

Tackling Depression: The Spiritual Perspective

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Depression is a state of 'mind' which is characterized by persistent sad, anxious or empty mood, feelings of pessimism, irritability, loss of interest in activities and surroundings, difficulty sleeping and various other symptoms and has become an important health issue, which made WHO to declare this year's World health day theme on depression. The immediate causes of depression may be many such as loss of a dear one, severe monetary loss, or inability to cope up with the expectations or standards prescribed by others around a person. However, if we delve into the basic cause of depression, it emanates from the inability of a person to adjust or cope up with the changes that have occurred in his/her life. The cause of this inability to adjust with the changes in life emanate from lack of training to the mind. Today, we train our children and ourselves to achieve success by all means, which has led to an endless pursuit of worldly possessions for worldly pleasures. We also train to keep ourselves physically fit so that we can achieve our 'goal' of success. However, we hardly have any time to train our mind to cope up with the stresses of life. This training of mind to seek the truth is termed as "Spirituality".

Spirituality as defined by scriptures, is a way of life. It makes us realize about the 'ultimate' goal of life, i.e. to know thyself or to know God. Once we start realizing that our ultimate goal of life is to know the truth, we will be able to understand that all the other goals that we have made in our life are 'pseudo goals' and are just a means to achieve that larger goal. This would then imply that having achieved or not achieved any intermediate so called 'goal' has nothing to do with the ultimate goal of life. If we focus on the larger goal, we would be able to appreciate the insignificance of these everyday goals that we keep on creating endlessly throughout our life. Having realized the insignificance of these intermediate pseudo goals, their achievement or non-achievement would not disturb us and help us get out of any disturbances that have happened in our life very easily.

Also, we would be able to appreciate that all the circumstances or people or things that we have in our life around us are meant to help us achieve that ultimate goal, sometimes by their presence and at other time by their 'absence'. While we appreciate the importance of the presence of these in our lives we fail badly in appreciating the importance of losses of these in our lives. The losses that we perceive as 'bad' are actually meant to strengthen us and take us to new heights. This phenomenon is similar to that experienced by a stream of water. If the stream of water is subjected to an obstruction, it overcomes that obstruction by slowly and steadily rising above it and flows through the obstacle. People who have realized this have been able to achieve great heights in this world despite all adversities in life. Saints have moved a step ahead of these people by achieving the Ultimate goal of life despite all adversities. For them the worldly achievements/ possessions or people hardly have any existence. Spirituality also emphasizes on the fact that we are not supposed to expect anything out of people, things or circumstances around us, rather we are born to serve them. If we refrain ourselves from expectations, we will not have to face disappointments if the expectations are not met and will be saved from the resultant depression.

This year's World Health Day theme was "Depression: Let's Talk". This emphasized on that importance of talking about the feelings and the thoughts that a person has been experiencing with someone, with an aim to primarily vent out the feelings as well as detect any depression in a person suspected to be having the signs/symptoms of depression. Tackling the issue of depression requires a more radical approach, focussing more on primordial prevention, i.e. before the emergence of risk factors rather than early diagnosis and prompt treatment. The training of mind should start well before the person actually starts facing the stresses in life, i.e. from childhood, as was practiced in earlier ages which had a *gurukul* system of education, as it requires lot of time and effort to train the mind. Also training the mind is easy in childhood when the child is more receptive than in later years of life. The focus of study in yesteryears was more on mind than on material world in contrast to today's education system. It is important to realize the fact that material world is for us; not we for the material world. As a short term measure for depression, talking and early detection would be helpful, but if we really want to end the problem of depression or other similar mental disorders such as anxiety, mood disorders etc. we will have to start early in life and make 'Spirituality' an integral part of our life right from birth to the tomb.