

Web-Based Radio Show

The Healing Relationship III: Feeling and Expressing a Wide Range of Emotions


How the experience of the feelings in the relationship with another person is very invigorating and really produces growth and health; and how to experience love, compassion, warmth, jealousy, envy, and conflict

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Good morning. Thank you for joining us today. As you recall, we're doing a series on Healing Relationships, and the last few weeks we have talked about different components of healing relationships – namely how important a healing relationship or what one might call a growth producing relationship has the element of security and has the element of warmth, intimacy, and trust. Also, last time we talked about the importance of the relationship embracing all of the different emotional qualities that a person experiences – both parties experience. This first occurs at the level of just gestures and facial expressions – the ability to feel what you feel really in the presence of the other person and be expressive at almost a basic physical level where you feel it fully so it shows up in your face and your eyes, whether they are gleaming or sad or curious or angry. That experience of the feelings in the relationship with another person is very invigorating and really produces growth and health. How many of us have relationships where we can experience freely and fully without conflict all of our feelings? Love, compassion, warmth, jealousy, envy, and conflict – it doesn't mean we necessarily verbalize all of these feelings, but it means that we can experience them. So this is a very, very important quality.

The additional qualities that this non verbal element has are if we are comfortable in this relationship, if we really feel secure with this other individual, we can expand to new territory. Let's say we are a person who has always been avoidant of anger or fearful of assertiveness. Well, with enough security and enough warmth and enough challenge, we will broaden. We will take a chance on being assertive. We may even take a chance on feeling angry. It doesn't mean we'll say it, but we'll feel it. It is the "feeling




it” and the “expressing it in our bodies” that has the benefits of growth producing and healing.

Now a healthy relationship has a partner which is always facilitating a broadening of what we feel and what we experience. It doesn't mean to make us angry all the time, it means there is always a background of warmth and security and trust and positive feelings. But it means they are helping us stretch, helping us explore new territory in the way we feel and the depth and range in the fullness and richness of the relationship. So this is very, very, very, very, very vital. That is what we talked about last time and I'm amplifying it a little bit.

Now all the listeners could picture relationships where they are stretched a little bit, where they feel encouraged to explore new territory and those where they are not. It is the ones where we are comfortable with what we have and we are stretching to broaden new territory that is growth producing, that is healing, and it's the qualities of the relationship we are talking about whether it is between parent and child, two spouses, two good friends, teacher and student, mentor, etc.

Now the next component that I want to address today is the ability to use ideas as part of this relationship. Here too, we build on this basic quality; this basic ability to feel an ever broadening range of feelings. This ability to experience at that critical level, where our emotional expressiveness signal what we feel and exchange signals back-and-forth in such a way that these signals encourage broadening and growth, and to add now the level of ideas to it. So we not only experience it, but we actually can think it. I'm angry, I'm sad, I'm happy, I'm curious, I'm inventive, oh boy – and we can actually speak it, play it, draw it, dance it, or in other ways symbolize it. So there are many forms that symbols take from a dance which with movement conveys a certain feeling, to a drawing, to just saying how you feel to a parent and a child playing make-believe. Or writing a screenplay, or writing a novel, or writing a short story, or just free associating where you have ideas.


Now in healing relationships and growth producing relationships, there is, again, this ability to feel and now experience the ideas and actually speak or communicate through ideas the full range of feelings – the positive ones as well as the negative ones. There is receptivity in both partners for this full range of feelings. There is also the encouragement on both sides for stretching; for going into new territory; for expanding. So there are certain feelings that most of us are comfortable with, but not all of us. For example, some of us are comfortable expressing warmth, love, and dependency and saying, “Gee, I love you” or “Gee, I feel so close to you now” or “Gee, I feel dependent



on you” or “Gee, I feel this” or “Gee, I feel that.” But not all of us are equally comfortable with that. Some of us avoid expressing intimacy. We don’t do it with our spouses; we don’t do it with our children enough. And it can come with this symbolic gesture the way we hug someone, the way we look at them, and experience the idea that “I feel close to so-and-so now” or “I don’t feel close to so-and-so now.”

What is critical here is the ability to experience the feelings, to express it to ourselves in an idea, to communicate that idea in some way to this other person in a way that conveys the idea, not just the feeling tone. Some of us have more trouble with anger or assertiveness, or we are more comfortable with intimacy and warmth but we tend to be more passive when it comes to a bold new idea we want to express or disagreeing or verbalizing a conflict. We get tight, we get anxious, we get inhibited, or we feel conflictual. Getting comfortable with that side of life, the conflictual; the assertive; even the angry side. Almost all of us have trouble with jealousy and envy, experiencing that in your relationships, realizing that is healthy too, to feel jealous of someone you care about, that you may have mixed feelings. One the one hand you admire them and you’re happy for them and on the other hand you feel jealous about them. Not all relationships can tolerate discussion of this. Some can if done in a warm and supportive way where you can say to the person, “Gee, I’m so happy for you and I wish I could join you and I’m a little bit jealous also.” The broader the range of feelings, the fuller and richer these feelings, the better.


