

Healing Through the Dark Emotions - The Wisdom of Grief, Fear & Despair  
Miriam Greenspan, 2003, Shambhala Publications

Offering user-friendly approach to “negative emotions” as badly-felt energies [p. xiv]

**EMOTIONS** are important to individual and collective well-being

Emotional Intelligence (Daniel Goleman, 1995)

To subordinate “feeling brain” to the “thinking brain”

Skills: self-awareness, mood management, empathy, impulse control [p. xi]

To be open to the wisdom of the **dark emotions**

- NOT “BAD” but **transforming lead to gold** – (emotional alchemy)

**Grief, despair, fear to gratitude, faith and joy** [p.ix]

FOUNDATION 5 - “The dark emotions are purposeful”

- Their pain calls for attention, as does physical pain [p.88]

Our spiritual strengths join with powers of courage and compassion when we live  
openheartedly in a world damaged and broken by human actions and inactions  
The world and ourselves need healing - a peaceful heart in dark times [p. ix]

**NEGATIVE EMOTIONS** are not to be subdued but authentically and mindfully felt

- From ignorance in tolerating painful energies to use in transformation [p.xii]

There are no negative emotions - just unskillful ways of coping

- to tolerate and befriend grief, fear, despair [p.xiii]

FOUNDATION 1 - “The energy of dark emotions is not ‘negative’ energy;  
it’s just energy” [p.86]

Suppressed grief often turns to depression, anxiety, addiction

Benumbed fear can easily lead to irrational prejudice, toxic rage, acts of violence

Overwhelming or unconscious despair often to severe psychic numbing, destructive to  
self and others [p. xii]

Reevaluate notion that individual healing takes place in a social vacuum

Constraint of emotion is usually more harmful than good [p. xiv]

Something good in so-called bad feelings

- but we can only get to that good by fully experiencing the “bad.” [p.3]

## LISTENING TO PAIN

“man is born of sorrow, as surely as sparks fly upward.” - Job 5:7

We grieve inevitable losses

- Inherent uncertainty and vulnerability of existence

To stay connected to the energy of painful emotions [p.11]

To attend to, befriend

To be mindfully aware but without being overwhelmed

To listen to the language of the heart [p.12]

Dark emotions to serve as guides

To teach us about ourselves, others and the world

To open our hearts to compassion

Help us to heal and change our lives

**Bring us information and supply energy**

**(the raw material of spiritual empowerment and transformation. [p.12])**

To find the power of the sacred in the midst of suffering

From fear of life's fragility into joy of living fully, open

Despair becomes a ground of a resilient faith [p. 13]

Without a listener, the healing process is aborted. [p. 14]

Emotions live in the body, not “all in your head” [p. 20]

And live in the world [p. 22]

FOUNDATIONS 6,7 - “Emotions live in the body, in the world”

- when emotions on friendly terms with body

- healing not only deeper, but wider [p.88]

*Imitatio Christi* - redemptive value of suffering

*Tikkun olam* - not individual salvation – transformation as “repairer of the world” [p.22]

Healing incomplete without *tikkun olam* - the repair, healing and transformation of the world [p. xiii]

*Shaman* - to see in the dark

Most faith traditions

- Sufferer deserving of charity, not psychotherapeutic treatment [pp22, 27]

## **VULNERABILITY - THE POWER OF NO PROTECTION [PP. 25-44]**

“THE OPEN HEART IS THE DOORWAY, INVITING ANGELS IN,  
REVEALING THAT THE WORLD - EVEN IN THE PIT OF HELL  
- IS CHARGED WITH THE SACRED.”

*Buddha* - the first noble truth is “life hurts”

“The power of the Book of Job lies in the contrast between the authentic voice of Job’s suffering and the hollow theological consolations of his Comforters”

Vulnerability is openness to those things we most cherish  
- love, intimacy, creativity...the sheer adventure of being alive, to the sacred.

“We are here to have our hearts broken by life.  
- to learn to live with vulnerability and to turn pain into love”

## **HOW DARK EMOTIONS BECOME TOXIC [PP. 45-70]**

Lenny Bruce - “We all live in a happy ending culture  
- a what should be culture instead of a what is culture.”

