




A Buddhist Perspective on Depression and Ways to Deal with Depression

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[Abstract]

The Purposes of this article are to present a Buddhist perspective on depression and ways to deal with depression according to Buddhism. First a perspective of depression according to modern psychological findings has been studied and presented to get an understanding of what depression is. Both the nature and the effect of depression have been discussed in this section. Then how these aspects of depression can be explained according to Buddhist Teachings has been studied. Next the causes of depression have been studied first according to modern psychological knowledge and according to Buddhist teachings. Then the research is followed by the ways to deal with depression according to modern psychology followed by a presentation of the ways to deal with depression according to Buddhism.

Keywords: depression, Dukkha, psychology, dealing.

Introduction

Depression is a universal, timeless, and ageless human affliction. (Hammen, 2001:2) Depression is not only the most frequent mental health problem, but is among the most serious. (Gilbert,1992:3) Depression is the most common mental health problem found in all age groups in the present.(Yapko,1997:10) It is common to the extent that depression is labeled as the common cold of psychopathology.(Gilbert, 1992: 3) It is a well-known and experienced fact that everyone experiences depressed feelings from time to time because no one escapes the hurtful things in life.(Yapko, 1997: xvi) When you are depressed, almost everything is overwhelming. Simple tasks seem difficult, difficult tasks seem impossible, and the energy to deal with much of anything – easy or hard – is missing. (Yapko,1997:xvii) Depression is compared to a prison where you are both the suffering prisoner and the cruel jailer.(Rowe,2003:2) Normal depression can be a completely normal response to painful circumstances, but when the person is unaware of ways to cope with these disturbing feelings that person is “going down in flames” and fall into major depression or clinical depression.(Yapko,1997: xvi) In worst case scenario depression is responsible for the majority of suicide deaths.(Gilbert, 1992:3)

Depression has been called an illness and treated with pills and electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). Some people are greatly helped by this treatment. Their depression vanishes. However for some people, pills and ECT bring only temporary relief or no change at all. For these people something more is needed. This is not surprising, since being depressed is something more than being ill. (Rowe,2003:vii) Some people who are unaware of correct methods to deal with depressed feelings tend to seek assistance from various ways that are not only unable to ease the depression but also create much more problems that follow after. For example many men use alcohol to hide from others what they see as their despicable weakness, and to hide from themselves their fear and despair. (Rowe,2003:22) And we know that alcohol not only triggers the mental restlessness but also creates more physical and social damage which consequently worsen the situation.

The fact that not everyone sinks into clinical depression ignites the idea that there must be specific factors that lead some people to fall into clinical depression and some people to be able to get over those depressed feelings which are faced by everyone from time to time.(Yapko,1997:xvi) It is worth paying attention and studying the factors that help some people to get over those depressed feeling while others get into clinical depression. The modern studies have discovered that depression is not a “fixed thing”. The best evidence to date states that for most people depression is not a biologically based disease. (Yapko,1997:xvii) That means depression is not genetic fault or a mysterious illness which descends on us. It is something which we create for ourselves, and just as we create it so we can dismantle it. (Rowe,2003:12) As depression is not a single problem with a single cause and single treatment. Depression can have many points of origin, and many paths can lead one out of its grip. .(Yapko,1997:xviii) Interestingly, studies suggest that the people who have fallen into clinical depression are often missing information or skills that could help prevent depression. .(Yapko,1997:xvi) Taking above stated facts into consideration we can suggest that understanding the factors that lead a person to fall into clinical depression and ways to avoid falling into clinical depression are crucial to deal with factors and incidents that cause depression and avoid falling into major depression.

Buddhism is a doctrine which mainly concerns about the human mind and psychological well-being.(A:I:5) In fact, Buddhism is a doctrine that had focused and given priority to the psychological or mental aspect more than anything else. This matter is evident when we consider the fact that in Buddhism mind is considered to be the forerunner and master of all things and all things are considered to be mind-made.(Dhp: i) So that, if we pay more attention and study Buddhist doctrine and teachings, it will be possible to understand the nature and effects of depression and factors and incidents that lead to depression according to Buddhist viewpoint. Then it will be possible to find ways and methods to avoid depression according to Buddhism. This would be an alternative approach to already available modern approaches.

