

Why Track Emotions?

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One of the nine ITP Commitments is “I open my heart to others in love and service. I stay current in expressing my feelings to those close to me and take care of my emotional needs in appropriate and healthy ways, seeking counsel when needed.”

We are emotional beings. We feel happy, sad, angry, disgusted, fearful, etc. Emotions are our constant companion. We experience a range of emotions every day. Yet, we have difficulty handling our emotions, especially our negative emotions. Not only do our emotional states affect us, but also those around us and how we experience life.

Society at large has had an evolving view of how one is expected to handle one's emotions in public. Prior to the 1960s, one was expected to be stoic and hide one's emotions. In the sixties, one was encouraged to “let it all hang out.” More recently, there is the notion of a middle ground referred to as emotional intelligence.

Science, religion and spiritual practices have come to the realization that emotions are what make us human. It is no longer “cogito ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am), but rather “I feel, therefore I am.”

Various studies have shown that emotions activate our cardiovascular, skeletomuscular, endocrine, and autonomic nervous systems. We feel emotions as a wave of energy coursing through our body. Sometimes these emotions are so strong that we are swept up by this wave and lose control of ourselves, behaving in ways that we later regret.

Our negative emotions point to areas of our soul that need healing. For example, situations that make us angry are telling us to look deeper into the reasons why. Our emotions are signals from our soul telling us to stop and look within us to discover what parts of us are in need of love, care, understanding and attention from us.

An important, and perhaps an essential part of any spiritual practice, is to stay current with one's emotions. For many, identifying their emotions is challenging. Our ITP

group in Thousand Oaks experimented with the emotional battery developed by Pam Kramer for Staying Current. We developed a tactile and playful approach to helping participants identify their emotional state—a set of cards, the size of playing cards, each printed with one emotion from the battery of emotions.

We asked participants to identify a difficult situation that they may be dealing with and sort the cards to find three cards that best capture their emotional state. Sorting the cards enabled participants to extract themselves from the hold of their emotions and become a witness to them. One member of our group suggested we call these cards “Witness Cards,” and the name has stuck. The process of sorting the cards is, for many, cathartic, and they have told us that it feels as if a weight has been lifted off them.

We have learned that sorting the Witness Cards trains one to recognize one’s pattern of emotional responses and to look within to recognize emotional scars, and to bring healing energies to those areas of one’s being.

For some in the Thousand Oaks ITP group, sorting the Witness Cards has become a daily practice.