

HEALTHY CORE GROUP
Personal experience of “Depression Disappears with CORE HEALTH”
EXPERIENCES, BENEFITS, SUGGESTIONS, REFLECTIONS

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I began the Healthy Core group in November 2004 as a skeptic, but a desperate one. My life had pretty much hit rock bottom, I was severely depressed, and I had been that way for quite a while. Nothing I had tried to alleviate my misery had worked, and I only kept going on because I was too much of a coward to kill myself. I want to provide a bit of background because only by doing so can I explain the tremendous changes the Healthy Core classes had for me.

BACKGROUND

I struggled with depression for much of my life. To set the stage, my family of origin was very often mean-spirited, violent, chaotic, dismissive, and devoid of nurturance. Interspersed there would be times of relative calm, sometimes even bright spots of fun, but they didn't last. My parents had each brought more baggage to their marriage than a relationship between two saints could endure, and I essentially grew up in a domestic war zone, but one I somehow knew to keep quiet about to the outside world. I felt like a schizophrenic zombie, and frankly, I was a mess.

Haunted by feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, I became a great little actress in the charade of our family life. Emotional vulnerability was just too dangerous in my household, and the only safe emotional expressions were sarcasm, derisive blame, and ridicule. I couldn't tell a real emotion from the ones I was allowed to express in our little familial farce. I became emotionally stunted and pretty much just started denying or dissociating from emotional reality. I was convinced I was worthless and deserved my despair, had zero self-esteem, and had a constant mental litany available to me 24/7 to support my sense of desolation.

I wanted to try to get beyond it all but had no clue how to do it. There was no network of caring mentoring adults, no extended family, no spiritual solution. I had no religious context to help me, having as a child run away at full speed from the nominal Protestantism of my family which I saw as hypocritical, authoritarian, “opiate of the masses,” and just plain bullshit.

My only escape was school, where I functioned well academically but was definitely a social outcast. The only thing I had of any meaning was educating myself and I read everything I could on science, anthropology, philosophy, etc. I was trying to fill the void but it wasn't working very well. Even as a child, rigorous intellectual authenticity with myself was vital and

the only thing that even remotely met that criterion was a grim existential atheism—you know, “life’s a bitch and then you die.” There was no deeper meaning, no better life after this one, and nothing helped me find peace or a sense of worth. I was miserable. I faked it through the futility I felt and became the resident skeptic and cynic.

I was angry, rebellious and wanted to get as far away from my family as I could, geographically and emotionally. I did both but neither brought solace or comfort. The anomie I felt as a child only deepened as a young adult, and I was a misfit, an outcast, a pariah. Part of me reveled in this, because I scorned the superficiality and stupidity of the mainstream, but part of me was excruciatingly lonely and adrift. I prepared for a life of aloof aloneness, knowing I could never do the family thing and believing that I would never have it in me to be a successful mother. Family certainly had been no source of joy for me. I felt I had nothing to offer to a child. Why replicate the misery?

Instead I journeyed down one seemingly futile path after another trying to find out what mattered, how to be passably happy, and how to survive. My inner vulnerability belied my external aloof persona, and I hungered so much for validation I sought it out from often unsavory sources. I recall one college boyfriend sneeringly tell me that I “craved affection.” He was right, but I was ashamed.

Mine was a mostly unsuccessful search for meaning. I experimented with drugs, dropped acid, “dropped out,” studied philosophy and religion in college, majored in anthropology, wanted to become a professor, but in my early twenties derailed my life with a disastrous violent relationship. The experiences in that relationship were devastating emotionally and physically. I survived an awful assault on my psyche, and in an era before domestic violence had become a feminist cause, I blamed myself, sunk into deeper despair and basically continued to fake it to the outside world.

I truly could not understand how people could be happy, at least not consistently. They had to be even bigger frauds than me, or else just exceedingly dense. Sure, I had my moments of happiness and joy, sometimes even quite a few in the years following my escape from that daily violent brutality. But they felt like aberrations, and I still had no solid belief structure which helped me make sense of it all, at least not one I wanted.

