

Transforming Negative Emotions



Peter Ingle

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About This Book

Comprehensive knowledge about the nature of negative emotions, the role they play in human psychology, and the possibility of transforming them as a bridge to conscious awareness all belong to a system of ideas known as the Fourth Way. These ideas were introduced to the western world in the early twentieth century by G.I. Gurdjieff, a Greek-Armenian living in Russia. The ‘system’ as he called it was later organized in written form by his protégé, P.D. Ouspensky, a Russian author who had gained notoriety through the publication of two early works: *The Fourth Dimension* and *Tertium Organum*.

One of Ouspensky’s subsequent books, *In Search of The Miraculous*, tells how he met and studied with Gurdjieff. Another book, *The Fourth Way*, comprises questions and answers from meetings that Ouspensky held in London and New York from 1921–1945. He also wrote *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution* which is a condensation of fourth way ideas.

The material that follows on these pages is drawn from my observations and insights over many years of studying and applying the system. I compiled my observations because I wanted to know as clearly as possible (1) the underlying nature of negative emotions, (2) what is gained by not expressing them, and (3) how that can lead to transformation. Ultimately, I wanted to fully understand and have conscious control over the

mysterious process veiled in the ancient idea of alchemy: that of transmuting the ‘coarse’ into the ‘fine’— which I discovered is very different than it seems.

Over the years, my studies confirmed that the groundwork for transformation is indeed laid by withholding the outward expression of negative emotions so that the force of their energy can be used as a psychological lever and catalyst which are otherwise *unavailable* to the mind.

In right order, ‘withholding’ the expression of negative emotions—even, and especially, in the face of intense suffering—enables awareness to become aware of being aware (to “remember itself”) above negative emotions and thereby transcend the innate sense of self that negative emotions spring from. The more this is understood, the more conscious the process becomes and the deeper awareness plunges into the mystery of itself.

As P.D. Ouspensky said, “You cannot struggle with negative emotions without remembering yourself more, and you cannot remember yourself more without struggling with negative emotions. If you remember these two things, you will understand everything better.”

To fully understand what he meant, it is best to start with a brief overview of how these two ideas shape the core of a system that Ouspensky so carefully organized, taught, and actualized within himself.



**A Brief Introduction to
the Fourth Way**

THE FOURTH WAY, which is said to have existed for millennia, is based on a system of ideas that describe human psychology in the context of conscious awareness. According to George Gurdjieff who introduced these ideas to the western world, the fourth way has appeared and disappeared in different forms, depending on the religious and political climate of the times.

The fourth way derives its name from the fact that it is distinct from three 'traditional' ways of inner development that were more common in the east: the way of the fakir, the way of the monk, and the way of the yogi.

The way of the fakir is an approach to conscious awareness through mastering the physical body by overcoming pain and enduring instinctive hardship.

The way of the monk is an approach to conscious awareness through mastering the emotions, typically in the form of religious devotion.

The way of the yogi is an approach to conscious awareness through mastering the intellect, a main stay of which is meditation.

Each of these three ways, each intended for different types of people, is a vehicle, a conduit, and a pathway to conscious awareness. All three characteristically require withdrawal into a monastery or ashram or secluded place.

The fourth way, on the other hand, takes place, not in isolation or under special circumstances, but in the ordinary conditions of contemporary daily life. It is said to be a balanced way of transcending the body, the emotions, and the mind *at the same time* through *direct* work on conscious awareness.

But what does this really mean? What is conscious awareness? How does it appear? How do we recognize it? And most importantly, how does it recognize and realize itself?

States of Consciousness

The fourth way explains that the consciousness of awareness can manifest in four successive degrees or levels. Although awareness itself does not change, it experiences degrees of opaqueness and clarity, variations of contraction and expansion, and a wide spectrum of self-awareness—from no cognition of itself as awareness to full self-realization within the



The Nature of Negative Emotions

The emotional center borrows material from the instinctive center, and with the negative half of the instinctive center and the help of imagination and identification, it creates negative emotions.

Peter Ouspensky

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS are usually the first place we go when we encounter discomfort, inconvenience, and suffering. Such is the nature of psychological 'sleep' to immediately *shield ourselves* against the forces that can awaken us.

Negative emotions are a reaction, not a perception. In this sense, they are not really emotions. They are defense mechanisms that prevent the possibility of full emotion.

With negative emotions, we turn away from what is really happening. We dig a hole and bury our awareness in it. Conquering a negative emotion means uncovering the hole. Transformation means releasing conscious awareness back into the open air.

Negative emotions have us see the world in relation to ourselves instead of ourselves in relation to a much, much larger world and the laws governing it. We don't usually see the world. We respond to it and see *that*.

Negative emotions represent our disagreement with reality, which is ridiculous when you think about it.

Negative emotions are harmful not so much for what they are, but because they steal our ability to control our consciousness of awareness. Recapturing this ability is what transformation and spiritual evolution are all about.



The Role of Non-Expression

If you choose, you are free. If you choose,
you need blame no man, accuse no man.

