

Life and Life-Energy

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Chapter 4

Energy Cycles and Emotional States

(a) Depression:

*“ How weary, stale , flat and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world.”*
- Shakespeare, *Hamlet* , Act I, scene ii , 133-134

Depression is psychic paralysis. In terms of its effect on the personality it is akin to lameness on the body. The metaphorical equivalent in natural energy is that of the role of bodily Inertia in resisting movement or change. The burden of depression absorbs and depletes one reservoirs of enthusiasm. With the loss of morale comes a slackening of will power. Incentives to action are quickly dissipated to a state of indifference.

Listlessness and apathy alternate with giddiness, sometimes wildly with capricious enthusiasms. A depressed state of mind may find temporary relief through a welter of ambitious projects. The damage done to its capacity for concentration soon brings to an end most attempts at prolonged endeavor. Concurrently, the obstinate power of fixed ideas over the mind may have the contrary effect of causing one to persist in the pursuit of a goal long after it would have been abandoned by any reasonable individual.

Whether its victim is immobilized, or seized with frantic though unsteady activity, one uncovers at its core an inherent emptiness. A fundamental breakdown has occurred in the psychic processes which bring the child of the spirit to term. One may even speak of a stubborn refusal to be born anew.

Medvedenko: Why do you always wear black?

Masha: I'm in mourning for my life. I'm unhappy

-Chekhov; opening lines, The Sea Gull

Often there is more delight to be obtained in dreaming of a rosier existence than in bestirring oneself to go looking for it. The exercise of the imagination has itself become the chief form of gratification; in some sense one does indeed locate the fulfillment one seeks through the act of imagining it. Why go searching in distant places what one imagines to have found at home?

Or, one may decide that one is content to review and relive past achievements. And there is delight even in regret, in wallowing in speculations of what one might have achieved from lost opportunities.

"Why did I not follow up my advantage at that time?" followed by the ironic reflection : "It wouldn't have worked in any case."

There can be a longing for foreign lands where, certainly, things must be better. Again, the fear of disappointment steps in to inhibit whatever steps are needed to go to them. Another of Chekhov's plays, *The Three Sisters* , comes to mind. The perpetual yearning for a "Moscow" of the imagination is actually a form of resistance *against* taking one's chances with the real

thing. This may not be altogether unwise. In *The Sea-Gull* Nina does indeed move to the Moscow of her dreams, which proves disastrous.

Those who live at close quarters with victims of depression will find it difficult to keep from interpreting their inertia as evidence for an attitude of willful obstinacy. They appear to be able to abide indefinitely, intractable as some bulky, firmly ensconced tree stump held in place by multiple networks of entangled roots, as if challenging all others to uproot them.

Friends and relatives discover to their exasperation that they will not be goaded into any form of constructive action, that - like aged widows who have lost both son and husband in the war - nothing can console them in their grief without measure, neither promises of reward nor threats of poverty, homelessness or disease.

Who has not known someone afflicted with symptoms of serious illness who refuses to seek help, citing cost, inconvenience, distrust of the medical profession - excellent arguments in themselves though threadbare rationalizations of his clear intention to do nothing that interferes with his obsessions, dreams or settled routines.

For one living under the shadow of depression there are good reasons for appearing to be innocuous or inoffensive. This is not necessarily negative: melancholic persons are reflective, weighing all sides of an issue before acting, capable of brooding for long periods on subtle matters. This can lead at times to impressive discoveries and insights. One takes care to maintain an

equitable balance with one's social environment. One strives to act responsibly, non-destructively; Yet at the same time one feels justified in contributing something less than one's fair share to one's obligations and responsibilities, as if one were reclaiming in bits and pieces the loved object, person or prize of which fate, nature or mankind have deprived one. Ashamed of appearing useless or boring, one is also quickly bored by things that animate others. Showing no concern for the future, one's imagination delights in fantasy and make-believe, becoming a master, indeed, of the "magical if".

Depression is the psychological equivalent to the conservative energy cycle of the passive balance, acting in accordance with the law of inertia to establish a homeostasis - (known familiarly as *withdrawal*)- wherein one can survive indefinitely through the exertion of little effort. Consider the body's reaction to extreme cold: trapped by a sudden snowstorm in the Arctic it will instinctively seek to conserve every scrap of warmth. The limbs are drawn up against the trunk, the face is lowered, the body huddles together as its systems shut down in hibernation. Energy exchange with the environment, anything that results in the loss of vital life-resource, is reduced to the bare minimum. One's only hope is that of being discovered and rescued from an environment by which one has been overwhelmed. This metaphor of Arctic survival is an effective description of the state of withdrawal characteristic of depression.

