

Lesson 117: Understanding the Difference between Feelings & Emotions

A great deal of emphasis is focused on the matter of emotions with respect to what they are or are not, when they should or should not be expressed and experienced, to what extent they should be expressed and experienced and how they should or should not be managed. As with everything else in life that lacks clarity of definition and purpose, there are different approaches and thought constructs that run the gambit of full expression to full suppression of the emotions and, of course, with everything in-between, depending upon whose viewpoint or belief you adhere to, which may or may not be psychologically beneficial. Added to the confusion is the matter of feelings, thought to be synonymous with emotions or as preceding emotions or are the result of emotions, and so are just as misunderstood. There are four reasons why it is important to understand the difference between feelings and emotions. First, is that feelings are not the same as emotions. Second, is that they each play a different role in your reality. Third, is that they are very important internal contributing factors that shape and mold your reality, as do other internal and external influences. Fourth, is that they too affect the quality of your life experiences. Thus, understanding the difference between your feelings and emotions is essential to identifying where they each begin and end and the distinct purpose they serve as a vital part of your reality. The purpose of this discussion is not only intended to help you understand the difference between your feelings and emotions because there is a difference, but to separate them so that you can understand how they are each affecting your reality, ultimately putting you more in touch with yourself and your reality.

The subject of what emotions are or are not is an ongoing and sometimes heated debate among psychologists, socialists and other scientists, such as cultural anthropologists and neuroscientists, with respect to whether or not emotions, especially anger, are actually emotions...are they internal or are they created between people. In fact, there is even a debate as to whether or not emotions actually exist. As if these differences in scientific perspective are not enough to keep stoking the fire of many a hot debate, there is the matter of what role the brain really plays with respect to the emotions. For a very long time it was determined that the limbic system was the seat of the emotions. Research now indicates that the limbic region of the brain is not the seat of emotions but is responsible for assessing the value of stimuli, among other cognitive responsibilities. However, given the fact that people do experience a wide range of changes in states of internal and interpersonal integration, albeit often far more subjective than objective, these changes are still considered emotions and, therefore, are treated in the scientific community as emotions, internally generated, until proven otherwise.

Without a doubt, emotional intelligence is paramount to a better quality of life, thus enough cannot be said about the importance of keeping the emotions in check and balance. Unfortunately, there are times in life when keeping the emotions in check and

balance proves to be much easier said than done and is really more of a process than it is an accomplishment. In times of stress, fear and anxiety emotions can escalate and things can get out of hand very quickly, which appears to make matters worse. However, this is not always the case. There are times when keeping the emotions in check and balance is not always a beneficial approach; in fact doing so can actually be quite limiting and can fence in opportunities for new experiences and block beneficial shifts in your reality. Sometimes the energy from strong negative emotions is just the boost needed to turn an undesirable situation into something desirable that often turns out to be far more rewarding, especially when it benefits others too. Negative emotions are sometimes the catalyst that can get you through a very difficult situation. They are the steam engine that can force a significant change in your reality that otherwise might not come to pass and that when resisted, can stall personal development and spiritual growth. The surprising transformation that often occurs equates to making a quantum leap from a very difficult place in your reality to something far better and unexpected. In some cases, the change that occurs is not only unimaginable and even thought to be impossible; these life-changing events are often expressed as having experienced a miracle. Such dramatic changes not only bring about a significant shift in your reality, they enhance your current personal experiences and will continue to shape and mold the quality of your future experiences in very unexpected ways.

From a scientific perspective, emotions play an important role in appraising and evaluating the environment and because they are always in a state of constant interaction with the environment, they assign relative meaning to the environment. The downfall is that emotions tend to assign meaning to the environment based on past events, which can be very problematic when these assessments are associated with painful conscious or unconscious memories. Whether the meanings assessed are accurate or not is a matter of personal choice in keeping with your beliefs and perceptions. Thus, if your beliefs and perceptions are distorted, your emotions will inaccurately assess your reality. Although emotions directly affect your personal interaction with the environment, they do not act alone. Emotions are part of a dynamic interplay between the mind and the brain, each taking on the task of assessing environmental influences and internal stimuli, which affects the way the environment is experienced. Inaccurate impressions of the environment, due to false assumptions, misconceptions and misunderstandings and outdated beliefs, not only affects personal interaction with the environment, the quality of interpersonal relationships is also affected.