So this research is an attempt to comparatively look into the depression both in modern psychological and Buddhist viewpoints. The nature, effects and factors of depression will be studied and analyzed comparatively to find similarities and dissimilarities between two traditions and to get a clear understanding of depression. A critical study of modern methods of dealing with depression will be followed by an introduction of ways and methods in Buddhism that can be applied to deal with depression. This research will contribute to the modern psychological studies especially in the fields of psychotherapy and counseling with an alternative perspective that could pave way for better understanding the nature, effects and factors of depression. Furthermore this research will provide methods and ways to skillfully handle situations that may lead to depression and ways to get out of depression based on Buddhism.

Depression According to Modern Science

The term depression as used here is thought of as a painful emotional reaction characterized by intense feeling of loss, sadness, worthlessness, failure or rejection. Depression is often a disproportionately intense reaction to difficult life situations. It may be accompanied by such physiological symptoms as tension, slowing of motor and mental activity, fatigue, lack of appetite and insomnia. (Humphrey, 2002:.4) A principal component analysis of these clinical symptoms of depression generated four factors; negative cognition with low self-esteem, guilt, self-criticism, and lowered mood; lack of drive with loss of libido, anergia, emptiness, anhedonia; anxiety with insomnia, crying, tachycardia, hypochondria; and arousal with appetite loss, weight loss, tiredness, mood worse in the morning. (Gilbert,1992:37)

To get a better understanding of depression we must look into the situation in various viewpoints and steps. First of all the nature and effects of depression in the individual level must be taken into consideration by looking into the psychological aspect followed by the physical aspect of depression. Then the nature and effects of depression in the bilateral and social level must be elucidated to get a wider picture of the situation.

The factors and incidents that cause a person to be depressed must be investigated and analyzed in order to understand the factors that lead a person to fall into depression. Only then it will be possible to find solutions and preventive methods.

Psychological Aspects of Depression

Depression is one of several disorders generically called affective disorders, referring to the manifestation of abnormal affect, or mood, as a defining feature. Typical aspects of depressed mood are sadness, feeling low, down in the dumps, or emptiness. However, sometimes the most apparent mood is irritability. (Hammen, 2001:4) In depression, neither the sympathy and concern of others, nor the gentle love of oneself is available. Love has fled, leaving only an awareness of an absence of love. (Rowe,2003:8) Other people may be there, offering all the love, sympathy and concern any person could want, but none of this compassion can pierce the wall that separates the depressed person from them, while inside the wall that person not only refuse himself the smallest ease and comfort but he also punishes himself by words and deeds. (Rowe,2003:8)

Instead of love the depressed person is filled with bitterness and jealousy. Bitter that his life has gone awry and jealous that other people, quite undeserving, have such easy lives and don not suffer as he do. That feeling of horrible jealousy and the loss of ability to love create anger. That person is angry with himself and angry with the world. (Rowe,2003:8) Some have called depression a disorder of thinking, as much as it is a disorder of mood. Depressed people typically have negative thoughts about themselves, their worlds, and the future. They experience themselves as incompetent, worthless, and are relentlessly critical of their own acts and characteristics, and often feel guilty as they dwell on their perceived shortcomings. Low self-esteem is therefore a common attribute of depression. (Hammen, 2001:4-5) They may report feeling loss of interest or pleasure, a feeling of 'blah', listlessness, apathy. Nothing seems enjoyable. (Hammen, 2001:4-5)

The negativistic thinking is commonly irrational and distorted, and represents very different interpretations of the self and the world during the depressed state than an individual would typically display when they weren't depressed. In addition to negativistic thinking, depression is often marked by difficulties in mental process involving concentration, decision making, and memory. Hopelessness about one's ability to control desired outcomes may be common, and the resulting despair may also give rise to thoughts of wanting to die or to take one's own life. (Hammen, 2001:5)

Physical Aspects of Depression

Less easy to calculate, and only recently a subject of study, are those biological correlates of depression, which appear to affect adversely immune system function and the capacity to combat physical disorder. (Gilbert,1992:3) Every emotion, pleasant or unpleasant, is accompanied by physical changes which become more profound the longer the emotions persist. Being depressed is a profound emotional experience, and this upsets the body's functioning. Depressed people are very prone to catching colds or flu, and sadly, some go on to develop cancer or heart disease. (Rowe,2003:2)