In my mid-twenties, I moved to Florida from New Jersey, began a career in social services (not in academia as I had wanted), became self-sufficient and all that jazz. I re-established relationships with my parents and, in my thirties, through therapy and much intense work, I learned to let go of the deep-rooted anger I felt towards them. Funny, though, I couldn’t do that for myself. That would take almost another twenty years.

I continued to plow on the only way I really knew—by denying emotions and intellectualizing my life. I had a great brain but a shriveled heart. Oh, I was good at feigning compassion, consideration, and doing all the things you are supposed to do to be a good person, but I felt like a fraud of the worst magnitude. I was a disembodied observer of my own life. I felt that I had two choices: Door Number One: explore things dispassionately, be the cold hard scientist, supposedly objective and rational, or Door Number Two: replicate the sarcasm, derisive blame and ridicule from my childhood. Neither worked well. Door Number Three eluded me.

I continued to search however. My academic training in anthropology, religion, and philosophy had opened me up to exploring many paths, and while I did find this intellectually stimulating, even fun, it was never a source of true comfort. I explored all types of things, from New Age to ancient philosophies, ACIM, IONS, continued in therapy, and researched metaphysics in scrupulous detail. My “inquiring mind wanted to know,” but like the Protestantism of my youth, it was not sufficient to penetrate through my rock wall of inner resistance. So much of it felt like a sham. It was diversionary. Or so I thought at the time.

Concurrent with this, I began to do very well in my career, had begun a relationship (for the first time in a decade) with a person I felt was “the one,” and did not know what to make of the contentment I felt from those two spheres. But it wasn’t going to last anyway. After seven tumultuous years, my relationship crumbled, my parents’ health was plummeting, and I became a residential caregiver for both of them as well as maintaining my demanding (and at that time still successful) job.

Then in the space of a few years, my father died, my mother developed Alzheimer’s, she died, and in October 2002 I was humiliatingly fired from the job I valued and held for 12 years. I collapsed. Neither therapy, St John’s Wort or Paxil were working and I could barely get out of bed.

In the midst of this stuporous depression, it had become glaringly apparent to me that the contentment I had finally felt via my work and an intimate relationship was not genuine—it came from external, transient, and ultimately losable sources. My always shaky sense of self was once again shattered. I had defined and validated myself through the good work I did on my job (many accolades, working extreme hours, workaholic, blah blah). When that was gone, I was naked. When I lost my parents (after having found them so late) I was orphaned (no other family for 1200 miles). When I lost my intimate partner, I was totally undesirable and alone. Everything combined into a toxic brew that reinforced a blanket condemnation of self and a reaffirmation of my worthlessness.

There was nothing left of me or for me, because I could not find me.

The succession of so many traumas left me desolate. I thought of suicide but was chicken. This was not an idle thought of mine and I had graphic role models for that, with two friends who had killed themselves in recent years, and the memory of my grandmother's suicide when I was six.

Allow me a brief digression here.... my grandmother had been my primary caregiver, and had killed herself in my family's garage through carbon monoxide poisoning (or as my mother put it, "took the gas pipe"). My family was forever silent about it—it was as if the woman never existed. I was complicit in the silence. I didn't have much of a choice.

It has only been in the last few years, after the deaths of my own parents, that I have lifted the veil of silence that shrouded my grandmother's suicide. I began to think quite a bit about my grandmother, about the pain she must have been in to take her own life. It felt like disturbingly familiar territory and that frightened me. Well I guess it was a good thing I was chicken, because otherwise I'd probably be dead.

In these past few years, what I have come to realize is that in my childhood silence I was stuffing my emotions—literally. When I look back on the rare photos from my childhood, I see a child of normal weight who ballooned into obesity within a year of my grandmother's death. It was an obesity which lasted until I was 17, when an emotional crisis triggered a crash that resulted in a great loss of weight. I continued to stuff my emotions, but I exchanged my drug of choice from food to drugs (of many hallucinogenic and mind-altering varieties). My excess weight stayed off until I was 27, when another crisis triggered an emotional response to eating, which plagues me to this day.

In the midst of all of this, I had started attending Unity in 2001 (after seeing Ram Dass there) and in 2002 had rediscovered IONS. Together these were opening a spiritual door which I had never considered genuine before. This was foreign territory for me, and depression be damned, I rustled up the last bit of enthusiasm I could muster to investigate them. Maybe, just maybe, I could find a spirituality that transcended artificial societal constructs. Maybe I could find a way out.

