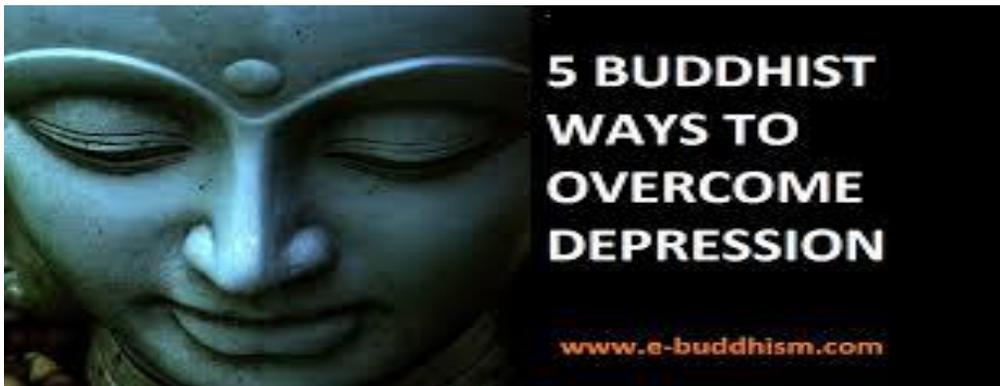


DEPRESSION – Buddhist View



Depression can come in various forms, from a passing blue mood to a severe psychological condition like major depression or manic-depressive illness, which require extensive treatment. The more serious conditions require professional help with for example intensive therapy or medication, there seems to be no easy way to avoid that. General psychology has determined that depressive disorders are often caused by a combination of genetic, psychological and environmental factors, but can also be caused by other illnesses. Women experience depressive disorders twice as many as men, and hormone levels appear to have a significant influence.

Buddhism generally approaches depression from a quite different viewpoint than modern Western psychology. The Buddhist perspective is that an underlying selfishness/egotism is often the basic cause of feeling depressed.

Another important thing to consider is that this selfishness/egotism does not have to be particularly strong in this life-time; according to Buddhism, we often experience the results of our karma (actions) in a next life. So a person could have been very loving and caring for others in this life, but still the results of karma from previous life-times can pop up to create suffering in this life.

A very interesting aspect of reflection on compassion and love is the point that we need to respect, forgive and have compassion not only for others, but ourselves as well.

One of the causes for depression can be a strong sense of dissatisfaction with ourselves; perhaps the page on lack of self-confidence could be helpful? In modern society, it appears that only 'being number one' counts, but this leaves out the other 6 billion people, including 'me'. Does that mean that I am worthless? Of course not!

From notes on a teaching by His Holiness the Dalai Lama:

"There was an empirical study that found that people who have the tendency to use more self-referential terms (I, me, myself) tend to have more health problems and earlier deaths (the Dalai Lama had heard this the day before from another speaker in neurology at a symposium on Buddhism and meditation in New York City). These people have more involvement with the self. Being self-absorbed has an immediate effect of narrowing one's focus and blurring one's vision. It is like being pressed down by a heavy load. If, on the other hand, you think more about others' well-being, it immediately makes you feel more expansive, liberated and free. Problems which before may have seemed enormous would then seem more manageable."

The following message appeared in a Buddhist discussion forum, where self-centeredness was discussed as a possible important factor in depression:

In Buddhism, we use meditation to improve our state of mind by habituating ourselves to a positive state of mind, but repeating the above sort of tantrums throughout the day will only keep us in the same negative state. Just imagine what happens if a perfectly happy

woman suddenly starts saying to herself "I feel miserable, I hate myself" once every five minutes...

The best solution to purify the karma of having depression is to do the purification practice of Vajrasattva. As long as the karma isn't purified, Oattitude. Once the self-cherishing attitude has been destroyed do a short meditate on emptiness.

Mediate on the extensive kindness and precious of all beings. "Every living being is the source of all my past, present, future hap. My own future Buddha, Dharma and Sangha come from purifying my negative karma enabling me to attain all the realizations and to achieve enlightenment. All this happens on the basis of other beings. Therefore every sentient being is the most precious thing in my life. Anything other than working for living beings is totally meaningless." This includes experiencing depression for them. There's nothing to work for other than sentient beings. Anything else is totally meaningless. Experience depression on their behalf by thinking this isn't my depression but the depression of numberless beings, this is their depression, their suffering. To give them every happiness; including freedom all the sufferings of cyclic existence and the bliss of full enlightenment is fantastic!

Feel the joy of it! This is their depression, so the most wonderful thing would be to experience it for them and allow all those suffering from depression to have every happiness. Then rejoice that you have this opportunity to experience this problem of depression on their behalf. "How fantastic it is that I'm experiencing this depression on behalf of all beings!"

