

# Managing Your Emotions



Finding emotions in your body makes a deeper connection than through your mind.

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*"No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care."*

— **Theodore Roosevelt**

I'm slowly recovering from Covid-19's assault on my lungs. I'm writing a book called *Instant Enlightenment*. There is a connection between growing in spirit and coming to know one's heart and lungs.

In allopathic medicine the heart and lungs have no emotion, although there is a recognition of the effect emotion has on the heart. Stimulating emotions increase one's pulse, sedating emotions decrease one's pulse, and disturbed emotions can damage the heart. This is not what I'm talking about.

Traditional Chinese Medicine connects organs and emotions, not organs in the Western sense but organ energy systems. The emotions of Traditional Chinese Medicine are culturally specific. They are not the same emotions that Western cultures share. I'm not talking about these either.

Emotions are a holistic experience. Your emotions are whatever you feel them to be. They are not the same as other peoples'. Our emotions are roughly similar because they draw on similar energies and similar parts of our brains, but each of us feeds different ingredients into the emotions we assemble.

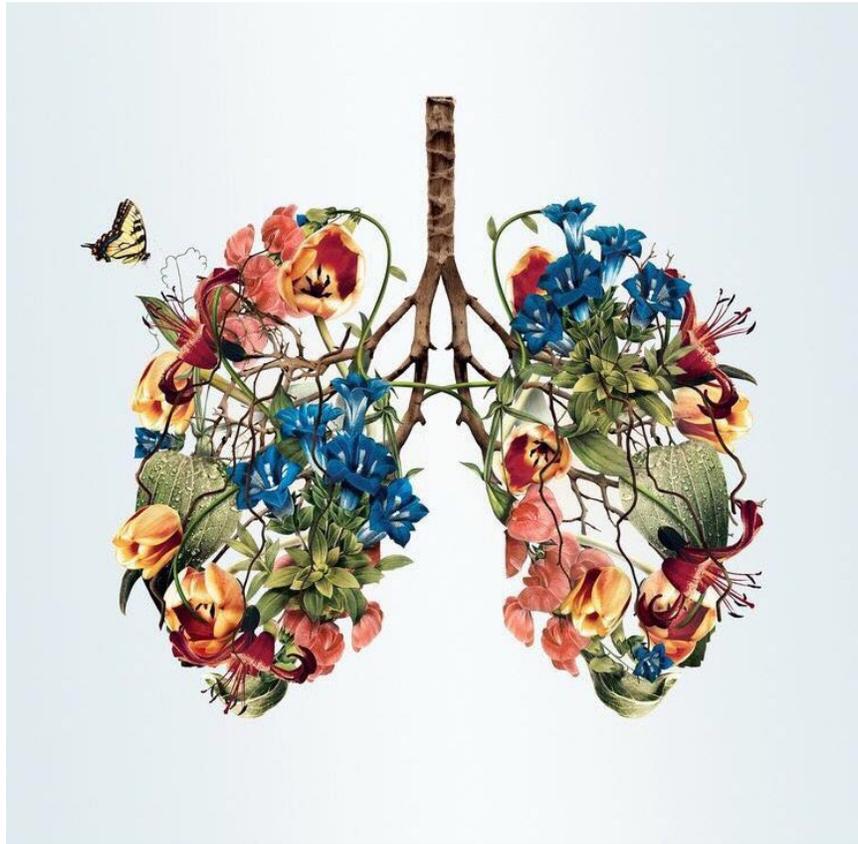
Our emotions are a combination of nature and nurture. We do have specific brain areas that dominate various emotions. At the same time emotions are assembled from our life experience and unique aptitudes. This has been colorfully described as our emotional chemistry and physics.

Our emotional chemistry is said to be what makes us similar or sets us apart. The perfect mate is said to be a person with "the right chemistry." Our emotional physics is what we can do with what we've got.

Those who know better reject the "right chemistry" idea of compatibility and point out that it's not what you start with that makes or breaks a relationship, it's what you make of it. Managing your emotions is a prerequisite to building an enduring relationship.

