



## THE GIFT OF DEPRESSION AND A CHINESE MEDICAL VIEWPOINT

By Linda Joy Stone, O.M.D., L.Ac., Dipl. Ac.

### ***A Different Way of Viewing A State of Being***

Depression seems to be affecting millions today, with anti-depressant medication becoming the most widely prescribed drug. In the past, this emotional state was referred to as melancholy, feeling mournful, gloomy or in grief. My Mac thesaurus lists “doldrums, down cycle, rut, apathy, boredom, emptiness”, as a few synonyms for depression. I prefer “gap, space and opening”.

What is it we're really feeling? Are we afraid to feel emptiness or our dark side, which may be essential to our growth? In a culture outwardly directed and geared to feeling good, darker, more reflective moods associated with depression can feel very uncomfortable.

Thomas Moore, in his inspirational book, *Care of the Soul*, says, “because of its painful emptiness, it is often tempting to look for a way out of depression. But entering into its mood and thoughts can be deeply satisfying. Depression is sometimes described as a condition in which there are no ideas—nothing to hang onto. But maybe we have to broaden our vision and see that feelings of emptiness, the loss of familiar understandings and structures in life, and the vanishing of enthusiasm, even though they seem negative, are elements that can be appropriate and used to give life fresh imagination.”

In Ram Das' informative book *Still Here—Embracing Aging, Changing and Dying*, he refers to depression as a time of reorientation and part of the Soul's evolution. He states that “perhaps this depression is part of what Saint John calls ‘the dark night of the Soul’, in which the Ego experiences a kind of death in order to allow the Soul to be born into its own full Awareness.”

I think that what we call depression is affecting what Carl Jung referred to as the “collective mind” and may be a clue that we're experiencing collective growing pains. This underlying low-grade discomfort deep in our souls may want

something from us. This may be the turning point of going from an outer directed, material life into a more inner directed, spiritual one where we can merge with the authority of our own Soul. Going into the depths of depression may create the fertile ground for a rich and soulful life and a renewed sense of self.

### ***How Chinese Medicine Views Depression***

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, we look at how the energy is flowing through the body. Is there a deficiency of heart, kidney or spleen energy? Is there constraint of the liver energy?

How does the fire element and the spirit of the heart look as it is reflected through the eyes? How is one's water element, kidneys and will as reflected through the bones or expressed through fear? How is one's wood element, liver and anger as reflected through one's body tension? How is one's earth element, spleen and assimilation of nutrients and ideas? How is one's metal element, lungs and relationship to one's body and the environment?

Depression can be found in an imbalance in vital energy (Qi/chi), be it on the physical or emotional plane. Acupuncture helps free up the blocked energy and redirect its flow where it is most needed. Acupuncture can help open up the heart and get us in touch with our forgotten nature. Acupuncture also helps relieve associated body tension and discomfort.

Whatever your state of being, it is important to identify it, without trying to figure it out, and decide whether or not you want assistance. Just having a witness acknowledge your "dark night" without judgment can be enough to allow change to start happening. Therapeutic counseling or "soul work" can also be of profound benefit for those willing to go deeper into their process.