(b) Anxiety

In much the same way that fire feeds on the stable configurations of matter, energy in latent forms such as fossil fuels compacted under the weight of millennia, so the condition of anxiety in ourselves is inflamed by the presence of depression in others. Anxiety may take many forms, both humane and callous: expressions of sympathy and concern, or nagging worry, interference, or abuse. Exploitation, greediness, boasting and deceit are also associated with anxiety, a readiness to take advantage of persons too elderly or too depressed to look after themselves. One thinks of the types of criminal who cheat senile victims out of their life's savings through the promise of quick riches.

Anxious behavior is characterized by swings and oscillations in the manner of a pendulum, moving erratically to and fro with abrupt changes of direction. Anxiety may take the form of panic; or aimless fear; wild-eyed terror; the willful pursuit of transient whims as they arise; benign forms of amusement and curiosity; everything from the most exemplary compassion to the destructive selfishness of an incorrigible busy-body. The personality of Neal Cassady as described in Jack Kerouac's novel "*On The Road* " captures this unpredictability, this ambiance of panic and flight. At the mercy of his whims, both supremely egotistic and utterly helpless, Cassady has developed a strategy based on stealing cars from parking lots, then setting out on the highways at over a 100 miles per hour. There may be some destination he wishes to reach; or he may change his mind before coming to it; or have no

purpose or goal whatsoever. Tiring of this mode of living, Neal Cassady will settle in for a brief spell until the restlessness overtakes him again and he is off once more.

Leaping from scheme to fancy, fancy to scheme like an elfin flame sprinting from branch to branch, shedding objectives with the same recklessness that once inspired them, Anxiety's native element is fire. The anxious mind jumps from one combustible source to the next; like a chameleon in the flames it assumes the coloration of its substrate, delighting in its power of mimicry, setting up transitory intimacies and conspiracies of identification in the very deed of flying away from them.

The cycles of storage of potential energy associated with depression, and those of transformation or thermal energy associated with anxiety, are thus inseparably linked, in nature, in society and in the psyche. The substrate, whether physical or psychological, is itself inert. As gasoline or oil or coal can serve as the basic for ignition, so the inert substrate of anxiety can become, variously, the attraction of a new sexual conquest, or gambling, some wild exploit, vices and addiction like those of smoking or alcohol. The adaptability of raw unharvested energy to a bewildering diversity of forms is driven by a permanent reality of incurable dissatisfaction, the very heart of all-consuming anxiety.

(c) Anger

In the same way that Anxiety feeds off the potential energy latent in Depression, so Anger feeds off the thermal energy, or heat, of Anxiety as a kind of nutrient, its source of kinetic power, storage and discharge, that which sparks and stimulates the cycles

of transformation of Being and Identity. Anger is obsessed with victories, with ambitions. Forceful anger is characterized by its immediacy, the goal of hostility is inhibition, suppression, reduction. Think of the rain that dampens the forest fire; medicines that kill the encroachment of disease-bearing organisms; the pruner's hook rooting out the weeds that infest the crops. Force is the physical equivalent to anger. It signifies focused kinetic energy in opposition to the aimless thermal energy of Anxiety. In response to the presence of an immanent threat, it exhibits action without reflection, rigidity, blind willfulness, fear, stubbornness and the appearance of strength. Smother the fire that heats the steam and the train will stop immediately.

Two of the fundamental energy cycles, the thermal and the kinetic, are active; the cycle of potential energy is passive, an *active cessation of activity*. The psychological equivalent for physical *action* is *passion*. All three cycles are "passionate", cycles of transformation and inhibition, not immobilized or inert states. It is intrinsic to life-energy that its natural movement is towards increase and fulfillment. Even the condition of psychic inertia or depression requires the continual or active suppression of creative growth.

It has been clearly demonstrated that there is a natural correspondance between the dynamical stages of the cycles of physical energy and the psychic states which we label as the emotions:

(a) Depression corresponds to the stability of stored potential energy, held in place by active pressure or oppression;

(b) Anxiety corresponds to fire, the conversion of energy from a potential well into a state of activity driven by heat;

(c) Anger feeds off the energy of conflict, of force drawing its power from the energy of the assailant. The distinction between anxiety and anger is the same as that between thunder and lightning : thunder spreads panic far and wide, lightning strikes blindly, yet with a narrow focus and devastating force.

