

## 2016 U3A Course based on

### Dancing With the Unknown

#### A Book about FEELINGS and the Everyday Experience of MIND and SOUL

##### Session 8 – June 27, 2016

Today's session is based on Chapter 10, *Emotions, Feelings and Thoughts*. Please note there have been some changes in Chapter numbers and titles since the original outline that I gave you at the beginning of the Course.

I've been talking about **emotion**, **feeling** and **thinking** since this Course began and saying that, together, they are our mind at work and what this mind is doing is connecting us to other people and the world around us in such a way that we can also be ourselves – worthy individuals in our own right. Our wellbeing results from achieving this reasonably well so we feel quite pleased with ourselves and quite comfortable in our relationships; the two go together, if either is compromised the other will suffer as well.

What I want to do now is look at each of these parts of our mind individually because they play different roles. Each contributes something different and even though our everyday experience of mind is the combined effect of all three, we need to consider what is different about them and also how they come together to achieve that end result.

Last time we met I was talking about our social engagement, which is a very large part of what our mind is doing. I made special mention of our autonomic nervous system (ANS) which essentially links our facial expression, speech and hearing to the internal state of our brain, heart, stomach and other organs, which are all parts of our subconscious mind. The thoughts we express and our underlying emotions influence social engagement, of course, but the part of our mind that is most crucial in this is our feelings, which we detect in one another with amazing sensitivity. We might think we know what another person is thinking or guess what their background emotion might be, but what we mostly experience is a feeling about it. Some people are more sensitive to this than others, but we all have it and we probably underestimate its importance.

I also talked about the patterns of connection within our brain and throughout our whole body. I really think that is the best way to think about all this physiology. Different regions of the brain do different things: for example the prefrontal cortex is heavily involved with thinking, other regions such as the limbic system are where our strong emotions are generated and in between there are various specialised brain centres involved in pleasure seeking, decision making and directing our all-important attention process. But it is the pattern of connectivity across the brain which is directing our experience of mind. Some networks are more active than others and they get this way from being used more often. I mentioned the network that links the prefrontal cortex to the emotion centres (*e.g.* the amygdala where fear arises, the hippocampus where memories are activated, the hypothalamus where the cascade of stress hormones begins) which enables us to balance our ability to reason on the one hand and our powerful emotions on the other, as long as this connectivity is healthy and strong.

You probably think of emotions and feelings as being much the same or very similar and there's nothing wrong with that of course, but when we want to dig deeper to see what the different parts of the mind are doing, we need to divide things up more precisely. The top-left diagram in the HANDOUT for today shows the distinctions I am making for the purposes of this Course.

The best way I know to see the huge influence that *emotions* have separately from feelings and thoughts is to think of them as *the doings of the subconscious mind* – even though many of their effects will become noticeable to us. All the hormonal and nervous patterns of connection within our body and brain are a swirling tide of *affect* that we recognise only in its consequences, not in its actual process. We don't know which brain networks and which hormone flows are occurring, we only know the conscious effects that follow from this that we might then refer to as fear or anger or joy. As I said earlier, the emotional response is the primary experience of mind – it occurs first – and it is followed by thoughts and words for our story and all kinds of feelings that are generated primarily, but not entirely, by the emotion.

There is good physiological evidence for this 'primacy of affect,' particularly from the work of Antonio Damasio, whose books included *The Feeling of What Happens* and *Self Comes to Mind*. It was back in the 1960's that a chap called Benjamin Libet showed that physiological changes occur in the brain and body about half a second before they become a thought or an action. We think of our will as generated in our thinking, but it actually begins at the subconscious level with what I am loosely calling an emotional shift – Damasio calls these changes 'somatic markers.' You can still change your mind, of course, but your next actions or words also have to be initiated subconsciously.

This helps to explain why our emotions are such powerful shapers of what we say and do. Our emotions predispose us to act in certain ways and not in other ways though we usually don't realise this is happening. If you are very fearful you simply can't say nice words of love and respect to the other parties involved. If you are angry you can't suddenly be kind and helpful, until your anger lessens. If you are full of joyful anticipation that, too, will affect how you behave. Maturana used to say the emotion was like the car gearbox – if it's in reverse, you can't drive forward. There are many different emotions flowing from one to another beneath the surface of our conscious mind all the time so it's an ever-present force that is shaping what we think, how we feel and what we do.

