Anger is a pillar that rises from the floor of humiliation.

Boredom is a cactus in the womb of imagination.

Courage is a joyous ride on the leopard of conviction.

Disgust is a shudder at recognizing the disowned filth of the mind.

Envy is a thorn in the flesh of admiration.

Fear is a rusty lock on the gate of adventure.

Greed is a hippopotamus eating a ten-egg omelette on a golden plate.

Hope is a trust fund set up by childhood happiness.

Ingratitude is an ice pick driven into the breast of generosity.

The BOOK *of* Emotions ♥ SALMAN AKHTAR

Joy is an ice cream made of children's laughter.

Kindness is the smiling dough of mother's bread.

Love is the offspring of play and forgiveness.

Mourning is a lonely corridor to a bustling tomorrow.

Nostalgia is a grand illusion about little illusions of the past.

Obstinacy is a wingless butterfly in the garden of surprise.

Pity is the perfume of sorrow in the armpit of contempt.

Querulence is the prickly heat on the skin of conversation.

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The BOOK *of* Emotions

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The BOOK *of* Emotions

♥

Salman Akhtar

Lotus Collection

'Envy', 'Hope' and 'Love' were first published in Housecalls in 2004.

First published in 2012
The Lotus Collection
An imprint of
Roli Books Pvt. Ltd
M-75, Greater Kailash II Market, New Delhi 110 048
Phone: ++91 (011) 4068 2000
Fax: ++91 (011) 2921 7185
E-mail: info@rolibooks.com
Website: www.rolibooks.com

Also at Bangalore, Chennai, & Mumbai

Cover & Layout design: Bonita Vaz-Shimray

ISBN: 978-81-7436-953-6

To

My beloved cousin

NASSER HARVANI

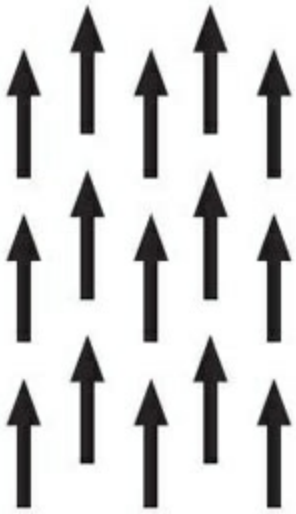
without some of the emotions
mentioned in this book

Contents

Prologue

Why this Book?

Practising psychiatry, psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis for over forty years and being an avid reader of books pertaining to the human mind has convinced me that most good books in this realm are difficult to read for lay-persons. Matters are made worse by the fact that books that are readable succumb to oversimplification and glib advice-giving. As a result, the seeker of knowledge about the intricacies of emotional life finds little that is meaningful to read. It is this lack that I am trying to address here. Only the reader can tell to what extent I have succeeded in offering a textured, nuanced, and yet engaging discourse in these pages.



Anger

Anger is a pillar that rises from
the floor of humilliation.

Anger is not a 'primary' emotion. It does not arise *de novo*. It is a response to fear, betrayal, humiliation, and other sundry injuries to self-esteem. Once on the stage though, it can readily take on the leading role in the drama of life. It has an exhilarating, even electrifying quality. The angry person feels fully alive, strong, and keenly attuned to any and every thing in the environment that can feed his emotion. In the words of Mary Gordon, the American novelist, anger 'fills the veins with purpose; it alerts the lazy eye and ear; the sluggish limbs cry out for movement; the torpid lungs grow rich with easy breath. The angry one is radiant in strength, and blazing like the angel with a flaming sword; banishes the transgressors from the garden they would only now defile.'

This portrayal of anger underscores its essential features: a wish to lash out against those who have caused offense, a sense of agency and power instead of weakness and passivity, a sentiment that mobilizes the entire body into its service, and an intoxicating rise in self-righteousness and moral superiority. It is no wonder that anger can (and often does) feel like a treasure.

But wait. The fact is that we have mixed feelings about anger. On the one hand, we discourage it in our children, we try to suppress it within our own selves, and feel remorseful and ashamed after an angry outburst. On the other hand, we respond to others' anger – especially when not directed at us – with admiration and even awe. Just recall the audience's gleeful response to Amitabh Bachchan's fury in the 'angry young man' movies of the 1970s, and the great satisfaction the moviegoers drew from Phoolan Devi's cold-blooded vengeance in Shekhar Kapur's *Bandit Queen*, and you will know what I am talking about. Far from being a passing fad, such 'respect' for justified (or justifiable) fury still pervades our collective cultural psyche; it lies at the base of our awe for Kaali's bloodthirst and Shiva's world-destroying *tandav nritya*.

The admiration and pleasure we receive from witnessing rage directed at others come from two sources. First, all of us carry within us a modicum of frustration and resentment (about such and such a person, or this or that situation) in our hearts, and therefore we can draw vicarious gratification by (secretly) identifying with the self-righteous, indignant victim. Second, on a plane that is usually out of our conscious awareness, we categorize anger into 'good' and 'bad' types. 'Good anger', we hold, arises from a credible cause (e.g. a spouse's infidelity, a business partner's embezzlement etc.), and it is unaddictive, calling forth a single and finite response and seeking justice. Such anger tends to evaporate as rapidly as it appears. A state of fatigue and remorse soon sets in, especially if the offending party shows contrition and makes some sort of reparative gesture. The cloudburst of temper subsides and things return to their usual humdrum pace, unless, of course, one is provoked all over again. In contrast to such 'good anger' is the 'bad anger', which comes in several forms:

- *Rage*: An intense form of anger, rage is characterized by its overwhelming effect on the mind. To be sure, something in the environment triggers even this type of anger, but the response is truly excessive. The enraged person loses all control, starts screaming at the top of his or her lungs, uses foul language, and tends to become utterly disorganized or even physically violent. The quantum of emotion flooding the mind here is clearly out of proportion and

seems to emanate from something deep and long-accumulated from the past. The frustrating events of today stirs up anger withheld from yesterday.

- *Vindictiveness*: At times, anger becomes a matter of life-style. It gets embedded in the very fabric of one's character. The resentment one feels is endless, it takes on a life of its own, and is hypnotically driven to punish the offender again and again. Such 'vindictiveness' (see the discourse on it later in this book) betrays the confusion of a contemporary adversary with an 'enemy' from a long time ago, most likely from his or her early childhood.

- *Displaced anger*: There are times when people do not direct their anger at the offending party. Instead, they target others who happen to be 'available' or seem too weak to retaliate. The cliché of someone kicking a dog when he is upset with his boss at work exemplifies such 'bad' anger. More significant is the propensity towards child abuse which, almost invariably, results from a conflation of contemporary and old frustrations. The helpless child is beaten in order to rid oneself of one's own sense of impotence.

- *Self-flagellation*: A variant of 'displaced anger' is its discharge upon oneself. Here the individual does not get enraged at those he perceives as having hurt him. Instead, he pours the liquid fire of rage upon himself. He stops eating, throws away and damages his prized possessions, and, at times, mutilates his own body. Such behaviours are best regarded as 'passive aggressive', i.e. maneuvers to hurt the offender by hurting oneself. A couplet from the Urdu poet Bashir Badar captures this scenario eloquently: *'Hum se majboor ka ghussa bhi ajab baadal hai/apne hi dil se uthey, apne hi dil par barsey'*.* The poet's inclusion of the word *majboor* tells us that beating up oneself results from the inability to directly confront others. The self-lacerating individual lacks courage. He also has no faith in others' ability to tolerate his angry protests and come up with conciliatory suggestions.

Far more severe than such blockade of overt aggression is the inability of certain individuals to feel any anger at all. Kept waiting for hours, they

display no displeasure when the tardy one finally arrives. Exploited by friends and family, they remain forever cordial. They appear placid while facing neglect, dishonesty, fraudulence, betrayal, and abuse. Nothing seems to irk them. They seem to possess an enormous quota of forgiveness. But in reality, this is not the case. True forgiveness can occur only after the offense has been registered and the emotions of hurt and resentment have been worked through in a piecemeal fashion. The persons I am describing here are not forgiving in the real sense of the word since they do not even register that they have been wronged. Their hunger for acceptance and their dependence upon others is great. As a result, they are all too willing to ignore hurts and injustices. In fact, they lack the healthy capacity for indignation that most mature and well-adjusted people possess.

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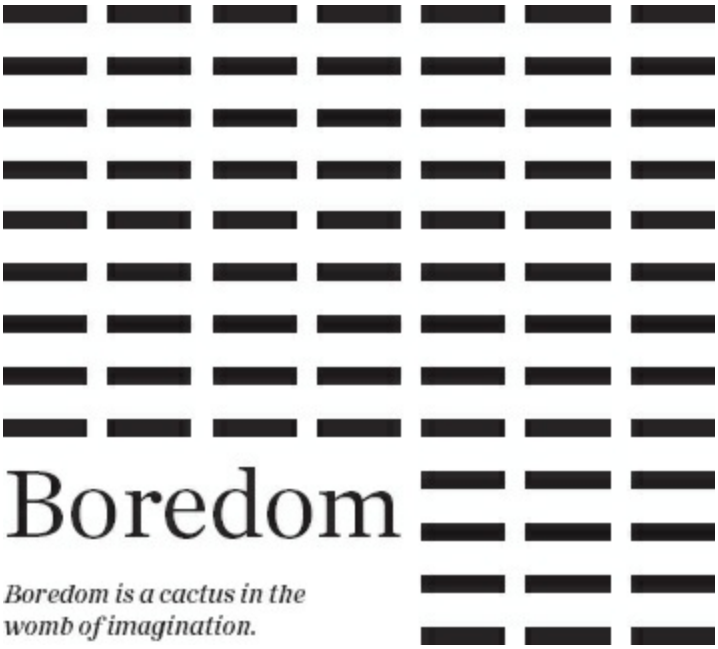
* For translation of Urdu and Hindi couplets in this book, please turn to page 124.

That said, we are in the position to review and summarize the main points of our discourse. These include (i) anger does not come out of the blue; it is a response to psychological injury, (ii) anger felt with too great an intensity and on too sustained a basis is morbid; severe childhood frustrations often contribute to this; (iii) incapacity to feel anger when situations warrant it, is also unhealthy; (iv) anger can be discharged in appropriate or inappropriate ways; and, (v) a mature person possesses the capacity to feel angry at credible causes, in limited fashion, and for the sake of justice. It is this type of healthy indignation and assertiveness that Krishna exhorted Arjun to experience while they were on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Krishna surely knew the morally correct forms and uses of anger!



While all of us occasionally feel bored and are at our wit's end trying to figure out what will pull us out of this emotional traffic jam, some individuals are much more prone to boredom. For them, the feeling of boredom is not transient, not quickly remediable by actively doing something or by being in good company. Boredom flows in their blood. They are chronically bored; they do not know what to do with themselves, and they can't find a way to enliven their subjective experience. Not that they do not try; they do. They take up hobbies, go on vacations, and, at times, change their line of work. But they can't seem to get out of the grey, suffocating fog of boredom. Work gives them little pleasure, lavish trips leave them unmoved. Drinking results in tipsy indifference. Relationships become an annoyance, marriage a burden, sex a chore. Even big money and extramarital affairs lose their luster soon. Being bored seems to be their destiny. But why?

Before we look for answers to this question, let us define what boredom actually is. What are its experiential constituents? How does feeling bored differ from feeling depressed? And what is boredom's relationship to loneliness (or to monotony)? In other words, let us map out the subjective territory encompassed under the rubric of boredom. As we take our first steps in this journey, we become aware that boredom is not a monolithic phenomenon. In fact, it is comprised of six elements and

each of them fuels the others. Working in unison, they give rise to the experience of boredom. The six elements are:

- *A feeling of dissatisfaction*: This comprises a sense of discontent and unease with the way things are. One does not feel comfortable within one's skin, instead feeling out of sorts. Things just do not seem right.
- *A disinclination to act*: One feels a lack of energy, an overall sense of weakness, and inability to change the state of affairs. Boredom, therefore, reflects a conflict between the need for excitement and the inability to find it. The bored person craves stimulation but rejects any stimulus that is offered.
- *Longing but without the knowledge of what one is longing for*: There is a peculiar absence of fantasy in the bored individual. He or she cannot visualize or conjure up an event that will release them from the trap of boredom. The person who is bored can be compared to someone who has forgotten a name and is asking others to remind him of it.
- *Emptiness*: One feels hollow, oddly devoid of psychic contents. The bored mind is like a barren field, incapable of germinating a crop of ideas. There is a feeling of deadness all around.
- *Passive attitude of waiting*: Hidden in the experience of boredom is a timid expectation that the world would somehow relieve one's suffering. One hopes for 'something' to happen, though one can't really tell what that something might be.
- *Disturbance in the sense of time*: Boredom is characteristically associated with an agonizing slow passage of time: a minute seems akin to an hour, an hour equal to a day. Desperately attempting to 'kill time', the bored individual feels slowly but surely 'killed' by the sluggishness of the clock.

Now that we have fleshed out the portrait of boredom, we may compare it with depression in order to discern the similarities and differences between the two experiences. Being bored and being depressed are alike insofar as both are unpleasant and unhappy states of mind. Both zap the life energy out of the individual who is in a bad mood and is no longer

good company for others. However, boredom and depression differ in important ways. In boredom, one passively waits for the world to jolt one back into vitality. In depression, one gives up on the external reality and licks one's own wounds. More importantly, boredom is accompanied by a flattened, emptied-out, fantasy-less mental life while depression is rife with nostalgia, self-pity, guilt, and masochistic rumination. The bored person does not know what to feel or what to do; he feels stuck. The depressed person sobs, cries, and envisions ways of committing suicide. The experiences of boredom and depression, as it turns out, are quite different.

A related question is whether boredom is a consequence of loneliness. Superficially this might appear to be the case, but actually the two are unrelated. Solitude is not always boring. It can be enjoyable and emotionally replenishing, besides providing an opportunity for creative activity. And boredom can set in while one is surrounded by people and seemingly engaged in social exchange. In fact, upon careful scrutiny, it becomes evident that while loneliness does not cause boredom, boredom – by rendering the individual unable to genuinely relate to others – might cause loneliness.

Yet another matter is boredom's relationship to monotony. Here too the temptation is to blame monotony (of schedule, experiences, etc.) as the cause of boredom. A closer look, however, reveals that exposure to monotony leads to outrage and impulsive action. Or it produces drowsiness and even sleep. Boredom is not the outcome of monotony. In fact, under certain circumstances (e.g. music, dance, religious rituals), the repetition of the same pattern again and again can even lead to ecstasy.

So if boredom is not brought about by loneliness or by monotony, then what is its root cause? The psychoanalysts who have sought answers to this question, especially Otto Fenichel and Ralph Greenson, have concluded that the state of boredom is a shield against the recall of painful emotions connected with past traumas and deprivations. The characteristic impoverishment of fantasy in a bored individual supports this idea: imagining can come precariously close to recalling. Or, it can

propel one towards dangerous actions. The bored individual seeks to avoid both these outcomes. Instead, he wants to be taken care of, and passively fed by the world. This seems to be a token of being loved; it can undo the traumatic deprivation of early childhood. The bored person is full of emptiness. His emptiness represents the hungry child with the concomitant image of an absent mother, or a mother who will not come to the child's rescue (hence, the agonizing slowness of the passage of time experienced by the bored individual). In fact, he is one big mouth waiting for an unremittingly generous breast.

The mention of such hunger brings forth the memory of Jaikishan Sakhuja (a pseudonym, of course), a classmate from my medical school days. A mediocre student and unremarkable in appearance, Jaikishan had 'distinguished' himself in a unique manner: he watched a movie every day. And, when I say every day, by God, I mean it! Each one of the three hundred and sixty-five days a year for the five years that we studied together! All of his classmates – including me, I must admit – regarded him as driven, addicted, somewhat odd, perhaps even a bit crazy. Lest you condemn his peers as judgmental, let me tell you that there were only four cinema halls in the town where our medical college was located which meant that poor Jaikishan had to see many, many movies ten-fifteen-twenty times each. Six p.m. every day, sitting in a dark hall, eyes fixated on a screen, perhaps a bottled cold drink (or, a deftly hidden lit cigarette) in his hand, Jaikishan was like a blissful baby on the breast. Mouth filled with mother's nipple, vision restricted to her face, all peaceful. Jaikishan did not go to watch celluloid sagas; he went to be breast-fed, as it were. The poor guy was neither addicted nor crazy. He was bored out of his mind.

Allow me to begin with listing the names of Rana Pratap, Tipu Sultan, Maharani of Jhansi, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, and Shaheed Bhagat Singh. If you have already gotten the drift of my thought, you might suggest that I also include Chhatrapati Shivaji, Prithvi Raj Chauhan, and – from a different angle – Mahatma Gandhi and (why not!) even Anna Hazare. Though they might have manifested it differently, each of these individuals possessed great courage. In the case of some, it was a matter of 'physical courage'. In the case of others, it was a matter of 'moral courage'. The former showed gallantry in war and/or physical bravery in confronting the colonial powers that ruled India till the mid-twentieth century. The latter showed ideological integrity in leading a non-violent revolt against oppression and corruption.

The separation of 'physical' and 'moral' courage is, however, somewhat artificial. Physical courage emanates from moral courage and moral courage contributes to acts of physical courage. The two are intermingled and often cannot be separated. And then there is a third category of 'intellectual courage' which propels imagination, sustains authenticity, and leads to inventions; 'there is no creativity without audacity' quips W.H. Auden.

Before proceeding further with such ideas, however, let us stop ourselves and ask what courage actually is? To my mind, at least, courage seems to consist of a subset of phenomena, including the following:

| *Holding on firmly to one's convictions:* A courageous man puts great faith in his own thoughts and perceptions. It might take him time,

trial and error, self-examination, and even some suffering to arrive at his ideological position, but once he has come to that point, he holds on to it tightly.

- *Truly cherishing one's ideals:* A courageous man refuses to betray his values and his idiom of life, be it sociopolitical, scientific, or literary. He refuses to be bought, bribed, or silenced by intimidation.

- *Needing no consensus:* One who possesses courage does not depend upon others' approval. He can stand on his own even when others do not agree with him or oppose him. He might even relish going against the so-called majority opinion.

- *Overcoming the fear of consequences:* This point cannot be emphasized enough. Courage is not synonymous with fearlessness. A fearless person is either foolhardy or he is operating under the protection of someone powerful. A courageous person, in contrast, knows that his stance and his actions can have adverse consequences for him, such as financial hardship, social isolation, ridicule, physical punishment, and so on. And yet he braces himself and overcomes the fear of the impending onslaught. Only then can he brave destruction and death and not betray the meaningful core of his existence.

Having delineated the psychological constituents of courage, let us return to the list of individuals at the beginning of this discourse. We know that proud chieftains and warriors like Rana Pratap and Shivaji displayed great prowess on the battlefield. We readily recall the bravery of Maharani of Jhansi in the early revolt against the British rulers of India. And we are all too close in historical time to the valorous militants like Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Shaheed Bhagat Singh and the non-militant Mahatma Gandhi — freedom-fighters who laid the foundations of modern, independent India. We recognize, admire, and salute their courage. And we – or, at least some of us – extend a modicum of such respect to the current social activist, Anna Hazare.

One profoundly courageous person from our nation's history, however, remains far less recognized. This is Prince Dara Shikoh, the son of Emperor Shah Jahan and the older brother of the nefarious Aurangzeb. A

scholar of Upanishads and Sufi mystical tradition of Islam, Dara Shikoh had the moral fortitude to declare – going against the scriptures of Islam – that Mohammed was not the last prophet sent to the world by God and there were prophets born in India as well; he named Guru Nanak as the prime example of this. The scholar-prince also had the courage to suggest – in his book titled *The Meeting of the Two Oceans of Sufism and Vedantism* – that, at their roots, Hinduism and Islam were one and the same. And for these two 'crimes', he was beheaded as per the command of Aurangzeb!

To be sure, one who acts with courage pays a price. Retributions of such sort in the political realm are well-documented (e.g. the repeated imprisonment of Gandhi, the execution of Bhagat Singh). Less attention is paid to the isolation and scorn faced by the creative artist who dares to be different. The shunning of Mirza Ghalib (1795-1869) by many critics of his time for writing 'meaningless' poetry is a striking example of the price one pays for 'out-of-the-box' thinking. The hounding of M.F. Hussain by right-wing zealots for defiling Hindu deities by his artistic imagination is another case in point. Let me put it bluntly. The Greeks might have poisoned Socrates but we Indians are no better: we, too, have forced cups of hemlock down the throats of our geniuses.

