

Emotional Literacy : What is it?

To be emotionally literate is to be able to handle emotions in a way that improves your personal power and improves the quality of life for you and—most importantly—the quality of life of the people around you. Emotional Literacy helps your emotions to work for you instead of against you. It improves relationships, creates loving possibilities between people, makes cooperative work possible, and facilitates the feeling of community.

There is some validity to the fear that a loosening of our emotional restraints could get us into trouble. But emotional literacy is not a mere unleashing of the emotions. Just as important is learning to understand, manage and control them. Emotions exist as an essential part of human nature. When we are cut away from them we become psychopaths. By acknowledging and managing our feelings and by listening and responding to the emotions of others we enhance our personal power. Being emotionally literate means that you know what emotions you and others have, how strong they are, and what causes them. Being emotionally literate means that you know how to manage your emotions because you understand them.

Empaths and Psychopaths

There are two kinds of people who seem destined to be powerful in the world: psychopaths, who feel nothing, or empaths, who are deeply in touch with the feelings of others. (These are two extreme types)

- Psychopaths can easily operate without the constraint – they can lie, steal, extort, maim, and kill without guilt. When they get a hold over other people, they can become enormously powerful. Consider Caligula, the Roman emperor, Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin. History is replete with obvious examples, but examples can be found everywhere, all around: in politics, business, gangs and within certain families.
- Empaths, on the other hand, gain power from their emotional skills. Born empaths have an innate gift for empathy that is fostered by their family and their teachers as they go through childhood and adolescence. Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa and countless others are historical and mythical examples of empaths. Their talent for loving others, fostering loving cooperation, for bringing out the best in people, gives them the power to get what people want most of all; more than money, more than political power or status, people want to love and be loved.

The emotionally illiterate experience is that our emotions are our enemies. When we are emotionally literate we are able to make our emotions work for us and others around us instead of against us. We learn to handle difficult emotional situations that often lead to fighting, lying, lashing out and hurting other people and we learn to enjoy loving, hopeful and joyful emotions instead.

The two extremes of the scale on the following page (zero awareness and total awareness) are unlikely to occur in real life but the places in between can be fruitfully explored.

Emotional Literacy : What is it?

Developing emotional literacy helps people work with each other cooperatively, free of manipulation and coercion, using emotions empathetically to bind people together and enhance the collective quality of life. At the core of emotional literacy is the focus on heart centred EQ. This differs from other approaches – when we see for example, that Daniel Goleman’s *Emotional Intelligence* has twenty index entries related to anger, and only three index entries on love in Chapter One, and none in the rest of the book. Thus, the idea that love holds a central place in people’s emotional lives is not a foregone conclusion. Even as everyone, deep in their heart, realizes the importance of love, it is an emotion seldom discussed in detail by experts in the field.

Emotional Literacy Development is thus, centered in the heart and consists of five principal skills:

1. Knowing your own feelings

Do you know your true feelings? Many people can’t define feelings of love, shame, or pride, nor can they tell the reason these undefined feelings are triggered. These same people are unable to tell how strong their emotions are, even if asked to categorise them as subtle, strong, or overwhelming. If you can’t figure out what your feelings are or what their cause and strength is then you can’t tell how much those feelings are affecting you and those around you.

2. Having a heartfelt sense of empathy

Do you recognize other people’s feelings? Do you understand why others feel the way they do? Do you identify with another’s situation or motives? This is the ability to „feel for“ other people, to feel their emotions as we do our own. Most people have only the vaguest idea of what others are feeling. When we are empathic, people’s emotions resonate within us. We intuitively sense what those feelings are, how strong they are, and what caused them.

3. Learning to manage our emotions

Are you in control of your emotions? Knowing our emotions and those of others is not sufficient to become emotionally literate. We need to know when and how emotional expression or the lack of it affects other people. We need to learn how to assert our positive feelings, such as hope, love, and joy. And, we need to know how to express our negative emotions, such as anger, fear, or guilt, in a harmless and productive way or to postpone expressing them until a better time.

