

Emotions out of control?

Heal yourself with awareness and meditation

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Introduction

Nothing is more important than being aware. Living in awareness is like being awake, while living without awareness is like being asleep. Negative feelings and emotional binges happen; we need to observe them and understand them, and we need to begin to be aware of them as soon as they come up. Here is a recipe for managing emotional binges and healing yourself:

- (a) Observe them, looking at the feelings involved and at the commentary involved, and at how the commentaries and the feelings intensify each other, leading to an emotional “binge”.
- (b) Apply awareness as often as possible, so as to notice the feelings and the commentaries when they are still small
- (c) Possibly use Affirmations (Talpa-Tama)
- (d) Use Centering Prayer.

But how did he do it?

Someone asked a teacher: How long will it take me to solve my problem? The teacher said: only the time it takes you to understand it.

Suppose you understand the problem, but are taken by surprise when something - an unkind word or look from somebody else, perhaps – comes so unexpectedly that you are already boiling with rage or envy or some other negative emotion by the time you notice what is happening? Your understanding was not enough because you had no awareness of yourself at that crucial time, until it was too late. So you need both understanding and awareness.

It is said that respected teacher Ali, of the family of the prophet Mohammed, was about to legally execute an enemy soldier with his sword. Ali drew his sword and raised it. The soldier spat in Ali's face. Ali stopped, replaced the sword in its sheath, turned around, and walked away. The other man, astounded, ran after Ali and asked for an explanation. Ali told him, "At first I was going to kill you according to the law, but when you spat in my face, I was going to kill you in anger. So I stopped." The soldier then asked Ali to be his teacher.

Sorry I had to use a war story, with enemies and killing. But the story is really about the way Ali manages his own emotions. How did Ali do it? If he were not aware, he would not have noticed the anger and its implications. If he had not noticed the anger quickly enough, he would not have been able to stop his own arm from bringing down the sword of anger.

For most kinds of emotional blocks and out-of-control reactions, the solution is thus quite straightforward: be *aware* of the problem; *understand* what is going on; live with heightened *awareness* and catch the negative emotions with this awareness *early*, when they are still just starting up and still low in intensity; then just *drop* them, but continue to be aware. This is how to live awake instead of living asleep.

Living with awareness

Living with awareness is a delightful experience, and it invites miraculous change to happen in your life, and it won't need much effort. Rather than effort you will need a certain discipline. For an athlete, doing his or her sport is enjoyable and challenging, and the frequent training that is required comes naturally: most of the time it's not a hard, unpleasant effort but a regular, enjoyable, discipline. The main effort is remembering – remembering to be aware. The Greek philosopher Socrates declared that life lived without awareness is not worth living. Many of us don't live with awareness – we are like robots, living a mechanical life. Someone can push your button by praising your clothes or your hair, and you will feel good and feel proud of yourself; or they can push your other button by means of an unkind word about you or your mother, and you will feel bad.

It's like switches, on a machine. Do you want to live like that? Do you want to act under the influence of these emotional reactions? When the emotional reactions get out of control, it's a sort of emotional binge, like drinking too much alcohol all at once. You are being controlled by your emotional programs built up in childhood, and by other people pressing your buttons.

