

# Care of the Soul

*A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life.*

by Thomas Moore

## Chapter 7: Gifts of Depression p. 137

The soul presents itself in a variety of colors, including all the shades of gray, blue, and black. To care for the soul, we must observe the full range of all its colorings, and resist the temptation to approve only of white, red, and orange - the brilliant colors. The "bright" idea of colorizing old black and white movies is consistent with our culture's general rejection of the dark and the gray. In a society that is defended against the tragic sense of life, depression will appear as an enemy, an unredeemable malady; yet in such a society, devoted to light, depression, in compensation, will be unusually strong.

Care of the soul requires our appreciation of these ways it presents itself. Faced with depression, we might ask ourselves, "What is it doing here? Does it have some necessary role to play?" Especially in dealing with depression, a mood close to our feelings of mortality, we must guard against the denial of death that is so easy to slip into. Even further, we may have to develop a taste for the depressed mood, a positive respect for its place in the soul's cycles.

Some feelings and thoughts seem to emerge only in a dark mood. Suppress the mood, and you will suppress those ideas and reflections. Depression may be as important a channel for valuable "negative" feelings, as expressions of affection are for the emotions of love. Feelings of love give birth naturally to gestures of attachment. In the same way, the void and grayness of depression evoke an awareness and articulation of thoughts otherwise hidden behind the screen of lighter moods. Sometimes a person will come to a therapy session in a dark mood. "I shouldn't have come today," he will say. "I'll feel better next week, and we can get on with it." But I'm happy that he came, because together we will hear thoughts and feel his soul in a way not possible in his cheerful moods. Melancholy gives the soul an opportunity to express a side of its nature that is as valid as any other, but is hidden out of our distaste for its darkness and bitterness.

### Saturn's Child

Today we seem to prefer the word *depression* over *sadness* and *melancholy*. Perhaps its Latin form sounds more clinical and serious. But there was a time, five or six hundred years ago, when melancholy was identified with the Roman god Saturn. To be depressed was to be "in Saturn," and a person chronically disposed to melancholy was known as a "child of Saturn." Since depression was identified with the God and the planet named for him, it was associated with other qualities of Saturn. For example, he was known as the "old man," who presided over the golden age. Whenever we talk about the "golden years" or the "good old days," we are calling up this god, who is the patron of the past. The depressed person sometimes thinks that the good times are all past, that there is nothing left for the present or the future. These melancholic thoughts are deeply rooted in Saturn's preference for days gone by, for memory and the sense that time is passing. These thoughts and feelings, sad as they are, favor the soul's desire to be both in time and in eternity, and so in a strange way they can be pleasing.

Sometimes we associate depression with literal aging, but it is more precisely a matter of the soul's aging. Saturn not only brings an affection for the "good old days," he also raises the more substantive idea that life is moving on: we're getting old, experienced, and maybe even wise. A person even in his middle or late thirties will be in conversation and offhandedly recall something that happened twenty years ago. He will stop, shocked. "I've never said that before! Twenty years ago. I'm getting old." This is Saturn's gift of age and experience. Having been identified with youth, the soul now takes on important qualities of age that are positive and helpful. If age is denied, soul becomes lost in an inappropriate clinging to youth.

Depression grants the gift of experience not as a literal fact but as an attitude toward yourself. You get a sense of having lived through something, of being older and wiser. You know that life is suffering, and that knowledge makes a difference. You can't enjoy the bouncy, carefree innocence of youth any longer, a realization that entails both sadness because of the loss, and pleasure in a new feeling of self-acceptance and self-knowledge. This awareness of age has a halo of melancholy around it, but it also enjoys a measure

of nobility.

Naturally, there is resistance to this incursion of Saturn that we call depression. It's difficult to let go of youth, because that release requires an acknowledgment of death. I suspect that those of us who opt for eternal youth are setting ourselves up for heavy bouts of depression. We're inviting Saturn to make a house call when we try to delay our service to him. Then Saturn's depression will give its color, depth, and substance to the soul that for one reason or another has dallied long with youth. Saturn weathers and ages a person naturally, the way temperature, winds, and time weather a barn. In Saturn, reflection deepens, thoughts embrace a larger sense of time, and the events of a long lifetime get distilled into a sense of one's essential nature.