This would be a perfect place to end this discourse, but a few matters pertaining to courage still need to be addressed. *First,* the cocky bravado of adolescence should not be confused with courage. Outlandish behaviours (e.g. spending the night in a graveyard) of teenage boys are not courageous. These actions are counter phobic, i.e. shrill assertions of bravery which paradoxically betray their fearfulness as they are venturing into the world of adult tasks and responsibilities. *Second,* committing suicide is frequently viewed as an act of cowardice. I beg to differ. I believe that to end one's own life is a very courageous act, but I would also hasten to add that what motivates or drives such courage is very often a morbid emotional state or seriously disturbed thinking. At the same time, one must remain open to the possibility that some suicides do result from a rational preference of dignified death over a life of indignity and shame. Such suicides are acts of pure courage. *Third,* there is the question of what makes some people courageous and others

cowardly. As my friend and colleague, the Philadelphia-based psychoanalyst Susan Levine points out, there is very little in-depth-psychological literature on the topic. Susan herself notes that courage refers to 'a conscious decision to tolerate risk or pain for the purpose of achieving a higher goal' and is therefore intricately bound with ethical and moral values. But where does the capacity to place ethics above comfort come from? Would it be too far-fetched to say that having parents who place their duties as mothers and fathers – without maudlin fanfare – above their personal desires, plays a role here? Having received love in childhood makes one strong as well. And then there are identifications with our heroes. This, too, becomes a fount of courage. When all this is in place, the call of a crucial moment in the nation's or family's history pulls the proverbial rabbit out of the hat. We act with courage and this, in a dialectical fashion, enhances our self-esteem and our capacity to act boldly all over again.

Finally, I must mention the acts of courage in the realm of romantic love. While the great epics of the East (e.g. Heer-Ranjha, Sohni-Mahiwal) and West (e.g. Romeo and Juliet) depict such heroism in a scintillating manner, no greater example of 'romantic courage' from real life can be given than that of King Edward VIII. The King of England – which at his time was the world's preeminent power – abdicated his throne for Wallis Simpson – a woman with whom he had fallen in love. To give up immense wealth and great authority to marry a twice-divorced, foreign-born 'commoner' must have required nerves of steel and a heart full of courage.

Disgust is a shudder at
recognizing the disowned filth
of the mind.

The word ‘disgust’ is derived from the addition of the prefix *dis* (meaning ‘bad’ or ‘problematic’ as, for instance, in disease, distort, disturb, distress, and so on) to the Latin word *gustare* (meaning ‘to taste’). It therefore refers – mainly – to revulsion at the thought of ingesting something foul in taste or smell.

Prominent among stimuli that trigger disgust (*ghrina* in Hindi) are the sight of rotten food on one’s plate, the odour of milk that has gone bad, and the discovery of a dead cockroach in one’s sandwich. However, such ingestion-related events are not the only triggers for disgust. The feeling can be mobilized by the sight of fresh feces in an unflushed toilet bowl or, worse, next to one’s car in a public parking lot. Looking at gory violence, open wounds in which maggots are crawling, pus-filled abscesses, vomit, and gangrene-ridden body parts can also stir up disgust. The thought of one’s body coming in contact with something slimy, sticky, and mucky too carries the potential of arousing the emotional response of disgust.

Of note here is that all the triggers for disgust listed so far – ingestion, smell, sight, skin-contact – have to do with something revolting coming close to or getting into one’s body. The fact, however, is that disgust can be evoked by psychologically and ethically noxious stimuli as well. Take a look at the following examples and you will readily grasp the point I am making here.

- Try to recall how you felt, as a child, upon learning about sexual intercourse and the fact that your parents might be doing such a God-awful thing!
- Describe – in some detail – the 'mechanics' and pleasure of oral sex (both fellatio and cunnilingus) to Nasreen, a culturally-repressed and sexually un-informed Muslim girl from a small town like Azamgarh, or, say, Kannauj. Note how sickening she finds your discourse to be, assuming, of course, that you are able to continue beyond the first few words.
- Observe your own emotional response to discovering that Pankaj, your brother who lives in New Delhi, demanded to be paid rent when your son asked him if he could stay in his house for a week or so while preparing for the IIT entrance examination.
- Ask Naren what he felt upon learning that his favourite school teacher had been taking bribes to give higher grades to students from wealthy families.

In all these instances, the predominant emotional response is one of disgust. This 'confirms' that while disgust is generally associated with 'ingesting' – orally, visually, via smell or coming in bodily contact with – something repulsive, purely psychological and moral triggers can also produce similar results. Not only is the subjective emotional response the same under these circumstances, the physiological and gestural accompaniments of disgust are also in evidence. These include a sense of nausea, contorted facial expression (with the eyes tightly closed and a characteristically wrinkled nose), hand gestures indicating that one is about to vomit, and an overall distancing recoil of the torso from the real or imagined location of the noxious stimulus. Disgust is a truly visceral response. Charles Darwin captured its essence when he stated that 'Disgust refers to something revolting, primarily in relation to the sense of taste, as actually perceived or vividly imagined, and secondarily to anything which causes a similar feeling, through the sense of smell, touch, and even eyesight.'

Now, you might have noticed the potential overlap this emotion has

with contempt and horror.

- Like contempt, disgust devalues the one towards whom it is directed. The only difference is that disgust is associated with a feeling of being encroached upon, being invaded and violated, while contempt is felt for someone or something at a safe distance. Moreover, contempt is a sustained feeling (i.e. it lasts over a period of time) while disgust is instantaneous and reflexive.
- Horror and disgust can co-exist as, for instance, in watching scenes of gory violence in a movie. They share the attitude of aversion and the wish to get away from a disturbing object. But horror has more fear in it and disgust more revulsion.

Disgust also has a relationship with fascination even though the two appear to be complete opposites of each other. The fact, however, is that disgust can serve as a powerful shield against fascination, especially if the latter involves objects, acts, and attitudes that are strictly forbidden by one's conscience. Think about it. Is it not possible that the sexually repressed small town girls' disgust at the description of oral sex (or, say, while looking at a graphically-illustrated edition of *Kamasutra*) masks an erotic interest and even sexual arousal? All right, if this does not seem convincing, take the example of a two-year old who wants to play with his feces: after all, it is his, and on top of that, it is soft, warm, and pliable... sort of like plasticine. But later, in the course of his development, this very child would treat the thought of touching feces with disgust. Why? What has happened in the meantime is that the word disgust (and the capacity for feeling it inside) has entered the child's vocabulary through an educational process (*'Chhi-Chhi'*, the mother shrieks upon seeing the child wanting to touch his feces; *'gandaa bachha'*, she admonishes). Gradually, the newly-acquired recoil from feces spreads to all dirty objects and, still later, to psychological and moral depravity.

This perspective on disgust conveys two messages about the origins of the phenomenon: one, that it is a reaction to underlying interest and, two, that it is an acquired response. Originated by Sigmund Freud and widely accepted by all subsequent psychologists, this idea is countered by ethologically-minded writers like Sylvan Tomkins, who suggest that

disgust is a primary, 'hard-wired' animal response to foul food and this response later extends to varied life contexts by a stimulus generalization principle. In this perspective, repudiation caused by disgust is a useful hereditary response and not a coquettish mask over forbidden desires. Who do you think is correct: Freud or Tomkins?

Well, let me help you here by suggesting a way out of this either-or conundrum. Most likely, the capacity for feeling disgust – especially with regard to eating something foul-smelling or distasteful – is biologically given to us. After all, it is an evolutionary advantage to avoid displeasure and harm to ourselves. Later, as our personalities form under the 'cultural' influence of our families, we begin to feel disgust at the sight of all bodily excretions: urine, feces, snot, vomit, sputum, menstrual blood, and so on. And, still later, we enlarge the orbit of our revulsion to include despicable actions and morally repugnant character-traits. The biology of disgust thus finds an ally in the aesthetics of civilized morality. That such psychobiological harmony would exist at the base of a jagged-edged reaction like disgust leaves us wondering about the complexity of human emotions.

Envy

Envy is a thorn in the
flesh of admiration.

Let me begin with a warning: what I am about to describe will require a confession on your part. And perhaps a bit of wincing, for I am sure that you would have a hard time admitting that *you* have ever experienced envy. But the moment I remind you of the phone conversation in which you learned that your friend's daughter had been accepted for admission into Harvard Business School, the memory of a peculiarly unpleasant emotion will come rushing back to your mind. Or, when you first caught a glimpse of your neighbour's newly-acquired Mercedes. Or, when you walked into Anita and Chandan's living room and were surprised to see an original painting by Hussain. Yes, the real thing!

Come on. Admit it. The bitter bile of envy has moved within you on these occasions. Knowing that you hardly enjoy such confessions, I must rush to tell you that envy is a human emotion and that all of us are susceptible to it.

Before going further though, a proper definition of envy seems in order. Nitpicking aside, envy refers to a painful realization that someone else has what one admires, covets, and wants. Someone has a better house, better job, better car, or better clothes. Material possessions are not the only instigators of envy, though. One can feel envy for someone else's looks, height, figure, voice, artistic talents, athletic abilities, and even their emotional peacefulness. In fact, when all is said and done, it is the last one that turns out to be at the bottom of all envy. Conflicted, torn, pressured and driven as we are, the encounter with someone who can handle it all, who appears unperturbed by the cacophony of daily events,

who is deep and still like a moonlit lake, leaves us achingly wistful. We admire such serenity. We want it for ourselves. And the realization that we lack it, makes us feel pained.

While such an experience is a bit unnerving, the fact is that envy is not all bad. A little envy leads to emulation. It fuels effort; one begins to work hard in order to acquire the valued attribute. Too much envy, however, causes feelings of dejection and leads to paralysis of endeavour. It leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Such envy is warded off by scorn towards others whom one secretly admires. It can also result in social withdrawal. One simply stops meeting those who stir up feelings of envy in him and he surrounds himself with people who have less of talent, looks, wealth, or mental peace. Yet another measure to keep envy in abeyance is to somehow 'possess' the envied one so that their glow becomes one's own. Hiring an outstandingly smart person and marrying someone deeply admired are actions that contain elements of this dynamic.

An important distinction needs to be made here between envy and its twin sister, jealousy. While the two words are often used interchangeably, the fact is that they represent entirely different sets of emotions. Envy is mobilized by someone else having a coveted attribute. Jealousy is caused by exclusion from a valued relationship. Envy involves two people. Jealousy involves three people. Envy propels one towards self-improvement or, if that fails, devaluation of the admired other. Jealousy propels one to somehow remove the fortunate rival from the bloody triangle. In Western literature, Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* and Shakespeare's *Othello* are prime illustrations of the themes of envy and jealousy, respectively.

Less dramatic but certainly closer to home is the saga of Umesh, the aspiring singer of Dayanand College. He knows that he sings really well, but he wishes that his talent was greater. He feels envious of Udit Narayan and Sonu Nigam. His jealousy is reserved for Ashok, the tabla player, who gets more attention from Mallika, the Keralite beauty in their class. Umesh wants to be the focus of her adoring glances. Secretly, and with a bit of guilt, he wishes Ashok harm. This is the syndrome of jealousy. It is distinct from envy.

Two more things can be said about envy. One: envy results from comparing and contrasting the living room of someone else's personality with the psychic bathroom of one's own. In other words, we develop envy when we look only at the surface attributes of others: their clothes, jewellery, cars, house, carpet, paintings, and so on. We juxtapose these against our worries, doubts, private failures and blemishes, the 'dirt' we have on ourselves. The result is envy. If we could know others' inner selves and those aspects of their existence that are hidden from the social eye, and if we could clearly see our external persona (note how often we feel surprised at reading a laudatory recommendation letter written on our behalf!), the pain of envy would evaporate like a drop of water on a hot frying pan!

The other thing about envy is this: on the surface, envy can lead to defensive scorn and even hatred. We begin to hate those who make us helplessly envious and, in a 'sour-grapes' fashion, devalue not only them but the very attribute which stirred up envious feelings in us in the first place. Envy, on the conscious level, is therefore a *cause* of hatred. On the unconscious level, envy can also be a *form* of hatred. After all, we do not ascribe a full, three-dimensional, complex, and subjectively-driven human identity to the person we envy. We hardly permit him or her ordinary foibles and human weaknesses. In narrowly focusing upon a single attribute of theirs, we rob them of the multifaceted existence that is typical of all human beings. Envy makes cardboard figures out of human flesh and soul. It dehumanizes people.

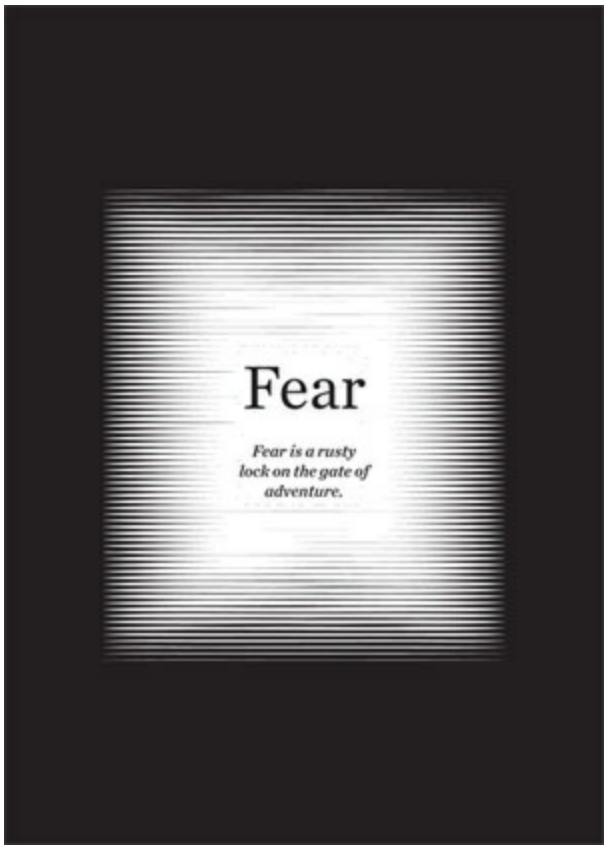
But where does it all originate? What are the experiences in childhood that lay the groundwork for envy? Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, looked for answers to such questions but, frankly, I think he came up short (the pun, which will become evident to you momentarily, is unintended). He traced the origin of envy to a girl's desire to possess a male genitalia and he termed the phenomenon 'penis envy'. While occasionally such feelings do arise in three-to-four-year-old girls (especially in a family setting where men are overvalued and women, especially the mother, is disrespected), they are more related to obtaining male social privileges than male genitals. And even then, to regard such feelings as the sole and ubiquitous explanation of the origin

of human envy is riddled with problems. To begin with, it does not explain the experience of envy in males. It also makes essential gender differences which, from our post-modern perspective, we know to be fluid, shifting, overlapping, and narrative-related rather than anatomy-based.

The psychoanalyst who has a more meaningful perspective on the origins of envy is Melanie Klein. She suggests that feelings of envy originate in the early mother-child relationship when the child begins to sense that the mother possesses the capacity to relieve his or her distress in a way that the child himself or herself cannot do. The soothing voice of the mother has far more pacifying qualities than words one can direct at oneself. Her touch is better than self-stimulation, her attention more comforting than our self-absorption. What does she have that we do not have?

This realization is the foundation of envy, Klein asserts, and I agree with her. Now, let us add that if the mother remains available and attentive, more often than not then, our frustration at her hands is minimal and our anger at her manageable. We can then turn our envy of her into a loving emulation. We 'identify' with her and learn to soothe others. If, however, the mother is less than optimally available, then our frustration builds up and the envy of her becomes intolerable. Later in life, this gradually spreads to large swathes of social experience and makes us vulnerable to painful envy of anyone whom we begin to admire.

Let me put it bluntly: too much envy betrays inner desperation for love (originally, from mother), and the anger that is invariably associated with such an internally-deprived state. As love fills us up, frustration recedes and envy becomes tolerable. So, what do you say if I ask your neighbour to give us a ride in his Mercedes to the film society function where Abhishek Bachchan and Aishwarya Rai are the chief stars? Could you handle that?



Fear is ubiquitous. All of us experience it at one time or another. The sound of footsteps approaching us from behind in a dark alley, an unexpected visit to the city morgue, an eye contact with a large alligator in the zoo, and a precipitous 'fall' of a rollercoaster can all give us goose bumps of terror. We shriek, scream, or simply become paralyzed with fear. We readily recognize its sinister presence on the threshold of our hearts and feel its slithery movement in our blood. Oh yes, we know fear.

But, wait! Do we understand the actual nature of fear? Do we know the purpose it serves? Do we agree upon the circumstances under which it is 'normal' to be afraid? And, when does fear become abnormal or morbid? Is fear to be avoided at all costs or can this bitter-gourd of an emotion be transformed into a sweet mango of psychological delight? Questions like these suggest that fear is simple and self-evident only on the surface. When examined carefully, it turns out to be a complex and nuanced phenomenon.

A good starting point of our sojourn to understand fear is the dictionary definition which declares it to be an unpleasant emotion caused by the

awareness of danger. The anticipation of being harmed is integral to fear. No wonder the fearful individual shows trepidation when faced with the distress-inducing object or situation. A certain diminution of courage is thus implicit in the experience of fear; cowardice and fear turn out to be Siamese twins. Moreover, fear is not regarded as an all-or-none phenomenon. The English language, for instance, distinguishes four levels of the severity of fear: *apprehension*, which refers to a vague anticipation of a bad occurrence; *dread*, which blends the conviction that one is facing danger with an intense reluctance to encounter the scary object or situation; *panic*, which denotes overwhelming fear coupled with alarmed hyper-activity (e.g. pacing, running away), and physiological concomitants (e.g. trembling, increased heartbeat, difficulty breathing); and *terror,* which signifies the most extreme degree of fear that is accompanied by psychic and motor paralysis.

Regardless of its severity or the lack of it, fear remains an unpleasant experience that all of us seek to avoid. It therefore comes as a surprise that fear is actually a useful emotion. Felt by animals and humans alike, fear is an evolutionary signal to keep us protected from danger. A sudden drop in the level of land under one's feet (e.g. near a cliff's edge, a downward glance from the balcony of a tall building), an object capable of abrupt and rapid movement (e.g. a snake, an insect that jumps), a situation that envelopes one in pitch darkness (e.g. a tunnel or a vault), and the sudden occurrence of loud noise (e.g. thunder) are all capable of mobilizing a fear response and, in turn, a variety of self-protective measures. We share our dislike of these prototypical danger situations with animals; they, too, associate them with a threat to survival and respond with fight-or-flight. Fear actually saves lives.

Take this close-to-home example of fear's utility to us. Rakesh Varma, a middle-aged accountant, comes out of his office on Barakhamba Road in New Delhi. He begins to cross the street, catches a glimpse of a fast-approaching truck, feels fear, quickly retraces his steps, and avoids being hit by the truck. Fear turns out to be his protector and ally. Let me put it bluntly: without fear, we would be in great danger.

Now, this does not mean that fear cannot acquire morbid forms. It can.

Such fears are called 'phobias' and it is fashionable to coin terms using Greek prefixes to designate specific types of fears. The list, by no means exhaustive, includes: agoraphobia (fear of open spaces), claustrophobia (fear of closed spaces), acrophobia (fear of heights), erythrophobia (fear of blushing in public), and so on. While each of them has its own psychological underpinnings, in the end all phobias are alike in being different from rational fears in three ways: *first*, phobias have a characteristically exaggerated and dramatic quality; the distress felt in response to an animal (e.g. a cat, a pigeon) or situation (e.g. being in a small space like an airplane bathroom) is vastly out of proportion with the potential risk posed by them. Think of Jaswinder Singh, the six-foot tall athlete who is terrified of a tiny spider in his bathroom or of Resham Khilnani, the Mumbai-based designer who refuses to use lifts and is often forced to climb several flights of stairs, and you will know what I am talking about. *Second*, normal fears are largely age-related and tend to diminish as one grows up. Phobias are impervious to the passage of time. *Finally*, unlike normal fears which safeguard our interests, phobias cause a restriction of life's enjoyment. Savita Gupta turns down dinner invitations if the host owns a large dog. Amjad Ali has given up the dream of travelling abroad because he feels queasy about flying. And Naresh Malhotra, a truly outstanding medical student, stays awake all night owing to the presence of a lousy lizard on his bedroom wall. Such fears are hardly rational. They constitute 'phobias' and, when severe, they need clinical attention.

