

# ...hoffman...



## THE AGONY AND THE ECSTACY Emma Amyatt-Leir experiences the Hoffman Process and shift happens

I like to think I'm a loving, kind and compassionate pussycat but mostly I'm a porcupine, keeping myself well protected inside spiky and defensive packaging. The day I arrived at Florence House in Seaford to do the Hoffman Process the hackles were up. Exhausted and fed-up, I'd been up till 2am because I would be away from home, the office, my daughter, phone and email for nine days. All because of a silly promise to write about the Hoffman Process in Wave.

What I knew from the pre-course work was that Bob Hoffman started running these courses over 30 years ago as a ways of transforming our deep emotional pain. He believed it derived from what he called Negative Love. As newborn babies we need a constant stream of unconditional love which our parents, being only human, are unable to give us. We feel abandoned and as a way of winning our parents back start to imitate them emotionally. As adults instead of being able to give and receive love we are relating on autopilot and end up either acting out our parents' negative traits or having to rebel against them. Either way we are not free to be ourselves.

This was all very interesting but I still didn't really want to do the course, in spite of the fact I wasn't paying top whack (which some people justified as being the price of a year in therapy whilst offering roughly three years worth of transformation). I'd done so many courses I thought I knew it all: Life Training, Landmark Education, Prosperity, Sex, Abstinence, Chanting, Being Silent, Shamanic Soul Retrieval, Eclectic Soul Annihilation - there's not a bit of me that hasn't been deconstructed, analysed, wept over and sent back into the world a little better. They were all fine to brilliant, but

after fifteen years of them I've not just got the tee shirt, I've redesigned the entire outfit.

So I got there late, I couldn't find the house and ended up in someone's kitchen only to find I was in the right place. My warm, clean and pretty room already contained a weeping roommate so I hurried to join the other 20 terrified souls around comfy looking sofas and signed agreements about not reselling the course. I eyed the group. Mostly around my age, youngest 27, oldest in her 60s. All totally normal looking. A posh woman in designer clothes, a longhaired drop-dead gorgeous archeologist, some mums, some business types. I worked out quickly which ones would be my friends and whom I'd avoid.

We gathered in a large, light room and were given work folders. There were four teachers. A tall, wise and compassionate American; A boyish English one, an Australian female occupational therapist with a background in mental health and an older man who told us all quite unashamedly that he was a recovering alcoholic. I decided to ignore him. I got the Aussie as my personal teacher. She sent me off to unpack and gave me my time for a private interview later.

I waited in the cold for 25 minutes to be sure I wasn't late for my one-on-one, I thought they'd be marking me out of 10 for everything I did and said. She asked questions on the pages and pages of pre-course work I'd done about my parents, about my experience of being a twin and what my childhood had been like. She made notes like Misunderstood and Needy and asked whether they were accurate descriptions. Misunderstood sounded glamorous and James Dean-ish. I told her Needy was disgusting, I loathe it in others and myself. So she wrote NEEDY in big letters on a card and told me this trait was getting in the way of being my true self. At least she hadn't written hedgehog.

Saturday's dawn was the first I've seen in a long while. 7.30am breakfast, first tasks for the day delivered at 7.45am. And classes scheduled until 11pm. What could they possibly find for us to do?

The next two days were taken up with getting into our pre-therapied, unreasonable, angry, child-like parts of us and bitching about our parents.

It was hard because I'm very rational and thought I'd forgiven my parents for everything - well ha, ha. The techniques were brilliant and uncovered all sorts of hidden anger and pain about my childhood, things that were still literally crippling me. There were two cathartic days in which I released huge amounts of buried feelings. They used all manner of visualisations, journalling, ceremonies, and physical exercise which took us to a place of physical and emotional exhaustion.

I'll be honest; it was a hideous experience. All the props I use to push the pain away had been removed. We weren't allowed to drink alcohol, take drugs, have sex or do the more subtle tricks like getting too busy to feel anything, overworking, helping others, tidying up obsessively or going for a run. By the morning of day five I'd have done anything to make the agonising, depressed, body-like-lead feelings go away. I said in my morning one-to-one: 'I can't go on, I can't take any more. I can't bear it.' My teacher replied 'The only way out is through, you're in the right place' and led me into the next process. By the end of the following evening I had gone from the deepest despair and hopelessness to standing in a circle with the group, who I now looked on as my dearest friends, singing along to Lou Reed's Perfect Day. The tables had been turned and after all the misery we'd been led through one exhilarating experience after another. I was able to really enjoy myself and felt liberated from my need to always be mature, sensible and cool. Day 6 was the happiest day of my life, on a par with the moment I first held my baby in my arms and looked into her eyes.

