



## POST-PARTUM DEPRESSION; A FATHER'S PERSPECTIVE

John is a 37 year old man who consulted me in 2003 for profound depression with suicidal thoughts. He has suffered from depression much of his life, but it worsened 18 months ago when he lost his job and when his wife gave birth, first to their daughter, and more recently to a son. "My world fell in on me when my children were born. I wasn't ready for parenting. My wife wanted to raise emotionally healthy kids, but I didn't know what that meant. I felt emotionally crippled."

He believes his depression stems from a chaotic upbringing. His mother was a stay-at-home mom who took on foster children. Many of the foster kids were emotionally troubled, coming from violent backgrounds or suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome. He felt the emotional needs of the foster children took precedence over his. His father was often away, and he was raised mostly by his mother, who was moody, irritable, and critical. He and his siblings were left to fend for themselves.

"There was nobody there for any of us emotionally." When he complained of this to his mother, she dismissed and belittled him, made him feel guilty and afraid, threatening that she might be even less available if she were to get a job outside of home. Confronting her felt futile, and he isolated himself in his room, shying away from all the chaos in the house, especially the frequent fights among the foster kids. He'd try to be helpful, but felt overwhelmed with the unhappiness in the house.

Since the birth of his children, he treats them pragmatically (he calls it "militant"), the way he treated the foster children he grew up having to deal with. Instead of feeling playful, he feels burdened with responsibility, unhappy, a heavy duty that he struggles with. "I don't know how to engage, and feel upset with myself about how I parent."

He avoids his wife when she is upset, fearing being pulled into her depression, and also feeling guilty, "as if I was responsible for causing her upset. Instead of being there for her, I want to isolate myself even more, fearing that she won't snap out of it. I wouldn't know how I'd handle it. She's my rudder, my stability, my backbone, and I rely on her for my mental wellbeing. Who would look after me, if she wasn't available? It feels awful, like a child, always needy."



Increasingly he feels he is a drain on his wife, and has been having suicidal thoughts from the guilt and shame his inadequacy provokes. “I’m always unhappy, irritable, forgetful, unable to contribute in the simplest ways. I feel worthless since losing my job, and crippled by my sadness. It’s like I’m emotionally starving. Even though I now have a beautiful family, I never feel happy.” Often he fights the urge to kill himself, the urge to step into an oncoming train, wanting to make it look like an accident so his wife could benefit from the insurance \$. They’ve been under financial stress ever since he lost his job.

His relationship with his parents is now distant, as he found that visiting them aggravated his depression. He fears confrontations with his mom, who has quarreled with his wife, blaming her for his distancing. Confrontations are too upsetting, so he avoids seeing them. His siblings and father have sided with their mother, and have distanced themselves from him. It’s sad, but he feels it’s for the best. His wife and kids are now his only family.

He doesn’t like his mother. “It’s difficult to reconcile that she’s my mother. She’s not a nice, loving person, and she’s not out for my good. I blame her for my depression, and have some anger toward her, but I also recognize she did the best she knew how, coming from a large family of 12, with alcoholism in her upbringing.”

He has a recurrent dream, of a bee hive, the bees growing in size, getting larger and larger, the din getting louder and louder. He wakes disturbed and disoriented. It reminds him of the chaos he felt growing up, where there were frequent fights among the foster children and also of the chaos he often feels in his current household.

He also remembers a dream of preparing to jump off a bridge that a friend of his who committed suicide jumped off of. He was about to jump, but then pulled back. On the one hand, he felt that profound despair he’s constantly feeling, but on the other hand there was joy, that ultimately he wanted more to live than to kill himself.

### ***The Parenting Dilemma:***

Our parents are our first teachers. Through their love for us, we learn how loveable we are. Children who grow up in a loveless household feel unlovable throughout their lives. As grownups and young parents themselves, they run the risk of feeling inadequate, not up to the task, as needy of love as their newborn



offspring. They relate to their spouse as a surrogate parent, and when they bring children to the world and attention is diverted to the infant, that insecurity around love intensifies.

In the homeopathic approach, *Aurum* or gold, in its pure form, is often thought of as a Rx for suicidal depression. People who need this Rx are high achievers who never feel good enough. When faced with failure in the work-place, they suffer profound self-hatred, like those sky scraper jumpers during the Great Depression.

There are many other homeopathic remedies indicated for suicidal depression. It depends on what the depression is about, how it manifests. When inadequacy revolves around parenting, a need to be nurtured, and a dysfunctional relationship with one's mother, I am inclined more toward the salt of gold, *Aurum muriaticum natronatum*. People who need this remedy question their worth and their ability to contribute emotionally to a family, never feeling good enough about their parenting skills. They feel they are burdening their spouse and children, and as a result feel it would be better for everyone if they were no longer around. I have seen it a life-saver several times in post-partum depression and during suicidal crises related to stress around parenting.

Within days of taking the Rx, John reported a change for the better, more positivity, less sadness. When the depression returned, it was not as strong, as if his tolerance for it had improved. He's more playful with his children, more present with his wife, and is experiencing more pleasure from just being around them. "I'm more aware of the joy I feel about being around them."

Over the next few months, he grew to appreciate more and more how much he loves being a stay-at-home dad, how emotionally satisfying this feels. His healing progressed steadily from then on, and I didn't hear from John until 2010 when, unexpectedly, he e-mailed me to say that he was doing very well, and that he no longer suffers from depression. His relationship with himself, his wife and his children is thriving, and he has never had a suicidal thought since he was given the homeopathic Rx. As he improved emotionally, he was also able to start a new and now thriving business.

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