumping you in the water. Soaked and infuriated, you hoist



yourself onto the affronting boat, ready to reprimand (and perhaps physically attack) its occupant...whereupon you find it's empty. The boat had been adrift. What then happens with your wrath? In the same way, many of the "boats" (people) that crash into us are operating on an unconscious "automatic pilot." (For a deeper treatment of "offenses," see chapters 18 and 25, "Forgiveness" and "Identity and Self-esteem.")

### **5a. Pride 2 (identity)**

**Generative interpretation.** This type of pride is the pleasure experienced when there's a public confirmation of the personal image we hope to project. We feel proud (2) when we know ourselves to be seen as somebody truly valuable and held in high esteem by others. This pride for our reflected identity always implies recognition by a third party (which could be an internal voice), that appreciates and values what we do and, even more importantly, what we are. Inner security, self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence are types of pride 2 born from a deep assurance that we are fundamentally valuable. For example, someone is going to present in front of a new client and feels sure of herself. Beyond obtaining the contract or not, beyond what others think, she knows that she's not risking her identity. This allows her to maintain her equanimity, even in the most difficult of circumstances. (See Chapter 25, "Identity and Self-esteem.")

**Effective action.** Pride in our identity calls for self-recognition and self-esteem for who we are, beyond our behavior or the results we've obtained. This self-worth focuses on the being, not on the doing or having.

**Benefit for responding.** When we recognize and value our own identity, we discover the ultimate foundation from which to energetically face the challenges of life. This recognition of our essential nature allows us to take care of ourselves and hold a space of peace and inner confidence, even in the midst of a turbulent world. Upon discovering this source of internal satisfaction, we can look at life as an exercise in manifesting our inner wealth, instead of as an effort to hide our own poverty, desperately trying to fill that emptiness.

**Cost of not responding.** When we aren't proud of being who we are and don't recognize our precious nature, we live trying "to win" self-worth through external recognition. This exposes us to the point that others have the power to define how we feel about ourselves. If we don't value ourselves, likely any other external recognition will deeply reach us; we may then end up living with a permanent feeling of dissatisfaction and self-devaluation.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This arises upon inquiring into our identity, finding a transcendent source of essential pride. We come to discover that the consciousness that we *are* is far bigger than that which we *believe ourselves to be*.



## 5b. Shame

**Generative interpretation.** Shame is the fear of making public any information that counters the image we want to project. We feel ashamed when we fear being discovered as truly inferior to the person that we attempt to show we are. Shame always involves a third party (which could be an inner critic), capable of revealing information that threatens the image we aspire to portray. The fear of humiliation, fear of public speaking (for many people almost as terrible as the fear of death), fear of being timid and the fear of disagreeing are types of shame spawned from a deep fear of not really being as good as we try to be, or as good as we try to get others to believe we are. For example, someone has to give a presentation to company executives and feels extremely insecure; or, somebody discovers that she committed an error and feels like a complete fool.

**Effective action.** Shame calls for reflection and a subsequent integration of our personality into a more authentic and mature level. If we feel ashamed, we need to verify if the shame arises from guilt. If we're ashamed because we think we've done something improper, we feel guilty and behave accordingly (as described in section 4b). Shame that doesn't stem from a specific transgression, but a general state of self-devaluation and inferiority, calls for deepening one's self-acceptance and transcending the fear of not being "good enough."

**Benefit for responding.** When we detach and let go of false images of ourselves, we discover a source of serenity and security. It's impossible to permanently maintain a perfect façade, thus deciding to stop pretending that we're someone we aren't is incredibly relieving. Paradoxically, upon accepting ourselves without shame, we discover that we're infinitely more valuable than we believed. From this moment forward, we needn't pretend any longer and can spontaneously and creatively express ourselves.

**Cost of not responding.** Shame is an expression of self-devaluation, self-distrust and self-degradation. Those who don't confront and transcend it are at the mercy of depression. According to Dr. Aaron Beck,<sup>vii</sup> director of the Center for Cognitive Therapy at the University of Pennsylvania, self-devaluation is a core ingredient of depression. Beck found that depressed patients can be characterized by the "4 Ds" – they feel Defeated, Defective, Deserted and Deprived. According to Beck, the lack of self-esteem is the principle root of the negative effect of any emotion. When the self-image is frail, it acts to magnify all the negative that one does or experiences. Any trivial error committed becomes a lapidary test of one's nature, intrinsically defective.

