

# The Hoffman Process

When you have reached a point in life when you are fed up with being fed up, and feel you could be more fulfilled, it becomes obvious that something is holding you back. If staying in the 'trance' of daily life is becoming intolerable, then maybe the prospect of getting away from it all to explore the Hoffman Process, a residential programme that fosters deep behavioural and attitudinal change may be an option. That's what I did. **Keith Cairncross** reports.

# Impossible

**L**ike me, many people have wallowed in the intellectual part, maybe even with hours of therapy, analysing and identifying the patterns of behaviour that cause so much pain. Like me, many seem unable to break free of these habits and keep repeating them ad nauseum. The result? You name it, everyone has a different tone to their litany of frustration, depression, procrastination, addiction...and the malaise continues to poison ourselves and those close to us unless action is taken.

Bob Hoffman, who developed the Process, was not a psychologist or

*'The mind is a 'monkey'.  
It always tries to  
dominate and pull us  
back into the darkest  
part of ourselves,  
through the behaviour  
that we actually wish to  
eradicate.'*

psychiatrist. He was sensitive and could see through the defensive layers of denial people enveloped themselves up in. Realising that even the brightest of people could fall into self-destructive spirals, the remedy could not rely on intellectual reasoning. The only way 'out' was 'through' and believed that since habits are learned emotionally, the only way to heal them is by releasing them emotionally. This involves radical re-education of the emotional parts of ourselves.

**Should I stay or should I go?**

It was with trepidation that I embarked on this seven-day Process. I had heard about

its mentally gruelling demands from friends who had been on it and from one of the key facilitators Tim Laurence who had come out to Dubai to give a talk about it. I had even been recommended it by two therapists who are Hoffman accredited teachers. Nevertheless I was resistant to the idea, and did my best for months to rationalise why I should not go.

My wife, I was recently married for the third time, was having none of that. Pitching it as a “transformational getaway”, she said it would be her wedding present to me. My “Thanks but no thanks” fell on deaf ears. Even weeks before I was due to attend; I was still procrastinating over doing the pre-course work, which forms an important part of the Process. Ever resourceful, she threatened to complete it for me, warning that after she had finished with it, I would go through a double wringer, so I got nervous and finally sent it off myself.

### Ready, steady, go

Arriving by train to the depths of Sussex I arrived at a beautiful country mansion surrounded by woodland which was to be my home for the next week.

We were hardly allowed to settle down and the first lecture was at 10 am. As I looked around the room at my fellow participants, I immediately started forming first impressions about them. I didn't feel connected to any of them or felt I had much in common, so I automatically went into my default behaviour of closing down and not engaging too deeply with anyone. How wrong my initial pre-conceptions turned out to be. This became part of the learning curve too – nothing was as it seemed. My propensity to judge is linked with the negative patterns all of us had come to shed.

### What was my problem anyway?

The reasons that lead me to Hoffman were many but essentially boiled down to an addiction to negative thought patterns like anxiety, pessimism and procrastination that did not serve me well in the fulfilled life I was now leading as an adult but still could not realise that I was actually leading. Clearly these hardened traits formed a protective armour that served to shield me as a child in the midst of some crazy-making people and situations, but now these defence mechanisms were no longer necessary or desirable.

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### Negative Love and the Quadrinity

Bob Hoffman started his teaching in 1967, propounding that ‘Negative Love’ was the cause of our ‘issues.’ Negative Love is what your parents or surrogates failed to do for you when they brought you up in your formative years. It is also what they ‘did’ to raise you that harmed you emotionally; hence the need to erect coping mechanisms or patterns to deal with it.



On an endless personalised gradient of intensity, typically it could involve abuse, abandonment, excessive discipline and expectations, criticism, unloading anxieties, money worries, parental fights, divorce etc.

These tendencies manifest themselves in diverse patterns...

**LOVE PATTERNS** appear as fear of intimacy, dependency or abandonment.

**WORK PATTERNS** degenerate into workaholism, fear of failure, fear of success, excessive authoritarianism.

**FEAR PATTERNS** emerge as imagining the worst, anxiety and procrastination.

**ANGER PATTERNS** manifest as vengefulness, abuse and so on.

The first step was to become aware of these patterns and over those first days the introspection was intense and I became increasingly depressed as I analysed each configuration and realised I had discovered some more I had not even been conscious of as they were so deeply ingrained. I started wondering – having stripped myself bare—who I really was and this is where the Quadrinity comes in. ))

# The Quadrinity

Bob Hoffman believed there were four different parts to us: the body, the mind/intellect, the inner child/emotional self, and the spirit/consciousness...

