

## EMOTIONS, HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

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Hello, this is Jose Parappully, Salesian priest and clinical psychologist at Sumedha centre, Jeolikote, with another edition of Psyche & Soul.

This weekend we shall reflect on our emotions and their role in health and happiness.

*“My father was a very angry man.” said Mr. Antony in his first therapy session. “He was always angry. His mere look would frighten us children. Looks like anger was the only emotion he felt. I never saw him smile. And I am like him. I seem to know only anger. I get into lots of trouble because of that. On the other hand I never saw my mother angry. But she cried a lot. She was a very sad woman. Any one could see that on her face.”*

Like Anthony’s father and mother, some of us experience and express only one or two emotions. The range of our emotional expression is very limited. An emotionally healthy person, on the other hand, experiences a wide range of emotions, not only anger and sadness, but also joy, grief, shame, exuberance, fear, gratitude, regret and so on, and feels free to express them.

An essential aspect of what makes us human is our capacity to feel. Healthy persons are in touch with a wide spectrum of emotions, and are able to express these emotions spontaneously and appropriately.

Healthy persons are emotionally expressive, but also have emotional self-control. They know when to express an emotion and to what degree, and when not to. They can be upset by an unwanted criticism, but they do not spend the whole day moody and ill-tempered because of it. They can be joyful and even boisterous, but also know when to be quiet and reflective.

Unhealthy persons, on the contrary, are overly restricted in their range of emotional expressions. They are comfortable only with a few emotions. For some persons, their anger dominates. For others, it can be grief, sadness or resentment. Moreover, emotionally unhealthy persons tend to express emotions in inappropriate ways.

There is an interesting gender dynamic to be noted here. Men are more prone to express anger than sadness. A man feels ashamed to cry, but not to shout! A woman, on the contrary, may weep when she is overcome by anger. Women are frequently socialised to believe that it is all right for them to cry, but not to show anger. Thus, a nun who withdraws to her room or a wife to her bathroom to cry her heart out after a severe scolding by her superior or husband may be experiencing and expressing anger, not sadness.

### **Emotional Expression and Health**

Emotional expression has positive impact not only on our emotional health, but also on our physical wellbeing. Psychologist Alexander Lowen observes: “A graceful manner, the sparkle in one’s eyes, the tone of voice, an overall aliveness and overall vibrancy expresses who we are more than words or actions.” But we will not experience any of these, Lowen observes, if our ability to experience and express a wide range of emotions is compromised or stifled. This will reduce vitality of the body. Feeling is the life of the body, and unless we let ourselves feel, our body is deadened. Moreover, when feelings are not expressed, they get embedded in the tissues and muscles of the body and give rise to muscular tension and psychosomatic illness. For example, lower back problems often are the result of muscular tensions arising from holding in feelings.

It is important, hence, to express our feelings rather than hold them in. However, we also need to have some emotional self-control. We need to know when, where, and how to express emotions, and also when not express them. Very often we express inappropriate emotions and inappropriately. For example, if I laugh at my mother’s funeral, that would be and seen by others as very inappropriate. We all have had experiences where we find someone expressing emotions inappropriately. We feel embarrassed for the person, but he or she is quite unaware of the inappropriateness or incongruence.

The purpose of emotional control is not to inhibit or limit feelings, but to make their expressions effective and appropriate.

*In the gospel of Thomas Jesus says “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”* What Jesus says is very true, from a psychological perspective. If we bring out the feelings locked up within us they will save us. If we do not, they will destroy us from within. The challenge for us is to recognize them and bring them forth in appropriate and constructive ways.....

- How do we feel about expressing our emotions? Which emotions do we express most often and which are the ones we suppress? *What do we need to do to bring more balance and appropriateness to your emotional expressions?*

We could stay with these questions and pay attention to the answers that come to us and decide on what we need to do make our emotional expression more healthy....

Jesus of Nazareth was an emotionally healthy person. He was very human. In the Gospels we find him expressing a number of emotions. He expressed anger when he saw how the Temple in Jerusalem was being turned into a marketplace. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. He expressed sadness at the doom that was to befall Jerusalem. He experienced fear and anxiety in Gethsemane. There are numerous occasions when his heart was moved and he expressed compassion for those suffering.....

We could spend a few minutes in the company of this emotional Jesus, sharing with him our own feelings about the way we express our feelings and how we feel about it and listen to what he has to tell us.

Have a pleasant weekend. May your emotional expressions enhance your health and happiness.

Be well. Be safe. Be blessed.

Thank you for listening.

**Jose Parappully SDB, PhD**