

EMOTIONAL MASTERY



Taking
Control of
Emotion

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Introduction

As human beings, we are well acquainted with emotions and emotional responses. We all feel happiness and joy when positive events occur in our lives. Alternatively, we feel sadness and fear with equal strength when negative events occur. Our emotional responses to life can guide us through rough water and into safe harbors. They give us a foundational mental platform that can provide stability in what can sometimes be a chaotic world. In many ways, our emotions are an important component in each of our individual definitions of humanity.

While emotions are a part of what makes us human, they also have the ability to tear the fabric of that humanity apart. Anger and fear, shame and disgust have caused many, if not all, of the violence that seems to be a part and parcel of our species behavioral repertoire. War, genocide and social abuse of all kinds stem from the wellspring of our darker emotions. By the same token, negative emotions in our own personal lives can wreak havoc and cause damage and destruction that, in its way, is just as terrible.

How can a mental process that produces such connectivity and defines our better natures also allow us to commit acts that are, in some sense, deeply inhuman? That is the key question that we will try to answer within these pages.

This is a book about emotional mastery. Why mastery? Well, very often, the negative consequences of uncontrolled emotional lability can have dire effects on how a person is able to live their life. We are all very aware of how a physical

handicap may limit a person's potential. In a similar vein, an emotional handicap can be equally crippling. Inappropriate or overly inordinate emotional responses can delimit or end social and professional opportunities and relationships. These setbacks can then trigger a set of even more outrageous responses. In the resulting turmoil, the individual suffering from these uncontrolled emotional responses is left reeling and seething. Unable to deal with the flood of emotions, they can only continue to attempt to survive what can be likened to a veritable emotional tsunami.

This is where emotional mastery comes in. When a person learns to temper, and control their emotional response to the situations that occur in life, they typically become more confident and more self-assured. This, in turn, leads to not only to greater levels of success, it also results in an even greater ability to experience measured responses to any event that may occur.

A person with emotional mastery is like a well-trimmed, well-ballasted boat. The sea may become rough and the course difficult, but the person who has command of their emotional responses makes headway nonetheless. It is this skill that we will attempt to convey to the reader in the text that follows.

We will begin by taking a look at emotions. We will examine what they are and what purpose they serve. By looking at the specific steps that occur in any emotional response, we will begin to decode the emotions and discover exactly how and why they can have such an extraordinarily strong effect on what we do and say.

Next, we will take a close look at the common positive emotions. We'll examine happiness, excitement, pride, satisfaction and amusement. We'll look at what they mean, their importance and, most importantly, how to tap into these positive emotions more regularly.

Finally, we'll turn our attention to common negative emotions. We'll look in turn at fear, disgust, anger, sadness and shame. We'll look at their causes, their negative effects and we'll give you some tips on how to deal with them.

There is no need to be controlled by your emotional responses to life's ups and downs. There is no need to let anger destroy relationships and opportunities. There is no need to let fear dictate what you can and cannot do in life. You can master these negative emotional states and reduce their impact. Likewise, you can also channel the energy that positive emotions bring into your life, using that energy to move farther and higher than you previously believed possible. Emotional responses no longer have to be a rollercoaster ride, full of peaks and valleys. You can exist in a more stable and steady emotional state, living your life at a higher level without the risk of dark clouds on the horizon. Let's take a look at how the process works.

Emotions - What Are They and Why Do They Matter?

Emotion is defined as a natural and instinctive state of mind that derives from one's circumstances, mood or relationship with others, distinguished from reasoning and knowledge. This is an interesting definition and one that fits right in with our subject of emotional mastery.

To begin with, the first thing that we notice when we begin to unpack the definition for meaning is that emotion is defined as a natural and instinctive state of mind. In a somewhat ambiguous manner, this idea of emotion as “natural and instinctive” strikes to the very heart of what emotion really is.

What Are Emotions?

