

# Emotions and the Pursuit of Peaceful Living

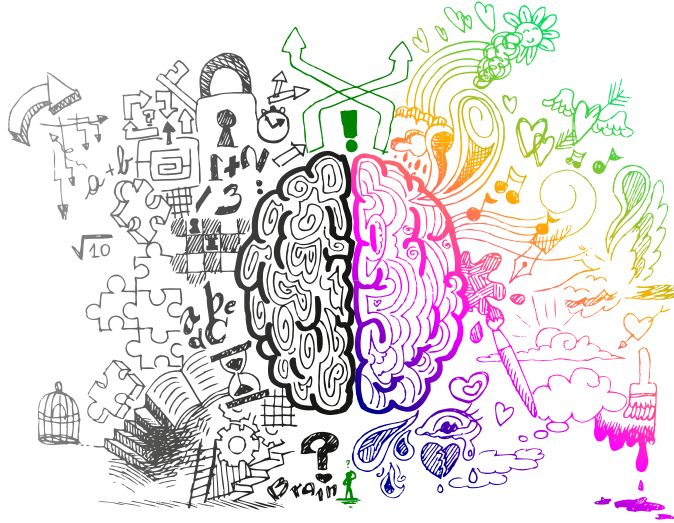
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Emotions play a catalytic role in how people react to the situations presented to them. For the same situation, different individuals react in different ways as we are seeing with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Although, generally speaking, the nature of this rare pandemic is uniform across the world, individual reactions vary significantly even at a local level with same demographics under similar conditions. This phenomenon is not unique to COVID-19 pandemic – it is the same during all events – big or small. Human emotions, at play at every juncture in life, are significant contributors to these variations in human reactions. A perspective on how such emotions are formed and what causes their variations is presented here.

Life is a journey of unending experiences, internalized and with the external world, which could be pleasant or unpleasant depending on the situation and one's state of mind. Each of these experiences results in emotions which could be positive or negative depending on the nature of the experience, personal attitude, outlook, spiritual state, and many other factors which may or may not be under one's control. Generally speaking, the positive or auspicious emotions create joyous feelings with peace, calmness, happiness, pleasure, cheers, friendliness, love, etc.; and negative or inauspicious emotions create distressing feelings with sadness, hurt, anxiety, anger, hate, jealousy, etc. However, one's reactions to emotions depend on how one regulates those emotions. Honorable individuals strive to maximize auspicious emotions and minimize, and

finally eliminate, the inauspicious ones. However, Jain thinkers expound<sup>1</sup> an additional step – especially for those persevering to achieve the spiritual apex – to strive for a state of pure emotions which are even beyond auspicious emotions. The benefits of this practice become clear later in this article.



Emotions are complex formulations that are composed of elements of cognitive expressions resulting from an individual's experiences and their interactions with other living beings or inanimate objects. Emotions work interactively with one's essential consciousness (being the very nature of the soul), and one's mind (or psychology that is external to the conscious

soul) to regulate one's conduct and define one's character. For spiritual practitioners, one's progress is directly related to the type and quality of one's emotions, and the level of one's indulgence in those emotions.

Spiritually speaking, an individual's emotions grow out of conscientious deliberations between the external psychology of one's mind and the essential consciousness of one's soul. The process involves a mental analysis of one's experiences and observations, and concurrent interventions upon these experiences and observations by one's conscious in the form of one's will (vīrya). The mind, using its cognitive capacity, draws inferences by consuming and analyzing the observational data it receives from the senses (touch, taste, smell, seeing and hearing), and the emotions arise from this mix of observation and analyses. This all happens at a lightning speed because we experience emotional reactions to situations in a way that is pretty much instantaneous.

The cognitive capacity, which directly affects the type and quality of emotions, is influenced by one's state of consciousness on the one hand, and one's state of mind and its vicissitudes on the other that either occludes or enhances the conscious state of the soul. The state of mind and fortitude of consciousness depends on one's karmic state that is covering the soul, which, according to the Jain doctrine of karma<sup>2,3</sup>, is tied to repercussions from one's thoughts, physical



actions, and speech (such as in communications) that have accumulated during the current and/or previous lives. Karmic repercussions from these hinder one's soul from exhibiting the full strength of its inherent, pure consciousness—thereby affecting the quality and capacity of one's cognitive analysis, and hence, the resulting nature of one's emotions.