Dr. David Burns agrees with him: "What is the source of genuine self esteem? This, in my opinion, is the most important question you will ever confront." Burns reflects on this question and concludes that: "First, you cannot earn worth through what you do. Achievements can bring you satisfaction but not (essential) happiness. Self-worth based on accomplishments is 'pseudo-esteem,' not the genuine thing! My many successful but depressed patients would all agree. Nor can you base a valid sense of self-worth on your looks, talent, fame, or fortune. Marilyn Monroe, Mark Rothko, Freddie Prinze, and a multitude of famous suicide victims attest to this grim truth. Nor can love, approval, friendship, or a capacity for close, caring human relationships add one iota to your inherent worth. The great majority of depressed individuals are in

fact very much loved, but it doesn't help one bit because *self-love* and *self-esteem* are missing. At the bottom line, only your own sense of self-worth determines how you feel."<sup>viii</sup>

Although it's impossible to obtain to self-esteem, Burns claims that there is good news: "The more depressed and miserable you feel, the more twisted your thinking becomes. And, conversely, in the absence of mental distortion, you *cannot* experience low self-worth or depression! (...) A human life is an ongoing process that involves a constantly changing physical body as well as an enormous number of rapidly changing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Your life therefore is an evolving experience, a continual flow. You are not a thing; that's why any label is constricting, highly inaccurate, and global. Abstract labels such as 'worthless' or 'inferior' *communicate nothing* and *mean nothing*."<sup>ix</sup> (In his bestseller *Feeling Good*, and its manual *The Feeling Good Handbook*, Burns offers specific and concrete suggestions for overcoming the distorted depressive state of inferiority.)

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This arises once we realize that all shame is based on false self-identification. We come to discover that the source of self-esteem and self-worth is transcendent and unconditional. There's absolutely nothing in the world that can devalue that which is essentially valuable: our self as Being's conscious manifestation and self-awareness. Upon realizing that it isn't necessary to *do* something to *be* valuable, we can dedicate ourselves to expressing the value that we *are*, instead of trying to correct the absence of the value that we *believe ourselves to be*. This is the best safety net for walking the tightrope of life.

### **6a. Pleasure**

**Generative interpretation.** We experience pleasure when we obtain, and we can enjoy, something we wanted; this is the joy and satisfaction of the fulfilled desire. Another type of pleasure is the relief of releasing ourselves from something that we didn't want to bear. The pleasant (or relieving) sensation is a message from our body indicating that what happened is instinctively pleasing and positive. It's nature's reward for acting according to its dictates. For example, someone arrives home after a long day at the office and happily collapses onto the sofa while being smothered by his or her children's kisses.

**Effective action.** Pleasure calls for an enjoying of the thing obtained and taking the time to relax. It's possible to use satisfaction as "re-creation" and a source of energy. For example, enjoying a well-deserved rest and intensely experiencing familial love.

**Benefit for responding.** When we allow ourselves to enjoy pleasure, we experience peace, tranquility, calm, satisfaction and fullness. We're able to consciously live the infinite delight that life can be. That gives us the strength we need to pursue desires and confront difficult moments.

**Cost of not responding.** When we don't allow ourselves to enjoy what we've attained, we develop a personality so obsessed with pursuing objectives that we don't take the time to enjoy and make the most out of what we already have. This absence of pleasure generates a continuous feeling of dissatisfaction, hunger

(for objectives) and greed.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This arises as we respond to life out of the essential wealth and fullness of *being*, instead of from the misery and anxiety of *lacking*. We learn to operate out of abundance, rather than scarcity, without being paralyzed by the fear of losing what we possess. We come to see life as an opportunity to manifest the essential wealth that we are, instead of a never-ending effort to acquire everything we don't have. The essential satisfaction (and the only immutable satisfaction in the face of life's impermanence) is that of being who we are. All material pleasure is necessarily transitory, because everything we have (even ourselves) is transitory. Only that which essentially *is* lasts beyond everything that can be obtained or lost.