In just a moment, we will talk about how to expand, how you can be a healthy, growth producing partner that helps your partner expand this range. We’ve been talking about expressing feelings and relationships that can embrace a broad range of feelings as being growth producing and healthy on the one hand, and healing on the other hand – helping you over difficult situations. We frequently hear about a child who has been exposed to trauma, helping that child play out the trauma, helping the child talk about what happened to them, help them talk about their anxious or scared feelings. But what we often don’t realize is that when we are helping someone talk out or play out, that that builds on all the qualities we have already talked about: the security, the intimacy, the trust, the ability to feel the feelings physically and feel safe and secure in having those feelings in the presence of another person and communicating them even just with gestures and facial expressions. Now when you communicate it with ideas as well, it’s truly a healing experience. But that may occur at later stages in the healing relationship. It may not occur right away; it may take a long time to get the other components cooking. So we shouldn’t jump in right away because if you challenge a person to, for example, express their anger or express their jealousy or their rage or their humiliation or their



embarrassment or other difficult feelings before there is that warmth, trust, and security, then you may have done more harm than good. You may make the person more anxious and fearful rather than healthier. So it is very, very important for healthy relationships and growth producing relationships to respect all the components we are talking about. Also realize that the next step as we talk about using ideas in the relationship and that these ideas build on all of these other elements that don't use ideas, but has to do with the physical feelings and emotional feelings we have in the presence of the other person, that here too we want each member or each partner in a relationship – parent/child, boyfriend/girlfriend, spouses, two friends – need to constantly be helping each other stretch; expand; going into new horizons and new territories. Humiliation is OK, embarrassment is OK, and you don't always have to be proud. Anger and jealousy are OK. You don't do that simply by saying it's OK. You do that by the warmth, the security, and by going into new territories together; having experiences together, broadening your range of experiences - not avoiding certain experiences.

For example, a child may avoid embarrassment or a sense of loss humiliation by avoiding any kind of school activity, athletic activity, or dance or music activity where they think they won't succeed. How does a parent help them into this new territory? Gradually. And slowly. Tie the experience with music or dance or sports to other experiences the child enjoys. Maybe they like beating daddy so daddy can get Junior out on the basketball court by evening the playing field where he has to only play with his left hand and Junior can beat him 70% of the time. Well, that gets Junior out on the basketball court. Then he's out there and one time he loses to daddy even with his left hand and he experiences anger and humiliation. Well, they tolerated it together, it may not be pleasant, he may cry, he may run into the house. But they at least sampled it. Next time he may get a little more comfortable with it. He may then venture out with some of the kids on the playground who he has been avoiding who are better basketball players having now been able to experience that feeling and maybe even talk about it with his dad about it afterwards. So that is the way you stretch – gradually with security, tying the experience to experiences you are already comfortable with.

Adults have the same reluctance to go into new territory, and some relationships are protective like a parent/child where the daddy or mommy overprotects the youngster and doesn't want him to try anything new and they want him to succeed all the time and don't want him to have a sense of failure, no embarrassment, no anger, no jealousy, two siblings shouldn't be jealous of one another, etc. And others kind of let it play out. But to experience these feelings comfortably, you can't let it get out of control. So with two siblings, if you let it get out of control and you let them fight where they scare each other,



or you throw someone in the water not a toe at a time but headfirst, and they can't swim yet, they get too scared and it's counterproductive. So you have to be careful of the too robust expansion – too quick expansion. So do it gradual and slowly against the background of security and warmth. It expands you to be able to use ideas. It expands your ability to experience the feelings at all levels from the basic physical sensation, the emotional expressiveness, to experiencing it at the level of ideas and hopefully discussions.

There are so many feelings and we can't go into all of them, but you can all think of examples and all think of relationships where you have been able to expand, expand, expand into new territories and new horizons. One of the hardest things for parents, for example, with their children, is separation. If the parent has a hard time with separation and talking about longing and missing, the child will, when they go off to school and go off to college. How do you prepare for that? Even going away for a weekend and even going off with your friends for a few hours is a kind of separation. So we have to enable our children, but also our spouses, also our best friends to experience all the feelings and have that as part of the relationship.

Does that mean, and I'm coming back to this, that every time you say you are angry at someone, "I'm angry at you" or "I hate you?" No you don't have to put salt in the wounds. You can find a way of expressing your anger in a constructive way where the relation will tolerate that idea without the venom. It doesn't mean that you won't explode sometimes and the relation doesn't need to tolerate that too. Healthy and growth producing relationships tolerate a little bit of venom at times, when you have had it, and they regroup and you learn that the security and warmth can return after that.

So all of these feelings are part of healthy and growth producing relationships. We talked before about a person who has been traumatized and working through in a healing sense and a therapeutic sense the relationship. Well here too, they may get angry at the person trying to help them – trying to help them relive something. They may be angry at the situation but they got overwhelmed and they have to be able to express that. When you think of what makes for good psychotherapy just like good relationships, when someone describes a successful therapy, they are often describing an experience where in the presence of their therapist they can experience fully their physical feelings, their emotional expressivity, and at the level of ideas...(end of recording)