Curiously, a condition called 'counterphobia' also exists. Here the individual willingly courts danger and draws pleasure from risky behaviour. Evel Knievel (1938-2007), the great American daredevil is an example *par excellence* of such a 'counterphobic' attitude. He established his own daredevil show, attempting ramp-to-ramp motorcycle jumps over parked cars, and a jump across Snake River Canyon in Idaho. Less dramatic examples are constituted by teenagers who drive recklessly, bet on staying overnight in graveyards, and are fascinated by gravity-defying roller coasters. Having tamed fear, or at least defied it, they can ride the erstwhile ferocious dragon with glee.

Acrobatic contraptions in an amusement park are, however, not the

only cultural artifacts cast out of fear's ore. Anyone who has read Bram Stoker's *Dracula* or Edgar Allen Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher* knows the literary pleasures associated with a well-titrated dose of dread. Closely related to such literature is the genre of horror movies. Blood curdling scenes from *Psycho* and *The Exorcist* have elicited loud shrieks of tormented joy from all-too-eager audiences. One thing is of note here, though: while gory depictions of violence do frighten us, it is the helpless anticipation of violence that truly terrifies us. The great maestro of fear, Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980), knew this well and declared: 'There is not excitement in the bang, only in the anticipation of it'. Hitchcock knew that fear is unpleasant but playing with fear, if done carefully, can yield pleasure. Interesting, isn't it?

Greed is a hippopotamus
eating a ten-egg omelette on a
golden plate.

Like most children from educated families of the 1950s, I was introduced to *Aesop's Fables* early in life. One story in the slim volume particularly caught my attention. It was about a farmer who found a goose that laid a golden egg each day. Initially jubilant at his good fortune, the farmer soon was unable to wait twenty-four hours for the next egg to arrive. He imagined that the goose had hundreds of eggs inside her but was stingy in doling out the wealth. The farmer grew restless and wanted all the gold immediately. He cut the goose open but found no gold inside it. All that happened was that the goose died and the farmer lost the daily nugget of riches that was assured to him.

Upon reading the story, I thought that the farmer was stupid. Did he not know that it takes time for an egg to arrive and develop in a mother's tummy? Yes, the farmer was a fool. I would never have done what he did. I would have taken very good care of that goose and over time become truly wealthy by collecting the eggs that she laid. I was smarter than the farmer. As a ten-year-old schoolboy, I was certain about this. Now, as a middle-aged psychoanalyst, I see that the main issue here is not one of smartness and stupidity, or even patience and impatience. It involves the capacity or incapacity to be satisfied. The farmer was impatient and deluded because of his greed.

But what is greed? How does it manifest itself? And what are its components and consequences? To understand all this we turn to the dictionary and find 'greed' defined as 'excessive and reprehensible acquisitiveness'. On the surface, the meaning of this phrase appears self-evident. However, a careful look reveals its nuanced nature. The first qualifier, 'excessive', suggests that acquisition can be termed 'greed' only

if it crosses a certain threshold but it does not tell us what that threshold is and who has set it up. The second qualifier, 'reprehensible', posits that greed lacks dignity, is subtly immoral, and is something to be looked down upon, but it does not tell us why it is considered as such.

Armed with these questions, we return to the phenomenon itself. We find that greed has four components: (i) *hunger* (there is a sense of pressure associated with the greedy person's urges); (ii) *inconsolability* (the greedy person never feels fulfilled, no matter how much he gets); (iii) *ingratitude* (since nothing is enough for him, the greedy person is hardly ever thankful); and (iv) *selfishness* (the greedy person is prone to disregard others in order to get what he wants). Aesop's farmer certainly displayed all these characteristics. He wanted more and more gold, he lacked patience, he could not be content with what he got, and acted with little regard for the very creature that was benefitting him. The farmer was indeed greedy. To tell the truth, the farmer is no great exception. All of us have come across people like him in our lives.

| Take Prema Patwardhan, who has about eight crore rupees in the bank, but still feels that she would 'relax' once she has ten. I do not believe her for a minute; I am pretty sure that once she reaches that mark, she will want fifteen, twenty, or even more crores to be peaceful. It is all a mirage, you know.

| Look at Jazadan Almirahwallah, the real estate giant and a new billionaire. The man owns at least seven apartment buildings in Mumbai and moves around town in a chauffeur-driven Mercedes. And yet, he demanded a jacked-up price when his own nephew tried to buy a small apartment in one of his buildings.

Greed is not only about money, however. It can involve other material acquisitions (e.g. clothes, jewellery, art, antiques), food, and even intangibles like fame, power, sexual liaisons, and travel-related experiences. Regardless of its manifest incarnation, the fundamental issues involved in greed remain the same: grotesque hunger, lack of satiety, ungratefulness, and lack of concern for others.

But why do some people become greedy and others do not? Exposure to

poverty during childhood has the potential of tilting our attitude toward acquisition in the direction of greed. However, it can also result in a tendency toward asceticism. And, in all honesty, there are people who have grown up dirt poor but are neither greedy nor ascetic as adults. So, material deprivation does not seem a sufficient cause for the development of greed. In combination with emotional deprivation (i.e. of love, praise, support, belonging), however, its impact is powerful. Here we have to remember that lack of love during childhood does not leave a gaping hole in the individual's psyche. Instead, anger, guilt at that anger, sadness, intensified appetite, and inexperience with feelings of satiety come to populate the void. That is what, if ingested – literally or metaphorically – fails to provide satisfaction. The resolution of greed therefore is not to give more and more to the afflicted person. The resolution lies in helping him cry his heart out for what he lacked as a child (and what the child inside him still lacks).

Now, since such a child exists to a greater or lesser degree in all of us, we all remain vulnerable to a bit of greed. Such 'normal' greed is focal, transient, and manageable by us without acting upon it. But it is there, no doubt. In all of us. And, therein lies the mystery of why greed is held to be reprehensible. We look down upon greed because it leads to uneven distribution of resources and deprives many for the pleasure of few. But we also condemn it because it reminds us of our own repudiated longings. If we acknowledge their existence, we will judge the so-called greedy one less harshly. And, that will surely be of help to him. We cannot be sure of this though; he may not be satisfied with this much kindness and may want more. Hmm.....

Hope is the silent fountainhead of life. It sustains us, offers us the promise of something good in the future, and keeps us going. A logical consequence of this is that all of us consider hope to be a 'good' emotion and contrast it with 'bad' emotions like envy, jealousy, rage, and so on. Indeed, we find hope to be highly desirable. As a corollary, we regard optimistic people to be healthy and admirable and pessimistic people to be somehow 'sick', or at least, unfortunate. We like the glow bestowed by hope on the human face. Our daydreams, myths, literature, and songs celebrate the fruitfulness of retaining hope in adverse circumstances. We associate lack of hope with cynicism, depression, and giving up on life. We associate hope with a robust commitment to life and happiness.

By and large, these widely-held notions are correct. However, they present an incomplete picture of hope. Matters pertaining to hope are actually far more complex. To begin with, we must distinguish between 'realistic' and 'unrealistic' hope. An outstanding high school student, who also happens to be a good basketball player, can legitimately hope to get into a good college in due course of time. But when we come across a marginal pupil with little else to distinguish himself, planning to join a top-notch college, we immediately recognize what 'unrealistic hope' is. Wanting to solve one's day-to-day financial problems by winning a lottery is still another illustration of 'unrealistic hope'. Such implausible optimism must be distinguished from expectations based on actual

talents, hard work, and reasonable probability of success. Realistic hope needs to be nurtured. Unrealistic hope needs to be renounced.

Besides this distinction, there is also the issue of 'conscious' and 'unconscious' hope. The former is readily available to awareness and involves the expectation of fulfilling this or that wish. We hope to pass an examination, get a job, buy a car, marry, travel abroad, have kids, and so on. In other words, 'conscious hope' tells us that our wishes are likely to come true. 'Unconscious hope' is not about wishes. It is about our emotional and developmental needs. Such hope prompts us to seek situations and people conducive to our continuing personal growth.

Let me give two examples that illustrate the distinction between 'conscious hope' and 'unconscious hope'. 'Conscious hope' takes us to a good college and 'unconscious hope' propels us to find a good mentor. 'Conscious hope' searches for opportunities offering material achievement and 'unconscious hope' looks for situations where personal authenticity can flourish. Most often, these two types of hope work together harmoniously. However, there are occasions when they come into conflict with each other.

- Take the example of Srilata Ghosh, who has fallen in love with her psychotherapist and desperately desires an actual consummation of their relationship. Here we can see that her 'conscious hope' is that the therapist will also fall in love with her, maybe have sex with her, marry her, and so on. However, we know that her 'unconscious hope' is that the therapist will not succumb to her seduction and, instead, will address the emotional hunger underlying it.
- A more familiar example is the five-year-old Raju, who is constantly demanding toys and other parental indulgences. His 'conscious hope' is that he will get what he is hankering for. However, his 'unconscious hope' is that someone in his environment will recognize the inconsolability that underlies his relentless demands and help him deal with that despair. Remember: a greedy child is looking for love and attention, not more toys.

Another wrinkle is added to all this by the fact that of itself 'hope' is

neither good nor bad. The same is true of hopelessness. Generally speaking, hopelessness is a negative emotion betraying a sense that one lacks inner and outer resources, and is doomed to failure. Indeed, in clinical settings, the presence of hopelessness is often regarded as a warning sign for potential suicidal tendencies. However, hopelessness is not a unitary phenomenon. It can be 'good' or 'bad' depending upon the circumstances. Occasionally hopelessness can be the result of a sensible and accurate assessment of one's meager prospects of success or the futility of a particular task at hand. Such realistic pessimism (e.g. in unrequited love, regarding unattainable life goals) grounds one in reality and creates the subsequent potential of finding alternative sources of satisfaction. This is 'good hopelessness', so to speak. In contrast to this is the 'bad hopelessness' arising from clinical depression or from a guilt-ridden devaluation of one's potential for success. Here the person gives up hope too readily, sees only the negative aspects of the future, and does not make adequate effort to realize his goals. Such a bleak outlook often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The one who does not try does not achieve 'Good hopelessness' binds us to reality, while 'bad hopelessness' tethers us to our inner demons.

Similarly, whether hope is 'good' or 'bad' depends upon how well-anchored it is in reality and what it propels us to do. If hope leads to a desperate and frantic pursuit of unattainable goals, then it is hardly 'good'. Actually, such hope is pathological. The same is true if hope condemns one to inactivity whereby one keeps passively waiting to be rescued by a bountiful Godot. On the other hand, if hope leads one to establish realistic goals, bear the labour of striving, and tolerate the pain of occasional disappointment, then hope is certainly 'good'. Such hope provides us sustenance in the face of obstacles and hardships. We gain the ability to bear the ups and downs of life without wincing or, at least, without wincing too much. We stop chasing mirages by giving up the well-reasoned expectation of finding an oasis. This is 'normal hope'.

But where does such normal, 'good', and life-sustaining hope come from? Well, to put it simply: from a satisfactory childhood. The repeated cycles of 'need-wish-appeal-satisfaction' during infancy and childhood lay the groundwork for a confident expectation that the world would

continue to provide emotional and material nutriment when needed. Frequent experiences of satisfaction of one's wishes and needs by one's parents result in the development of a sense of inner security and optimism. This sense is what the renowned psychoanalyst Erik Erikson termed 'basic trust'. Such trust in oneself and in the world is what keeps us going. It makes us strong and capable of continued effort. It also makes it possible for us to bear losses; we feel that life would offer us other rewards just when it has snatched a trophy from our hands. Without it we would sink into a dark abyss of despair. Think about it: what else but hope sustains lovers separated by distance, freedom fighters facing oppressive tyrants, and parents raising children with significant disabilities? While devotion, sustained effort, and prayer certainly help, personal hope is the actual source of strength in these situations.

Let us face it. Hope is the petrol of life's automotive and the best antidote against suicide. It helps us survive the crises and misfortunes that befall us. It holds our hands when the evening descends into night and dawn appears too far. In such moments, hope sings soothing lullabies to us, creates positive dreams, and wakes us up replenished and ready to face the next day. Remember that when the mythical Pandora's Box was opened, all emotions escaped but one. The emotion that refused to leave, after each passion was spent and sorrow spilled, was hope!

Ingratitude

Ingratitude is an ice pick
driven into the breast
of generosity.

This happened some twenty years ago. One morning during a professional meeting in New York, I happened to have breakfast with a colleague from California – a two-egg-omelette-bacon-toast-orange juice-coffee sort of thing. We had not seen each other for quite some time and the little sit-down meal provided us the opportunity to catch up on personal and professional news. As we finished and the waiter brought the check, I – impelled by the old Lucknow-style generosity – paid for both of us, declining his not entirely feeble offer to go Dutch. I was expecting that he would respond with something like: 'Thank you very much' or 'That was very nice of you'. Instead, he said, 'Next year, I will buy you breakfast.' I mumbled a few polite words in return and we parted. Something did not sit well with me, though. I found myself wondering about what he had said ('Next year, I will buy you breakfast.') and I found myself repeating the words in my mind. My colleague had most likely uttered them with a benign, if not affectionate, intent but I was left a bit unnerved. I kept wondering whether my friend was expressing gratitude for my gesture or, by bringing up *his* desire (and capacity) to act similarly, was balancing things out. His response simultaneously acknowledged and denied feelings of gratitude, I concluded.

If this is indeed so, one has to wonder why gratitude is hard to bear. And, what might be the origins of its opposite: ingratitude. In other words, why do some people not acknowledge – or, rush to forget – the kindness received from others? Now let me hasten to add that my colleague from California was not ungrateful. He had simply found a way of expressing his gratitude that partly, at least to my mind, cancelled the feeling. Others are farther along on this spectrum and never seem to concede that someone has been good to them. They can never bring

themselves to say the two simple words: thank you.

In order to understand the malady of ingratitude, we must return for a moment to gratitude itself and see what it stirs up that is hard to bear:

- Gratitude implies the recognition that someone has been kind to us, someone has offered us an opportunity, given us a gift. This, in turn, warrants that we renounce the cynical world-view we might be carrying in our hearts. The 'pleasure' of complaining is no longer ours.
- Gratitude also compels us to get off the throne of smugness. By explicitly registering someone else's generosity, we can no longer claim to be the only good folks in the crowd.
- Gratitude also tells the giver that we are satisfied and happy with what he has bestowed upon us. Encrypted in this communication is the absence of greed. By saying 'thank you', we are declaring our pleasure and contentment. We shall not ask for more.

It is these three accompaniments of gratitude, namely, the need to renounce cynicism, to give up arrogance, and to overcome greed, that makes it difficult for some people to bear it. As a result, they come across as ungrateful. Their ingratitude reflects a personality type that is all about taking, extracting, and parasitically sucking favours out of others without the usual adult feature of mutual concern and reciprocity. The attitude of such individuals can, at best, be called 'childish'. Now, we know that even under the best of circumstances, children have to be taught the ability to be decent, reciprocal, and thankful. Parental instruction to children for saying 'thank you' when they receive compliments or gifts lays the groundwork for the child's adaptation to reality. When things do not go well in childhood and one grows up feeling deprived and resentful, such adaptation to reality does not occur. Capacity for feeling and expressing gratitude fails to develop. Each benefactor is then measured against the lack of love and attention for which the beneficiary grieves inwardly. This debt is projected upon the benefactor. His acts of kindness therefore become only a partial payment of an old debt, and hence hardly worthy of gratitude.

No wonder those with ingratitude often 'forget' others' acts of kindness towards them – from which they have indeed benefitted. Or, at other times, they camouflage their lack of being thankful under loud and flamboyant proclamations of how full of gratitude they are ('*Main to Sarkar aap ke ehsanon ke bojh se zindigi bhar daba rahoonga'*, to put it in the Bollywood style). This is a caricature of gratitude, a fake product, not the real thing. Actual gratitude is sombre and forever looking to offer something in return. Ingratitude is Janus-faced: its one side comes across as mindless indifference to other's kindness and its other side appears as shameless exaggeration of indebtedness. Either way, ingratitude turns out to be a close relative of cruelty.

Ruthlessness of this sort is harder to bear if it comes from those truly close to us. We can ignore – more or less – a stranger who does not thank us after we have held the door open for him. We can swallow the hurt if a wedding gift we give is not acknowledged or responded to by a 'thank-you' note. But we can hardly overcome the pain caused by our friends', our spouse's, or our children's indifference to our acts of generosity. The latter's ingratitude can be especially devastating. King Lear's despair and outrage puts this in sharp light:

> *Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,*
> *More hideous, when thou show'st thee in a child,*
> *Than the sea monster*
>
> [and later in the same scene:]
>
> *How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is*
> *To have a thankless child.*

On the Indian scene, portrayals of ingratitude range from the character of Manthara in *Ramayana* to the heartless offspring of aging parents in the 2003 hit Bollywood flick, *Baghban*. Manthara was greatly indulged by King Dashratha and permitted to live within his palace (unlike other maids who lived in separate quarters). She returned this favour not by gratitude but by inciting Queen Kaikai, Lord Rama's stepmother, to ask more and more of the king, including the disenfranchisement of Rama from ascending to the kingdom's throne. Receiving goodness did not

make her thankful and humble. It stirred up further greed which she lived through the proxy figure of Kaikai. The result, as we know, was disastrous.

The movie, *Baghban*, is also a tale of ingratitude. Its characteristic Bollywood shrillness aside, this Amitabh Bachchan–Hema Malini starrer depicts the cold indifference of adult children to their aging parents. Preoccupied with their own concerns of money, status, living space, and parties, the grown-up children resort to separating their loving and self-sacrificing parents from one another. The indignity they inflict upon their mother and father betrays their utter incapacity to feel gratitude.

Matters pertaining to ingratitude do not end with thankless indifference, however. Things can get worse. Certain people react with explicit acts of aggression and meanness towards their benefactors. They react to a good deed by either asking for more (which minimizes the giver's benevolence) or by some outrageous act of hostility. Surely, it is experience with such people that give rise to the wry saying: 'No good deed goes unpunished.'

The first thing that strikes one about the word 'joy' is that neither the dictionary nor the thesaurus mentions 'happiness' in connection with it. The explanatory words and synonyms include pleasure, delight, enjoyment, delectation, and fruition but not happiness. This is puzzling, since we tend to reflexively equate 'joy' with happiness. But this does not seem to be the case, at least not in the English language. I for one, refuse to succumb to a lexical dictate of this sort, and insist that joy is, if not the same as happiness, at least one form of it; the other three forms are elation, ecstasy, and contentment.

Before explicating on this statement and at the risk of getting mired in further linguistic conundrum, I wish to note that the English language distinctions between various kinds of happiness get blurred when transported to Hindi. Here the words *prasannta* (which, frankly, never caught on as an expression of daily usage) or *khushi* (which, unbeknown to us, is borrowed from Urdu) seem all inclusive. They subsume all four types of happiness that I just mentioned (joy, elation, ecstasy, and contentment). Does that mean that we Indians do not feel the different types of the pleasurable emotion called happiness? Or, that our language of day-to-day conversation lacks precision while terms for various forms of happiness do exist in the warehouse of our literary heritage? After all, *musarrat, lutf, ishrat,* and *itmenan* (or *taskeen*) in Urdu and *praphullta,*

anand, *harshonmad*, and *santushti* (or *santosh*) in Hindi do seem to be the respective synonyms for elation, joy, ecstasy, and contentment.

That said, let us turn to these four experiences and examine how they differ and what they have in common:

- *Elation* is pleasure-based happiness. Stated more precisely, elation refers to the uplifting emotion that is felt upon the fulfillment of one's wishes. It is the sentiment of a hungry person receiving a plate of food, a young woman accepting the much-awaited marriage proposal from her boyfriend, a couple purchasing their first car, an ardent cricket fan getting great seats at a test match, and so on. Elation is highly pleasurable but, by its very nature, it is dependent upon external triggers and is short-lasting.

- *Joy*, the topic under consideration, is the efficacy or assertion-based form of happiness. It accompanies the experience of self-confidence and self-assertion. Successful exercise of intellect (e.g. solving a mathematical riddle) or physical prowess (e.g. hitting a boundary in cricket) also produce joy. The emotion one feels is pleasurable and boosts trust in one's capabilities. Pride is, therefore a Siamese-twin of joy. The affective state is reflected in the body's response of lightness, swiftness, and gestures of affirmation (e.g. thumbs up, screaming 'yes' out loud, chest pumps).

