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THE PENDULUM

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Our emotions are constantly in motion, even when we sleep we dream. We are like a violin string that even when it still has its tension the potential for harmony or discord. We always possess an emotional tension within us which is the ever present possibility of pleasure and pain and even if we know ourselves well our emotions can always surprise us.

Swings of the Pendulum

The motion of emotion is like the swing of a pendulum. If the pendulum swings high it will then swing low and even when the pendulum is in the centre, still and calm, it has within it the energy to oscillate back and forth if it is moved. Similar processes are present in emotions. Even when we are calm we can quickly be touched off to swing either to the high side or to the low side.

I can be calm, centred in the middle of the pendulum and friends, whom I have not seen for some years, unexpectedly arrive. In the surprise and pleasure of seeing them and sharing news and gossip with them I can quickly become emotionally high, voluble, happy, enthusiastic. For most of us, social occasions are accompanied by pendulum swings. To use another example: I am driving my car, my emotions are relatively stable and quiet, what we will be calling tolerable and I am involved in an accident. My emotions swing high with anger, fear, perhaps guilt and embarrassment. This swing is about what happens to my feelings, not what appears to be happening. I may look calm and yet be very upset, or appear to be very angry and in fact my emotions are still, I am fairly calm.

Lows

The low of the pendulum is the result of a depletion of physical and emotional. You can feel low after a strenuous game of tennis, a swim a long car drive and these can be lows that are in what I call a tolerable area of the low side of the pendulum. Here we can get low without being hurt because we are close to the strength of our calm.

A pleasant low can also be a feeling we have after seeing a harrowing movie or a good production of a Shakespearian tragedy. The pleasant low can be the martyrdom of feeling that we are working harder than everyone else, or giving more than everyone else and in the low after the working and the giving we can feel rather smug or self-pitying or perhaps both at once.

The extent that we are going to be hurt by the self-pity or the smugness will depend on how far we swing on the pendulum. The further we swing low the more we are going to get hurt.

The same situation will apply to the unpleasant, intolerable low. The degree to which we are going to get hurt or hurt others in that low will depend on how deep that low is, and how

long that low is. When I swing very low, because of an extreme high, my mind will seduce me into focusing on the hurt around me to the exclusion of the nourishment around me. One way to begin to move out of this dangerous state is to be able to draw on other people, who are not caught up in the negativeness of my low; and who can move me toward doing something that will give me a feeling of accomplishment.

Even when the low feels pleasant, there is still a great temptation to stay there and focus on what I call the “down stuff”; the imperfectability of man, the darkness of the night, the selfishness, the meaninglessness of our live, the insignificance, the shortness of our lives, the inevitability of death, the profundity of pessimism and the impossibility of marriage. Some of these feelings can be enjoyable, some of these can be useful to us. What I am saying in Contribution Training is that we need to have an awareness of the process that is happening. When we are low we are not in fact able to evaluate things in a balanced way.

Often in the low, we want to say to ourselves that we are in fact in calm, we are seeing things in balance, when it is clear to an outsider that we are low and being negative. A function of the deep low side of the pendulum is feeling that our negativeness is profound.

We feel that we are both correct and justified in our negative evaluation. In fact, we have swung low on the pendulum and this is clear to others, while it is in no way clear to us. Even when someone points out to us that we are low, we do not want to recognise it.

The Unpleasant Low is a feeling of worthlessness, self hate depression and often guilt. When guilt slips up on us or engulfs us when we are in a low, that low is going to be invariably unpleasant and extremely hard to come out of. A pleasant Low of self pity can become an unpleasant low of depression because we begin in the self pity to feel guilty. Like most married people I can get into feelings of great martyrdom in terms of my relationship with my family. I can get into a low of feeling that I make all the sacrifices, then I can almost enjoy that low of feeling sorry for myself and feeling superior. But then if I begin to feel a sense of guilt because of what I am feeling towards my wife, then I will am going to be quickly flipped over into the unpleasant low of feeling depressed and failure. This guilt can feed on itself, I can begin to remember in the low all the ways I have failed my wife and my family. In the deep pleasant low and guilt, the deep unpleasant low.

An unpleasant low is going to be harder to get out of than a pleasant low. In unpleasant low we will often feel a great sense of inertia. We will be rejecting of people who want to assist us in moving out of a perhaps dangerous space that we are in.

People can stay in lows for very long periods of time: days, weeks, months, years. They can come to feel that their life in this low is quite tolerable. Yet they are always on the brink of hurting themselves more and hurting other people more.

We need to learn to be able to recognise when we are low, how we are low, and how deeply we are low. We need to be able to find ways to come out of these lows. We need to have people around us who have the ability to perceive when we are low and the strength to overcome our resistance to their efforts to help us. We need to find ways that we can get small amounts of feelings of accomplishments when we are low so that we can move

towards the tolerable area where we can take responsibility for the space we are in and in an ordinary way do something about it.

Highs

When we are swinging high compulsively and putting out the energy which that swing entails, we can hardly bear to be interrupted in what we are doing. This is one way that we can physically recognise the compulsiveness of the high. When I am high on conversation, I am talking- I am pushing my point across it is almost physically hurtful to stop myself from talking. When someone is swinging high with anger, verbally or physically wanting to lash out at any enemy, to stop the swing and bring the emotions back down towards the calm can be impossible. There are smaller ways in which we can recognise the compulsiveness of the high. I can be high if I am reading and cannot bear to be interrupted; or another high is when, because of my emotional swing I cannot concentrate any of my attention on the page I am reading. The words simply do not fit together into sentences and thoughts, because of the way my pendulum is swinging.