The fact that emotions are natural and instinctive indicates that they are a deeply rooted biological behavior. Like all deeply rooted behaviors, they serve a specific purpose. In this case, that purpose is to influence our actions. Our emotional state can cause us to make a specific choice out of a menu of possible responses. Likewise, emotions can also cause us to refrain from making a choice we otherwise would have taken.

The word emotion itself bears out this connection. Emotion, like the word motivation, comes from the Latin word “*emovere*”, which means “to move”. Emotions, both positive and negative, have the ability to physically move us. They are, in a very real sense, motivators. They developed to move us out of dangerous situations and into situations that are more beneficial to survival.

For example, consider our primitive ancestors. Hunger was always a very real threat. Starvation was not an uncommon occurrence. Therefore, the happiness that was felt by each individual when finding a cache of food was a palpable force that kept them going in times of want. The memory of the joy that was felt upon discovering edibles motivated them to not only keep searching for food during lean times, it also motivated them to experience that feeling of happiness again.

In a sense, our emotional responses programmed us to be able to solve the problems facing an organism attempting to survive in the wild. These responses were passed down from generation to generation as positive behavioral adaptations. Our brains became wired to have an automatic emotional response to certain external stimuli. Anger and fear, happiness and love were all internal reactions to outside events. In a way, you could say that emotions are a conduit whereby the outside world and the interior realities we all possess meet and communicate.

Emotions not only help us to navigate more successfully through the world, they also provided us with a series of potent social signs. When we experience emotion, we send quick and involuntary physical messages to those around us that communicate our feelings and reactions to what is currently happening. These are reactions that we all share. As children, we feel our own emotions due to the behavioral programs that we are all born with. We also observe the emotional reactions of those around us. As a result, we slowly develop a sense of appropriate emotional reactions to the situations that we encounter.

This emotional development is what allows us to make fairly complex decisions about the people around us. We learn how to trust and who to trust. We learn

how to detect dishonesty. We learn how to judge the faithfulness of a mate. We learn how to deal with failure and setback. We learn how to deal with death and the loss of loved ones.

This exchange of emotional signals helped our species to develop a complex and rich social life. Even though each individual is essentially locked into their own self, emotions allowed each individual to communicate with other individuals in a way that was broadly and mutually understandable.

Why Do Emotions Matter?

Survival and socialization make emotions critically important. We still depend on our emotional response to keep us alive as much as our ancestors did. Emotions still trigger very specific physical and psychological reactions. They set in motion and coordinate many biological systems that together work to deal with whatever situation is at hand. In other words, if a specific set of responses has worked in the past to handle a similar situation, then those responses can be used today to deal with a crisis.

For example, let's consider fear. Fear is a powerful emotion, one that the majority of people would prefer not to experience. However, fear plays a very important role in our species' survival and our individual survival as well.

Let's say that you are on a dark street at night in an unfamiliar city. You suddenly realize that there is someone behind you who is following and slowly getting closer. Your reaction to this modern situation is identical to the reaction your ancient ancestor had while encountering a predator at night.

Once the threat is realized, you both feel an initial jolt of fear. Your ancestor's

emotional reaction developed out of a fear of being ambushed and attacked at night. Your emotional reaction simply adapts that primal fear to a modern canvas. The two situations separated by hundreds of thousands of years are essentially the same. Therefore, your fear initiates an entire suite of pre-programmed routines designed to allow you to survive the threat.

To begin with, your hearing and vision become hyper aware of your surroundings. You pay particular attention to sounds and you scan your surroundings carefully, looking at the fine details of what you observe.

Next, you automatically begin to rearrange your priorities. If you were hungry, that hunger is forgotten. If you were feeling tired, you are now preternaturally awake and alert. Every non-critical need is suppressed so that you can concentrate totally on surviving.

Next, all of your sensory information begins to be filtered. Unnecessary information is discarded or disregarded. Information that pertains to the threat that you're facing is gathered and collated in order to give you a more accurate picture of what is happening.

Relevant information is then used as the basis for potential options to deal with the threat. These options are instantly rated as easy to hard/safe to dangerous.