Thus, one's state of the mind directly influences the type and quality of emotions one is experiencing. When not restrained, the mind constantly wanders under the influence of its trepidations and/or attachments, and these wanderings seriously affect the formation of emotions in terms of their nature, intensity, duration, etc. One can learn to restrain the mind with regular practice of mindfulness and meditation<sup>4</sup>.

Emotions are formed uninterruptedly through all awakening moments – while eating, working, driving, reading, writing, and everything else we do in life. The external psychology of the mind and the inherent consciousness of the soul are continuously conducting analysis (processing the senses observations and other information and drawing conclusions), contemplating actions, and performing introspections (evaluating the conclusion for their validity in context of one's state of mind, persona, objectives, etc.). While this feedback loop of analysis, contemplations of actions and introspections is continuing, the emotions are created, modified, amplified, diminished, neutralized or eliminated depending on the individual's internal state and external factors like surrounding environment, people, etc.

It is important to note that while the emotions grow out of deliberations between the mind and consciousness, they are, at the same time, contributing to the same deliberations about whether to engage in rightful or wrongful actions by the individual. Thus, one's responses to emotions depends on one's state of consciousness and mental disposition, and one's ability to regulate emotions – all of which could vary significantly. For instance, the fear of an accident may prevent someone from driving recklessly, or one's sadness may motivate one to help others in

need, or one's excitement from an achievement may lead to egoistic and irresponsible behavior towards others. Consider, a situation where without any provocation Henry attacks John either physically or with spiteful language. This could prompt John to retaliate with a range of options including, to immediately strike back in kind, or to retract and plan how and when to react, or simply not react at all. The type and extent of his reaction would also depend on his mental disposition or emotional state – e.g., John would react one way if he were already angry, and differently if he were in a joyous mood. If John is a naturally peaceful individual, his reaction could be muted, such as forgiving Henry. In this manner, we can envision scores of reactions depending on John's states of emotional, mental and consciousness dispositions.

According to Jain philosophy, the state of consciousness and cognitive capacity of the mind – which are instrumental in forming emotions – are conditioned by four passions or vices – anger (*krodha*), egoism (*māna*), deception (*māyā*), and greed (*lobha*). These vices bring forth two inclinations: attachment (*rāga*) and malice or aversion (*dveṣa*). Together, these vices and inclinations are catalysts for the nature of emotions. They can take an individual on a trajectory of positivity or a spiral of negativity depending on one's spiritual efforts, including the practice of meditation and mindfulness, to tame the mind and purify the consciousness. Two of these vices – greed and attachment – are considered to be the hardest to control and eliminate.

Greed is the worst instigator. It is the cause of insatiable longing of humans for everything – wealth, fame, health, appearance, social or political stature, and uncountable other desires. Longings can result in all kinds of detrimental emotions. To illustrate the point, when one fails to satisfy a desire, they become angry, are ready to deploy any means to achieve it, and so on. And upon achieving it, they could become arrogant-egoistic on having achieved it, or sad-angry-violent at the thought of losing it. When someone else acquires what one desires, one could become envious and willing to engage in deplorable means to deprive others of it. Thus, we can easily see how greed comes into play to create all kinds of undesirable emotions.

Attachment leads to possessiveness. After acquiring a desired object and becoming possessive of it, any thought of losing it could result in sadness, anger, violence or a slew of other negative emotions. It is the cause of aggravated emotions – the stronger the attachment, the fiercer the emotions. Detachment, on the other hand, is instrumental in pacifying one's emotions.

An individual who is motivated by a quest for honorable living, strives to minimize inauspicious emotions and maximize auspicious emotions by steadily abating their anger, ego, deceit, and greed while suppressing attachment and malice. Such an individual develops respect for other living beings and ecology, and becomes thoughtful, mindful, and a follower of the inner (pure) consciousness by developing other similar traits. This is a lifestyle that reveres the principles of nonviolence, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-possessiveness and honorable conduct<sup>5</sup>. While enjoying the emotions of peace and joy, such individuals radiate the same all around themselves.

