

Are You Depressed? Or, Is It Something Else?

by

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There is a saying that depression is anger turned in on itself. That means the anger that you may be holding within your mind has nowhere to go and rather than being expressed outwardly, it is festering inside. Like undigested food that turns putrid, the anger becomes depression. You feel lethargic and dull, uninterested in anything. You may find yourself without energy and not wanting to get out of bed. You may find yourself crying, moody and irritable. Your sex drive may diminish to nothing. You may even feel suicidal. In an attempt to remedy the situation, you seek medical advice and may be prescribed any number of antidepressants. These medications may prove useful as they alter the chemistry of your brain which has been thrown off kilter by the repressed anger. But, the medications are only helping alleviate the symptoms; they do not remove the cause.

There is another saying that underneath anger is sorrow. That means that our anger is really an expression of loss. Our anger is an expression of unresolved grief. This makes sense because the second stage of loss and grief is anger. The five stages of loss and grief, as outlined by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, are denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These stages are not necessarily linear. They may arise in various shifting sequences. Also, current research suggests that there is a sixth stage, the phase of "yearning." Yearning is a powerful feeling and may permeate the other stages as an underlying reality experienced as a hole in our heart - something missing which we desperately want.

I would suggest that the fourth stage is actually sadness, not depression. When sadness is expressed and not discounted, it often leads, in time, to acceptance. Depression itself is really not a natural emotion. It is a distortion of sadness and sorrow, or anger, which comes from loss. The difference between sadness and depression is that sadness runs its course whereas depression can go on for years and years. Our loss can be anything: a person, a shattered dream, a material thing....And we may yearn extensively for that person or dream to return. Our life contains many losses and we are often conditioned to treat our losses in a stoic manner depriving ourselves of the natural response of grief. Our culture frowns upon crying which is way of releasing our pain. Our culture is also rather inept at understanding the energy of anger and how best to express it - to release it. Consequently, when we arrive at the second stage of loss, which is anger, it is often repressed giving rise to the festering which brings about depression. Anger at loss can quickly give way to sadness if we understand and allow the naturalness of sadness and sorrow rather than hiding it away.

As William Shakespeare states through the voice of Duke Vicentio in his play *Measure for Measure* "...Yet in this life lie hid more thousand deaths..." suggesting the myriad of losses, or "little deaths" we experience in a lifetime. Even the natural process of maturation requires us to lose our childhood for adolescence and adolescence for adulthood. We must often lose our innocence for experience and our heart for love. Who has not experienced a broken heart?

And who has not been angry over such loss when in fact sorrow is the real emotion so often disallowed by our culture. But a broken heart is an open heart, a heart that can cry - and feel.

In the Judo-Christian system, our great loss is expulsion from paradise, from Eden. And from that loss has come our existence in this "veil of tears." Sorrow can be found around every corner. And yet, what we find instead of sorrow is hatred and violence. There is a natural sadness that comes from living in this world. But that can be distorted into an unnatural depression as opposed to a philosophical compassion.

Although depression is accepted as a bona fide ailment with an official diagnosis, anger, sadness and sorrow, even yearning, have no such diagnostic status. There are no prescriptive medications to alleviate those natural states. They must simply be lived through as part of the human experience.

If you are feeling depressed, examine your life for the many losses you have suffered. If you are angry, examine your life for the many losses you have suffered. As you begin to touch upon these losses, let yourself feel the sadness and sorrow; cry tears. Release the pain. Let yourself yearn for that which you miss, whether it is a lost love, a recently deceased pet, the passing of a friend or, at the deepest level of our consciousness, the separation of our individual self from the Eden that certainly exists within the secret caverns of our dreams. Although you may be deeply saddened and you may yearn in agony, you will likely feel much less depressed and more alive as a human being. And, as these somewhat unpleasant and often misunderstood emotions pass, you may even find yourself becoming somewhat happier.