

The Cure for Depression

by Rev. Kathleen Scott

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Two more days until the election of our next president. It reminds me of the story of a preacher who had a son, about whom he was concerned for his future. He decided to perform a test which would reveal his character and possible path in life. He placed four items on his son's bed: a Bible, a twenty dollar bill, a Playboy magazine, and a bottle of whiskey. He then hid behind the door and said to himself, "If he picks up the Bible, he'll be a preacher like me; if he picks up the \$20, he'll be a businessman and that would be okay. But if he picks up the Playboy, he'll be a womanizer, and if he picks up the whiskey, he'll be a drunk. When the young man came into the room, he picked up the Bible, put it under his arm, then picked up the \$20 and put it in his pocket, proceeded to pick up the Playboy magazine and leafed through it, then took a swig of the whiskey. "Oh, no," said the preacher. He's going to be a politician!"

Just thought you might need a laugh at this point! I guess I don't have to encourage you all to get out and vote on Tuesday.

The subject of my talk today is the cure for depression. I will be addressing this topic from both scientific and practical standpoints.

I. Brain Chemistry: It is scientifically impossible to be grateful and depressed at the same time. The study of brain chemistry has revealed some astounding results. In a text entitled *The Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression*, by Alex Korb, a neuroscientist at UCLA, there are four studies cited: first, a group of young adults was assigned to keep a daily journal of things they were grateful for (Emmons and McCullough 2003). Other groups were assigned to journal about things that annoyed them....The young adults assigned to keep gratitude journals showed greater increases in determination, attention, enthusiasm and energy compared to other groups.

"The effect of gratitude is not just limited to young adults who haven't yet been beaten down by the sad realities of life. Even less frequent moments of gratitude were shown to have an effect. The same group of researchers conducted a separate study on adults, which showed that even a weekly gratitude journal was beneficial.. Subjects assigned to journal weekly on gratitude showed greater

improvements in optimism. It also influenced their behavior in a variety of ways. It caused a reduction in physical ailments, so these subjects had fewer aches and pains.

“Another group of Chinese researchers looked at the combined effects of gratitude and sleep quality on symptoms of anxiety and depression. They found that higher levels of gratitude were associated with better sleep, and with lower levels of anxiety. Their results showed that people who showed more gratitude were less depressed. (Ng, *et al*, 2012)

“The wide variety of effects that gratitude can have may seem surprising, but a direct look at the brain activity during gratitude yields some insight. Researchers from the National Institutes of Health, in another study (Zahn, *et al*, 2009), examined blood flow in various brain regions while subjects summoned up feelings of gratitude. They found that subjects who showed more gratitude overall had higher levels of activity in the hypothalamus. This is important because the hypothalamus controls a huge array of essential bodily functions, including eating, drinking and sleeping. It also has a huge influence on one’s metabolism and stress levels.

“Feelings of gratitude directly activated brain regions associated with the neurotransmitter dopamine. Dopamine feels good to get. Gratitude can have such a powerful effect on your life because it engages your brain in something called a “virtuous cycle.” Your brain only has so much power to focus its attention. It cannot easily focus on both positive and negative stimuli. On top of that, your brain loves to fall for the something referred to as the *confirmation bias*: that is, it looks for things that prove what it already believes to be true. And the dopamine reinforces that as well. So once you start seeing things to be grateful for, your brain starts looking for more things to be grateful for.”

“After WWII, Western medicine began to study scientifically how perceptions, emotions, attitudes, thoughts and perceived meanings profoundly affect the body, sometimes dramatically.

Biofeedback experiments “demonstrated that in only a few moments the mind can move matter, made meters move dramatically by willing, trigger bells and whistles on sophisticated electronic gadgetry merely by taking thought, by changing one’s mental images and feeling states, leading to the conclusion that thoughts deserve, as genuinely as any drug or surgical procedure, to be called ‘therapeutic.’” *Healing Words*, Dr. Larry Dossey.

II. Energy: everything in the universe is made of energy, and everything is vibrating. No matter how solid something appears, the atoms are vibrating at a particular pitch. In teaching voice lessons, I demonstrate how different parts of the body will amplify sound. Some of you may know that I was an opera singer for many years in Europe and NYC. Opera singers do not use microphones unless they are singing outdoors. They learn to use something called “sympathetic vibration.” You are all probably familiar with the joke about the soprano that sings her high note so loudly, it breaks a glass. Well, technically, that is possible provided the soprano is singing the same pitch as the level at which the atoms in the glass are already vibrating. So, in singing, we learn that low notes vibrate the chest wall (sound example given here); middle notes vibrate the facial bones and the hard palate (another sound example), and high notes vibrate the upper head bones (final sound example). In just such a way, thoughts, moods, and feelings have vibratory identities and impact energy, and since everything is made of energy and everything is vibrating, your state of mind is sending out messages all the time. As physicist, Erwin Shrodinger, put it: “Mind, by its very nature, is a *singulare tantum*. I should say, the overall number of minds is just one.”