For millennia, Jain thinkers have taught that while focusing on enhancing the auspicious emotions, one must remain attentive to their potentially adverse implications. If left unchecked, elations from auspicious emotions – for instance, those emanating from success – could easily lead to the feelings of arrogance (ego), escalating desire (greed) to retain the achievement, and concern about losing it (attachment). Similarly, one should be careful in responding to the negative emotions – for instance, when deceived by a friend, one should try to motivate that person to act ethically or even ask for a retribution, but always refrain from a negative response such as being deceitful in return. The reemergence of spiteful vices could dilute or reverse one's hard-earned accomplishments leading to digression from a righteous state to an inauspicious one.

That is why Jain philosophy<sup>6</sup> emphasizes the practitioners to persevere in the pursuit of purifying one's emotions. Pure emotions are auspicious emotions which are devoid of all kinds of vices, in particular, greed and attachment. With the emergence of pure emotions, a practitioner mitigates the risk of reverting to spiritually downward trend. With minimization of maladies such as egoism, greed and attachment, the advanced aspirants start experiencing the innate characteristics of their soul with unbounded consciousness (*chetnā*), bliss (*sūkhā*), and vigor or willpower (*vīryā*). Now, they become better at controlling their mind to desist forming any adverse emotions. If any emotions do get formed, the aspirants stay neutral in an unattached state without indulging in them. They continue to observe the world through their senses but keep their minds divested from external maladies, refraining from such so as to abstain from processing sensory information with any passion or prejudice based on one's ego, and desire for self-gratification. Such aspirants use sensory information to enhance their knowledge while staying engrossed in blissful emotions that are pure and free of any maladies. One may regard this state as that of passivity, but to the contrary, it is an active exercise where all the actions are controlled by the soul in its state of inherent purified conscious, and not by the mind.

In summary, emotions are cognitive reflexes that are created, strengthened or dissipated interactively with active participation of one's mind and conscious. They can be complementary to one's quest for honorable living when auspicious, and counter-productive when inauspicious in quality. Therefore, one needs to control all kinds of emotions to avoid getting into a spiral of negativity or a swirl of over-excitement, while at the same time, manage one's responses to the emotions to avoid reacting in ways which could be harmful in the long run. One must strive to minimize and eventually eliminate the inauspicious emotions, and maximize the auspicious ones. However, for the ultimate spiritual advancement, one needs to experience only pure emotions by staying neutral to all emotions without actively indulging in any kind of passions.

In the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, when we are assessing reactions, our own and those of others, we should be cautious that our emotional reactions are based on these insights. Our emotions should not confuse us into reacting in ways that are harmful and based on egoism, aversion, and attachment. They should be the result of a harmonious understand of ourselves, our nature, and thus be a force of awakening and not ignorance.

## References

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- <sup>1</sup> Parveen Jain, chap. 6 in *An Introduction to Jain Philosophy* (New Delhi: DKPrintworld, 2019).
  - <sup>2</sup> Ibid., chap. 11.
  - <sup>3</sup> Sadhvies Nidhi-Kripa, *Karma Samhitā*, 2006, pp124-132, ISBN : 81-88795-03-8, Maitri Charitable Foundation, New Delhi, India.
  - <sup>4</sup> Parveen Jain, *Living with Mindfulness*, <https://www.parveenjain.com/blog/living-with-mindfulness>
  - <sup>5</sup> Ibid., chap. 12.
  - <sup>6</sup> Ibid., chap. 10.

## Further Reading

1. Simon Makin, *Constant Shifts between Mental States Mark a Signature of Consciousness*, Scientific American, March 12, 2020, Web: (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/constant-shifts-between-mental-states-mark-a-signature-of-consciousness/>)
2. Alan Cowen and Dacher Keltner, *Self-Report Captures 27 Distinct Categories of Emotion Bridged by Continuous Gradients*, (Berkeley Social Interactions Laboratory, Department of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley, CA, August 7, 2017)
3. James J. Gross, *Emotions Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects*, Psychological Inquiry, 26: 1-26, 2015, Taylor & Francis Group, LLC)