

Coaching to the Human Soul Ontological Coaching and Deep Change

Volume II: Emotional Learning and Ontological Coaching

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Introduction

Emotions and human existence

Humans are not only linguistic beings, constituted in language, they are also emotional beings. To be human is to live in a continual flow of moods and emotions, like a “stream of feeling”, that is intertwined with our desires and preferences, and what matters to us. In our everyday “busyness”, during which we are preoccupied with continual thoughts about such matters as tasks at hand, things to be done, what we think of others and what they think about us, we are often unaware of what is happening in our emotional world and how this shapes the quality of our lives.

Emotions are present with us throughout our lives. People do not leave their emotions in the car park or on public transport when they go to work! We are emotionally active even when we are asleep, as evidenced by our dreams. Emotions are an integral part of the human experience and underpin all forms of human action. Thinking, listening, planning, decision-making, speaking and physical movement are all human actions continually influenced by emotions. We are shaped by our emotional experiences, for our emotions are powerful determinants of the quality of our actions and how we experience life.

Organisations ignore the role of emotions in the workplace at their peril, for they have a direct bearing on:

- leadership and management excellence;
- team development and performance;
- innovative thinking;
- business results;
- stress reduction and the wellbeing of individuals;
- the implementation of change; and
- the transformation of organisational culture.

The intellectual heritage of the Western world, dominated by a mindset that privileges rational and analytical thinking, has retarded recognition of the pivotal role of emotions in the quality of human perception and behaviour. In the somewhat provocative words of 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, “only fools and hypocrites want to eliminate emotions”.¹ Significant developments in neuroscience² and psychology (in the area known as Emotional Intelligence)³ lend support to Nietzsche’s statement.

Emotions and the human soul

Our time in history can present significant emotional challenges. Accelerating and often disruptive change requires continual adjustment and adaptation to new circumstances for which we have not been prepared. Consequently, we may find our selves repeatedly “off balance” and unsettled. We may wonder, “Who is in charge of my emotional life – me or the rest of the world?”

Continually experiencing emotional disequilibrium does not necessarily mean being in emotional turmoil, but it does mean that we do not operate from a secure emotional foundation in dealing with the vicissitudes of life. Being emotionally “off balance” may be experienced in various ways – as an on-going sense of worrying, being negative and “grouchy”, struggling to cope, a persistent vague, yet nagging, sense of dissatisfaction, or a non-specific dulling of enjoyment in life. What can be at stake is the issue of living a meaningful and fulfilling life, which is an issue of the human soul.

Emotions are an integral part of the soul. From an ontological perspective, the soul is the intersection of our linguistic, emotional and somatic being, and is about feeling deeply connected to our full humanity; in particular it is about being in touch with what profoundly matters. Dictionary definitions of the soul clearly articulate the place of emotions in the human soul. For example:

- The seat of human personality, intellect, will and emotions.⁴
- The seat of emotions, feelings and sentiments; the emotional part of man's nature; intellectual or spiritual power; higher development of the mental faculties.⁵
- The word “soul” in English is derived from the old English word “sawol”, the earliest recorded use being 1121. Its meaning was “spiritual and emotional part of a person, animate existence”.⁶

Experiencing a life that continually nourishes and enriches the soul is not only about life going well “on the outside”, but also “on the inside” (i.e. the interior dimension of our existence). Visible indicators of success, such as material and financial security, highly regarded employment, enjoyable social life, and positive family and workplace relationships are all important contributions to the quality of life. Equally important is what 19th century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard referred to as a “rich inner life”.⁷

Emotions are at the heart of a rich inner life. Our most important relationship is the relationship we have with our individual selves. This is not only what we think, but also what we *feel*, about our selves. Being at peace with who we are, having a passion and an enthusiasm for life, and experiencing the joy and pathos of life all constitute essential emotional ingredients of a rich inner life that nourishes the soul.

Emotional Learning

Unfortunately, “the world” does not constantly attend to our wellbeing, express concern and offer assistance when we are experiencing emotional difficulties. Somehow we are expected to be able to manage, yet our emotional education is left to chance, ignored, or at best marginalised, by the formal curricula of our educational institutions.

