

Lessons from my Depression

By ARCHANA SANKARAN



I was in a hopeless, dark place about seven years ago. I was living in a single room on the thirteenth floor of a building. One day it felt like it made more sense to jump from the window than to find the energy to continue with life. I think it was the right choice I made to live on.

When I talk to people on an intimate level, I find that many admit to being depressed at one point in their lives. Many admit to such suicidal moments. Unfortunately there are still a lot of us who prefer to mask our vulnerabilities, especially socially. [Depression](#) is thus a lonely space.

I am sharing my personal story of using alternative healing methods and a change in lifestyle to regain my mental health. I suggest some changes in healing from depression that could be useful to you.

I had recently lost a job. I had been unsuccessful at the attempts to find a match via the Indian matrimony hunt. In my last trip back home, my father had refused to let me come home for a break. He had called me a personal and professional failure. That had hurt very deeply. My mother had watched silently. It felt like there was a numbing pain in my heart and I didn't see a way out.

That morning when death had made sense, it shocked me deeply as well. That I was depressed struck me like lightning one morning in Mumbai. I took action. I wandered out of that building and down the road. I found a psychiatrist's (or was it psychologist's) office close by. I walked in; the woman was not in. I called her and she brusquely told me to make an appointment for another day. A painful moment especially from the mental corner I was in that morning.

I had texted a friend earlier asking for a referral to a homeopath. His reply was quick. God bless him. The homeopath was not far away. I sat numbly in the homeopath's clinic till the last patient left. The homeopathic medicine was like a fresh shot of blood to my body and mind. The next couple of days were powerfully transformative. I got a glimpse of what life could be without the brain fog. I had not known much about homeopathy till then. As long as it worked like it did, I didn't care.

I had carried around the brain fog for years. It had crept up on me slowly and the toxic external circumstances had added fuel over the years. Sometimes I speculate that my depression had a genetic component. It took me months and many visits to the homeopath to get some sense of life back into me. I decided to move to an intentional community. However, the final moment of leaving Mumbai was not smooth. My landlord, by then tired of my unemployed status, threatened to move my possessions to the road. These external shocks hurt me very deeply. One thing is for sure, the recovery from depression should be in a safe and emotionally easy environment.

At this point, when I left Mumbai for Auroville, I had less blackness in my mind than before. I had somewhat more energy. My mind settled at a place above pain. I still could not be functional. I felt shy, awkward and vulnerable in conversations with people. I could only do a minimum of work that I did not enjoy. Any stress would lead me back to the feeling of heaviness.

It was a vacation of sorts in that intentional community, Auroville in South India. I had a little money saved up from work, so I could manage my living expenses. I volunteered at a few places; this gave me the freedom to do the kind of work that rested me. For example, I worked with sorting peanuts in the process of making peanut butter. I think it is one of my favorite jobs! I had to pick the rotten peanut out from a bunch of them. So relaxing. This is another lesson I wanted to share. Simple work gives us a sense of contribution and usefulness.

I started to make some healthy connections with people. Life seemed good. It all lasted for a year and a half. As I started to have more energy for life, I started to take more risks. I started to confront the issues that had led me to the depression. My parents were my first point of confrontation. I had been educated, been medicated, been set up for marriages without my full consent. I had been a dependent person wholly willing to ignore my inner desires so I could fit in to my family's goals. I think this is still very common within the Indian social system.

Telling my parents that some of their choices for me had hurt me mentally was like talking about the buried elephant in the room. My parents reacted with denial and my father with verbal abuse. This began a cycle of verbal abuse for me, my talks with my father.

In the first few years, it threw me back again into severe depression for months after. I don't know even know why I stuck to that family situation. I guess there is a deep internal desire for love and acceptance. I have had to accept that these desires cannot be fulfilled by my family. They are not healthy people themselves.

I don't think we walk into depression suddenly. I think there is a buildup of toxic situations over a period of time that finally causes a breakdown. Unwinding from depression involves waking up to the toxicity and finding choices that are healthy for you. And sometimes this takes a long time.

The period of these confrontations was also a time of growth. I grew as a health practitioner. I wanted a way to soothe myself and also a way to contribute to care around me. I grew a garden, ran a small clinic, volunteered at an animal center. I did a course in psychology as I wanted to understand the dynamics of my family and social relationships more. I was not ready for full-time employment; I was still too scared.

I see now why this was so. Some of the traumas I had picked up while being depressed and interacting with people had led me to social phobia. I was in no hurry to return back to the competition or those people. My opinion of people has not changed much in these years. While recovering from depression, one is hypersensitive. It is difficult to deal with the so-called normal world without a protective insensitivity. While I struggled and shivered through my social interactions in those intervening years, I hope you do it differently. Meditation helped me enormously in finding a ground with people.

My depression had stopped having shut-down days. This was two years ago. It had become a sort of uncomfortable feeling in my body. I liked to be at home and be secure. I found travel or change challenging. I had started making art as a way of expressing myself. Somehow a dance scholarship came my way, and I took it up in a leap of faith. Those weeks of dancing switched me out of the depression completely. Moving my body, although a huge mental challenge, connected me to reserves of energy within me. I found myself happy for no reason. I had forgotten what that simple happiness was. I guess you can say that from that point I have been depression-free.

The intensive meditation courses came this year. I am not frightened anymore of the monsters I worried still lurked in my head. In fact, meditation did the opposite, made me sensitive to the anger and hurt I was storing inside. It has given me a lot of compassion for myself. Bad situations do arise and the body mind reacts to it with negativity. Sometimes overreacts to it. The solution in my case seems to be to move and to change. That I can find my ground over and over again embracing change, still surprises me. This is my current life lesson on my path toward wholesome living.

I shared my story to create hope toward a totally natural way to heal from depression. In retrospect, I can say that there were life lessons to be learned by me and until I learned them the mental loops persisted. It took a lot of openness to life and tenacity to follow the signals my body-mind gave me to recover. In the process I learned about so many talents I had buried inside of me which could never have happened otherwise.

Depression is not something you would wish on anyone, so I don't say "great, you are depressed." However, I hope you find a way to be authentic to your emotional needs. I hope you find a way to heal from depression in your own best way.