In traditional texts, Saturn is characterized as cold and distant, but he has other attributes as well. Medical books called him the god of wisdom and philosophical reflection. In a letter to Giovanni Cavalcanti, a successful statesman and poet, [Marsilio] Ficino refers to Saturn as a "unique and divine gift." In the late fifteenth century, Ficino wrote a book warning scholars and studious people in particular to take care not to invite too much Saturn into their souls; because of their sedentary occupations, scholars can easily become severely depressed, he said, and have to find ways to counter their dark moods. But another book could be written about the dangers of living without study and speculation, and without reflecting on our lives. Saturn's moods may be dangerous because of their darkness, but his contributions to the economy of the soul are indispensable. If you allow his depression to visit, you will feel the change in your body, in your muscles, and on your face - some relief from the burden of youthful enthusiasm and the "unbearable lightness of being."

Maybe we could appreciate the role of depression in the economy of the soul more if we could only take away the negative connotations of the word. What if "depression" were simply a state of being, neither good nor bad, something the soul does in its own good time and for its own good reasons? What if it were simply one of the planets that circle the sun? One advantage of using the traditional image of Saturn, in place of the clinical term *depression*, is that then we might see melancholy more as a valid way of being rather than as a problem that needs to be eradicated.

Aging brings out the flavors of a personality. The individual emerges over time, the way fruit matures and ripens. In the Renaissance view, depression, aging, and individuality all go together: the sadness of growing old is part of becoming an individual. Melancholy thoughts carve out an interior space where wisdom can take up residence.

Saturn was also traditionally identified with the metal lead, giving the soul weight and density, allowing the light, airy elements to coalesce. In this sense, depression is a process that fosters a valuable coagulation of thoughts and emotions. As we age, our ideas, formerly light, rambling, and unrelated to each other, become more densely gathered into values and a philosophy, giving our lives substance and firmness.

Because of its painful emptiness, it is often tempting to look for a way out of depression. But entering into its mood and thoughts can be deeply satisfying. Depression is sometimes described as a condition in which there are no ideas - nothing to hang on to. But maybe we have to broaden our vision and see that feelings of emptiness, the loss of familiar understandings and structures in life, and the vanishing of enthusiasm, even though they seem negative, are elements that can be appropriated and used to give life fresh imagination.

When, as counselors and friends, we are the observers of depression and are challenged to find a way to deal with it in others, we could abandon the monotheistic notion that life always has to be cheerful, and be instructed by melancholy. We could learn from its qualities and follow its lead, becoming more patient in its presence, lowering our excited expectations, taking a watchful attitude as this soul deals with its fate in utter seriousness and heaviness. In our friendship, we could offer it a place of acceptance and containment. Sometimes, of course, depression, like any emotion, can go beyond ordinary limits, becoming a completely debilitating illness. But in extreme cases, too, even in the midst of strong treatments, we can still look for Saturn at the core of depression and find ways to befriend it.

One great anxiety associated with depression is that it will never end, that life will never again be joyful and

active. This is one of the feelings that is part of the pattern - the sense of being trapped, forever to be held in the remote haunts of Saturn. In my practice, when I hear this fear I think of it as Saturn's style, as one of the ways he works the soul - by making it feel constrained, with nowhere to go. Traditionally, there is a binding theme in saturnine moods. This anxiety seems to decrease when we stop fighting the saturnine elements that are in the depression, and turn instead toward learning from depression and taking on some of its dark qualities as aspects of personality.

### **Insinuations of Death**

Saturn is also the reaper, god of the harvest, patron of end-time and its festival, the Saturnalia; accordingly, imagery of death may permeate periods of depression. People of all ages sometimes say from their depression that life is over, that their hopes for the future have proved unfounded. They are disillusioned because the values and understandings by which they have lived for years suddenly make no sense. Cherished truths sink into Saturn's black earth like chaff at harvest time.

Care of the soul requires acceptance of all this dying. The temptation is to champion our familiar ideas about life right up to the last second, but it may be necessary in the end to give them up, to enter into the movement of death. If the symptom is felt as the sense that life is over, and that there's no use in going on, then an affirmative approach to this feeling might be a conscious, artful giving-in to the emotions and thoughts of ending that depression has stirred up. Nicholas of Cusa, certainly one of the most profound theologians of the Renaissance, tells how he was on a journey, on a ship in fact, when the realization dawned on him in a visionary way that we should acknowledge our ignorance of the most profound things. Discovering that we do not know who God is and what life is all about, he says, is the learning of ignorance, ignorance about the very meaning and value of our lives. This is a starting point for a more grounded, open-ended kind of knowledge that never closes up in fixed opinions. Using his favorite metaphors from geometry, he says that if full knowledge about the very base of our existence could be described as a circle, the best we can do is to arrive at a polygon - something short of sure knowledge.