Then in early 2003 I was offered another job in my field (which in retrospect I never should have taken) and it was a disaster. Nine months later I lost that job. It was October 2003 and I was in total despair. I lived off of unemployment, liquidated many assets, and knew that I was totally unready to look for work. That continued for a full year, until November 2004 when I began the Healthy Core classes.

EXPERIENCES AND BENEFITS OF THE HEALTHY CORE CLASS

It was in this state that I started the Healthy Core class. Unable to work, totally miserable, broke, dazed, and unable to find a way out. What I didn't yet know was what I needed to find was a way in.

Back in the spring of 2004, Ed and I had spoken on the phone at some length about the upcoming class and it felt genuine to me. Although I didn't really know anything about kinesiology, I was very impressed by Ed's passion for it, his erudition, and by the fact that my intuition told me this was the real deal.

I was right. The Healthy Core class was transformative. Our class became my laboratory and I couldn't invalidate what I was experiencing. Our muscle testing provided experiential validation of the class concepts and met my rigorous need for scientific authenticity. I was seeing transformation with my own eyes with other group members, and I was experiencing it personally myself. This wasn't quackery or mumbo-jumbo. This was real!

The class was rocking my world and seriously challenged the inevitability of my old intellectual "life's a bitch and then you die" paradigm. I was beginning to sense the possibility of an authentic spirituality and new emotional reality which together began to reframe my worldview and my personal sense of self. My heart was beginning to unshriveled and I was finding myself in a brave new world. My journey was opening up a new pathway to wholeness for me.

I believe three things consecutively conspired to allow this to happen for me on such a deep level:

1) In 2001, finding Unity, with a metaphysical mystical interpretation of reality that felt like it could be genuine. This **opened the spiritual door for me**, the atheist/agnostic, to find authentic spirituality and a sense of self worth based on who I am and not what I do.

2) In 2002, finding IONS again after many years, and exploring the intersection of science and spirituality. This **gave me the scientific basis** I needed to even acknowledge that there can be a valid basis to spirituality. It legitimated my profound change in worldview, and facilitated my receptivity on a heart level.

3) In 2004, finding Ed, whose kinesiology classes **gave me the valid personal experiential basis** to truly accept on a heart level what I was just beginning to intellectually integrate from Unity and IONS.

The Healthy Core class has been a very important turning point for me, one that literally enabled me to make life-affirming changes. I began to integrate my intellectual knowledge into my heart and vice versa. This felt valid, genuine, real and it was terrain new to me. This culminated in the work we did on self worth, which was ground-breaking for me on several levels:

1) For the first time, I felt authentically worthy just for being. This was not an abstract concept any more! No more defining myself primarily by what I did, produced, or accomplished. These things can be great, but in the grand scheme of things they are illusory. My self worth became inherently based on my being and not something I needed to earn via my doing. Importantly, I felt this at a very deep level—the energetic level. It went to the core of me and started clearing out 50 years of accumulated cultural debris.

2) I clawed my way out of the abyss of depression. I wouldn't say that every day is a bed of roses, but I have learned that I have choices to help make my life more joyful. I know that this requires my effort, vigilance, and patience, but I am on the energetic road with it. A concrete example occurred when some severe emotional issues exploded in December 2004. What previously would have knocked me out for several days only debilitated me for a few hours. This so stunned me that I stopped to analyze my response. I realized it was our Healthy Core work which kept me from sinking so deeply and enabled a speedier and more complete rebound. This has been replicated many times.

3) I was able to begin a successful job hunt in November 2004 that culminated in obtaining a position of merit in April 2005. This required facing a lot of demons and while some of them still lurk, I'm still here. Finances are a bit rocky, but I am making headway.

4) I am beginning to find joy. For the past couple of years, I had lost my ability to enjoy the things which had once given me pleasure (such as gardening, artistic hobbies, creative writing, reading, etc). I am beginning to find the joy in them once again. While I have only taken small steps in these areas so far, just the fact that I am able to take the steps is the most important change for me. Finding the actual joy is a monumental achievement. I no longer avert my eyes when I pass gardens, I stop and admire them. I have enjoyed writing again, and have voraciously rediscovered the joy of reading. I have faith that my artistic joy is soon to unfold itself as well.

