

Reprinted by
 permission
 from
 Shambhala Sun.

"Blue Dream Clouds II"
 Monoprint by
 Wendy Mark

Determined to Heal *"Depression is absolutely impermanent and dependent on conditions,"* says GEHLEK RINPOCHE. *"The most important thing is not to submit to the habit of undermining ourselves."*

WE ALL KNOW PEOPLE who have experienced depression. Many of us have experienced it ourselves. It paralyzes you. You don't want to move. You don't want to do anything. You don't even want to get up. You just want to lie there with your doors and windows shut. Everything feels blank, empty, meaningless, and joyless.

Where does depression come from? The causes seem to be different for different people. No doubt, some depression is connected to a chemical imbalance. When people started asking me whether it's possible to be a spiritual practitioner if they take prescription drugs for depression, at first I was a little hesitant to give an answer. But I have seen how much these medicines can help people, particularly those whose depression is connected to a chemical imbalance. People who have a spiritual practice often worry that they are a failure if they take medication. They think it means they are weak-minded or not making enough effort to help themselves. Not

at all. Sometimes medication is the only thing that will help, and with that help, the person can focus much better on their spiritual practice and their whole life.

However, many of us who do not experience chronic or severe depression still get very depressed from time to time. I would like to relate what I know about this type of depression from the point of view of Tibetan Buddhism.

From that perspective, a lack of self-appreciation and self-compassion causes depression. We have a habit of underestimating and undermining ourselves. I notice that people in the West can be extremely hard on themselves. You encounter an obstacle or experience a setback and you think, "I had the opportunity, but I blew it. I couldn't do it. I am incapable. I am worthless." Rather than appreciating or accepting themselves, people will think something is wrong with themselves and find fault with everything they do.

As human beings, we have tremendous capacity, the same capacity the Buddha had when he was a human being. Every single one of us has the same pure and open nature as the Buddha, no matter how covered-over it may be by depression or any other difficult mental state. We are all entitled to become

GEHLEK RINPOCHE is the founder and president of Jewel Heart in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the author of *Good Life, Good Death: Tibetan Wisdom on Reincarnation*.

Importers of Fine Buddhist Art

TARA & COMPANY

Thangka, Statues and Custom Orders

ONLINE CATALOG
www.taraco.com

Designed by www.dsoa.com

enlightened. Whether we do it or not is our choice. Enlightenment is not a gift from somebody else. It is our own achievement. The only real obstacle to development is underestimating ourselves and submitting to negative addictions, and when we are depressed it becomes very difficult not to submit. It is important to remember that everything we experience, including depression, is a dependent-arising: its occurrence depends on causes and conditions. Depression is absolutely impermanent and dependent on conditions. So we need to help ourselves and create positive conditions.

There are many things you can do to help yourself through depression. The most important thing is to first recognize the situation. Cut out the denials completely. Denial is the breeding ground for negative emotions. Acknowledge the problem and investigate.

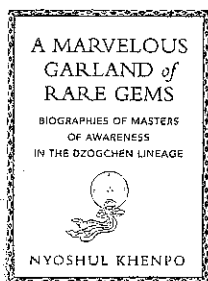
Yes, you are suffering. That is true. But the reasons you give yourself for why you are suffering may not be true. Have a dialogue with yourself. Find the true reason you are depressed. At first, it may not be so clear to you, but after a little while the truth will begin to emerge. Depression is interlinked strongly with fear and the thoughts and feelings that fear produces. You think you blew it, that you are incapable, that you are not good enough. You think you are a terrible person and are punishing yourself. You are telling yourself things that make the depression stronger—after some time your depression can become a habitual pattern.