The emptiness and dissolution of meaning that are often present in depression show how attached we can become to our ways of understanding and explaining our lives. Often our personal philosophies and our values seem to be all too neatly wrapped, leaving little room for mystery. Depression comes along then and opens up a hole. Ancient astrologers imagined Saturn as the most remote planet, far out in cold and empty space. Depression makes holes in our theories and assumptions, but even this painful process can be honored as a necessary and valuable source of healing.

This saturnine truth is evoked by Oscar Wilde, who, for all his emphasis on fullness of style as a central concern of life, knew the importance of emptying. From the prison cell where he was being punished for his love of a man, he wrote his extraordinary letter, "De Profundis," in which he remarks: "The final mystery is oneself. When one has weighed the sun in the balance, and measured the steps of the moon, and mapped out the seven heavens star by star, there still remains oneself. Who can calculate the orbit of his own soul?" We may have to learn this truth, as Cusa did, that we cannot calculate (notice the mathematical image) the orbit of our own soul. This peculiar kind of education - learning our limits - may not be a conscious effort only; it may come upon us as a captivating mood of depression, at least momentarily wiping out our happiness, and sending us off into fundamental appraisals of our knowledge, our assumptions, and the very purposes of our existence. In the ancient texts Saturn was sometimes labeled "poisonous."

In recommending some positive effects in saturnine moods, I don't want to overlook the terrible pain that they can bring. Nor is it only minor forms of melancholy that offer unique gifts to the soul; long, deep bouts of acute depression can also clear out and restructure the tenets by which life has been lived. The "children of Saturn" traditionally included carpenters, shown in drawings putting together the foundations and skeletons of new houses. In our melancholy, inner construction may be taking place, clearing out the old and putting up the new. Dreams, in fact, often depict construction sites and buildings just going up, suggesting again that the soul is *made*: it is the product of work and inventive effort. Freud pointed out that during bouts of melancholy the outer life may look empty, but at the same time inner work may be taking place at full speed.

## Coming to Terms with Depression

In Jungian language, Saturn may be considered an *animus* figure. The *animus* is a deep part of the psyche that roots ideas and abstraction in the soul. Many people are strong in *anima* - full of imagination, close to life, empathic, and connected to people around them. But these very people may have difficulty moving far enough away from emotional involvement to see what is going on, and to relate their life experiences to their ideas and values. Their experience is "wet," to use another ancient metaphor for the soul, because they are so emotionally involved in life, and so they might benefit from an excursion to the far-off regions of cold, dry Saturn.

This dryness can separate awareness from the moist emotions that are characteristic of close involvement with life. We see this development in old people as they reflect on their past with some distance and detachment. Saturn's point of view, in fact, can sometimes be rather hardhearted and even cruel. In Samuel Beckett's melancholy play *Krapp's Last Tape*, we find a humorous, biting depiction of saturnine reflection. Using a tape recorder, Krapp plays back tapes he has made throughout his life, and listens with considerable gloom to his voices from the past. After one of the tapes, he sits down to make another: "Just listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway."

These few lines reveal a distance between past and present, as well as a cooler perspective and a deconstruction of values. In most of Beckett's plays we hear characters express their depression and hopelessness, their inability to find any shreds of former meaning; yet they also offer an image of the noble foolishness that is part of a life so riddled with emptiness. In the absolute sadness of these characters, we can grasp a mystery about the human condition. It is not a literal aberration, although it may feel that way, to suddenly find meaning and value disappear, and to be overwhelmed with the need for withdrawal and with vague emotions of hopelessness. Such feelings have a place and work a kind of magic on the soul.

Krapp, whose name suggests depression's devaluation of human life, shows that cold remorse and self-judgment do not have to be seen as clinical syndromes, but as a necessary foolishness in human life that actually accomplishes something for the soul. Professional psychology might try to correct Krapp's self-criticism as a form of neurotic masochism, but Beckett shows that even in its ugliness and foolishness it makes a certain kind of sense.

