

# Understanding Depression

Geoffrey D. Wilson



## Ethereal Soul

According to the praxis of Chinese Medicine, the movement of the Ethereal Soul regulates the totality of our psychic activity. This includes our life dreams, plans, ideas, inspiration, intuition, creativity and relationships with others. The proper movement of the Ethereal Soul (housed in the liver and called the 'Hun') is monitored by the Mind (housed in the heart and called 'Shen' or spirit).

If there is too much restraint of the Ethereal Soul's movement, depression ensues. And if the Mind fails to control the Ethereal Soul's movement, manic behaviours result. There is a flip to this. Depression and mania can appear independently or together. When they exist together, this is called Bipolar disorder.

## Manic Depression

Depressed patients have no faith in the future. They often lack ideas and dreams, are invariably direction-less and frequently suffer from feelings of loss, isolation and separation. The manic patient has too many ideas and dreams. Unfortunately, due to the chaotic state of the Ethereal Soul, very little ever comes to fruition. In simple terms, depression occurs when the Mind over-controls, whereas manic behaviours arise when the Mind fails to control and integrate.

## Liver Qi

Depression is often due to pathogenic factors (such as heat) inhibiting the movement of the Ethereal Soul. This produces stagnation of the Liver Qi. It may also be due to deficiencies emanating from insufficient stimulation of the Ethereal Soul. Most importantly, the precise differential diagnosis of depression is critical when selecting acupuncture points to needle, prescribing herbal formulas, or devising strategies for the modification of attitudes and behaviours.

## Anxiety

Anxiety without depression is also quite common. Feelings of anxiety include the emotional expressions of fear and worry and may be accompanied by deficiencies or pathogenic factors. If the anxiety is caused by a deficiency of blood, for example, the Mind cannot be anchored. If the anxiety is caused by a pathogenic factor such as heat, the Mind becomes easily agitated.

## Restoration

The restoration of a spiritual connection for the patient is vital to the healing process and the role of the practitioner is to assist with this process in a supervisory capacity, being sure to provide ample resources for growth and encouragement, all the while managed with compassion. The onus of responsibility for the practitioner is to find a way for the patient to restore a connection to spirit and subsequently maintain this re-connected state of Mind.

After nearly 25 years as a holistic practitioner of Oriental Medicine, I have observed that emotional imbalances are unequivocally an obstacle to spiritual growth and the maintenance of general wellbeing. A great sage once said, "Balance is when emotions have not yet emerged. Harmony is when they are active, but all in proportion." If this is true, then it seems plausible to suggest that the focus of therapy in relation to the treatment of depression and anxiety is to precisely identify the emotional state (e.g. insecurity, timidity, anger, sadness, resentment and so on) and cultivate within the patient the means to regulate emotional responses thereby harmonizing the activities of the Ethereal Soul.

Geoffrey D. Wilson  
Director - Art of Health

Geoff is available for consultations on Weds. Appts are available via [geoff@artofhealth.com.au](mailto:geoff@artofhealth.com.au) or 0408 883 823



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**Art of Health Australia Pty Ltd** PO Box 125 Annandale NSW 2038  
Tel: 1800 089 770 Fax: (02) 95290750 Email: [info@artofhealth.com.au](mailto:info@artofhealth.com.au)  
[www.artofhealth.com.au](http://www.artofhealth.com.au)