

IV. Taking an Emotional Pulse

Just as our heart is beating every moment of our existence, so are we feeling something every moment of our waking day. Unless we have a reason to measure our heartbeat we don't stop and take our pulse to know that we are alive. And, unless we experience a crisis or major shift in our life experience, neither do we stop to take an "emotional pulse" to know what we are feeling. We take our heartbeat, and our feelings, for granted. Yet, learning to "check in" with ourselves can be a valuable means for personal growth and self-awareness. By identifying certain emotions, we can learn to understand, and ultimately release, those emotions that are holding us back and creating unhappiness. But we can't release anything that we haven't fully identified, understood and taken responsibility for.

It is important to realize that certain emotions exist in *context*. For example, the emotions we feel at home are typically quite different than the emotions we feel at work or with our friends. I may be upset with my boss but feel quite loving with my partner. Yet if I haven't fully dealt with my upset at work I may bring those emotions home with me and, without realizing it, may take these emotions out on the person that I love. I may even come to believe that the emotion *is* with my partner when it is in fact an emotion that I feel at work. If we stop to examine, we can see this dynamic at play very clearly in our love relationships. *We contaminate our primary relationship or present moment with old emotions that existed in another context or in another time of our lives.* If we do not make the distinction between what is now and what is then, or between what is here and what is there, then we will act out feelings that are inappropriate for the present context. Or, at minimum depending on the intensity, these unresolved emotions will tend to color *every* aspect of our lives. So, by placing the emotion in context you will create important distinctions that will help you deal effectively with the emotion.

Taking an emotional pulse is *consciously directing your awareness toward your inner world*. There are two basic approaches you can take. You can start with a *present* feeling or you can start with the context. Starting with the present feeling is simply stopping wherever you are, whatever you are doing and asking yourself the question, "What am I feeling *right now?*" and then responding to the question. You can use "My Emotions and Thoughts" page to help you label or put a word to the feeling. Right now as I write these words I am feeling upset with a phone call I just made. I wanted something done and the person I talked to said that it could not be done. I perceived her as rigid and inflexible and unwilling to make an effort to take a particular action. The emotion is, "anger", "resentment". The thoughts that go along with the emotion are, "wait a minute, this does not make sense to me. You told me one thing and you're doing another. You can't push me around like that." From this awareness I can say, "Within the context of my work I am feeling angry and resentful."

Depending on when you stop to take an emotional pulse, the intensity of the feeling may be mild or disturbing. And of course, the feeling may not always be "negative". We are focusing on the negative because it is the negative feelings that interrupt your peace of mind. It is certainly just as important to acknowledge and feel the "positive" and you may very well get in touch with these feelings when you take your emotional pulse. It doesn't matter what the feeling is, as long as you learn to put words to it.

It is very easy for us to gloss over our emotional state and regard our feelings as insignificant. Or, maybe we might "check in" with ourselves and acknowledge nondescriptly, "I'm OK" without really looking. Even a mild feeling may contain much more substance than at first glance. Perhaps I'm feeling a mild feeling of emptiness and as I look at that feeling I discover that a few hours before, my mother called and was critical of a certain action. As I

acknowledge this feeling, I am aware of concluding, "she doesn't care." And as I reflect on the feeling even further, I discover that this is a thought that I think quite frequently in other situations. It has even become my view of people in general, "nobody really cares."

Another way of taking an emotional pulse is to take an inventory of your emotions much as you did in the first exercise. You start with reflecting on the contexts of your life and asking yourself, "where am I emotionally in this context?" and then going through the checklist of emotions. One way of proceeding, as you reflect on these various contexts, is to ask yourself, "Am I at peace in this area?" or "Do I seem troubled in any way in this area?" Once you answer that question, you can then get more specific about the emotions.

The whole purpose of taking an emotional pulse is to identify the negative feelings that are holding you back and to realize *it is the feelings themselves* that is the source of your unhappiness. Without identifying the feelings, we will tend to look outside as the "cause" of our distress. This is not to say that certain events don't "trigger" certain emotions but once the emotion is triggered, it is up to me to find a way to deal with it. If I am not dealing with it inside, the only other choice is to blame, punish, attack and accuse the one who "caused" me such pain. This can only lead to a never-ending cycle of attack and defend. And, again, this is not to say that one must ignore real events that are harmful, or pretend that certain events don't exist. If there is real abuse or physical attack, I need to take steps to protect myself. But there are many lesser circumstances where the "hurt" or the "offense" is nothing more than a violation of my own "shoulds" and beliefs. Or perhaps it is simply how I am interpreting the event that is the cause of my distress.

At least once a day over the next week, take a moment out of your day to ask yourself, "Where am I emotionally?" You can try either method that you choose. This may take no more than a couple of minutes but you can certainly take more time to "open up" or "flesh out" the feeling. Sometimes, simply acknowledging the feeling allows it to disappear but other feelings may require a little more working through. Once you identify the feeling, see if you can write out some of the thoughts that go along with the feeling (again, "My Emotions and Thoughts" page may be helpful). This process may seem tedious at first but you are learning to train yourself to look within. And it will get easier, and eventually it will become second nature.

Once you identify the feeling, try putting it in one of the following forms so that you can distinguish the context, and then connect the feeling to the thoughts that you are "running" in your own mind rather than to the external event or person. Lastly, see if you can identify any negative actions that lead from the feelings and thoughts.

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	CONTEXT	FEELING	because I am...	NATURE OF THOUGHT	THOUGHT	ACTION
In regard to my...	<input type="checkbox"/> marriage <input type="checkbox"/> primary relationship <input type="checkbox"/> work <input type="checkbox"/> family of origin <input type="checkbox"/> financial situation <input type="checkbox"/> current family <input type="checkbox"/> spiritual life <input type="checkbox"/> inner life <input type="checkbox"/> education <input type="checkbox"/> communication <input type="checkbox"/> alcohol/drug use <input type="checkbox"/> social life <input type="checkbox"/> body <input type="checkbox"/> past <input type="checkbox"/> future <input type="checkbox"/> present moment <input type="checkbox"/> event _____ <input type="checkbox"/> relationship with _____ <input type="checkbox"/> other _____	I am feeling...	because I am...	<input type="checkbox"/> believing <input type="checkbox"/> telling myself <input type="checkbox"/> interpreting <input type="checkbox"/> assuming <input type="checkbox"/> demanding <input type="checkbox"/> imagining <input type="checkbox"/> concluding <input type="checkbox"/> expecting <input type="checkbox"/> remembering <input type="checkbox"/> picturing	which leads to the action of...	
EXAMPLE	marriage	<i>resentment anger</i>	because I am...	telling myself	<i>Susan does not care about how we spend money</i>	<i>blaming her and making her wrong</i>