An important aim of this volume of *Coaching to the Human Soul* is to position *the emotional domain of human existence as a domain of learning and change*. An emotional learner is not someone who stands at a distance from emotions and inspects them in a detached manner. An emotional learner is open to fully experiencing their emotions, especially ones that are not familiar and potentially uncomfortable. They are willing to learn to utilise their emotions to develop the quality of their thinking, creativity, decision-making, leadership, responses to challenging situations, and personal and professional relationships.

This book is an invitation to become an emotional learner: to inquire into, explore and learn about the many and diverse aspects of the emotional world, conceptually and experientially.

A fundamental premise of Ontological Coaching is that *emotions are an integral part of the process of deep change*. Learning and change occur in the human nervous system. Because emotions occur within the nervous system they are embodied experiences, influencing all aspects of our being and behaviour. The domains of language, emotions and body are inextricably intertwined in the nature of our existence and all three domains are involved in the change process, especially in transformation or deep change.

Despite considerable expansion of the knowledge base about emotions, a caution is in order if we are to fully embrace the power of emotions to facilitate profound learning and deep change. There is a risk that our approach to emotions remains dominated by a rational and analytical mindset, from which emotions are viewed intellectually and conceptually, and not experientially. Emotions are not simply concepts, even though language is used to identify and label emotions. Emotions are felt experiences, occurring within the body. They encompass all of our being. Humans are not only linguistic and emotional beings; they are also bodily or somatic beings.

Emotions and Ontological Coaching

As the purpose of coaching is to facilitate learning and change, working skilfully in the emotional domain is an essential coaching competence. Because of the integral role of emotions and body in the process of change, ignoring the emotional and somatic domains in coaching is likely to limit the resourcefulness of the coach and their value to clients.

From the perspective of Ontological Coaching, working respectfully and competently in the emotional worlds of coaching clients is an indispensable prerequisite for the development of coaching as a profession.

By fully embracing the power of the emotional domain as an area of learning and change, Ontological Coaching has the capacity to:

- facilitate Emotional Learning;
- expand Adaptive Intelligence;
- contribute to the development of a rich inner life; and
- respectfully touch the human soul.

Ontological Coaching has a particular interest in long-term emotional frames of mind, known as *moods*, which can be “life-enhancing” as well as “life-stultifying”⁸, and may be deeply embedded within a client’s Way of Being. In the methodology of Ontological Coaching, working with moods is an essential part of the process of facilitating deep change.

Applying the methodology of Ontological Coaching necessitates the coach being an emotional learner, someone able to manage his or her own emotional Way of Being so they can be at their resourceful best for coaching clients. Emotional Learning becomes an embodied practice for the ontological coach; an integral part of his or her everyday living, ensuring that both experiential and conceptual learning informs their coaching practice.

One of the purposes of this volume is to contribute to the development of Ontological Coaching as a profession by providing a sound theoretical basis for the inclusion of moods and emotions in coaching methodology and practice. An ontological approach to the emotional domain is a unique and valuable addition to existing emotional knowledge, complementing what is known from neuroscience, psychology and philosophy.

Overview of Volume II

Volume II of *Coaching to the Human Soul* consists of sixteen chapters, divided into two main sections.

Part I, covering Chapters 1–6, provides a context for understanding the critical importance of Emotional Learning in the process of change.

Part II is a detailed coverage of Ontological Coaching’s uniquely powerful utilisation of moods for facilitating deep change.

Part I: Why Emotions Matter

In Chapters 1–3 a detailed framework for understanding the transformative power of Ontological Coaching is developed. The historical necessity for deep change is explained, and a model for understanding the nature of deep change as *the transformation of human consciousness* is presented. The transformative power of Ontological Coaching resides in its capacity to contribute to the transformation of human consciousness through profound shifts in Way of Being, and the subsequent expansion of Adaptive Intelligence.

Chapter 4 presents an intellectual basis for the integral role of the emotional domain in deep change. Drawing on developments in neuroscience and psychology, the limitation of a mindset dominated by rational and analytical thinking is demonstrated, and an argument for a new form of rationality that incorporates emotions is presented. The critical issue of being an emotional learner is also addressed in detail in this chapter.