Bodywork can release emotions. More than that, bodywork can release trauma. But accessing the body can be done without manipulation. There are some areas of the body that don't move voluntarily and can't be manipulated yet they're full of nerves and connected to our brains. There are aspects of these systems that we can only access with our minds. It is the mental energy stored in these systems that I'm talking about.

What follows are the sections from *Instant Enlightenment* in which explore the heart and lungs. While it's valuable to explore one's emotions through intellect, mood, and memory I believe it's essential to explore emotions in the body through sensation and imagination.



## Lungs

Get to know your body from the inside out. Don't just think about it or rely on the sensations or pain to remind you. Go inside and explore what you can perceive, locate, and influence through muscle, movement, sensation, and intuition. To be enlightened is to be aware, and the place to start is in yourself.

Our lungs are under our control though perhaps not as much as we think. Our lungs ask so little of us and allow us our autonomy, but when our lungs have a need we must serve our lungs.

When I was young I felt emotionally unsupported and cut off from my mother. I would have fits in which I would cry and hyperventilate trying to get her attention, demanding an emotional connection. It didn't work because she didn't have it in her, and I could not understand. This went on for years until I resigned myself to it. I needed to be heard and she simply couldn't. Ever since then my lungs have been the place I store disappointment and loss. This is a resigned form of grief.

Over the years I have come to recognize my mother's dysfunction. She never grew up and could never provide. She remained a child her whole life, playing by herself in a solitude of her own. She was an ever present absentee mother, not cruel but not providing. Since my siblings were more than 10 years older than I, I was effectively an only child. Lacking a mother meant I was particularly alone.

These were the years between 3 and 8. Now I am returning to my lungs. The connection is indirect and certainly nonverbal. My lungs are just a location. There is emotional energy I'm looking to heal but now there is physical damage also.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine the lung system houses our emotions of grief and joy. But it's not the physical lung it is the lung energy. It is a mistake to equate the material with the energetic yet we can explore one to find the other. The insights we're looking for are stored in the energy fields of our systems, not as sensations but as intuitions that can emerge from them.

We explore our bodies using movement, perception, memory and thought, but we're looking for a deeper connection. We would like to hear our organs speak as voices but what they have to say cannot be fully said in our language. Perhaps they speak in some other language or something we don't recognize as language.

Our broadest language is what we experience in our dreams, a combination of everything: emotions, words, people, drama, memories, and sensations. This is what we want to invoke in communing with our body, to sensitize all of our faculties and allow any response. To do this we must loosen our ego, set aside our words, distance ourselves from judgment, and detach from reason.

Connect with the organs of your body in a form of meditation that's deeper than mindfulness. And it's not the organs per se, but the energies they store. Be open to whatever messages you get. What is aroused in you is your truth.

Explore your lungs in space, sensation, function, memory, and emotion. For some of us, there may be words, sounds, music, or nothing. You don't know where ideas come from, but if you're focusing on the energy of your lungs and your lungs have something to tell you, then whatever currents are flowing through your mind may contain the message.

As in the noise of the cocktail party, you may not be able to distinguish separate voices. Let your imagination lead you. Let your imaginary ears and eyes find their own focus. We exert ourselves to see faces in the foliage but the shamans say they see these forest spirits everywhere. The difference is being open and receptive.

You are entering shamanic territory, a state of bridging different worlds. In this, you will never settle and you don't want to. It is a dynamic realm and it is temporary. You must find grounding before you enter and you will return to grounding after you exit.