According to studies physical symptoms such as changes in appetite, sleep and energy are common. Reduced energy is a very frequent complaint. Appetite changes may take the form of increased or decreased appetite with corresponding weight gain or loss. Furthermore, depressed people complain of listlessness, lethargy, feeling heavy and leaden, and lacking the physical stamina to undertake or complete tasks. Sleep changes are one of the hallmarks of depression, and can take several forms: difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or too much sleep. Depressed people sometimes experience what is called "early morning awakening." (Hammen, 2001:7) Moreover, depression may well reduce life expectancy in certain physical disorders, e.g., cancer. (Gilbert,1992:3)

Social Aspects of Depression

Outside these physical and life threatening aspects, depression significantly affects family life. (Gilbert,1992:3) As studies have shown that substance abuse, alcoholism and eating disorders are frequently accompanied by depressive disorders(Hammen, 2001:19) Hence when the depressed person gets addicted to substance abuse and alcoholism, his family life and social life gets affected inevitably. This matter is confirmed by studies that have found a significant relationship between the incidence of battering and the abuse of alcohol. Not surprisingly, the abuse of alcohol overwhelmingly emerges as a primary predictor of marital violence.(Hanson,2017:270) The above statement is proved by studies which showed that rates of domestic violence were as much as 15 times higher in households in which the husband was described as often being drunk as opposed to never drunk. (Hanson,2017:270)

In the societal level alcohol use is linked to an overwhelming proportion of unwanted sexual behaviors, including acquaintance and date rape, unplanned pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV infections.(Hanson,2017:271) The much prevailing evidences of theft and killings which are linked to substance uses are also linked to depression whereas depression is the first motivation causing that person to use drugs to cope with sufferings caused by it. Furthermore, as a direct consequence of apathy and diminished motivation of depression, it is common for individuals to withdraw from social activities or reduce their typical behaviors. (Hammen, 2001:6)

The Factors that Lead to Depression According to Modern Science

There are many theories and explanations concerning the factors that cause depression. In fact it is agreed by most of the modern psychologists that there is no one cause or the cause, because there are many (Yapko, 1997:9). There is an enormous body of scientific literature indicating that depression has its roots in three general areas: biology, psychology, and sociology. (Yapko,1997:13) Some psychologists and psychiatrists believe

that depression results from a chemical imbalance in the brain. But there are some psychiatrists who reject the idea that depression can be explained as a chemical imbalance. (Rowe,2003:12) So, biology is only a part of the depression story (Yapko,1997:xvii). It is agreed by many that depression is not genetic fault or a mysterious illness which descends on us. It is something which we create for ourselves (Rowe,2003:12). Actually, it is more accurate to speak of depression as a complex disorder than as an illness (Yapko,1997:14). For most people depression is the product of a hurtful way of interpreting and responding to life experiences. Depression involves an intricate set of projections about yourself, life, the universe, everything(Yapko,1997:xvii).

The factors that cause depression are as follow: when the person someone depended on, or a child he should have protected, died, or when a loved and hated parent left this life without a word of reconciliation. The guilty, anger, desolation, lack of love arise in the mind of that person (Rowe,2003:7) A person may grieve over the loss of more than just people. He may grieve over the loss of childhood, fear to grow up, the loss of youth, of beauty and virility, and seeing oneself no longer desirable, while dreaded old age approaches (Rowe,2003:7). Moreover when a relationship ends painfully, when they get laid from a job, when they respond imperfectly to a situation, people tend to blame themselves(Yapko,1997:xvi). There are many evidences that there are many good, intelligent, healthy people sinking into depression when their lives don't work in the way they'd like (Yapko,1997:xxii). A major problem with most depressed people is that they think, feel, and act out of a depressive perspective that is distorted and hurtful, and then make the mistake of actually believing this perspective is a god given truth (Yapko,1997:xvi).

