

STEP INTO YOUR **SHAMANIC DREAM**

Spirituality & Health

5
STEPS TO AN
**EARTH-
FRIENDLY
LAWN**

TROUBLE MAKERS
IMPROVE THINKING

5 STEPS TO
AVOID OPIOIDS

A GARDEN *for*
enlightenment

CAN HEALING SCHOOLS
HEAL DEPRESSION?

Joan Halifax
Tracy K. Smith
Sera Beak



Can HEALING SCHOOLS Heal Depression and Anxiety?

Perhaps you or someone you love can relate to the following: Despite seeming to have done “everything right” on the path of personal growth and holistic wellness—meditation and personal development retreats; transformational workshops; eating an organic diet; a yoga, qigong, or dance practice; perhaps even pilgrimages to India or Peru—there remain patterns that could be described by Western medicine as depression or anxiety.

BY PREMA GAIA

I have had my own challenges in these areas, but always hesitated to seek labeling for them, as I intuitively felt they were part of a much broader holistic picture than Western medicine typically describes. I also knew I wasn't alone in my thinking. On World Health Day in 2017, the World Health Organization launched a yearlong program titled "Depression: Let's Talk," and part of the message of the day was summed up by *Health and Human Rights Journal*:

"The excessive medicalization of mental health not only fails countless individuals in need of services, it fails all of us, in every stage of our lives."

The article goes on:

For example, there exists compelling evidence that higher prevalence of depression is strongly linked to early childhood adversities, including toxic stress and sexual, physical, or emotional child abuse, as well as to inequalities and violence, including gender-based

inequalities and gender-based violence, and many other adverse conditions which people, especially those in vulnerable situations such as poverty or social exclusion, face when their basic needs are not met and their rights are not protected.

In other words, the roots of depression and anxiety may be found in power imbalances more than chemical imbalances. Meanwhile, I'd had several conversations with alumni of healing arts schools who were deeply touching and sparked my curiosity. They had shared about how their work in these programs had transformed their capacity to thrive both personally and in their relationships, and to step into greater service in their communities.

That inspiration led me to research several well-established healing arts schools that are partially residential and partially home study programs, requiring a minimum of 200 to 300 hours and often taking one to two years or longer

*Carrying the Sun Up the Hill,
Rolling the Moon Back Down* »
Laura Berger

RESEARCH IN ENERGY MEDICINE

"The Emerging Science of Energy Healing" ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16463714

"Biofield Science and Healing: An Emerging Frontier in Medicine" ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4654791/

"Biofield Therapies: Helpful or Full of Hype?" ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2816237

"Bioenergy Healing: A Theoretical Model and Case Series" ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18466852



to complete. In my quest, I was fortunate to be able to speak with the founders or senior teachers of these three schools and ask them how their program frames depression and anxiety:

The Four Winds Society
Luminous Awareness Institute
The Barbara Brennan School of Healing

Although each of these schools has a different philosophy and different sets of practices, there were common threads that wove through each conversation. In the context of working with depression and anxiety, each of these schools provides a healing environment that includes:

- The experience of healthy relationships in community
- Awareness practices and tools for using energy medicine in self-healing
- Self-care, dietary, and lifestyle practices, including such practices as yoga and qigong
- Opportunities to share one's gifts with others and possibly to create new career pathways
- Returning of wounded parts of self back into wholeness

I also spoke with anthropologist Marilyn Schlitz PhD, the former president of the Institute of Noetic Sciences and now chair of the PhD program at Sofia University in Palo Alto.

Dr. Schlitz has been studying alternative forms of healing for decades, and she told me that studies of "biofield healing therapies" (the research term for the various forms of energy medicine) have shown promising outcomes in working with anxiety and depression. More scientific work is needed, Schlitz says, but she pointed to several helpful studies listed below, including a 2015 report published in *Global Advances in Health and Medicine* that noted this powerful and self-evident truth:

"The roots of biofield concepts and practice have persisted for thousands of years and remain the basis for many medical interventions and self-healing practices across the globe. They are rooted in indigenous schools of medicine, such as Chinese, Tibetan, Native American, African, and Ayurvedic medicine. Their ongoing use has continued to flourish over time and their potential payoff in terms of service to society could be transformative."

Schlitz went on to say that, though there have been no studies specifically of the impact on levels of depression and anxiety of participating in healing arts schools, a number of studies have looked at the impact of transformational healing community experiences on mental health.

One such study, published in 2006 in *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing*, looked at emotional well-being before and after participating in a nine-day residential emotional healing program called The Hoffman Process (a

continued on page 53

THE FOUR WINDS SOCIETY

"If you're not a little anxious at the reality of the world today, you're out of touch. But that anxiety cannot be paralyzing you. It becomes a summons to the mission we came here to fulfill. It's a depressing situation politically, economically, and in how humanity is raping and looting the Earth. But that becomes a call to action for us. How do we become agents of transformation? How do we become involved in the creative change and not victims of it?"