Damasio popularised a psychological card game that came to be called the Iowa Gambling Task in which players either won or lost money when they chose a card from one of four different packs. Some packs paid better and more consistently than others and players with a healthy brain soon worked out which they were. Physiological measurements showed that this was happening subconsciously before they could explain it in words so it was an emotional change that directed them to make the decisions that they made. People with faulty brain connectivity due to trauma or post-trauma stress were not able to do this. We often say we had a feeling about something before it became a thought.

I refer to *feelings* as the *conscious awareness* that we have of our experience at any moment that is non-verbal, at least in the first instance. We often think of them as emotions, but I want to draw attention to their own peculiar properties which are different from either thoughts or emotions. After first registering something that we might call an emotion, we will probably describe how we feel in words. By labelling our feelings we eventually turn them into thoughts, mainly for the purpose of sharing the experience with somebody else. But the feeling itself occupies some middle ground between the two. It lacks the logic of a thought, but can be identified more clearly than an emotion. It also affects what we say and do and it plays a far bigger role than we generally realise in the way we make meaning of everything that happens.

To give feelings their identity we have to blend the known with unknown, which is actually not unusual for our mind – we do it all the time. We intermix in our sense of meaning things we know and things we don't know. I was talking about recognising the unknown in our last session. To identify feelings in their own right you have to sense that there's a part of the experience I can't quite explain to you in words, or at least when I try to do that something seems to have been lost. The words we use for our story are commentaries on our experience, not the experience itself.

This is where the effects I referred to as the hidden mind in our last session are coming into play and where we see what Kahneman calls the ‘marvels as well as the flaws of intuitive thinking.’

In speaking about the hidden mind I mentioned subconscious effects on our behaviour such as saying things we ‘didn’t mean to say’ or doing things we ‘didn’t mean to do.’ A quick way of explaining this is to say that our emotions had overridden our thinking process, but this misses something. The philosopher, Laurent Dubreuil, proposes in his book, *The Intellectual Space*, that there is a distinct mental process whereby we ‘say more than we think and think more than we say’ and by acknowledging this in its own right we will understand our mind better.

Feelings are shy and elusive because they lose their identity as they are fashioned into thoughts and they are so vague sometimes that they slip back into the subconscious swirl. But they are always there, attached to both our thoughts and our emotions. Mary E. Clark wrote in her book, *In Search of Human Nature*, that ‘perhaps it is the quintessential error of the modern Western world-view to suppose that thought can occur without feeling.’ Thought assumes a preeminent position at the ‘head’ of our mind, as distinct from the ‘heart,’ and while this is valuable in some ways, it has led us astray as the main guiding principle for the use of our mind.

Our thoughts can be vague and haphazard too, but they pride themselves on being logical and unambiguous most of the time and because this kind of language is so helpful for the interpersonal communication that we need to achieve things together we have constructed a view of reality that is one step removed from our actual experience. In this dual reality there are two kinds of meaning: what this situation is supposed to mean, objectively and logically, and what it actually means in one’s experience. We have a third-person reality and a first-person reality and we need to integrate the two if we can, but they will never be exactly the same. Words have dictionary meanings attached to them, but as we are using them we are creating our personal meanings based on the whole experience of our social engagement.

For making meaning our feelings are crucial because they tell us what is important – what matters. As Paul Gilbert says in his delightful book, *Stumbling on Happiness*, ‘feelings don’t just matter they are what mattering means.’ Without a feeling about something it simply wouldn’t have any significance – it wouldn’t matter to you so it would mean nothing – even if the cold logic of language suggested otherwise. To encode meaning solely in the language itself is to disembodify cognition and place it outside human experience. Because the feelings occupy a space between the thoughts and the emotions, both of which make demands upon them, the more subtle feelings are easily missed. They may be subsumed and taken over by the thoughts that want the limelight or they may be lost again as they sink back into the vast sea of subconscious emotion. But yet ‘feelings are what matter most in life’ as the distinguished biologist, Charles Birch, wrote in his book called *Feelings*.

In our everyday experience it’s quite obvious that feelings are at the forefront, though they are not acting alone. Our social life revolves around the people and places that make us feel good. Our consumer society is fuelled by advertising which is directed straight at our feelings. Whether it is a breakfast cereal, a soft drink or a motor car the ads don’t need to tell you much about the product because their emphasis is on the simple message: ‘*what a feeling!*’ Successful products usually have extra ingredients such as scent, froth or fizz that contribute nothing except a nice feeling when you use them. People are more likely to buy services that make them feel good and the house you buy will be justified by location and resale value, but it will almost certainly be the one that feels right.