From a psychological perspective, emotions reveal patterns of reactive behaviors linked to adverse events experienced sometime in the past, generally in childhood. As the same emotion or range of emotions is repeatedly expressed in response to the event, whether forgotten or remembered, eventually a pattern of reactive behavior emerges. These patterns are not only dysfunctional, the behavior itself is habituated, automatically acted

on whenever an event or a situation occurs that closely resembles the original event that initially triggered the behavior pattern, even if the original event has long been erased from conscious memory or didn't even occur in the current life time. These patterns of habituated behavior require little or no conscious thought or awareness; they are automatic responses to conscious or unconscious memories and other stimuli. When these behavior patterns are triggered by certain internal or external stimuli, they also trigger an avalanche of other undesirable affects that negatively manifest in your reality. Without some form of intervention or very honest self-observation, the dots are seldom connected because these events appear to be separate or isolated incidences, appearing to have nothing to do with one another because they happen to occur in different time sequences or at different stages of life, making it difficult to identify the reactive behavior pattern.

As emotions do not operate alone, but interface with neural and biological processes, they also interact with a number of other internal influencing factors, such as moods, fatigue, your priorities at any particular stage of your life and your overall wellness. Whether emotions are expressed verbally or non-verbally, they are first felt from within. Thus, your moods affect your emotions just as your emotions affect your moods. If you are well rested and comfortable with your environment, the balance is reflected in your emotions, which is reflected in your state of mind. When your mood changes, your emotions sense the change and automatically reflect the shift in your state of mind. Your emotions assess and assign meaning to your overall wellness, peace of mind and contentment with your environment, which too is always reflected in your state of mind. Your priorities, which tend to realign during the various stages of your life or in response to unexpected changes in your reality, also impress your emotions. The more important your priorities are, the stronger your emotions are toward those priorities. Thus, a shift in your reality may have a huge impact on your emotions because the priorities being affected are central in your reality at the time. However, at another time in your life, that same shift can occur in your reality and have little if any impact on your emotions because those same priorities are not as central in your reality as they were previously.

When emotions are suppressed or repressed they create internal conflicts in addition to the circumstance or event that triggered the emotions to begin with, that when left unexpressed and unresolved can have some very serious adverse affects - mentally, physically and even spiritually. Although suppression or repression is not a healthy means of coping with your emotions, neither is lashing out at others. Striking a healthy balance, especially during stressful times can be like walking on an emotional tightrope. On one hand, releasing emotions can be very therapeutic, as this is a release of pent of energy. However, doing so can cause more harm than good, which is why it is essential to take a time out, to think it out, as opposed to just reacting. The mess created from acting out with strong emotions can be harder to clean up than the actual event that

triggered the emotions. Unleashing emotions is a balancing act, as doing so without thought is not the antidote to settling a personal or interpersonal issue, which by the way is not the same as stating your case, even emphatically. When it comes to emotions, extremes in either direction are usually problematic. Emotions that rise to an extreme must also come down, just as emotions that spiral downward must also be raised back up and leveled off for the sake of emotional well-being, otherwise you can lose touch with reality. Emotions are responsible for physical and physiological changes in the body, thus, extreme fluctuations can cause unpleasant changes in response to chemicals released into the body. Some chemicals can be toxic to the body, such as the release of too much cortisol. Studies have shown that crying emotional tears helps to release built up toxins in the body, as well as to help alleviate emotional pain. Emotional tears contain certain chemicals that are indicative of high stress levels, that when not released remain in the body, eventually causing physical or physiological disorders.

Accurate interpretations of life events are difficult under the best of conditions, given the human propensity toward subjective interpretations, skewed by equally subjective assumptions, beliefs and perceptions. Attempting to discern life events accurately in the midst of a personal crisis, especially when strong emotions prevail is a challenge. Life is a subjective experience just by its very nature because it is largely dependent on sensory perceptions, which of themselves are subjective. Even intellect, which is primarily objective sometimes errs a little too close to being subjective. Although subjectivity can skew and distort life experiences, it is essential in many areas of life, most prominently in those that involve creativity, such as in the arts, as well as invention and even technological advancements. Because stress and duress is not a good time for a subjective interpretation of an undesirable situation, circumstance or event, emotional time out is very beneficial, as is unleashing emotions in a safe environment, where no one is harmed. Sometimes just releasing strong emotions in a safe environment is all it takes to get back on track. However, because emotions cause changes in the body, there is always the possibility of unpleasant side effects, such as fatigue, loss of appetite, headaches or body aches, as well as many other physical symptoms that so often appear to be unrelated, but are very much related.

Joy, sadness, anger and fear represent changes that occur in your emotions in response to the changes that occur in the states of personal and interpersonal integration. As mind and brain emerge, the outcome is reflected in the emotions. Your external world mirrors your internal world, thus, the more integrated your internal world is the more integrated your external world is. The result is emotional balance. States of internal unrest are the result of unresolved internal conflicts, which give rise to a range of negative feelings and emotions, such as sadness, fear, impatience, intolerance, frustration, resentment, anger, hostility and depression, none of which are conducive to living in harmony. Harmony requires balanced emotions and balanced emotions are the result of resolved inner and outer conflicts.

