

TWO FOUR-LETTER WORDS

Hate and Love. Two small four-letter words with big impact. The extremes of a spectrum of the most powerful human feelings.

Someone in a meeting asked, “What drives people to hatred?” The person referred to current news of political, religious and ethnic intolerance that led to confrontations, vendettas and violence between seemingly “nice” people. “If people are innately healthy,” this person asked, “then how come they don’t act that way? Would a ‘healthy’ person deliberately try to harm another person just because they disagreed with them?”

This question plagues people everywhere: What creates hate in people, such an awful feeling with such destructive consequences? It is just as painful to experience hate and to undertake hateful acts as it is to be the object of others’ hatred. The feeling of hate is so negative and bleak that it is a wonder people can stomach it.

As I’ve considered an explanation for it, what has occurred to me is to imagine a continuum of feelings, from the most beautiful and most positive feelings to the most ugly and most negative feelings we know. Then imagine that acts of love and acts of hate, and all actions between the two, are byproducts of this feeling continuum. The connection is obvious between the feelings we have and the range of behaviors that is possible to us at any point along the line. No one basking in the warmth of gratitude could, in that moment, strike out at another person. No one roiling in the turbulence of anger could, in that moment, offer solace to another person. No one mired in depression could, in that moment, join in silly laughter.

When we are experiencing the feelings at the more positive end of this continuum, the range of behaviors that occur to us are considerate of the common human condition and being connected to others. They are helpful and unselfish. Love, joy, forgiveness, warmth, respect, trust, compassion, wonder, light-heartedness, are the kinds of positive feelings that generate behaviors representative of thoughtfulness, appreciation, understanding, service, tolerance, sharing, kindness, curiosity and stability.

When we are experiencing the thoughts and feelings at the more negative end of this continuum, the range of behaviors that occur to us are focused on our small personal world and keeping it the way we want it. They are hurtful and mean-spirited. Hate, dissatisfaction, blame, alienation, disrespect, mistrust, bad will, righteousness, and contempt are the kinds of negative feelings that generate behaviors representative of malevolence, envy, malice, enmity, insensitivity, prejudice, disdain, hostility and intimidation.

If I have a hateful thought and feeling and I look around at the world to see what's there right then to figure out what is making me feel so bad, I'll certainly find something. And then I will hate that thing and try to get it out of my life. The more I hate it and work to get rid of it, the more I have it on my mind, the bigger and more threatening it appears to me and the more of my mental space and energy it occupies and drains. The worse I feel, the more I hate *whatever it is* and the more extreme my behaviors become in an attempt to force it away. If I come in contact with others who see *whatever it is* differently, I hate them, too, because they must be wrong and stupid. If that thing is making me feel so bad, no one should like it.

If we talk to people engaged in hateful or mean activities, it won't be long before *whatever it is* will be mentioned. It could be anything – from life circumstances of poverty or illness, to a family member, to the police, to an agency or institution, to a boss or co-worker, to a whole race of other people. If we talk in depth to such people, we normally will find that their list of *whatever's* has changed over their lives. If they conquered one thing, it wasn't long before something else popped up to take its place in “making” them angry or outraged.

In the same way, often those who are filled with love but have little understanding of how love originates will attach that loving feeling to someone or something that was in their presence when they felt the most wonderful. That's why people say that beautiful weather makes them feel great, or a certain person makes them happy, or a certain hobby makes them forget all their troubles, or a certain place does something for them.

In either case, powerful feelings that are hooked into something in the outside world are bound to create insecurity and fear. In the case of hatred, the fear is that the person will not prevail against *whatever it is*; in the case of love, the fear is that the person will lose *whatever it is*.

Very rarely do we stop to wonder: If certain “things” in our world had the absolute power to make us love or hate, why wouldn't they affect everyone the same way? Why wouldn't everyone hate the same things? Why wouldn't everyone feel great in the presence of the same things?

The missing knowledge is that feelings are direct expressions of our thoughts about life, **not** inevitable reactions to the outside world, unmitigated by our own thinking. Anyone, at any time, can create any thought and immediately experience the corresponding feeling. But knowing how thought is created – where it comes from and where it goes – matters a lot in an attempt either to understand and ameliorate hatred or to understand and foster love.

Love and hatred are feelings that stem from exactly the same source – our changing thoughts. Those thoughts are generated within our own minds. We create thoughts

continually. If we understand that, the thoughts that produce negative, hateful feelings will pass because we won't make anything special of them, nor will we engage them. The thoughts that create positive, loving feelings will pass, too. But we won't worry about hanging onto them, or replacing them. We can count on the fact that always, always, new thoughts will keep coming to mind. We are never stuck with any one thought, nor are we ever limited by thinking we've already done.

The only thing that "holds" a particular thought or group of thoughts in place and gives it power is deliberately focusing on it and continually regenerating it. The likelihood of doing that is increased by the intensity of the thought. Strong thoughts and feelings arouse either strong fears or strong longings. Unless we understand the thought process, and the neutrality of that process, we can become unwitting authors of sustained and troubling upsets or desires. If we do understand the neutrality of the process, if we do understand that it is the nature of thoughts to come and go continually and it is the nature of thoughts to vary tremendously in quality and quantity, we can experience hate and love, and the whole range of other feelings, without paying an emotional price and without indulging behaviors that are non-constructive.

If we do understand that feelings simply reflect our thoughts, we gain an even greater strength: the ability to guide our lives by following the feelings that bring us peace and turning our backs on the feelings that don't. It is possible simply to leave thoughts alone and let our natural inclination to more positive feelings be our guide through life. In common parlance, people call that "following your heart," or "staying in the zone," or "listening to your conscience." Everyone is more naturally drawn in the direction of love than in the direction of hate, but everyone is just as capable of creating and sustaining hatred as they are of every other possible feeling. The less we understand this, the more frightening our worst thoughts are to us and the more we work to cling to our best thoughts. Fear and desire are the troublemaker thoughts, not the original ideas that prompted them. But fear and desire are thoughts, too, and will pass like any other thought if we understand them and leave them alone.

Hate is an ugly feeling arising from negative thoughts taken to heart. Love is a beautiful feeling, arising from positive thoughts taken to heart. Neither is permanent. But each is a constant potential. The thoughts and feelings of hate reinforce our fears and take us deeper into the small world of our own making. The thoughts and feelings of love take us out of our own little world and bring us closer to the universal experience of all life.

The expression of hatred or of love in any given moment has nothing to do with innate health, however. We never "lose" something innate to us; we do not move in and out of our health. We are eternally whole expressions of the divine energy of the universe, with the possibility of operating across the whole continuum of the human potential. What is healthy is the infinite capability to recognize thoughts and feelings as illusory and

transitory and see hope in the truth that we are always changing our minds. What is healthy is that the natural pull towards love is the constant impetus to change.

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