Yet thought promotes the idea that it knows best and deserves to stand above feelings or emotions as the product of our mind. Given our cultural history for the last several hundred years this is only to be expected. We emerged from the dark ages by developing our intellect and religions and philosophy helped us to distance ourselves from animal passion and take the higher moral ground. An awesome human creativity was unleashed in art and literature, cathedrals and cities, and the

advent of science brought unprecedented advances in our mechanisation and lifestyle. Much more recently – in our lifetimes, in fact – the digital computer made information seem more important than meaning and became the sadly inappropriate metaphor for understanding the operation of mind as if it was mechanical rather than biological. Very recently the idea of embodied cognition has restored some balance and we still have this great power of thought to help us work out some better ways of understanding our mind. Our ability to think is a great blessing if we can just keep it in perspective and use it wisely.

Thought is not logical and precise like the operation of a computer because the language we use has quite different properties from the language that computers use. It is constructed from a great many different metaphors, similes and analogies over a long period of time. Unsurprisingly, the most common origin of our metaphors is our experience of the physical world and of our bodies. We say we are up when we feel good and down when we feel bad, on top of things or ahead or behind when we are running late, which are metaphors from space and time. We go to the head of the table or to the heart of the matter and so on. The ability of our mind to recognise a common shape or form or pattern and therefore see the similarity between two very different things (my chaotic life and a can of worms, for example) is a special quality of human language that we could not do without. If thought was more precise we could not connect as well as we do with other people. There has to be this fuzzy kind of logic where something can be seen as being like something else – similar in some form though not in the detail – or we would not be able to carry out our all-important conversations.

This would be a devastating loss because conversation is the process whereby we create our culture in each moment of our communal experience. Our everyday experience is to create our individual stories and share these with other people. This is the way our individual stories evolve and it is the only way that our culture can evolve, for better or for worse. We often underestimate the importance of every conversation that we have. What we talk about most becomes our cultural norm and this can be limiting or it may, at some point, trigger important changes, which will be driven by a series of new conversations. So, of course, it is only natural to value the thoughts that we say and hear – they are important. But often we fail to appreciate how redolent with feelings all our thoughts are. Alfred North Whitehead described thoughts as ‘intellectualised feelings.’

When your friend arrives to visit and you ask how she is she might tell you part of her story: her car had a flat tyre so she caught the train, the train was running late and then it started raining and the taxi driver put her out in a puddle – it’s a wonder she got here at all. The story is built around her feelings. On the other hand, when a scientist or a businessman describes something he regards as important he will make it sound dispassionate and reasoned to give it more ‘weight’ and we will all pretend there is no emotion behind it and no feelings involved. Sometimes the feelings are all too obvious such as when I had forgotten to pass on a telephone message for my wife causing her to miss an important appointment and she made it clear to me that she was feeling very angry! I felt bad about it too.

Where do these feelings come from and why do they arise? The agents that cause our feelings can be identified, but not the exact cause of any particular feeling because they are a combination of three different forces. They are shaped firstly by our emotions (some inborn, some learned), secondly by our thinking, which can overwhelm everything else at times if we have a very emotive thought, and thirdly by the sensory stimuli affecting us at that time. In a book called *Embodied: The Psychology of Physical Sensation*, Christopher Eccleston identified 15 different senses that influence our feeling state. We are most aware of the sights, sounds and smells, taste and touch, that are special sense organs are bringing to our attention, but our mind is also busy maintaining body processes so hunger, fatigue, pain, itch, heat and cold also come into it and the proprioceptive senses whereby we keep our balance and move about are especially important. You only realise how important they are if you start to lose your balance or your movement is restricted.

The bemusing thing about feelings is that they are always yours and you are never without them, but they seem to have a life of their own in that you don't choose them; they arrive of their own accord. You have little control over them, though it's reported to be easier to make yourself sad than it is to make yourself happy. Christophe André, in a book called *Feelings and Moods*, called them the 'internal echoes' of what is happening, what has happened and what might happen and 'the beating heart of our link with the world' and he added that they make us 'more lucid.'

