

Ramblings About How I Cured My Depression

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Since Robin William's suicide I've been thinking a bit more about depression and my own relationship with it. It's always been a very important topic for me. I used to be very depressed to the point where I made plans to kill myself and I think once when I was about twelve I even walked out the door with the intention of following through with it.

One day in seventh grade I remember telling half the class that I wished I was dead. Someone told me that wasn't cool to joke about and I insisted that I was not joking and I genuinely wished I was dead. I never heard back about that. No one mentioned it to the teacher as far as I know, or if they did, she didn't bother to address it.

The depression felt absolutely inescapable. For many years I envisioned my adult life as nothing more than going to work, coming home and watching television by myself. My greatest dream in life was to have 500 channels to distract me from how much I hated life. Having a successful career or even a loving girlfriend seemed completely unrealistic for me.

Then I went through a magical transformation in my late teens. It didn't feel like I overcame a chemical disorder in my brain. It felt like reality itself had altered, like the whole universe had changed shape and meaning, as though God had finally presented Himself to me. If I went back in time to tell myself how happy I would be in my adult life, there's no chance I would have believed it. I was so deep in depression that I wasn't able to even accept that this kind of happiness and satisfaction was possible in human beings.

I think that may be one of the keys. A depressed person must first accept that happiness, true happiness and satisfaction absolutely is possible. But how do you communicate that? Just telling someone that it's possible isn't going to do it because it's a feeling and belief that lies much deeper than our logical reasoning.

For so many years I've wanted to try to explain how I did it but it seems like every year that goes by it gets harder to frame into words and I lose the sense of what it felt like to be depressed.

What I do know is that I made a conscious choice to stop being depressed. I know that's offensive to many people, but I truly believe it. However, I also remember when people would tell me that I could just choose to be happy. That didn't help me. Just insisting that happiness is a choice is not doing anything to help people with depression.

On the other hand, insisting that depression is all chemical, calling it a disease, telling people that they are helpless, and implying that the cure can only be done through a doctor, I believe is even more damaging. I think that attitude was a big part of what kept me trapped for most of my childhood. There were actual authorities on the subject telling me that I was helpless, making me believe that there was nothing I could do to affect my own life.

I know that there are many chemical and biological reasons for depression. It frequently seems like a disease to both the sufferer and the medical professionals, but I feel that reminding people of that is an extremely counter-productive approach. People should feel empowered to make changes. Calling it a disease strips people of that power.

I never went to counselors for my depression or even really talked about it beyond that one day in seventh grade. I'm certainly not suggesting that people be that closeted about it, but in a way, I think it helped me by not telling anyone. I was never put in counseling and never prescribed drugs. I came out of my depression completely on my own. I think that counseling may really have helped me get out of it earlier, but I am convinced that taking regular pharmaceuticals may have helped temporarily but would ultimately have made me even more trapped in my negative perspectives.

However, my depression left me right around the same time that I got deep into marijuana and psychedelic use and started selling drugs. You could argue that the mushrooms, LSD and other psychedelics I took at that time changed the chemical makeup of my brain and allowed me to find a better life. There's probably some truth to that, but at the same time I've known many depressed people who smoke weed and take psychedelics and see no improvement. In a very small number of cases it even seemed to make it worse. So simply going out and having fun with recreational drugs is not going to cure depression.

So what was it that really ended my depression? It's hard for me to know for sure, but I think it had to do with me just kind of giving up on a lot of stuff. Again, not something I would recommend for someone fighting depression. But in all honesty, I kind of gave up on life. Specifically, I gave up on trying to find a girlfriend, but also, in general I gave up on my drive to be happy and fulfilled. Instead, I decided to just start smoking pot until I forgot how sad I was. I figured when the marijuana stopped killing the pain I would start drinking and if that didn't do it I'd move on to coke and eventually heroin if that's what it took to to make myself feel good.

I hesitate to tell this story because it sounds like absolutely horrendous advice to give to someone with depression. And it would be. In no way am I advising folks to take this approach.

On the other hand, it's what worked for me. Life is such a strange, backward, counter-intuitive experience. Perhaps realizing that was part of my solution. I had to recognize that there is no logical road map for life and there never will be. Each and every person must carve their own path.

There were other things during that time that I think kept me safe from dangerous drug addiction. I got some minor drug addictions to marijuana and tobacco and may have felt myself becoming addicted to a couple other things like a form of speed that was still legal, but nothing that would kill me.

But I think what it came down to was that I was willing to make the decision to end my depression. I was willing to make the sacrifices. I was willing to give up all respect from my family and society as I went down my path of illicit drug use. I was okay with the risks. I knew I might go to prison or wind up dead in a ditch. I accepted that. At the time I didn't realize how safe marijuana and mushrooms really were so I always felt like I was taking this huge risk. I think that sense of risk helped tremendously. Even though the fear was unpleasant at the time, the next day, after facing my fears of trying that new mystery drug, I felt empowered, like I'd overcome something, even if I hadn't enjoyed the high. In the long run I think

that was a major player in the end of my depression.

Another thing I think, was simply the marijuana community in Bellingham, Washington. That was just a unique and happy coincidence that the small-time drug dealers and users in that town were such supportive and caring individuals who accepted me for who I was without judgement. I guess that's one solid piece of advice I can give in all this rambling: surround yourself with people who support you and accept you for who you are. Reject the others... but reject them compassionately.

On the other hand, you also want to surround yourself with people who are honest with you, who aren't going to lie to you to protect your feelings. For me, I am happiest and most comfortable around people who I know aren't going to sugar-coat things. If I catch someone lying, even if it's coming from a place of love, I lose trust in that person and I lose a measure of self-respect. If I see them being brutally honest with someone, even if they're being harsh, that can make me more comfortable knowing they probably aren't harboring unspoken judgments.

Is that good advice? I don't know. It seems so counter-intuitive. Many folks insist that you should be supportive and make people feel good even if that means not being totally straight with them. That doesn't work for me but it might for other people. But I wonder if many people who take that attitude are also suffering depression. It does seem kind of rare to see someone who is ruthlessly honest and straightforward who is also suffering from deep depression, but maybe that's just my own perceptions fucking with me.

But maybe the best advice I can give is to experiment. Don't just accept your depression lying down. Try new things. Try new ways of looking at life. Get to know new kinds of people. Gauge how all this makes you feel over time and keep experimenting. If something helps you feel empowered or like there's a beacon of hope, then explore it further, even if it doesn't directly help your depression. Search for new and different ways to truly convince yourself that escape is possible and that you deserve that escape, and that your friends, family and society are all rooting for you.

On the other hand, I'm no psychologist or counselor. I'm just one dude who happened to cure his own depression and is now writing a rambling, disorganized blog post about it. Who knows if I have any idea what I'm talking about.