



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

"Frustrations Caused by the Emotional Programs" Excerpted from *The Spiritual Journey Part 2, The Human Condition*

Thomas Keating

EXISTENTIAL MODEL OF ORIGINAL SIN SECURITY (security/survival). SENSATION (affection/esteem). POWER (power/control).	
EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO FRUSTRATION OF THE ENERGY CENTRES	WAYS OF REACTING TO FRUSTRATION OF THE ENERGY CENTRES ACCORDING TO TEMPERAMENT
Apathy (sloth) Envy/jealousy Lust (greed-gluttony)	Anger/revenge Grief Pride/ambition AGGRESSION DEPENDENCY WITHDRAWAL

Let's begin, at least, to look at this diagram. You'll notice here we speak of grief and anger as the first result or the first movement of responding to the frustrations of the energy centers. Then that grief and anger break down into certain more complicated responses depending on our temperament, personal history and cultural conditioning.

GRIEF

Let's take a look at grief: Grief is that emotion that responds with sorrow when what we want is taken away from us. Now, if you want security and something happens that fouls up your symbol of security, like losing a million on the New York Stock Exchange, grief instantly arises. This is not the wholesome grief that Jesus refers to in mourning, which is the willingness to let go of what you want and to bear the pain for a greater good; namely, freedom from something that is harmful, or to enter into a better relationship with what is good.

ANGER

Anger is the more complex emotion which goes off when the good that we are seeking is difficult to obtain. Some psychologists call this "the emergency emotional responses." They are the simple responses of our emotional nature whenever we're confronted by a sensible, mental, or spiritual good according to our perception. And also, we respond whenever we perceive a sensible, mental or spiritual evil, or perceive it that way.

FIRST MOVEMENTS OF OUR EMOTIONS

That part of our emotional mechanism called "the pleasure appetite" are the simple first movements of our emotions. For instance, love is simply the attraction towards the good before you think about it or decide whether it really is a good. You know, it's like some food that you like – it's placed on the table and you immediately want to eat it. That's normal. But reason might come in and say, "Well, this is a fast day; or, it might be poisoned, or something." And you take a second look at it. So that on other levels, we can intervene and frustrate the movement of the passion. If something evil is placed on the table that we don't like, then we experience aversion, a simple movement away from it – aversion, or hate. If the thing is hard to get or isn't immediately present, we experience a desire for it. If it's an evil, we experience a backing off, an aversion. We want to get away from it, escape from it. If the good thing that we desired becomes present, we start eating this delicious food; you experience joy. So, desire is the soul seeking joy. If the thing was an evil and it gets forced down your throat, then you experience grief, that is, the presence of the undesirable or the hated evil.

THE TYPHON IN US

When you desire security as the supreme value of life, any cultural symbol that you demand, need, or expect that is withdrawn is bound to produce instantaneous grief. Remember whenever the soul is deeply moved by an emotion, the imagination immediately starts twirling and you get the commentary, "How can they do this to me? How can people be so cruel? How can God forget me? Blah. Blah. Blah." This, of course, is the Typhon in us going off, the emotional exchange which was perhaps reasonable in a child of two. But now, I guess you realize, you're an adult and something a little more mature is hoped for, expected. But again, most of us – I would say all of us – come to the age of reason thoroughly under the influence of those things. And so, you have to start somewhere, and the spiritual journey begins when you start. Before that, everything else is a show or external ritual or a shell. It doesn't mean a thing, except insofar as it may be an occasion to hear the message. It's doing something with the message that begins the Christian life and which Jesus, in his parables, speaks about as "the Kingdom." At some point you have to say "Yes" to having the mustard seed sown in your psyche.

NOBODY HAS TO CHANGE, EXCEPT OURSELVES

Grief is a very frequent experience when our emotional centers are frustrated. And it tells us infallibly, "Brother, or sister, you've got a problem." Any upsetting emotion tells you that you're in trouble. It's not somebody else's problem. It's not the events of life. It's your problem and you, as a mature human being aiming at full Mental Egoic consciousness, which is that of a human being, have got to take yourself in hand, take responsibility for those emotions, and change them, and stop blaming other people or events for how you feel. Nobody has to change for us to change except ourselves. And if other people have problems, that's their problem. But if you're upset, you've got a problem and you'll always have it until you change it, and you can change it. And the effort to change it is what in our Christian tradition is called the "practice of virtue." It's as simple as that. Virtue simply is the introduction of reason, balance, moderation into our emotional life, which up till then has been irrational, sub-human, and childish, or infantile, if you prefer.