We like to label them as good or bad, from a basic instinct to distinguish an opportunity from a threat, but in reality they can be a bit of both. In all languages there are more words for negative feelings than for positive ones and psychological tests show we are quicker to detect the negative ones from a list of words flashed on a screen. Balancing this is the fact that we can more readily analyse and explain the positive feelings when we reflect on them, so positive moods generally predominate in our conscious mind in the longer term. As we saw in the previous session about the hidden mind, our instinctive and subconscious mind is geared for a quick reaction to trouble while the more reflective, distinctly human, part of our mind is designed to promote feelings of wellbeing.

Negative feelings lead towards withdrawal and avoidance that may be accompanied by irritation or anxiety while positive feelings promote openness and accessibility along with curiosity and enthusiasm. The negative ones are put into language more slowly with more detail and a narrower outlook while good feelings take hold quickly and expansively making us more energetic and persuasive, though their wider generalisation can also be misleading.

We often have more than one feeling at the same time and it's interesting that the good and the bad don't necessarily occur inversely – they can be increasing or waning together. Sadness doesn't entirely prevent joy from occurring, for example, so there can be a rich mixture of feelings at any time. Feelings also have a property called remanence, which means they can persist even when the initial cause has long passed. But the main thing about feelings is that they will flow naturally from one to another, if we allow this to happen.

Authentic acceptance of every kind of feeling – allowing it to be there when it occurs, trusting that it will move along – is the unmistakable sign of a healthy mind. Psychologists counsel clients to 'be the chessboard, not the pieces' so you don't fixate on a particular feeling. Christophe André makes an important distinction between *rumination*, which is a self-centred, blaming and judgmental kind of reflection, and a genuine *reflection* that is open-minded, accepts the unknowable and opens the door to moving on rather than staying in the problem. There are echoes here of my earlier difficulties that resulted from much rumination in which self-consciousness was prominent.

In the HANDOUT there is an ancient poem by Rumi called *The Guest House* in which he speaks about welcoming every feeling that comes along, including the ones we don't like. I think there is great wisdom in this because it allows for the natural flow of our feelings and it fuels and strengthens our social engagement. As I've said, social engagement is primarily a connectedness fuelled by feelings and as such it is crucial for the wellbeing of our mind.

A very popular author at the present time is a research professor from Texas called Brené Brown who came to fame suddenly a few years ago with one of those TED talks that got millions of hits on the internet. It's easy to look up if you want to listen it. She speaks about the power of vulnerability and the way we connect with others through our weaknesses and by doing that we find that our real strength lies in our imperfection – it is what gives us the authenticity that we need for strong social engagement. I first came across here in this book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, where she writes that 'owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing that we will ever do.' She speaks of 'wholehearted living' that arises from engaging with the world from a place of worthiness. Her latest book *Rising Strong*, continues in the same vein. Her books are quite personal, about her own problems in life, and some of the Americanisms in them

are a bit 'cute' for my liking, but the thinking behind them fits very well with what I am talking about in this Course.

She's a fairly straight-talking, sassy kind of Texan and she spells out what we need to do to connect strongly with other people and learn to love ourselves, which are two of the three essential relationships as I have been putting it. She calls this essential process of being with your feelings the '*reckoning*' and the '*rumble*.' She gives lots of examples from her own life of what happened if she tried to avoid this honest self-examination and why it was so important to check out the story she was making up to become aware of the lies it contained. We can't really *manage* our feelings because we don't have that kind of control over them, but we do need to take responsibility for them so I would say we can *care for them* in a responsible way. Engaging with our feelings is the required business of our mind.

## BREAK

So far as the emotions themselves are concerned, there are many books about them and different ways of labelling them, which I am trying to simplify here in my focus on feelings and everyday experience. Even relegating them to the subconscious as I have done, there is no denying their enormous influence. An emotion can overcome each of our three strongest motivations: hunger, sex and the will to live. People will go without food altogether if they find it too disgusting, are easily put off having sex by some interfering emotion and can take their own lives while in the grip of the deepest despair. Those primary motivations are themselves the healthy products of emotion. At their best the emotions lay the solid foundation for a satisfied mind, but there are three ways they can go wrong: an emotion can occur with the wrong intensity (*e.g.* excessive anger) or the wrong expression (*e.g.* silence for expressing anger) or it can simply be the wrong emotion for that situation (*e.g.* fear that is unfounded).

