

HEALING THE DARKNESS OF DEPRESSION

Question: *On the subject of depression: I would like to know if there is something I can do to avoid an incapacitating reticence to do anything? I don't want to take pills.*

Answer: If it's any consolation to you at all, you are not alone. According to the National Institute of Mental Health more than eighteen million people suffer from depression. It is reported to be the leading cause of disability in this country and the world at large. The psychic landscape of clinical depression can be terrifying. It is replete with persistent thoughts of suicide, profound feelings of sadness and total loss of energy and motivation. Many people with clinical depression are unable to get out of bed for days on end. Feeling ashamed and guilty they hide behind denial and often are too embarrassed to seek outside help. Often these people, and others suffering from milder forms of depression, look for alternative solutions to conventional medicine and drugs to reverse their symptoms.

My answer to your question will assume that you have *not* been diagnosed with clinical depression but that you nevertheless feel consumed by it. It will begin with a description of the holistic mind/body model. This will be followed by an outline of some of the mind/body self-help steps used in combination with conventional medicine to promote healing. I will follow each self-help step with a brief explanation (in brackets) of the metaphysical principals that underlie the treatment and how it applies to your problem.

The Mind Body Model and The Link Between Stress and Illness

To understand the mind/body model it helps to get a clear picture of the link between stress and illness. Clinical observation confirming how stress predisposes people to various kinds of illness is cogently described by Dr. O. Carl Simonton in his book *Getting Well Again*. The crux of the link between stress and illness is that unreleased, chronic stress suppresses the body's immune system.

The Effects of Psychological Stress

What is germane to our point is that it is not stressful situations that create disease but rather our psychological *reaction* to those situations that make us vulnerable. Psychological stress, in the mind/body model, occurs when a person interprets a situation as dangerous, difficult or painful and decides that they don't have the resources to cope with or escape from its clutches. The effect of psychological stress is particularly acute when it threatens the person's core identity. This often occurs when an individual loses a loved one or spouse through death or divorce, retires from a life long career or experiences significant life role changes. These situations often create a crisis that the individual interprets as beyond their ability to handle. Often the crisis is reminiscent of an early childhood event and so works to re-open old psychic wounds. These conditions produce an inner state of fear, hopelessness and despair. The individual begins to identify with these toxic emotions rather than more nurturing, life-sustaining ones. This toxic emotional state gets recorded in the limbic system of the brain promoting a series of physiological changes to occur in the body that adversely affect the immune system and produce disease (including clinical depression).

The Manifestation of Disease

Almost every bodily system suffers under the duress of chronic psychological stress. For some it manifests as sustained suppression of the reproduction system and problems of infertility. For others it manifests as heart disease, hypertension, *depression*, insomnia and clinical anxiety. For many, chronic stress affecting the body's uptake of sugar produces weight gain, weight loss or the onset of adult diabetes. Suppression of tissue repair caused by stress leads to decalcification of

the bones. Chronic stress leads to severe muscle tension, fatigue, migraine headaches, diarrhea, constipation, arthritis, asthma, gastrointestinal disorders, chronic pain and a whole host of immune system disorders.

Similar to the metaphysicians view, the mind/body model sees sickness, produced by psychological stress, as a manifestation of the inner struggle going on between the self-destructive part of the person consumed with toxic emotions and the more nurturing, life supporting part of the person calling for love, life and wholeness.

At Dr. Simonton's world-famous Cancer Counseling and Research Center the following mind/body self-help steps are used in combination with traditional medical treatment. At the counseling center they are prescribed for individuals suffering from "terminal" cancer and they have produced remarkable results. They are also efficacious for treatment of depression and other diseases. As mentioned above, comments regarding the metaphysical aspects of each step will follow in brackets. []

MIND/BODY SELF-HELP STEPS

Make a Mental Decision To Become A Different Kind Of Person

Through psychological counseling the mind/body patient is encouraged to **a)** make *a decision* to become a different kind of person who is capable of handling all of life's problems **b)** decide to identify *with the life sustaining, nurturing part of themselves* instead of the part that is toxic and self-destructive.

[The key to solving your problem lies not in what you *do* but in what you *think*. Changing your thinking about the kind of person you are will correct the conditions that have brought about your problem. Your new thinking will enable you to take the action necessary to release you from the anguish of your depression.

Depression is a mental process with which you must stop identifying. To do this you must learn to cultivate what is called in Eastern traditions your inner *Witness*. Ask yourself this question: Is the part of me that *notices* my depression, depressed? The part of you that can *assess* your depression is your inner witnesses. It is connected to your higher mind and thrives on love instead of fear. This is the part of yourself with which you want to identify. Why? Because this is the REAL you. You are *not* your depression. You are not even your body. You are the one using your body. Your body's depressed condition is a response to the *misthoughts* of fear created in your mind and projected onto your body.