Anxiety, stress, and anger are some other factors that are closely associated with depression. In regard to the relationship of anxiety to depression, Mullaney has outlined that: anxiety and depression are interwoven and inseparable; represent distinct disorders; they can remain difficult to separate; anxiety is depression and anxiety generally occur together but depression can manifest as a distinct entity(Gilbert,1992:38). In a systematic

cause and effect explanation, David Viscot considers anxiety as the fear of hurt or loss leads to anger with anger leading to guilt, and guilt, unrelieved, leading to depression(Humphrey, 2002:4). James H. Humphrey confirms this by stating that anger at yourself triggers depression and damages your self-esteem (McKay et al,2003:7). Anger and fear act as “umbrella emotions” that can collectively overload emotional circuits, resulting in mental paralysis and often leading to states of depression(Seaward,2015: 23).

Talking about social aspects of depression, some psychologists state that the factors that have caused depression are far more likely to be environmental than biological(Seaward,2015:xx). Another social aspect is family upbringing as the truly powerful agents of socialization are parents (Seaward,2015: 20). So good or bad parenting can affect the psychology of a person to some extent. Psychoanalytic theory presumed a tight relationship between adverse events in childhood and psychic disturbances in adulthood. This viewpoint received empirical support from recent researches as well. (Herman et al, 2004: 17)

When considering above stated details we can understand that even though the biological or chemical factors have some effects on some people but in general for most people the psychological and social factors have effects the most. Especially opinions and interpretations of people in regard to particular situations and things are the key factors that cause depression. To become depressed one has to have acquired over the years a complex set of interlinked opinions which relate to the particular circumstances of life. And to understand why some people get depressed and others do not, we need to understand how different individuals interpret stressful and adverse situations, and to relate this, not just to physiological events, but to the individual's life and the world he lives in(Rowe,2003:13).

Buddhist Perspective on Depression

When consider the definition, nature, and causes of depression according to modern psychological analysis we can compare the depression to be

very similar to some aspects of the Noble Truth of Suffering (Dukkha Ariya Sacca). Even though the term ‘Dukkha’ is translated as suffering, unsatisfactoriness or stress it has a very broad meaning comprising many aspects as follow: Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are stressful; association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful. In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful (SN 56: 11).

When we see the broader meaning of the term Dukkha we can see that the part of “sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress and despair are stressful” (Soka parideva dukkha domanassupāyāsāpi dukkha), fits exactly with some aspects of nature and effects of depression as explained according to the modern scientific explanations. To see how similar they are and to get a better understanding of nature of these aspects we have to study them one by one.

In Anguttaranikāya Soka is described as sorrow, sorrowing, sadness, inward sorrow, inward sadness, of anyone suffering from misfortune, touched by a painful thing. “aññataraññatarena vyanena samannāgatassa aññataraññatarena dukkhadhammena puṭṭhassa soko”. (MN.iii, 250).

In visuddhimagga it is defined as a special sorrow due to destruction of closed relatives, “sokādīsu soko nāma ñātibyāsanena puṭṭhassa cittasantāpo”. Sorrow is a burning in the mind in one effected by loss of relatives and so on. It has inner consuming as its characteristic, its function is completely to consume the mind. It is manifested as continual sorrowing. Sorrow is a poisoned dart that penetrates a being’s heart; setting up a burning there like burning with a red-hot spear. (Nanamoli, 2010:516)

Lamentation or “Parideva” is verbal clamour on the part of one affected by loss of relatives and so on. It has crying out as its characteristic. Its function is proclaiming virtues and vices. It is manifested as tumult. (Nanamoli, 2010:516)

Pain or “Dukkha” is bodily pain. Its characteristic is the oppression of the body. Its function is to cause grief in the foolish. It is manifested as bodily affliction. Pain distresses bodily. Thereby distressing mentally again. (Nanamoli, 2010:517)

Grief or “Domanassa” is mental pain. Its characteristic is mental oppression. Its function is to distress the mind. It is manifested as mental affliction. For those who are gripped by mental pain tear their hair, weep, thump their breasts, and twist and writhe; they throw themselves upside down, use the knife, swallow poison, hang themselves with ropes, walk into fire and undergo many kinds of suffering. (Nanamoli, 2010:516)

