

Highly Commended = Anonymous (NSW)

There is the human soul...

There is the human soul that tries to free itself of suffering. There is also the body's physical capacity to re-energise and regain perspective. When that freedom to renew isn't found, immobility engulfs us in a sea of psycho-energetic depletion.

It doesn't start with words but feelings, a weight in the heart, cringing at insensibilities, as if operating from a different paradigm of perceiving. Depression, as I understand, is provoked by one's own self-observations against circumstances in one's environment, reality, and how one perceives oneself relative to expectations. It is the inability to protect oneself from the attributes of suffering within that reality. Depression is a pause in adaptability. Conquering depression comes with imagination, the tool that re-creates our perceptions and experiences, from both a physical energetic perspective and a mindful spiritual view.

My sibling has blocked her mobile, I cannot reach her unless she chooses to reach me. She only contacts at her own convenience. Her despondency creates a suffering I cannot ignore. A pain resonates with earlier feelings of hurt. This highlights my need for connectivity and loving care, and punctuates the absence of the latter. My mind interprets, judges, processes. There is intellectual as well as emotional activity. Anger and injustice are aroused. My critical mind processes and re-processes the injury. Feelings arise and an invasive rationalising begins, "This is not someone who cares for you, they have left you in the dark, ignored your daughter's twenty-first birthday, accused you of poor choices for a sick mother. If they cared they would not... It is painful, and it makes me want to weep with sorrow, and I do. I also compare: "my sister should be more supportive. Aren't sisters part of flesh and blood, meant to care? I cannot understand. I judge from my expectations, from standards I believe in."

Darkness clouds my thoughts, a weariness of heart, I am angry for what I feel. She seems none the wiser. I cannot separate what should belong *to* me from outside of me. The behaviour's emotional weight has consequences that cannot be ignored, "her issue, not mine". Yet it transfers to me – I feel the sting and ponder over the circumstances, considering them wrong. A discomfort crawls over me. I cannot reconcile this, that I should not feel offended. A dark cloak weighs down on me, I brood in its shadows, wistfully. I mull over the situation, make judgments, my feelings react to the circumstances, as I perceive them. This is not ok, I tell myself. It doesn't *feel* right, I sense. As such my *feelings* are in judgement mode as well. "She has invited you for Christmas lunch", my uncle says. Why does *he* tell me and not *her*?"

I have lost my job. Thankfully my friends stand by me. I buy presents for my sibling's children. My mother also buys but forgets my child... says she is too old. My mother and my siblings each forget my daughter's 21st. Not even a card! I struggle with this oversight and the many past overlooked experiences. I feel like the invisible woman, grieving the long slow loss of my husband to cancer and feeling my daughter's expectation of a better life than ours. I am not happy. I do not care for the sport of sibling wars, nor Christmas charades. This is not ok and I am sad that it is this way.

Am I meant to perform like a wind-up monkey, with cymbals – playing happy families, 'clang', 'clang'? I do not want to go there for Christmas, or the Sunday before, as is the custom with my family. There is something seriously missing. "You are making something of nothing, you've got it wrong, you've upset your sister" my uncle says. My intuition is screaming, "I do not want to go there, something is terribly wrong". He has just invalidated my feelings, invaded my perceptions, as my father did. "You are imagining things pet, and upsetting your mother" he would say. I always knew something was wrong then with my mother, and that something is

wrong now. Why are we replaying these old scripts? My mother couldn't bear to see me – sadly, I 'imagined' nothing, she was seriously not well. Dad couldn't see that. "It isn't ok" I blurt out to my uncle, "that I'm treated like a disowned shoe, revived again for Christmas. "It is not ok to abandon gestures of connectivity, like my daughter's 21st, and that you sit there each year while my mother makes excuses that *my* child is too old for presents. Even having lost my job, I could not deny the children presents. It is not ok that my sister fails to communicate throughout the year, knowing the critical circumstances I face, vetting my incoming calls, still expecting me to play happy families at 'our' Christmas gatherings. Not 'our' Christmas. I have said it now. They can blame me, scapegoat me in my absence, and I am freed from the hypocrisy, from the charade of this distasteful moment, .33 recurring repeatedly in my life.

The role-play brings on the dark princess, drawing the mind into a downward spiral. She is at the pit of my stomach, an infinite emptiness. She hangs onto my heart and twists. She consumes all my energy dragging down on it, chained to the soul. I say "No, it's not ok, I'm not coming!" I am sad, but not powerless.

Depression comes when we struggle with our place of value in the family and its echo in the other parts of our lives. When the script contradicts or devalues who we really are, and we do not stand up for ourselves, then depression takes a grip, we collude, allow ourselves to be helpless victims of unspoken scripts of the past. They resurface under pressure: stress, illness, a crisis or set of circumstances. Like Sisyphus, we slip back into carrying the heavy stone up the winding path, to the very top of the mountain. When we get there, it rolls back down again. Here, at this pivotal point, we have a choice, we can break down and give in, knowing we are repeatedly condemned to carry this boulder to the very top, and repeatedly watch it roll back down again. Or, like Sisyphus, we can choose to triumph – survive our destiny, live another day, despite the circumstances, win the battle of perception.

Depression arises when we transgress the laws of our own true nature, or stress to be what we are not, and become in conflict with our selves. Here, the soul weeps loudly as we struggle against a paradigm that is not our own, bound to "yes" when we mean "no". Sorrow's in perceiving; understanding thoughts, actions, words and deeds from our own paradigm of being, thinking, sensing; this being so strong, we're less able to connect to others' views. At times, we are deafened by the silence of our lone singularity, caught in the sorrows of our sensibilities – we dare to expect more from a world that falls short of our idealised values.

Depression is feeling the fall from the height of expectations. Depression is the darkest night – without a star of hope or inspiration that this need not be. Depression is the death of each breath without desire for the next. Depression is abandonment, unable to look to the new day for fear of repetition. Depression is losing sense of self, not transcending ego. Depression is Narcissus drawn into a reflection of suffering, unable to pull away. It is winter, filled with darkness, empty shadows, as Persephone is taken to the underground and nothing flourishes for months. Depression is like death – buried in a realm of processing loss. What emerges is the birth of the new, built on re-kindling inspiration and renewal. At worst, things stay the same.

Overcoming depression can occur when we unhook from identification with ego's pain and fear of silence; or when we free the soul to commune with the elements. Overcoming is letting go of ideal expectations, just letting things be as they are.

Overcoming depression is stepping out of the shadows of disempowering stories, and transcending paradigms of perception to re-create new ways of seeing, being. Overcoming is stepping away from the ones who love us, yet who have lost touch and can no longer see who they are, let alone who we are. Overcoming is caring for the body temple and listening to the cry of the soul within, dancing its rhythm with passion, feeling flow at the very core of our being.

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Overcoming is communing with our deep inner core, deliberating with those who speak with our very souls – finding dear hearts connected as friends to enlighten the darkness. Overcoming is allowing ourselves to listen to the healing processes within the darkness: signals that tell us to stop, re-think, change, listen to the music of the soul and start afresh, follow what we love, allow the tides of change and stop crashing against old waves.