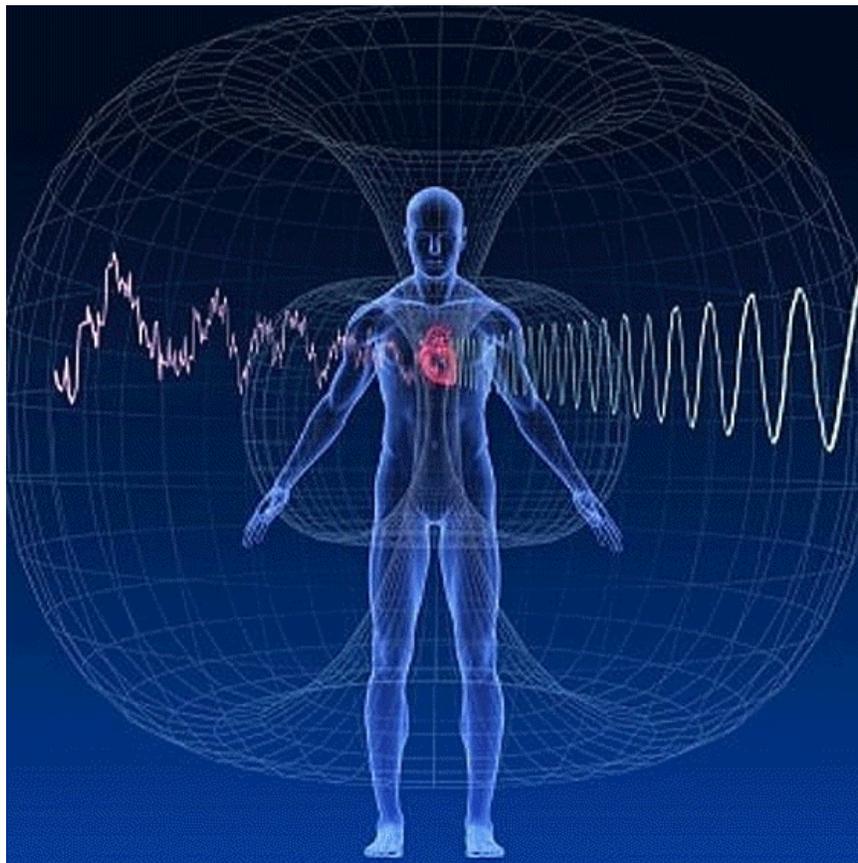
Your journey is to an energy world that's different from your mind or the physical world around you. You are visiting to retrieve a message. Like a space traveler or an ocean diver, you are out of your realm. You are holding a lifeline back to the familiar, sensible, conscious, and grounded. Back to a world that we believe is sane.

Don't expect it to make sense. Your lungs don't live in your world and you can't expect them to understand you. You must be soft and gentle, attentive and accepting. Most of all you must be honest and to be honest you must be fearless.

Place your hands on your chest and breathe. After a few breaths, move your hands to your sides, back, and abdomen. Feel the skin and bones. Only a thin membrane holds in the blood the heart pumps through your lungs.

Simply attend. Use your imagination. Imagine a balloon, a sponge, train, or pendulum. If you've seen pictures of lung tissue, then imagine it is around you. Attend to the responses of your muscles as it expands and contracts.

Is there tension, are your actions smooth and controlled? Are you fully relaxed? Look in your memories; watch the images. Don't strain, don't try, just witness and support. Invite the history and the present to fully come forward. Accept both and make a comfortable space they both can occupy. Integration is about acceptance, not resolution. There can be a resolution but you cannot make it happen, you can only invite it.



## Heart

We think of the brain as the seat of intellect and the heart as the seat of emotions. The structure of the brain exceeds our understanding while the heart seems relatively simple: just a muscle with a lot of coordinated parts. It's more than that.

The heart is a partner to the lung and connected directly to it. Most of the heart's energy is directed not to pumping blood through the body, but through the lungs. The muscles around the capillaries throughout the body push blood through your tissues. There is too much territory and far too much resistance for all your blood to be cycled every minute by the power of your heart alone.