Despair “Upāyāsa” is the same as the tumor produced by excessive mental suffering in one affected by loss of relatives, and so on. Some say that it is one of the states included in the formation aggregate. Its characteristic is burning of the mind. Its function is to bemoan. It is manifested as dejection. (Nanamoli, 2010:516)

Furthermore in Visuddhimagga these aspects are comparatively summarized as sorrow is like cooking of oil in a pot over a slow fire. Lamentation is like boiling over from the pot when cooking over a quick fire. Despair is like what remains in the pot after it has boiled over and is unable to do so any more, going on cooking in the pot till it dries up. (Nanamoli, 2010:516-517)

When consider above mentioned details it becomes clear that nature and effects of depression are very similar with above mentioned aspects of the Dukkha.

The Factors that Lead to Depression According to Buddhism

As stated earlier according to Buddhism the mind is considered the most important factor that plays a significant roll in the whole mass of suffering and distress, in this case depression. The power and importance of the mind and how the mind creates all these suffering and stress is

evident from the Buddha's own words as follow: "I don't envision a single thing that, when undeveloped & uncultivated, brings about such suffering & stress as the mind."(A I 5)

In the cycle of existence, jāti or birth is considered as the base for all these sufferings. "jātipaccayā jarā-maraṇaṃ soka parideva dukkha domanassupāyāsā sambhavanti."(S II 2) The meaning is "conditioned by jāti arise jarā-maraṇa, sorrow, lamentation, dukkha, domanassa and distress." In the cycle of existence "Avijja" or ignorance is stated as first aspect in the link.

In psychological terms, some types of consciousness which are immoral (Akusala), are the root cause of suffering. That is because they spring from attachment (lobha), aversion or illwill (paṭigha, dosa), and ignorance (moha). (Narada,1979: 30)

Lobha, from √ lubh, to cling, or attach itself, may be rendered by 'attachment' or 'clinging'. Some scholars prefer 'greed'. Craving is also used as an equivalent of lobha. (Narada,1979: 31) In the case of a desirable object of sense, there arises, as a rule, clinging or attachment. In the case of an undesirable object, ordinarily there is aversion. In Pāli such aversion is termed dosa or paṭigha. Dosa is derived from √ dus, to be displeased. Paṭigha is derived from 'paṭi', against, and √ 'gha' (han), to strike, to contact. Illwill, hatred are also suggested as equivalents of 'paṭigha'. (Narada,1979: 31) Moha is derived from √ muh, to delude. It is delusion, stupidity, bewilderment. It is 'moha' that clouds an object and blinds the mind. Sometimes 'moha' is rendered by ignorance. According to the Abhidhamma, moha is common to all evil. Lobha and dosa do not arise alone, but always in combination with moha. (Narada,1979: 31)

As stated earlier the bottom part of explanation of the Dukkha which reads as "association with the unbeloved is stressful, separation from the loved is stressful, not getting what is wanted is stressful" is very similar with the incidents that cause depression as explained according to modern science. In the same manner they are the incidents that lead a person to experience

above mentioned aspects of suffering.

Association with the unloved is meeting with disagreeable beings and formations (inanimate things). Its characteristic is association with the undesirable. Its function is to distress the mind. It is manifested as a harmful state. (Nanamoli, 2010:517) Separation from the loved is to be parted from agreeable beings and formations (inanimate things). Its characteristic is dissociation from desirable objects. Its function is to arouse sorrow. It is manifested as loss. (Nanamoli, 2010:517) Not to get what wants is called suffering since one does not get what is wanted. Its characteristic is the wanting of an unobtainable object. Its function is to seek that. It is manifested as disappointment. (Nanamoli, 2010:517)

Other factors are unwise attention (Ayoniso Manasikara) that gives rise to desire and ill-will (Conze, 1972: 73-74) which is a main reason for people to get depressed and failure to understand the norm or the nature of the worldly conditions. The Buddha described this situation as follow: when an uninstructed person meets with gain, loss, fame, disrepute, blame, praise, pleasure, pain, he does not reflect thus: 'This situation that I have met is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change.' He does not understand it as it really is. Then Gain, loss, fame, disrepute, blame, praise, pleasure, or pain obsesses his mind. He is attracted to gain, fame, praise, or pleasure. And he is repelled by loss, disrepute, blame, or pain. Thus involved with attraction and repulsion, he is not freed from birth, from old age and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and anguish; he is not freed from suffering. (A:8:6)

When considering above mentioned details it becomes obvious that depression is not something very new that is prevailing only in the modern societies as claimed by some psychologists. (Yapko, 1997:xx) Rather it is something the Buddha analytically explained about 2500 years ago in Ancient India. And according to Buddhism there are many causes for depression as elaborated above.

