



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

"Dismantling the Emotional Programs, Part 1"
Excerpted from
The Spiritual Journey Part 2, The Human Condition

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[Evolutionary Model and Existential Model Chart appears on page 2 of transcript.]

Last time we observed that when one of our emotional programs for happiness is frustrated, we immediately experience automatically the negative emotional response to the frustration of the value that we have invested in one of those energy centers, and hence, our emotional life instantly reflects one of these emotions. Thus, our emotions are really great friends and most reliable witnesses to what our true values really are. This is an important observation to make: that when we hear the Gospel call to repentance, which means change the direction in which you are looking for happiness, and take it to heart and decide to do it, what happens?

The same thing happens to us as Paul describes in his poignant description of his own personal experience of the struggle. That is, you begin to become aware that it isn't enough to renounce consciously, on the conscious level, these false values, but that they are thoroughly entrenched in the unconscious and there they continue to survive and act out while you are making efforts to dismantle the false-self system. And why that is so important to keep in mind is that even when we decide what to do, the real work of the spiritual journey consists of patiently, calmly, and humbly acknowledging that the values are still thoroughly alive in the unconscious. And every time you are upset is the infallible proof that they are still there. The emotions faithfully record what your real value system is, even if you think you've changed it. An emotional upset is the infallible sign that we're attached – addicted -- to one of these centers.

EVOLUTIONARY MODEL Chain of Being Evolution of the Human Family Soma	EXISTENTIAL MODEL Energy Centers And Individual Human Development Sarx
4. Mental Egoic Rational Person-hood, Full Self-Reflective Self-Consciousness, Industrial/Technological Culture, Nation-Co-operation	4. Age of Reason <i>Co-opted by the energy centers. Hence their programs are:-</i> a) justified, b) rationalized, c) glorified,
3. Mythic Membership Verbal, Socialization, Farming Culture, City-State/Nation/Race,	3. Group Over-identification Uncritical acceptance of :- a) parental, education, b) ethical, training influences, c) religious, cultural conditioning,
2. Typhon Magical, Emotional exchange, Hunting culture - clan, Formation of Body Self,	<i>Hence, preconceived ideas and pre-packaged values.</i> 2a. Power Center Power and control, 2b. Sensation Center Affection and esteem, Sexual energy/pleasure,
1. Uroboric Immersed in nature, food, shelter, matter Immediate fulfillment of needs.	1. Security Center Survival and security.

The purpose of asceticism, which simply means a spiritual discipline, is to change the addiction into a preference. This is the distinction that Ken Keyes, in his remarkable book, *Handbook to Higher Consciousness*, makes. A preference means that it would be nice if so-and-so approved of me. If they don't, you can still survive. If you're addicted, you're wiped out if they don't approve you anymore. Another test for an addiction: Try to stop it. If you say, "Oh, I'm not addicted. I'm free," the simple test is – litmus test – if you really are free, see if you can stop. If you can stop it, I agree, you're not addicted. If you can't, it's an addiction. And every attachment is really an addiction. And in a book by Gerald May, he addresses this problem and suggests that every attachment or addiction follows the same principles as a physiological addiction, such as drugs or alcohol. In other words, it modifies the brain cells so that they expect certain chemicals above the ordinary, and when you withdraw, this whole system is still in place and cries out for some kind of satisfaction, or the same kind of chemicals it was depending upon, and hence, you experience in varying degrees, withdrawal symptoms up to the point of tremors. And so, when we withdraw from some addiction, be it cigarettes, or a drug, or an attachment to some practice of our own, or some relaxation, etc., whatever it is that we are invested in, there is always a period of mourning. That's what Jesus, I think, meant: "If the thing isn't good for you, oh how happy you are if you go through that period of mourning, because then you will come to freedom and health."

Now what is destructive about the energy centers is that they hinder the free flow of grace. They are like blocks in the nervous system and in the musculature in the body and in the psyche. They prevent us from living in the here and now. They also prevent us from loving other people unconditionally. Notice the wisdom of Jesus' recommendation, "Love one another as I have loved you," which is unconditionally.

The whole of Matthew chapters five and six is about freedom from the false self and the emotional programs for happiness that can't possibly work. Notice some of those wisdom sayings. Let's take one: "If someone hits you on one cheek (Ooh!), turn the other (Ooh!)." Well, I haven't met too many people who like that one. Anyway, it doesn't mean – it's not a pacifist manifesto – and it doesn't necessarily mean you always do that. What it means is have the freedom to be able to respond to the way people treat you even if they punch you in the nose without having to react emotionally out of your energy centers. In other words, it's an invitation to respond rationally and as a human being and under the influence of grace rather than to be compulsively ordered to strike back or get revenge, or something else. To turn the other cheek is the invitation to be free of how other people treat you so that you can treat them as God has treated you, which is with unconditional love. That's freedom! And that's what delivers us from this stuff. If we practiced that (what he calls a commandment or a suggestion) for a few months, I think you'd almost be a saint. Just try it! For three months unconditionally accept everyone, every event with love. And just see what you're like in three months.

