

Feeling it ALL

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Last week I woke up at 4:30 in the morning and there was no way I was getting back to sleep. So I put on a random old Netflix movie, *The Family Man* with Nicholas Cage. Jack was a super successful Wall Street tycoon with everything but love. But he did not want love. He had power, respect, a fast car, and a penthouse apartment. And he was truly happy. But then Hollywood did what it does best and in came a skinny black man who pulled an *It's a Wonderful Life* trick, and Jack woke up in an alternate life, with his college sweetheart as his wife and 2 cute kids, a cluttered house in New Jersey, and a job selling tires. It was a nightmare. Jack was confused, lost, angry, and trapped. But in time, he transformed. In a matter of weeks, he was not just happy, he was in love. A part of him that lay dormant for his whole life blossomed, and his heart was full of tenderness and joy. Then snap, back comes the thin black guy and Jack woke up in his luxurious bed alone. And he passionately knew this was not the life he wanted. He was a family man, and he wanted love.

Feelings. You and I and everyone on this Earth are motivated by our feelings. And throughout our lives, we at some time or another feel every emotion. Of course we usually just want to feel the pleasant ones. We want happiness, peace, satisfaction, and most of all, love. We also at times want to feel powerful, successful, respected, appreciated. But not one of us misses out on the emotions of anger, jealousy, regret, despair, grief, pain, and loneliness. Our personalities and our life-choices are a mosaic of mixed emotions which come together to form who we are, how we think, where we live, who we are with, what work we do, how we care for ourselves, and how we entertain ourselves. To be human is to feel it all, and to create our lives based on our feelings.

The word that always pops up for me is WHY. Why are we so emotional? For me, the answer goes back to my belief that we are spiritual beings having a human experience. We each have a soul which is eternal, and each soul chooses to be born into a body to experience what it feels like to be human. Many people think our soul came to Earth to learn lessons, and perhaps that is true. The notion of Earth being a school is common, and it makes sense. I have learned many things in my life which I am sure are beneficial to my soul. And believe me, I am still learning.

Billions of people believe in reincarnation and karma, and that makes sense to me too. The theory is that each soul chooses to be born into a body in order to experience certain things. The soul has a loose agenda which is guided and complicated by free will and external circumstances. My new twin granddaughters, who at a month old, already have distinct behaviours. We are not born blank slates, ready to be influenced by external factors. We are born with old souls which are eager to be alive again. We have built in likes, talents, phobias, and even personalities. We are thrilled to experience everything which is a part of this complicated cornucopia of emotions that is a part of being human.

Fifteen years ago I was given Emmanuel's Book, a Manual for Living Comfortably in the Cosmos. It begins: "The purpose of life is exploration. Adventure. Learning. Pleasure. And another step towards home." It says "This Earth plane is neither the beginning nor the end of your existence. It is simply a step, a schoolroom." As in school, we learn by trial and error. We

learn by observation. We learn by working hard and being focused. But we learn best by experience. It is hard to learn how to paint if you have never dipped a brush into colours. It is hard to do math if you've never understood that you have 10 fingers that you can use to add and subtract. As a soul it is hard to learn unless you have a body with senses, emotions, mobility, and the ability to think. And so each of us is a beautiful blend of body and spirit, so we can learn.

But why then do we feel so many negative emotions, and do so many things to sabotage our happiness? Is it because we learn best by contrast? Can we really know joy without knowing sadness? Can we feel peace if we have never felt chaotic and confused? Can we feel deep love without the experience of intense loneliness or fear? Do we need every hurtful emotion as a balance or as a motivator? Perhaps.

There is another theory about the soul which does not dwell on learning as much as experiencing. We are not here to perfect anything, but we simply choose to be born to feel everything. Being an eternal soul is boring, with no ability to taste, to run, to sleep, to play, to make love, to get angry, to weep, to shout for joy. How lucky we are as humans to be able to express how we feel, and to seek out new experiences that bring out our feelings! People do dare-devil things like jumping out of airplanes and rafting down rough rapids. They choose to go to horror films, and to movies with graphic violence and torture. Some self mutilate and some become addicted to harmful substances. And many millions over the ages have voluntarily gone to war, to kill each other and to experience the worst of humanity. At a lesser extreme each of us has done one or more things which have sabotaged our health and happiness. There seems to be a drive in people to feel every emotion, even the ones that are horrible. This makes no sense to me, but I know it is true.