After dealing with our parents it was time to look within. The four aspects of ourselves, or our Quadrinity, was the lesson of the day. These are our body, our emotional self, our intellect and our spiritual part. The body is easy, we know it's there in principle, but it often gets ignored and abused. As I explored this aspect I found myself being able to listen and hear that it didn't want to stuff it's face full of all the fabulous food on offer - that cry came from my emotional, needy part. Here at last was the key to my weight problems. My intellect and my emotional child have long been battling in my head. They bicker like this:

Emotional child: 'I'm bored, let's go out and party'  
Intellect: 'No, there's work to be done'

Emotional Child: 'Well I'm hungry, there's doughnuts in the kitchen.'

Intellect: 'You'll get fat, or should I say fatter'

Emotional Child: 'But we've done nothing but work all week, we need a little treat,'

Intellect: 'O.K. Just one'

2 hours later... 'Look at you, you fat pig, you've eaten the lot, how will anyone love you if you stuff your face all day'

They were vicious. Well not anymore, after 35 years of battling they are finally best friends. It has meant in the last week work has been dramatically less stressful in spite of double the workload. I've had more fun with my daughter; she's been easier to look after. I'm in better health and, alleluia, I'm losing weight.

So, in spite of knowing it all, the Hoffman Process really worked for me. I think its success lay in the fact that it approached the profound issues of our life from all aspects. The course is longer than most and being fully residential with no time taken cooking or washing up the only thing to do is face yourself. With a teacher/student ration of 1:6 there was no way to avoid seeing what was there.

I feel full of energy and my complexion is better, that mask I wore was a livid red. Everyone is telling me how different I look. My husband has signed up for the next course, as have the partners of many of the others on my group. They saw we hadn't developed mad, staring eyes, started using strange new words or become evangelical (OK maybe just a little bit). I am just more loving, more open, more compassionate to myself and others. I used to laugh and look like the life and soul, but I think I was crying inside without even knowing it. Now I've learnt how to find the love I so desperately sought, within myself. It's a weird feeling being a pussycat but other people seem to like it and I'm being metaphorically stroked everywhere I go.

## What other people have to say about the Hoffman Process

Patrick Holford, Founder of the Institute for Optimum Nutrition and author of the Optimum Nutrition Bible:

*I was coming out of a long-term relationship and had noticed negative, re-occurring issues I really wanted to change. I had done lots of other workshops before but I saw these fundamental patterns stemming from early childhood and parental programming, which is why I did the Hoffman Process. After the course I felt more complete and happy in myself and that benefit continues, due to the tremendous support the Hoffman Institute offers. I haven't found true love yet but my relationships have better beginnings, better middles and better ends.*

### **Gina Lazenby, Founder of the Feng Shui Society and author of The Healthy Home:**

*A friend took me to a meeting about the Hoffman Process, as personal growth is important to me. I felt intuitively that the course was right for me, even though I didn't know much about it.*

*After the course I went home to visit my family in Yorkshire for the weekend. At the time I was considering moving to San Diego. I wanted sunshine and a healthier life. However thanks to the process I saw my family in a completely new light. It was a homecoming in a true sense. Everything fell into place and after many years Yorkshire started to look really attractive again. I decided to pack things up in London and go back to my roots.*

### **Aaron Schwarz, Actor and Father Brighton:**

*The process was a lifesaver. I had been battling unsuccessfully with anger and depression for twenty years through Buddhism, anger management courses, counselling and 'self help' books. But relations with my wife and newly adopted son were at an all time low. Something dramatic had to change if I was to save my family. I knew it had to come from me. I had realised my feelings were linked to the unresolved painful relationships with my family, especially my parents. I saw an advertisement in Wave magazine. I knew very little about the Hoffman Process but it seemed it would help.*

*The week was totally overwhelming: the most intense and amazing experience I've ever had. And I don't lead a sheltered life! A lifetime of experiences was compressed into one week. Almost a year on, I'm still resonating from its power. I was altered profoundly. I used to fight with my mother all the time. I couldn't be in the same room without arguing. But now we naturally and spontaneously hug and say we love each other. My*

*understanding and appreciation of both my mother and father has grown to new depths.*

*My family situation with my wife and child has also improved enormously, although there are set-backs, when old behaviour rears its ugly head. But we as a family have experienced more happiness together than ever. I had always been driven by the need to succeed. Although I had 'achieved' a lot, what I hadn't achieved was this feeling of simply being OK and loveable as I was. I found self-love. It's a great feeling.*

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