### **6b. Desire**

**Generative interpretation.** Desire is the emotional equivalent of hunger, thirst and itch; as such, pleasure is the emotional equivalent of eating, drinking and scratching oneself. We have the impulse of desire when we want something we don't have (we feel an emptiness and an anxiety to fill it). Desire is based on the belief that we'll be happier, or will have more pleasure, once we've obtained the wanted object. Examples might be to want different work, make more money, spend more time with the children or live in another house. In contrast, rejection arises out of the belief that we'd feel better if we could avoid that which we dislike. Rejection is a negative desire, a desire to not have, like not wanting to go to a meeting or a birthday party for an irritating relative.

**Effective action.** Desire is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it generates great energy for pursuing our objectives; on the other hand, that energy can "burn the fuses" of consciousness, making us do things we never would if we contemplated the consequences of our actions. Effective action in the face of desire is the search for *conscious* satisfaction. Before pursuing desire, we need to consider the congruence of it with our long term objectives and values. Sometimes, superficial desire is toxic (like addictions). In such a case, it's possible to inquire into our deepest desires, those that underlie the superficial desire. (In "Conflict Resolution," Chapter 13, Volume 2, I explained how to find the ultimate root of desire by repeatedly asking: "what would I obtain through X, that is even more important for me than X is itself," where X is the desired object at different levels of depth.)

Only when we find a deep desire can we use its energy for self-motivation in the pursuit of noble objectives. Thus, we can combine desire, intelligence and discipline to design courses of action as effective as they are complete. For example, doing what's necessary to find a new job, receive a pay increase, or contact someone we feel attracted to. (See Chapter 24, "Values and Virtues.")

**Benefit for responding.** When we pursue our desires in accordance with our values, we feel a satisfaction and completeness during the process, regardless of the result. This brings about a feeling of inner peace. By making this disciplined effort to accomplish an assigned mission, we have a greater chance of obtaining what we want and thus satisfying our needs and interests.



**Cost of not responding.** There are two ways of not responding to desire: not trying to obtain what we want (repression), or trying to obtain it at all costs, without awareness of values or transcendent objectives (indulgence). In the first case, the consequences are frustration, hopelessness and unhappiness. We may develop obsessive thoughts and live in a state of dissatisfaction and permanent anxiety. We might feel envy and jealousy toward those who have what we want, and perhaps remorse and self-recrimination for having behaved so impulsively. We can slip into despair, thinking that we'll *always* be unsatisfied, instead of believing that *at the moment* we sense a deficiency that can actually be addressed.

In the case of indulgence, the consequences are the abandonment of personal values and limits and a slip into embarrassing behavior. Indulgence in short term pleasures (like addictions or vices) quickly transforms into long term suffering, remorse, and a feeling of being unable to control oneself and consistently act with discipline.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This arises once we find the essential peace and completeness of *being* who we are and operating with integrity (beyond circumstantial pleasures), instead of the weak satisfaction of *acquiring* the objects we desire that, by nature, are transitory and impermanent. We come to discover the unconditional happiness that naturally surges from our heart and consciousness when we live in harmony with ourselves.

### **7a. Wonder**

**Generative interpretation.** We're filled with wonder when we find ourselves face to face with something we consider valuable, mysterious and magnificent. Wonder is the fundamental attitude of all natural and human sciences, of all religions and philosophies. For example, we may experience wonder when contemplating a piece of art, when sensing the abundance of nature, when realizing the theoretical harmony of mathematics, or when recognizing the unfathomable depth of the human spirit. Especially within the world of business, we can marvel at the infinite complexity of the economic and social systems in which companies operate. (See the story "I, Pencil" in Chapter 15, Volume 2, "Commitment Conversations.")

**Effective action.** Wonder calls for contemplation and reverence; it invites an investigation of the mystery to discover its hidden beauty and possibilities; it invites using our senses and imagination to merge ourselves with the transcendent and its manifestation. With wonder, we can motivate ourselves toward excellence by being inspired by that which we admire. By approaching problems with wonder, we can see them as immense opportunities for learning, accepting what we don't know as fertile ground for exploration and growth. Wonder sparks arousal and curiosity within our minds; it keeps us looking for the hidden possibilities of reality which inspire us to live; it helps us to deeply respect other human beings in the unfathomable mystery of their freedom.

