

Humans and Emotions

By Amara Karuna, ©2010



What happens when we decide to be partners and build family with someone, and after a few months or years the rosy glow of our idealism wears off and it seems to become so much more difficult than we imagined? Why do we find ourselves arguing, feeling jealous, greedy, and uncooperative? It seems if the other person would just do it our way, and stop being so unreasonable, things would work out great!

How do we communicate what we want without being controlling? How do we stay connected when our needs seem to be conflicting with others? Why do we keep trying to stop drinking, smoking or eating too much, and find it such an ongoing struggle? Why does life seem so unsatisfying at times?

Emotional problems between people are the main reason for breaking up relationships, businesses and communities. Because our Western culture is so emotionally repressed, most people have no models for how to handle their own emotions in a responsible and healthy way. We go through life hoping for peace and pleasure, and if we get triggered or have our "buttons pushed", we tend to blow up out of control, and then try to get out of the unpleasant emotions as fast as possible, without really understanding where they came from or why they are so intense.

The shadow is any part of the psyche that is unpopular and judged as undesirable. Shadows exist because of an accumulation of past hurtful experiences. We can see our own shadows in the places where we find ourselves compulsively doing things that we have already decided we do not want to do, such as indulging in addictions. It is also seen in chronic illnesses that we can't seem to heal. Or where we feel blocked in moving forward toward the things we want to create in our lives.



Shadows live in our unconscious, so by their nature they are hard to see. It is far easier to notice something you do not like about another person, thus projecting your shadow on to them. The problem with shadows is that no matter what attempts are made to control or ignore them, they keep popping their ugly little heads up in the most inopportune and embarrassing moments.

This is because they want healing, and they want to be honored and acknowledged. The longer they are pushed away and repressed, the more energy they build up, until they really seem like monsters lurking somewhere under the thin veneer of our "nice" conscious personalities.

The good news is that shadows and old emotional distresses can be cleared and permanently resolved, with loving help from others. This book is intended as a resource for people who would like to help themselves, their friends and their lovers to feel more deeply satisfied with life and relationships.

This chapter and the next give a summary of some of the basic ideas from Re-evaluation Co-counseling (RC), because it is a really useful groundwork on which to base our more specific Heartbeat Nurturing Therapy. If

you have not yet been trained as a co-counselor, these chapters are important.

What is Peer Counseling, and Why Do It?

Peer counseling is aimed at teaching lay people how to be effective in helping themselves and others with emotional issues, and in regaining our innate goodness and intelligence. It is based on observation of what really works in practice, not on theories of what ought to work. It evolved from the experiences of thousands of people.

You can use it on different levels. Some people have sessions occasionally just to blow off steam in stressful times. Some set up regular sessions which provide a deep long term therapy, systematically removing the blocks that keep them from realizing their dreams.

Re-evaluation Co-counseling is a world wide network of non-professional counselors, who trade sessions for the purpose of clearing emotions, dissolving rigid patterns of behavior and recovering the ability to be present and think clearly and rationally. It is a people's liberation movement that started in the 60's and has spread all over the world. RC has spawned many permutations and offshoots, such as Co-Counseling International, the National Coalition Building Institute, and Holistic Peer Support Counseling.

This spreading of information was encouraged by Harvey Jackins, the founder of RC, because of his generous attitude that the more people who know and practice their own healing, the faster the world situation will improve. You can see the original organization at www.rc.org, where you will find many resources for learning the skills.

Human Nature and Intelligence

What are human beings really like? Underneath all the programs, conditioning, expectations and hurts that we get, what is our true basic nature? Think about: What would you be like if you were really free to be your true self? What are young children like before they are socialized?

Human beings are basically intelligent, zestful, loving, communicative and cooperative. We love to be close with each other, and we love

to share. We love to create things. Our inherent nature has a vast capacity for flexible intelligence. Each of us is whole and complete, unique, and with limitless potential. Nothing can permanently damage our real nature, but many things can cover it up.

When our thinking process is working well, when we are relaxed and feeling normal, information from our environment comes in mostly on a subconscious level. Most of what is happening at any time does not need our conscious attention, such as sounds sights, smells, temperature of the air, etc. It gets evaluated, processed and sorted, and then filed in our memory to be recalled at will later. We can respond to each new situation with an appropriate, new and creative response.

How We Get Hurt

Why don't people always act according to our true inner nature? If we are so cooperative and loving, why are we killing each other and the planet? Through the natural process of living, we get hurt. We get hurt physically, mentally and emotionally on all levels, and frequently. This is a normal part of life, and we are equipped to deal with it, if we were allowed to.