5 common ways to cope with dark emotions...can be a crucial part of surviving and affirming life

ENDURE - we can outlive what we endure

DENY - we can use “positive denial“ to mute our latent fears

TRANSCEND OR BYPASS, - we can work skillfully with painful emotions

Distracting from emotional pain as long as you’re aware of what you’re doing

AVENGE - we can find benign forms, e.g., the formation of MADD

ESCAPE - like BYPASS, without addiction

## **THE ALCHEMY OF DARK EMOTIONS - 3 skills, 7 steps**

*Talmud* - Your heart will give you greater counsel than all the world’s scholars [p. 73]

SKILL 1 - Attending - learning to listen [p. 75]

SKILL 2 - Befriending - feel it to heal it [p. 76]

SKILL 3 - Surrendering - to let it go, you have to let it flow [p.78]

Prayer - an ancient practice in the art of surrendering

The art of surrendering to fear is the art of living

When we attend to fear, it lets itself go [p.195]

FOUNDATION 3 - “Emotional energy is directional” when skills mindfully used  
- moves in direction of greater harmony, healing and transformation.  
- sets us in motion - can’t make it happen, but let it happen [p.87]

FOUNDATION 4 - conversely, aborted by the fear of emotional energy  
- converts energy to toxic emotions (shame, envy, psychic numbing...) [p.87]

STEP 1 - Intention - focusing your spiritual will [p. 79]

FOUNDATION 2 - “Emotional alchemy starts with intention.”  
- clear conscious use for healing, transformation = halfway there! [p.87]

STEP 2 - Affirmation - developing emotion-positive attitude [p. 80]

STEP 3 - Bodily Sensation - sensing, soothing, naming emotions [p.80]

STEP 4 - Contextualization - telling a wider story [p.83]

STEP 5 - Non-Action - befriend what hurts [p.85]  
- to be simply present  
- not avoid, cling to, try to fix or even understand, without a goal in sight  
- requires regarding fear as a kind of “meditation” and to focus on it as clearly and openly as possible [p.194]

STEP 6 - Action - social action, spiritual service [p.85]  
- from Non-action, we hear what fear is asking of us  
- appropriate action becomes clear, from the heart, not always rational  
[pp.194-195]

STEP 7 - Transformation - the way of surrender (flow) [p.86]

**[Emotional Exercises - pp 197-203]**

**FROM GRIEF TO GRATITUDE [PP.90-116]**

**FROM DESPAIR TO FAITH [PP.117-164]**

## **FROM FEAR TO JOY - The Age of Anxiety [p.166]**

### WHAT IS FEAR FOR? [P.169]

6 basic existential fears -- pain, loss, death, vulnerability, isolation, chaos [p.170]

- as a way of knowing

“don’t be afraid to explore your fear -- you never know where it can take you! [p.172]

- value of irrational fear - alerts us to past pain, humbles us, lets us know that we are in need of healing [p.172]

- avoiding fear leads to phobias

“affect tolerance” - capacity to feel emotion

So, too, is “fear tolerance”

- the raw emotion of fear is not actually paralyzing but energizing [p.173]

### FEAR IN A FEAR-NEGATING CULTURE

FDR - the only thing we have to fear...is fear itself

Sounded reassuring at the time but exemplifies “fear of fear”

Only wimps and cowards are afraid [p.177]

SHAMING FEAR - “WERE YOU SCARED?”

Of dark emotions - fear is the most shamed and condemned [p.179]

THE WARRIOR AND THE VICTIM

Patriarchal system - social division of gender

Men are fear-conquerors - heroism and power

Women the fear-bearers - powerlessness [p.181]

BANISHING FEAR [p.182]

- “we don’t learn which fears to respect and which to shrug off” [p.183]

NUMBING FEAR - most extreme form of banishment

- develop need for escalating stimulation

More alienated from reality, purpose, intelligence of fear

Less able to cope with real fears about real things [pp.183, 185]

ACTING OUT - when no longer free to act with it

- Destructive aggression [p. 185]

### THE ALCHEMY OF FEAR

Chogyam Trungpa - “in order to experience fearlessness, it is necessary to experience fear.” [p.187]

THE MOVEMENT FROM FEAR TO JOY

- not just from the work we do, but mostly through facing our demons [p.191]

## **EMOTIONAL ECOLOGY**

WE LIVE IN THE WORLD AND THE WORLD LIVES IN US [p.207]

WE FEEL IN COMMUNITY; WE HEAL IN COMMUNITY [p.211]

Emotions are relational

Courage to enter our woundedness

Also courage to reach out and find connection to others [p.212]

The world “family system” [pp.214, 229]

Women - carriers - codependent - socialized

Men - bystanders - independent - detached [p.216]

E.G. - elder President Bush experience [pp.230-232]

Empathy and compassion - the gold

Inborn capacity to feel with others their pain and pleasure

Practice of speaking from the heart, listening with compassion [pp.239-240]

**GLOBAL HEALING IN A BROKEN HEARTED WORLD** [pp.242-261]

**33 Emotional exercises** [pp.265-294]

**DARK EMOTIONS IN AN AGE OF GLOBAL TERROR** [pp.295-300]

*{comment - PEACE-FULL: in fullness of understanding and definition, Shalom}*

*{comment – “negative emotions” are like “side effects of medicine”  
a brilliant marketing ploy to segregate undesirable from desirable effects,  
But ALL are actual effects of medicine}*

*{comment: the powerful use or misuse of fear}*

*{comment: TMI = too much information}*

*{comment: compels us outward, not inward}*