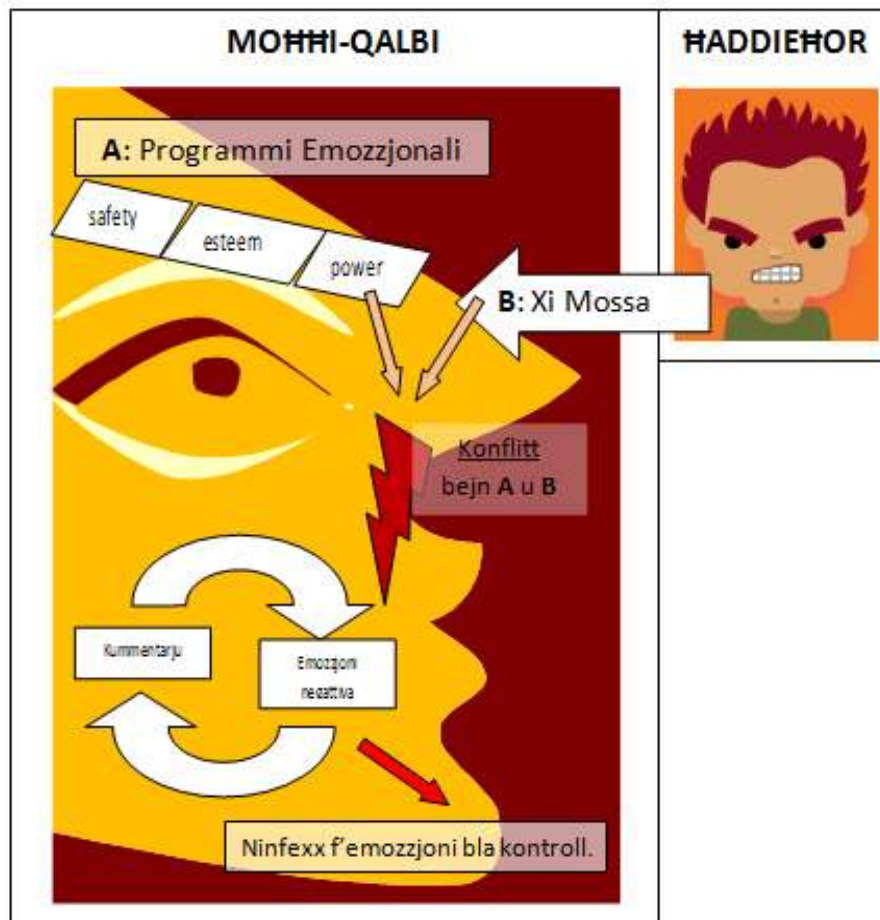
Can you be aware of yourself? Go on, try it now.

Practice this for a few moments: Look at yourself from a step back, almost as if you were some other person looking at you, but – this is the most important point – do it without judging, praising, or evaluating yourself in any way. Just look at what goes on inside you without judging or praising and without being caught up in it. Just look.

That’s what it means to be aware of yourself. If you are judging, praising, or putting yourself down, you’re not being a clear-eyed observer because you have not taken a step back from the normal internal life – you are still in it, and you cannot see properly from inside the ordinary self: you would simply be adding a voice to all your usual voices. The real observation that is called “awareness” does not involve judgement – it’s just looking, not thinking or feeling. Try this exercise as often as you can and make sure

Ninfexx f’emozzjoni negattiva bla kontroll?

Nifhem, inħares ġewwa, u ninduna kmieni!



you are not blaming or praising or criticising yourself.

Living with awareness means to be less caught up in yourself. You will probably give yourself permission to accept yourself without hating yourself. Then you will be able to love other people. This love will heal yourself and others.

Understanding oneself

When you are aware, you will notice more of what is happening inside you. Then you can *think* about what has been observed, and try to *understand* it. Even here, you should try to understand without praising or blaming, or making excuses for

yourself, or putting yourself down in any way. Whatever there is in your mind and heart at present, try and understand it, and maybe also understand where it came from (but don’t blame somebody else for it, either!)

What will you discover? Here is one possibility: you may discover that you (like all of us) have emotional needs for safety, esteem, and power over others. These have been called “emotional programs for happiness”. That is, without you being necessarily aware of it, your ordinary self “thinks” that it needs safety, esteem, and power in order to be happy, and it is always trying to meet these felt needs.

You may discover that when somebody ignores you, or insults you, or threatens you, or does something else, that action may clash with your emotional needs for safety or esteem or power. Such a clash or conflict seems to create a negative feeling in you, which may be anger, aggression, dislike, hurt feelings, jealousy, despair, self-hatred, putting oneself down, self-pity, regarding oneself as a victim, or other negative emotions.

You may discover that during such times you talk to yourself silently and make a “*Commentary*” such as “that person doesn’t like me” or “who does he think he is?” or “I’m a complete failure”. Does this Commentary reduce the negative feeling? On the contrary, it probably increases it! It’s like stoking a flame: the flame gets larger and hotter. A more intense negative feeling is generated, and this, in turn, calls up a stronger Commentary. This, in turn, generates a stronger feeling. Pretty soon, in a few seconds or minutes, the negative emotion rises so much that it is out of control, and you are having an emotional binge (tkun qed tinfexx fl-emozzjoni negattiva bla kontroll, jew tkun “qabzitlek”).

