

PART

I

# Finding Another Way

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL



# 1

## Beyond the Broken Brain

In the middle of the path through life,  
I suddenly found myself in dark woods.

—DANTE

If you believe that depression is not just in your head, this book is for you. If you have been in therapy and have popped pills and supplements but still feel like you're not quite right, read on.

Do you ever wonder why your entire being hurts when you are depressed? Have you ever asked yourself, "How did depression take hold of my body, mind, and spirit?" Perhaps you can trace back and pinpoint exactly when darkness struck your life like a hurricane. On the other hand, maybe the blues seeped slowly into your physiology like water into the basement of a house. You see the evidence of the damage but can't find the source of the problem.

Depression can become an unwanted companion casting a shadow on every aspect of your life. Do you feel robbed of liveliness and energy? The menacing presence of a heavy heart, waves of anxiety, or crabby irritability may describe your experience of depression. You long to feel happy, yet you experience a gulf of emptiness inside that

nothing can fill. Then again, maybe you have recovered from a bout of depression and want to prevent a recurrence. Having been released from the grip of depression, you now want to safeguard your most precious assets: happiness and vitality.

We wrote this book because we believe that a different way of thinking about depression is needed. As long as our culture is stuck thinking that depression is only about a chemical imbalance in the brain, there will be no cure or plan of prevention in sight. We hold that depression is about more than a “broken brain” (a chemical imbalance) or an emotional problem that you should be able to let go of or talk your way through. It is not an unavoidable genetic problem. Although depression can be a reaction to a trying situation in your life, it does not have to be a permanent state of mind.

## The Broken Brain Mentality: If It's Not Your Brain, It's Your “Mother”!

So what is this about a “broken brain,” you ask? When Western medical science seeks answers to a problem, it focuses its search on the physical body. That is its area of expertise, and it does this well. First it isolates a disorder to a particular system in the body, such as the circulatory, the digestive, the respiratory, or, in the case of depression, the nervous system. The next step is to centralize the problem to a specific organ, such as the heart, the stomach, the intestines, the lungs, or the brain.

Victory is theirs, Western medical scientists believe, if they can find a causative molecule. When low levels of the brain chemical serotonin were linked to low mood and other depressive symptoms, the medical community thought that it had identified what was wrong in the body and how to fix it; that is how Prozac, a drug that increases serotonin levels in the brain, became a household name.

This line of thinking and its success should not be undervalued. There is a wealth of clinical evidence that biological and chemical processes in the brain influence thinking and emotion. Logic therefore dictates that if those processes go awry, abnormalities of thinking and emotions will result. In other words, if the brain breaks, the emotions suffer; but does this line of thinking really tell the *whole* story?

If the brain is “broken,” what caused the breakage? Different opinions exist. Medical doctors are inclined to focus on the physical, whereas psychologists focus on the mind. You are the product of your experiences, the psychologist surmises. Since the neurons in your brain are hardwired in early childhood, the experiences and family patterns of interaction at that time are pivotal in making you who you are today. The biological and chemical processes in your brain, the theory goes, reflect your ongoing relationship with your environment.

Depression, according to this line of thinking, is the result of a life-long collection of experiences, from childhood to the present. Because memories are stored in your brain, the key to living depression-free is to understand the thought patterns in your head. Therefore, psychologists claim, talk therapy and the changes that result from such therapy are the solution. In other words, if it’s not your brain, it’s your “mother”!

## Treating the Organ of Depression, Not the Cause: What’s Wrong with This Picture?

Antidepressant medications artificially and externally manipulate the level of chemicals in the brain. Ultimately, the brain reacts to this artificial manipulation by blunting its sensitivity to these chemicals. This is not unlike hearing loss that results from long-term exposure to excessively loud noise. The person who is taking the medication is then forced to incrementally supply the brain with more and more of the substance in order to achieve its purpose. This is generally followed by the need to take another medication to counteract the negative side effects of the antidepressant. It is not uncommon for people who increase their antidepressant during the day to then need a sedative or a sleeping pill at night. (How depressing!)