**Benefit for responding.** When we face the world with wonder, we develop a disposition for seeing problems as challenges and learning from them. We come to consciously enjoy the beauty and mystery of reality, and foster an evident enthusiasm for exploring and knowing. With wonder as the cornerstone of our attitude, we

show reverence and respect for everything that exists and invest tremendous energy into manifesting possibilities.

**Cost of not responding.** Without the capacity to wonder, or if we don't allow ourselves to do so, life seems flat and gray. We become blind to the opportunities to enjoy, learn and create. We feel a permanent boredom, weariness, lack of respect and disregard for both reality and other human beings. We find it difficult to connect with others, feel alienated, have a lack of empathy and abundant cynicism. Oscar Wilde once defined a (wonder-lacking) cynic as one who "knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This arises as we live in the essential wonder of *being* and in the essential mystery of *existence*. (As Heidegger<sup>x</sup> says, the fundamental question of metaphysics is: "Why are there essents rather than nothing" or "Why is there something rather than nothing? Why does anything exist at all?") We come to contemplate, in astonishment, the eternal mystery of life and feel a reverential respect for all its manifestations.

## **7b. Boredom**

**Generative interpretation.** We feel bored when we don't find anything valuable in a situation or its possibilities, or when we don't think it's feasible to enjoy the present or create opportunities for the future. For example, when we attend a meeting about issues uninteresting to us, or when work doesn't offer challenges or opportunities for growth.

**Effective action.** Boredom invites us to search for more interesting alternatives. We become bored because we don't see any possibility for satisfaction in a situation. Thus, we have two options: to more deeply investigate the situation, or change our surroundings. If we're bored, but believe it's important to remain where we are, we can choose to do so responsibly, without taking on a victim role.

**Benefit for responding.** When we sense boredom and try to change it, we immediately regain our interest. For example, if we're in a meeting and declare that we don't understand the sense or usefulness of the discussion, this involvement itself immediately piques our attention.

**Cost of not responding.** If we become trapped in boredom, we can develop negative moods like apathy and ennui. We lose energy and feel alienated by everything happening around us; we become but a passive spectator of our life and may find ourselves more often acting as victim, rather than player.

**Opportunity for transcendence.** This arises when we decide to look for the interesting angle that every situation presents. We can transcend boredom by fundamentally committing to participate in the dance of life with 100% of our being.



## Cognitive and emotional distortions

Emotions usually present themselves with a self-validating force. When we feel guilty, for example, we think that it's because we've done something bad. But the truth is that we feel guilty because we *think* that we've done something bad, not because we *have* done it or because what we've done *is* bad. "Bad" is an opinion that depends on the criteria we've established for ourselves.

For example, we may feel guilty for having said "no" to someone. This guilt seems to be well-founded, but by detachedly investigating it, we discover the extreme danger of an implicit mandate to "never deny anyone of anything so that they don't feel betrayed." In our formative years, we learn that to receive attention and be taken care of, it's best to please adults. Consequently, we unconsciously generate the belief that "it's always necessary to please others" and, from that moment forward, we hold this belief as a value in life. Thus, it isn't surprising at all that we feel guilty when declining a request.

In order to act with emotional intelligence, we need to understand the basic emotions and know their generative histories. Yet understanding emotions is only one part of a more complex system. In order to act effectively, we need to complement our understanding with a capacity for critical analysis and the ability to reframe a situation. For example, we can *dissolve* the sensation of guilt by giving ourselves permission to frustrate others when their desires aren't congruent with our own interests. In the next chapter, we'll integrate the differentiations made here into a practical way of being effective with tasks, relationships and our own well-being.



## Appendix: The celestial messengers

The enlightenment of Siddhartha Guatama (later called “Buddha” or “Enlightened One”) illustrates the possibility of using pain, sorrow and fear as “awakeners,” as guides in the search (which all humans undergo) for inner peace in the midst of the turbulence and impermanence of the external world.

The legend recounts that the oracles announced to his father, the lord of a small kingdom, that the recently born Siddhartha would become a great military or spiritual leader. The king had a perfectly defined plan of succession, and was willing to ensure at all costs that his son didn’t stray from the path of politics. Thus he constructed a walled city where Siddhartha lived the first twenty years on his life, carefully guarded. In order to avoid any spiritual “infection,” the city was filled with exquisite gardens and each inhabitant of the city was chosen with great care. All of the prince’s companions (including his wife) were youth of noble blood. The men were strong and the women beautiful. Thus, Siddhartha’s life was but a series of constant pleasures.