When we are being hurt, our thinking process shuts down, or seems to work very differently. People do not usually think well while hurting. The forebrain, which holds the more evolved part of our brain and the capacity for rational thought, becomes less dominant. The more primitive reptilian brain area takes over, inducing feelings of fight or flight. Did you ever try to think or make decisions with a headache or while you are very upset?

The input of information from the environment is still pouring in, but it's not getting processed or evaluated as usual, and a kind of mis-storage occurs. All the sights, sounds, smells, etc., emotions, as well as the experience of being unable to think clearly get stuck together in one big recording/memory. This recording is like a videotape of the incident, which is stored for later processing, perhaps at a safer time.

Emotions are natural waves of energy that arise in response to a stimulus, and if they

are allowed to flow and are not repressed, they naturally resolve themselves. It is natural for a child to get angry if another child steals a toy, or if they are denied a food that they really want. The emotion can be validated and allowed space to be felt, and yet not be the deciding factor in how the situation is resolved.

Hurtful things happen to us as a natural part of life, and our emotional responses to them are our natural way of healing the hurts. A child who is sad about not having another cookie can be allowed to cry, and have the feeling acknowledged in a respectful way. They can be given empathy, but not another cookie, and soon the tears will wash through and the inner sun will shine again.

In our lives, in this culture, we experience many disappointments and moments of neglect, abuse and not having our needs met. If we are not given loving empathetic attention around the emotions stirred by these hurts, they tend to get stored in our subconscious shadows. In an ideal situation, as soon as the hurtful event is over, the person would be able to release the hurt and heal. Hurts always naturally seek release. However the safe space, time, and attention from a caring person that encourages the healing are not usually available to most of us, so the emotions and information tends to stay stuck. They will stay stuck an entire lifetime unless they are processed.

A stored hurt creates a rigid, inflexible spot in our mind, a recording of the whole event. The recording seems to take up space, to use up some of our capacity for intelligence. All the information seems to be stored in one big lump, like a recorded movie. Separate bits can't be remembered individually as they can when it is stored normally. It becomes a place where we can't think well, that when alone we avoid remembering.

Why? What happens right now when you think about something that was really a hurtful event? You re-experience the hurt. It's all still right there, and so we try to avoid remembering it.

Practice: Scan Your Triggers

Take a moment and think of times when you have acted like that. Maybe write them down for further reflection. This behavior

indicates a place here you have been hurt, and still carry the scars of that hurt.

The recordings wait in our subconscious storage vault, like a booby trap. When anything later happens which is similar enough to the original hurts, we experience that unpleasant phenomenon known as being triggered. The new situation may not even be a hurtful event. It may just be similar in any way to the old event. We call this being "Re-stimulated" or "Triggered." It's also commonly known as getting your buttons pushed, or overreacting. When the old recording starts to play, it feels like a replaying of the old incident. You feel the same feelings, find your self saying the same words or compulsively doing the same actions. It takes you out of the present and into the past.

A person acting out of an old distress recording will say things that are not pertinent, do things that don't work, and fail to cope effectively and gracefully with the present situation. They will feel terrible feelings that may have nothing to do with the present situation. You can tell you've come across residue in someone because they're acting frozen, nonsensical or rigid. They become irrational and "not themselves". They may get memory flashes of the old situation. "Temporary insanity" is a classic description of being triggered.

Whenever someone is triggered, and they have failed to cope effectively with the new situation, it also becomes a new hurtful experience. It gets recorded with all its new feelings, sensations and thoughts. Thus new situations are added on top of the old ones, and the distress recording gets bigger, adding more layers.

This means the booby trap has more triggers. It takes up more of our free thinking space, and there are less areas of experience in life that are not upsetting to us. The person becomes more disposed to be upset by more situations, and more deeply upset, and for longer times.

We get hurt early and often. We get hurt by accident when we are babies; we get bumps, or get cold, hungry, frustrated or scared. This could get taken care of by our inherent healing process, if it were allowed to happen. But by far

the greatest cause of our hurts is from contagion from irrational adults. For example, when a child runs outside naked, and the parent (having been punished by their own parents for exactly the same thing) gets upset and yells at the child, telling them how bad and embarrassing they have been acting. Then the child carries guilt, shame and fear about their body as a distress.

When there has been enough re-stimulation, and when the same hurts happen over and over, they form patterns, which become incorporated into our personalities and even reflected in our body structure. They color our beliefs and effect every part of our lives.

Most patterns are latent, when you do not feel the distress all the time, but it lies inside waiting to be pulled out by a similar event. We see these as our "problems". We know that we get triggered by certain things. "Oh, I always get mad when someone is late for anything." "I hate to talk in front of a group".

Practice: Scan Your Beliefs About the World

What kinds of chronic patterns have you seen in yourself and others? Take a moment and write down the basic ideas about life and this world that you base your actions on. What do you believe about yourself? About the world?