Next, you start to remember any memories that you have involving similar situations. These can involve things that you've actually experienced, stories that you've heard from others and even fictional accounts that you've read or watched. All of this information is processed and used to continue to develop

survival options.

Instinctually, you find yourself either making some kind of involuntary noise or being unable to utter a sound. This is deep instinct taking over. Genetically, you know that attempting to communicate with other friendly people can increase your odds of survival. Equally, you know that making any kind of sound can decrease those odds.

You begin to look for patterns in what has already happened using all of the above sensory and memory information. You use any pattern that you detect to try and make predictions about what will happen next.

Finally, in a much shorter amount of time than it took to read this, you arrive at an involuntary decision. All of the complex responses that have been invoked by the threatening situation culminate in a decision to either fight the threat or flee from it. Which one is ultimately chosen depends on the individual, their experiences, and the situation itself. In the end, you will either turn and attack or you will run away.

All of these complex physiological responses were caused by the initial feeling of fear. You are completely unaware that they have been occurring. All you know is that you feel threatened, are afraid and need to either run or confront the threat. One emotion galvanized an entire array of systems which, in turn, had an effect on goal setting, concepts, motivation, priorities, and attention.

Gaining Control Over Your Emotional Responses

Despite all that we know about emotional responses, the science of emotion is anything but exact. While it is fairly certain that some emotions, as we just discussed, produce physical results, the exact relationship between the emotion and the physical responses being triggered is uncertain. In fact, scientists and behaviorists don't even agree which emotions should be considered universal and legitimate. This means that ultimately, we don't know if emotions are responsible for the way we view reality or if it is our view of reality that causes an emotional response.

However, what has been proven is that emotions can be successfully regulated. We, as human beings have the ability to control the way we feel and how we express our emotional reactions.

As we discussed earlier, some emotional responses do not need to be controlled. Uncontrollable belly laughs with a good friend is a tonic to both mind and body. However, that same laughter may not be found appropriate at a business meeting or at a funeral. In this way, it can be seen that a cornerstone of emotional mastery is the element of appropriateness. When you have a particular emotional response to a situation, you have to ask yourself "Is my reaction appropriate to the stimulus that gave rise to my feelings?"

Emotional inappropriateness is very common in stressful situations. As human beings, we are hardwired to detect right from wrong. We also seem to be extremely sensitive to witnessing self-serving behavior, especially if the benefits of that behavior come at our expense. So, it comes as no surprise that modern life

exposes us to the many situations that have the ability to trigger inappropriate emotional responses.

For the majority of people, modern life means urban life and urban life means crowds, traffic, and noise. Historically, developmentally and genetically, we are not particularly well adapted to the types of conditions that urban life typically offers. For example, consider commuting in the average city. The roads and highways are congested. Every person in every car is under pressure to get to a specific location at a certain time. The worry about not being on time causes a baseline amount of stress. If one person attempts to gain what is perceived as an unfair advantage over other drivers in regard to the positioning of their vehicle, this stress and its resultant emotional reaction can increase exponentially. Stress and frustration explode into anger and, if not controlled, can result in one driver committing acts of violence on another. This is the phenomenon known as road rage.

We all have, in one form or another, experienced this type of situation. It could have occurred in rush hour traffic. It may just as easily have occurred in a line at the supermarket or an entertainment event. People are edgy and the sight of someone trying to unfairly advantage themselves can send negative emotions through the roof.

Now, letting the full force of your frustrated emotional response out may feel good at the time. However, you also have to realize that no matter how emotionally good it makes you feel, it's never appropriate and almost always a negative adaptability-wise. Think about it, the more you allow yourself to boil

over and yell, rant, punch surfaces, etc., the more toll your behavior is taking on your reputation and your relationships.

Trying to calm down when you're angry or frustrated certainly isn't easy. However, with practice, it can be accomplished. In fact, allowing yourself to fly off the handle may actually be detrimental to your health. Research has shown that people who are unable to control their emotions are far more likely to suffer from depression and hypertension. So, not only do you gain a social benefit from emotional mastery, there is also a physical boost involved as well. In short, if you're suffering from less than optimal health, the inner calm that comes from controlling your emotional responses may be just the thing you need to start feeling better.

