

3 FEELING WELL BY THINKING STRAIGHT

“What do you mean by a person’s intelligently organizing and disciplining his thinking?” our clients, friends, and professional associates often ask.

Answer: “Exactly that. Just what we say.”

“But when you say that by rationally and realistically organizing and disciplining his or her thinking a human can live the most self-fulfilling, creative, and emotionally satisfying life, you make that ‘life’ sound like a cold, intellectual, mechanical and, candidly, rather unpleasant affair.”

“Maybe so. But doesn’t it *sound* that way because our parents, teachers (and therapists!) propagandize us to believe that we can ‘live it up’ and ‘get the most out of life’ only through highly ‘emotional’ experiences? Haven’t novelists and dramatists, by rationalizing some of their own ‘emotional’ excesses, often spread the dubious notion that unless we roller-coast from deep depression to manic joy and then down to the bogs of despair again, we can’t claim we really ‘live’?”

“Oh, come now! Don’t you exaggerate?”

“Yes, probably. But don’t *you*?”

“No. Surely you don’t, in your own personal lives, always behave like cold-blooded, big-brained, emotion-squelching individuals who never *feel* any sorrow, pain, joy, elation—or *anything*?”

“We hope we don’t. And we can get affidavits from sundry past and present wives, sweethearts, friends, and co-workers to prove that we don’t. But whoever proved well-organized, rational thinking incompatible with intense emotion?”

"It still sounds that way. And as yet you rational therapy boys haven't done a thing to disprove this. How can you disprove our feeling that rationality makes us too cold?"

"We don't have to disprove *your* hypothesis. According to the first principles of science, the individual who hypothesizes had better prove the theory and not expect anyone who doubts to disprove it. You assume that just because reason *may* interfere with intense emotion (and we definitely grant that it *may*) it *must* so interfere. When and how will you prove *that*?"

"A good point," our questioners often admit. "Reasoning need not interfere seriously with intense feeling, but doesn't it normally tend to do so?"

"Not that we've ever found. Reasoning normally blocks inappropriate, self-defeating, or disorganizing emotion. Indeed, we hold, as one of our main tenets of RET, that since thinking creates feeling, the more clearly the inappropriately emoting individual thinks, the less he continues to sustain his inappropriate state of feeling."

"Then you've practically admitted our charge," our questioners often interject at this point. "You've just said that rational thinking and intense emotion cannot coexist and that the former drives away the latter."

Nothing of the sort! You've illegitimately substituted the word 'intense'—which we did *not* use—for our words 'inappropriate, self-defeating, and disorganizing.'"

"What a silly quibble! Don't they mean the same thing?"

"Not necessarily. Intense emotion may appropriately and realistically follow the actualizing of some of your values. Thus, you may greatly desire to love, find a most suitable object (such as a member of the other sex) with traits you rate highly, and intensely love that person. You may then express your love quite constructively by treating your beloved affectionately and by inducing him or her to join you as your steady companion or mate. And your love may lead to fortunate results: inducing you to work harder at your profession. Self-defeating or disorganizing love, on the other hand, would rarely lead to these results."

"Your main point, then," interject our skeptics, "holds that although disorganizing emotion seems largely incompatible with rational thinking, *appropriate* emotion and rationality seem compatible. Right?"

"Yes. We contend that rational thinking in the long run results in increased feelings of pleasure. For human reason, properly used, helps people rid themselves of their disruptive feelings—and especially of disorganizing panic and rage. Then highly pleasurable emotions and pursuits tend to surface. Even unpleasant emotions—such as intense sorrow and regret—help us to feel happier and get more of what we want in life. For when we handle them properly,

and use them as signals that something has gone wrong in our lives and had better get corrected, they help us rid ourselves of undesirable experiences and occurrences (such as failure and rejection) that instigate us to feel sorry and regretful."

"Very interesting. But this remains *your* hypothesis. And, as you so cleverly noted before, the onus now rests on *you* to prove your view valid."

"Right. And prove it we shall, in the remaining pages of this book, by presenting a mass of clinical, experimental, personal, and other data. But the most important and unique proof remains the one you'd better try for yourself."

"Who—us?"