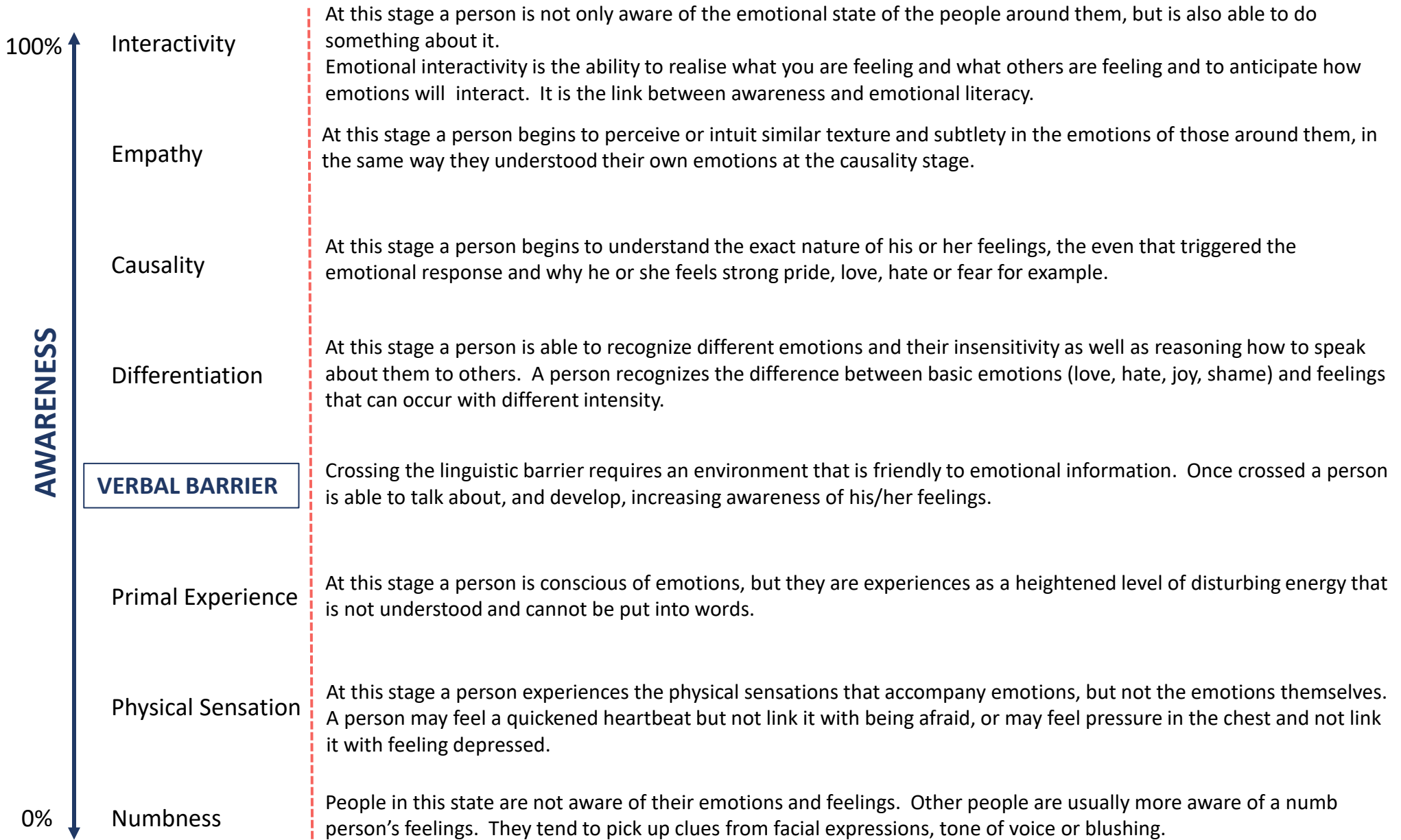
4. Repairing emotional damage

Do you know how to apologize and make amends? Being human, we all make emotional mistakes and hurt others but we seldom take steps to remedy our errors and prefer to “sweep them under the rug.” We must learn to recognize what we have done wrong and fix it. To do this, we have to take responsibility, ask for forgiveness, and make amends. These tasks aren’t easy, but if we don’t carry them out, our un- acknowledged mistakes will permanently poison our relationships.

5. Putting it all together

Eventually if you learn sufficient skills you develop an ability that I call “emotional interactivity.” This means you can tune in to the feelings of people around you, sensing their emotional states and know then how to interact with them effectively.

