

## What Are Positive Emotions?<sup>21</sup>

Positive emotions have at least *two* noteworthy qualities: they feel good and they reach beyond the individual. Examples include affection, cheerfulness, zest, hope, surprise, and awe. Happy people feel connected to their environment, and unhappy people feel separated from it. Most positive emotions include regard for other people. Compassion, for example, is an emotion that keeps us in touch with others even when it's difficult to stay connected.

Negative emotions feel bad, and they separate us from others. Examples include hatred, anger, disgust, guilt, sadness, shame, anxiety, and pity. Anger pushes people away, and sadness disconnects us if our response is to curl up within ourselves. Pity, for example, is a *slightly* less positive emotion than compassion because pity implies a feeling of separateness from the suffering individual. When we “take pity on” someone, we're moved to help, but we probably don't feel as if we're equals—on the same level.

Sadness is a “soft” emotion—there can be an opening to others, a readiness to receive help. Anger and hatred, in contrast, are “hard” emotions that flatly reject others. Soft feelings—sadness, guilt, rejection, embarrassment—

require that we befriend them and go through them, feel them until they pass on their own. Hard feelings like anger require different treatment. We “let go” or “abandon” anger and hatred, whereas soft feelings become workable when we pass *through* them. When we let go of hard feelings, we usually discover soft feelings underneath. For example, beneath anger is often longing for connection, fear, sadness, or loss.

Negative emotions serve a useful function by alerting us to a problem. Our emotional or physical well-being might be in jeopardy when we feel negative emotions, and we should take heed. For example, bodyguards know that a sense of fear is a better defense against getting mugged than a black belt in karate. Fear will tell us where not to go and when to run. Likewise, sadness can alert us to a disconnection in relationship that could, left undetected, jeopardize the well-being of our families. We don't want to *eliminate* negative feelings—we just don't want to get stuck on them.