

RCUI PUBLIC SEMINAR SERIES
Johannes Kelpius Lodge , Boston, MA

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Held: October 30, 2015

THE FREEDOM SERIES: Segment 1.02

THE NATURE OF EMOTIONS

In order to fully appreciate the power of the Freedom Exercises, we would need to undertake an analysis of the many factors important in eliciting emotive states answering questions defining the nature of emotions, what they really are, how they came to be over evolutionary time, and how to rationally utilize them. And truthfully, this is not an easy matter after listening to the disagreement between emotion theorists. And even such an analysis would be incomplete until we understood the physiological relationships between our organ systems, the autonomic nervous system, the spinal nervous system, the hormonal system, the hindbrain, midbrain, and forebrain, and who knows what else.

Progress has been made over the last century and I shall discuss such in a more advanced seminar. However, all this is not needed for each of you to effectively utilize the Freedom Exercises. And utilization is why we are sharing time together today.

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However, it is important for us to arrive at a common understanding of the most basic words used in everyday conversation when talking about emotional experience.

(1) When I use the word ‘feelings,’ I am referring to those sensations you perceive in your conscious awareness when experiencing an emotive state. For example, if you are really scared and afraid, you might notice the output of the visceromotor system producing wet, chilly palms, racing heart, rapid breathing, tightness in your gut, and other feelings attributable to the body. Layered on top of such physiological signs, are more subtle feelings of apprehension and foreboding and find you cannot move or cannot remain where you are. If asked, most of us would use our language and cognitively label the sum of all of these feelings and body states with the emotional label--FEAR. Whenever, a socially-agreed upon cognitive label or name is grafted onto an emotive state which is easily identified by covert social behavior I call such an ‘emotion.’ This definition is consistent with one offered by James and Lange in the 19th century and recent adaptations.

(2) When I refer to an ‘emotive state,’ I am referring to all of the physiological and psychological processes occurring post-stimulation by an eliciting event or agent inducing compensatory overt and covert motor responses. Generally,

emotive states draw the attention of conscious awareness generating neural circuits such that we experience conscious feelings.

(3) The word ‘emotive’ derives from Latin and means ‘causing movement.’ That is, an emotive event is one capable of arousing emotions,

(4) Herein, the word ‘conscious’ refers to the cognitive content made available for consideration by the unconscious processes of the brain. We can state that we are aware and know it. Consciousness has perceptual content.

The most important factor to focus upon when working the Freedom Exercises is that of our consciously noted feelings. What bothers or excites us most during an emotive state are the feelings generated themselves. Feelings, in and of themselves, are straightforward perceptions of the state of our body-brain, and may simply be observed as to particular qualities and intensities currently present. Moreover, extended observation upon our ‘feeling states’ teaches us that feelings, though they arise from brain processing, often fail to represent the actual state of the body. For instance, in the vast majority of chronic pain syndromes the initial injury is generally healed or stabilized prior to six months. Unfortunately, injury-activated, central neural circuits involved in alerting the patient to acute tissue damage, e.g., nucleus accumbens, anterior cingulate cortex, and the

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ventromedial prefrontal cortex, do not return to quiescence after body healing.

Rather, the patient continues to suffer ongoing ‘hurt’ and ‘psychological distress.’

Such continued activity within the brain is resistant to medical treatment and is often debilitating.

I treated such patients for many years and learned a great deal about associated physiology, feelings, and emotions. One of the most interesting was the observation that the intensity of pain experienced by every single patient was 2 - 4 times more than what I would expect from an overacting central neural circuit processing physiological ‘hurting.’ So the question became, why are patients claiming honestly to be in significantly more pain?

It took a long time to solve this mystery, though the answer in the end was not very complex. First, none of their prior practitioners had bothered to explain or demonstrate that the neural circuitry underlying ‘physiologic nociception’ or hurting, was independent of those underlying ‘psychological distress’ or suffering. Second, each patient had unconsciously adopted and entered into a well-defined social role—called ‘chronic pain patient.’ A ‘chronic pain patient’ does not get better. Third, practitioners had complicated medical treatment by transforming the simpler state of ongoing nociception into a complicated and intertwined emotive

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state named PAIN. Fourth, medical practitioners believe that humans conditions are linearly related to prior conditions in time; when, in truth, we rarely operate in a linear manner. Rather, for us causality is associative and not temporal. Past experiences are associated unconsciously with our current experience, this particular individual is associated unconsciously with one or more qualities and actions towards us, this word is semantically linked with this emotive state or social role, and so on. In other words, inside your head lives a vast, invisible, multidimensional array of neural processors linked together by past experiences, beliefs, expectations, hopes, fears, and so on. A great semantic map!