The triggers that elicit emotional change often go unnoticed so we may be surprised to find ourselves thinking or acting differently when we don't know the reason because we didn't realise that our emotions had shifted. Some of these triggers come from the way we use our body, particularly our face. When you smile or frown or put on a sad face your emotions will change too; be careful if you try this because I found you can make yourself feel very sad. The act of smiling to yourself is a wonderful tonic that is almost certainly under-utilised. Research has shown that whether you stand or sit in a slumped or erect posture or are seated in a hard or a soft chair will create a slightly different emotional state. You may not be aware of this in your feelings at all, but the base emotion brings about a slightly different thinking pattern. After sitting in the hard chairs people were found to be more rigid in their thinking and less willing to negotiate in a trading deal and those who had been sitting in soft chairs were more flexible and easy-going. I mentioned earlier that the subconscious emotions predispose us to say and do things according to the general form or shape of that emotion. Fear closes down many options in our thinking and doing while it directs our attention towards fight or flight kinds of response. Joy opens up more possibilities in our imagination.

Such is the power of the emotional pattern formed at the deepest level of our mind that we often have cause to doubt whether our thinking is running the show or not. We feel compelled to act in certain ways that reason tells us might not be wise or even safe. I mentioned the importance of the brain connectivity that links the frontal cortex with the emotion-generating sub-cortical regions for keeping our mind running smoothly. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is helpful when thinking can guide the emotions, but sometimes it seems to be the emotions that are firmly in control.

A useful metaphor for thinking about this comes from an American psychologist, Jonathan Haidt, who wrote *The Happiness Hypothesis* and also *The Righteous Mind*. He likens this relationship between thinking and emotion to riding an elephant. Our thinking and will is the mahout or elephant rider who guides the much more powerful elephant by subtle nudges based on his or her acute awareness of every slight movement they make together and what it signifies for achieving what they want to achieve. Without this skill your elephant could take you on a dangerous and bumpy ride and there is no way you could prevent this from happening. That skill is the same skill we need to use to enjoy a smooth relationship between our thinking and our emotions and the subtle nudges and awareness that could probably not be explained in words or thoughts are what is happening in our feelings.

In the real world, rather than the metaphorical, elephants are very interesting creatures, noted for their sophisticated social engagement, which is one reason they can work closely with humans. All our interactions with animals illustrate the role that the non-verbal or emotional part of our mind plays in social engagement generally. We can communicate with our pet cats and dogs and other animals because they sense our feelings and we sense theirs.

In our social engagement not only are our thoughts and our feelings sensitive to the other person, but our subconscious emotions are as well. If we are distressed and we take the time to be with another person who loves us we will often notice that our whole mind has calmed down – thoughts, feelings and emotions. The life-enhancing value of social engagement occurs at the subconscious level as much as at the conscious level. It can be a great help just to park your elephant next to another person's elephant for a while and let the emotional connection happen.

Labelling the different emotions that are involved is not easy because they overlap and often conflict. I am guided mainly by Jaak Panksepp, whose thinking is summarised in a book he wrote with Lucy Biven called *The Archaeology of Mind – Neuroevolutionary Origins of Human Emotions* though I have oversimplified his important work considerably. Panksepp is an Estonian-born neuroscientist working in America with whom I feel a common bond because he works mostly with animals and has studied the evolution of our human emotions. He is most famous for claiming that laboratory rats emit squeals of 'laughter' that are inaudible to us when they are tickled. The crux of his science, though, is the fact that there is a set of primary, instinctive emotions that we share with other mammals. These are the foundations of our own emotional mind.

In his research he identified seven distinct neural networks in the brain that each produce one of our *primary instinctual emotions*. We have these from the day we are born and they shape everything that our mind does. On top of this base of emotional instincts there are all the common emotions that we speak about in daily life, which are variations that we have learned in the course of our lifetimes, especially in the first few years. We tend to think of guilt and shame, jealousy and envy, resentment, contempt and even anxiety and depression as innate elements of our emotional repertoire that could not be changed, but it's more useful to think of them as learned derivatives of the primary set of emotional instincts.

Panksepp's seven primary emotions that I have renamed slightly are *seeking, fear, anger, grief, lust, care* and *play*. I have arranged them in a circle in the diagram given in the handout. The first one is quite new to the emotion scientist's lexicon and it is clearly the most fundamental of all. Seeking is the deep yearning we all feel that the poet, John O'Donohue, calls 'an undertow of possibility.' It is felt in the excitement of exploring and discovering, pursuing and realising our expectations, and it is driven by the fact that everything is changing and we must always be trying to adapt. We can only speculate about what unknown influences could be involved in generating this indefatigable human will to know and explore.