"We have to help people be born newly with a new story for themselves and for the planet. Not the story of being victims, or of being wounded, or the stories of our childhood, but the stories of courageous travelers from the stars and through this world, who are here to bring a new vision for the planet and to live heroic lives as agents of change."

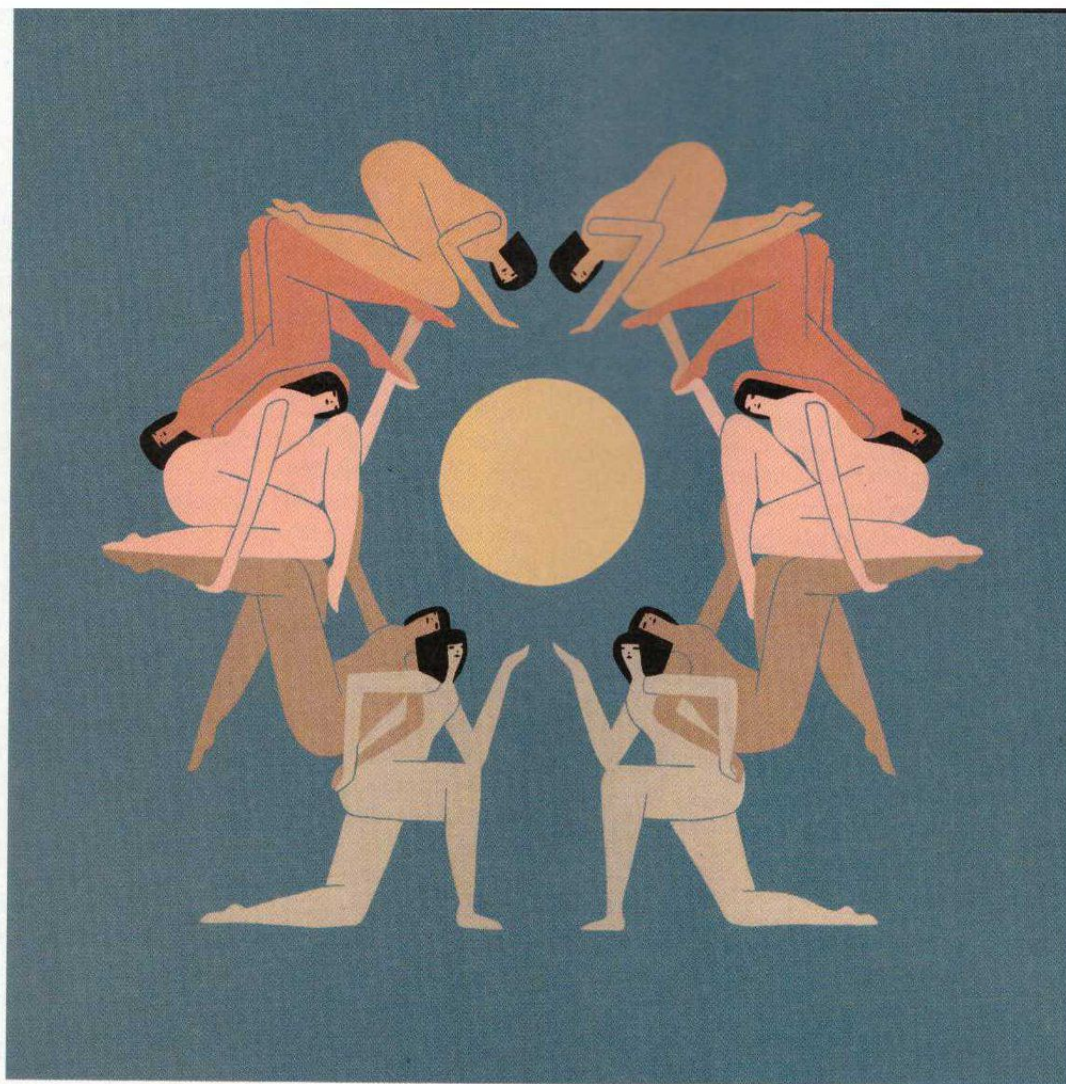
"One of the topics that is really important to address today is how to work with this time of the great upheaval. The Incans call it the Pachakuti: the great renewing of the world. We need to recover the sense of mission: What is it that we came to do here? Mark Twain said that the two most important days in a person's life are the day the person is born and the day the person realizes why they were born. Much of the work we are doing today is helping people recover parts of their healed self that were lost as a result of societal trauma. Soul retrieval is an essential strategy of the shaman that must be done not only personally but collectively, because we're living in a time of great soul loss: a de-spirited time."

"The way we work with the energetics has to do with clearing the imprints of disease from the *luminous energy*

"We didn't come here to spend another year in therapy, we came here to start a revolution."