Subsequently, whenever a practitioner asked a patient to rate his or her level of pain—it is impossible to separate out the components of hurting from suffering—as patients believe their feelings of distress and pain came from a single system. Effective pain management is impossible as long as patients truly believe in the socially-created role of ‘chronic pain patient.’

Once I understood the underlying nature of the brain in chronic pain, I was able to correct such misconceptions, I could begin effective treatment to allay hurting as a central neural process and suffering as a psychological neural process. Guess what? Patients cured themselves.

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The reason I brought up chronic pain was to introduce several factors common to our general feeling state—which we call moods. Each and every mood has a hedonic tone or valence interpreted cognitively as ‘pleasant’ or ‘unpleasant’ as well as a cognitive evaluation as to ‘liking’ or ‘disliking.’ Currently, neuroscientists believe that the anterior cingulate gyrus is where such qualia are added to bare sensation. Moreover, transient emotive states also display similar feelings and evaluations. From what I have already discussed, clearly underlying the cognitive labels of pleasantness and likability are neural circuits whose function are related to avoiding actions which are not conducive to survival and continuing actions which are beneficial.

The mental and physiological states to which we are desiring are ones to be experienced directly and without complication by the the cognitive labels of pleasantness and likability. Our goal is to simply experience and observe the most basic feelings related to the emotive state without [1] cognitive exaggeration and hedonic biasing or [2] joining our current feelings to remembered feelings and their assorted cognitive associations. Experiencing ‘bare feelings’ is analogous to the early Buddhist teachings of mindfulness and ‘bare attention.’

Such skills can be learned via [1] intentional observations of our most basic

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feelings and how they are related to various body organs and posture over a significant period of time or [2] sustained practice of the Freedom Exercises. The first approaches the goal directly and the second indirectly. Today, we deal only with the indirect method as it provides some additional benefits over time.

EXERCISE NUMBER TWO

In the next set of exercises, we are going to use self-hypnosis so to place ourselves into an attentive state in which we simply observe the bare feelings present to our awareness. When I say bare feelings, I mean those feelings which remain when you give up your cognitive labels of pleasantness, liking, or naming. This means giving up many words—such as depressed, angry, hateful, proud, happy and a thousand more words. Bare feelings are difficult to name for they are many different kinds. Some useful phrases are simple joy, contentment, clarity, utter peace, well being and so on. Usually, bare feelings are best understood by matching them to images such as ‘a calm pool of clear water,’ ‘a warm, cozy bath,’ a ‘turbulent mountain stream,’ ‘a burning poker,’ and so on. The feeling generated by the image needs to be of the same tone as what you are observing within.

Step 1: Adjust your posture so you are sitting symmetrically with your feet firmly on the floor and your hands separated and resting on your thighs. When

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comfortable, take in a slow, deep, effortless inhalation, hold it for a few seconds and then exhale slowly, effortlessly, freely and without restraint. As you exhale, let go of the tension in shoulders and neck, feel the upper body and arms relax as the body settles into the seat of the chair. Allow the eyes to close by themselves as the breath exits the lungs.

Each inhalation, holding and exhalation must be effortless and free of straining in the chest or diaphragm. Relaxation comes only from simple and soft action.

Step 2: Take another slow, deep breath of air, effortlessly holding it for several seconds, and then begin a slow exhalation. Continue to breath softly. Shortly, I am going to count downwards from 103 to 101 and when I get to 101, I want all of you to have inhaled and be holding your breath without straining. I will then count downwards as you exhale trying to time your last bit of air with my very last number. . .103 . . .102 . . .101 . . . count with me it your mind. . . 100 . . .99 . . . 98 . . .97. . . 96. . . 95; concluding the exhalation smoothly as I intone the final number.