- *Ecstasy* is the merger-based form of happiness. Webster's Dictionary defines it as 'a state of overwhelming emotion, especially rapturous delight; mystic or prophetic trance; intense exaltation of mind and feeling', and so on. The experience of ecstasy involves bliss that is so powerful as to overwhelm reason, motility, and clear consciousness. The frenzy of political martyrdom is a loud vehicle for ecstasy and the religious mendicants' rapt absorption in worship is a quiet one. In either case, the self dissolves into something larger than itself. Transcendence is ecstasy's sister.

- *Contentment* is the subtle form of happiness that results from a feeling of satisfaction. Freud's phrase, 'happiness of quietness', though used by him ironically in describing hermits, is better suited for the

experience of contentment. This type of happiness is produced by finishing a good meal at a 'micro' level and becoming what one had set out to become on a 'macro' level. The latter feeling reflects that life has gone well, that we have arrived at the goals we had set for ourselves, and our actual selves have begun to approximate the desired view of ourselves. We can now feel content and hum *Kuchh na kaho, kuchh bhi na kaho* under our breath!

After this long digression into the pleasurable emotions that constitute happiness – of which joy is but one form – let us return to joy and take a closer look at it.

The first thing we note is that while the experience of joy is not restricted to any age, certain junctures in life are especially suitable for producing joy. The earliest prototype of joy is to be found in the childhood game of 'peek-a-boo'. In it, the mother covers her face momentarily and then reveals it; the child bursts into laughter. The rediscovery of mother firms up his fragile self and the discovery that one could last without her – even for a few seconds – buttresses confidence in oneself. A little later in life, joy appears in connection with the acquisition of upright locomotion. The child is thrilled at this new skill and can barely stop exercising it. Still later, the enhanced capacity to play and to master rule-bound games (ranging from carrom and chess through video games to cricket, football, and hockey) produces joy. During late adolescence and young adulthood, the confidence derived from beginning to live on one's own (say in a college dorm) or from landing one's first job, become important joy-producing events. Becoming a parent (especially for the first time) is yet another life event that gives rise to joy.

At this point, you might protest and ask me, 'How come you do not mention sex anywhere in this discussion of joy? Doesn't having sex produce joy?' Well, my answer is that 'yes, indeed, it does.' But let us be more precise and put it this way: when someone consents to having sex with us, it leads to elation. When we reach sexual climax and have orgasm, it gives rise to ecstasy. When we are in a post-coital peacefulness, we are experiencing contentment. But when we are having sex (doing

it!!), the emotion we feel is pure and simple joy!

Kindness

Kindness is the smiling dough
of mother's bread.

To most of us what constitutes kindness is self-evident. Or, so it seems. The dictionary definition of kindness makes reference to affection, sympathy and forbearance, i.e. notions that appear well-understood and widely accepted. However, a careful consideration of what kindness actually is leads one to a winding path of nuance and complexity. Kindness does not turn out to be an emotional monolith but a multifaceted diamond with the glint and glow of each facet being as precious as that of the other.

The constituents of kindness include the five following attributes.

| *Accepting others as separate individuals in their own right:* This means recognizing that the subjective experience of others is independent of oneself and that they have a right to experience things differently than oneself. It also implies viewing others as 'whole' persons, i.e., with both 'good' and 'bad' qualities, with strengths and weaknesses, and with their own hereditary, developmental, and cultural background. Such a stance permits one to renounce the desires to control others, and shape them according to one's own values and desires. Instead, one tenderly and respectfully lets them be who they are.

| *Taking a charitable view of others' motivations:* For instance, if someone fails to pay a personal loan on time or forgets to invite one for a dinner party for their son's college graduation, kindness dictates that we discern – and give premium to – the best possible explanation

of their behaviour. The delayed payment then appears related to the indebted individuals' financial hardship and the forgetting to invite us based upon the other person's being overwhelmed with all the arrangements for the event which, as he tells us later, took place while his mother fell ill and his brother left for studies in Germany.

| *Keeping others in mind:* Most importantly, this means realizing – fully – that one's actions (and inactions) have impact upon others. One does not do anything without affecting others around one. Depending upon the nature of the deed, such impact can extend beyond family members and close associates to the world-at-large. A different sense of 'keeping others in mind' involves remembering others outside of holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries, etc. Driving past a newly-installed traffic light, for instance, one picks up the mobile and calls one's son since he likes knowing such things. A patient of mine who is a marine engineer was deeply moved by learning that her ten-year-old nephew remembered her while on a trip abroad with his parents. Upon seeing the model of a ship in a museum, he said, 'I wish Aunty Leela were here; she would have loved seeing it.' He had kept her in mind.

| *Letting go of one's claims upon others:* This involves forgiveness and the capacity to give up resentment of or claim to requital for a real or imagined insult or injury. The so-called offending party is allowed freedom from one's claims upon it. An air of letting bygones be bygones prevails. It must be added parenthetically though that forgiveness is facilitated by the offer of an apology from the perpetrator; it is difficult to forgive in the absence of an apology. And, while certain heinous acts (e.g. rape, murder) might turn out to be unforgiveable, a kind person is able to forgive most interpersonal offenses of day-to-day life.

| *Treating others with generosity:* While giving gifts and money do play a part here, the trait of generosity goes beyond the material realm. It extends to seeing goodness in others, evolving a charitable view of their motives, helping those in need, and giving one's time, attention, and physical labour for the benefit of others. Moreover, true

generosity extends beyond a selected few and 'parties of interest'. To shower a sexy girlfriend with gifts while not tipping the parking-lot attendant and forgetting one's nephew's birthday reflects how 'turned out' one is, not how generous!

Together these attitudes constitute the textured trait of kindness which all of us deem admirable. However, as the Dalai Lama repeatedly points out, kindness (he uses the word 'compassion' more frequently) is not a luxury. He declares that 'as human beings, and even as animals, we need compassion and affection to develop, sustain ourselves, and survive.' Being kind to others brings us reciprocal acts of gratitude and benevolence. It also enhances our self-esteem. We feel better when we show compassion towards others and are more connected to the world around us. Kindness reduces isolation and wins friendships.

Take this exchange, for instance. I was having dinner with two of my colleagues and, in an unguarded moment, I told them proudly that I had published six or seven books in the last year or so. One of my colleagues responded by saying, 'That is some literary diarrhea, I must say.' Before I could even register that his comparing my productivity to loose stools had bothered me, the other colleague interjected that a preferable term would have been 'literary galactorrhea' (bountiful flow of milk from the breast). He transformed the earlier envious attack into an admiring acknowledgment. His act of kindness won my respect and gratitude.

This shows the socially beneficial effects of kindness. However, excessive kindness can cause problems. Now, the reader might object and say 'how can a good thing like kindness be excessive? How can it hurt others?" In response, I offer the following imaginary scenarios.

| Ramesh Gupta, a professor of history at your local university, suggests that we should have forgiven Nathu Ram Godse, the cold-blooded assassin of Mahatma Gandhi, since 'the poor chap' was brain-washed by the right-wing Hindu rhetoric. Why hang someone who is so tragically deluded himself? Is Professor Gupta being kind or excessively kind?

| Kittoo, the seven-year old son of Dilip and Suman Bhargava, is

insistent that his parents take him to a shop and buy him a cricket bat now! It is about 8 p.m. on a Thursday evening and his physician parents have just returned from a long day at work. They tell him that they will take him shopping on Saturday. But Kittoo is inconsolable. He becomes enraged and starts screaming at the top of his lungs. Within a few minutes after the whole drama begins, he is rolling on the floor. Would it be an act of kindness for the family to go looking for a cricket bat right that minute? Or would that constitute excessive kindness?

More examples can be given but the point, I think, is made. To exceed the limits of civility, plausibility, and reality, and to avoid setting appropriate limits to behaviour can appear kind but in reality is not so. Undue indulgence of this sort arises from masochistic self-abnegation and results in perpetuation of 'bad' behaviour on others' part. Such 'excessive kindness' differs from normal kindness which respects the boundaries of reality, ethics, law, and morality. Excessive kindness emerges from a desperate desire to not-behave like one's unkind parents. Normal kindness emerges from a respectful wish to emulate one's kind parents.

Love

Love is the offspring of play and forgiveness.

No human emotion has been more idealized than love. Literature, in the form of poetry and fiction, from all eras of human existence and from all regions of the world, is replete with celebration of romantic love's power and potential. The experience of falling in love is exalted, the nourishing capacity of love is revered, and the couple in love is admired by everyone. All over the world, ballads, sonnets, novels, plays, and movies join in the chorus of this merry serenade to what is regarded as the noblest of human emotions. Approaching our own cultural celebration of love, we encounter the divine intimacy of Radha and Krishna, the yearning cadence of Kalidasa's *Meghdoot*, the soul-wrenching epics of Heer-Ranjha and Sohni-Mahewal, the poignant ghazals of Ghalib and Firaq, the eye-popping splendour of Taj Majal, the tragic hues of Saratchandra's *Devdas,* and, yes, the maudlin extravaganzas of Bollywood!

Yet there is widespread recognition that love can also bring suffering and pain. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, declared: 'We are never as vulnerable to pain as when we are in love.' In love, we surrender our pride; give over the control of our emotional destiny to someone else. One smile from our lover, one act of indulgence, makes our day. His or her indifference turns our hopes into futility and despair. Love humbles us. It places us at the mercy of the beloved's whims.

But what *is* love? How do we define it? What are its characteristics? Is it even possible to render a definition of an emotion as sublime as love in words? Well, I think it is. Love, to my mind, is a confluence of two great rivers: the Ganga of affection and the Jamuna of sensuality. To paraphrase Freud, when we have concern, curiosity, and caring feelings toward someone but no sexual desire, then we have the condition of friendship. And, when we have erotic longing but no affection and

concern, then we have the condition of lust. But when the feelings of friendship and lust coexist in an optimal admixture on a sustained basis, then we have the condition of love. Besides synthesizing tenderness with passion, love also creates a harmony between wishful fantasies and plausible goals, between past hurts and current pleasures, and between imprisonment within one gender and transcendence of such existential constraints by dipping in the subjective experience of the partner. Love leads to loss of freedom while enhancing one's life experience through the nectar of mutuality.

Love, then, is a mixed bag of tricks, to use a hackneyed colloquialism. No wonder it is admired as well as suspected, and even feared. For each poem about falling in love, there is another for unrequited longing for someone who remains indifferent to our desire (*'Hum hain mushtaaq aur woh bezaar/Ya ilaahi yeh maajraa kya hai?'* laments Ghalib). Pick up any book of quotations and you will see what I mean. The section on love is full of observations that encourage one to open one's heart to love and an equal number of statements that warn about its ephemeral quality. The latter reduce it to a mere illusion, a passing surge of bodily desire, or, let us face it, a bit of lunacy.

The fact is that we are hardly 'sane' when we fall in love. We are in *junoon* (the Arabic word for madness and the etymological root for *majnoon* or 'the mad one'). We turn the one we love into a demigod or goddess. We ignore their weak points and overvalue their charms. If the beloved is a woman, her voice sounds better to us than those of Lata Mangeshkar and Kishori Amonkar combined. Her beauty surpasses that of Aishwarya Rai, her imagination roams farther than that of Arundhati Roy, and her kindness exceeds that of Mother Teresa. If he is a man, he appears to be an optimal blend of all the Khans, Kapoors, and Khannas of Bollywood. He stands tall like Bachchan and sits serenely like Buddha. He sounds like Jagjit Singh, thinks like J. Krishnamurti, and dances better than Hrithik Roshan. In other words, the beloved is perfect. A jackpot of affectionate and erotic satisfaction.

Then the awareness of reality sets in. We begin to sense that things are not 'all-good.' If our beloved is a man, he somehow begins to appear less

tall, less handsome. He seems a bit miserly. And, what is this about having to drink each time we go out? Can't he have fun without alcohol? A similar script seems to be inscribed on the other side of the page as well. Why is she so rigid? She seems so preoccupied with her family. Does she have to love her father that much? And, although she is pretty and all, let me tell you the truth: her friend, Saadhna, is far better-looking.

It is at this juncture that many people fall out of love and, after a lull of variable duration, start their search for a partner again. However, these are those who, after some soul-searching, realize that their 'objections' pertain to human attributes that are ubiquitous. In other words, no one would be devoid of such 'blemishes'. They are able to grasp the fact that all human beings are imperfect and if, in the setting of such flaws, someone still brings them peace, excitement, kindness, and erotic gratification, then this opportunity is one to hold on to. This is love. A tender and fumbling and evanescent joy of mutuality. It is the best we humans can muster. Those who are falling in love look into each other's eyes all the time. Those who are 'staying' in love look at the world together.

All this applies to 'normal' love which hardly exhausts the forms and varieties of love felt by us and those around us. In fact, there are at least five conditions involving abnormalities of love.

- The first involves an *inability to fall in love.* Those suffering from this malady have pronounced defects in their capacity for empathy, concern, and trust. They cannot develop closeness with others, they lack spontaneity, and they lead their lives on a coldly factual basis. They lack the ability for the perceptual compromise essential for falling in love. In other words, they simply refuse to idealize anyone.

- Next is the *inability to remain in love.* Those with such tendency cannot 'swallow' the disillusionment that inevitably follows the giddiness of infatuation. Unrealistic expectations of the 'transformational power' (if she comes into my life, I will be a changed man!) of someone's love and anxieties about the unavoidable loss of complete autonomy and freedom can also cause one to withdraw from a love relationship.

- *Falling in love with the 'wrong' kind of people.* Let me hasten to add that the word 'wrong' is not employed here in a moral sense. It simply indicates that there are some choices in our love lives that are bound to result in disaster. Falling in love with one's uncle or aunt, the principal or dean of one's college, one's nephew or niece constitute a few such examples. People who are already married or committed to someone else, live at a great distance, and are much older or younger in age (hence facing entire different life tasks) are also the 'wrong' people to fall in love with. At a deeper layer in the mind that is not accessible to conscious awareness, all 'wrong' people stand for our childhood images of mother and father. And this is the reason for their fascinating effect upon us, as well as for the guilt (and self-destructiveness) that inevitably accompanies such relationships.

- *Inability to feel loved.* It is as if a person has a mirror in front of him but cannot see himself in it. This happens because of a reflexive disbelief in other's love and, underneath that, in one's own lovability. Subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) maneuvers which destroy the love that is coming one's way also contribute to this problem.

- *Inability to fall out of love when reality warrants just that.* Imagine that you fall in love with Shah Rukh Khan or Priyanka Chopra, now what are you going to do? Or, if the target of your romantic desire is your sister's husband or your uncle's wife, what is the likelihood of a 'successful' outcome of such longing? Willy-nilly, you will have to tame your impulse and re-direct it in a more suitable direction. But some people just cannot do this. They lack the strength to bear the pain of unattainable goals in the realm of love. They refuse to accept the writing on the wall, bang their heads on that wall, go mad, and turn into stalkers.

This brings us back full circle and we recall that some madness also accompanies the experience of falling in love. However, it is a sweet and transient 'insanity.' Soon the saffron sentiment of idealization meets the white wisdom of reality and the green glue of mutuality. And then the tiranga (the tricolour) of deep and truly mature love is unfurled across the sky of life.

Mourning

Mourning is a lonely corridor to
a bustling tomorrow.

The mere mention of the word 'mourning' floods the mind with visions of tears and funerals and sounds of wailing and sobbing. Images of weeping men and women, rituals of cremation or a body being lowered into a freshly-dug grave, and tear-soaked words of condolence are among our immediate associations to the word. That it should be so is understandable for loss of a loved one by death is the most potent trigger of the emotional reaction called mourning.

Used in a broader fashion, the term 'mourning' also refers to the chain of sentiments aroused by any loss, big or small. This can range from the loss health to that of material wealth. Surgical amputation of limb can stir up a mourning reaction just as one's car being stolen can. Less dramatic events also have the potential of mobilizing the emotional sequence associated with mourning. A missed appointment with an out-of-town friend, a misplaced Mont Blanc pen, and an unexpectedly bad result in a college admissions test are all capable of causing us to mourn. Such 'minor' hurts and disappointments give rise to the 'normal' sadness of daily life. Feeling sad and even shedding a few tears under such circumstances is healthy; it is the productive form of mourning.

Such broad conceptualization of mourning has commonalties with its narrow usage (i.e. a reaction to the death of a loved one). In both instances, mourning comprises of a set of emotions that unfold over time when one is faced with a loss. Shock and disbelief ('But I met him just last week and he appeared fine!') are the immediate responses. These are soon replaced by emotional pain and a desperate sense of longing. Depending upon the gravity of the loss, there might be physiological disturbances accompanying this stage. Pacing, sighing, clutching one's chest, pulling at hair, rubbing hands, loss of appetite, and disturbed sleep are often evident. As time passes, the turmoil seems to settle. The lost person is talked about in exalted ways and all his or her blemishes are

glossed over ('A lost object is an idealized object,' mused Sigmund Freud in his 1917 seminal work *Mourning and Melancholia*). A propensity of bargaining also sets in: 'had I only done this or that, this loss might not have happened'. Fleeting moments of blaming oneself appear as does irritability and even anger at the occurrence of the loss in the first place. Sooner or later, this too passes. A sense of profound loneliness and sadness now takes over. The bereaved finds himself or herself fluctuating between heartache, pining for the departed one, dull indifference, and the dawn of resigned acceptance of the changed life situation. Gradually the rays of hope appear on the psychic horizon and the potential space for a substitute begins to open up. The night, it seems, is turning into day.

Matters do not always proceed in a linear fashion, however. Grief comes in waves. It waxes and wanes. Just when recovery seems at hand, one is hit by a fresh upsurge of sorrow. Moreover, no mourning is ever complete and, by implication, no lost object of our affection is ever totally given up. It only moves to a different location in one's heart. A past lover is not 'replaced'; he or she is psychologically 're-placed'. The pain diminishes, to be sure, and strong emotions do not get readily mobilized. The wound turns into a scar but the story remains.

The process takes its own time. It takes, for instance, about two years to recover reasonably from the loss of a beloved parent or from the break-up of a serious romantic relationship. The process, like the healing of a bodily wound, cannot be rushed. However, it can be delayed if certain complicating factors happen to be on the scene. Mourning over death, for instance, is prolonged if the death was unexpected, occurred in violent circumstances, was the result of suicide, and if the death left many unsettled accounts, so to speak, between the deceased and the bereaved. Moreover, the greater the impact upon day-to-day reality of the bereaved, the harder it is to resolve the grief. The sudden death of a wage-earning head of a household is thus more difficult to reconcile to than the passing away of an elderly grandmother who was long-suffering from terminal cancer.

Mourning over the death of a child is profoundly difficult, if not utterly unfathomable. Not only is the occurrence contrary to the natural order

of things (e.g. grandparents die first, then parents, then children, and so on), it is tantamount to the demise of dreams and hope for future. Parents are left with the burden of 'survivor's guilt' and find grieving to be a life-long nightmare. The pain is greater when the offspring lost happens to be an adolescent. Having brought the child to the threshold of adulthood and then losing him or her is truly devastating. The fact that parents are often at cross purposes with their teenage children further complicates mourning such a loss.

When grief does get stuck or complicated, the manifestations of ordinary mourning process get prolonged over time. The tendency to become teary and/or to feel that the deceased is not really dead – a state of mind normally experienced for a few days or weeks – now extends over months and years. The language changes associated with the acceptance of death (e.g. 'Manohar ji is fond of sweets' changing into 'Manohar ji was fond of sweets') get delayed and the dreams typical of early mourning (e.g. seeing the dead person alive, rescuing him or her from a life-threatening situation) continue long past a few months.

More significantly, new symptoms appear. The most important among these is a peculiar attitude about the physical possessions of the deceased. Under ordinary circumstances, things left behind by someone dead get divided into three categories: things that are thrown away (e.g. a toothbrush, socks), things that are given away to the poor (e.g. old clothes, shoes), and things that are kept in the family and passed on as heirlooms (e.g. jewellery, diplomas, private journals, unfinished manuscripts). Moreover, such disbursement usually takes a few weeks to few months. In complicated grief, however, one notices a disregard for time in this context. One either gets rid of the deceased's things immediately (in a magical attempt at denying the significance of what has just happened) or hangs on to them for ever (in a hapless admission of one's inability to face the pain of loss).

Another development is that things that ought to have been thrown away (e.g. dentures, old underwear, a glass eye, a half-empty bottle of cold cream) are kept and, strikingly, held on to in a very strange way. They can neither be used nor thrown away. They cannot even be looked

at. Looking at them would stir up painful emotions of anxiety, pain, and sadness. These things no longer remain mere physical artifacts; they become what the psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan has called 'linking objects' i.e. things that connect the bereaved with the deceased in unspoken and mysterious ways.