Since it's a little difficult to do in one gulp, there are other methods that sort of get us started in diminishing the false-self system. We might take a minute to talk of them because since we've been sort of describing the distress and the hindrances and the harm that these things are doing in our lives, it's time to say how they might be reduced – how to change an addiction into a preference. A preference is a beginning of freedom, whereas an addiction is a form of slavery or tyranny. It means that the habitual way of responding from early childhood is continuing and we can't do anything else. We can't change it. And when we try, it doesn't work. Our emotions still go off. Notice how this teaching of Jesus aims at the heart of the problem. He's not recommending some casual acts of self-denial or asceticism. He's not recommending you flagellate yourself. He's not recommending some extreme fast. He doesn't say that you have to stay up all night. He doesn't say you have to pray ten hours on your knees. He doesn't say you have to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. All he says is change the programs for happiness that can't possibly work. Is that so hard? Well, it's such a common-sense appeal. Because, instead of doing something that's useless, we might as well put our energy on what really counts. It seems, in his view, it wouldn't take long to modify our addictions into preferences, if we put our minds on it.

There are many methods of doing so. I've already suggested what seems to be Jesus' own short-cut to freedom which is: accept unconditionally everyone in your life, no matter what they do to you; which doesn't mean, of course, to be subservient to everyone or to let everyone walk all over you. It means to accept them as they are and still love them. But once you've accepted them, it may also be God's will to modify, correct, or improve the situation by suitable remonstrations when you're at a certain level of peace.

Let me just offer a couple of suggestions. As we saw, when frustrated these energy centers immediately set off grief or anger. Grief really is a paralyzing emotion while it's functioning. You really can't do anything. You feel sorry for yourself, or you can't relate to others, or you have no energy to do anything. It's a very oppressive kind of emotion when it's very strong. Apathy is even worse. You have to almost light a bomb underneath that! Anger also is a very absorbing emotion and distressing one and it's that feeling that automatically responds to an evil that was difficult to avoid that has now descended upon you in full force. And hence, it produces very deep reactions. As we saw, there's always a commentary. When any one of these emotions gets going, the imagination reinforces it with various defensive or aggressive thoughts.

Here is just a little way, a suggestion of how these energy centers in the sense of the value system that produces them, can be gradually modified. When one notices the same emotional turmoil repeating or recurring or recycling, pinpoint the emotion; in other words, name it without analyzing, without thinking about it, without reflecting on it. Just report it to yourself, as if you were a reporter. In other words, "I feel anger. I feel apathy. I feel pride, whatever it is – grief." And then pinpoint the event that triggered that emotional response. In this way, you can quite easily sleuth back to which one of the programs is resonating -- sometimes there's overlapping, of course; several are involved at the same time. Since normally one is predominant because of our personal history, if you work on that one, the others also begin to disintegrate. The next thing is to ask yourself this question, "Am I willing to give up my desire to control this person?" Or, "Am I willing to give up my desire for the approval, esteem, or affection of this person?" And the answer always is, "Yes, I give up my desire with all my heart and energy." It has to be a choice. Hence, we all need to be motivated that this is worth doing.

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO FRUSTRATIONS OF ENERGY CENTRES		
<p>ANGER/REVENGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hostility • Desire for revenge 	<p>APATHY (SLOTH) (withdrawal from life)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boredom • Bitterness • Aversion • Despair 	<p>ENVY / JEALOUSY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitiveness
<p>GRIEF (refusal to let go of loved possession)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-pity • Discouragement 	<p>LUST (greed/gluttony)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand for excessive bodily, mental, or spiritual satisfactions 	<p>PRIDE/AMBITION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand for fame, Wealth or power • Vindictive triumph • Ambition/Vanity • Self-hatred in face of failure

These energy centers were developed by repeated acts. They can be taken down by repeated acts. There's nothing absolute or mysterious about them. They're just a habit. Since they have deep emotional overtones, it takes a little repetition, determination, and patience to keep letting go of the value system by a deliberate act every time it presents itself. So, that it's a form of, really, recollection or of meditation for daily life. You notice the events that triggered it every time it goes off. Now you know the center that's involved, "I give up my demand for security." And you say it – in your imagination or out loud, if you like, and several times, and try to move on to something else. Obviously, it's not going to take it down all at once. This is simply one method of working at it. But you'll notice that by making a point of letting go of your principal value system, or emotional program for happiness, that you began to see how

much power it has in your life, and how many times it's subtly influencing your reaction. And so, as you gain a certain sensitivity, you become more prompt in letting go of the emotion as it arises.