The three natural brain chemicals that are associated with feeling good—dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin—work in concert with one another. Nature did not intend for one of them to work independently of the others. Nature intended for them to work synergistically and in balance with one another. This is what brings long-lasting

relief from symptoms. If one aspect of the body is interrupted, it triggers a cascade of reactions that runs through and disrupts the balance of the entire body. Unfortunately, medications generally target only one or two of the brain chemicals. This partial solution can potentially create other problems.

Given how medical doctors and psychologists perceive the problem of depression, it is no wonder that they focus on the biochemicals and the life experiences that influence brain function. The most common treatment modalities used by Western medicine today are drugs and talk therapy. Drugs, whether synthetic or natural, manipulate the chemicals in the brain. Generally speaking, talk therapy aims at figuring out the inner workings of the mind.

## Drugs: A Window of Light?

When it comes to the question of depression, we want you to consider the following: What came first, the chemical imbalance or the episode of sadness? It is generally accepted that a chemical imbalance accompanies depression. Depression is associated with a biological derangement in the brain. This derangement may be triggered by a genetic tendency, lifestyle choices, a tragic event, or a combination of the three. In other words, a chemical imbalance *coincides with* the presence of depression. However, this coincidence (known in science as a *correlation*) does not necessarily indicate causality. It also does not indicate the direction of the causal relationship. That is, does the chemical imbalance cause the depressive episode, or does the depressive episode cause the chemical imbalance?

Antidepressant medications manipulate the level of at least one of the three brain chemicals. Serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine are called *neurotransmitters*. Considered mood brighteners, they are responsible for feelings of alertness and happiness. According to Western medical theory on depression, effectively increasing the levels of at least one of these biochemicals should resolve depression in a person.

The value of pharmaceutical interventions to treat depression is currently being questioned by the scientific community. In a study done in the United Kingdom in 2008, antidepressants were shown to

be only slightly more effective than taking a placebo. This can be interpreted to mean that people who take antidepressants get better because they believe the pills are helpful and they expect to get better. This placebo effect calls into question whether the antidepressants actually have inherent curative properties. In addition, many researchers are concerned about the negative side effects of the pills. For a variety of reasons, approximately 40 percent of people discontinue their use in the first month. That being said, some people who have experienced severe depression report feeling helped by the medications initially.

Episodes of depression recur in 50 to 85 percent of people who have had one episode. This terribly high recurrence rate has led some physicians to advocate that people who have been treated for major depression remain on antidepressant medication for life, as a preventative measure. Yet even then many individuals do not recover their zest for life, their physical and emotional vitality. In fact, it is reported that 70 percent of people who take antidepressant medication continue to experience lingering symptoms of depression. In addition, a lifelong use of medication may mean living with negative side effects such as dry mouth, rapid heart rate, constipation, dizziness, sexual dysfunction, jitteriness, blurred vision, and memory impairment. In short, medications do not always cure what ails, and they can potentially trigger other problems.

Why keep looking to find a cure in a pill? At best, drug interventions simply soothe the depressive symptoms. This is because pills manipulate one's brain chemicals but do not treat the totality of one's being: body, mind, and spirit. Only a limited biochemical aspect of one's physiology is addressed, and only in a segregated area. When underlying causes are neglected, symptoms tend to eventually recur. However, relief from the darkness of depression must be sought, and antidepressants may, in some cases, provide a window of light. There is anecdotal evidence that this pharmaceutical technology has been helpful to many people.

If you have chosen to take medication to relieve the symptoms of depression, you are not precluded from embarking on the holistic program this book prescribes. The two are compatible and additive in their effects. The whole purpose of this book is to show you how to kick-start your own self-healing mechanisms; to do more than simply

address the symptoms of depression. We want to introduce you to a holistic way of treating depression that delves deep into the core of your physiology and sends symptoms scurrying away permanently. We want to offer you a fuller, more encompassing view of the problem, with natural solutions.

There are natural ways of balancing brain chemistry that do not require popping a pill (synthetic or natural). Mind-body techniques are available that bring overall balance to one's physiology and, consequently, affect brain chemistry deeply, safely, and holistically. The body is the best pharmacy, and this is where nature intends for you to go when you need medication.

Treating depression with drugs alone is analogous to using aspirin to relieve a fever caused by an infection. Aspirin merely reduces the fever and makes the patient feel more comfortable. It does not address the cause of the infection.