The following five-step program can help you develop the emotional mastery that you need to improve the quality of your life. Using these methods, you will be able to start identifying the situational triggers that initiate particular emotional responses. You will also begin to learn how to redirect your thoughts away from those triggers so that your reactions to them become more muted. In time, and with practice, you will be able to minimize your negative emotional reactions and replace them with more positive, appropriate and adaptive results.

1. **Choose Your Environment** - In order to begin controlling your emotional responses, you first have to begin by identifying the specific situations or environments that trigger those responses. As we said, it may be stressful situations, like being caught in traffic. It may be more social situations, like parties or get together's that tends to bother you. Every person is different.

However, no matter what environment provides the triggering mechanism for your emotional reactions, knowing what those environments give you a way to begin avoiding those situations when you can.

2. **Alter Your Environment** - When you know the environments and situations that cause you stress and trigger emotional reactions, you can not only avoid those situations, you can also begin to alter how they operate. Let's say that entertaining makes you uncomfortable, causes you stress and triggers negative emotions. You could simply avoid entertaining, However, for the average person, this is simply not possible, not to mention altogether healthy. So, instead of avoiding a party, find ways to make parties more enjoyable to you. Use themes for the party that interest you. Plan the party around activities that you enjoy. In short, alter the environment by reducing the things that cause the most stress.

3. **Shift Your Attention** - When you are in a situation that is causing you stress, take your attention off of the things that are stressing you and place it instead on things in the environment that calm and center you. For example, going back to that traffic jam situation. You have the choice to either focus on the immobile gridlock and the ticking clock on your wrist or on anything else. Keeping your focus on the traffic or the time will only make the situation more and more intolerable. Focusing on something else, something pleasant, will reduce your stress, reduce your emotional reaction and, in general, make the situation bearable. Listen to the radio or an audiobook. Look out the window and see the beauty in the sky. Do

anything that will shift your attention from the negative into the positive.

4. **Change the Way That You Think** - At their core, emotions are greatly influenced and perhaps are caused by cognition. When you think that a situation calls for sadness, you feel sad. When you feel that a situation calls for anger, you feel angry. Likewise, when you feel that situation calls for happiness, you feel happy. The argument about whether thoughts cause emotions or emotions cause the thoughts is essentially a chicken or egg situation. What is certain is that thoughts directly influence emotions. This means that if you change the way you think about a given situation, you will change how you feel about that situation. This means that by simply altering your thoughts, you can also alter your emotions and moods. This gives you the power to change a net negative environment into a net positive environment and reap the rewards as a result.

5. **Reduce the Intensity of Your Response** - There will be times that you will be unable to avoid or alter a situation, change your focus or alter the way that you think. In these cases, it will feel like a tsunami of emotion is about to pour out of you. In these cases, realize what is happening and simply forbid yourself to react the way that you are reacting. Take a slow inward breath. Hold that breath for several seconds. Then, exhale just as slowly. This type of “cleansing breath” can control the wave of emotion that you are feeling. It can help you to center yourself and find that point of calmness and rationality that you need to successfully control your reaction.

Emotions are a part of the human condition. For the most part, they are positive adaptations that contribute to our survival and our success. However, there are situations where our emotional reactions can be detrimental. These steps can be utilized by anyone to master their emotional reaction to almost any situation. Doing so will make you healthier, happier and better able to experience the joy that positive and appropriate emotional reactions can bring.

Common Positive Emotions and How to Maximize Them

We've taken a look at the general subject of emotional response. We've seen what emotions are. We've looked at how they are caused and how they can be controlled. Now, it's time to take a look at specific emotions in a little greater detail. We're going to take a look at the three most common positive emotions. We'll discuss what they are, their importance and how to make sure that you are maximizing their effect on your life.

Happiness

On its face providing a definition of happiness seems a little odd. After all, each of us already knows what happiness is, right? While we may not be able to specifically define happy, we all know it when we feel it, even when we use different words to describe the emotional state we're in - joy, contentment or even gratitude.