Commentary : It is instructive to contrast and compare the ideas presented in this essay with current psychiatric practice. Our theoretical framework acknowledges certain Freudian or Freud-inspired insights as valid, along with more recent discoveries in psycho-chemistry. The Unconscious Mind is admitted here, together with the representation of the fundamental cycles of psychic energy transformation as domestic dramas involved "father, mother and child", the so called complexes , albeit with radical re-interpretations . These are not traced to infantile sexual desires and a so-called 'castration complex', notions that we consider fairly silly, but to the analogies that pertain between the transmutation of psychic energy in the formation of identity (the Rebirth Mechanism), and the reification of the procreative role of the 'persons' of Father, Mother and Child as temporal phases in the creative process.

We also identify a relationship between the rising and passing away of emotional states, and the cycles of action and reaction commonly found in physics, chemistry and biochemistry. Whereas contemporary neuropsychiatrists seek to relate each emotion to a specific neurotransmitter in the brain, - (serotonin as the causative agent of depression (relieved by Prozac) , sodium for manic-depression, (relieved by Lithium) , dopamine for anxiety, (relieved by Thorazine),

testosterone for anger, (relieved by Xanax) - our hypothesis maintains that the emotions are more akin to the cycles of transformation of the states of matter and energy rather than to specific material substances, that energy storage (matter), energy transformation, (heat), and energy in action, (force) are the 3 fundamental paths by which psychic-energy, or what we have called life-energy, seeks to actualize its inherent potential within the limitations imposed by a material cosmos through the expression of emotion. In the interplay of these transformative cycles of in and between individuals, one may situate all the dramas of social, domestic and spiritual life.

We therefore readily acknowledge that the psychic energy cycles associated with emotional distress can activate physio-chemical cycles in the brain's biochemistry that replicate their structure. Given that the human brain and body have developed over to accommodate the survival of the conscious being within them, it is only to be expected that there should be intrinsic chemical responses triggered by the processes of emotion. It makes sense that medicines and drugs can be developed to modulate their power and give enough temporary relief to allow the rational part of the person to take stock and initiate constructive action.

However, we cannot stress too much that, in our opinion, unless mind and body be thoroughly redirected onto a creative path, the narrowly conservative cycles of mental activity fixed in the Unconscious as the result of traumatic experience, conditioning or long habit, will continue to operate along biochemical pathways belonging to a unwholesome, neurotic or diseased mind.



Seen from this perspective, the now fashionable quarrel between ideational versus chemical psychiatry is really concerned with the 'primary' and 'secondary' attributes of mental life. It is essentially a replay of the medieval dispute between alchemy and chemistry. Central to this was the nature of "substance": are the "elements" what we now call the "states" of matter - solid (earth), gas (air), liquid (water) , combustion (fire) - or the substances listed in Mendeleev's periodic table? Empedocles versus Democritus.

Analogously: are the "emotions" certain combinations of chemicals (psychobiology), or mental states calling upon chemical reactions (psychoanalysis) ? Antinomies, as Immanuel Kant pointed out, are usually false dualisms arising from a limited vantage, like the 3 blind men quarreling over the nature of the elephant. By shining a bright light in a darkened room, many seemingly important distinctions evaporate.



The acquisition of knowledge in the human sciences is a far more difficult than what one finds in the 'hard' sciences (physics, mathematics, chemistry, biology), if only because in the latter one can generally get somewhere with hard thinking and patient effort, whereas with regard to the former a lifetime of creative activity can turn out to be little more than floundering about.

Research in the human sciences (anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, journalism) must accomodate subjective experience to the external world. Paradoxically, because the task is so much more difficult, the standards tend to be lower. Only

persons with talent, training and persistence can do mathematics, but almost everybody considers himself an authority on history, psychology and human nature.

Therefore it is not surprising to find that the level of discourse in subjects like history, sociology and so forth tends to be either embarrassingly mediocre or of surpassing excellence - among the latter on places the works of the great philosophers. Such polarization is not surprising: in the face of great difficulties, one either rises to the challenges posed by them, (which means that one has the ability to accept them), or one pretends to deal with them by evasion, subterfuge, vapid generalities or sleight-of-hand. So that although most history texts appear to consist of a stew of hero worship, apologetics, ideological bias, extravagant conclusions from insufficient data, and reinforcements of some standard model, one also finds the occasional Thucydides, Ibn Khaldun, Suetonius or Fernand Braudel.

Psychological thought, likewise, can descend to the ravings of a Sigmund Freud, an obsessed sex maniac who taught all those who look at the source in judging the validity of someone's ideas, that all mental life is sublimated sexual desire ; or rise to the incredible heights of wisdom attained in Buddha, Socrates, Christ or Gandhi.