Emotional Literacy : Measuring Emotional Awareness



Emotional Literacy : An Emotional Awareness Questionnaire

		Yes	No	Not Sure
1.	A I have noticed that sometimes when I find myself with a person who is very emotional I am surprisingly calm and without feeling			
	B At times when I am about to interact with people I don't know well, I feel sensations like heart palpitations, stomach cramp, dryness or a lump in the throat, or shortness of breath and I don't know why this is happening			
	C Sometimes I am flooded by emotions that disorganize and confuse me			
	D From time to time, I am aware of having feelings of anger, from slight annoyance to full blown rage			
	E If another person is emotional, I am usually able to tell what emotion they feel, such as fear, happiness, sadness, hope or anger			
	F I enjoy situations in which people are having strong emotions of love, hope and joy, like at weddings or in church			
		Yes	No	Not Sure
2.	A Sometimes after a difficult time with another person, I feel as if parts of my body are numb			
	B I take one or more over-the-counter drugs to deal with headaches, stomach and digestive symptoms, or body pains that my doctor can't explain			
	C I know I have very strong feelings, but I am frequently unable to talk about them to other people			
	D I am aware of having feelings of fear, from apprehension or terror			
	E Sometimes I can feel other people's feelings in my own body			
	F I am appreciated by other people because I know how to cool down emotional situations			

Emotional Literacy : An Emotional Awareness Questionnaire

		Yes	No	Not Sure
3	A I can easily kill a small animal like a snake or chicken without feeling anything in particular			
	B I am often jumpy and irritable, and I can't help it			
	C I find myself lying about my feelings because I am embarrassed to speak about them			
	D I am aware of having strong feelings of love and joy			
	E I often do things for other people because I sympathise with them and can't say no to people			
	F I am good at helping people sort out their emotions because I usually understand why they are feeling that way			
		Yes	No	Not Sure
4	A I can be around people who are suffering physical pain without getting upset about it			
	B I get sweaty palms around people I don't know			
	C I know I have strong feelings, but most of the time I don't know what those feelings are			
	D I am pretty good at knowing what I feel and why			
	E Sometimes other people's feelings are very clear to me, and that can be a problem			
	F I can usually handle people who have strong feelings and unload them on me.			

Emotional Literacy : An Emotional Awareness Questionnaire

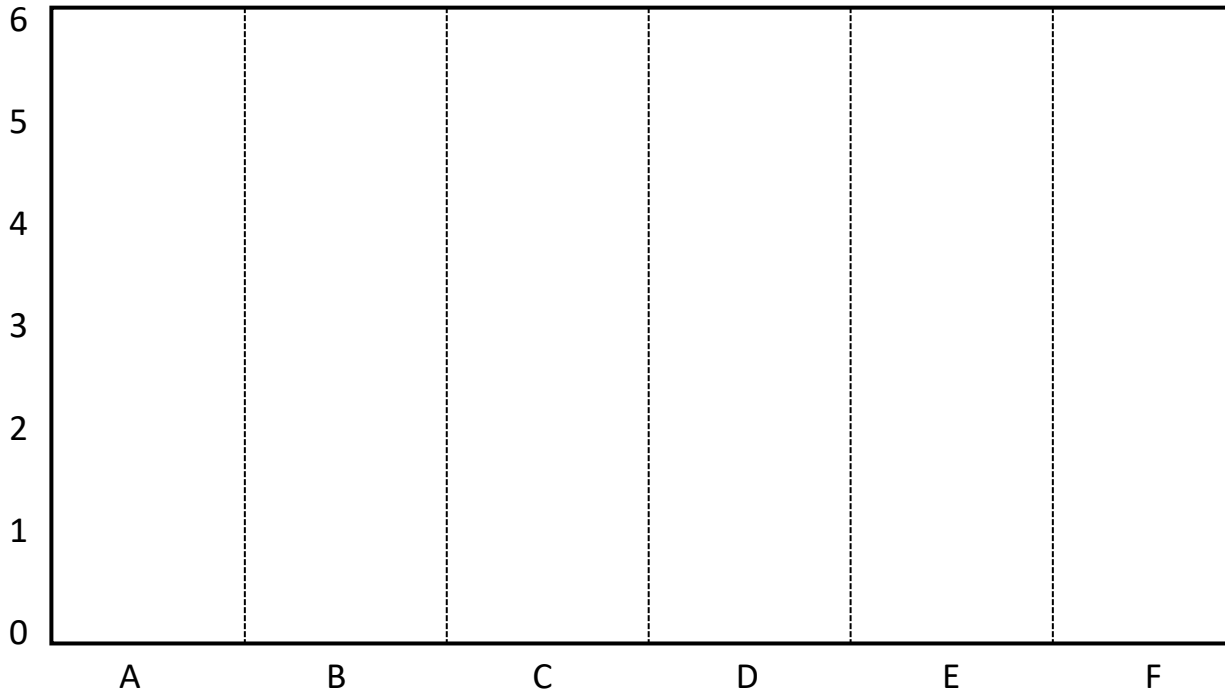
		Yes	No	Not Sure
5	A I am almost always a rational person and have no problems with my emotions			
	B I have been in love and suddenly inexplicably lost that feeling completely			
	C I am overwhelmed by bad moods sometimes			
	D When I have to make an important decision, I usually know how I feel about it, whether it be scared, excited, angry, or some other combination of emotions			
	E In a competitive situation in which I am winning or clearly superior, I feel bad for the other person			
	F When in a room full of people, I can tell how the group is feeling, excited, angry, bored or scared			
		Yes	No	Not Sure
6	A I very very rarely cry			
	B Sometimes when I watch a TV commercial, tears come to my eyes and I don't really understand why			
	C Sometimes when I am feeling bad, I can't tell if I am scared or angry			
	D I am a person who at times feels shame and guilt			
	E If I had the opportunity to shoot an animal like a bird, rabbit or game and wouldn't be able to do it because I would feel bad for the animal			
	F I often change the way I act toward another person because I figure it will make things easier between us.			