Nevertheless, a solid definition of happiness is essential if you want to not only understand it but also get more of it into your life. Many researchers will describe a happy person as someone who is experiencing subjective well-being. However, that is the same thing as saying, "I know that I'm happy when I'm happy." It's sort of a non-defining definition.

Perhaps a better way of describing happiness might be as "a feeling that your life is good, with meaning and it's worthwhile." This definition works because it captures both the brief feelings of happiness that contribute to an overall positive outlook, as well as encompassing the deeper feelings of satisfaction and

contentment that also contribute to more lasting and deeper felt senses of the emotion.

Happiness is important for a number of important reasons. Of course, as a positive emotion, it makes us feel good. However, studies have shown that happiness is directly linked to other things that, in and of themselves, contribute to the quality of life. The following is just a partial list of these benefits.

- Happy people are healthy people. They get sick less and they tend to live longer.
- Happy people have better personal relationships. They tend to get married, stay married longer and have more lasting friendships.
- Happy people are more productive and make more money.
- Happy people are more altruistic. They give their time and money.
- Happy people deal with unhappiness better. They tend to overcome adversity easier.

The great thing about happiness is that it can be cultivated. While some happiness seems to be genetic and some is influenced by current circumstances, almost 50% of all experienced happiness comes from the things that we do every day. This means that there are specific activities that you can do to raise the level of happiness that you experience in your life. These include:

- Remembering a time when you were happy and describing that time to yourself;
- Envisioning your life going as well as possible in every little detail;
- Envisioning your relationships going as well as possible in every detail;
- Imagining what your life would be like without the things that you have that make you happy;
- Recording through photographs or drawings the things that bring you the most joy.

Excitement

Excitement is defined as “a feeling of great enthusiasm and eagerness.” While the emotion of excitement does contain elements of enthusiasm and eagerness, the dictionary definition of the word doesn’t seem to completely capture the essence and importance of this reaction.

It’s only when we start to look at some of the synonyms of excitement that we begin to get a better idea of what this particular emotion encompasses. Words like exhilaration, anticipation, animation and elation begin to capture the panoply of feelings that come packed into the idea of excitement. Excitement is an emotion that sizzles. When we are looking forward to something, we feel alive

and connected. There is, in a very real sense, a purpose to life when we have enthusiasm.

One theory about excitement holds that happiness isn't what most people want. Instead, what they are really looking for is a higher level of excitement in their lives. Excitement doesn't truly trump happiness. After all, contentment and satisfaction are nothing to sneeze at. However, excitement is nearly as important as satisfaction in a life well-lived. In fact, when you examine them both, it becomes readily apparent that happiness and excitement are intimately tied together. It's almost as if each relies upon the other in order to be fully realized.

Think about it. With excitement, we feel motivated. We are ready to take action and do what needs to be done. We have the momentum necessary to climb that mountain, reach goals and experience the concurrent fulfillment. All of this promotes a feeling of supreme happiness.

Now, imagine the same situation, but without the element of excitement. The zing is gone. Without excitement, we are unmotivated. Our ability to take positive action is reduced and the effect of the actions that we do take are limited. We are not inspired to climb the mountain. We fall short of our goals. As a result, there is little to no fulfillment in life and, accordingly, less happiness. While too much excitement is likely counterproductive, a life without any excitement at all would be agonizing.

As human beings, we experience the world through our senses. While the idea of sensuality has been co-opted to become synonymous with sexuality, nothing could be further from the truth. Instead of sexuality subsuming sensuality, it is sensuality that encompasses far more than sexuality. Think of the smell of the

earth after a thunderstorm or the taste of a well-prepared meal. Think of your favorite piece of music or a smile on the face of a friend. All of these things are sensual in nature and that means that they are part of basic human responsiveness and reaction.

When excitement is eliminated from the equation, none of our sensual information is as interesting or important. We look forward to a good meal. We are eager to see a smile on the face of a loved one. This natural excitement over the good things in life contributes to the level of happiness that we feel when they occur.