Think of your body as a learning device. The chief function of a learning device is to enhance learning. If it does not do this it fails. The way to learn from the body is to recognize that it is a blank slate onto which your fearful thoughts have been projected. Fear presents the concept of lack to the body. The body follows the directives and begins to close down. So it cuts off energy, interferes with sleep, appetite, motivation, libido etc. and begins to manifest diseases such as depression.

All forms of disease are messages manifested to bring the *misthoughts* of fear into awareness. Fear comes from being in a state of conflict or having a split mind. It occurs whenever we hold grievances, or choose to do what we wholly do not want to do. The way to change the body is to induce the mind to give up the miscreations of fear it has projected onto the body. *A Course In Miracles* says that *this is the only application of creative ability that is truly meaningful*. One

way to do this is to interpret your bodily symptoms much like you interpret the symbols in a dream so that you can learn from them. In this regard depression can be viewed as symbolic of being *immobilized or frozen with fear* over some situation that you do not wholly want or some form of fear or unforgiveness that you are holding in your mind.

Forgive

Mind/body patients are counseled to practice forgiveness. Because the venom of resentment produces long-term psychological stress the mind/body patient is counseled to make a mental decision to *let go of all grievances* over past hurts and instructed how to use mental imagery to release these grievances. (see exercise on website).

[Every moment of our lives, in every relationship, we are demonstrating either love or fear. Resentment is a product of fear. It is a reflection of deep feelings of self-condemnation, and fear of recrimination. In our relationships, the more we choose to focus on resentment over the faults of others or how we're being treated, the more we end up condemning ourselves. We must recognize that the anxiety produced from our self-condemnation gets projected onto our bodies. Forgiveness withdraws the projections of our ego back into our mind where they can be released and healed. Forgiveness produces inner peace. Inner peace is the greatest boost to our immune system. In Course terminology *healing is inner peace.*]

Visualize Healing

The mind/body patient is guided through deep relaxation exercises and mental images of *the body working together with medication to produce health*. While deeply relaxed, the individual is also prompted to create mental images of what life will look like when health is restored. Deep relaxation combined with mental imagery is expected to be practiced three times a day, for 15-minutes until well beyond recovery.

[The metaphysical healing power of imagery has been understood for centuries. It is based on the principle that the images that we hold in our mind and dwell upon with deep emotion get projected out onto the world. Replacing mental images of despair and with images of hope will alter the projections of your unconscious mind and lift the darkness of depression. I am not suggesting that you replace all traditional treatments with visualization. But I am suggesting that you use it in addition to traditional treatment.

Which brings me to discuss your desire not to use pills. Look at it this way. The body is not the problem. The mind is. This does not mean that it is wrong to use remedies from outside the body to heal it. The fact is eating, sleeping, drinking water, taking exercise are all remedies outside the body. We don't ask how to overcome our "problem" of hunger or thirst without eating food or taking drink. It is impossible in this world for *us not* to use these remedies. You may want to begin your forgiveness process by forgiving yourself for needing medication. In the words of the Course, *do not despair because of your limitations. It is your function to escape them but not to be without them*. Take medication if it helps you to get over the hump of your depression. Just realize that ultimately it is dealing with *effects* and not cause, which is always some form of fear or unforgiveness held in the mind. Keep working on that to heal the cause.]

Set Goals for the Future

The mind/body patient is counseled to engage in goal setting.

[The *writing out of goals* is an outward expression of an inner commitment to decide to take charge of your life. It is the first step in turning thoughts of hope into reality. I would recommend that you write out your goals, and even draw pictures of them, just before falling

asleep at night. Then before you fall asleep ask your higher mind to show you the way to remove any obstacles that are preventing you from manifesting them. Keep a journal of your progress toward your goal. Put your focus on the progress you are making. This will further serve to turn despair into hope.]

Practice Regular Physical Exercise

One hour of physical exercise three times a week is assigned for mind/body patients to restore balance to the immune system. So important is this step that if exercise is too difficult at first, the individual is encouraged to use mental imagery of exercise to begin to build the expectancy of greater health and physical ease in the near future.

[Physical exercise is particularly good for depression because it changes physiology by increasing oxygen thereby igniting new levels of energy. It is also a way of demonstrating love and forgiveness of yourself. All of this is a profound medicine for healing depression.]

Making a decision to become a new kind of person, not identifying with depression; forgiveness, visualization, goal setting and physical exercise are just some of the mind/body self-help steps for healing. Primarily they produce healing by replacing thoughts of fear, with thoughts of love. When all is said and done, all disease can be viewed as the crucible of our redemption when used to learn our lessons of love and forgiveness. Here is a prayer to make this so and heal the darkness of depression..

Dear God, make me an instrument of your peace. Teach me to recognize that the world I am unhappy with is but a mirror reflecting back to me the things that need to be healed in me. When I am withholding love, when I am in steeped in judgment, or lost in despair, please heal my perceptions and help me to see things differently so that I may sow love and forgiveness everywhere and in so doing receive the gift of wholeness that is already mine. Amen.

May you be aware of the peace and gentleness that is with you always.