Ways to Deal with Depression According to Modern Science

The treatment of depression in the modern world can be broadly categorized into two ways first is medical treatment and the second is psychological treatment.

Medical therapy includes drugs therapy and Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) (Rowe,2003:vii) Additionally brain operation is an option as well. There are many antidepressant medicines used to get rid of depression. As they believe that the antidepressant drugs would restore the chemical balance of the brain. (Rowe,2003:12) But according to studies it has proved that antidepressant medications are only part of a total solution. (Yapko,1997:xvii) So, just giving someone antidepressant medication, without teaching thinking (cognitive) or social (interpersonal) skills, is not doing a depressed person any favors. (Yapko,1997:xviii)

In regard to psychological therapies, there are many forms, including psychodynamic, marital and family therapy, behavior therapy and various hybrids and combinations. (Gilbert,1992:13) In general psychotherapy focuses on thoughts and behaviors that are problematic, then interprets underlining meaning of these thoughts and behaviors and offers solutions that are practiced by the client as circumstances warrant. (Fredricks, 2008:2)

These different methods of psychotherapy work differently to different people. The same therapeutic approach won't work for everyone. That's why psychologists try to find for new approaches to deal with psychological problems. The holistic approach is such approach which seeks new ways to deal with psychological problems. (Fredricks, 2008:2) Whereas Buddhism based approach can be considered as a holistic approach. It is agreed by psychologists and psychiatrists that no one can say this is the right way to treat depression because there are many right ways, ultimately defined by successful treatment in individual cases. (Yapko,1997:9) The path to recovery will be created by individual's learning about depression, understanding how it affects himself and why, and honing the

skills to deliberately change his thoughts, feelings, and behavior quickly and efficiently (Yapko,1997:xviii). As emotional well-beings is defined as the ability to feel and express the full range of human emotions and to control them rather than be controlled by them. (Seaward,2015: 23) Once you can recognize the patterns that lead to disappointment or despair, you will be in a good position to learn to do things differently(Yapko,1997:xxi).

Ways to Deal with Depression According to Buddhism

The most important aspect that must be developed to achieve mental development is Sati (Mindfulness). The Buddha stated that “This is the only way, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering and grief, for reaching the right path, namely, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. (Nanamoli, 1995:61)

The Buddha further explained the way to apply mindfulness as follow: “He abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief in the world.” (Nanamoli, 1995:61) Same pattern goes with contemplating the feelings in the feelings, contemplating consciousness in consciousness, and contemplating mental objects in mental objects.

The part “having put away covetousness and grief is very important here as it actually is the way to get rid of factors that lead to depression. So applying mindfulness or Sati is the main practice to overcome depression according to Buddhism. The story of Patācāra(Dhp: 288) can be cited as an example of a person who suffered from depression due to losing many things that is dear to her later got rid of depression after gaining sati or mindfulness.

We saw that it is agreed by most modern psychologists that it is not things in themselves which trouble us, but the opinions we have about these things. (Rowe,2003:13) Buddhism also agrees with this opinion that’s why in Buddhism “Yoniso Manasikara” or “wise consideration” given priority and suggested to follow prior to any other practice.

