

How Depression Serves Us

By Kara-Leah Grant

What causes depression? No one knows. No really—not even the medical profession. Do a quick google search and see what comes up. The best they can offer is a few theories of biological factors combined with environmental and behavioral issues. They can estimate how likely someone is to experience depression based on this, but they don't know the root cause. Makes it hard to heal something when you don't know what is causing it! So we *don't* treat depression, instead we treat the symptoms of depression. Big difference. Symptoms of depression are generally divided into three categories—mood, physical and cognitive.

According to the New Zealand website Everybody, mood symptoms of depression include a persistent low, sad or depressed mood, loss of interest and pleasure in usual activities and irritable mood. Physical symptoms of depression include change in sleeping patterns, change in appetite, decreased energy, tiredness, fatigue, physical slowing or agitation. Cognitive symptoms of depression include thoughts of worthlessness or guilt, involving loss of confidence in self and excessive guilt about past minor wrongs. As a result of feeling bad about themselves, people may withdraw from doing things and from contact with others. There can be thoughts of hopelessness and death. The person may feel there is no hope in life, wish they were dead or have thoughts of suicide. People may have difficulty in concentrating or thinking clearly. They may not be able to read the paper or watch television. They may also have great difficulty making even simple everyday decisions.

Treatment for depression usually focuses on medication and psychotherapy. One fools the mind into feeling OK, and the other looks deeper into some of the beliefs and behavior patterns that may be contributing to the depression. However, both focus only on the symptoms of depression—and this can be helpful because it gives the depressed person a lift and the necessary strength to start taking a hard look at what is actually *causing* the depression. But if treatment and action stops with just these two methods, as it so often does, then the root cause is never addressed and a huge opportunity to realign a person's life is fundamentally missed.

So what really causes depression? Here's one possibility worth exploring. What if depression is caused by a soul in crisis? What if it's a desperate plea for attention? A flare above stormy seas during a dark and windy night exploding into the atmosphere? And what do we do?

Turn a giant hose on the flare and wash it away without bothering to follow the trail all the way back to the flare's source—that soul of ours. And if the words *spirit*, *soul* or *consciousness* don't work for you, then think of it like this:

When you are depressed, it is simply the *True part of who you are* telling you that things are *not right*, and that you need to make some fundamental changes in your life.

Hence all of those symptoms above—we become disinterested in our life as it is and have difficulty focusing on anything external. Before we go any further, let's establish a conceptual framework for how we work. First, we have the physical body, the emotional body, the mental body and the energetic body. Simple enough right? Examples of parts of these bodies are our hands, our feelings, our thoughts, and the firing of our nerve synapses. Think of it like the four elements, earth = physical, emotional = water, mental = air, energetic = fire. But there is another element—the fifth element. Aristotle named the fifth element as the ether—that which encompasses all that is. Hinduism and Buddhism call that fifth element *Akasha*, also ether. And Japanese culture named it Void/sky/heaven. Within our body, the fifth element corresponds to our soul. It is the part of us that connects with all that is—with the ether, the akasha, or consciousness. (You could also use a yogic framework to explore this layering of the bodies—the five koshas.)

When you experience depression it is because the four material elements are no longer in alignment with your fifth element—your soul. You are lost and floating away from Self, abandoned on the great expanse of ocean... and so a flare is sent up. Depression arrives—this sense of something being fundamentally 'not right,' this total lack of motivation to engage in the world as it is for you right now, this profound sense of sinking and despair. Those depressed thoughts and feelings are the flare, shooting up from the soul into the atmosphere to grab our attention. If we perceive depression through this lens, then it becomes an opportunity to pay attention to what's really going on inside of us and work to find alignment again. This doesn't preclude the use of medication or therapy – both of these are useful. However framing depression like this turns it into a gift—an opportunity. Instead of something that we fear or resist, it becomes something that we choose to accept and work with.

