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ANGER

by

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Dawn is breaking in the East. The fog is still rising from the river as a flock of geese takes flight to a distant shore.

Does the water on the river refuse to reflect the image of the geese? Are the geese concerned about their image being reflected on the water?

The paragraph above is an attempt to explain a simple reality that has taken place hundreds of thousands of times. It is reality "as it is." It will continue for thousands of years in the future as long as there are rivers and geese. It "has to" occur because all the *conditions* are there for it to occur.

Now lets add something to the scene. As the geese are flying across the river there is a movement on the shore. Two hunters stand up from a duck blind and fire several shots -- four geese fall. The hunters whoop and holler and high five each other as the remaining geese escape and fly off at a hastened pace.

Check your emotional reaction. How do you feel? Are you happy for the hunters? Are you angry? Your feelings may be influenced by membership in the NRA or the Audubon Society. What, however, is the cause of your feelings?

Most people will say something like, "This upsets me; it makes me angry!" OR, "I love it; it makes me want to go hunting." How can the same event "cause" two different emotions? Does a dropped pen fall at your house and float at mine? People regardless of age, education, race, I.Q., or social status rarely ever develop what I call the first insight into the human condition, i.e., events in life do not "cause" how we feel. If they did, ALL people for all times, that is, for thousands of years in the past and thousands of years in the future would have to feel the same way about events that happen to us. All I need is one event in which I drop something AND it doesn't fall and I have disproved the law of gravity (or I am dreaming – there is no gravity in dreams, that's why we can fly and walk through walls, etc.).

By the way, does a dropped pen fall faster at my house and slower at yours? No. All objects accelerate at approximately the same speed. If the events in our lives "caused" our feelings, I couldn't be more upset when a car pulled in front of me, and you less upset! We would all "have to" feel exactly the same. If not then the event isn't the cause of our feelings. We do not teach this in our schools. Our educational system, from Pre K to Post Graduate work, does not teach the difference between correlation and cause and effect. The flat tire and your anger are correlated, that is, they happened closely in time, but they are not causal. How can a tire squeeze on your pancreas, heart, lungs, etc. and get all those juices running around inside of your body? It doesn't even know what it is much less whether it is inflated or deflated. And it is not personal. It doesn't say, "Here comes Tom, I think I'll go flat!"

Our children are not prepared to enter life with a strong foundation. And as adults, the vast majority of people live all of their lives, 80+ years, without ever having this first insight into their own condition. This is what I have called the greatest human tragedy. Without knowledge of this first insight happiness, inner peace, and healthy love relationships (which are the prime issues in human existence) become practically impossible.

So if the things that happen to us do not cause our emotions, what does cause them? It is what we tell ourselves about these things: our attitudes, autosuggestions, perceptions, beliefs, *or simply*

put, it is our thinking. We say approximately 60 thousand sentences in our head everyday. This is why we are tired in the evening. If you multiply this out we get approximately 22 million sentences a year that runs through our heads. Multiply your age X 22 million and this, by and large, equals who you are (age X 22M = YOU). It is very difficult to be any different in a moment's time, a day's time, or a life time than this constant flow of thoughts that stream through our mind. Endocrinologists tell us that if we want to change at the cellular level, we change how we think. It is claimed that Buddha said: "Pain in life is not an option, suffering is." (I say claimed because Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1436, some 1,200 years after Buddha's death and it is often difficult to believe some of the stories in today's New York Times. But whether it was Buddha or Bertha the insight was remarkable.) Epictetus said in the first century ACE that, "People are disturbed not by things but the views they take of them." Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet, Act 11 Scene 11: "Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Descartes' famous dictum: "I think, therefore I am," has often been restated today as: "I am therefore I think." Alfred Korzybski, a general semanticist, states this very clearly when he wrote in 1933 in *Science and Sanity* that, "People drive themselves un-sane by the words they choose to say in their heads." Dr. Albert Ellis, my personal mentor, colleague, and friend developed Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, the grandfather of the Cognitive Behavioral movement in psychology, and his famous ABC theory of personality based on these principles where A, the Activating event, does not cause C, the emotional Consequence, but it is our Beliefs about A that truly causes our feelings.

So what are the beliefs that cause Anger? We have all been angry many times – how do you do it? Stop and think about this a minute, I don't want to give you the answer too soon. Anger is the most common human emotion. We have created an enormous amount of human suffering on this planet as a result of not understanding and mastering this emotion. Arguments, fights, hatred, prejudice, bigotry, murder, genocide, and wars of all kinds have largely been the result of uncontrolled anger. You scratch the skin surface of most people and there is a raging torrent of anger underneath. Well, how do you do it?

The following equation for Anger is only one of several equations I have developed from over 42 years of seeing clients in all types of settings. This is the first time I have put these equations in print. I will introduce other equations for Anxiety, Depression, Guilt, Healthy Love and Marriage, and Personal Happiness in future editions of the newsletter for the Institute for Science and Human Values (ISHV). These equations are, I believe, a science of the human condition. When I can write you equations that work for every human on the planet, then it is not just guess work any longer. I also strongly believe that these laws of human nature are as permanent as the physical laws of gravity, electromagnetism, the strong force, and the weak force that governs the Universe. This is a very strong statement. Of course, I am very bias – and I may be dead wrong! So you will want to question, doubt, and even challenge me on these issues. This is very important, ***because it is the beliefs that we hold that go unquestioned, that have the potential for causing us the most harm.***

The following equation for Anger is how ALL people get angry and stay angry:

$$A = ET + S$$

A is anger.