### Brain Chemistry Gone Awry?

A recent study stating that antidepressant medications appear to help only severely depressed people and work no better than placebos in many patients has rocked the perception of the public. "Although patients get better when they take antidepressants, they also get better when they take a placebo, and the difference in improvement is not very great. This means that depressed people can improve without chemical treatments," said Irving Kirsh of the University of Hull in England, the author of the study.

Dr. Helen Mayberg, a professor of psychiatry and neurology at the Emory University School of Medicine, responded to the study by saying, "This [depression] is about very sick people; there's something wrong with their *brains*" (italics added). Herein lies the problem, we think. Even dedicated and well-meaning psychiatrists tend to see depressed patients as cases of brain chemistry gone awry, rather than seeing them as a complex system whose body, mind, and spirit have gone awry.



Approximately 118 million antidepressant prescriptions are issued in the United States each year. Do we really believe that millions of U.S. citizens are walking around with something wrong with their brains that a pill can cure?

Not even a decade ago, physicians treated heart disease by focusing on the organ of the heart, rather than focusing on the person experiencing the disease. Nowadays, no cardiologist would think to give a pill for heart disease without simultaneously discussing the impact of lifestyle on heart health. It is our hope that very soon the psychiatric and psychological communities will shift their current paradigm and begin to think of depression in a holistic manner rather than simply as brain chemistry gone awry.

## Talk Therapy: Words and Nurturance

Going to therapy can be extremely helpful for a depressed person. The most common recommendation is to attend talk therapy and take pills. How effective is talk therapy? In some studies, therapy has been shown to improve the symptoms of depression as significantly as medication. These studies have focused primarily on cognitive-behavioral therapy, which strives to bring cognitive awareness to the relationship among thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. There is no doubt that awareness can be a powerful tool for positive change. The hope is that by actualizing personal awareness or insights, people will eventually set themselves free of the same old situations and the same old negative feelings.

There is enormous healing power behind the changes in cognition, behavior, and relationships that are brought on by talk therapy. Everything affects brain chemistry and our overall physiology. If we sit and look at a photograph album and remember the past through pictures, our body chemistry is altered. If we get caught in a traffic jam, our physiology is changed. If we are stressed because of a family conflict or concerns at work, our internal environment is thrown out of balance. Likewise, beneficial changes in the way we perceive ourselves,

which can be brought on by talk therapy, are a powerful means to alter physiological chemistry. Effective psychotherapy can be an aid for overall health as well as a treatment for depression. Improved relationships that result from an increased awareness of our thoughts, actions, and emotions can induce positive changes in our being.

However, although therapy certainly offers insight into many of life's problems, by itself it is not a cure for depression, especially major depression. Mild depression is more likely to be treated effectively by therapy. This type of depression is usually time-limited, and increasing self-awareness and experiencing a therapeutic relationship can be very helpful in ending the depression sooner rather than later.

The foundation of talk therapy is the belief that insight leads to change. Talking about life issues is indeed good and helpful. We believe, however, that this is putting the cart before the horse. Improvements in the overall health of the individual—body, mind, and spirit—must also take place if changes in perception (insight) and alterations in feelings are to become permanent. The internal world must move into an overall healthier state. After this psychophysiological shift occurs, insight engendered in the context of a positive relationship can be of great assistance in promoting continuing change.

Mental and physical exhaustion also limits the effectiveness of talk therapy. All too often, a depressed person lacks the mental, emotional, and physical energy to turn insight into action. It is entirely possible to have an intellectual understanding of the connections among thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and still not be able to make changes. It is not uncommon to hear people say, "I know what I should do, I just can't do it" or "I know I shouldn't think like I do—it doesn't help me, but I am unable to change the way I am." Perhaps you have said similar words yourself.

Depression depletes our energy. This emotional malaise (lack of ease) affects every aspect of our being. The talking cure is limited because words are abstract building blocks. They are not the practical interventions that are needed to rise from deep sadness. Talk therapy does not give the necessary physical, mental, and emotional strength to put insight into action. For this—the project of restructuring body, mind, and spirit—we need practical techniques that help us to build ourselves up from the inside out. To fix a crumbling house, the builder starts at the foundation, not the roof. We must do the same.