Feelings and emotions do not weigh equally on the scale of life, which is why it is so important to understand the difference between them and the role they each play in affecting your reality. Feelings tell you very important things about yourself and the nature of your personal reality that are so often in contrast to the way your emotions speak to you. Feelings tend more toward the subtleties of life, whereas emotions tend toward the immediate and more prominent aspects of life. Feelings generate a sense of right and wrong...emotions acknowledge good and bad. The difference is that the feeling of right and wrong sustains, whereas the emotions of good and bad are susceptible to the winds of change. Although feelings give credence to your emotions in the sense that feelings consider that your emotions matter, emotions on the other hand are more about what is going on externally, not about what is going on internally, thus they are like two ships passing in the night. Because emotions integrate more closely with reality, they not only establish attitude, they tend to set the ground rules of what is and is not acceptable...at least for today. However, attitude is subject to change as circumstances and events carve and shape your reality, whereas feelings tend toward longevity, mostly because they are supported by your beliefs, which too tend toward longevity. Thus, feelings are grounded in beliefs, whereas emotions are not necessarily reliant on or grounded in any belief structures, though beliefs may certainly influence them.

Although feelings tend toward longevity and stability and are mostly reliable, the downfall is that they tend to alert you to perceived or anticipated danger, which seldom actually happens because the danger is not real; it is the illusion of a non-existent danger. Unlike feelings, emotions take charge and alert you to immediate danger that is real in an objective sense. The similarity is that both feelings and emotions prepare you to act on the threat of danger, whether perceived or real by kicking in your fight-flight-freeze response, triggered by neural activities in the brain. In response to a real or perceived threat, the brain sends the appropriate signal to all the parts of your body, thus releasing the necessary chemicals into your body, such as endorphins, providing you with the necessary stamina for protection and survival, whether you really need it or not. While emotions alert you to immediate danger and prepare you to act in defense of danger, as well as assuring your immediate survival, feelings are all about the long-term preservation of self with respect to mind and body, thus acting as a ground.

Another contrast between feelings and emotions is that feelings tend to be low-keyed; whereas emotions are not only strongly expressed, they are temporary in nature. Emotions tend to come and go in contrast to feelings that tend to sustain over much longer durations. Because your feelings do not change as quickly as emotions, certain feelings can last a very long time, sometimes even a lifetime. When you express the feeling of love, the person whom the love is directed at can rely on the certainty of your feeling and the likelihood of its longevity. Love and emotional voids are entirely different expressions, though they are often treated as being the same. Although love is

generally considered an emotion, love is actually a feeling. Lust is a strong emotion and as emotions are temporary in nature, lust comes and goes in waves, unlike love, which is far more sustaining and durable, which is why love is not technically an emotion.

Feelings have emotional counterparts. The counterpart to the feeling of happiness is the emotion of joy, the feeling of worry is the counterpart to the emotion of fear, the feeling of contentment is the counterpart to the emotion of enthusiasm, the feeling of bitterness and depression is the counterpart to the emotion of anger and sadness. Feelings are distinguished from their emotional counterparts by their duration, keeping in mind that a feeling is sustainable, whereas an emotion is temporary, which makes it easy to distinguish one from the other and easier to identify the role each is playing in your reality. However, anger is questionable because anger can endure or it can be temporary. The issue of anger is a psychological hot button among many scientists, provoking ongoing debates as to whether or not anger is actually an emotion or is it a state of mind...a feeling. Although anger appears to be paradoxical in that it can be expressed as a feeling or it can be expressed as an emotion, anger is clearly discernible, whether as a feeling or as an emotion. An angry response is not the same as being angry. Being is a state of mind, which is a very different energy than an angry response, which is a temporary knee-jerk like reaction to an irritant. You can respond to someone angrily or you can be angry with that person. When anger is a state of mind, the feeling of anger can be long lasting and can even last for the duration of an entire lifetime. It is important to discern if you are responding out of anger or you are angry with someone because the outcomes are very different. If your anger is lasting, and because things are not always as they appear on the surface, you might want to consider exploring the underlying reasons for the anger.