The next emotion that might go off – a little more complex – is apathy. Now apathy is a pervasive boredom with life or one's community or one's family, the result of a constant recurrence of frustration that has finally gotten to you. It's a kind of withdrawal from life, from friendship, as hopeless, no good. And someone who suffers this disease might speak this way, "I've served this community for ten years or twenty years. I've given the best of my life to this organization. You've never asked my opinion, or if you did, you've never followed it. This is the last straw. I'm going to my room and close the door. I don't want anyone to dare to knock on that door. You go your way. I'm going mine. Leave me alone." Then, the bottom line is, "To hell with you!" Now, this is about the most difficult disposition to fix there is. And in a community, it's a disaster. Nobody can talk to this person because they're so hurt, so self-righteous, and they love it. They love that feeling of hurt. It nourishes their sense of domination and satisfaction. They're so hopeful that their activity will hurt everybody else. And it does. There's almost nothing you can do with that disposition. Apathy is the pervasive opting-out of life and hugging one's own little lifestyle and nest for the sake of ever better and better survival on that level. It's a fixation in human misery.

LUST

Lust, here, is not just sexual misbehavior. It's rather the overweening desire for pleasure of a bodily, mental, or spiritual nature as a compensation for the intolerable affronts that people offer by not honoring our unreasonable demands for happiness. The nature, remember, of these energy centers is to ever increase unless we start changing them, and to become more subtle and more pervasive and more all-encompassing of our life on every level of our human faculties. The rejection or the grief is now experienced as so intolerable that we must have not only what we want but a vindictive triumph; that is to say, to see our enemies cut down before our eyes into pieces, or something similar, and other attitudes a little less bloodthirsty, but the movement is towards more and more of that stuff.

PRIDE

Pride is experienced in two ways: In some people, it's experienced as self-rejection. Now, I must punish myself for not having measured up to my talents, my anticipated success in work. So, instead of being angry at the other people for firing me unreasonably, I take it out on myself and say, "I'm no good." And so, I adopt various self-destructive measures, which could include suicide in some people, if it gets strong enough. I can't bear to see myself failing. And pride brings the judgment (neurotic pride, of course): "Guilty!" Not God. He's trying to save us from this nonsense. But pride always suggests that we're not doing enough, not measuring up to our great potential, not converting the world, if that's what we're after, not being the president of this multinational, if that's what it is, not being the abbot of this monastery, if that's what it is.

THE PATIENT DISMANTLING OF THE EMOTIONAL PROGRAMS

The false self is the most deceitful of all creatures. It easily adjusts itself to any state of life whatsoever. And so, it graciously changes its clothes, its address, the furniture – anything else – as long as you don't ask it to change itself. But, I'm sorry to say, it does not drop dead upon request. When it hears that we have heard the great call of the Gospel to change, and we resolve, now, to adopt the principles of the Gospel, and we're not going to give into these security trips, these ego trips, these power trips, the

emotional centers just say, "Ha. Ha. Ha. Just try it, brother!" Then, you're in spiritual combat, because what you want to do, you can't do. And so, you experience with Paul who describes it magnificently, "What I want to do, what my mind approves, I don't do. What I hate doing, what I don't want to do with my will and good judgment, I find myself doing." That's the exact description of what happens when you start taking yourself in hand, confronting the fixated, emotional patterns of a lifetime and trying to change them. It's a job, but it can be done. It's not done by pursuing extremes, but by the patient effort to dismantle the emotional centers, one by one. Fortunately, if you can determine what the biggest one is in your personal history and work at that, all the others diminish because they're all inter-related.

Now, we come to anger which usually is accompanied by the desire for revenge. Now anger is a part of the emotional reaction or appetites that are called the emergency passions. And these are hope and fear and anger and courage and despair. Now, this part of our emotional system is different from the simple movement of the pleasure appetite because it concerns goods that are difficult to obtain. That's what adds the emergency aspect to it, or evils that are hard to avoid. Okay? So, when a good that is hard to get arises, you experience hope. When the evil that you fear arises, you experience courage to fight against that. If the evil overtakes you, you may experience despair, discouragement; or, finally, you may experience the response of rage or anger, which is characteristic, across the board, of most of the frustration of the energy centers. You may also experience envy or jealousy as a particular response to grief or to any one of those other frustrating emotions.

Thus, I say once again, the emotional programs for happiness are programs for human misery because they put you in a situation where, day by day, they're constantly going to be frustrated by reality and one will be plunged in upsetting or afflicting or negative emotions again and again and again. This can't be good for your health.