III. L’il Abner: Most of you are old enough to remember in the funny papers L’il Abner which had a character named Joe Btfsplk, who always had a dark rainy cloud right above his head, and everywhere he went he brought bad luck, a jinx. Wherever we go, with whomsoever we interact, we are taking with us a “thought atmosphere” and having a direct effect upon how things unfold and upon the quality of our relationships.

IV. The Healing Properties of Sound: Every Sunday, we sing hymns of one sort or another. In India, in Hindu communities they sing a wide variety of chants; in Buddhism, too, chants are sung, in Tibetan Buddhism, they are sung along with mudras (specific had movements). In Native American culture, the use of drums, chants and dance is still prevalent. Why? Because sound directly impacts body chemistry. When one sings, the immune systems works 100 times more efficiently and when one sings in a group, 400 times more efficiently. Sound changes one’s mood. Let’s experiment – we will all sing OM three times together. (Singing). Now let’s try sound with a mudra: AH three times with arms outstretched to the sky. In that simple exercise of sound, OMs and AHs, your body chemistry was altered.

V. Levels of gratitude: Thich Naht Hanh, a famous Vietnamese author and Buddhist monk/teacher, once said, “Be grateful for your non-toothache.” I used to laugh so much when I heard that because all my life, from the age of 2 to 50, I had terrible dental problems: pain, braces, root canals, abscesses, gum infections - one dental disaster after another. Finally, right before I began my

ministry, I had to have all my teeth removed and have dentures. Since that time, I have never had another toothache! So I am continuously grateful for my non-toothache!

In a book entitled, *The Power of the Mind to Heal* by Dr. Joan Boresenko, co-founder of the Mind/Body Clinic at the New England Deaconess Hospital and an instructor at Harvard Medical School, she writes, “[we should practice] gratitude in our life for all things that do not need healing...when you find yourself stuck in awfulizing about the things that seem wrong, remember to say a prayer of gratitude for all the things that are right.”

I used to get a regular massage and I used that opportunity to bless and thank each part of my body as it was being massaged, i.e., thank you, feet, for working so marvelously on my behalf, you have carried me many miles, thank you, digestive system, for faithfully breaking down all the foods I have eaten, thank you, arms, you carried my children and bags of groceries, and held onto my dance partners. It is easy to take for granted that which we are used to. We also can thank the earth, the bees, the trees and flowers, the fruits and vegetable for nurturing us, the sky for rain.

VI. Finally, a Bible verse: In First Thessalonians, 5:18, it says, “In everything, give thanks.” It is important to acknowledge and remember that meaning is *where* you see it and *how* you see it. Dr. Yujiro Ikemi, Japan’s leading researcher on spontaneous remissions in cancer patients noted that in every case, there was a shift in awareness that made something happen in the body.”
Unconditional Life, Dr. Deepak Choprah

In *Quantum Healing*, by Dr. Deepak Choprah, he states: “[When] you give in to helplessness and fear, the complicated chain of the immune response, with its hundreds of precisely timed operations breaks apart. You start sending out the neuropeptides associated with negative emotions, these latch onto the immune cells and the immune response loses its efficiency...the decreased immune status of depressed patients is well documented.”

What about when things appear to go wrong, or you have to deal with difficult people or an illness? One sage stated in a famous prayer, “I am grateful for all these challenges and all these difficult people too, for they drove me to You.” Practicing gratitude releases an energy which can begin to turn things around. What has often appeared as a negative circumstance is many times really the pivotal point for a new direction that one needs to take. Often, in retrospect, you can clearly see that it had been a blessing in disguise and had led you into a deeper and more meaningful place.

VII. In conclusion: Meister Eckhart, a 13th century Christian mystic, once said, “If you say only one prayer in your life, ‘thank You’ would be enough.”

So, the cure for depression is gratitude, all the time.

1. Create a gratitude journal and every day, write down 5 things for which you are sincerely grateful. Allow yourself to really *feel* that gratitude. Find 5 different things every day – you will see that you will need to expand your awareness and definition of blessings in order to do so..

2. Experiment with sound and mudras (motions): Sing three OMs and three AHs, raise your hands to the sky – sing loudly and feel the vibrations in your body. Do it again! Or sing your favorite hymns. I have written many simple songs designed to change the body chemistry in positive ways. Free CDs to anyone who wants one.

3. Practice “In everything, give thanks.” See if you can find the blessing in what appears to be a an upsetting circumstance, an illness or a difficult person.

4. And, finally, remember, you are always creating a “thought atmosphere” that is affecting everything and everyone. Be a blessing to the whole world with your personal atmosphere of joy and gratitude. And know this: it is impossible to be depressed and grateful at the same time!