Emotional Literacy : A Questionnaire

Count all the YES answers for each letter:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							

Shade in for each total on the graph:



KEY

- The A questions examine emotional numbness (EN);
- B questions test for physical symptoms (PS);
- C questions refer to chaotic primal experience (CE);
- D questions test for differentiation (DF);
- E questions for empathy (EM); and
- F for interactivity (IA).

The profile you generated will help you see what kind of work you need to do to improve your Emotional Literacy

Emotional Literacy : Most Common Example Profiles and their Meaning

1. Low Awareness Profile

6						
5						
4	XX					
3	XX	XX				
2	XX	XX	XX	XX		
1	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	
	EN	PS	CE	DF	EM	IA
	A	B	C	D	E	F

If your profile looks like this you are a person who hasn't paid much attention to your feelings and tends to be puzzled by the feelings of others.

Most of the time you are not aware of feeling any emotions at all; they're not part of your normal life as far as you can tell.

On the occasions that you have a strong emotional response, you feel anger or fear and you do everything you can to overcome that unwelcome state.

Raising your emotional literacy will reap positive rewards

2. Low Awareness Profile

6						
5						
4						XX
3				XX	XX	XX
2				XX	XX	XX
1		XX	XX	XX	XX	XX
	EN	PS	CE	DF	EM	IA
	A	B	C	D	E	F

If your profile looks like this, your emotions are part of your everyday life awareness. You know how you feel, why, and how strongly most of the time.

You feel comfortable talking about emotional subjects and understand other people's emotions, but you may find that your awareness is a problem.

If you talk about your emotions you may create problems for yourself, and if you don't you may feel like a stranger in a strange land where no one sees what you see.

You are in a very good position to develop a high level of emotional literacy.

3. Average Awareness Profile

6						
5						
4			XX			
3			XX	XX		
2			XX	XX	XX	
1	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX
	EN	PS	CE	DF	EM	IA
	A	B	C	D	E	F

If your profile looks like this, you are aware of your feelings but don't always know what to do about them.

You understand some of your emotions but are puzzled by others. You are able to empathize at times but at times you are left cold by other people's feelings.

Most of the time, when in an emotional state your feelings are a bothersome, chaotic jumble which to try to get away from by ignoring them. When you try to talk about them to other people the results are mixed. Sometimes feelings are resolved, sometimes they are made worse.

