

### **Courage & Depression:**

One way to understand depression is to see it as a problem that has to do with courage. It develops in people who have, most often by necessity, become afraid of the unavoidable dangers of life. People who have had to give up on their independent development because they have had to become immersed in what others do, think, or need. People who suffer from depression will usually have lived a life having to restrict themselves. The result being that the less they do the less they can do, and the more helpless they become.

The more someone is forced to shrink back from the difficulties and challenges of life, the more they naturally begin to feel inadequate. It is inevitable. If someone's life has been a series of "silent retreat's" they end up wedged into a corner and have nowhere else to hide. The depressive person has learned that, no matter what they do, "it makes no difference". This is why depression is sometimes referred to as 'learned helplessness' – i.e. that the person has learned that being helpless brings the least amount of pain.

Therefore, the fear of the consequences of living a full life leads to an excessive sense of failure, impotence, inadequacy, and rejection. Finally, the individual does not dare to move. The depressed person may lie in bed for days, letting the housework pile up, plugged into the small corner of their life.

Life itself demands the willingness to risk oneself on a daily basis. Every day life asks us to arise and face the unknown, to prove ourselves again. Every one of us has to find courage to face this uncertainty. "Will I be good enough today?" "Will I be adequate enough as a parent today?" "Can I still prove myself at my job?" "Is my life secure today?" "Will my husband still love me today?" If the truth were known, each day requires courage and self-belief.

The depressed person, for genetic, family, or circumstantial reasons, begins to retreat from life's unpredictability. Life demands independence and self-responsibility and the courage to face into it. In trying to not put a foot wrong, in trying so hard to not let others down, the depressed person begins to sink deeper into their shell.

Most people find it hard to understand depression because they are in denial of their own fears and dreads. So entrenched are they in their security defining rituals and status confirming routines that they find it hard to understand the anguish and terror of the depressive. They prefer to label depression as some form of selfishness or self-pity. They label the depressed person as someone who refuses to grow up.

However, they forget and deny the real fear that influences their own life. The fear of difference, isolation, loss of support, loss of power, is within everyone. People can protect themselves from the terrors of life by getting a spouse, a job, a family, success, substance-enhanced good feeling, and by building a security-fence of social status.

However, when these things fail and he or she is threatened with the loss of any of these things, how logical it is that he or she gives way to some form of depressive withdrawal.

The loss comes because of a physical illness, the death of a family member, the infidelity of a spouse, the breakup of a marriage, the mental health of a child, or just chronic stress. In fact chronic stress illustrates how one cannot spend everyday of one's life trying to prove oneself. One cannot pretend to be in control and supremely competent when deep down one is unavoidably average. At these times he or she discovers that all the status and securities do not protect them from life itself.

In many ways depressive withdrawal from life into helplessness and dependency is the last and most natural defense available to any creature. Dependence on others is a basic survival mechanism. When someone gives up hope in his or her ability to cope he/she is reduced to a state of depression.

The guilt of the depressed person is understandable because they feel the sense of failure in not being able to fully live their lives. They feel guilty because they know very well that they have, until now, failed to live up to their potential because they have twisted and turned in their efforts to be "good" in the eyes of others.

The truth is that we are not in this world to please others, nor are others there to please us. If we can but grasp the truth, we are in life to be heroic in facing the challenge of everyday life and to be fearless in our pursuit of happiness, regardless of what anybody thinks. The integrity of the self is more important than anything. Don't give up!