Your heart synchronizes with your lungs, your breath, and all the tissues of your body. Your heart generates a magnetic field that permeates your tissues and extends beyond your body. You can't set your pulse but you can stimulate or sedate your heart and tension can interfere with your heart's coordinated function. With practice you can gain greater control over your pulse.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine your heart's energy is responsible for your enthusiasm, vitality, joy, and restfulness. A lack of heart energy is associated with torpor, restlessness, depression, and insomnia. We feel heartbreak in our chest and we're asked to place our hand over our heart when stating our commitments.

“If you have any type of heart disease, any strong emotion such as anger may also cause severe and fatal irregular heart rhythms. Expressions like ‘died from fright’ and ‘worried to death’ are not just hyperbole — they are physiologic possibilities. Furthermore, when patients with newly diagnosed heart disease become depressed, that depression increases the risk that a harmful heart-related event will occur within that year... Even in people with no prior heart disease, major depression doubles the risk of dying from heart-related causes.”

— **Srini Pillay**, MD (2016)

Emotions affect your heart, and debilitating emotions harm your heart. People feel in reaction to their experience with little control over their feelings. For most people any emotional control other than repression is disparaged as immature, being emotional is considered childish. This prejudice affects men more than women.

Aside from repression, we have few tools for regulating our emotions. Easily overwhelmed, most people seek to return to normal. But “normal” is normally dysfunctional, and returning to it puts us back where we started only to begin the cycle again. Emotions are at the heart of our health and spirit.

Emotions affect the heart and your heart will affect your emotions; it works both ways. The question is whether we're talking about a simple muscle or an energetic system. The answer is that no one really knows because the two cannot be defined in even remotely equal terms. Allopathic medicine is entirely mechanical, Traditional Chinese Medicine is entirely energetic, and psychology is entirely uninformed.

Part of the answer of how to deal with one's emotions is to recognize that emotions are difficult to understand. They summarize many things and often express our basic conflicts. Dealing with one's emotions is not a reasonable task. Emotions are not understood, they are experienced.

I am not telling you what to feel though you should recognize the physical consequences of your feelings. I am asking you to investigate what you feel.

To be enlightened is not to have pure emotions or simple emotions but to fully embrace your emotions. This naturally leads to some resolution but it also leads to greater expression. Of all the features I've

felt in the presence of enlightened people, the most palpable was their emotional presence. These people listened to me emotionally and spoke authentic, emotional truth.

When you embrace your emotions some aspects of your conflicts will resolve. Difficult feelings may neutralize each other on contact. Others might lose their foundation, begin to erode, and be washed away. A person with many conflicted emotions who embraces his or her conflicts will move toward resolution. If they don't, their search for resolution will at least become a high priority.

Here is the key: you want to both be in control and allow your emotions to be beyond your control. It's a question of what emotions you project on the world. Engage your conflicts without injuring others. Recognize how easily your struggles can manifest in the world that you create for yourself. Engage that struggle and take responsibility for it.

This is what it means to love your enemy. It means your enemy is not your real enemy but your realization of the energetic enemy. At the same time, you do not love your enemy in a personal sense but in a spiritual sense. The enemy you see in the world is the manifestation of deeper, broader conflict that affects many more people than yourself.

If you imagine yourself as a cell in the immune system of human culture, then your enemy is one of a million infected cells. Your task is not heal or convert them, it is to dispatch the conflict which may mean dispatching them. You have greater power over the negative when you appreciate and understand it. Demonizing the negative is to project your own illusions and, in doing so, you lose sight of your adversary's vulnerability and need as well as your own.

Emotion has its good and bad sides, its strengths and weaknesses. Emotional purity is yours to recognize and become fortified with. Emotional pollution is yours to clean up, repair, dissolve, or discard. In moving into the heart realm you will encounter conflict. Proceed carefully and be prepared.

Your heart is a gateway to purgatory and, as many gnostic teachings will tell you, do not enter without a guide. Even if you've lived a perfect life—and perhaps more so if you've led a perfect life—you will encounter the generational conflicts and trauma carried in your lineage and your species. Many of the most sanctified people take on the most heinous conflicts. Your work does not get easier as you become more enlightened, it becomes more consequential.