More work is needed to become fully literate

Emotional Literacy : Developing it

Three Steps :

1. Opening the heart: This comes first because the heart is the virtual seat of our emotions. It is in our hearts that we feel good when we are happy, in love, or joyful. It is here that we feel bad when we are sad, angry, and heartbroken. So I start by freeing the centre of our feelings from the restrictive impulses and influences that keep us from showing love for one another.

2. Surveying the emotional landscape: Once the basic heart- opening ground- work is done, you can look around and take note of the emotional terrain in which you live. You can learn to know just what you are feeling, how strongly, and why. You become aware of the ebb and flow of your emotions. With your loving feelings as a secure base you note the emotions being experienced by others and see how their feelings are affected by your actions. You develop empathy. You begin to understand how all the emotions interact and sometimes create feelings that can flood over us and others. In short, you become more aware of and wiser about your own feelings and those of people around you.

3. Taking responsibility: People make mistakes in their relationships, little ones and big ones. When you make a damaging mistake you need to apologize and take responsibility for your actions. It also stands to reason that you should make amends and correct your behaviour so the mistake won't happen again. Very few people are emotionally skilled enough to apologize sincerely, and without any defensiveness.

Unfortunately, most people are loath to admit, even to themselves, that they have done something wrong. If they can admit it to themselves, they have trouble admitting it to others. Others apologize freely and repeatedly but never do anything to change their behaviour, so their apologies are meaningless. Taking responsibility for our actions and correcting our behaviour is the final phase of developing and applying emotional literacy.

To do so, you must practice with others in your life and particularly those who share your emotional goals.

Opening the heart: With supportive people and friends, you take part in simple acts of mutual affection.

- Name something about another that you value and appreciate
- Catch another 'doing the right thing' and name it ; thank them if that is appropriate
- Tell another, who is important to you about something you have accomplished that you feel proud of and ask for their acknowledgement
- Discuss how you accept/reject acknowledgement
- Publicly acknowledge yourself for something you have achieved that has meant a lot to you

Emotional Literacy : Developing it

Surveying the emotional landscape: You focus on the ebb and flow of your own emotions and those of the people around you. Listening with an open heart you strive to understand emotions and their reasons. In this process we develop the ability to craft and make action/feeling statements AND also accept other's action/feeling statements about ourself. Then, the next step is to tap into our intuition and share that with others.

- Identify something another does that causes upset or aggravation, make sure you are carrying no charge about it. State the description to the other as an action/feeling statement. Make sure to use 'I' statements and not 'You' as the latter will create defensiveness. Own your response. **EG.** When 'X' happens/occurs, I feel 'Y'
- Accept action/feeling statements from others by paraphrasing it – wait for acknowledgement that you have fully heard. Do not explain or become defensive
- Reveal and intuitive hunch you have had. You may use language such as 'I'm sensing that ...' or 'My intuition is telling me that ..'
- Discuss how you might validate the intuition and generate ideas on how to do so

Taking responsibility: You admit that with minor or major mistakes you have hurt people in your life. You apologize and make amends. This means owning mistakes and being authentic in apologising and forgiving.

- Identify something you have done, wittingly or unknowingly that has had a negative impact on another. Name the situation or incident and apologise for it.
- Accept or reject the apology from another on its authenticity
- Ask for forgiveness for something done or not done
- Grant or deny forgiveness when another offers – again based on its authenticity

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF EMOTIONAL LITERACY

- I. Place love at the centre of your emotional life.** Heart-centred emotional intelligence empowers everyone it touches.
- II. Emotional Literacy requires that you not lie by omission or commission.** Except where your safety or the safety of others is concerned, do not lie.
- III. Stand up for how you feel and what you want.** If you don't, it is not likely that anyone else will.
- IV. Emotional Literacy requires that you do not power play others.** Gently but firmly ask instead for what you want until you are satisfied.
- V. Do not allow yourself to be power played.** Gently but firmly refuse to do anything you are not willing to do of your own free will.
- VI. Respect the ideas, feelings and wishes** of others as much as you do your own. Respecting ideas does not mean that you have to submit to them.
- VII. Apologize and make amends** for your mistakes. Nothing will grow you faster.
- VIII. Do not accept false apologies.** They are worth less than no apologies at all. IX. Love yourself, others and truth in equal parts. Never sacrifice one to the other,
- X. Follow these commandments** according to your best judgment. After all, they are not written in stone.