Epictetus

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS negate, deny, reject, and resist reality. Controlling the expression of negative emotions throws light on this fact.

The non-expression of negative emotions stifles the instinctive center and interrupts the logic of imaginary 'I'. It highlights what awareness *is not*.

Not expressing negative emotions is a way to reclaim the internal space that rightfully belongs to impartial awareness.

We—as awareness—are usually caught *inside* a negative emotion. Not-expressing it is the first step to getting outside it.

Not expressing negative emotions creates psychological pressure, but this pressure is helpful and in no way harmful because *used correctly* it enables us to see how binding negative emotions are.

Not expressing negative emotions is the practical basis of psychological thinking—thinking which is geared toward conscious awareness.



Negative Emotions and Denying Force

Suffering becomes deliberate if you don't rebel against it, if you don't try to avoid it, if you don't accuse anybody, if you accept it as a necessary part of your work at the moment and as a means for attaining your aim.

Peter Ouspensky

IN THE SYSTEM, 'denying force' refers to all forms of discomfort, unpleasantness, inconvenience, interruption, misfortune, pain, and tragedy which cause friction and suffering in our life, which in turn usually result in some kind of negative emotion followed by its outward expression.

Friction and suffering create internal pressure which we don't know how to accommodate, so we psychologically process that pressure through the internal mechanism of negative emotions and then expel it through physical expression. In short, negative emotions serve as a conduit and relief valve for the pressure *and the material* of denying force.

We are taught almost from birth to have a negative attitude toward denying force: to dislike it, see it as a hindrance or problem, and want to avoid it.

Viewing denying force with a neutral attitude requires self-remembering: the self of awareness 'remembering' to be consciously aware in the face of friction and regarding its pressure as a catalyst.

Most negative emotions originate in the instinctive center (the center of sensations) because the instinctive center is designed to *resist the discomfort* caused by denying force.



The Process of Transformation

When the fire is strong, it soon appropriates
to itself the matter which is heaped on it,
and consumes it, and rises higher by means
of this very material.

Marcus Aurelius

THE NON-EXPRESSION of negative emotions is not enough by itself because it is primarily an effort by the mind to harness attention. This effort needs to be complemented with conscious awareness—pure awareness aware of being aware.

Non-identification means awareness being consciously aware of itself independent from the struggle that is taking place between negative emotions and the effort not to express them.

Transformation is *based* on non-expression and *depends* on non-identification.

Not expressing negative emotions creates internal pressure. The more this pressure can be sustained, the more it pulls things apart, like water that keeps boiling until its lighter molecules break free as pure air—pure aw-air-ness.

Not expressing negative emotions represents control over our lower centers (of sensations, movements, thoughts, and emotions) whereas non-identification represents awareness controlling itself and being aware of doing so.

Transformation leads to a state of non-identification that is aware of being aware. The observer transforms itself into a conscious observer.



Transformation and Awareness

All below duly travel'd, and still I mount
and mount. Rise after rise bow the
phantoms behind me.

Walt Whitman

BECAUSE AWARENESS IS not consciously aware, we simply forget about transformation. A negative emotion comes, we forget, and we express it.

Even when we try not to express a negative emotion, the possibility of transformation can get overwhelmed by self-doubt. The negativity seems too powerful and real, and transformation seems beyond our ability. We have to transcend these attitudes, too.

We have to see friction, denying force, suffering, and negative emotions as stepping stones instead of stumbling blocks.

'I's from the instinctive center and imaginary 'I' want to keep awareness involved in the struggle with negative emotions. They *want* awareness to fight on their level and on their terms, which means identification. That way, they keep awareness focused on negative emotions instead of on itself. Awareness has to learn to shift its focus and play the game at a higher level *above the struggle*.

One reason transformation is difficult is that the emotional center is entangled in the instinctive center. When something happens to irritate the instinctive center, its reaction prompts a parallel reaction in the emotional center. Conscious awareness is required to keep the emotional center out of the instinctive center's reactions, and to pull it out when the instinctive center tries to pull it in. It is exactly this overlap, brought about by identification, which prevents transformation.

For negative emotions to be transformed, they have to be brought to the surface and be exposed. In the discomfort of this process, we confront our imaginary picture of 'I' because seeing that is part of the experience of transforming the Self of awareness that sees it. But even when we start to see it, we become identified with it in the form of dismay or self-judgment or hopelessness. Awareness has to stay afloat above those waves, too.

If we are honest, we see that we are preoccupied with our own life. It is an ongoing subject of speculation, worry, and selfish manipulation. Usually we don't realize that this is all sleep and that what we call 'my life' is really material for something else.

We finally become negative about our inability to transform negative emotions and realize we have to start there.

The self of awareness is *never* negative. It just seems that way to the 'I's because all they know is imaginary 'I'.

The human mind is clever. It will control the outward expression of negativity to an extent and declare victory while still indulging negative 'I's inwardly. Even when we cut off the head of the worm that wants to express itself, the tail keeps wiggling. We then have to find a deeper level of non-expression and non-identification. Awareness has to isolate itself further, and then even further.