Step 3: Continue to breath softly, focusing attention upon how the body feels resting in the chair. If there is discomfort, do not be upset or concerned . . . just allow this feeling to remain just as it is . . .focus attention on whatever part of the

body feels uncomfortable. Just observe the feeling. How intense is it and how does the intensity vary as you watch. Does it have a sensory component? Sharp, dull, throbbing, pinching and so on. If you are comfortable . . . then comfort is simply present . . . where does comfort begin . . . where does comfort radiate towards . . . focus upon this body feeling. Does it feel like anything you recognize? Are there any sensory words to describe the feelings present. Do any images arise from the unconscious which are visible analogs of the feeling. Take the next few minutes to better understand the simple nature of the feeling present.

Step 4: Take another inhalation, hold it for several seconds and begin to slowly exhale as you softly count downwards 94 . . . 93 . . . 92 . . . 91 . . . 90.

Step 5: Take another inhalation, and as you take air into your lungs, say out loud: 1... 2... 3... eyes open and fully present.

Would some of you like to discuss your experience? It will be very helpful for all of us as unified group. I will make inquiries as needed.

EXERCISE THREE

In this exercise, I am going to ask each of you to choose a strong emotion to re-experience during the next self hypnosis period. Since you are recalling a time when you strongly felt such an emotive state, the feelings may arise from the

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underlying neural circuits without much associated body changes or slight changes. It does not matter. What matters is to pay attention to what you feeling is—not what it means or represents. We are going to ‘play with such feelings’ in trance so to show you how ephemeral feelings actually are when they are not reinforced by self talk and other emotions.

Step 1: Adjust your posture so you are sitting symmetrically with your feet firmly on the floor and your hands separated and resting on thighs. When comfortable . . . take in a slow, deep, effortless inhalation, hold it for a few seconds and then exhale slowly, effortlessly, freely and without restraint. As you exhale, let go of the tension in shoulders and neck, feel the upper body and arms relax as the body settles into the seat of the chair. Allow the eyes to close as the breath exits the lungs.

Each inhalation, holding and exhalation must be effortless and free of straining in the chest or diaphragm. Relaxation comes only from simple and soft action.

Step 2: Take another slow, deep breath of air, effortlessly holding it for several seconds, and then begin a slow exhalation. Continue to breath softly. Shortly, I am going to count downwards from 103 to 101 and when I get to 101, I want all of

you to have inhaled and be holding your breath without straining. I will then count downwards as you exhale trying to time your last bit of air with my very last number. . .103 . . .102 . . .101 . . . count with me in your mind. . . 100 . . .99 . . . 98 . . .97. . . 96. . . 95; concluding the exhalation smoothly as I intone the final number.

Step 3: As you relax further in your self hypnosis you shall find that you are less easily distracted away from the task at hand . . . quietly begin thinking of some event in the past which had a very strong emotive state attached to it . . . maybe anger or anxiety or fear . . . it does not have to be unpleasant . . . choose a happy event and relive this in your mind. As you remember your event . . . allow the memories to be fully present so that the feelings will be very easy to observe. . . As you observe your state you will see that not only are the bare feelings present, but so many thoughts and opinions and judgments . . . continue focusing your attention on this inner state . . . I will give you a minute or so to do this.

Our first chore is to pick one of the myriad of thought labels running through your head . . . reach up and take one thought or particular word . . . imagine throwing it out of one of the many doors to conscious deliberation . . . find another word or thought and throw it away . . . keep doing this until you run out of words which label or explain your bare feelings. . . as you rid your

conscious awareness of such labels . . . notice what happens to your overall feeling state. I will give you another couple minutes to throw your labels and beliefs and expectations away so to see what remains as ‘bare feelings.’ Such bare feelings may have no affinity with your original emotive state.

Step 4: Take another inhalation, hold it for several seconds and begin to slowly exhale as you softly count downwards 94... 93... 92. . . 91. . . 90.

Step 5: Take another inhalation, and as you take air into your lungs, say out loud: 1... 2... 3... eyes open and fully present.

Would some of you like to discuss your experience? It will be very helpful for all of us as unified group. I will make inquiries as needed.

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