Chronic patterns are created when we are hurt so frequently over a long time, that the feelings become pervasive, and we think "that's just the way I am". These are seen as idiosyncrasies of personality, or as your viewpoint on reality. Chronic patterns are constantly triggered; they play all the time. They are like colored glasses through which we see the world. They can be identified in a person's posture, speech, emotional attitudes (like pessimism), and ritual rigid behaviors (like compulsions and addictions).

The Natural Healing Process

The process of storing hurts can be reversed. Our abilities to think clearly and respond freely can be recovered, and repaired. A natural healing process is built in, and we are all born with it. If it could operate, it would allow stored distress to be removed immediately. This emotional release process can

be called "discharge" in the sense of discharging or draining a battery, or catharsis.

Emotional release is a natural, inherent process. Every young child does it spontaneously. It is a physical, chemical process that happens in our bodies. When sad, we naturally cry and sob. When afraid, we laugh, tremble and have cold sweat. When angry we rage with loud sounds and large movements, and have hot sweat. When we have physical discomfort we relieve it by yawning and stretching. When we want to communicate an experience we do so with animated, non-repetitive talking. All of these are avenues of release for the emotional energy, and have a healing effect if done consciously within a safe and loving situation, with someone who wants to listen.

If the process of catharsis is allowed to finish, the stuck information in the distress recording is released, evaluated and stored correctly. The area of our thinking around the old painful moment is restored to flexible awareness. This is called "Re-evaluation," and is an automatic response after emotion has been discharged. It is the "Aha" feeling of resolution and understanding that comes after releasing. The purpose of counseling is to encourage the catharsis process so that we can reclaim all the areas of our flexible thinking that have been blocked.

Blocks to the Healing Process

What keeps the natural healing process from happening?

Originally it is the lack of an attentive, loving person at the moment of the hurtful experience. In painful moments, we are often alone or the others around are involved somehow in their own pain. There is a vast shortage of people who know how to truly pay attention to someone else when they are hurting.

We grow up with a chronic feeling of never having enough personal attention. This is due to similar hurts instilled in the adults we depend on, and also to the isolating structure of our society, which makes it very hard for parents to get the help they need. Do you feel like you got enough attention while growing up?



Our culture also confuses the healing process with the hurt. We think if someone is crying, we need to get them to stop, and then they will be all better. We do not realize that the crying itself was what would make the hurt dissolve.

Inhibitions are learned early. We are told "don't cry", and get lots of patting, rocking, threats, or humiliation: "Big boys don't cry". Or "I'll give you something to cry about." Soon the inhibitions become internalized, and we stop ourselves without having to be told.

No form of catharsis is more important than the others. If they are encouraged and persisted with, the stuck hurt will be released in just the right way for the client. Often you will have many different feelings about one hurtful event.

Everyone keeps trying to get attention, although not with awareness. We talk out our problems, or cry on a shoulder with friends. If you listen, much of everyday conversation is people trying to client about their problems. But it is hard to be thorough and deep with this unaware "clienting", because our conditioning not to have feelings takes over whenever the discharge gets deep. Also friends are often unskilled at listening and will often offer advice, give criticism, or just take the attention back to themselves by interrupting and talking about their own feelings.

In co-counseling we structure our time together so that we create a safe time for us each to have a turn being listened to, when the listener has been trained to listen well. In this way deep and true healing can take place. In Heartbeat Therapy, we do some of this

discussion and listening work before and after the cradling sessions, so it is useful to know the skills.

If the discharge process is allowed to operate, people can return to natural state of freedom and zestful living. Each gain in recovering our capacity for intelligence is worthwhile, even if it is small.

Chronic Isolation and Fear of Intimacy

One of the main things that keeps all the emotional patterning in place is the isolation that is built in to our modern society. We have gotten far away from our tribal roots, and many people live alone, or in small families. Our daily lives are not structured to create opportunities for deep sharing and closeness.

Most people hope to find one other person to live and be partners with. They depend on that one person for all their needs for sharing and intimacy. Even if we do have a partner, the internal and external stresses often make it hard to have enough satisfying time together. As we can see, this places great stress on the primary relationship, and many relationships do not last long. The feelings of hurt and rejection are added to old feelings, until a fear of any intimacy arises. It seems easier just to be alone. Many people struggle just to have any closeness and connection in their lives.

When we take time to share therapeutic time in sessions, it creates an opportunity to not only release our programs about isolation, but to meet some of our actual needs for closeness. By going to the roots of our first experiences of closeness in infancy, we create a situation where the patterns can be re-structured.

This is Chapter One of Heartbeat Nurturing Therapy, A Guide for Friends and Lovers. By Amara Karuna. Order on Amazon.com.