You may also discover, or remember, the damage done by such emotional binges to yourself and to others in the past.

The more you understand the mechanisms within yourself, the more you are able to accept yourself – you will be able to live with yourself without hating yourself. Then you will have the courage to change. And you will also have the courage to love, and to take necessary risks so as to live a full life that includes serving others. This love, in turn, will help to heal you and others.

Applying Awareness

So, what can you do after you have understood what is going on?

You should get into the habit of thinking that the internal stuff you have discovered is not “you” but something that you have. To *identify with* something means to think that you *are* that something. *Don’t identify* with these processes and tendencies and feelings and commentaries – these are things that come and go. Think of them as, not “you”, but simply as parts of a mechanism that works in certain ways, which you are studying. Don’t blame yourself, either, provided that you are willing to understand the consequences of certain reactions you may have made in the past.

Okay, so what next? You can become so constantly aware that you start noticing the negative emotion earlier and earlier every time. Soon, you should be able to notice the negative emotion *at the very beginning*, when it is still very small. You will find that there is a sort of desire to let it go, to drop it, which is easy to do because the negative feeling is still small. So drop it! Don’t forget the Commentary that goes with the negative feeling: you need to be aware of that, too, as early as possible, and of course

you then have to drop that too, at once. It's important to notice here that we are not talking about suppressing or hiding or ignoring the early negative feeling or the early commentary. We are talking, rather, of noticing and dropping. This is quite different from hiding or ignoring or suppressing. It might go something like this, for example, when I start to get angry with someone:

He has challenged my self-esteem with that word he said to me. [AWARENESS, BASED ON A PREVIOUS UNDERSTANDING]

Oh – here it comes! Here is the beginning of the anger (it's my anger, but it's not "me" really; it comes and goes). At this moment, it is still so low it's only a small irritation at present (but I know it will grow if I indulge it). [AWARENESS]

And ah! There is the negative commentary I am making inside my mind, to go with the negative feeling. [AWARENESS]

I drop the little anger, right now. [A SMALL, EASY, ACT OF THE WILL]

I drop the negative commentary, right now! [A SMALL, EASY, ACT OF THE WILL]

What a relief! I feel more free already!

Sfidali ir-rispett lejja nnifsi b'dik il-kelma li qalli. [AWARENESS ISSA SKOND MA NKUN FHIMT QABEL]

Aa! Ara ġejja! Qed inħoss l-ewwel tikka rabja. (Ir-rabja hija tiegħi iżda m'hijies "jien" – dik tiġi u tmur). S'issa, dis-sekonda, ir-rabja għadha kif bdiet, u għalhekk għadha tant dgħajfa li tista' ssejthilha biss irritazzjoni, imma qed tikber kull sekonda. [AWARENESS]

Aa! Arah dak il-kummentarju li qed nisma ġej minn ġewwa, li jmur mal-emozzjoni negattiva. [AWARENESS]

Dik ir-rabja, li s'issa għadha zgħira, inċediha, nitlaqha, ma nagħtijiex merħba, nitlaqha minn idejja iss' issa! [ATT MHUX DIFFIĊLI TA' VOLONTÀ]

Inċedi wkoll il-kummentarju iss' issa! [ATT MHUX DIFFIĊLI TA' VOLONTÀ]

Taf li diġà inħossni illiberat u eħfef!

You may think that God is not helping you sort out your own problems. If you feel this, it could well be that you are so filled with your negative feelings and commentaries that you have not left a place for God to come through. Is this what's happening? You can solve this problem by these methods; that is, understand, don't identify, accept what there is (for now), be aware, catch the negative feelings and commentaries *early*, and drop them. Much more space is left inside your cup when you do this, and God, who is always present, will fill the remaining space with his grace and healing energy. Open yourself to God's grace: it's always there, but sometimes it's waiting for our permission.