Krapp playing his tapes and muttering his curses is also an image of ourselves turning our memories over in our minds again and again, in a process of distillation. Over time something essential emerges from this saturnine reduction - the gold in the sludge. Saturn was sometimes called *sol niger*, the black sun. In his darkness there is to be found a precious brilliance, our essential nature, distilled by depression as perhaps the greatest gift of melancholy.

If we persist in our modern way of treating depression as an illness to be cured only mechanically and chemically, we may lose the gifts of soul that only depression can provide. In particular, tradition taught that Saturn fixes, darkens, weights, and hardens whatever is in contact with it. If we do away with Saturn's moods, we may find it exhausting trying to keep life bright and warm at all costs. We may be even more overcome then by the increased melancholy called forth by the repression of Saturn, and lose the sharpness and substance of identity that Saturn gives the soul. In other words, symptoms of a loss of Saturn might include a vague sense of identity, the failure to take one's own life seriously, and a general malaise or ennui that is a pale reflection of Saturn's deep, dark moods.

Saturn locates identity deeply in the soul, rather than on the surface of personality. Identity is felt as one's soul finding its weight and measure. We know who we are because we have uncovered the stuff of which we are made. It has been sifted out by depressive thought, "reduced," in the chemical sense, to essence. Months or years focused on death have left a white ghostly residue that is the "I," dry and essential.

Care of the soul asks for a cultivation of the larger world depression represents. When we speak clinically of depression, we think of an emotional or behavioral condition, but when we imagine depression as a

visitation by Saturn, then many qualities of his world come into view: the need for isolation, the coagulation of fantasy, the distilling of memory, and accommodation with death, to name only a few.

For the soul, depression is an initiation, a rite of passage. If we think that depression, so empty and dull, is void of imagination, we may overlook its initiatory aspects. We may be imagining imagination itself from a point of view foreign to Saturn; emptiness can be rife with feeling-tone, images of catharsis, and emotions of regret and loss. As a shade of mood, gray can be as interesting and as variegated as it is in black-and-white photography.

If we pathologize depression, treating it as a syndrome in need of cure, then the emotions of Saturn have no place to go except into abnormal behavior and acting out. An alternative would be to invite Saturn in, when he comes knocking, and give him an appropriate place to stay. Some Renaissance gardens had a bower dedicated to Saturn - a dark, shaded, remote place where a person could retire and enter the persona of depression without fear of being disturbed. We could model our attitude and our ways of dealing with depression on this garden. Sometimes people need to withdraw and show their coldness. As friends and counselors, we could provide the emotional space for such feelings, without trying to change them or interpret them. And as a society, we could acknowledge Saturn in our buildings. A house or commercial building could have a room or an actual garden where a person could go to withdraw in order to meditate, think, or just be alone and sit. Modern architecture, when it tries to be cognizant of soul, seems to favor the circle or square where one joins community. But depression has a centrifugal force; it moves away from the center. We often refer to our buildings and institutions as "centers," but Saturn would probably prefer an outpost. Hospitals and schools often have "common rooms," but they could just as easily have "uncommon rooms," places for withdrawal and solitude.

Leaving a television running when no one is watching, or having a radio playing all day long may defend against Saturn's silence. We want to do away with the empty space surrounding that remote planet, but as we fill in those voids, we may be forcing him to assume the role of symptom, to be housed in our clinics and hospitals as a pest, rather than as a healer and teacher - his traditional roles.

Why is it that we fail to appreciate this facet of the soul? One reason is that most of what we know about Saturn comes to us symptomatically. Emptiness appears too late and too literally to have soul in it. In our cities, boarded-up homes and failing businesses signal economic and social "depression." In these "depressed" areas of our cities, decay is cut off from will and conscious participation, appearing only as an external manifestation of a problem or an illness.

We also see depression, economically and emotionally, as literal failure and threat, as a surprise breaking in upon our healthier plans and expectations. What if we were to expect Saturn and his dark, empty spaces to have a place in life? What if we propitiated Saturn by incorporating his values into our way of life? (Propitiate means both to acknowledge and to offer respect as a means of protection.)

We could also honor Saturn by showing more honesty in the face of serious illness. Hospice workers will tell you how much a family can gain when the depressive facts of a terminal illness are discussed openly. We might also take our own illnesses, our visits to the doctor and to the hospital, as reminders of our mortality. We are not caring for the soul in these situations when we protect ourselves from their impact. It isn't necessary to be *only* saturnine in these situations, but a few honest words for the melancholy feelings involved might keep Saturn propitiated.