You may attribute your depression to being abused or neglected as a child. I don't want to downplay the terrible suffering from being abused. But even so, it is important to realize that the abuse happened in the past. You have survived and you are not being abused by anybody now. You are being tortured by the painful memory and are unable to let it go. You have to recognize the suffering you are carrying, but then you also have to move through it and move on. No matter what has happened to us, we are responsible for what we do with the life

CHAGDUD GONPA FOUNDATION'S

TIBETAN TREASURES

announces the release of



A MARVELOUS GARLAND OF RARE GEMS *Biographies of Masters of Awareness in the Dzogchen Lineage*

NYOSHUL KHENPO RINPOCHE
TRANSLATED BY RICHARD BARRON

“...Nyoshul Khenpo maps out the ‘ultimate lineage of direct transmission,’ the heart of all the lines of transmission of Dzogpachenpo from the primordial buddha to the present day, showing the connection between masters and students in an unbroken line of succession. His work stands

out because of its completeness, for it includes all of the distinct lineages, along with the lives of the students of the great masters, stories from the oral tradition, and different teaching styles. **Anyone who matters is represented here, every link in the chain, including masters of our time.**”

—from the Introduction by SOGYAL RINPOCHE

Place your order online at www.tibetan-treasures.com or call (877) 479-6129
or (330) 624-3706 • 49.00 • ISBN 1-881847-41-1

we have now. We have the capacity to heal ourselves, if we allow ourselves to do it.

The reality is that we have the capacity to heal ourselves because our deeper nature remains free no matter how much confusion and fear we carry. The traditional example is that our deeper nature is like the open sky that is always there, even when covered by dark clouds. Yes, it is important to acknowledge what has happened in the past. If you don't, you will have to go on revisiting the incident and relive it over and over. But then you have to think, "That was quite some time ago. I still have my life and I have the opportunity to make different choices. I can choose to help myself." That is much better than telling yourself, "I have been wounded. I will never heal, and finally I am going to die." That doesn't help at all. This is how we can begin to stop undermining ourselves.

When you look more deeply into the nature of depression, you will see that the external circumstances that contribute to our suffering are nothing more than triggers. The real origin of our suffering is ego. The fearful energy we have accumulated through our ego in life after life causes us to suffer tremendously. Abuse during childhood or other painful experiences are a triggering point. They do have an effect, for sure. But they are not the root cause. Understanding this, you will have more strength to stand up to the negative forces that keep trying to take you over. You confront the big lie of the ego. You see the truth. If you keep doing this, gradually it will give you a reliable experience that cannot be taken away by anything else. No matter what negative thoughts your mind tries to sell you, you won't buy them. You will see through them.

In Tibet, we were taught several traditional techniques for dealing with what we sometimes called a "sinking mind." When your mind is clouded by depression, one method is to consciously direct your attention to something positive. When I was a child in Tibet, some of my teachers used to take me up into the high

Harvard Negotiation Insight Initiative



Spirit in Action

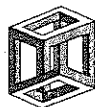
Join us in June, 2006 for the **Summer Learning Forum**.
Come explore contemplative practice and the inner life while building skills in negotiation and conflict mediation.

Week I: June 19-23, 2006

Week II: June 26-29, 2006

Harvard University

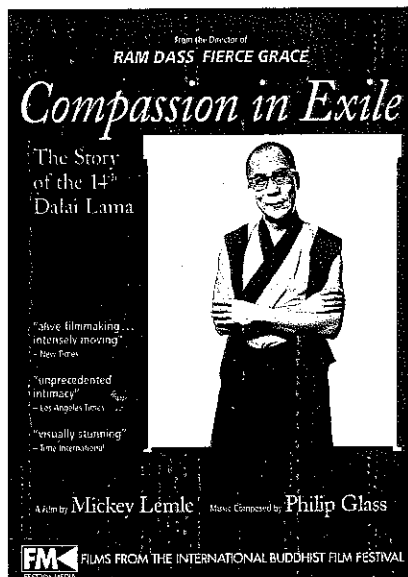
"If HNII isn't the next important frontier, I don't know what is."
Douglas Stone, co-author, Difficult Conversations