In this connection, there's a delightful story that I think might emphasize how important it is to be alert to the problem (which is self-knowledge) and to be prompt in noticing the emotion before it gets to a certain strength or point that sets-off the commentary. Because, remember, once the commentary gets going from the imagination, it's going to reinforce the emotion and then you'll be off to the races and spend the next half hour or two hours in emotional turmoil. Because once the pot really gets boiling, you just have to wait till it calms down, because some emotions, like fear and anger, set-off chemicals in the body, so you'll just have to wait for the liver to filter this stuff out – and that may take several hours. The prudence, then, is to let go of the annoyance or whatever it is, of the frustration – fast! And the sooner you develop that skill, the faster you demolish the value system itself, which is only an illusion. It's simply our way of conceiving ourselves, reinforced by the ordinary way we think, that is stimulated and held in place, by our usual interior dialogue, which, incidentally, our Centering Prayer practice is distancing ourselves with.

So, when you're doing the Centering Prayer plus this exercise in ordinary life, you're reinforcing the whole process. And the distancing that our silence in prayer gives us from the interior dialogue enables us, then, to reevaluate our programs and with greater ease to resist them, deny them, reject them. But we don't repress the emotions. We simply release the energy that is involved in the value system that the emotions are faithfully registering. We don't suppress them; we don't repress them. And if there's some duty to correct somebody, a child or a friend, this can be done later when our emotions are not upset and when we're as calm as we normally can be. But at the time that we're upset, this is not the time to reinforce the old patterns by blasting our friends or shouting at the children, or whatever it is. This is the time to free ourselves from unconscious fixation, routine that compulsively forces us to react with emotional distress every time that program is frustrated, which is quite a bit of the time for many people.

Here's this little story about how monkeys are trapped in a certain area in Africa. I first heard this story from Joseph Goldstein at the Buddhist-Christian conference a few years ago. It goes like this: In this area of Africa, the local planters have a way of catching monkeys that are raiding their banana plantations. They take a coconut and they slit it in half, scoop out the insides and then replace it with sweetmeat that they know that this breed of monkeys just love to eat. They then seal up the coconut, leaving just a slit, like in a mailbox, where the little villain can get his hand in sideways. And then they hide in the underbrush and wait for just a little while and sure enough some unsuspecting little monkey comes swinging through the trees; he smells the sweetmeat, and says, "Ah! Treats for me!" He jumps down, picks up the coconut with great joy, slips his hand into the coconut and grasps the sweetmeat. Of course, now when he tries to remove the sweetmeat, he has a fist; his hand will not fit through the slit. And so, he's kind of caught there. Now, the hunters emerge from the bush and start getting closer, and closer, and closer. And the monkey's aware that they're coming, about to catch him. And so, with greater anxiety he pushes, pulls, pulls and,

finally, with one great tug – nothing happens. And the hunters catch him, roast him, and eat him!

This, of course, is a parable of the human condition. We know now that if we think about this affront, insult, or whatever, for one more second, we're going to be caught by the hunters; the afflictive emotions that we know by now always go off when this happens. So, we're not innocent. And yet, how stupid can you get? Because of the compulsion, the years of doing the same stupid thing, you know you're going to be caught, but you want just one more second of thinking that sweet thought of revenge. And then the hunters, the afflictive emotions, catch you, roast you and eat you up for the next day or three.

What's the solution to that? Well, you don't have to have a Ph.D., for heaven's sake, to realize that all that stupid monkey had to do was to let go of the emotion! Open your hand, for gosh sake. And then he could have emerged, jumped in a tree, and be off to freedom. There we are; here's our choice. When you experience that sticky sensation – molasses – you can't get it off. You shake, shake, shake. And so, the emotional fascination both for joy, for sorrow, for self-destruction.

Hence, the importance of respecting our incredible dignity as a human being and loving ourselves properly. That is, as the receiver of the incredible gift of human life, then which there is no greater vocation. All others are built on that one. To be a member of the human race is the proof that God loves you. It's his choice out of, not just a few billion choices, but out of an infinite number of persons who could be here – you're here! It's not an accident. You're chosen as a member of the human race. So, it's a big deal.