Because depression is one of the faces of the soul, acknowledging it and bringing it into our relationships fosters intimacy. If we deny or cover up anything that is at home in the soul, then we cannot be fully present to others. Hiding the dark places results in a loss of soul; speaking for them and from them offers a way toward genuine community and intimacy.

### **The Healing Powers of Depression**

A few years ago, Bill, the priest I mentioned earlier [in the book, not in this chapter], came to me with a remarkable story. In his sixty-fifth year, thirty years into the priesthood, as a compassionate pastor of a

rural church he had given what he thought was perfectly appropriate aid to two of his women parishioners. His bishop, however, thought he had mishandled church funds and used poor judgment in other respects, and so, after a lifetime of respect, he was given two days to pack and leave the diocese.

When he began talking to me about his situation, Bill was quite lively and interested in his experiences. He had taken to group therapy well, where in particular he had found ways to engage some of his anger. He even decided at one point to become a therapist himself, with the idea that he might be able to help his fellow priests. But when he talked about the trouble he had fallen into, he gave me explanations and excuses that seemed naive. About one woman he said, "I was only trying to help her. She needed me. If she hadn't needed my attentions, I wouldn't have given them to her."

I knew I had to look for a way to hold and contain all of Bill's unusual experiences and interpretations without judging them. We spent a great deal of time with his dreams, and quickly he became quite expert at reading their imagery. I also invited him to bring in paintings and drawings that he had been doing in his group therapy. Discussing these images week after week gave us some insight into his nature. By means of this artwork Bill also had a chance to look closely at his family background and some of the key events surrounding his decision to become a priest.

Then a curious thing happened. As the naive explanations for his behavior fell away to be replaced by more substantive thoughts about the larger themes in his life, the tone of his mood darkened. As he expressed more of his anger about the way he had been treated throughout his life as a seminarian and priest, he lost much of his lightness. Meanwhile, he had moved into a home for priests, where he was largely withdrawn. He embraced his solitude and decided not to participate in activities in the home, and gradually, the wounds of his recent experiences deepened into genuine depression.

Now, Bill spoke critically of the church authorities and talked more realistically about his father, who had tried to become a priest and had failed. To some extent Bill thought that he was not cut out by nature to be a priest, that he had taken his father's place, trying to fulfill his father's dreams and not his own.

Bill trusted his depression enough to allow it a central place in his life. In true depressive style he would start every conversation saying: "It's no use. It's all over. I'm too old to have what I want in my life. I made mistakes all along the way, but I can't do anything about it now. All I want to do is stay in my room and read." But he remained in therapy, and every week he spoke from and about his depression.

My therapeutic strategy, if you can call it that, was simply to bring an attitude of acceptance and interest to Bill's depression. I didn't have any clever techniques. I didn't urge him to attend workshops on depression or try guided fantasies to contact the depressed person within. Care of the soul is less heroic than that. I simply tried to appreciate the way his soul was expressing itself at the moment. I observed the slow, subtle shifts in tone and focus that Bill brought in his manner, his words, his dreams, and the imagery of his conversation.

In his depression, when Bill said that he should never have been a priest, I didn't take that statement literally, because I knew how much his priesthood had meant to Bill over the years. But now he was discovering the shadow in his calling. His life as a priest was being deepened, given soul, by new reflection on its limitations. Bill was having to face for the first time the sacrifices he had made in order to be a priest. This was not an absolute disavowal of his priesthood; it was a completion. I noticed that even as he uncovered piece after piece of the sacrifices he had made, and even as he felt intense regret for having become a priest, at the same time he spoke of his loyalty to the church, his continuing interest in theology, and his concern for death and afterlife. In some ways, he was only now discovering the real core of his priesthood. The docile, compulsively helpful priest was dying off, to be replaced by a stronger, more individual, less manipulated man.

From his depressed state, Bill could only see the dying, the ending of a familiar life and the emptying out of long-held values and understandings. But the depression was clearly correcting his naivete. For most people, their cardinal virtue is also their pivotal fault. Bill's childlike concern for all beings animal, vegetable, and human gave him his compassion and altruistic sensibilities. But his vulnerability also made

him the butt of jokes among his fellow priests, who never realized how much he suffered from their teasing. His generosity was unlimited and in a sense had destroyed him. But his depression strengthened him, giving him new firmness and solidity.