Program on
Negotiation
at Harvard Law School

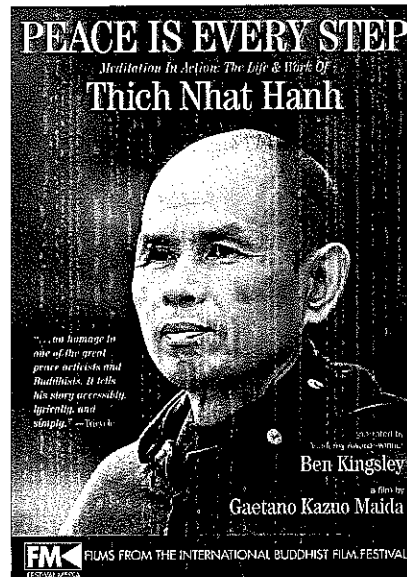
For more information or to register
visit www.pon.harvard.edu/hnii
617.495.7711

FIRST TIME ON DVD



From the director of
Ram Dass Fierce Grace
"Beautifully shot... His story is inextricably entwined with that of Tibet." —Tricycle

See the trailers at www.festivalmedia.org
Available at booksellers everywhere, or visit www.ibff.org



With 90-minute bonus:
Touching Peace—An Evening With Thich Nhat Hanh
"His words resonate long after the film stops."
—Yoga Journal



Tibetan Spa



Tibetan Mantra Massage Stone

Renew your inner energies with our exclusive Tibetan Spa collection for massage, bath and aromatherapy

Tibet Collection

HAND MADE FAIR TRADE

Our catalog is filled with treasures made by Tibetan and other Himalayan artisans reflecting the many facets of Tibetan culture.

800-318-5857 order@TibetCollection.com

www.TibetCollection.com

Guest Accommodations,
Massage, Swimming Pool & Sauna,
Book/Giftshop

Nature, Hiking Trails, Wildlife,
Meadow & Redwoods

Tibetan Art, Prayer Wheels,
Sand Mandala, Statues
& Temple Murals.

Group Rental Facilities,
Meeting halls, Organic
vegetarian food.

Land of
Medicine

Soquel, CA (831)462 8383 www.medicinebuddha.org



**Khensur Rinpoche
Jampa Tegchog**

(Author of *Transforming the Heart*)

Starting in March 2006:

-*The Way of Life of
a Bodhisattva*
-*The Insight Into
Emptiness*

Jon Landaw
(Author of *Buddhism
for Dummies*)

Discovering Buddhism
courses starting in
February 2006 with
-*Mind and its Potential*



mountains. We enjoyed ourselves up there quite a lot. We brought food for a picnic and looked down into the valleys from high above. I think they did that to show us how the mind can be influenced toward the positive. Changing the outer conditions can take you out of your habitual way of thinking and give you a new view. You can change your mind this way.

If getting yourself into a new setting for awhile doesn't work, there is a visualization you can apply. Think that your mind is like a small, white cotton ball. Think that this cotton-ball-mind lifts itself up from your body, goes out of the topmost part of your head, and rises up in the air until it is above the clouds. Let it stay there for a while and then bring it back.

Let me share a third technique that also involves some visualization. At the time of the sunset, go to a park or look out from a window facing the setting sun. Stand straight and relax completely. Look at the sun going down and lift yourself high on your toes and watch the sun going lower and lower. Think that all your problems and difficulties, all your depressions, are going down with the sun and disappearing beyond the horizon. If you do this day after day for some time, it helps.

There is no benefit whatsoever in ignoring our problems. We must not submit to them. We must acknowledge them, stand over and above them, and overcome them. We are beautiful human beings, endowed with buddha-nature, capable of overcoming any problem we could have. We must use that ability. There are countless meditation and visualization techniques that can help us. We have many tremendous tools in our hands. We need to make use of them, including medication when that is needed. All these things together give us the capacity to heal ourselves. The most important thing is to develop the determination to heal rather than submit to the old habit of undermining ourselves. ♦