ET is Egocentric Thinking

S is Should

So anything that happens that I don't like, or find inconvenient, unpleasant, frustrating, or annoying -- SHOULD not exist! Of course if I do like it, it SHOULD spring into existence! As Ellis use to say, "The Martian's are dying laughing at this logic provided they are rational." They may be crazier than we are (scary thought I know). They are bending over hitting their little green knees and exclaiming, "Look at these Earthlings! There are almost seven billion of them and most have average or above intelligence and they are looking at things that clearly exists and *demanding* that they not exist because *they* don't like it. **So the sole existence of anything in the Universe is dependent on their whims or their likes and dislikes at any particular moment. YOU CAN'T GET ANY CRAZIER THAN THIS!!!**" In its extreme form we call this psychosis -- denial of reality. So every time we are angry we are a little psychotic. We are demanding that the World and others be a certain way that we approve of and do only the things that we like -- not what they like. What happens when someone else, your parent, sibling, mate, child, friend, boss, employee, neighbor, stranger, etc. wants something entirely different than you? What is the Universe going to do now? We don't just get angry over the BIG things, like our mate running off with our best friend, but if the car in front of us at the red light is a second late starting to move (average time to start moving is about three seconds) -- we are laying on the horn. Our belief: They have inconvenienced me for a moment, as they *Should or Must* not do -- "Off with their heads!"

Try it out, the next time you have the slightest bit of anger or see someone else that is angry -- look for the Should, Musts, or Demands. There are 17 major Shoulds that fall under a Demanding Philosophy to life. If you will single red flag these shoulds every time you hear someone say them, you will see why the world is largely in the shape that it is today. Double red flag every time you say, think, or write a should and you are on your way to making a major philosophical mind shift from a Demanding Philosophy to a Desiring Philosophy. This is not a mere changing of a word here or there. It is a major mind shift -- a shift in thinking. A shift in the way you see yourself, others, and the world. Red flagging is also a way of training your conscious awareness -- "waking up" as they say in Eastern Philosophy. In summary, red flag the following 17 shoulds that lead to a Demanding Philosophy so you will be able to make a shift to the Desiring Philosophy toward life. If you never do anything else but get this down pat, you will make a major step toward personal happiness and inner peace.

Demanding Philosophy

Should
Must
Ought
Have to
Got to
Suppose to
Need to
Expect
Insist
Obligation

Desiring Philosophy

Better (or it would be better)
Desire or desirable
Prefer or preferable
Could
Would
Nice
Wish
Hope
Request

Ultimatum
Fault
Blame
Deserve
Owe
Imperative
Demand

Why are the desiring words rational and the demanding irrational? Not because we picked a certain number of words and called them rational or that some particular group or country preferred them. They are rational or irrational because they can either be supported or not supported by the evidence. Not because of a proclamation or dogma. This stands the test of reason and science. For example, I had a patient come in to see me and said that smoking was good for him. Joking and kidding with him I said, “Really! Maybe I missed those studies. What University ran these? Where is the evidence? Prove it that smoking is good for you and I will stop off and get a couple of cartons on my way home from work. It is a lot easier than working out.” He laughed and could see the irrationality of his thinking. The desiring philosophy can be supported by the evidence, e.g., it *would be* better health wise if you didn’t smoke can be proven. The evidence is in. But if you have a cigarette in your mouth, the end is on fire, and you are sucking in on the cigarette – you *should be* smoking! Now a lot of people will say, “well, since it would be better if we didn’t smoke, then we shouldn’t do it.” I say to them, “I am from another planet and I want to find out what Earthlings are like and I ask, “Do people on Earth smoke?” They say, “Yes, but they shouldn’t do it!” I say, “What do you mean they *shouldn’t do what they do?*” See how pervasive the thought habit is. The demanding philosophy is a command or proclamation that can not be verified or proven – that is *why* it is irrational and leads to human disturbance.

The lake doesn’t refuse to reflect the geese and the geese are not concerned about their reflection because all the *conditions* are there to create this moment in time. This is the world “as it is” at this moment. Every moment “has to” exist if it exists because it does, not because you like it or not. This is the only rational should: *Everything that happens today should happen*. The key word in this statement is *happens* not should. If there are hunters waiting on the shore, this just represents different conditions -- not Shoulds or Musts. Zen expresses this succinctly: “No snow flake ever falls in the wrong place.”

One of my favorite quotes from Shakespeare:

“We are such stuff as dreams are made on and our little life is rounded by a sleep.” What was Will, this brilliant man who Harold Bloom called the inventor of the human, saying to us? “We are such stuff as dreams are made on” – he is saying that we live all of our lives like we are in a dream, a fantasy, or an illusion. “And our little life is rounded by a sleep” – is the eternal sleep of death. Life is a struggle because we don’t accept it as it is. It might not always be pretty, but when we live in illusion we are deceived by our own minds. When we embrace all of life “as it is,” and accept the unpleasant, pleasant, and neutral as a never ending cascade of events that no amount of money, fame, or worship will ever change, the result is joy. We escape suffering and disturbance by acceptance – not illusion.