**—ALBERTO VILLOLDO PHD
FOUNDING TEACHER**

field (LEF). When you can clear these imprints, you upgrade the quality of the field. The LEF is an information field that organizes the body, the same way that a magnet organizes iron filings on a piece of glass. Once you clear the imprints from the field, you don't have to keep re-creating the same behaviors and patterns of relationships that lead us to be depressed and anxious about life. The basis of our training at the Four Winds is this: If you can create the conditions for health, then disease, anxiety, and depression are removed."



Around the Sun
Laura Berger

LUMINOUS AWARENESS INSTITUTE

"One of the things that we're training at Luminous is how to have healthy relationships, connection, and interdependence," says Annalisa Adelberg. "How to be able to reach out to people and have them respond in a healthy way, and how to be

that resource to each other. We're also depressed and anxious because we were hurt when we were children, and we are still living from those hurts. So we need healing work that helps us repair where those hurts occurred and bring in the

new information and a new experience so that those ruptures can be healed and a new 'loving rewire' can be made."

Raina Delear adds: "Residential programs are exceptionally supportive for creating experiences in which students can rewrite, replace, and integrate previously encoded trauma-based patterns and limiting beliefs. I recommend the book *Unlocking the Emotional Brain*, by Ecker, Ticic, and Hulley. It shows how the brain can rewire and reconsolidate memories, upgrading the emotional baseline, when given an integration period of a minimum of five hours after the healing experience or session."

"We're anxious and depressed because we're not in our natural relationship as humans: We're isolated and cut off and not functioning well as a community and as a society. And in this modern age we're getting more and more isolated."

—ANNALISA ADELBERG AND RAINA DELEAR
FOUNDING TEACHERS

continued from page 51

program that emphasizes forgiveness). At the beginning, half of the 99 participants in the experimental group were mildly to moderately depressed (based on "Beck Depression Index" BDI scores). Immediately after treatment, none of the respondents was even mildly depressed; the means changed from 14.29 to 2.36 on the BDI index. In follow-up research of participants one year later, only 17 percent were reporting mild to moderate depression. In short, this group healing process proved not just immediately more effective than pills, but more effective over time. The participants also experienced significant increases in empathy, emotional intelligence, and well-being. Those results are the opposite of the emotional numbing and other ill effects that may be caused by some antidepressant or anti-anxiety medications.

After all of these conversations, I decided to enroll in a healing arts program. I won't mention which one, but if any of the gleanings from these interviews call you to make healing school a part of your journey, then perhaps our paths may cross. I also found myself wondering what would

BARBARA BRENNAN SCHOOL OF HEALING

"I had a client come to me who had experienced severe depression for many years, had been prescribed many different medications, and had even undergone electric shock treatment. I worked with her over a period of a few years, and her condition began improving steadily to the point that she became stabilized enough to enter and successfully complete the four-year BBSH program. Her parents had actually started putting aside a fund to take care of her living needs for the rest of her life, feeling that she would never improve enough to be able to support herself. But after finishing healing school she went on to complete college and create a career and life for herself that exceeded anyone's expectations—even her own."

"Some individuals may be best served by receiving one-on-one healing support from an advanced practitioner over a period of time before considering an extended healing school program, to ensure that they are emotionally and physically equipped to navigate through the deep personal shifts involved in these experiences."

—ANNE HOYE
DEAN OF THE SCHOOL

happen if just one in 50 people chose to attend a healing arts school instead of a university. Our times call for radical transformation, deep planetary healing, and societal renewal to allow the new Earth that we know is possible to emerge. It feels like this growing movement is an idea whose time has come.

Prema Gaia first wrote for *S&H* about leaving the fast life in Los Angeles and spending four years living "ultra light"—taking to the road with the clothes on her back and no money at all. Gaia is passionate about facilitating transformational events, connecting changemakers, working one-on-one with clients, and writing about emerging movements that are supporting global awakening. www.premagaia.com

HOW HEALING ARTS SCHOOLS APPROACH DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

THE FOUR WINDS SOCIETY

- Illumination: Clearing toxic imprints from the luminous energy field. Detoxifying and upgrading the body and brain
- Extraction: Identifying and extracting intrusive energies, entities, and emotions
- Soul Retrieval: Healing emotional trauma with shamanic journeying
- Dreaming the World Into Being: Creating a new life by crafting new energy maps

THEFOURWINDS.COM

LUMINOUS AWARENESS INSTITUTE

- Practices that support awakening and developing fluency in various levels of awareness
- A strong emotional support system designed to facilitate the repairing of attachment wounds and anxiety
- Guiding students through a sophisticated characterology model to harvest the gifts and heal ruptures from past traumas
- Empowering students to practice energy medicine on themselves and others

LUMINOUSAWARENESS.COM

BARBARA BRENNAN SCHOOL OF HEALING

- The Physical: Nutrition and health, cleansing and detoxification, self-care
- The Aura: High-sense perception training to identify and resolve distortions in the energy field
- The Hara: Creating a strong relationship between a person's energy field and the Earth and reconnecting the person to their life purpose
- The Core Star: Reconnecting students with their oneness with the Divine

BARBARABRENNAN.COM