It is a truism that the patterns of behavior stemming from someone's emotional condition must influence and even determine the psychological states of persons in his or her surroundings. A dynamic interaction is set into motion

complementary to one's internal energy cycles (Rebirth Mechanisms) . The entanglement of internal and external dynamics lays down a fine-skeined branching network based upon the action-reaction mechanisms of the creation and destruction of life-energy, extending far beyond the lone individual, and in some instances involving the entire planet. These networks of mental activity function like a global mental climate, surges and storms interspersed with patches of calm, wide ranging harmony and communication, or violence and war, darkness or obscurity. The Christian Scientists make much of this phenomenon: to them a single poisoned heart can contaminate the health of all mankind. The effects of this global psychic climate at the level of the unconscious mind are immense. With the advent of the Internet we are seeing its effects to a greater extent even in the sphere of normal consciousness.

In the same way that, in the internal domain, the phase of the Child (Being), moves through confrontation with the Father (Non-Being) to the Mother state (Becoming or Pregnancy), to bring about the rebirth of Self, so , in the external domain, Depression (the death of the Child, or grieving) engenders Anxiety (the death of the Father or panic) , which engenders Anger (the death of the Mother, or hostility) , which in turn engenders Depression.

External events produce internal states which find their outlet in behavior , resulting in the creation of internal states in one's immediate circle, in an endless chain. These immense linkages of interaction permeate households, communities, entire

societies, ultimately the entire world. The cosmic dance of psychic energy linking every living being on earth finds its perfect expression in the Tibetan symbol of the Mandala. The effectiveness of works of fiction and theater derives from the endless vitality of the interaction of internal and external worlds.

Considering social psychology as a kind of ecology: the consciousness of the lone individual depends in some measure on its social environment, in the same way that a living organism needs food to survive. Dependency on a hostile environment engenders depression; dependency on an indifferent environment engenders anxiety; dependence on a chaotic environment engenders hostility.

Summarizing:

I. *Depression* is externally inertial, internally kinetic. It is a state of anger turned against itself. The depressed personality is consumed with anger that can find no outlet for release. In positive terms one thinks of the longings of the subject of a repressive government for justice; in negative terms one thinks of persons who withdraw from the world to forever nurture a private resentment.

II. *Anxiety* likewise is externally thermal, internally inertial. One might even describe it by the odd expression "frustrated depression". At the base of one's gyrations from one idle enthusiasm to the next, lies an incurable dissatisfaction with life. No anxiety is more acute than that which is coupled with enforced boredom. Its' combination with the spectre of an uncertain future makes such suffering all the more acute. The

miseries of imprisonment and solitary confinement stem from such anxiety.

The paradigm for this double-sidedness of anxiety is found in the story attached to the famous comedian Grimaldi. Although he delighted all of Europe with his antics, he went to a doctor to seek relief from depression. The doctor's recommendation was "Go see Grimaldi perform". To which he gave the classic reply: "*Io sono Grimaldi !* "

III. *Anger* . Although the behavior of an angry individual may take the form of directed violence, the internal person is prey to instability and chaos. One seeks through anger to restore or sustain some tangible reference frame, some secure foothold in a turbulent world. Insecurity is the keynote: insecurity causes panic, giving rise to the need to bring about the restoration of order through the use of force. Anger is counter-anxiety.

Each of the primary emotional states arises as in reaction to some perceived external reality: one does not normally experience fear or grief, guilt or shame, unless there is something to be afraid of, a loss to be grieved, a deed acknowledged as wrong, a loss of self-respect. One reacts defensively towards a perceived threat, positively towards a perceived benefit. The sequence of phases involving dependency, transformation and activity are reiterated, both in Man and Nature, through the coupling of energy storage with energy liberation. One finds them in the cosmic cycles of biology, chemistry, physics and cosmology, the carbon-nitrogen cycle of living interdependency on the earth, the hydrogen-helium energy cycle in the sun, and so forth.

In the simplistic model of the electrical circuit, the potential-kinetic coupling of energy is present in the transformation of chemical energy in a battery (exchange) , its suppressed through resistance (kinetic) , and storage in a stored in a capacitor.

The homology of the physical and psychic cycles of energy transformation unifies all of Nature, inner and outer, as an awe-inspiring and stupendous architecture. The description of this unity is part of the heritage of European philosophy, being present as far back as the world systems of the pre-Socratic philosophers, notably those enunciated by Anaximander, Heraclitus and Anaxagorus.

(vii) Bound Energy and Free Energy

The spontaneous creativity that characterises the living nature is driven by the power of life-energy. Suffering arises from the binding of life-energy to the inanimate cosmos. As interpreted by the ideas presented in this essay, "mental illness" is the external manifestation the supression/reduction of the innate creativity of life-energy to the flat, unregenerative , conservative cycles of physical energy transformation: Potential, Thermal and Kinetic , corresponding to the mental states of Depression, Anxiety and Hostility.