Fascinatingly, in the psychotherapy of those suffering from protracted grief, these 'linking objects' acquire great significance. The therapist not only encourages the bereaved to talk more and more openly about his feelings of loss but also encourages him to bring his 'linking objects' to the office. Encountering them, touching them, holding them, and reminiscing about them (and through these about one's complex feeling about the lost person) helps thaw the frozen grief. That inanimate object should help revive and resolve emotional reactions about someone who himself (or herself) has now become inanimate is an amazing paradox that, in the midst of tears, can bring a smile of gratitude on our faces. Such, as they say, is life!

Nostalgia is a grand illusion about
little illusions of the past.

While the Viennese born psychoanalyst Edith Sterba deserves the credit for writing the first in-depth psychological study of nostalgia, the emotion has been known to mankind since the creation of homes and departures from them. The word 'nostalgia' is derived from the Latin *nostrum* (home) and *algos* (pain) and is better known by its colloquial equivalent, 'homesickness'. The emotion is a bitter-sweet one. It is bitter because it reminds one of loss, i.e. the temporary or permanent separation from home in particular, and from a familiar environment in general. It is sweet because thinking of lost places in a sentimentalized way creates a mental union with them; in fact, it creates a mention union with an idealized version of them. What is lost appears precious in retrospect. The irretrievable becomes the irreplaceable.

I will return to this point a little later. For now, let me note that while we think of nostalgia largely in connection with those living outside of the country (e.g. the NRIs of England, Canada, and the United States), the people who have migrated within the country are also vulnerable to such feelings. The Urdu poet struggling for a song-writing 'break' in Bollywood, the Ludhianvi cab driver in New Delhi, and the Tamilian dosa-maker in a South Indian restaurant in Kolkata are all vulnerable to pangs of homesickness. Meet them after the workday is over and

darkness is settling over the city, sit down and talk to them, allow a little time to pass and you will see how the conversation tends to find its way to the pleasures 'back home'. Glowing terms are used. Sentiments are roused. Voices choke. Tears roll down the cheeks.

You can witness the same scene in London, New York, and Toronto. Ensconced in their comfortable abodes, NRIs get together in parties and after a drink or two they amble into the dimly-lit chamber of reminiscences. One brags about his days at IIT Kanpur, the other tells tales of PGI Chandigarh, and a third cannot seem to say enough about Ahmedabad. Their words are ecstatic. The portrait they paint of their erstwhile hang-outs are idyllic. One wonders how could they ever have left such heavenly places?

And this brings up the central dynamics of nostalgia. To put it bluntly: nostalgia is a mind game, a cognitive sleight of hand. It is not based upon a truthful recollection of past events and places. It is based upon a selective memory of their good aspects. The one who waxes eloquent about the youthful escapades of college days has conveniently thrust away the memory of dreaded exams, the intimidating and occasionally cruel teachers, the empty pockets and the resulting envy of affluent classmates and so on. By highlighting the 'good' and sequestering the 'bad', a glorified view of the past is created.

In the United States, the same trick is evident in the paintings of the artist Norman Rockwell. On the surface his works remind us of the 'good old times' when people were nicer, time moved slowly and life was easy. Rockwell portrays the America of 1950s as blissful, but he's tricking us. Ask any African-American and he or she would rebut this with vehemence; those were times when racism was rampant and damaged many hearts and souls. In fact, as we look at Rockwell's paintings with open eyes, many questions begin to arise. Would one really enjoy spending time in that seemingly idyllic barbershop? What would one talk about with that barber? What if the dog sleeping near his feet turned out to be not as friendly as it looked? And how does one know that the white boy getting a haircut is not a real brat?

Look, nostalgia is deceptive in its emotional appeal. We do not get as

fulfilled as we thought we might be when we are presented in reality with lost objects from our past. The pleasure provided by nostalgic objects (e.g. an old gramophone, a juke box) turns out to be momentary. Nostalgia keeps us spellbound but, in the end, leaves us tied to our naïve illusions.

The allure of such magic, however, is great. It has led to an entire culture of relics and reminiscences. And, this is not restricted to the people of one or the other nationality. Norman Rockwell speaks to Americans just as Marcel Proust, in his tormented ramblings on grief, spoke to the French. Themes of loss, departure, and yearning for the original are also striking in the paintings of the Italian artist Georgio de Chirico who spent a peripatetic life, scuttling between Italy, Greece, and France.

Nostalgia has spurred great creativity in our own country as well. The entire genre of *birha* (separation) songs – sung by young married women in the mournful longing of their parental homes – capitalizes on the feeling of homesickness. An outstanding example is constituted by the song *'Ab ke baras bhej bhayya ko, babul/saawan mein leejo bulaaye re'* from Bimal Roy's 1963 film *Bandini.* In Urdu poetry alone, there is a treasure trove of verses on this theme, ranging from Akhtar Shirani's *'O Des Se Aane Waaley Bataa'* to Jan Nisar Akhtar's evocative *Aakhri Mulaaqaat,* which deals with the memories of an elderly maid-servant, lost toys of childhood, unopened letters of youth, lovingly embroidered handkerchiefs, dried up ink pens, and broken watches. Another version of such a reminiscent montage appears in the popular Jagjit Singh song *'Woh kaaghaz ki kashti, woh baarish ka paani'.*

The great Mirza Ghalib, however, saw through the rosy exaggeration of wallowing in the past and retorted *'Karte kis munh se ho ghurbat ki shikayat Ghalib?/Tum ko be-mehriye-yaaran-e-watan yaad nahin?'* That Ghalib's stern reminder is very close to the mark is evident by the fact that the nostalgic individual only seems to be looking for a lost object. In reality, he is looking for a retrospectively idealized object and, as the French psychoanalyst Dominique Gaechan notes, in the guise of that search, he is looking to recreate a retrospectively manufactured state of

self-innocence and purity.

Now, all this is fine and dandy in the realm of art, poetry, and song. However, if the ubiquitous human tendency for nostalgia spreads to involve cultural matters, all sorts of good and bad possibilities appear on the horizon. In muted forms, idealization of the national past can propel people to read about it, value the archival material stored in our museums, and respect ancestral traditions. However, a retrospectively created grandiose view of the past can be utilized by crafty politicians to garner support for a move to return to the past and ethnic purification. The revisionist history of India associated with the Hindutva movement, and its nefarious consequences in the not too remote past, are a case in point here. What I am saying is basically this: the selective distortion of memory in nostalgia might be good fodder for cocktail parties and poignant creativity, but it is an undesirable ingredient for political engineering. The latter needs greater contact with truth and reality than the intoxication of nostalgia offers.

Obstinacy

Obstinacy is a wingless butterfly
in the garden of surprise.

The Webster's Dictionary defines obstinacy as perversely adhering to an opinion or course of action in spite of reason, argument, or persuasion. Note the emphasis here on the elements of rigidity, refusal to change, and a certain kind of oppositional attitude towards the dictates of reality. Webster's choice of the word 'perversely' suggests that obstinacy is an undesirable trait of character. The irksome persistence associated with obstinacy is looked down upon. And yet, we admire those who are resolute in the pursuit of their dreams.

It is therefore imperative to distinguish between firmness of one's convictions on the one hand and an adhesive-like clinging to one's stance on the other. The former is a product of gradual evolution of ideas during which alternate ideologies and viewpoints, as well as pitfalls and limitations of one's own, have been encountered, weighed, and accounted for. The path then chosen is a committed one. Firm ideological conviction thus differs from prejudice: the latter arises from ignorance of facts or, more often these days, from deliberate jettisoning of available knowledge. It is also relatively free of emotionality. Obstinacy, in contrast, avoids shaking hands with contradictory evidence. Fixity of ideas and demands persists despite the demonstration of their lack of feasibility and their adverse effects upon self and others. Any challenge to them is met with anxiety and anger. At times, the individual might seemingly renounce his or her demands while inwardly waiting for the next opportunity to assert them all over again. Obstinacy, in essence, reflects a deep-seated difficulty in compliance with others, and with one's own real circumstances. It is the opposite of congenial flexibility.

The socialization process of early childhood is where one finds the origin of such rigidity. As soon as the child begins to crawl, and especially

as he or she begins to walk, all behaviour becomes subject to parental (especially maternal) restrictions. The child's naiveté about the environment compels the mother to enforce limits in order to keep him protected from dangers. The child is 'forced' to comply. Self-impelled desire becomes subjugated to maternal commands. The phase of 'toilet-training' especially brings this matter to the fore. The animal ease of urinating and defecating anywhere and anytime has now to be given up to 'please' the mother who wants the child to behave with greater sphincteric civility. 'Holding on' and 'letting go' become the central issues for the child at this stage. The difficult choice between remaining totally self-willed versus learning to cooperate with the environment (as represented, in this case, by the mother) has to be made. Lack of adequate resolution of such age-specific conflicts lay the groundwork for tendencies towards obstinacy in adult life.

Events of later childhood and adolescence also contribute to the genesis of obstinacy. After all, if a six-seven year old child has to put up with constraints imposed upon his 'sexual' curiosities (e.g. 'Where do babies *really* come from?', 'Mommy, why can't I kiss you on the mouth like I saw daddy do?') and also upon the time he or she spends in playing versus doing homework. Adolescent rebellion is often responded to with even more strict limit-setting by parents. If love between parents and children is less – at any of these stages – than frustration and anger, negotiated settlements and compromises become difficult. The child fights back, even if by throwing up passive resistance. Obstinacy is thus born.

Such linkage between childhood 'imperiousness' and adult rigidity of demands is inherent in the ancient Indian classification of relentlessly demanding attitudes (*hut* in Hindi) into three types: *bal-hut, stree-hut, and raj-hut* (the demandingness of children, women, and kings). Anecdotes and fables depicting the disastrous outcome of such tenacity abound in our mythology. In an implication that surpasses a tongue-in-cheek impishness, the three (child, women, and royalty) are equated and seen as self-centered, intolerant of limitations, and, come to think of it, incapable of accepting substitutes to what they deem as the objects of their desire (that there is a shameless devaluation of women here, goes

without saying). In the absence of gratification of their desires, all three (children, women, and kings) are seen to be utterly inconsolable. A contemporary rendering of such ancient 'wisdom' would regard obstinacy as having little to do with gender and a lot to do with emotional immaturity, both in children and adults.

Moreover, the behavioural tenacity and putting others to inconvenience constitute only the outer face of obstinacy. The inner face is constituted by the profound experience of emotional discomfort if one's demands are not met. This makes one wonder if the external demand of an obstinate person is largely symbolic anyway. In other words, it is not the acquisition of an external object (e.g. a toy, a piece of jewellery) that is important here. What is important is the internal chaos that will result in its absence.

Such sadomasochistic underpinnings of obstinacy have been romanticized by poets who lament the beloved's *zid* (the Urdu equivalent of Hindi *hut*) while secretly drawing pleasure from the suffering it induces in them. The attempts they make to overcome the beloved's *zid* are far from valiant; these take the form of pleading (listen to Farida Khanum croon *'Aaj jaane ki zid na karo'*) and further masochistic submission (a la Jagjit Singh's *'Woh bedardi se sar kaatein mera aurr main kahoon un se/Huzoor aahista aahista, janaab aahista aahista'*).

There are two arenas where sticking too rigidly to one's pre-formed opinion can lead to disastrous results. The first is scientific research and the second is politics. The former requires open-mindedness and cognitive resilience; both confirming and refuting hypotheses are integral to scientific methodology. The latter arena also requires the capacity to shift perspective and make compromises; democratic forms of government depend upon such pluralism and flexibility. Obstinacy in a scientist can, at times, result in astounding feats of perseverance: Thomas Edison, for instance, conducted 66,000 experiments before finding a viable way to create the incandescent bulb. Mostly, however, obstinacy spoils scientific judgement. The trait is even more dangerous when found in a political leader. It forecloses the possibility of seeing matters from viewpoints that differ from one's own. Opportunity for a

deeper grasp of a given situation is thus missed. Short-term and narcissistically-motivated gains are then chosen over long-term advantages for all. No better illustration of this can be given from within our own history than that of Mohammed Ali Jinnah who, contrary to all reason and compassion, kept insisting upon his demand for Pakistan. Reflecting neither the doctrine of Islam (with which he had little to do anyway) nor the sentiments of all Indian Muslims, Jinnah deployed the demand for partition as an armor for a fragile self-esteem. The result of his defensive grandiosity and, more importantly, his obstinacy, was a national trauma that we all mourn still today. Obstinacy, as you see, can have serious consequences!

Pity is the perfume of sorrow
in the armpit of contempt.

Seeing someone in distress can evoke all sorts of emotions in us. We might experience *sympathy,* i.e. feeling sad for them and finding ourselves willing to relieve their suffering. We might respond with *empathy,* i.e., resonating with their pain and 'understanding' their experience of it. We might react with *tenderness,* whereby their diminished stance becomes an agent for our delicate handling of them. The list of emotions aroused by the sight of someone else's misery, however, does not end with such humane responses. After all, we – all of us – are also capable of reacting to an encounter of such sort with *indifference* and, let us admit it, by *contempt* and *glee.*

Where does *pity* figure in this spectrum? Defined by the Webster's Dictionary as 'slightly contemptuous sorrow for one in misery or distress,' pity appears to subsume many of the above-mentioned affects. It has a tinge of sympathy and a modicum of tenderness, to be sure. But it does not seem to rest upon empathy. In fact, we recoil from what we imagine as the subjective experience of the 'pitiable' one. At the same time, indifference does not characterize the experience of pity. We feel drawn toward the object of our pity. Peculiarly drawn, since the 'attraction' seems to comprise sympathy, tenderness, and, believe it or not, a certain amount of scorn. We do not regard the one whom we pity as our equal. We look down upon him and, under the morally elegant cloak of sorrow, we devalue him. Viewed as such, pity turns out to be a cousin of contempt, not a sister of kindness.

Lest all this sound hypothetical and intellectualized, let us take a look at the following situations.

| We see a dog on a busy street. He is yelping feebly, his hind quarters crushed by a truck that went on its way. Bleeding profusely, the dog drags himself on foot or two by the strength of his forelimbs, fails, falls as the traffic around him rushes on. The dog looks up, as if begging to be picked up. A car screeches to a stop but hits the dog and is itself rear-ended by a three-wheeler. The dog is dead. Waiting to cross the street on the nearby footpath, we watch the drama unfold in a matter of minutes. We feel a surge of pity for the dog.

| Manoj is drunk again. Alcohol has ravaged his life. Generally a soft-hearted and kind man, Manoj changes drastically under the influence of alcohol. He becomes lecherous, crosses all bounds of civility, lunges at women, including his friends' wives. The profound contrition and heartfelt apologies of the next morning have stopped appeasing those around him. He has been barred from many homes, and is not invited to parties anymore. He has sworn off drinking many times but sooner or later he falls victim to the habit again. Tonight, he is drunk again. We see him trying to unlock his apartment door but failing due to the lack of motor coordination caused by his drunken state. He gives up and lies down on the landing outside his door. And then, he vomits all over himself. Manoj seems possessed by an inner demonic force bent upon destroying him. We pity him.

| We turn the television on. Scenes of sub-Saharan Africa are splashed over the screen. We see people devastated by draught, hunger, malnutrition. Hollow-cheeked men, barely able to walk on their stick-like legs and bare-chested women whose breasts have shrunk and disappeared between their mocking ribs. Starved children who stare at the camera and appear to be nothing but a bag of bones. Almost non-human in their abject misery. We feel pity for these people.

Having presented three situations that are likely to arouse pity in us, we are prepared to return to the beginning of this discourse. We note that our feelings in encountering these scenarios are a mixture of sadness,

distancing ourselves, and subtly looking down upon the one in a wretched state. But this is not all. If we can bear some distasteful truths about ourselves, we would discover that underneath our 'slightly contemptuous sorrow' lurks a sense of relief ('thank God this is not happening to me'). It was this sensation that perhaps Sigmund Freud had in mind when he talked about the 'narcissistic origin of compassion'. As if this is not enough, in the unlit corners of our psyche there might even be a bit of pleasure in other's suffering.

No, do not recoil from this. Allow yourself to think for a moment. Remember how, as children, we enjoyed acts of cruelty: ruthlessly killing a lizard, making fun of a newcomer at school ('ragging'), throwing rocks to separate dogs united in sexual heat, mocking a stuttering cousin of ours, ridiculing the 'crazy' woman roaming on the streets ('wandering lunatics of India', the British called them). Remember the intoxicating sense of triumph that such acts of cruelty brought?

All right, I admit that as adults most of us have renounced this ill-informed and morbid pleasure. At the behest of civilized morality, we have suppressed impulses of such sort and erected powerful barriers against them. Pity happens to be the prime example of such ethical architecture. Nonetheless, the sorrow and sympathy we muster at the sight of another's misery somehow remain a bit unconvincing as the covert stench of contempt finds its way to all the nostrils in the room.

But what about self-pity? Does it work on the same dynamics? I would say 'yes'. In moments of self-pity we project ourselves as tragic, good folk who no one truly understands and against whom have turned all the brute forces of nature or God. We tell ourselves that we are victims of this or that person, such and such circumstances beyond our control, and so on. However, what we fail to notice is that in painting this self-portrait of hapless misery, we are doing injustice to our strength, our ability to make choices – even the ones that seem formidable – and our capacity to change the course of our lives. Self-pity is a narrative of pained and lonely helplessness which secretly provides the morbid pleasure of devaluing those who care about us. The hero of the movie *Devdas* (with K.L. Sehgal playing the lead role in the 1936 original, and Dilip Kumar and Shah

Rukh Khan replacing him in the 1955 and 2002 remakes, respectively) is an example par excellence of such tendency. Wallowing in drunken self-pity, Devdas devalues both his childhood girlfriend, Parvati, and his prostitute-turned-caregiver, Chandramukhi. Feeling morally superior to all, he ends up destroying whatever love and affection the two women are able to offer. Self-pity not only poisons our own dignity as adult and responsible members of our families and of the society-at-large, it also bites the hands that feed us. It is masochism and sadism rolled in one. Pity those who enjoy self-pity!

Querulence

Querulence is the prickly heat
on the skin of conversation.

Impolite though it seems, the fact is that there exists a kind of person who loves to complain and fight. He has a chip on his shoulder. One or the other grievance preoccupies him, no matter what his real circumstances are at a given time. No one has offered a better description of such a state of mind than the mid-twentieth century British psychoanalyst Melitta Schmideberg. Here is an excerpt from her description of a querulous individual:

> He is unable to forget or forgive. Time makes no difference: a grievance thirty years old is as fresh as one which arose only yesterday. He feels that the wrong he has suffered can never be remedied. The pathological lack of insight is characteristic, and while he is extremely sensitive, he usually shows scant consideration to the feelings and rights of others. He is deaf to any argument, although he often provokes arguments, and refusal to reason with him only increases his querulence.

The sort of individual Schmideberg describes readily dismisses any explanation one might offer for one's 'wrong' action towards him. Suppose you promised to meet him someplace at 4:00 p.m. but could not get there till 4:45 p.m. because your elderly aunt (whom you love and respect dearly) requested that you stay with her till her husband returns home, the delay is enough to keep him pouting for the rest of the evening. Attempts to explain the reasons for your tardiness fall on deaf ears. The querulent person is unable to see the other person's point of view. And, while I have used the generic 'he' in describing this character type, the malady exists in both men and women.

Take Satwant Hanspal. Yes, the tall and a bit heavy Ph.D. student from Delhi University. Whenever you meet her, sooner or later the

conversation ends up with how someone is treating her in an unjust manner. Her thesis guide meets her for a much shorter time than she wants. Her roommate is miserly and never buys her own toothpaste. Her mother always calls her at early morning hours despite knowing that Satwant is not a 'morning person'. Her friend never reciprocates a dinner invitation. You get the picture. The litany is endless. Listening to such 'injustices', you feel pressured to act as a judge. Satwant, the anguished plaintiff, subtly places you in this exalted position, of course, with the expectation that you would rule in her favour. The fact that the accused party, the 'defendant', is missing from the scene and not allowed a chance to present his or her side of the story seems of little consequence to Satwant. Frankly, all she wants you to do is to rubberstamp a verdict that she has already arrived at: she is right, others are wrong!