The key to the excitement is to see the joy inherent in all things. Of course, jumping out of an airplane will certainly raise your level of excitement. The trouble is, you can't jump out of an airplane every day and even if you could, you would soon become used to the experience and the excitement would wane. A better approach is to get excited about the smaller things in life. Excitement takes many forms. A walk with a pet, a beautiful sunrise or sunset or a quiet moment with a loved one all have the capacity to bring great joy and, as a result, should be looked forward to with eagerness and anticipation

Amusement

Amusement? "What's amusement?" you might be asking. Or, better yet, you might be saying "Why amusement?" Well, amusement is nothing more than a slightly more dignified word for a sense of humor. We all know how good it feels to laugh. A really deep and profound laugh is like throwing open the windows of your soul and letting the sun flood the rooms. It simply feels good to laugh. That's why amusement or laughter is the third of our positive emotional states.

Now, laughter shouldn't be confused with happiness. In some sense, they aren't directly related at all. While happiness is an emotional state that may lend itself to amusement, it's not a requirement for laughter. In fact, laughter is just as common in sadness as it is in happiness. It can even be said that the laughter that's experienced in the toughest of life's moments is that much sweeter. Like grapes slightly pinched by frost gain a sweetness and depth of taste so too does laughter that occurs in sadness.

If you can laugh when life has you down for the count, then you can, in theory, accomplish anything. Laughter is not ephemeral. It is not transitory. It is certainly not a waste of time. Real laughter contains real power - a power to effect positive change in any life. This is the precise reason why laughter in life is so important.

To begin with, laughter is good for you. It's good for your physical health. Studies have shown that laughter actually shuts down the release of stress causing hormones. This, in turn, makes your immune system stronger so that you are better able to fight off disease. In addition, the muscles you use when laughing will release tension, bringing an overall sense of well-being.

Laughter is also good for your mental health. When you're down and experiencing negative emotions, laughing can break that bad mood and lighten things up. This increases your emotional energy. In fact, the simple act of smiling sends signals to your brain that all is not as bad as it seems. The result? You actually start to feel better emotionally.

Finally, laughing allows you to connect more easily with the people around you.

Studies have shown that when people find the same things humorous, they are far more likely to think positively about a person. That's because a smiling or laughing face is interpreted in a positive manner. Laughing people are not threatening people. Smiling people rarely pose a threat. When you laugh and smile you open yourself up to people and people open themselves to you in return.

Common Negative Emotions and How to Minimize Them

We've taken a look at the power that positive emotions can have on your life. We've seen that positive emotions like happiness, excitement, and amusement can profoundly affect physical health, mental health, and overall outlook. Now, it's time to take a look at the darker side of emotional reactions.

Specifically, we're going to take a look at three of the most common negative emotions. We'll discuss what they are, their importance and how to make sure that you are minimizing the deleterious effects that they can have on your life.

Anger

Anger is a natural emotional reaction. It is not necessarily a bad thing. It evolved as a way to protect us from threats and dangers. The physical reactions that anger evokes are designed to make us look bigger, louder and more threatening than we really are. The idea is that when confronted with danger, our reactions help to scare off whatever it is that is posing a threat to our health.

So, anger can be a good thing when properly moderated. However, several problems arise when anger is not properly moderated and spirals out of control.

You see, mild anger is brought about whenever we feel that our basic needs are not being met. So, for example, we tend to get angry when our food supply is threatened. From an evolutionary standpoint, this is a good thing. Food is necessary to survival and so is a good thing. A threat to food may mean not

surviving, so it is a bad thing. Therefore, because anger helps to mitigate the threat to food, it is also a good thing. This reaction is hardwired into us. That is why you feel annoyed when someone eats the last doughnut or slice of pizza.