The condition of depression is all-encompassing. Depression is a physical problem that is beyond the reach of pills, it is a mental problem that is beyond the reach of words, and it is a spiritual problem that requires techniques to help us connect with the abstract qualities of life. Talk is good. It can be exceedingly helpful, but it does not reach the deep physical roots of depression. It affects perceptions and viewpoints and helps us to change the way we relate to ourselves and others. This is wonderful, but it is often not enough.

Fortunately, many practical techniques exist that positively affect our whole being. These work on a totally different spectrum than talk therapy does. When our overall health is improved and our inner source of healing is activated, then talk therapy can become increasingly helpful. (And hopefully you never again need say, “Coulda, woulda, shoulda.”)

## What If There Were Another Way?

Both drugs and talk therapy have a time and a place. Nevertheless, on the overall effectiveness of treatment, studies say that of all Americans who experience a major depressive episode during their lifetime and use conventional methods of treatment, 50 percent will experience some symptoms of lingering depression and 50 percent will have a recurrent episode. Seventy percent of people who experience a second episode are likely to have a third. In addition, approximately half of the people treated with only the conventional treatment methods for depression show no improvement. Are you wondering why? We were, so we researched it and wrote this book.

There is another way. Let’s think about it. Your physiology has an inherent self-repair mechanism. There exists an internal healing intelligence that guides the healing of wounds. This intelligence senses the pain brought on by a cut on your finger and immediately mobilizes a series of reactions to stop the bleeding, form a scab, and induce the regeneration of skin. Elegantly and effortlessly, this process has a 100 percent rate of success, assuming it is not interrupted. It must be successful, for your life depends on it. What if there existed a way to unleash your innate healing intelligence to cure depression?

Depression is a condition that intimately involves many facets of you: your physical being as well as your mental, emotional, social, and

spiritual self. This is perhaps why, when you are depressed, everything hurts, nothing seems right, and problems may at times seem larger than life. Do we really think that one single chemical or even a whole concert of such substances is capable of creating an emotion on its own? Can we really expect to solve our problems by talking our way through them? If we could, we would. However, a problem can't be solved with the same mind-set that created it in the first place.

We are not denying that an imbalance in brain chemistry is involved in depression. We merely want to highlight the fact that the interplay of molecules in the brain is incredibly complicated. Brain health is affected by much more than the quantity of brain chemicals produced. Hormones, for example, greatly influence the workings of the brain. Food, in turn, influences the production of the hormones, and our emotions often guide our food choices—for better or for worse. All aspects of our physiology are interwoven. Mother Nature is a weaver, and she has woven every thread of our being into one tapestry, which is maintained by our lifestyle. This is the point of holism.

Holism goes deeper than the eye can see. Human beings are more than the mortal packaging they inhabit. We are a creation of our consciousness. In fact, in a deeper reality, an energetic pattern of vibration underlies the totality of our being—body, mind, and spirit. From a holistic perspective, matter is energy and energy is matter, so there is no separation between body (matter) and mind (energy). Where attention goes, matter flows, it's been said. The implication of this philosophy is tremendous: it implies that we can use our consciousness to create our worldview, our mind, and our body—and to heal. We do this by enlisting a consciousness-based health program based on the ancient science of Ayurveda.

## Ayurveda: Weaving the Fabric of Health

During the Vedic epoch in India (about five thousand years ago), there lived sages, wise men and women, who developed a system of health called *Ayurveda*. This ancient science has recently been revived, to the delight of millions. Ayurveda provides an instruction manual for unleashing the self-repair mechanisms that are inherent in our physiology.

Ayurveda can help us to do this because it looks at the human being from a deeper reality than Western medicine does. Ayurveda moves beyond studying the systems of the body to studying the underlying energetic patterns, the vibratory essence of the human being. Its concepts readily correspond to modern theories of quantum mechanics physics, which are increasingly deciphering the energetic nature of the human body, mind, and spirit.

Ayurveda is considered by many to be the original holistic science of health, and we think it is the ultimate system of mind-body medicine. The solutions for depression offered in this book are based on this ancient science of healing. Following the Ayurvedic path will help you no matter where you are on the continuum of mental and physical health. Ayurvedic interventions will enhance your well-being whether you are battling a major depressive episode, are trying to beat the blues, or simply need support coping with the problems of daily living.