The energy rush towards the compulsive high takes away our awareness of where we are, who we are with, what we are doing. The only awareness I can have in the high, is the awareness of the high and in the high it is just about impossible to have an awareness of the strength that lies in the calm. Yet this is precisely the awareness we need if we are going to get too high and get hurt in the high, and then get hurt in the inevitable swing to the low. In the high we need some way of slowly bringing ourselves back a point at a time, into the tolerable area where we can have some choices about where we are going to put our energy. Where we can have some choices about how angry we are going to get, or how high we are going to get, artificially through drinking or drugs, or how high we are going to get in talking with someone who really stimulates us.

As with the low, where we need someone else to help us find some feelings of accomplishment and slowly move from the deep low into a low that is tolerable, so in the high we often need someone else to point out to us how high we are getting. Yet that interjection when we are swinging high will so often feel to be an intolerable interference. What I am saying here is that we can train ourselves to avoid those extreme highs around which we are going to get hurt.

The Calm

The middle area of the pendulum is the area of the calm. It relates to but is not the same as the complete stillness of a pendulum not moving at all. Our emotions are never this still. Life means a continual movement of our emotions just as it means a continual movement of ourselves and our organs. Without that movement we are dead. Even when we sleep our emotions are in some state of movement, we are dreaming, we are absorbing and digesting

the emotional lessons and the emotional pain of the day. Without the emotional calm of the sleep, we would go mad.

Our true strength, our real health, and our genuine awareness is to be found in the calm. In the low our emotions are turning inwards. Twisting and turning on each other, becoming convoluted, with the mental sabotage that we are alone with these emotions, with these problems and that solutions are not possible. In the low, we can only be aware of ourselves as failure or victims. In the low, our mind functions to convince us that this is the truth, that we are either failure or victims. In this way we are most productive in manufacturing emotional problems which are in fact mainly function of the degree to which we are low on the pendulum, not a function of the content of those problems. If my low is sufficiently low and deep, I can turn my failed marriage into a sincere belief that I have serious problems in intimate relationships, in any long term relationship with a woman, around sex, around being able to trust other people over a long association. If I continue to stay low, I can feed these problems with new evidence, new guilt, new proof that these problems are the core of my person. However, what may well be happening is I do not have problems that are serious in these areas. However I am very low. In this sense, the low creates my illness as it is sapping my strength.

If I have some time in the calm area, perhaps I can see that I am going through the break-up of my marriage, that this has happened to a lot of other people, that it is incredibly painful yet ordinary. Perhaps in the calm I can draw on the deep knowledge that we had five very good years together and that in ways my wife and I were really good for each other in those five years. Perhaps I can draw on my belief that love does not always take one form. My wife and I had a love that was important and while the hurt, sadness is unbearable perhaps I can believe that that can pass. Within the calm, I do not have to create an illness out of this hurt that that I am going through.

Within the calm lies our incredible ability to recuperate, adapt, to keep going in the face of surprising change and often unbearable pain. For me, somewhere deep in our organism we know that tragedy is mundane and we live in a world of hurt. I do not know if it is because we know this that we have so much strength to cope, or because we have so much strength to cope we can face the reality of how life hard is. I do know that people are mainly strong, healthy and capable of contributing. I know that because I have some understanding of the calm, and of the strength that we have when we are in touch with our true selves; because it is the true me that I can find when I can relate to my calm, I can be close to that point of stillness. Personally I am not very often there. To be there more than I am is a struggle that requires a lot of discipline and a lot of help from others.

One of the ways we get hurt in the compulsive highs is that we are taken away from the true awareness that lies in the calm. The distance between the calm and the high represents a loss of awareness.

When we have a relationship to the calm area, we can make contributions to others without defeating ourselves by the highs of grandiose plans or the lows of demeaning our abilities; and what I am talking about now is a relationship to the calm, I am not saying that we should always stay in that still area. We need the energy to flow through the highs and we

need to recuperate that energy in the lows. We need the aggressiveness and the risk-taking of the swinging high and we need the evaluation self dance of our lows.

However, our true strength and our health and our awareness lies in the calm.

The Use of Deep Highs and Lows

There is however, another force that can counteract our fears. Within the extreme highs and lows of the pendulum in which we experience so much of our hurt, lies the energy to shake our life at its very roots. Within that shaking we can often find really useful new directions. In the anger at our superiors in a job we do not like and where we are being treated unfairly, we can find the courage to take the risk of resigning; and that feeling of being able to feel ourselves in an environment is both very calm and very powerful. This is the calmness and the power of at times being able to feel ourselves in a beautiful physical setting. – A sea shore at moonlight, or being alone on a mountain top and at that time we can have the awareness of both the grandeur of nature and our own insignificance and our own power. True awareness is the balancing of being able to see myself as both insignificant and powerful, and to skip ahead to some material we will be dealing with later it also the ability to be able to see myself as both caring and cruel. In short, within the calm I am able to see how I relate to my world and I am able to see that on a mundane, day-2-day, moment to moment basis.

If we are swinging to extreme highs and then falling into extreme lows, we will not have a relationship to the calm. The calm will not exist for us. We will not have a way of tapping that strength that health and that awareness. The fall from an extreme high is such that we spend no time in the calm and we do not even know its existence. It is like being on a fast train at night time; we do not know the country we are in.