"Yes—you. If you really want to see whether the theories we shall present have value for you, we would strongly advise you to keep your present appropriately skeptical frame of mind, but also experimentally to put it at times in abeyance and give yourself a chance to *try out* our rational viewpoint in your own life. Take some area in which you think you have needless misery—some shame, guilt, or grandiosity that keeps ravaging you—and try, really try, some of our thinking formulas to rid yourself of these damaging feelings. Don't accept what we say on faith. Try out our notions. See to what results they lead."

"Seems fair enough. Maybe we shall try."

"OK, then. Let's see if we can get on with some of the evidence to back our basic theories of rational thinking and *appropriate* emoting."

At this point, we generally outline some of the basic principles of rational living.

As noted, human feeling stems from thinking. Does this mean that you can—or should—control *all* your emotions by reason? Not exactly.

As a human, you have four basic processes, all indispensable to your survival and happiness: 1. You perceive or sense—see, taste, smell, feel hear. 2. You feel or emote—love, hate, fear, feel guilty or depressed. 3. You move or act—walk, eat, swim, climb, and so forth. 4. You reason or think—remember, imagine, hypothesize, conclude, solve problems.

Ordinarily, you experience none of these four basic processes in isolation. Take, first of all, perceiving. When you perceive or sense something (for example, see an apple), you also tend, at the very same time, to think about it (figure out its suitability for food); to have some feelings about it (to desire or not to desire it); and to do something about it (to pick it up or throw it away).

Similarly, if you move or act (say, pick up a stick), you also tend to perceive what you do (for example, to see and touch the stick); to think about your act (imagine what you might do with

this particular stick); and to have some emotion about it (to like it or dislike it).

Again: If you think about something (for example, about a crossword puzzle), you simultaneously tend to perceive (see) it; to have feelings about it (react favorably or unfavorably to it); and to move in connection with it (use a pencil to write on it).

Finally, if you emotate about something (say, hate other people), you will also tend to perceive (see, hear, touch) them; think about them (remember them, figure out how to avoid them); and take some kind of action in regard to them (run from them).

We function, then holistically—perceiving, moving, thinking, and emoting simultaneously. Our four basic modes of relating to the world do *not* work separately, each beginning where the others leave off. They all significantly overlap and denote different aspects of the same life processes.

Thus, thinking, aside from consisting of bioelectric changes in the brain and of remembering, learning, and problem-solving, also involves—and to some extent, has to involve—sensory, motor, and emotional behavior.

Instead, therefore, of saying, as we usually vaguely say, “Jones thinks about this puzzle,” we could more accurately note that “Jones perceives-moves-feels-and—thinks about this puzzle. Because, however, Jones’s motives in regard to the puzzle may largely focus upon solving it, and only incidentally on seeing, manipulating, and emoting about it, we may state that he thinks about the puzzle without specially mentioning that he also perceives, moves, and feels in relation to it. But we’d better not forget that Jones (like everyone else) doesn’t really have the ability, except for a split second or two, just to think about the puzzle.

Question: Since we have four basic life processes and cannot truly separate thinking from perceiving, moving, and feeling, why do we give it top billing in rational-emotive therapy?

Answer: For reasons we shall shortly make clear. But let us first point out that emoting rather than thinking emerges as the main problem of human living today. Previously, in competition with other animals, humans had the problem of seeing, moving, and thinking better than they did, to ensure their survival. Today, after inventing eyeglasses, radar, aircraft, electronic calculators, and other perceiving-moving-thinking aids, humans rule supreme on this earth and literally seek other worlds to conquer.

Only in the emotional area have they as yet made remarkably few advances. In spite of amazing physical progress, they still show little more emotional maturity or happiness than in past centuries. Indeed, they act in some ways more childishly, emotionally uncontrolled, and mentally disturbed.

We have made some progress, of course. In the field of diagnosis

and psychotherapy, considerable understanding of emotional disturbance has already occurred. In the biochemical realm, the use of drugs, neurological exploration, biofeedback methods, and other techniques add to our knowledge of how humans upset themselves and what we can do to help them regain their emotional equilibrium.

Nonetheless, our outstanding problem emerges as that of controlling or changing emotion and thereby alleviating almost universal disturbance. Which leads us to ask: *How* can we go about understanding emotion and make it better serve human ends?