Forced to participate – willy nilly – in such courtroom dramas, we feel burdened and even a bit resentful. Over time, we begin to avoid Satwant and this, in turn, further fuels her sense of grievance. And, this brings up an important aspect of querulence: the complaints lodged by the querulent individual are often valid! He or she is not a liar. That is not the problem here. The problem is that the individual's emotional reaction to the 'injustice' is altogether excessive or else he is unable to see anything but his own point of view. It is wrong, for instance, for a customer who comes in the shop later to be served first, but no one keeps harping on this 'injustice' for days and weeks except one who is truly querulous.

But why? What makes a person querulous? First, the one who would turn into a querulous adult has faced much unfair treatment as a child. Neglect and beating by parents, being treated as their stepchild, mockery and chronic teasing by an older sibling, and early exposure to ethnic or religious prejudice can all lay the groundwork for harboring resentment for the rest of life. A second – and, related – factor is the hate that one experiences towards one's abusive parents and siblings (and, the substitute figures standing for them later, in adult life). Such hate, while understandable, nonetheless gives rise to guilt even though the latter emotion is generally suppressed and eliminated from day-to-day awareness (i.e. turned into 'unconscious guilt'). The querulent individual is in effect saying, 'I am not guilty and I am not bad; it is others who are

bad and I can prove it to you.' This adversarial attitude protects him inwardly from depressive feelings.

No wonder, the querulous individual has a driven, even manic, quality about him. Finding fault in others and harbouring grievances is not optional for him; it is mandatory. He needs 'enemies'. He is prone to suing those who offend him and is frequently involved in litigation. If his focus is upon the neighbourhood, he is forever ready to unmask civic miscreants and environmental polluters. If his attention turns toward the domestic front, he constantly bickers about one or the other family member's neglect of responsibilities. In the 1960s and 1970s Bollywood movies, the role of harsh and critical mother (or mother-in-law) played by Lalita Pawar embodied such a psychological stance perfectly.

Far more consequential is querulousness in the realm of politics. A striking example of the conundrum that can result from it: the Osama Bin Laden-George Bush stalemate of the last decade. Osama ranted against the moral bankruptcy of the West and derided American neo-colonialism. Bush held al-Qaeda to be the source of all problems, inventing an 'axis of evil' where none existed. Blaming others helped both of them. Osama could merrily ignore the Arab monarchs' strangulation of their people and the pitiful lack of support from rich Arab nations to the struggling Palestinians; he could also overlook his own mistreatment of girls by prohibiting them to study beyond the fourth grade in school. Bush also benefitted by shifting American attention to the juggernaut of Islamic fundamentalism. He could thus push under the rug his unjustified invasion of Iraq, the problematic heath-care system in the United States, and the disaster he had unleashed on the national economy. Both Osama and Bush reaped 'anti-depressive' benefits from their querulence.

And, let us admit it: blaming others – in small doses – can be uplifting. Shameful as it is, the time-trusted recipe for boredom is gossip about how such-and-such a person is carrying on with so-and-so's wife, or how this guy has embezzled exorbitant sums of money that are utterly unjustifiable, and so on. Talking ill of others makes us feel noble ourselves. But let the pleasure be enjoyed judiciously. Let it not become

addictive. Otherwise, we would become like the querulous individual described here, and who wants that?

Remorse

Remorse is the shadow of
yesterday's transgression.

Let us begin by making a distinction between the two closely related emotions of guilt and remorse. Guilt is a nagging and unpleasant feeling of morally culpable. It arises from harbouring conscious or unconscious impulses to commit acts that are prohibited by one's religion, family traditions, local law, or a personal sense of right and wrong. Guilt is about breaking rules, in one's imagination or in reality. The search for the *font origio* of guilt takes us back to childhood. It is during this time that our desires are simple, direct, and intolerant of delay in their gratification. We want what we want; we despise realities and people who come in the way of the fulfillment of our wishes. We wish such 'enemies' gone, vanished, even dead. Given the limited circumference of the interpersonal world of our childhood, it is our parents and siblings who usually constitute such 'enemies'. They are the ones who seem to come in the way of the immediate gratification of our wishes. Small wonder therefore, that we hate them from time to time and, in the typical childhood mode of absolutism, wish them dead. And the persistence of these death-wishes towards others becomes the bedrock of the human experience of guilt.

Remorse, in contrast, is the dark uneasiness resulting from the awareness that we have done something that is hurtful to someone we otherwise love and care for. Take note of the important difference from guilt. Specifically, guilt is about impulses and desires, remorse about actions that have been really committed. Guilt is the sister of anxiety, remorse a cousin of regret. The difference between regret and remorse is that the former is mostly self-directed while the latter focuses upon the consequences of one's action (or, inaction) upon others.

That said, let us go on and explore the nature of remorse a bit further.

To begin with, the feeling is distressing and burdensome. It carries moral overtones and is therefore different from simple regret. It follows an action, including an act of omission that has proven injurious to a significant someone in one's life. And, to top it all, a certain amount of secrecy and shame accompany the feeling of remorse. After all, the behaviour in question has hardly been commendable. This last mentioned feature is responsible for yet another difference between guilt and remorse. Guilt presses for confession, remorse for covering up.

Lest all this appear too abstract, let me offer a couple of instances of remorse.

- Ranjit divorces his wife Sheela soon after finding out that she is suffering from cancer. Orphaned at the tender age of four, he just does not have what it takes to stay the course with a sick and physically-failing spouse. A few years later, Sheela dies and Ranjit begins to feel bad that he abandoned her in the time of her need. He tries to justify his divorce in all sorts of ways to himself and others, but in vain. In his heart, he is aware of what he has done. He is unable to concentrate on his work, he can't sleep or eat well, and is chronically wistful and restless. Ranjit is a man struck with remorse.

- Ratna is in love with Mukesh, her medical school classmate. She comes from a Brahmin family and he is an Aggarwal, i.e. from the caste of Vaishyas. While devoted to him romantically, Ratna gives in to family pressure against her plans to marry this young man. Mukesh becomes clinically depressed and drops out of the medical school. Now Ratna is saddled with the torment of remorse. Her friends tell her that he must have been vulnerable anyway and that it is not her fault he left his studies. One friend even suggests that that her boyfriend was being cruel to *her* by passive-aggressively acting this way. Her family says that she should not blame herself; after all, she has been a righteous daughter. Nothing helps, however. Ratna weeps tears of blood remorsefully each night after Ravi, her newly 'acquired' Brahmin husband, falls asleep.

- Kailash refuses to budge when Kavita, his twelve-year old daughter, expresses a desire to buy a dog. It will be too much work, he argues.

Kavita's mother agrees and, frankly, they are not entirely wrong. However, they overlook the fact that Kavita – an only child – has a desperate need for company. Kailash fails to empathize with this. He also does not register that Kavita's request for a dog has arisen soon after the family's move to a new house and that she has lost some important friends in the course of this change of residence. His adamant refusal, justified on this or that logical ground, breaks Kavita's heart. For years, this remains a sore point in the father-daughter dialogue. Getting old and facing ill-health, Kailash begins to mellow and a black cloud of self-doubt arises with him. Maybe he was wrong after all. Further contemplation gradually convinces him of his error. A vise of remorse clutches his heart. The smugness of the past is transformed into an anemia of self-esteem in the present.

The three stories compel us to ask the logical question: What is the remedy for remorse? What steps, if any, can one take to unshackle oneself from the prison of this sentiment? The answer is threefold. *First,* one has to acknowledge to oneself and perhaps to one or two close friends that one has indeed done something hurtful. *Second,* one has to offer reparation to the injured. By reparation, I mean the triad of admission of wrong-doing, sincere apology, and the offer of material replacement or substitute gratification. The *third* measure is to realize and accept that total and lasting relief from remorse – especially in its severe form – is a long-term process and at times, unattainable.

One thing, however, is certain. Much soul-searching and honest self-reflection is necessary for handling remorse. A quick offer of material replacement is hardly effective and can, paradoxically, further traumatize the one originally hurt. At the least, hasty attempts at solving the dilemma of remorse result in clumsy solutions.

A bold leap of imagination at the precipice of this insight, leads us to consider the story of the birth of Lord Ganesha. Here is its bare-bones outline: Lord Shiva goes away for some time, leaving his consort, Parvati, alone for that period. Wanting to take a shower and to safeguard her privacy, Parvati rubs her hand and from the dirt of her skin she fashions a little boy. She tells him to stand guard at the bathroom door and to not let

anyone enter while she is taking a bath. The boy follows his mother's command. Soon, however, Lord Shiva returns and wishes to be with Parvati. The boy resists. An enraged Shiva cuts off his head. On learning of this, Parvati is shocked and dismayed. Shiva is now filled with remorse. He promises to 'fix' the problem immediately. Temperamental by nature and being passionately in love with his consort, Shiva cuts off the head of an elephant – the first creature he lays his eyes on – and affixes it to the boy's body. And thus Ganesha is born!

To be sure, there are other versions of Ganesha's birth and equally certain is the fact that many profound messages about life are contained in this parable (e.g. a woman who is unaccompanied by her husband needs to develop self-protective devices, a man returning to such a woman must not mistake her 'crustiness' as a lack of desire for intimacy, and so on), but one important aspect of the tale is the emotion of remorse and how the quick dissipation of it can only result in a caricature of a solution (wisely, though, the mythmakers or Gods, if you will, placed an elephant – and not a goat or dog or wolf – is Shiva's way, for the elephant is known for its long-lasting memory. In other words, a profound message here is that quick solutions, even if they suffice temporarily, would need to be reflected upon later and emotionally worked through on a deeper basis).

This brief foray into one of our dearest mythological stories is intended to drive the last mentioned point home. Remorse is not something we can shrug off easily. It gnaws at one's soul, lowers one's self esteem, and is frequently confounded by a layer of secrecy and shame that develops later. In unfortunate circumstances, where the individual lacks the honesty to acknowledge that he or she has harmed a loved one and does not have the fortitude of bearing the burden of remorse, self-destructive tendencies (including depression, excessive drinking, and even suicidal impulses) can develop. In fortunate circumstances, where the individual acknowledges his misdeeds, apologizes to the 'victim', and offers reparation, relief from remorse is possible. But soul-searching has to be done, effort has to be made, and time has to be allowed to pass. Who said redemption was easy?

Shame

Shame is the ugly
sister of shyness.

Imagine you are a man, walking into a conference room with your fly open. Or, coming out of the men's room, all relieved and ready to rejoin the ongoing party and suddenly noticing that you have peed on yourself; the wet spot on your pants is a vestimentary testimony to your clumsiness. Or imagine, God forbid, you emit a loud fart at a solemn wedding ceremony, or worse, at a funeral.

The mere thought of such occurrences stirs up shame which, it seems, is the most dreaded of human emotions. To be sure, guilt, remorse, and regret are also not feelings that we look forward to or enjoy experiencing. But these are private emotions and can be relegated to unseen cloisters of our inner selves. We can keep them concealed. Shame, in contrast, is highly public. By definition, it evokes a sense of being exposed and becoming the object of others' scrutiny. There is no escape from it. Well, almost. But let me not get ahead of myself. Let me first delve a little further into the subjective experience of shame.

As I do so, four components of the feeling immediately become apparent. *First,* there is a sense of sudden exposure, a sense that something awkward or undesirable about oneself has become evident to others. It is as if all the eyes in the room are now focused upon oneself, who, in turn, appears fatally flawed and blemished. Unlike the feelings of guilt, where the imaginary reprimand is auditory, the rejection experienced with shame is intensely and fundamentally visual. When we feel guilty, we recall childhood reprimands from our parents. Feeling ashamed, we remember their critical and humiliating glances.

Second, a sharp increase in self-consciousness or self-awareness accompanies shame. Go back in your mind to the imaginary moment when you farted loudly in public and you will immediately understand what I am talking about. The 'pre-fart' state of your mind differs

remarkably from the 'post-fart' one, if you pardon the literary stink raised by these expressions. Before the mishap, you were calm, going about your life, seamlessly one with the environment. After it, the figure-ground relationship became severely strained. You became acutely aware of yourself, alienated from the melody of events around you.

This brings up the *third* element of shame: an acute sense of aloneness. The open zipper of your fly, the wet spot on your pants, and that awful noise (no longer to be named!!) from your otherwise mute behind are yours and yours alone. Unlike sadness, outrage, and anxiety, shame cannot be shared. You have to bear it by yourself. All alone. And, at this point, enters the *fourth* and final element of shame and that is a subjectively-perceived pressure to hide. Unlike guilt, which propels one to confess, shame forces one into hiding. You want to leave the room, run away from the party, never be seen by those who heard your 'you know what'. Reflexively, you cover your face with your hands. This desire to hide is not restricted to the feelings of embarrassment about one's bodily attributes and functions. Shame about one's possessions (e.g. car, house) also leads to a similar response. You do not want anyone to see them.

The troubling experience of shame mobilizes defenses which can range from over-compensation of perfectionism and exhibitionism to the repudiation of one's own shame and induction of shame in others. Gaudy flamboyance of dress, house, and cars is often a disguise for inner feelings of lack and inferiority. Flying into rage at the slightest criticism is more evidence of the same, just like the tendency to ridicule and humiliate others on a continual basis. Shaming others is a preemptive strike against the dread of being shamed by others.

Now, you might ask, is there a healthier way to be relieved of shame? Can anything help? The answer is yes. There is a particular attitude in others that *can* diminish one's shame. It is called acceptance. Yes, simple and straightforward acceptance by others who have witnessed our blunders tends to reduce our shame. Guilt is relieved by acknowledging that one has done something bad and then receiving forgiveness from the involved parties. Shame is relieved by others overlooking the blunder and their continuing to carry on the relationship with us as if nothing

really happened.

This 'exposure–wish to hide–relief by acceptance' sequence is strikingly well illustrated in the Hindu mythology via the scene in *Ramayana,* where Sita prays for the earth to open up and absorb her in its maternal embrace. Deeply ashamed (and also feeling betrayed and indignant) at being asked by Rama to give proof of her chastity, she prefers to die rather than further humiliate herself by going through the *agnipariksha.* Sita's longing for death is the ultimate form of hiding one's humiliated self from others. The earth which does open up and take Sita in, symbolizes a kind mother. Tulsidas's literary stroke here is full of psychological genius. In it, the writer of *Ramayana* has masterfully explained what it is that we need to overcome shame: a combination of hiding oneself and a peaceful acceptance by others (especially by a maternal presence).

The mention of mother-child relationships brings us to the origins of shame in human psychological life. Shame is felt if the parents respond with criticism and horror to the growing child's age-specific acts of motoric and social clumsiness. These can range from forgetting to say 'thank you' and 'sorry' to bedwetting and from interrupting a conversation to not being able to tie shoe laces. Reacting to them with pronounced disappointment and disgust can cause the child to feel very ashamed. Unduly teasing and mocking reactions to a child's physical attributes (e.g. height, weight, shape or size of nose or ears) can also contribute to enhancing the psychological bedrock of shame. Curiously, exaggerated reactions on the part of parents to the child's ordinary achievements and minor developmental advances can also give rise to acute and painful self-consciousness in the child. Take the example of a parent who jumps up and down with joy every time his or her child utters a new word for the first time. As a result, the subtle increment in the child's mental capacity does not become smoothly linked with his or her erstwhile self. Instead, a sense of fracture between one moment and the next occurs and this jagged discontinuity in the self-experience leads to shame.

These three types of parental responses (loud exasperation at ordinary

failures, mocking of physical attributes, and gushing notice of minor advances in development) make the child painfully self-aware and alone. They also render him or her vulnerable to feeling shame. If, however, the parents can accept that a growing child will commit mistakes and will have his or her fair share of 'blemishes', the child learns to accept him- or her-self with equanimity. Occasional ruptures in a 'good-enough' view of one's self then become tolerable. They do not lead to shame. The earth as a kind mother does not have to hide such a person in its embrace. A good, kind, and accepting mother is already inside him.

Under less fortunate circumstances, a narcissistic personality develops which is highly prone to shame. The ever-present dread of humiliation is warded off by relentless pursuit of perfection, unquenchable thirst for admiration, and chronic grandiosity and ambitiousness. While great social success might, at times, result from all this, the inner anguish does not go away. Underneath the shimmering band-aid of glory, an experienced eye can always discern the existence of the throbbing abscess of self-doubt and shame.

Tenderness

Tenderness is a poor man's wedding cake.

Unlike other emotions (e.g. anger, fear, guilt, envy), tenderness eludes the grasp of language and compels one to resort to metaphors. Jane Austen declares: 'there is no charm equal to the tenderness of the heart.' But she does not tell us what tenderness actually is. Victor Hugo paints a gorgeous portrait of the emotion in stating that 'a mother's arms are made of tenderness and children sleep soundly in them' but he too leaves us hungry for something explicit. We know that tenderness is akin to kindness, but there is something softer and more private about it. We also know that tenderness is a component of love, but its essence seems to elude our grasp.

Searching for clarity, we turn to the dictionary. The entry allots more space to the root word 'tender' than to 'tenderness' itself, but many usages of the former (e.g. soft, easily broken, fond, showing care, gentle, mild) do give us useful guidance to interpret the latter. Tenderness thus comes to denote the emotional state of soft-heartedness, caring, and a gentle or low-keyed compassion. Each of these elements gives the emotion of tenderness its particular texture.

- *Soft-heartedness* implies the mellowing of not only one's well-chiseled narcissism, but of one's (actual, imagined, or wished-for) grip on others; one also has to step away from the 'hardness' of regarding life to be controllable and predictable. Soft-heartedness therefore translates into humility and openness to the perspective of others.

- *Caring* genuinely about people, things, and ideas around oneself is regarded by Erik Erikson, the renowned psychoanalyst, as the hallmark of maturity. Erikson recalls having asked Sudhir Kakar for

the Hindu term for care and being told that there did not seem to be one word for it, but that the adult is said to fulfill his task by practicing *dama* (restraint), *dana* (charity), and *daya* (mercy). Erikson responded by saying that these three words are well-translated into every-day English as 'to be careful', 'to take care of', and 'to care for'.

| *Low-keyed compassion* refers to the fact that the benevolence and empathy accompanying tenderness is not shrill and maudlin. It is subtle and operates quietly. This absence of drama in tenderness, however, does not mean that tenderness can not lead to great acts of affection, generosity, and sacrifice.

A harmonious blend of these three constituents (soft-heartedness, caring, and low-keyed compassion) is what the emotion of tenderness is all about. Think about the manner in which a mother holds her newborn baby in her arms. Close your eyes and imagine a kindergarten teacher relating to her little pupils and you will grasp the essence of tenderness. Take a look at the following situations as well and you would readily understand what I am talking about.

| Chandrakant Goel had a long-standing desire that his daughter, Rina, would follow his footsteps and enter the medical profession. She, however, lacks interest in medicine. She wants to pursue her talent as an artist into a full-time vocation. She wants to go abroad, but getting into Harvard Medical School is not part of her dream. She wants to go to the prestigious Rhode Island School of Design and Arts. Rina's father listens to his daughter's passionate plea. His heart melts and he agrees that she should follow her calling. This is a moment of tenderness.

| Once they have finished dinner, Seetha Jayaram does not let her husband throw the untouched rice on his plate into the garbage can. She carefully scoops it up and puts is aside. And the next morning, she scatters it in the backyard for birds – mostly sparrows – to eat. Seeing the little creatures eagerly pecking on the rice grains, Seetha smiles contentedly. This is a moment of tenderness.

> Yasmin Farooqi is sitting in her elegant drawing room reading a novel that she bought a couple of days ago from Khan Market. Her six-year-old son, Akram, is playing nearby. They exchange a few words here and there, but are mostly absorbed in their own worlds. Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes pass. The silence in the room thickens and Yasmin becomes aware that Akram has fallen asleep. She looks at the little boy with a deep sense of satisfaction: 'he is turning out so well – what a good boy he is and how fortunate I am,' she thinks. Quietly she gets up, removes the toy from his hand, and spreads her warm shawl over him. Akram remains asleep though now with greater comfort. This is a moment of tenderness.

A correction needs to be quickly added here. The fact that my illustrations of tenderness have revolved around caregiving relationships (father-daughter, woman-birds, mother-son) should not be taken to mean that tenderness does not figure in friendly and erotic scenarios where the two partners are on equal footing. It does. However, even in these latter contexts, the emotion of tenderness is associated with altruistic concern for the other party. A friend or a lover becomes a sort of mother during such moments. In a highly sensual depiction of a wife's post-coital gesture towards her husband, Jan Nisar Akhtar, the Urdu poet, captured such soft and gentle form of caring.