Depression might be the first moment when you've felt the stirrings of your soul, it's a sign to dig deep inside and start listening to what your soul has to say, it's a neon flashing sign instructing you to change your life now, from the inside out. The arrival of depression in your life could even be something to celebrate! Yes, I know, I said celebrate – because now you are being FORCED via feeling awful to make changes in your life that you were reluctant to make before. Depression is your soul desperately trying to get your attention. *Wake up! Here I am!!! Listen to me!!!*

However, without creating a framework around depression that sees it as an opportunity to turn in and find greater alignment, we can become completely absorbed in the *feelings* and *experience* of depression. Our depression can depress us further—because we don't know what these feelings are about, we don't like them, we just want to fix them and make them go away and we want to feel better again. My own experience of depression demonstrated this perfectly. Denial of my own truth and of the path my soul wanted to walk led to depression. Following the flare back down to my soul, and listening to what it wanted, put me back on the right path and the depression melted away. (With a lot of effort and hard work – *knowing* what's going on doesn't make it any easier to deal with!) However, it becomes very difficult to heal the root cause of a condition when the belief system doesn't accept there is such a thing as a soul, or a consciousness beyond the body, feelings, mind and energy.

This is the conundrum western medical experts find themselves in. Until they can embrace an understanding of the world which includes the spirit, they can not heal a condition caused by the pain of the spirit. The key to unraveling depression is simply being completely honest about WHO you are, and what YOU want. Even if it means facing up to truths in your life you would rather keep hidden.

At its most basic—a misalignment of internal truth causes depression.

- Like, you married your wife because you thought she was hot and now you can't stand her.
- Maybe you pleased your parents and became a doctor when you secretly yearned to be a lawyer.
- Or you really didn't want children at all and can't bring yourself to feel any love for them, and feel *awful* about this.
- Or you miss your home country so much and even though you'd be 'worse' off you really want to move home again.

Our soul knows our truths. We *know* our truths. But so often... they are hidden and denied. Instead, we buy into what society tells us. Like we should be happy because we won Miss Universe—but our true self couldn't care less about being Miss Bloody Universe, and instead wishes she were living in the Arctic charting the movement of polar bears. “How could she possibly be depressed,” society mutters. “She's got everything a girl could want! Fame, money, looks...” But life is so much more interesting and complex than that. We don't all find fulfillment in the same things—even though we're sold the same external desires via our advertising-controlled media. Looks! Wealth! Fame! Possessions! Eternal Youth!

Denial of who we truly are combined with actions taken for external reasons create depression.

- I'll make a million bucks and then they'll love me! So why aren't I happy now...
- I'll be a Sports Star and it will be awesome! So why aren't I happy now...
- I'll marry the richest man I can find and then everything will be wonderful! So why aren't I happy now...

What makes us truly happy is simply being who we truly are. It's aligning our physical, emotional, mental and energetic selves with our spirit, soul, consciousness, true Self. So if you are encountering depression, the most empowering action you can do is to first change your perception of it. Explore welcoming it into your life as a gift from your soul.

Start by getting the help and support you need from your friends, family and the medical profession—medication and psychotherapy are excellent at treating the symptoms. This is important because when you are in the depths of depression, and I know, I've been there—it is *impossible* (nearly) to do *anything*. And to start listening to your soul or true self, you need to be able to take action. With the symptoms taken care of, or at least lessened, and the support and love of those close to you, then you can start to do the hard work that will free you from depression forever. The big question you need to ask yourself is: Who am I *truly*? How do I align myself to truth in my life?

Rates of depression are increasing all over the Western world, and I wonder if it is caused, in part, by our general reliance on external sources to chart our life's course, with little heed paid to the yearnings of our soul. At some point, this total disregard for our own internal truth manifests as a profound sense of despair and disillusionment with life. Instead of seeing the horror of a world plagued with depression, we can instead see it as a giant wake-up call—our collective soul is crying out for recognition.

In the wake of material comfort, it is time to finally understand that true joy, happiness and contentment comes from living an authentic life—however difficult that may initially seem.