Despite its role as an evolutionary necessity, too much anger, brought on by the stresses of modern life can, like all negative emotions, destroy your health and your personal and professional relationships. So, here are some tips for reducing and handling any anger you may feel

- Exercise regularly. Regular exercise helps reduce the hormones produced by anger.
- Get plenty of sleep. Being overtired increases stress, which also increases the instances of irrational anger.
- Express yourself. “Stuffing” your feelings and opinions away unexpressed will only compound your feelings of annoyance and anger.

Fear

Fear, like anger, is a necessary emotion. In fact, while we are using the term “negative emotion”, it should be pointed out that none of the emotions that we are discussing are in any way inherently negative. By themselves and in moderation, they play an important role in allowing us to survive in this world. It is only when these emotions spiral out of control that they become problematic and begin to have negative effects on an individual that they can be truly considered “negative emotions”.

So, fear is necessary, as long as it is an appropriate reaction to a given situation. For example, fear of a bear, when you're in the woods in bear country and you see a bear, is healthy. Why? Because a bear may represent a threat to your continued existence. On the other hand, fear of things that don't represent an active threat is not healthy. Examples of this would be an unnatural fear of elevators, spiders or high places. In these cases, the fear is misplaced and negatively affects a person's life.

One of the best ways to control unnatural fears that may be negatively affecting your life is through the use of the AWARE method.

- First, ACCEPT the fear. It's happening. It's real to you.
- Next, WATCH the fear. Observe it. Step outside of yourself and dispassionately assess the situation. Is your reaction appropriate?
- Next, ACT normally. Do not let the fear control you. Breathe normally. Continue talking, walking or whatever it was that you were doing before the fear started.
- Next, REPEAT each of the above steps as necessary until your level of fear begins to subside.
- Finally, EXPECT the best possible result. When you do, you are much more likely to analyze the situation correctly and reduce your extreme reaction to it.

Sadness

Once again, this is not an inherently negative emotion. Sadness is an entirely appropriate response to things in life that involve loss. It is entirely possible that sadness is the one emotion that is unique to us. It likely evolved out of our ability to perceive the passage of time and, as a result, the inevitability of death. Therefore, sadness serves a very real purpose. It allows us to grieve and by grieving realign our sense of what is right with a universe that doesn't care about the survival of the individual.

However, like all emotions, sadness can become crippling when it is experienced in ways that are out of proportion to the situation in question. In these types of situations, it can lead to depression and other mood affecting disorders. If you find that this is happening to you, there are several things that you can do to eliminate the effects of sadness and get your emotional life back on track.

- Allow yourself to be sad. Many times, sadness is an entirely appropriate response. Pretending that sadness isn't appropriate will only serve to intensify your reaction over time.
- Find healthy ways to express your sadness. It is good to communicate how you are feeling by externalizing your emotion. This may involve journaling, painting, drawing or writing or talking with friends. The way that you do it is unimportant. The fact that you do express your sadness is all that matters.
- Pursue happiness. There are things that make you feel better when you are

sad. Oftentimes, you don't feel like doing those things when you're down. However, now is the time when you absolutely must do them in order to break the cycle of sadness. So, think about the thing that you want to do least and then go and do it. You will find that when you do, your mood will lighten and you will feel better.

Conclusion

We have seen that emotions can have very powerful effects on how we perceive the world and on how we act. Oftentimes, these effects are positive and beneficial. However, there are times when these effects can have negative repercussions, bringing us down and destroying the things that we hold dear. It is in these situations that emotional mastery can help us to control these negative effects.

In order to learn about emotional reactions and how to master them, we started by looking at emotions themselves. We learned what emotions are and we took a close look at why they matter. Next, we examined how to gain control over your emotional reactions, looking at the specific steps you can take each day to master your own emotions. We then looked at the common positive emotions and learned how to maximize their beneficial effects. We ended by then looking at the common negative emotions and learned the techniques that can help to minimize their effects.

Now, it is your responsibility to take what you've learned and begin to master your own emotional reactions. When you do, you will find that the extreme highs and lows of your emotional life will begin to even out. You will spend far less time in non-productive negative emotional states and far more time doing the things that will make your life fuller, richer and more satisfying.