In opening to your emotional truth you are looking for two things: strength and guidance. You find strength in cleaning your history and resolving your trauma. You find guidance by dropping your defenses and asking for it. Guidance comes from somewhere else, it is not something you fabricate.

In my role as a therapist—at least what I call being a therapist—I work to evoke my clients' sense of strength and connection with guidance. Without these there will be little progress. With these they can make positive, permanent change.

You may be able to map part of the territory but the deeper and stranger territories you cannot map, at least not in any form you've mapped before. The mysterious territory will not make sense to you until you exit from it, until you gain an appreciation of the whole.

You need a guide, and the guide cannot be anyone outside you: no doctor, therapist, coach, or teacher will know your territory. Some people are too proud to admit their ignorance, and these people will not find their guide. The guide must emerge from inside you. They can only emerge once you've set your needs and preconceptions aside.

In putting ourselves aside we confront our limits. We will not set our family aside and many of us will not set our job, authority, power, or privilege aside. The more you retain, the more your travel through the landscape of your emotions is delayed.

I'm not saying you have abandon your family and culture, but you do have to separate from your familial and cultural preconceptions. In your search for your emotional authenticity you may find yourself resisted by those in your family and community for whom you are playing a useful role. You may also find yourself having to accept and repair relationships with people you've rejected or harmed. You can do this in humility but you cannot do it with a sense of privilege or entitlement. Discovering your emotional truth requires leaving your ego behind.



## **More Than Mindfulness**

The connection is to your heart; you are becoming heartfelt rather than mindful. The goal is to fully surround yourself in the energy of your heart.

The exercise of mindfulness focuses you both on what's in your mind and what's left when your mind is empty. Becoming heartfelt means focusing on the being and doing of your heart. This may start with the experience of your pulse in whatever part of your body you can sense it. It goes beyond the pulse to currents of energy and resonances in your body.

Go beyond the pulse as a verb and look for the energetic state of circulation. This exists as a rhythm in your brain and a sense of coherence in your body. Coherence means the symbiotic attachment of different parts of your body. Sense your pulse in various parts of your body.

You'll find the pulse is not synchronized in different parts but it is coherent. That is, the pulse peaks at different times in different parts of your body. While the beats are not synchronized they are coherent, that is their duration is the same.

As you notice your pulse in different locations, notice how your pulse feels differently in these locations. You can hear your pulse in the waves of white noise in your ears. You can see your pulse in the scintillations behind your eyelids.

Your first task is simply to receive as much and as many sensations of your pulse as you can attend to. You may feel your pulse in several places at once, or you may cycle through focusing on different places. Discard your mind, your thoughts, and your emotions. You are just moving to the rhythms with attention but without a sense of the present, like dancing. This is a meditation in itself, but there is a next step.

The next step is to bring in the empty mind and let the beats flow through it. To invite and allow whatever memories and association come while you are engaged with your heart's rhythm. You are not looking for sense or story, you are looking to dream without lucidity letting conflict and chaos build your landscape.

Look but do not look too careful. Take what's shown without demanding more. As in a dream, you cannot examine the images without tearing the fabric. It's not until the meditation is over that the message is complete. Don't interrupt.

There may be no message or no apparent message. Remember what you can and revisit the memory on occasions throughout the day. It could well be that the meaning is only evident when your mind is focused elsewhere.

The body meditation is unlike other meditations. It extends beyond the time over which you're actively engaged. Unlike a key that opens a lock, the heartfelt meditation matures as your body responds to it and ferments over time. You are calling in your body's voices and some of them speak through other means, through the modulation of energies that appear only when you're in other states.

Stay relaxed as you go through your day. Remain attentive and thoughtful. Some memories are like slowly moving bubbles that take time to emerge. In the same way that we try to remember a word or a name that takes minutes, so the bodies memories may take hours.

# References

Pillay, S. (2016, May 9). Managing your emotions can save your heart. *Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School*. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/managing-emotions-can-save-heart-201605099541>

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