5) I can say that I feel grounded and authentic as I never have before. I have reconnected to my core and now have a sense of awe, a sense of wonder, and a spiritually-grounded gratitude for my life. I have even felt that I can finally explore my recently discovered issues around my grandmother's suicide and move forward. Although some days

I do feel like I'm running on empty, I know how to find my energetic level fuel pump and can "gas up" for re-empowerment.

6) I feel genuinely compassionate towards myself. I have been searching for this for so many years and the class focus on self-forgiveness at an energetic level was key to this success. The guided meditations and experiential muscle testing significantly reinforced this during the class and have proved beneficial post-class as well. For example, if I find myself succumbing to my old self-critical reality (or "paradigm slippage" as I call it now), I can usually catch myself before I'm too far down that path by silently repeating parts of the meditations where my older wiser self comforts and welcomes home my younger misguided prodigal self. It's a helluva lot better than my former mantras.

7) I learned that I had this in me all the time. But, just like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, when Glinda the Good Witch tells her that all she ever had to do to get back home to Kansas was to say it to herself, I would not have believed it either without an experiential basis. The Healthy Core class gave me this basis. For example, it helped me reframe my perception of my years of cherished meditative childhood escapes where I left this planet and floated in blissful Otherness. These became my Perfect Moments and were re-contextualized within a new scientifically and experientially validated paradigm that integrated authentic spirituality. In all seriousness, I think that for many years these Perfect Moments were one of the few threads that tenuously connected me to sanity, and now I am weaving my own tapestry of connection with the Oneness. And you can bet its vibrant, colorful, rich, lush, riotous in its joy, and its mine. All mine.

8) I can end the anguish of my inner isolation. It has been eight years since I have been in an intimate relationship and for almost all of that time I was either too busy getting over the old one or too screwed up to even think about a new one. Being alone wasn't the hard part, but the loneliness was. It still is. But in the last few months I have felt a few faint glimmers inside that maybe I am finally healthy enough to reach out to another and to receive back what may be given to me.

IN A COSMIC NUTSHELL

My years of searching were not in vain or wrong, but my perspective needed adjustment. I needed to break free from the constricting prison of my self-imposed and culturally reinforced personal desolation in order to realize my cosmic connection. I needed to break my heart open, to unshriveled it, in order to realize that separation is illusory. For virtually all of my life, I have been searching for a "way out." What I have found instead is a "way in." In so doing, I have found my healthy core. And I don't EVER want to lose it again. Door Number Three. Or some might call it grace.

SUGGESTIONS & REFLECTIONS

The Healthy Core class was an intensive experience, from both the aspect of time commitment and the tremendous shift it enabled in me. Often being a very linear thinker, I sometimes felt disoriented in the class, because I wasn't sure where we (or I) were going. I kept wanting to model the class after a college course and yearned for a written syllabus and reading list. I sometimes had a hard time just going into the uncharted territories of the class.

The speed of the class was sometimes disorienting. I was experiencing changes on an energetic level that didn't always simultaneously translate into emotional changes, and I often had the feeling of being on a roller coaster where nobody had the "off" switch. I think I am still integrating some of the energetic changes post-class, and I sometimes find it difficult to remember all that we did, or to remember to do the work.

I found the guided meditations in class to be very helpful, but I needed more reinforcement. I wanted energetic core boosts to be available to me in daily doses. Cassettes of each class' meditation would have helped me integrate emotional and intellectual changes more smoothly and concurrently with energetic level changes. Perhaps then I could have modulated the roller coaster better.

It feels easy to backslide and I don't want to do that. Guided meditation cassettes would help here too. I am realizing that I need to work at this every day because consciousness-changing and paradigm-shifting is ongoing work (or play, as the case may be). Sometimes I just feel mentally foggy and don't do the work, and I regret it. Sometimes, though, it comes through loud and clear, and I am more grateful and grounded than I can believe. I am looking forward to seeing the write up of this class.

Thank you Ed, more than you will ever know.