Feelings do not establish attitude as do emotions, but they do reflect your prevailing attitude. Feelings also reflect the state of your mental and emotional health. Thus, if your feelings are predominantly negative, your mental and emotional health is probably at stake. Holding onto negative feelings makes personal and interpersonal integration difficult. Inhibited integration can result in isolation and depression, keeping in mind that feelings endure for long periods that can extend into weeks, months, years and even a lifetime, and when left unresolved can continue adversely affecting your personal reality. Negative feelings are the manifestation of internal or external conflicts, triggered by an undesirable event. Things happen in life; undesirable events occur as the result of choices you or others make, which can adversely affect the nature of your personal reality. Your experience with such events is rightfully expressed as the emotions of fear, anger or sadness and is most beneficial when not carried to extremes. Feelings are a little more comprehensive and can include unhappiness, worry, discontentment, bitterness, anger and possibly depression. The strength of your own constitution and the extent of your conditioning are internal factors that affect the intensity of your emotions and likewise affect the intensity of the event. Emotionally

disturbing experiences can cause a downward shift in your feelings to the extent that it becomes very difficult to overcome the impact. This in turn can create additional difficulties, such as inhibiting healthy integration in other areas of your life, making it difficult to function, be productive and creative, which can lead to mild or severe depression, as well as feelings of isolation. When healthy inner and interpersonal integration is sorely challenged, the shift in state of mind can lean in the direction of an anti-social attitude, rigidity and inflexibility, as well as personal chaos.

Awareness is very important because all expressions gauge the state of your mental health. Obviously, the longer you feel anger, when in the feeling state of mind, the more you put your mental and emotional health at risk and the more your attitude declines. A prolonged angry state of mind not only makes internal and interpersonal integration difficult, studies have shown that prolonged anger is linked to cancer and other illnesses and disorders, such as hypertension. When healthy integration shifts into inhibited personal or interpersonal integration with the environment, not only is it unhealthy, it can lead to irritation, intolerance and impatience, not to mention it doesn't do much in the way of extending kindness and compassion, and above all, it prohibits the expression of unconditional love. Thus, it cannot be stressed enough that a fundamental understanding of the role your feelings and emotions play in your reality is paramount to understanding how the quality of your life is affected by your feelings and your emotions in response to internal and external influences.

Keeping emotions in check and balance is not just a simple matter of making a conscious choice to do so. Intentions are certainly a worthy endeavor; however, the best of intentions can only go so far without knowing what underlying contributing factors are hidden beneath the surface. The best of intentions tend to hit the wall rather quickly when there are underlying contributing factors resulting in internal conflicts not yet resolved. Thus, the inability to keep emotions in check and balance without having first resolved any internal conflicts can do more harm than good in spite of good intentions because failing to do so can make you feel like a failure, which is very self-defeating. Attempts to keep certain emotions in check and balance by suppressing or repressing either the emotions and/or the cause of them is just as futile an effort and can undermine your well-being. This is not to say that there are times when holding back emotions is not beneficial because there are times when doing so is actually very beneficial, but only long enough to allow for clarity of mind. In other words, take some time to calm down. Breathe first and react second, that is, if you need to react at all. Sometimes things work out on their own. Reacting to situations in the heat of the moment tends to cause more problems than an emotional outburst is worth. Thus, controlling the emotions is essential in such times, but not to the point where suppression or repression creates additional internal conflicts that have to be resolved as well.

As feelings tend to be sustainable, emotions tend toward instability, which is why emotional intelligence is key to maintaining stable emotions. However, to achieve emotional intelligence it is essential to understand the difference between your feelings and your emotions. As was described above, feelings and emotions serve very different purposes and function much differently from one another. Maintaining stable emotions means making a clear distinction between your feelings and your emotions, especially given the built in propensity for one to fade quickly and the other to endure. Although feelings tend to be low-keyed and generally non-threatening, as opposed to emotions, which run on higher energies and can be quite threatening, feelings need to be reevaluated from time to time. Because feelings are backed by very specific belief structures, unexamined beliefs and feelings can morph into useless and self-defeating defense mechanisms. Thus, it is in your best interest to examine your beliefs from time to time, as a kind of self-motivated check and balance, just to make sure that your beliefs, which are supporting your feelings, are not outdated and are no longer serving a useful purpose. As living in the present requires your beliefs and feelings to be in harmony with your reality, it may be that your beliefs need an occasional alteration and your feelings need to undergo a little tweaking here and there just to make sure they are in accord with your current reality. Feelings that served a useful purpose in the past may not be serving the same useful purpose today. Although feelings are a built in safeguard, a place of reliability and assuredness, they do not serve a functional purpose if they are undermining your own efforts. It is to your benefit to take time to sort your feelings from your emotions and clearly identify them, one from the other.

In closing, it is our hope that you will have gained insight with respect to understanding that there is a distinct difference between your feelings and your emotions, as well as the importance in understanding how they operate in your reality and affect the quality of your life experiences. As always, please feel free to share your thoughts, comments or personal experiences.

Many Blessing,

Linda, Z and the Collective We