Yet one day, Siddhartha slipped out and walked through the city beyond the wall, accompanied only by his personal servant, Channa. Suddenly they came across a feeble old man, walking slowly with a cane; Siddhartha asked Channa with curiosity: “What happened to that poor man?” “Nothing, my lord, he is simply old.” “And why is he like that?” “For no special reason, my lord; with time, all humans become like that.” “All humans!?” Siddhartha exclaimed in alarm, “You mean that all my friends will become old?” “Indeed, my lord.” “And my father, he’ll also age like that?” “Indeed, my lord.” “And what of myself, will I also become old?” Siddhartha asked, frightened. “Unfortunately, that is what awaits you, my lord,” responded Channa.

Soon thereafter, Siddhartha and Channa passed in front of a house from which complaints of pain filtered into the street. Siddhartha looked in the open door and saw a man lying on the ground, moaning in distress. Several members of his family attended him, trying to soothe his suffering. Siddhartha returned to Channa and asked him: “What has happened to him to that poor man?” “Nothing, my lord, he is simply ill.” “And why is he like that?” “I don’t know, my lord, but I don’t believe that there is any special reason; all of us are like that at some moment in our life.” “All humans?” Siddhartha exclaimed, even more alarmed, “You mean that all my friends will become ill?” “Indeed, my lord.” “And my father, he’ll also become ill?” “Indeed, my lord.” “And what of myself, will I become ill?” Siddhartha asked, frightened. “Unfortunately, that is what awaits you, my lord,” responded Channa.

A short time later, Siddhartha saw a corpse on a funeral pyre. Upon noticing that someone was lighting the branches underneath, Siddhartha was moved to stop it and said to Channa: “We must save that man! They are burning him!” Holding Siddhartha back, Channa explained to him: “My lord, that man is dead. The family is incinerating the body according to our funeral rites.” “Dead?” Siddhartha asked, confused. “Why has he died?” “I don’t know, my lord, but I don’t believe that there is a special reason; death awaits all human beings at the end of life.” “All human beings?” Siddhartha exclaimed, supremely alarmed “You mean that all my friends will die?” “Indeed, my lord.” “And my father, he also will die?” “Indeed, my lord.” “And what of myself, will I die?” Siddhartha asked, in absolute fright. “Unfortunately, that is what awaits you, my lord,” responded Channa.

At this point, Siddhartha was falling apart. Ageing, disease and death – the “three celestial messengers” – as the legend calls them, had destroyed the illusion of security that his father had tried to construct in the walled city. (See the section “The hero’s journey” in Chapter 3, Volume 1, “Learning to Learn,” especially the commentaries about the important role of disillusionment on the path of knowledge.) Siddhartha’s pain, sadness and fear irreversibly plunged him into a “dark night of the soul.” But the story doesn’t finish here. Siddhartha saw a fourth scene which, literally, “blew his mind.” A monk with an immense smile of happiness passed Siddhartha and Channa.

“What happened to him?” Siddhartha asked, “Doesn’t he know that he also, like all of us, will become old, sicken and die?” “Surely he knows it, my lord.” “Then, why does he smile?” “I don’t know, my lord.” At this moment, Siddhartha understood that his father’s walls were no more capable of stopping suffering than a wall of sand could hold back the sea. Yet there was knowledge powerful enough to make that monk smile; and that knowledge was worth more than anything in the world was.

This was the beginning, recounts the legend, of the path that lead Siddhartha to leave his father, family, friends, and luxuries of the court; the path that lead him to become a yogi, an untiring seeker of illumination, and finally to discover the essential nature of existence. Many years later, when Siddhartha “awakened” under the Bodhi tree – thus becoming Buddha – he finally realized why the monk had been smiling. And then, he too, smiled.

(Although on a smaller scale, I hope that you smile in the same way after practicing the exercises in Chapter 19, Volume 2, “Meditation, Energy and Health” – exercises not unlike those of Siddhartha’s – and after reading Chapter 26 of this volume, “Spiritual Optimism.”)

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