Yoniso Manasikara is a key factor in not falling into depression or any other mental adversity. It is the foundation in the process of developing the mind to know things as they really are (yathābhūtham). Yoniso Manasikāra is pivotal. It is like the hub around which revolves the entire methodization for the overcoming of āsavas. What is emphasized is to give right direction to mental activities. (Buddharakkhitha, 2011:100) As a matter of fact, manasikāra is one of those innocuous mental factors (cetasika) which is associated with every state of consciousness. That is why it is called a “primary mental factor”, common to all states (sabba-cittasādhāraṇa), wholesome (kusala), unwholesome (akusala) and indeterminate (avyākata). (Buddharakkhitha, 2011:100) Literally manasikara means manam karoti – “makes the mind to attend that”, i.e., to consider, direct attention, think, etc. in this context manasikāra therefore, is fixing, one’s mind totally to a certain purpose, having a thorough-going method in one’s thought. (Buddharakkhitha, 2011:100-101)

When a person considers wisely and get to know the problem and the cause of the specific problem clearly then he can look for a solution for that particular problem. If there is a way out of it he can proceed with that way to get out of that particular problem. If he gets to understand that this problem or the matter that cause him to be depressed is something unavoidable and it is the norm of the world, then he can make up his mind and accept that situation and not get effected by adverse incidents. Here we can state the story of the Kisāgotamī (Dhp :114) as an example of a person who suffered from depression due to the death of his loving son later got recovered by understanding this fact that death and loss is unavoidable factor that every person must face.

The next practice that can be recommended to deal with depression is understanding the norm of the world or the nature of things as they really are. The Buddha has clearly stated that “these eight worldly conditions revolve around the world, and the world revolves around these eight worldly conditions. What eight? Gain and loss, disrepute and fame,

blame and praise, and pleasure and pain.”(A, 8: 6) Most of the people tend to get overexcited when experienced gain, fame, praise, and pleasure and cling into it as permanent, happy, and belong to oneself. When most of the people are faced with loss, disrepute, blame and pain they tend to get very depressed and think of them as permanent, unhappy and belong to oneself. It is important to understand that these eight conditions come and go from time to time. Sometimes there is gain and another time there can be loss. Sometimes we can get fame and some other time disrepute can occur. People may praise us at some point and at some situations people may blame us. Pleasure and pain occurs from time to time inevitably.

Furthermore it is essential to understand that “These eight worldly conditions that one has met are impermanent, suffering, and subject to change.” (A, 8: 6) Then we can let it go and not to get depressed when faced with these conditions. These three characteristics are called “Tilakkhana” or Three characteristics of all phenomena. Every conditioned thing is subject to these characteristics. When we keep in mind this fact we can make our mind to be calm amidst these inevitable conditions.

Upekkhā or indifference to both satisfactory and unsatisfactory feelings(Nanamoli, 2010:153) is another crucial aspect to develop in order to not get effected by depressive incidences. Upekkhā is to view impartially. That is to view neither with attachment nor with aversion. It is the balanced state of mind. (Narada,1979: 137) When we develop Upekkha we can be calm and not to get distressed or depressed when we face unsatisfactory feelings. Furthermore we will not get over attached or addicted to satisfactory feelings that cause addiction and distress when we lose that object or sensation which contains satisfaction.

There are many other practices and aspects that can be applied to deal with depression and avoid falling into major depression which is related to cognitive and psychological aspects that need much space and time to describe in details.

Conclusion

Taking all the above mentioned matters we can conclude that depression is something inevitable in the life of human beings. When a person is not able to handle depressive situations he can fall into major depression which has many bad consequences.

When the nature and effects of depression as described by modern psychological studies are compared with the teachings of the Buddha it became evident that depression is very similar to some aspects of Dukkha or Suffering. Those aspects are Soka (sorrow), Parideva (lamentation), Dukkha (pain), Domanassa (grief), Upāyasa (despair) which have very similar symptoms and characteristics with depression. The incidents and factors that lead to depression are very much similar to each other as well.

Even though medical treatments are effective for some people but for some others it is not useful. It is agreed by many modern psychologists that knowing about depression and skills to deal with these incidents that cause depression is crucial as a preventive method to not to fall into clinical depression. There are many psychologists who seek new ways to deal with depression. One of them is called holistic approach which combines traditional spiritual methods with modern psychological methods as an alternative way to prevent falling into major depression. So seeking explanations and solutions from Buddhism can be considered as a holistic approach.

Mindfulness is the best way to overcome sorrow, despair, lamentation, grief, distress and of course depression. Being mindfulness and wise consideration will pave the way for people to understand the norm the nature of every worldly conditions as inevitable and all are impermanent, suffering and subject to change. Then developing “Upekkhā” or indifference is needed to not to get effected by factors and incidences that cause depression.

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