

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON FAITH  
SOME THOUGHTS ON DEPRESSION  
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**Q: How do Buddhists deal with depression?**

**A:** This is my personal view of depression that I have developed as a Buddhist who is very interested in the inner world of human beings.

I understand that, medically speaking, clinical depression is defined as an illness, as opposed to a condition in which an individual feels “under the weather” or “has the blues.” Although Nichiren Daishonin does not address this particular type of sickness in his writings, I believe it would fall under his category of “illness of the mind.”

It seems that how an illness of the mind manifests varies from person to person. The Daishonin states: “Illnesses of the mind differ greatly in severity. [There are] eighty-four thousand kinds of illnesses of the mind that arise from the three poisons and that afflict ordinary people of the six paths...” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1111). It would seem that there are as many illnesses of the mind as the number of people who suffer from them.

As pointed out in the above passage, depression is the outcome of a life afflicted by a kind of poison. And the origin of this poison differs from individual to individual. In some cases, the cause of one’s depression may have been made in this lifetime; in other cases, it may date back to past lifetimes.

When it comes to an illness of the mind, dialogue is a very important tool to overcome it. For instance, dialogue with a senior in faith who has a solid grasp of the Daishonin’s Buddhism or with a professional skilled in this medical field seems crucial for the depressed individual to locate an exit from the mental and emotional disorders contributing to their depression. From the Buddhist perspective, these people function according to Buddhist principles as good friends or Buddhist deities to those suffering from depression.

Life-to-life dialogue, which I admit is not easy, can help us examine ourselves more thoroughly. It can enable us to recognize weaknesses and distortions within and see what needs to be changed. Through life-affirming dialogue, we can also stimulate a new sense of purpose and passion toward living.

Buddhism teaches that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo should be done with a positive orientation. When we have strong desires in our hearts, clear goals in our minds and solid determination in our lives, our innate Buddhahood will definitely be activated enough to supersede the negative forces that cause depression.

It is within this context that we should understand that the Lotus Sutra is the best medicine. The force of our Buddha nature must prevail for us to become happy.

It is safe to say that, when we start living with hope for the future, we will have already begun overcoming our depression. In addition, if we pray for the happiness of others and take action on their behalf, we have already regained our mental health on a fundamental level.

It is not proper, then, to say “just chant” to those who suffer from depression. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with a weak life force, with no knowledge of how our lives need to be changed or developed may not bring about a true solution. Chanting is more

meaningful when we have a clear goal and solid determination; praying in this manner enables us to tap the wisdom to know what to do and the life force to put forth the effort needed to accomplish our dreams.

It is important to recognize that courage is the key to our happiness. This is often what is missing in the lives of those who fall prey to depression. As the Daishonin's "Reply to Kyo'o" reads: "Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?" (WND, 412). With faith in the Gohonzon as our center, all our problems that have generated depression in our lives can be wiped out.

The message of Buddhism is: "Let's use our minds and bodies to tap the brightness and joy within, to the point where our entire existence becomes full of vitality, and we feel entirely secure." SGI President Ikeda suggests in *Discussions on Youth* that we should "do something! Start something! As you make consistent efforts, you will begin to see your goals come into focus. You will discover your mission, the one only you can fulfill" (vol. 1, p. 49).

By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and taking action, Buddhism says that we can empower ourselves from the inside. Encouraging others also enhances our lives. This is the most powerful way to battle the causes of depression. By focusing on others' lives and helping them become happy, we will realize that we have already taken the important steps to rid ourselves of depression. The Daishonin explains that "if you light a lamp for another, your own way will be lit" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1598).

In many cases, Buddhist wisdom will lead a person suffering from depression to seek help in the form of psychotherapy and/or one of the many new and effective antidepressants on the market. These medications are meant to correct chemical imbalances, enabling the person to function more efficiently and tap their full potential.

In the final analysis, Buddhism instructs us to establish the kind of identity that is unshakable under any circumstances, that is free from suffering on the deepest level. In other words, Buddhism exists to help us become strong enough to rise above whatever created our depression. It also makes us wise enough to realize that life in and of itself is beautiful and worthwhile.

Through the process of human revolution, we can even view depression in a positive light. We can eventually see how the life force that helped us overcome our depression led us to greater happiness; how facing depression was the beginning of a journey to a new life. Defeating depression is a great experience that opens our lives and one we can share with others, encouraging them to open their lives, too.

Great dialogue and correct Buddhist practice allows us to find the solution within.