
DEPRESSION - BELIEVING THE LIE

by

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As a therapist/counsellor in Northern Ireland, I meet with many depressed people. These people believe in hopelessness (as described very aptly by Roger Horrocks in *Self and Society* Vol XVI No 6). Having had faith in hope for awhile and then lost it, renders one vulnerable, easy prey to pessimism and despair. The defence mechanism, like the barricades erected outside homes, are visible. Taut, tight bodies reveal the pain. Women are particularly prone to this disease and the frightening aspect is, that it is so contagious. They whisper their sad gospels with stooped heads and clenched hands. Soon their listeners mirror their behaviour. The quiet acceptance of their hopelessness scares me. The fires of their despair are fuelled by the insistence that, 'There's nothing anyone can do about it'.

However, some share their agony with me. I give them permission to cry and I tell them it's all right to be angry. Every time comes the soft reply. 'But I'm not angry Phyll, I'm just sad and depressed.' Soon their whispers get louder and like the joy of assisting at childbirth, I listen as emotions change from sad lethargy to frustration

and finally to rage. I urge them to touch their anger: to feel it in their body; to smell it; to get it out so that it does not get buried too deep only to manifest itself at a later stage. They begin to feel the shift/release. The waters break and finally the birth pangs reveal an energy which till now was masked and sealed tight.

So many of them never experience the release - only the unfinished business of still birth - a total absence of the primal energy, the raw sound of human-ness. They still whisper their hopelessness with strange forms of speech, across internalized barricades, still passive, still untouched. It is, as we say in Northern Ireland, 'Business as usual' Nothing has changed. One woman admitted, 'I've gone all in on myself.' Another confides, 'God has forsaken us. The anger of God is on us.' In time this translates into 'God has forsaken me. The anger of God is upon me.' They allow God anger, not themselves. Somehow it always goes back to God in Northern Ireland!

In an island where religion is emphasised on street corners and in most homes, it is not difficult to

believe that it is also the cause of much of the depression I come across. From an early age one is told, 'You are a sinner in need of being saved'. Not too long ago, I talked to a seven year old who declared she was bad. She stated that Jesus had died for her and she had to do something in return. What a heavy load for a young child to carry! Each Sunday she repeated with the congregation, 'Lord, I am not worthy.' This is the ultimate lie, that someone is unworthy, unacceptable, unclean. I have advised many women to change the liturgy and to say aloud, 'Lord, I am worthy. You made all things good.'

The Roman Catholic Church held 'virgins' and 'martyrs' in particular esteem in my young days (in the 50's). One was habitually advised to look to the Virgin Mother and emulate her life-style. This included 'keeping all things in your heart' as Mary did. In other words, 'say nothing and put up with your pain'. In the 50's also Catholic women (married of course) who had given birth, had to be purified before receiving sacraments. I recall my own mother, (who incidently had to undergo the purification ceremony seven times) feeling unclean and sinful for having produced yet another offspring. What an insult to womanhood! A Church which denied contraception to its members, yet demanded purification before being re-admitted to 'Mother Church', revealed a total lack of respect, decency and love. Many woman already suffering from post-natal depression had also to recover from the scars of alienation:

Contradictions in a belief system as promulgated by the Church, must of necessity lead to confusion amongst the 'flock'. One is reminded that God 'loves you' and then as a PS 'if you keep his commandments'. One learns at an early age that God loves conditionally. I am not loved simply because I **am**, but only if I am a good girl. And, sadly, some are never quite good enough, never quite up to standard. One woman confided that she found it difficult to understand the teachings of her Church regarding the statement 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you'. 'If this be so', she said, 'then why do we have to use all the mediators in order to get to God?'

This is a good question, worthy of a reply. This dependency on others or on a Church to save us, surely suggests our inability to know ourselves, and fosters dependency on outside agencies. Some women still believe that God sends crosses to those he loves. Here is the lie again - that I am not responsible for me. God controls me from up there. He knows what is best for me, and that is why I bear this cross. Therefore, for example, cancer can be accepted as God's love. What a strange God, and indeed what an unhealthy philosophy that has such devastating results! I remind such women of the scripture that insists, 'I have come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly.' I remind them that they can choose life in abundance now.

The Bible teaches that peacemakers are the children of God.

Some religions, however, advocate 'just wars' - the taking up of arms for God and Country. Again we are reminded to forgive others their trespasses against us so that God might forgive us our trespasses against Him. This is a God who waits for the first move in reconciliation to be made by us. Many women forgive others quite easily. It is themselves and their sinful, guilty natures they find difficult to forgive. This, no doubt, can lead to low self-esteem and depression. So many women see themselves as hopeless victims, and so the lie lives on. To a lot of people, the sentence, 'You must be born again in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven', entails a total surrender of their own will and judgement to a Church which will translate this scriptural command for them. I urge my clients to read a deeper significance than the ones usually suggested to them.

For example, unless I renew my thought patterns, my values, my belief systems about myself, I cannot enter into my own healing or wholeness. Affirmations such as 'I am renewed, recreated daily in the loving healing energy that surrounds and fills me' or 'I gladly participate in my own holiness', would seem to wipe out old guilt-laden negative verses. The scripture that reads 'worship me in the beauty of holiness' then becomes 'when I am wholesome, integrated, content I am already worshipping.' I use scripture for my own ('clients') ends, I know. I admit this. (I am told Satan does likewise - perhaps we have both 'copped on')

There would seem to be an unhealthy insistence on one's sinfulness in the teachings of some churches in Northern Ireland. Many people believe they are bad, on their way to hell. When one is made to feel sinful at an early age, one enters into a state of alienation, separateness and fear. The ones who feel guilty often come to me. Many times they are seeking a new guru, one to show them the way again; someone to rescue them, someone who knows the route to eternal life, so to speak. Most of the counselling I do is in verifying people's own goodness; breaking the lie of guilt and unworthiness. I try to show them that it is possible to go into themselves and not thereby escape life but find it at the very centre of their own humanity. Right there answers can be found and a whole new meaning of living.

Depression, I realize, takes many forms but basically it is a 'going in on oneself; a desperate retreat from the big bad evil world spells hopelessness; just as the big, bad, evil abyss of one's own unworthiness does. John Riddpath (Self and Society Vol XVI No 6) may find help in meditation. I am glad he does. But in my humble experience, it is the last therapy depressed people need. Some want it. They ask me to teach them so meditate. (I am also a Yoga teacher) But at the same time, they hope they don't have to do anything. With their energies at an all time low, meditation would seem to be just what is needed, a forgetting about the pain, a travelling inwards into the great

quiet dark womb, to the primal silent cave. Here they may cry their sad tears of dejection and believe the lie.

Attempting to interest such people in their bodies, showing them how to make sounds with the breath, how to stretch arms above and away from the body, to open up and outwards away from the positions of defensiveness and to embrace something good in themselves - all this is very threatening for them at first. Eventually the barriers are broken down. To feel and hear sounds vibrating in their solar plexus helps many to delight in their humanness, instead of retreating from it. Allowing people to 'cry to the Lord in a Loud

voice', takes God by the hand and makes Him accessible. Until we actually hear our own cry for help, until we have reached in and touched our own pain, brought out our own beauty, we deny our humanity. But when we can hear ourselves crying for help we may see the lies for what they are.

If the interpretations of the gospels have led to low self-esteem, depression, dependency, hopelessness, then it is time we used some new translations that can open up more creative, meaningful ways of being. I shall continue to preach my gospel of hope. 'And the truth shall make us free!'

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