

Midlife and the Art of Depression

By Michael Irvine

Everyman has a soul - this is the first teaching, the central wisdom around which this book is written. There are men, millions of them, who are quite content to live the collective life. They are like sheep herded in and out, each day bound by someone else's beliefs or trapped within their own mindaholism, unaware that we even have an inner world, We are entrenched in a matrix of commercials, un-natural vibrations and fields of ideas, institutions, schools, careers - relations that separate us further and further from our essential selves.

This mindaholism/brainwashing/collective entrainment is essential preparation. We sit in our comfortable western culture, flipping channels, logging on, connected to the hilt, the knowledge of the universe apparently at our fingertips - and yet increasingly soulless. Rampant illness and disease, wars, terror, we stand like trees with our roots dangling in the air. Leaning against each other, confusing this leaning for relationship or workshops, or whatever you have created in the mind to keep you from having to look down.

We have access to more forms of medical care and holistic healings, medicines, and on and on, and yet we are most unwell. It is as if the culture that is the illness itself is trying to pass itself off as the medicine. Like so many wounded healers, both feeding off of each other: the criminal and the lawyer; the priest and the paedophile; the rich and the poor; the ill, the suffering and the physicians, the healers; the unemployed and the counsellors; the street people and the social service agents - and on and on, our society and social structure is insane, it breeds insanity. It demands that you live out of your body until you get so ill that you must then rely on its addictive medicines to sustain you, to mask over the very symptoms that you need to pay attention to in the first place - because God help us if everyone just got up and left.

Built on the sands of unconscious intentions, built on false roots, built on fear and a certain speedy, fast-food soullessness, it is designed to collapse. For like trees dangling in the air, leaning one against the other, eventually the leaves begin to turn and fall, the wood becomes brittle, and somewhere around midlife a man begins to feel the hopelessness of it all. In between meetings and conversations, in between who he thought he was, a certain emptiness begins to surface. Perhaps he looks down for a moment and notices that he is no longer on the earth, his legs are dangling, turning blue, and his roots are shrivelling up. Perhaps an illness, job loss, a failed relationship takes him out. Self help books, the myriad of workshops, and so on begin to lose their energies. Something takes him out long enough to feel the empty space that was/is patiently below everything he has mistaken himself for. And for the most gifted of the rootless un-men, this haunting feeling of having manufactured a self.

We have become quite good at filling up this space, this essential void. Instead of falling, allowing a settling back into our bodies, we take up a parallel career, quickly fill up the relationship void and a myriad of other distractions and addictions begin to appear. We decorate it and we call it life.

Well, it's a long way down and denial, fear, panic, sexual/relational additions, pseudo-caring,

avoidance, alcohol, foods, drugs, and the man's mind itself can appear to be useful ladder rungs en route.

If a man doesn't know he has a soul, he is a soul, If he hasn't experienced it, felt this magic, wonder, its calling into his own mystery, he won't know the difference. In the end it is our inability to enter the void, to know the way of our dreams and our lost connections with the feeling and intuitive self. And particularly, it is our projection onto woman in all of her outer forms that keeps us from our own fem-in-men. It is far easier for a man to penetrate a woman than to penetrate his own mystery and reconnect with his own soul. Far easier to go up and out, to speak out, to ejaculate, to masturbate, to marry someone - some other source - than it is to drop down through his own inner darkness. Through hidden patterns, pains un-lived, sufferings held in the memory body. To awaken a desire to make love to these most distasteful aspects of yourself, to hold your own depression in your heart. To still oneself enough that dreams then begin to be re-membered.

A life that leans towards soul is a life that is more back and down than up and out. A soulful life and depression are mutually inclusive. Depression is just another word for getting down, for dropping all the masks and faces, for getting real, for coming down out of the mind's tower of babble and settling into the body's wisdom. Less words, more wise, deeper becomes highest. When we say we are depressed, we are really saying, "I'm ready to drop it all, everything I have created is now destroying me. I cannot hold up these false images anymore." In this way depression is really an art. It is a great gift to finally be overcome by depression. Depression is a calling. It comes from below. It calls us to glance down at our legs dangling here.

I recall one of Christ's sayings: "You cannot have two masters." And I realize this so clearly in my own life. So much of my life and time has been spent in this ambiguous place, This in between space, one foot in each world - one holding onto some collective identity, one dropping down into this awareness I am writing now; one seeking to hold on to certain pleasures, these in direct contradiction to the other foot deepening. There's a point where a man's balls are stretched to the limit ... he must choose his master.

There is a wisdom deep in the midlife that there is nothing to create, everything that is essential is already here. This is a powerful awareness and it represents one of the major colours in the art of depression.

Nature is an incredible metaphor for the soul, of living in harmony with the many conflicting and polarizing aspects of self. A river cannot change its course, and it is intimately connected with all of the elements. Without the earth and high banks it would soon dissipate, without the stones and clays and trees the banks would dissolve. Her everything is intricately connected - each seemingly a separate element, yet each an aspect of the whole. The soul is like this: many aspects, all interconnected - and depression is like this. It comes into our life as a calling. It says. "Hello, Hello, you have become too linear again, you have become too aligned with certain parts of yourself and you are neglecting me. There are many parts within you, and because you are entering another life change, you have called me up from the depths of your unconscious to help you through this crossroad. I will meet you tonight when the mind is quiet. I live in the shadowlands, in the dreamscapes, and I'll wait for you there, if you can still yourself

enough to let me into your awareness.

The river accepts itself, its own limitations and a certain natural humility, because it recognizes the interplay of all the elements and the millions of variables. In effect, it remains silent. The river knows that even by speaking out it may disturb what is already immaculate. The river does not need to become itself. To seek meaning to heal itself, because it is itself by the very nature of its own humility, its own surrendering into nature's course.

Now men, men are peculiar animals in that they seem to believe they can change the course of a river and not upset the whole of the environment. Man manufactures a self that is in direct opposition to the earth, to nature and all of the universal rhythms - and so to his own soul.

Man manufactures a self ... this is the second colour in the art of depression. Just imagine it for a time, just sit with that awareness for a few days and it will begin to work on you. It will begin to breathe some awareness into your depression. You are so and so, you speak this way, you use these words, you hold these beliefs ... and on and on. Where does that come from?

In this way, this brief writing is about the end of you. It is an invitation to deconstruct yourself. For, to the degree you identify with yourself, to the degree you define yourself, so too you have separated yourself from this greater reality. This, of course is one of the central tasks of midlife. Earlier belief systems no longer fit. We are moving to more universal models, more holistic, more spacious, grief's surface previously hidden. What was at the beginning of life seems to rise again past midlife.

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Michael Irvine lives in Ottawa, ON. You may contact him at (613) 786-1327 or by email at mykaeldorji@hotmail.com.