**THE SPIRITUAL SELF** is the essence of who we are, present and eternal, it harbours our authentic qualities of loving unconditionally, intuition, creativity, patience, acceptance, forgiveness, compassion and self-reflection.

**THE EMOTIONAL SELF** is our 'feelings' aspect that remain underdeveloped since it was not unconditionally loved and validated. With a range of emotions from joyful and playful to sad and troubled, it can get 'stuck' in a feeling and become resentful, stubborn, selfish, vengeful, exhibiting procrastination, lack of self-esteem etc.



**THE INTELLECT** is our rational problem-solving thought processor striving to make sense of our feelings and experiences. It is logical, knowledgeable, excellence-driven, inventive, but negatively critical, judgemental, perfectionist, defensive, controlling, deceptive, argumentative etc.

**THE BODY** provides vital sensory information, it learns, sends psychosomatic 'messages', displays pain, pleasure, sensuality, energy, vitality and movement. Here negative patterns appear as chronic pain, anxiety, hyper active, exhaustion, tension.

I can't reveal in detail how the nuts and bolts of the week pieced together as all participants pledge confidentiality, but I can say that the Process was meticulously structured to ensure that no 'inner stone' was left unturned. We were not allowed any 'escape routes' – no phones, TV, idle chit chat – in order to speed up the process of realisation and change.

Cohabiting in this 'laboratory' setting, support from staff and fellow participants was constant and it was touching to feel how everyone became more at ease as they started opening up. What was also comforting was that actually my problems were no different to anyone else's. Everyone has been traumatised in childhood to some degree. I found it educative to understand how this had played out in their lives through their relationships and careers.

Once you have identified the life patterns that dominate, the emotional release part of it kicks in with powerful exercises to heal the wounds of the past, aimed at breaking the bonds between you and your parents and helping you take responsibility for your actions.

## Living in such close proximity has its risks...

Opening this 'can of inner child worms' has its risks. Once you start to live your true self and be in touch with feelings it can engender life changing realisations and some people at this stage often realise that they are in the wrong relationships, wrong jobs, and go on to make profound changes

*"The quality of teaching and organisation of the Process was seamless. Superbly choreographed, the team kept us engrossed and there was no opportunity to get distracted. From breakfast at 7.30A.M. to group and individual activities ending at 10 pm, the Hoffman Process is not for the faint-hearted."*

to their lives, which may be ultimately fulfilling but certainly destabilising.

This stage is followed by learning about forgiveness and compassion for parents and childhood caregivers. After all, parents mostly did what they felt was best for you, however misguided. But for instance, they were brought up in an era where thrashings were common, where they were not nurtured themselves as children, where they were exposed to other problems like alcoholism or domestic violence, the negative patterns get passed on through generations and healing is required.

Forgiveness of your parents whether they are alive or dead is a great healer, and if they are still alive or if you have become a little distant from them, to tell them that you love them can be very cathartic and forms a key part of your healing Process.

Exercises and rituals of breaking the generational bonds ensure that the negative

patterns that have held you back from living your best life, loving to the fullest because of phobias, fears and anxieties will not be passed on to future generations.

## And today?

It has now been four months since I finished the Process, and yet I haven't. It has become a lifelong learning, a way of life. The universe is still throwing out challenges – that are the essence of life. Some I have failed at the first hurdle, and with others I am managing them much better. Now when I lapse back into negative spirals my capacity to 'pick myself up, dust myself off and get back on track' is much swifter and less entrenched. For this I am grateful to the Hoffman Process.

The support from amongst my group has been tremendous, and Tim Lawrence himself is still checking in to see how we are doing. There are a lot of 'post graduate' and refresher activities that you can participate in to expand within the Hoffman community.

As Einstein said, "When you examine the lives of the most influential people who have ever walked among us, you discover one thread that winds through them all. They have been aligned first with their spiritual nature and only then with their physical selves."

Hoffman gives you that opportunity to join the ranks of the good and the great, everyone has it in them. Me included. ■

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