A Cure for Depression

By Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar, M.D.

Do you ever wonder why so many people are depressed? 1 in 10 Americans over the age of 12 are taking antidepressants. What has happened to us? In my medical practice, I see people every day who complain about feeling depressed. When I ask them if they can describe what their depression feels like, most of them describe feelings of loneliness, grief and trauma. A majority of my patients feel disconnected from the world. Even those who are surrounded by friends and family feel lonely. They tell me they feel un-witnessed. They are afraid to live from their true selves as it may be different from the 'norm'. They adapt to the norm so they are not rejected or left out. They are afraid of being left alone in the world if they are authentic. They adapt in order to fit in. They compromise their true selves. This is the root of their loneliness.
As a physician I believe depression is over diagnosed and over treated. Loneliness, trauma and grief are mistaken for depression. When these conditions are medicated, they do not heal . All three of these conditions currently exist in epidemic proportions in our society. What is the cause of this?

I find the core feeling that arises from loneliness, trauma and grief, is *a lack of safety*. Most of my patients don't feel safe in our world. This feeling creates stress. Stress can cause anxiety. Many begin to judge themselves for how they feel. This results in shame. This adds to the feeling of loneliness. The spiral this creates activates the fight-or-flight response. People become reactive when they are functioning at this level. They find it difficult to access deep emotions such as love and patience. Instead, they behave reactively through anger. They are in survival. This leads to feelings of emptiness and lack of meaning. This can lead to depression.

Two decades ago, I began to notice a difference in the way people related to each other. Prior to that, they had real interest in each other and were available for each other's joys and sorrows. They had more meaningful presence in each other's lives and truly cared about their fellow human beings. Currently, people don't feel they are cared for. In our virtual world, there isn't a real connection between people. The computers and cell phones that were designed to ease our lives are being used in ways that isolate us. Facebook does not create real connections. Text messaging is not real communication. Humans need each other in order to thrive. They need to *feel* that they matter.

Since the beginning of time, we have been there for each other in community. In order for us to heal our loneliness, we need to connect in a *real* way. Being real takes courage. It makes us vulnerable and transparent. This transparency exposes our true selves, our strengths and our weaknesses. It shows our authentic selves. This reveals our inner light. When we share our light, we heal.

I struggle with how modern medicine has failed to help our communities heal. Its approach merely manages our symptoms, but does not promote true healing. Only we can heal ourselves. Margaret Mead's eternal words, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" are worth embodying. I believe that when we heal our isolation with *real* and courageous connection with each other, our loneliness, trauma and grief will heal. When we bear witness to each other from our hearts, love will replace anger. Our life will once again, matter. This is the way we can heal our unsafe world. No prescription can replace the power of human connection.

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