If you are currently taking medication and choose to continue, this holistic program will help you to achieve radiant good health. On the other hand, it can help you to transition away from medication, if it is judiciously applied in consultation with your physician. Ayurveda can also help people who have never experienced depression but who want to keep any possible genetic tendencies at bay by maintaining a state of optimal wellness. Fundamentally, this knowledge can help anyone who wants to uproot depression from his or her life.

## Ancient Science, Modern Wisdom

Ayurveda is the world's oldest system of natural medicine. Whereas fads come and go, Ayurveda has had five thousand years to work out its kinks, toss what doesn't work, and refine what does work. Native to the Vedic civilization of India, it predates Chinese medicine by several hundred years. So are you scratching your head now, wondering why you have never heard of it? Maybe you have.

Ayurveda is the tree of knowledge from which many popularized therapeutic interventions have grown: for example, aromatherapy, sound therapy, vibrational-energy therapy, herbal therapy, massage therapy, polarity therapy, chakra therapy, and yoga postures. As a complete system of health, however, Ayurveda has been introduced to the

Western world only in very recent times. We and a lot of other people who have experienced its benefits think it is here to stay.

Ayurveda has had such longevity because it helps us to maintain ours. *Ayur* and *veda* are two Sanskrit words that mean “knowledge of living.” This explains why the focus of Ayurveda is to teach us how to live our lives vibrantly by creating good health every step of the way. As a matter of fact, Ayurveda defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. Health is not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. This ancient science offers the epitome of a holistic approach to living life with zing. Think of Ayurveda as Mother Nature’s spokesperson, giving instructions on how to weave threads (our daily actions) into a vibrant tapestry (our physiology).

Ayurveda is, however, more than an instruction manual for how to live our life. It is all about awakening the incredible “physician within” to actualize our potential to heal. More specifically, as will be explained, the physician within can be conceptualized as the natural intelligence inherent in all of us. This natural intelligence can heal a cut on our finger, bring balance to our brain chemistry, and even heal a broken heart. Explaining how natural intelligence works and how it can be unleashed is the job of Ayurveda.

Why, then, does undoing depression seem so hard? Even when you have a road map, the difficulty often lies in following it: getting the correct orientation, reading the signs, staying on course, and making the right choices at crossroads. Yet even for these challenges, Ayurveda proposes a solution: expanding your awareness. This is the key step, the answer to safeguarding happiness, to living life with zing. Before you dismiss the rest of this book because of statements that may seem overly simplistic, unrealistic, and unconvincing, let us offer you a glimpse of the belief system underlying the Ayurvedic worldview.

Ayurveda is ancient yet ultramodern. It is ancient when measured by chronological time, because the gems of wisdom it offers are timeless. The Ayurvedic framework is described by the sages in metaphorical and poetic language rather than with modern terminology. Ayurveda is ultramodern, ahead of its time, because its fundamental concepts are currently being explored and expounded upon by those at the cutting edge of modern science and technology: quantum physicists and molecular biologists, among others. We expect that in the future,

as modern wisdom catches up with this ancient science, *Ayurveda* will become a household name. As you read about Ayurveda, you will often realize that we are telling you what you already sense, can validate through your experience, and intuitively know to be correct. The beauty of this system of health is this: it works!

Often the brain must be fed before the mind can open. Therefore, throughout this book, we intend to draw parallels between ancient precepts and modern scientific knowledge. From the onset, let us underscore that Ayurveda represents a complete system of health. Although its roots trace back to the ancient Vedic civilization of India, its principles are universal in their applicability.

## Seeing Life through the Eyes of the Vedic Sages

The ancient sages and the scientists of modern times have one fundamental thing in common: both strive to understand the nature of the universe and its inner workings. How they go about doing this determines which category they fall into: sage or scientist. Addressing the question of how each group (and everyone in the academic disciplines between the two) arrives at an understanding is beyond the scope of this book. Suffice it to say that this is the issue that fills the corridors of universities and drives the creation of volumes of academic manuscripts.