Using affirmations

Besides awareness, one additional method is that of using an affirmation (talba-tama), such as:

If you believe in a Higher Power your affirmation may sound something like this:

God help me!

My God, I trust in You.

Lord, I throw myself at your mercy!

Alla, għinni!
Alla tiegħi, nafdak
Mulej, nintelaq fil-ħniena tiegħek.

If you don't believe in a Higher Power, then you will have to choose an affirmation that makes sense to you, such as "I will not be trapped by negative emotions. I will let them go." or "I will not fall into the anger trap; I will let it go as soon as it starts."

Some people rely on affirmations like these to come to their mind at the right time. You probably need to repeat your affirmation many times at times when you don't have a problem, to be sure that it will come into your mind and heart at the right time. The right time is when your negative emotion is still at the very beginning. The right time is not when you have already lost your temper, or going through an emotional binge of jealousy, hatred, resentment, frustration, self-pity or whatever. As you know from your past experience, unless you do something about it early enough you are going to get swept up again by the strong emotional current.

Make sure that your chosen affirmation does not put you, in your mind and heart, against other people. It might seem comforting, for example, to say: "God, help me and punish them." But that's probably one of the worst things you can do; you are asking God to keep you separate from others in your little safe ego shell, and you are closing yourself off from the rest of the world.

Don't forget that if you don't forgive those who have hurt you, or if you are habitually judgemental, you are heading for deep, deep trouble and unhappiness. So don't forget to deal with lack of forgiveness (and its negative emotions: anger, resentment, jealousy, self-pity, loss of face, or whatever) and with angry blaming commentaries in your mind and heart.

Using Centering Prayer

If you have found a prayer, or a type of prayer, that seems to help you, remember to practice it often enough. A person who prays is not alone.

Persons who trust in a Higher Power may wish to learn how to give the ego or ordinary self a rest for 20 minutes at a time by simply not talking to oneself and not daydreaming, while at the same time resting in God, without using a picture of God. One way of doing this is called Centering Prayer (It-Talba tal-Kunsens). See www.contemplativeoutreach.com or www.EasterSpirit.com and download a brochure in one of several languages (English and Maltese included). If you have this experience 20 minutes twice daily, the foundation of your emotional binges and incessant commentaries will be eroded, and you will have peace. Your commentaries may be one or more of the following:

I am a failure.
I am worthless.
I am angry with everything.
I am unhappy all the time.

I want to fight and destroy things.

Jien falliment.

Ma niswa' xej'.

Nirrabja dwar kollox.

Dejjem qalbi sewda,

qatt ma jien kuntent.

Irrid nigġieled u nkisser.

With a meditative prayer like Centering Prayer, if you follow the instructions in the leaflet and do it properly, the strength of these voices should get weaker and weaker.

Such a practice opens you up to energies of healing and motivation that are not only your own but are also beyond your ordinary self. You will also get great peace, joy, confidence, security, and the ability to love and to receive love. You will realise more of the beauty and sacredness of every thing and every place and every moment of live, and you will live in gratitude.

Summary

In order to heal and to live happily and peacefully, do the following:

Practice living with an awareness of yourself and of the world around you as continually as possible without judging, criticising or praising yourself.

Understand negative emotions and the commentaries that increase those emotions. Understand your childhood emotional programs of safety, esteem, and power – and make sure they don't get on top of you; make sure they don't make an unhealthy interference with the way you relate to other people. Understand what happens in you when someone threatens these emotional programs for happiness.

Be aware of the negative emotions earlier and earlier as they arise. Continue to be aware of what goes on inside you all the time, so that with this awareness you can train yourself to "catch" the negative emotion at the earliest possible moment. This is the moment when the emotion is still weak, not yet intense. Then *drop* the emotion, also with awareness of what you are doing. Be aware at the same time of the corresponding commentary, and drop that as well.

If you wish you may use an affirmation, which will come to your mind and heart at times of emotional need.

Consider a practice that puts the self-talk to rest for 20 minutes at a time and opens you up to the all-present God. Centering Prayer is one such practice. This will heal you and open you to the beauty, the joy, and the love.

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