Think again and again, "How lucky I am that I can experience this depression for them. I've made many prayers to take others' suffering onto myself, so now those prayers are being actualized. How fantastic

this is! It makes my life so rich, so meaningful! How fortunate I am to experience this depression on behalf of all living beings."

used to achieve enlightenment to benefit all beings in this and future lives, especially all those who suffer from depression- just like using snake venom to produce it's own anti-venom.

Suffering from depression can be a good thing because it allows you to easily see the pain of other people. By using your own experience of depression you can clearly feel the unbearable pain of many, many other people. There are so many people who are depressed and many others creating karma for future bouts of depression. Experiencing depression on their behalf might be even more powerful than practising tantra because if tantra isn't done correctly, on the basis of the three principal paths, it's not a quick path to enlightenment.

You can also do some preliminary practices such as Vajrasattva to purify the negative karma that causes depression.

Depression is a state of extreme unhappiness, described by sufferers in a recent BBC radio program as a black, dismal, dungeon of despair; as a stifling hot room with no means of escape; as a heavy overcoat of pain with the buttons soldered together; and as like walking through treacle. It is characterized by a sense of loss of control over one's life, a loss of enthusiasm, and the inability to enjoy pleasure. One may know what to do, but cannot summon the energy to do it.

The second reason why selfishness causes depression is because it prevents us from doing the one thing that is guaranteed to bring happiness - cherishing others. Self-obsession smothers consideration for the needs of others and we stop giving love. The constant whirl of self-centered thoughts in our heads, "I am so sad, I need to be happy," blinds us to the needs of our family and friends, and we do nothing to

help them. Our self-confidence takes a further battering because we no longer

receive the feedback of love from them, or the pure satisfaction and joy of making them happy. The joy of making others happy is pure because we do not crave it again and again, unlike the joy of self-indulgence which is impure because it never brings satisfaction. Cut off from the world, we sink into unhappiness, self-doubt, and the thought that we are going insane. This is depression.

Buddha's diagnosis of the cause of depression is not petty or discriminative. We all have self-cherishing, and if we allow it to take over our lives and block our love and compassion for others, we will be in danger of following that awful path into depression. Depression does not cause misery, depression is misery, at its worst. In the human realm anyway. Depressives may not believe this, but it can get far worse in other realms of rebirth.

To indicate our own part in the development of depression is not to point the finger of blame and cause guilt. If we can see that the cause is in our own mind, we will understand that the cure is also in our own mind.

Seeing the shattered self-confidence of depressed people, many new-age creeds attempt to cure the problem with the philosophy of "love yourself first." But this is the cause, not the cure. The great Indian Bodhisattva, Shantideva, said, "If you want to be happy, you should never seek to please yourself." Instead, we should seek to please others.

FIVE BUDDHIST WAYS TO OVERCOME DEPRESSION

1. Meditation

Meditation is not easy, and if it was, it would not be able to deliver to you the peace and well-being that it does once you get the hang of it. Like all worthy endeavors, it takes practice, patience and even some hard work in order to get benefit from its invaluable gifts.

2. Begin Each day with a Positive Motivation

Rather than just hoping that you will have a peaceful day and have positive experiences, make it happen. The first feelings of the day are the most influential as to how the rest of your day will be. If you make an effort to make these thoughts a part of your conscious and subconscious awareness, you will not only have a more peaceful day, but affect others in the same manners as well.

3. Practice Mindfulness

The mind, the brain and our thoughts can be wonderful and glorious gifts we can give ourselves, if we use them right. But as we all know, our minds often lead us into destructive patterns of thought, extreme negative inner self-talk and self-deprecation that can lead us into feeling pretty awful, if not downright isolated and depressed.

Being mindful means that rather than simply going through the motions and reliving pain, you will become more aware of your feelings and thoughts, and therefore improve them. By becoming more aware of your feelings, you are more likely to think of actions and solutions as they relate to negative and toxic thoughts.

4. Before you Eat, Offer your Food to Buddha

Start by imagining that all good food is made of a blissful nectar that increases all of your wisdom. Next, imagine that Buddha is lightness in

your heart and that when you eat, you offer the blissful nectar to Buddha, as you are nourishing and filling up your own heart and soul. Visualize this thought and eat mindfully, feeling grateful for the act of eating and for the gift that it is giving us. This will also ensure that you will eat slower and help you to reflect about where your food came from, how it came to your table, to your mouth, and to your well being.

5. Looking Back on Our Day

This is similar to beginning the day with a positive purpose and spirit of intent. When put into motion, it will create a more peaceful and fulfilled day, all around. But just as important as it is to have a positive start to your day, it is of equal importance to end the day with the same degree of mindfulness and reflection. The act of looking back upon your day will not only help you learn about yourself and hopefully help you to be a better person, a spiritual person, and a loving person to yourself and others, but be a happier person as well.