As far as we know, the Vedic sages did not sit on sterile laboratory benches, make use of scalpels, or experiment on other living beings. They did not use microscopes, employ molecular biology techniques, or have mechanical computers to solve complex mathematical equations. What they did have was the earth around them; this was their laboratory. They made connections based on no other reference than life as they saw it. Traditionally, it is believed that the nature of the universe was revealed to them while they were in a deeply meditative state of mind. (Einstein did this too, you know, and so can you.) Essentially, the Vedic sages realized the following:

As is the microcosm, so is the macrocosm.

As is the atom, so is the universe.

As is the human body, so is the cosmic body.

As is the human mind, so is the cosmic mind.

This verse states that living beings are microcosms of the universe itself. The Vedic sages understood that we are made up of the same elements as the cosmos and are influenced by the same forces. The fire that burns deep within the belly of our planet is the same energy that drives digestion in our stomach and intestines. The element that makes up the earth we walk on creates our physical body. The expansive space that surrounds us is as vital to the universe as it is to the working of our brain. The mineral composition of the water in the sea is similar to the fluid inside our cells. The elegant workings of the universe are mirrored in our cells.

If human beings are, in effect, a reflection of the universe, then they are also subject to all the laws that govern the universe. The same natural intelligence that controls the rhythms of the seasons also regulates the inner workings of our physiology: our digestive, circulatory, endocrine, reproductive, respiratory, and nervous systems. The same force that drove a seed to create an oak tree also drove a single cell to create the wonder that is you.

Before we start to get too heady, let us explain how the concept of natural intelligence and life-energy relates to the task of daily living. Our physiology is a manifestation of the natural world. Life-energy is blocked when our connection with the energy field that underlies the natural world is disrupted. Disease ensues when the flow of natural intelligence transmitted through our mind, our body, or our spirit is impeded.

Every day, through every action we take and every decision we make, we are guiding the flow of this life-energy. Our decision to live in accordance with the laws of nature or against them brings consequences. It determines the health of our physiology and the well-being of our mental and emotional life. Teaching us about these laws and, therefore, restoring the flow of connection to natural intelligence is the goal of Ayurveda.

Ayurveda focuses on the person who is experiencing the symptoms rather than on the symptoms themselves. Therefore, instead of the one-size-fits-all Western medical approach to treating the brain, Ayurveda offers a comprehensive plan that addresses the uniqueness of the individual, starting at the level of spirit, beginning with consciousness.



Rather than focus on the treatment of a symptom, Ayurveda addresses the underlying cause that created the fertile ground for an ill condition to flourish. This is why we have begun with an introduction to this science of living, which offers knowledge on how to live life rather than on how to get rid of a symptom. This is also why we believe that Ayurveda can teach us how to create happiness in our lives.

The following chapter will discuss the Ayurvedic paradigm of depression. The benefit of this worldview is that it opens the gateway for the treatment and prevention of depression. Only a multidimensional analysis of the problem of depression can bring about a holistic solution to the condition. Let's get to the root of the problem. The answer to depression is in the minds of the Vedic sages.

## Depression: A Slow Leak in the Basement or a Dramatic Tornado?

Before we proceed, we would like you to consider the evolution of your current predicament in terms of the many aspects of your being:

- What analogy would you use to describe your unique expression of depression? Think back on your experience of depression. How would you describe it? Would you say it came on like a slow leak in the basement of a house? Was it not easily identifiable until it had already caused damage? Or did depression hit you like a dramatic tornado? Can you trace your bout of depression back to a specific triggering event?
- Depression happens—it evolves and changes. What were the first telltale signs of depression in your life? Did the symptoms change over time? Can you correlate any lifestyle habits or events that triggered them to change, for better or for worse?
- Depression is created one act at a time. How did your symptoms of depression affect your physical self (your general health and your physical stability and strength)? Your mental self (your thinking and perception)? Your emotional self (your feelings)? Your social self (the manner in which you relate to others)? Your

spiritual self (your ability to remain mindful of the abstract aspects of life)?

- Depression is undone one act at a time. Describe any interventions that have been successful for you in undoing depression. As you describe them, consider which aspect of your being you are addressing. In other words, how were you able to support your body, mind, and spirit to restore physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being? Be specific.
- Think back to a time in your life when you were not experiencing depression. In fact, think back to the best time of your life. How would you describe your physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual self at this point? Please realize that this describes your true nature.