Those aptitudes which are normal to the spiritual being, sensitivity, love, empathy, compassion, tolerance and so on, are blocked through the enslavement to causal mechanisms. Behavior patterns latent in the Unconscious reduce free vitality to a banal materialism . Such bondage cannot be overcome by reason

alone, but only through a process of adjustment that assimilates the root conditions of the illness to the holism of a higher state.

The flow of life-energy through the human psyche is either free or obstructed. In some sense we've returned (*hopefully at a higher level of sophistication*) to Franz Anton Mesmer's magnetic fluid. When the flow is obstructed we say that it is bound. *A sick mind is therefore one in which a sick mental process is operative.* Life-energy in its bound state is likely to exhibit such traits as egoism, vanity, self-love, self-pity, cynicism, neurotic guilt, obsessions, rigid patterns of behavior, and blind clinging to a self-referential system of beliefs impervious to all argument. Apposite to each negative trait of the mind in bondage there is a corresponding state in the mind that is free.

Life-energy is therefore present in the human psyche in two conditions, bound and free. The former is limited in potential and in action. The other is unfettered and potentially limitless.

Some quotations: The first is from William James's essay "*The Energies of Men* " ¹:

" The existence of reservoirs of energy that habitually are not tapped is most familiar to use in the phenomenon of 'second wind'. Ordinarily we stop when we meet the first effective layer, so to call it, of fatigue. We have then walked, played or worked 'enough' so we desist. That amount of fatigue is an efficacious obstruction, on this side of which our usual life is cast. But if an unusual necessity forces us to press onward, a surprising thing occurs. The fatigue gets worse up to a critical point, when gradually or suddenly it passes away, and we are fresher than

¹William James; Writings 1902-1910, page 1226; Library of America, 1987

before. We have evidently tapped a level of new energy, masked until then by the fatigue-obstacle usually obeyed. There may be layer after layer of this experience. A third and a fourth 'wind' may supervene. Mental activity shows the phenomenon as well as the physical, and in exceptional cases we may find, beyond the very extremity of fatigue distress, amounts of ease and power that we never dreamed ourselves to own, sources of strength habitually not taxed at all, because habitually we never push through the obstruction, never pass those early critical points. "

From Erich Fromm's *"Escape From Freedom: "*²

"The word 'power' has a two fold meaning. One is the possession of power over somebody, the ability to dominate him. The other meaning is the possession of a power to do something, to be able, to be potent. The latter meaning has nothing to do with domination; it expresses mastery in the sense of ability....

Thus, power can mean one of two things, domination or potency. Far from being identical, these two qualities are mutually opposed.

Impotence....results in the sadistic striving for domination...Power, in the sense of domination, is the perversion of potency."

From Heinrich Zimmer's *"Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization"* .³ Expounding upon Hindu philosophy, Zimmer makes reference to *Maya* and *shakti* . *Maya* designates a very general phenomenon, akin to the author's "life energy". *Shakti* corresponds to Fromm's notion of 'power' :

"Maya is any illusion, trick, artifice, jugglery, sorcery or work of witchcraft; an illusory image or apparition, phantasm, optical illusion;

² Avon, 1972

³Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series VI, 1974

Maya is also any diplomatic trick or political artifice designed to deceive....At the same time, Maya is the supreme power that generates and animates the display: the dynamic aspect of the universal Substance. Thus it is at once , effect (the cosmic flux), and cause, (the creative power). In the latter regard it is known as Sákti, “Cosmic Energy”. The noun sákti is from the root sák, signifying ‘to be able, to be possible’. Sákti is ‘power, ability, capacity, faculty, strength, energy, prowess; regal power; the power of composition, poetic power, genius; the power or signification of a word or term; the power inherent in cause to produce its necessary effect; an iron spear, lance, pike, dart; a sword.”

Although ‘shakti’ translates as spiritual energy, it does not always manifest itself in a loving form: its presence can be discovered in the action of the sword, the might of the tyrant, in poetic power or genius, even in the compassion of a saint. Shakti is Maya directed by living motivation. Such motivation may be free, thus wholly conscious , or bound, therefore partly conscious and partly unconscious. In the malevolence of the tyrant one finds a living energy that is identical in every respect to the passion firing the altruistic love of a saint, one reason why the latter counsel us ever to mitigate our judgments on the former. Fromm’s categories of power and potency relate to an identical resource of psychic vitality. It is the state of mind alone which establishes the distinction between them.