Kapdon ko samatey huey utthi hai magar
Darti hai, kaheen unko na ho jaaye khabar
Thuk kar abhi soye hain kaheen jaag na jaayen
Dheere se urhaa rahi hai unko chaadar

This certainly is a moment of tenderness. And one can come up with similar moments of tender affection between two friends, siblings, teammates, and, above all, between doctors and their patients. Tenderness, in this last-mentioned context, manifests as devoted attention, well-honed concern, and respect for the patient's autonomy.

Viekko Tahka, a prominent psychologist in Finland, has put all this most succinctly. He says that tenderness is the emotion arising from the empathic sharing of a loved one's pleasure while leaving the pleasure itself for that person. Tahka adds that this letting the other keep the

pleasure is followed by a second pleasure in the subject arising from the knowledge that one has contributed to the other's happiness. And, such 'silent sacrifice' constitutes a center-piece of tenderness.

Unease

Unease is an ill-fitting shoe on
the foot of commitment.

The feeling called ‘unease’ resides midway between anxiety and worry. Anxiety refers to a vague sense of apprehension; one feels that something bad is going to happen even if the lurking danger is far from clear. Worry refers to an intellectual preoccupation with things that can go wrong; ‘what if this happens’ and ‘what if that happens’ are the cognitive notes of worry’s music. Unlike anxiety and worry, the feeling of ‘unease’ is not linked to the future. It does not contain the anticipation of something ominous. Instead, it involves a sense that something *is* wrong, something *is* missing, something *is* inappropriate and ill-fitting. However, what is actually wrong still remains unclear. The individual experiencing unease feels dissatisfied with how things are at the moment and can not be at harmony with the setting or people around him. He is full of misgivings and desperately tries to locate the source of his distress. ‘Am I not dressed properly for the occasion?’ ‘Do I really belong in this crowd?’ ‘Is my behaviour inappropriate?’ He repeatedly asks himself such questions, but not finding resolution, he remains disconcerted.

One thing, though, is clear. The phenomenon of ‘unease’ mostly occurs in social settings like cocktail parties, college graduations, Diwali gatherings, and so on. One does not feel comfortable in one’s own skin. One regrets having come there, but one knows that not coming would not have helped either. ‘Is this function wrong for me to attend? Or, am I wrong for this function?’ the one with unease wonders. But, hold it. Does

all this mean one cannot feel uneasy all by oneself? Or, is the unease that occurs in solitude a different feeling altogether?

A careful look at such questions reveals that unease comes in two varieties: acute and chronic. Acute unease arises upon encountering unfamiliar or conflict-laden situations; it disappears when the catalytic situation is removed or mastered. Chronic unease is imbedded in one's character and – like smoking – is hard to get rid off; it is always there. Here are two examples of situations producing acute unease.

| Rajni Apte and her Muslim husband, Abbas Ahmad, decide to go to Istanbul for a brief vacation. While there, they are visiting the Blue Mosque. The tour guide asks them to leave their shoes behind and enter the mosque where, in a cordoned section, many Muslims are offering prayers. Rajni, who is brought up in a liberal Hindu family which freely intermingles with Muslims, is surprised at the unexpected feeling of unease. She hesitates, tells her husband that she will wait outside while he sees the interior of the Mosque. But he insists that she accompany him, which she does. Soon she finds herself marveling at the architectural details of the inner sanctum. Her unease has evaporated!

| Sameer and Ruby Bhattacharya are visiting their good friends in London. This is their first trip outside India and they are brimming with excitement. As 'dutiful' tourists, they do not want to miss anything: Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, Madame Tussaud's. The list goes on. One evening, they are walking by a movie house; their hosts – Sameer's college buddy, Abhijit, and his wife, Nandita – playfully suggest that they walk in and see a 'porno flick'. Sameer and Ruby both are gripped with unease. The idea is too audacious for their simple and homely tastes. They feel overwhelmed, laugh nervously, say that they are 'not interested' in such things. This is an understatement, to be sure. The fact is that they have been made highly uncomfortable by their friends' suggestion.

Similar states of inner tension are mobilized when one senses that a topic one wishes to avoid is about to be broached, and at the discovery that a person one hates was also on the guest list for the intimate dinner

one has just arrived at. The common element in all these illustrations is the environmental triggering of difficult inner emotions, especially those that are ill-understood by the subject. No wonder 'acute unease' readily diminishes upon circumventing or mastering the situation.

Chronic unease is a different matter altogether. It is integral to some people's personalities. They are forever uneasy, never feeling at home anywhere. No matter where they go, they feel like a misfit. They do not possess a sense of belonging to their own ethnic or religious group and exist on the margins of their professional organizations. The essence of their malady is captured by the 1950s Talat Mahmood song *'Jaayen to jaayen kahaan,'* or, if you will, the 1970s Lata Mangeshkar lament *'Ai dil-e-naadan, aarzoo kya hai? justuju kya hai?'* The chronic unease felt by such individuals seems to emanate from a deep conflict with their psyches. On the one hand, they have a desperate need to belong, to fit in some place. On the other hand, belonging suffocates them and they (often, unwittingly) marginalize themselves; they avoid participation in group efforts, rarely attend meetings, abhor committee memberships, and just do not 'circulate' enough. Yet, they loathe being overlooked and forgotten at important occasions. Neither social isolation nor commitment to others diminishes their unease.

Suffering of this sort usually results from having ill-fitting parts of personality. For instance, one believes in God while he also feels like an atheist. As a result, one does not feel at home either with the believers or with the non-believers. Another example is someone who is Muslim by birth but 'feels' and acts like a Hindu. Such a person remains uncomfortable, to a greater or lesser extent, with both Hindus and Muslims. And, then there is the individual who is awkward with small talk but loves to take over the party by reciting memorized poems. It seems that there are not one but two people living inside this person. When one comes out, the other feels left out and resentful. As a result, one never feels satisfied and is always uneasy. Being raised by parents with markedly different personality traits or being raised by different caretakers at difficult periods of one's childhood can predispose one to such inner struggles on a lifelong basis. Unease is not an easy matter, to be sure.

indictiveness

Vindictiveness is the bitter
growl of injured vanity.

We all get hurt in the course of life. Things do not turn out the way we would like them to. Salesmen mislead us. Neighbours behave rudely. Friends and family members fail to live up to our expectations. All this hurts but, knowing that most such 'betrayals' arise from others' personal limitations or from genuine miscommunication between us, we tend to forgive those who have caused us suffering. Usually such forgiveness is preceded by the expression of some annoyance and even anger at the offending party. However, once the latter has acknowledged the fault and offered an apology, the situation becomes tolerable. Some pain still remains but we bear it and go on with our lives. Time gradually heals the wound and the relationship resumes its earlier vigour all over again.

Not everyone is capable of handling disappointments in this way, however. People are different from each other and deal with hurts and betrayals in different ways. Some become fearful of relatedness and retreat into a shell. Others hold on to grudges and are unable to forgive. They ruminate about what happened, how they were injured, and who is responsible for their humiliation or disappointment. They might go a step further and seek revenge.

Now let me quickly add that a desire for revenge can be felt by anyone faced with a grievous insult, for instance, rape or marital infidelity. Revenge undoes lowered self-esteem and reverses forced passivity and is

therefore a tempting option for the victim of abuse. Morally incorrect though it sounds, the fact is that some limited form of revenge might actually help emotional healing under such circumstances.

But such a context-based and relatively short lasting bout of rage does not constitute vindictiveness, the topic under consideration here. Vindictiveness refers to a deeply ingrained tendency for lack of forgiveness, an unrelenting need for locating a villain, and a persistent wish to inflict suffering and harm upon him or her. People who are given to vindictiveness continue to harbour resentment towards their offenders for months, years, and often their entire life. They are prone to sustained hatred and can disregard all limits in their pursuit of real or imagined offenders. Western literature contains many such characters. *The Merchant of Venice's* Shylock with his literal-minded insistence upon extracting 'a pound of flesh' in lieu of his unpaid debt and *Wuthering Heights'* Heathcliff with his bitter rants against the woman by whom he feels betrayed are two outstanding examples. Towering above these is the character of Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. His hunger for revenge against the whale that bit off his leg drives him to such 'demonic' revenge-seeking that it ultimately destroys his own self. Just hear him give vent to his hatred:

> Towards thee I roll, thou all destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake, I spit my last breath at thee. Shrink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! And since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale!

Corresponding portrayals of such ferocious vindictiveness can readily be found in Indian mythological and literary traditions. *Mahabharata's* Shakuni readily comes to mind and so does *Heer aur Raanjha's* Kaidon. Shakuni was aggrieved by the mistreatment his nephew Duryodhana allegedly received at the hands of Draupadi. He then set out to destroy her five husbands, the Pandavas. By conning the oldest of them – Yudhishtra – in a game of dice, Shakuni drew Draupadi in public to be disrobed; remember the stunning *cheer-haran* scene from the epic?

Kaidon, uncle of the beautiful Heer, was chronically bitter about the limp he had developed as the result of childhood polio. Unable to find a mate himself, he concocted all sorts of schemes and shenanigans to destroy Heer's prospects of uniting with her lover, Raanjha.

Since these scenarios familiarize us with its antecedent injury, we empathize with the protagonists' bitterness. We can feel its sting in our mouths. Becoming one with the hero, we love to see him 'get even'. Nowhere was the associated glee more evident than in the audience response to the 'angry young man' movies of the 1970s. Betrayed by his father, the hero of *Zanjeer, Deewar, and Shakti* (played with uncanny earnestness by Amitabh Bachchan) could bypass law, take matters into his hands, destroy those who came in his way, and cold-bloodedly take revenge against figures of authority. And we gladly shifted our moral values, no longer considering vindictiveness an undesirable character trait. Our response to the mayhem let loose by a gang-raped and devastatingly humiliated Phoolan Devi in *Bandit Queen* was similar. We felt vindicated and shamelessly put aside the well-worn dictum that two wrongs do not make a right.

Does this mean that in unlit corners of the heart, all of us harbour a proclivity towards vindictiveness? Do all of us want to take revenge for the injustices dealt to us during the course of our lives? But if this is so, how is it that some people stand out as being petty and vengeful and others do not? The answer, I believe, lies in the fact that while the capacity for revenge-seeking lies buried in all of us, it surfaces as a well-consolidated behavioural trait only in those who have suffered severe frustration or abuse in their childhoods. The impotent rage at being beaten, betrayed, unfairly treated, sexually abused, and humiliated on a chronic basis accrues over years. This emotional gunpowder can instantly explode with the slightest provocation in later adult life. Having been hurt too many times makes forgiveness difficult. One finds the perpetrators of childhood re-incarnated everywhere. One begins to maintain an 'enemies list', to use Richard Nixon's phrase, and to continually plan to settle the scores. One lives for revenge with a single-mindedness of purpose and becomes remorseless, ruthless, and heartless.

But how does it all fit with the so-called decent morality? Don't all the prophets and the wise men of the world instruct us to be forgiving, and even 'turn the other cheek'? Given this, revenge would appear 'bad' and vindictiveness a pathology of character. But wait. There is a place in almost all moral and philosophical systems for justified retaliation too. Illustrations of such thinking range from the Old Testament's 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', dictated from Lord Krishna's encouragement of righteous aggression on the battlefield in *Mahabharata* through the Islamic concept of *jihad* (the modern corruptions of the concept notwithstanding). On a humbler note, Nietzsche reminds us that 'a small revenge is more humane than no revenge at all'. And here lies the key to the puzzle. There can be such a thing as 'good enough revenge' provided (i) it inflicts limited injury; (ii) it is a one-time deal, and, (iii) it does not involve self-destructive acts. Vindictiveness, in contrast, knows no bounds, is deeply entrenched in one's character, and ends up poisoning one's own life. It is not good for the soul. In the words of Francis Bacon: 'A man that studieth revenge keeps his own wounds green.'

Let us begin our consideration of worry by imagining the following scenarios:

- Sushma cannot sleep or eat, pacing the hospital's corridor as her son is taken into the operation theatre for a major surgery. Her mind is crowded with all sorts of apprehensions. What if something goes wrong during the operation? What if he loses too much blood? What if he never wakes up from anesthesia? And, so on.
- Vinod has lost his job and spends a restless night tossing and turning in his bed, trying to figure out what to do next. He is tense and preoccupied. Keeps thinking about ways to find a new job. He calculates how long the money he has in the bank can last, if he does not find a job soon. He does not know how to tell his wife about their predicament.
- Pradeep has a small though important role in the play being staged at his college. He keeps going over his lines in his mind since he's afraid that he might forget them during the performance. He plays the scene in his mind over and over again, but cannot get rid of the dread of forgetting his lines and embarrassing himself in front of the audience.

While different in nuance and focus, these situations have one thing in common: they depict people in a state of worry. And perhaps it is better to call worry an 'emotional state' since it seems far more complex than

being just an emotion. In fact, there are some who assert that worry is not an emotion at all but the intellectual accompaniment of the emotion called anxiety. The way I see it, however, is that worry is an unpleasant state of mind with three aspects: emotional, intellectual, and somatic. Emotionally, it is characterized by a feeling of nervousness, irritability, and a sense that one cannot escape from the bothersome preoccupation. Intellectually, there is a preoccupying concern that some task has gone wrong or might go wrong – the 'what-if' component of worry – and that all measures one can conjure up to fix the problem are, in the end, futile. Somatically, there is restlessness, inability to sit peacefully in one place, pacing, difficulty falling asleep, and loss of appetite. Chronic worrying is associated with loss of weight and other adverse effects upon physical health. The immune system of the body is especially vulnerable to such stress. Blood pressure can also rise, leading to all sorts of complications. The old edict *chinta chita hai* (literally, worry is a funeral pyre) eloquently sums up the situation.

Such ominous implications are also evident in the origin of the English word 'worry'. The word is derived from the Old High German *wurgen,* which means 'to strangle'. Indeed, the dictionary definition of worry includes phrases such as 'to harass by tearing, biting, or snapping at the throat', and 'to assail with rough or aggressive attack' alongside the more expectable 'mental distress or agitation resulting from concern for something impending or anticipated'. Worry is hazardous for both the body and the mind, it seems. But is all worrying bad? Is there no such thing as realistic worry? Here is what the psychoanalyst Judd Marmor has to say on this issue:

> Worry over realistic matters may be regarded as a defensive function of the ego, the purpose of which is to either ward off an anticipated real trauma or to deal with the painful consequences of one already experienced. The student who is concerned with his ability to pass an important pending examination would be an example of the first type of reaction; while the one concerned with the consequences of his having failed the examination would be an example of the second. In the latter instance, the worry repetitively seeks to undo the trauma. In the first instance, the individual is

concerned with 'How can I deal with what is going to happen?'; in the second, with 'How can I undo what has happened?'

Realistic worry can thus pave the way for solving problems. By imagining a plethora of strategies to deal with the dreaded fiasco, we might come up with one that works. Or, at least, we would meet the adversity – should it actually materialize – in a well-prepared manner. Ruminating over all that can go wrong, while distressing, would then have acted as a sort of vaccination. There is evidence, for instance, that surgical patients who seem totally worry-free are more likely to be emotionally traumatized by the operation than those who do not regard themselves as invulnerable and do worry (at least a bit) about what is coming their way. Such anticipation enables them to cope more effectively with the trials and tribulations of the post-operative phase. They fare better in the long run.

It is therefore important to recognize the normalcy of realistic worry and not label all worry as morbid. Freedom from excessive, unrealistic, and debilitating worry is of course desirable. Inability to experience moderate, realistic, and problem-solving worry is not. The friendly exhortations like *fikr na karo yaar, chinta mat karo dost* and *tension mut lo pyaare* apply to the former and not to the latter. A judicious dose of worry is actually good for the soul.

Frankly, to not worry at all in today's world of increasing fundamentalism, terrorism, hyper-nationalism, wars, and genocide shows questionable grounding in reality. It seems hardly sane to maintain an attitude of bovine complacency as more and more countries acquire nuclear arms, creating the risk of such arsenals falling into deranged hands. And what about global warming? The melting of snow caps? The predicted extinction of marine animal life? Or the long-term consequences of America's pillage of Iraq and the drone attacks in Afghanistan? Or the devastation of Palestinian dreams by the ruthless Israeli settlement policies? How long should the Pakistan-inspired terrorist attacks on India be tolerated without retaliation? Must we ignore all this and not bother ourselves with the troubling thoughts stirred up in us? Come on, let's admit it! Some worry does seem indicated

here, especially if it results in creative and useful plans to avert the potential dangers facing our world. Indeed, worry of this sort might be our strongest ally as we navigate through the global turbulence of our times.

Xenophobia is deafness
wearing sunglasses on a
moonlit night.

Derived from coupling the Greek *xenos* (meaning 'strange') and *phobia* (meaning inordinate fear), the word *xenophobia* appeared in the English language around the beginning of the twentieth century. It denotes excessive apprehension of strangers and foreigners, and those who are ethnically, religiously, and racially different from oneself. The unease felt upon encountering them seems an admixture of anxiety, unexplained fear, dislike, and even hatred. The spectrum of xenophobic emotions is thus wide and can range from clumsy avoidance through active dislike to prejudice and violence directed towards those categorized as strangers. The phenomena subsumed under the rubric of xenophobia therefore have enormous social implications and warrant serious attention.

Mild manifestations of xenophobia are not difficult to find. One needs a discerning eye though, since these 'symptoms' are subtle and mostly appear as omissions, avoidances, and thoughtless indifference. Individuals at this level of xenophobia display a bland lack of interest in those who are culturally, racially, or religiously different from them. They lack knowledge of others and do not make use of the opportunities that can provide such knowledge. Their circle of friends and acquaintances is restricted to homoethnic people and their overall lifestyle reflects such loyalty. If the person is Hindu, for instance, he has no Muslim friends, lacks knowledge of why Eid is celebrated, and cannot name even two or three Muslim freedom fighters. If the person is Muslim, he has no Hindu friends, displays a striking ignorance of the great Hindu epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* and mindlessly prefers Muslim over Hindu sportsmen. Such simple-mindedness makes life easier and less demanding. However, it is also accompanied by a

smug self-acceptance; it is as if one knows all there is to know about oneself (and one's group) and there is nothing left to be discovered. Worse, in not paying attention to discordant ethnocultural groups, one is also compelled to ignore the inner voices that are discordant from a highly sanitized view of oneself. Pushing others away, one becomes divorced from the richness of one's own experience.

Moving further along the spectrum of xenophobia, we encounter prejudice. Here the belief in the superiority of one's group is more explicit. Lifestyle is markedly ethnocentric. One cracks and enjoys ethnic jokes. Stereotyping others becomes rampant and, when shared with those of similar persuasion, goes unquestioned. Mrs Sushmita Gangulee, for instance, whispers to her Bengali neighbour how she can never associate with Muslims. 'They are different from us, you know... they hardly ever take a bath and most of them end up marrying their cousins. What is truly horrible is that they don't really love India,' she says, wrinkling her nose. Shahid Ali, a highly educated Shia academic, prohibits his daughter Azra from marrying Sultan because he happens to be Sunni. Devraj Pande avoids Bengalis ('Bongs') because they are clannish and pretentious. And, Amrit Natrajan would not associate with people from Gujarat and Punjab. 'They are gaudy and uneducated,' he asserts. Unsatisfied with the brevity of his diatribe, he adds, 'Essentially vulgar!'

As we can see, the passive disinterest in others and the existence of narcissistic blind-spots about one's own group have given way here to active mistrust of others and increasingly virulent prejudice towards them. Lopsided political ideology develops at this stage and is accompanied by 'propaganda addiction'. This refers to the voracious appetite that some prejudicial individuals develop for published or broadcasted material that supports their world-view. Such material might refer to historical matters or to current affairs but all the arrows are pointed in one direction. While books published by reputed (or, shall we say, disreputed) presses can figure in this cornucopia of hate, a greater role is played by pamphlets, emails, and internet websites. The individual who is spiraling downward towards rage at minorities finds such material exalting. It diminishes his inner loneliness and, by

mirroring his prejudice, makes his distorted beliefs seem rational, consensual, and even normal.

The next step in such xenophobic 'villain-hunger' is messianic sadism. With this development, thinking becomes dangerously stilted and empathy for others is completely lost. The individual feels totally self-righteous and begins to deploy a self-serving and cruel ideology to justify destructive intentions toward others. When this state of mind receives encouragement from the fiery exhortations of a charismatic but paranoid political leader, then violence and murder appear to be divinely sanctioned and utterly guilt-free. Killing others feeds one's megalomania and creates the illusion of having merged with the idealized leader. Such 'messianic sadism' can propel communal riots, mass killings, and genocide.