If people were allowed to give the more violent and greedy aspects of our personalities free reign, I think humanity would have destroyed itself long ago. So there are checks and balances built into our innate make-up. One of these is the sense of belonging. We are social creatures who want to be respected and loved. Very, very few of us can deny this. So to be loved, we have to be nice to each other. We have to learn to control our antagonistic and selfish sides in order to get along with people. It is hard to be loved if you are cruel. So we learn to tame our more hedonistic tendencies and enhance our traits like generosity, compassion, and kindness. We are taught by our families, our teachers, and our peers how to get along harmoniously with others.

From the earliest times of civilization people have had some spiritual beliefs that have been turned into religions. At their best, religions teach us to love each other and to take care of each other. They ideally bring out our more positive emotions. I think they are one of the safe-guards to the survival of humanity. And they provide meaning in our lives and usually a connection with a creator or a God. Being involved in a spiritual community is a soul growth experience. I know many of you here feel like this church is your sacred home and that its members are like extended family. And I know that here you learn and practice important values that make every aspect of your life better.

This week I read the book Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman. He says that there is a huge difference between mental intelligence and emotional intelligence. Many people with high IQs have not developed their ability to feel or to express their emotions properly. So many are awkward socially and are often not really happy. Emotional intelligence helps us to navigate the ups and downs of social interaction, and navigate personal challenges in ways that help us to feel peaceful, happy, and loved. Unfortunately, the interpersonal skills necessary for harmonious relationships are not directly taught in our schools, and often not in our homes. So we are all in emotional turmoil more than we have to be.

There are five components to emotional intelligence. They are:

- 1) Knowing one's emotions, which is part of self awareness.
- 2) Managing emotions which means handling your feelings so they are appropriate, and so you do not suffer unnecessarily.
- 3) Motivating oneself has to do with self control and getting into the "flow" of life.
- 4) Recognizing emotions in others helps you be more caring and have empathy.
- 5) Handling relationships of all sorts is a vital part of living a full, loving, happy life.

The more adept each of us are at mastering the skills of emotional intelligence the more enjoyable and fulfilling our lives will be. But even if we are an emotional genius, we will experience all of the tough emotions as well. We can just handle the difficult times better.

Everyone here has felt a multitude of emotions in their lives. Usually, we feel the most when we are in a time of transition or a time of celebration or a time of loss. For me one of the most emotional times was when I gave birth to my daughter Sunyata. There was the joy of anticipation while I was pregnant, to have a child to raise and to love. There was the fear of all the ways my whole life would be changed, including my body. There was a deeper bonding with my husband and the appreciation for how helpful he was. And of course there was the intense pain of childbirth, and the fear that came with that. Then the indescribable joy of holding my beautiful, perfect baby. I was overwhelmed with a love like I had never felt before, and still feel today.

My consistent emotion is one of gratitude. This is a peaceful feeling, bordering on bliss. It is an attitude of appreciation that has enriched my life in so many ways. Many times a day I take the time to give thanks for the people, events, meals, beauty, and pleasures I have been blessed with.

We will take a moment now to think about a time in your life when you felt intense emotions, and perhaps after the service you can talk to someone about your experience. Or you can take this time to be grateful for your life....

I have a good friend, Anne Berube, who wrote the book Be, Feel, Think, Do. She writes "The invitation is to feel it all and use this body of ours for what it was made for - a vehicle for the soul to feel this human experience. When we can see our being as a processor of all our experience, including suffering, we suffer less." (pg. 131) She says "emotions are the bridge

between the soul and our thoughts. They let us know the information we are presented with is important. Our emotions tell us we need to pay attention." (pg.137) She contends that to live a happy life we need to relax into being, and experience the basic peace and joy of life. We must let ourselves feel our emotional reactions, before we jump into thinking and doing. This makes our life more soul centred and more enhanced emotionally. We learn to love others, to love the Divine, and to love ourselves. In short, we learn to love and feel it all.