Chapter 5 outlines in detail the multidimensional nature of an ontological interpretation of emotions. This includes the role of emotions in the construction of reality, behaviour, the quality of communication and relationships, and how effectively we deal with challenges and problems.

In Chapter 6, the notion of Emotional Acuity and its relevance to Ontological Coaching is developed. A suggested set of Basic Human Emotions is outlined as a context for coaches to heighten their awareness of the nature of specific emotions and their affects on perception and behaviour.

Part II: Moods and Deep Change

Chapter 7 provides a detailed exposition of the difference between moods and emotions. The relevance of moods in Ontological Coaching is introduced, and the distinctive contribution of philosopher Martin Heidegger to an ontological perspective on moods is presented.

Chapters 8–12 provide a detailed exposition of a model of moods, called Some Basic Moods of Life, which is central to the methodology of Ontological Coaching. The influence of specific moods on perception and behaviour is described and instances of the application of the Basic Moods model are provided in coaching examples.

In Chapters 13–15 a comprehensive set of ideas and strategies are presented for coaches to (i) develop their own emotional resourcefulness and (ii) apply in coaching conversations to support emotional change by clients.

Chapter 13 looks an interrelated set of moods to position the coach to be at his or her emotional best in coaching and in life. This mood set is complemented in Chapters 14 and 15 by a wide range of ideas and strategies for shifting and managing moods, as something that is essential for the development of Emotional Wisdom. The coach's personal experience in applying these ideas and tools is an invaluable basis for their effective utilisation in coaching.

Finally, in Chapter 16 the unique and valuable contribution of Ontological Coaching to the transformation of consciousness is reviewed. This includes highlighting the role of emotional wellbeing and mood management for the expansion of Adaptive Intelligence and the successful operation of organizations, as well as in well-functioning societies.

Reading Volume II

You are encouraged to read this volume as an emotional learner. It is important to emphasise that a book can only provide written words, in the form of ideas, concepts,

models, facts, opinions and stories. It is possible to read the book from a detached theoretical and intellectual stance, and to remain in the linguistic domain. To do so, however, is likely to limit the Emotional Learning you can gain from your engagement with the contents.

This volume may well trigger responses, positive and negative, which will be in the form of linguistic, emotional and bodily responses. You are particularly encouraged to *observe what is happening for you emotionally* and to stay with your emotional experiences as a potential opening for learning. As stated earlier, one of the important dimensions of emotions is that they are *felt experiences*, not just words or “things”, occurring within the nervous system and therefore within the body. You are also invited to notice when you may not want to engage with your emotional and bodily responses to what you read, and remain with a linguistic response; for example, focusing only on your opinion and not what is happening for you emotionally and with your body.

It is important to emphasise that, while it is not essential to have read Volume I of *Coaching to the Human Soul*, your understanding of the approach of Ontological Coaching to moods and emotions will be greatly enhanced by having done so. The dynamic interrelationship between language and emotions that is integral to our Way of Being means that the ontological approach to language covered in Volume I is an important foundation for this volume. Reference to the key distinctions from Volume I are shown by an asterisk (*).

As with Volume I, a range of examples of Ontological Coaching in action, Reflective Activities and Self-Coaching Exercises are provided to ensure that you gain an experiential understanding of the expanded methodological framework of Ontological Coaching presented in this book.⁹

Welcome to Volume II, *Emotional Learning and Ontological Coaching*.

Notes

- ¹ Robert C. Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche: What the Great “Immoralist” Has to Teach Us*. p. 75.
- ² See, for example, Antonio Damasio, *Descartes Error* and *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and The Making of Consciousness*. Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*. Candace Pert, *Molecules of Emotion*.
- ³ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* and *Working With Emotional Intelligence*. Reuven Bar-on and James D. A. Parkers (eds.), *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence*.
- ⁴ *Collins Paperback English Dictionary*.
- ⁵ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*.
- ⁶ *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*.
- ⁷ Robert C. Solomon, *op cit.* p. 4.
- ⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*.
- ⁹ These are reports of actual coaching conversations. Names, and occasionally circumstances, have been changed to ensure anonymity.