In the horror one feels at contemplating all this, the sight of three points must not be lost, however.

- First, the fact that one might have somewhat greater comfort with 'people of one's own sort' (i.e. sharing the same religion, language, culinary preferences, rituals) is not pathological in itself. After all, the 'us versus them' distinction inherent in such preferences goes back to the earliest periods of our lives. Infants have been shown to smile preferentially upon being made to smell their mother's milk over the milk from another woman's breast. Early childhood attachments lead to taking in the picture of one's mother (and later, father) including her skin colour, facial features, sound of her voice, and so on. We know that by eight months of age, the infant clearly recognizes parents, siblings, and direct caregivers. He or she now reacts with what the renowned child observer Rene Spitz called 'stranger anxiety', i.e. pronounced discomfort and crying upon being held by strangers. This normal experiential factor, stranger anxiety, is critical for organizing later xenophobia, though it is not a sufficient factor in itself.

- This brings up the second, and that is the evolution of stranger anxiety into xenophobia and later into prejudice, hatred, and violence towards others is dependent upon many, many variables. Just like

not all seeds scattered on a piece of land turn into plants and, later, into full-grown trees, similarly not all stranger anxiety evolves into xenophobia and prejudice. The dual engines of chronic personal frustration and societal upheaval (especially on the economic front) are needed to transform the phase-specific and passing anxiety of a child to ethnocentricism and discriminatory practices of the adult. The more hurt, depressed, and angry one is at the personal level and the more one is exposed to the fierce 'uplifting' speeches by a leader who points fingers at others, the more likely it is that the normal in his realm would turn into the abnormal.

| Finally, one must not succumb to thinking that some people are prejudiced and others – including oneself – are not. The fact is that there are prejudiced and non-prejudiced parts of personality in all human beings. The former contains the potential of omnipotence, arrogance, aversion to knowledge of reality, and hatred of differences. The latter contains the potential of flexibility, humility, curiosity about self and others, and a fundamentally pleasant, though a bit sad, attitude to encountering the world at large. It is the proportion of these two parts in the intrapsychic economy (and their evocation by sociopolitical triggers) that ultimately determines whether, and to what extent, an individual becomes overtly prejudiced. Xenophobia, it turns out, is both ubiquitous and highly-complex.

Yearning

Yearning is the open mouth
of lonely despair.

According to the Webster's Dictionary, yearning signifies a 'tender or urgent longing'. While we readily understand the meaning of longing in this context, the two qualifiers – 'tender' and 'urgent' – give us pause. We think about them and then conclude that 'tender' implies that a mournful (even anguished) emotion accompanies yearning. And 'urgent' indicates that there is some risk involved in not satisfying the demand implicit in the yearning. Together the two prefixes ('tender' and 'urgent') impart a throbbing and near-mandatory quality to yearning. Matters involving yearning seem hardly plebian. We cannot put yearning aside.

That said, let us go further and see what we can learn about the true texture of yearning. Since no major psychoanalytic books offer us help in this regard, we are forced to look elsewhere: language, fiction, poetry, philosophy, religion and, yes, even madness.

The word 'yearning' is derived from the Latin *georn* (meaning 'eager') and thus implies a sense of righteous urgency. Philosophical writings tell a similar story. Plato, for instance, traced the root of all human longing to God, having cleaved his original man-woman creation into separate male and female halves, each of which keeps searching for its counterpart. Less well known are the corresponding Eastern notions. The Latin *georn* was preceded by the Sanskrit *harati* and Plato's myth seems derived from Max Mueller's translation of the following passage in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad,* where the origin of the world from the *Atman* is described.

> But He felt more delight. Therefore, a man who is lonely feels no delight. He wished for a second. He was so large as man and wife

> together. He then made his Self to fall into two, and thus arose husband and wife. Therefore, Yagnavalkya said: 'We are two and are thus (each of us) like half a shell'. Therefore, the void that was there was filled by the wife.

The majestic icon of *Ardhnareshwara* subsumes the essence of this proposal, even though our post-modern vantage point might plead for some gender equality in this regard. Nonetheless, one thing seems certain. A particular wistfulness is invariably associated with yearning. It is as if the yearning individual does not expect to find fulfillment. The object of his desire is elusive, slipping away through his fingers. In the Urdu idiom, yearning seems closer to a combination of *hasrat* (an unfulfilled wish) and *justujoo* (a desperate search) than simply to *aarzoo* (a robust desire). One can plead and search all around but one comes up empty-handed. A song from the immortal Guru Dutt movie *Pyaasa* eloquently captured such emotion: *'Aaj sajan mohe ang laga lo, janam saphal ho jaaye/Hriday ki peerha, deh ki agni sub sheetal ho jaaye'*. There is longing here no doubt but there is also a palpable dread that one's wish would not come true. Closer in time and more explicit about the shadow of futility in yearning are the Urdu poet Shahryar's lines from the movie *Umrao Jaan: 'Justujoo jis ki thi usko to na paaya hum ne/is bahaaney se magar dekh li duniya hum ne'*.

Having grasped the nature of yearning does not mean that we have understood its origin or that we can identify its normal and abnormal forms. Let us take the matter of its origin first. Yearning, at its base, represents a baby pining for his or her mother. Left alone, the weak and helpless infant can barely look after its own needs; even its survival is doubtful under such circumstances. Frightened to its core and desperate for its caretaker's presence, the infant emits a cry for help. Weeping loudly, screaming for attention, and making increasingly wild gestures with his ill-coordinated little limbs, the baby 'yearns' for his mother to return. The comfort provided by her voice, her touch, her embrace, and her bountiful breast is the sole ointment against the wound of separation. Yearning is the emotional tether that ties the baby to his absent mother. Remember the Webster phraseology? Matters can hardly get more 'tender' and 'urgent' than this.

To be sure, experiences of separation and loss from later periods of childhood also consolidate the capacity to feel yearning. The ever-so slightly nervous desire to pry open the closed doors of the parental bedroom and witness their intimacy gives yearning its first 'romantic' flavour. However, the life and death scenario of infantile separation from the mother remains the poignant bedrock of all yearning in the subsequent life. Even the romantic longings of the adult give evidence of the potentially fatal undercurrents of yearning. The great Urdu poet Ghalib expressed this truly eloquently: *'Usi ko dekh kar jeetay hain jis kaafir pe dum niklay'*. That was more than one hundred years ago. In recent times too, similar sentiment has been voiced. Just hear the ghazal sung by Chitra Singh: *'Kabhi to khul ke baras abr-e-mehrbaan ki tarah/Mera wajood hai jalte huey makaan ki tarah',* or listen to the Hrithik Roshan starrer Kites song: *'Zindagi do pal ki/intezaar kab tak hum karenge bhala,'* you would immediately know what I'm talking about.

Talking of yearning in the context of love brings us to a consideration of normal and abnormal forms of this emotion. Normal yearning, I would argue, is bearable, seeks persons or experiences that are achievable, and therefore, more or less amenable to satisfaction. The desperate desire for an academic degree, the pressured hunger for a trip abroad, the anguished longing for the beloved's attention, all belong in the category of normal yearning. Abnormal yearning, in contrast, involves substances that are harmful (e.g. cocaine), company of people who are not good for one's emotional and social life (e.g. liars, adulterers, wife-beaters), and experiences that hurt others (e.g. rape, child abuse). Such is the situation of the addict who hankers after his drug of choice and is willing to do anything to get it, the stalker who just cannot take 'no' for an answer and keeps pestering the woman he claims to love, and the serial killer who is enslaved by demonic urges to maim and kill. All in all, it seems that the greater the risk associated with yearning and the more palpable the dissatisfaction upon its gratification, the more pathological is the yearning.

Let me admit one thing, however. While abnormal yearning invariably ends up causing injury to oneself or others and normal yearning does not

do so, the latter also has a tendency to leave us a bit unfulfilled. The academic degree we coveted, the car we wanted, and even the beloved's favour that we longed for, soon diminish in their impact and we are left longing all over again. Sensing such an onset of disillusionment, the luminous contemporary poet Nida Fazli wrote: *'Neeyat-e-shauq bhar na jaaye kaheen/Tu bhi dil se utar na jaaye kaheen'*. But why does this happen? What is inherent in yearning that renders it largely inconsolable?

The answer lies in the fact that yearning in adult life is an admixture of childhood, even infantile, longing for parental attention *and* the contemporary desires for more age-appropriate achievements. When the former element is greater (owing to childhood deprivation), yearning becomes difficult to satisfy. When the latter element is greater, satiety seems more likely. But because all individuals have had a modicum of deprivation in childhood, all yearning retains a core of inconsolability. Could it be that this is why the Buddha declared that suffering is integral to life?

Zest is the owner of a dog
called ambition.

Zest, defined as ‘an enjoyably exciting quality to one’s attitude and behaviour’ is not simply an emotion. It is a psychological state that affects the mood as well as thought, value, action, and expectation. Zest lends passion to life. A zestful individual appears happy and engaged with the world robustly. His body and mind are one and he is ready to take the world, or the bull, by the horns. There is an air of exuberance and expansiveness about him. In common parlance, he is full of enthusiasm.

Zest seeks company and is often infectious. One with zest has an urge to share his emotional riches with others. Zest comes with generosity and optimism. And, it induces reciprocal emotions in others. Zest has the quality of infatuation and it is invariably present when there is infatuation, but it can occur outside of romance, love, and sex. One can have zest for cricket, music, travel, Bollywood and, melodramatic and pretentious though it may sound, for life in general. Unlike the bored individual who is full of emptiness and the depressed individual who is full of self-loathing, the zestful individual comes across as being full of goodness.

Others respond to him with mild amusement which also contains a hefty dose of admiration. If they can see their way out of envy – which zest also tends to induce in others – they might participate vicariously in the glow of his zest. The zestful one thus has the potential of becoming a leader. And, indeed most great leaders of the world (e.g., Stalin, Mao, Churchill, Gandhi, Castro, Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Nehru, Arafat, and Mandela) have been full of zest as persons, even if their nationalist enthusiasm and shining political vision occasionally covered up feelings

of loneliness, futility, and even depression.

This leads us to ask if zest is always a normal and healthy attitude or are there forms of zest that are abnormal and morbid? The fact is that such a distinction does exist. Normal zest, even though radiant, is usually transient; it is like the sun's light that gets masked by clouds and enveloped by night, but then it predictably reappears. One can repeatedly become zestful about the same thing, but the emotional state itself is temporary. The zestful person who is emotionally healthy can rest a while and be low-keyed and pensive. Moreover, his enthusiasm has a realistic quality; the plans he makes sound plausible even when there is large quantum of boldness attached to them. Normal zest leads to creative actions and, very often, productive outcome. It involves desires to enjoy and participate in the realms of work, play, art, music, theater, sports, social welfare, and politics. Normal zest is often stirred up by children, lovers, and pets but artistic creativity and civic concerns can also mobilize it.

And then there is abnormal or morbid zest. In contrast to its healthy counterpart, abnormal zest is prolonged and leaves little possibility of relaxation. There is a driven and compulsive quality about it. Unlike normal zest which is a bonus, so to speak; abnormal zest is a need, if not an addiction. Its goals are either implausible or drawn largely from unmet desires of childhood. The objects one seeks are idealized and once achieved, they leave one unsatisfied. The much longed-for Mercedes and the six-crore flat one desperately wanted to own fail to heal the wounds hidden under the pressured enthusiasm. The deliriously-planned European vacation and the excitably anticipated evening with Bollywood stars leave one unfulfilled. It is the need to ward-off the throbbing reminder of this very laceration of the soul that gives abnormal zest its rigid and compulsive quality. The following couplet from a ghazal I wrote some three decades ago describes such an emotional state: *'Andar ka shor accha hai thorha dabaa rahey/Behtar yehi hai aadmi kuchh boltaa rahey'*.

The next logical question pertains to the origins of normal and pathological zest. Well, the original prototype for the joyous feeling of zest seems derived from blissful experiences at the mother's breast in

nursing. Or, perhaps, such experiences constitute the bedrock of zest which is further shaped and consolidated by happy and efficacious activities of later childhood. Memorizing multiplication tables, reciting poetry by heart, playing hockey or cricket, singing well, and making a beautiful piece of art can result from and give rise to feelings of zest. The span of years between eight and twelve is especially important for the consolidation of zest as a character trait. It is during this period that a child ventures out of the parental orbit and makes forays into the world of reality. The child is eager to make things together with his peers, to share in constructing and planning, and to attach himself to teachers and parents of other children. He watches and imitates people representing different professions – doctors, policemen, cricket players, etc. Mimicry is, however, not enough for him. He wants to make things himself and make them well. What the renowned psychoanalyst Erik Erikson has called the 'sense of industry' appears at this age. Coupled with the desire for adopting pets, the burgeoning capacity for hard work, playfulness, creativity, and involvement with the society at large (at this age, represented by the school) make the child appear a proto-adult and a happy one at that. The lyrics of such personality growth are inevitably written upon the musical notes of zest. Needless to add that receiving parental (and later on, peer) approval and admiring glances from one's teachers confirms the veracity of one's enthusiasm. The capacity for normal zest becomes solidly anchored in one's character.

The developmental background of abnormal zest contains an additional factor. While the growing child has received good maternal care – and later, satisfying experiences with both parents, siblings, and teachers – there has been a sudden rupture of that care. This might have been in the form of the mother being hospitalized for some illness or her becoming depressed upon losing a parent or a new baby. Something or the other must have happened to have caused a break in the good and loving care the child was receiving. And while the good care might have been resumed, the child is left with the fear that deprivation might happen again; he or she now 'feeds' upon the world with a pressured and extraordinarily 'urgent' hunger. This is the essence of abnormal zest.

Both normal and abnormal zest, essentially, are linked with the

experience of breast-feeding. Zest is a milk-based product, it seems. In light of this, it is fascinating that the other dictionary meaning of ‘zest’ (besides enthusiasm) refers to ‘a piece of the peel of an orange or lemon that is used as flavouring’, as, for instance, in a gin-and-tonic. But what is the connection between milk and gin-and-tonic? I leave it for you to figure out for yourself.

Epilogue

What about anxiety, happiness, jealousy, and regret?

This question is partly factual and partly rhetorical. On a factual level, it can be answered by pointing out that the emotions of anxiety, happiness, jealousy, and regret have been addressed in the sections on worry, joy, envy, and remorse, respectively. On a rhetoric level, the question is its own answer. In other words, no book on our emotional life can ever be complete; the shades, hues, nuances and textures of what goes on in the human heart remain elusive in the end. Writing about such matters can hardly achieve closure and perfection. If one can provide some flickers of instant recognition, the delight of hints and allusions, and an impetus to continue one's search for the truth of the human emotional life, one has indeed discharged one's duty.

Translation of Urdu/Hindi Poems

I am not a professional translator and therefore what I am able to offer below needs to be taken in a charitable spirit. More importantly, it should be remembered that poetry rarely fairs well in translation. Words and phrases in poetry are not used merely for their denotative significance; they are used much more for their emotionally kindling potential and their prosodic qualities. Besides, poetry as a medium of expression is far more reliant on the mother tongue than is prose. No wonder great prose has been written in languages other than one's mother tongue... take Nabakov, Beckett, Ionesco, and Rushdie, for instance... great poetry is always ensconced in the poet's mother tongue. It is with such caveats that the following material should be approached.

Salman Akhtar

Page 4: *Hum se majboor ka ghussa bhi ajab baadal hai/apne hi dil se uthey, apne hi dil par barsey*
A strange cloud is the oppressed one's rageeed
It rains on the very heart that it has risen from.

Page 55: *Hum hain mushtaaq aur woh bezaar/Ya ilaahi yeh maajraa kya hai?'*
Here I am, desperate and eager; sheifferent
Why such conundrum, My Lord?

Page 67: *Ab ke baras bhej bhayya ko, babul/saawan mein leejo bulaaye re*
Oh, father, do send my brother to fetch me
I can not be away from home, this monsoon.

Page 67: *O Des Se Aane Waaley Bataa*
Tell me, you who have come from my own land.

Page 67: *Aakhri Mulaaqaat*
The Final Encounter.

Page 67: *Woh kaaghaz ki kashti, woh baarish ka paani*
The paper boat we used to make, that gushing rain water.

Page 67: *Karte kis munh se ho ghurbat ki shikayat Ghalib?/Tum ko be-mehriye-yaaran-e-watan yaad nahin?*
O′ Ghalib with what audacity do you complain of being an immigrant
Have you forgotten the callousness of friends back home?

Page 72: *Aaj jaane ki zid na karo*
No, no, no, please do not talk of leaving today.

Page 72: *Woh bedardi se sar kaatein mera aurr main kahoon un se/Huzoor aahista aahista, janaab aahista aahista*
As she beheads me ruthlessly
I moan with the pleasure of surrender: slowly please, gently please!

Page 94: *Kapdon ko samatey huey utthi hai magar*
Darti hai, kaheen unko na ho jaaye khabar
Thuk kar abhi soye hain kaheen jaag na jaayen
Dheere se urhaa rahi hai unko chaadar
Gathering her vestiments, she has risen from their bed
Cautious in each move, lest she disturb his sleep
Exhausted he seemed last night, after all the effort
Gently, she covers him with the bedsheet, suffused with their union.

Page 114: *Aaj sajan mohe ang laga lo, janam saphal ho jaaye/Hriday ki peerha, deh ki agni sub sheetal ho jaaye*
Sweep me off my feet, hold me tight in your arms, my lover
Only that will relieve all the ache in my heart, only that shall quench my body′s thirst.

Page 115: *Justujoo jis ki thi usko to na paaya hum ne/is bahaaney se magar dekh li duniya hum ne*
No, I never did find the one I was forever looking for
But, by God, the wandering took me to all sorts of interesting places in this world.

Page 115: *Usi ko dekh kar jeetay hain jis kaafir pe dum niklay*
Though her beauty is a torment for me, it is looking at her that keeps me alive.

Page 116: *Kabhi to khul ke baras abr-e-mehrbaan ki tarah/Mera wajood hai jalte huey makaan ki tarah*
Someday, do let go and drench me like a cloud burst;
For my existence has slowly but surely turned into a house on fire.

Page 116: *Neeyat-e-shauq bhar na jaaye kaheen/Tu bhi dil se utar na jaaye kaheen*
I dread to think that my passion might become dim, my thirst quenched.
That someday even you might not remain desirable for me.

Page 120: *Andar ka shor accha hai thorha dabaa rahey/Behtar yehi hai aadmi kuchh boltaa rahey*
To suppress the pain within, it is not bad to try keeping busy, even talking endlessly.

Acknowledgments

Teachers and mentors from my days of medical education, psychiatric residency, and psychoanalytic training imparted their clinical wisdom to me. My patients honoured me by trusting me with their innermost selves. My department chairman provided unwavering support to my academic pursuits. My students looked up to me and thus strengthened my work ego. My colleagues generously shared their psychological insights with me. My family safeguarded the ambiance necessary for creative work. Dr Rajnish Mago, Dr Basant Pradhan, and Ms Aditi Dubey provided useful inputs and my assistant, Jan Wright, prepared the book's manuscript with diligence and good humour. My dog, Majnun, made sure that in focusing upon human emotions, I would not overlook his. To him and to all the individuals mentioned above, my sincere thanks indeed.

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About the Author

Salman Akhtar, MD is an internationally recognized psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, writer, and poet. His more than 60 books include *Immigration and Identity* (1999), *Freud along the Ganges* (2005), and *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (2009). Recipient of numerous prestigious awards, Dr Akhtar is a globally sought out speaker. He has conducted teaching workshops in many countries, including Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, England, Holland, Mexico, and Turkey. He has published seven volumes of poetry and serves as the Scholar-in-Residence at the Inter-Act Theatre Company. He maintains a clinical practice in Philadelphia.

***Remorse** is the shadow of yesterday's transgression.*

***Shame** is the ugly sister of shyness.*

***Tenderness** is a poor man's wedding cake.*

***Unease** is an ill-fitting shoe on the foot of commitment.*

***Vindictiveness** is the bitter growl of injured vanity.*

***Worry** is a chainsaw in the tree-house of fantasy.*

***Xenophobia** is deafness wearing sunglasses on a moonlit night.*

***Yearning** is the open mouth of lonely despair.*

***Zest** is the owner of a dog called ambition.*

'This is a truly wonderful book: lucid, insightful and wise. Akhtar is both subtle and elegant, able to communicate complexity with a lightness of touch and literary flair that is rare among psychoanalysts.'

– Sudhir Kakar