One of the things we are seeking is to feel good and the identification of a 'pleasure' or 'reward' centre in the brain was a major milestone in 20<sup>th</sup> century neuroscience, but it also led to mistaken ideas about human happiness. The brain networks in which the neurotransmitter, dopamine, is

especially active that cause insatiable ‘pleasure seeking’ in rats when they are stimulated are now known to fire in advance of and in *anticipation* of rewards; in other words they are an expectation system, not a satisfaction system. They are implicated in all our addiction traps. This helps to explain why happiness is an elusive emotional state that is often experienced in looking forward to something more than in actually achieving it and is probably best served by striving for something else that is meaningful rather than chasing it directly.

Fear is an obvious consequence of seeking because we are sure to come across threats as well as opportunities. We have a great need for this emotion as a motivator and it serves us by sharpening our intellectual focus and our intuitive reflexes; without fear the mind gets lazy. Its main derivative, anxiety, is an expectation of fear that we learn throughout our lives and it narrows our attention and sabotages our desire to love. Anger stems from an impulse to correct something you perceive to be wrong and, while it can protect one’s autonomy at times, the learned variations of it such as resentment can be a serious blight for one’s mind. These emotions and the range of negative feelings that derive from them will be considered in a later session when we look at the ways we suffer.

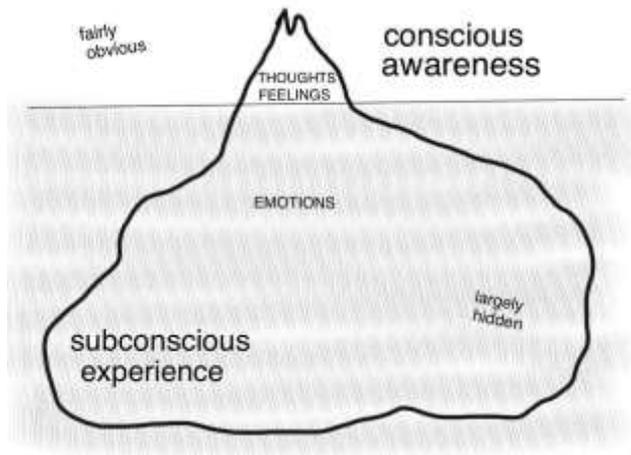
Grief is the distress and pain of separateness that is most apparent after the loss of a loved one. Panksepp used the word, panic, because separation produces agitated behaviour, but he also made it clear that this is not the same as the fear response; it is a quite different deep instinct arising from our craving for connectedness; we often underestimate the need for grieving after any kind of separation or moving on, even a minor one.

The primary emotion of lust is our natural sexual desire rather than selfish gratification; it is not simply for reproduction because sexual intimacy is such an important component of our social engagement. It also manifests as greed in other ways through the selfish wanting more of everything. Care and play are the emotions from which our quintessentially human behaviours arise. As adults we can be a little shy about our caring instinct, but the physical contact of hugging and touching are indispensable behaviours and, as I said, the mother-baby bond is the template for caring behaviour and the foundation stone for our ability to love. The fact that play is also a primary emotion reminds us of the need for our imagination, which is one of the threads I have tried to keep alive throughout this story.

In my book love is not a primary emotion. I agree with Karla McLaren and others that love is something more than an emotion because it exists whether you and I have feelings about it or not. We are attracted to it and it guides us from the depths of our mind and works wonders for us if we believe in it and cultivate it, but it is not just another component of our emotional repertoire.

The learned emotions that derive from care, lust, play and seeking would constitute a long list of great pleasures and also different kinds of pain and sorrow. The joy of romantic love and the distress of jealousy and envy will be considered later as will lots of other details about our diverse range of emotions.

Emotions, feelings and thoughts are all essential parts of our mind, but I have given emphasis to our feelings for their role in optimising our autonomy and our connectedness. Regarding autonomy, they enable us to know our individuality more clearly. When e.e.cummings wrote a *Poet’s Advice to Students* he emphasised how hard it is to write anything original and part of his explanation goes like this: ‘Whenever you think, or you believe, or you know, you’re a lot of other people; but the moment you feel, you’re nobody-but-yourself . . .’ Regarding connectedness, feelings provide the authenticity we need to connect best with other people.



Emotions, feelings and thoughts.



Panksepp's seven primary emotions.

*This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honourably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.*

**Rumi - The Guest House (c. 1250)**