By means of his depression, Bill was also better able to see the villains in his life. Previously his naive point of view gave everyone in his experience bland approval. There were neither real heroes nor full-bodied enemies. But in his depression Bill began to feel things much more deeply, and his hostility toward his colleagues came out of him with real grit. "I hope they all die young," he once uttered through his teeth.

Bill would tell me convincingly: "I'm old. Let's face it. I'm seventy. What's left for me? I hate young men. I'm happy when those young turks get sick. Don't tell me I have lots of life left. I don't."

Bill was strongly identified with being an old man. How could I argue with his telling me and himself to face facts and not deny his age? But I believed that this clever statement was a defense against considering other options for identification, and that, paradoxically, it served to keep Bill protected from the lower dimensions of his depression. By giving up at that particular moment, he didn't have to think the thoughts and experience the feelings that were waiting for him in the wings.

One day he told me a dream in which he was going down a steep flight of stairs, then down a second flight; but the latter were too narrow for him and he didn't want to go any farther. Behind him the figure of a woman was urging him on, while he resisted. This was a picture of Bill's state at the time. He was well into a descent, but he was fighting against taking a deeper plunge.

Bill's complaint "I'm an old man; there's nothing left for me" was not really Saturn settling in. Although his statement sounds like an affirmation of age, it is more an attack on age. When he said this I wondered if he had been denied the opportunity to grow up during his many years as a seminarian and priest. He told me that in some ways he had felt like a child the whole time, never worrying about money or survival, never making life decisions, but simply following the orders of his superiors. Now fate had shoved him into a place of profound unsettling and reflection. For the first time he was questioning everything, and now he was growing up at an alarming speed.

"Your dream," I said to him, "about descending a narrow staircase with a woman urging you from behind - I think we might turn to Freud and see it as an attempt at birth."

"I never thought of it that way," he said, interested.

"You seem in your melancholy to be in a bardo state. Do you know what that is?"

"No," he said, "I never heard of it."

"The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* describes that time between incarnations, the period before the next birth into life, as bardo."

"I don't have any taste for the events of life these days."

"That's what I mean," I said. "You don't want to participate in life. You are between lives. The dream may be inviting you to descend into the canal."

"I feel very reluctant in that dream, and I'm disturbed by the woman."

"Aren't we all," I said, thinking how difficult it is to be born into this life again, especially when the first time around was so painful and apparently unsuccessful.

"I'm not ready," he said with understanding and conviction.

"That's all right," I responded. "You know where you are, and it's important to be exactly there. Bardo takes time; it can't be rushed. There's no point in premature birth."

Bill rose to leave and go back to his "cave," as he called his room in the monastery. "There's nothing else to do, is there?" he asked.

"I don't think so," I said, wishing I could give him some specific hope.

Bill had measured the steps of the moon in his theology classes, and he thought he knew what was good for the soul. But now, having learned from his depression, he was speaking a more solid truth. "I will never again tell another person how to live," he said. "I can only talk to them of their mystery." Like Oscar Wilde in his depression, Bill was finding a greater point of view, a new appreciation for mystery. You would think a priest would be the one person familiar with mystery, but Bill's depression could be seen as a further step in his education in theology.

Eventually Bill's depression lifted, and he took a position in a new city where he worked as both counselor and priest. His period of schooling in Saturn's truths had some effect. He was able to help people look honestly at their lives and their emotions, whereas at a former time he would have tried to talk them out of their dark feelings with purely positive encouragement. He also knew what it was like to be deprived of respect and security, and so he could understand better the discouragement and despair of many people who came to him with tragic stories.

Care of the soul doesn't mean wallowing in the symptom, but it does mean trying to learn from depression what qualities the soul needs. Even further, it attempts to weave those depressive qualities into the fabric of life so that the aesthetics of Saturn - coldness, isolation, darkness, emptiness - makes a contribution to the texture of everyday life. In learning from depression, a person might dress in Saturn's black to mimic his mood. He might go on a trip alone as a response to a saturnine feeling. He might build a grotto in his yard as a place of saturnine retreat. Or, more internally, he might let his depressive thoughts and feelings just be. All of these actions would be a positive response to a visitation of Saturn's depressive emotion. They would be concrete ways to care for the soul in its darker beauty. In so doing, we might find a way into the mystery of this emptiness of the heart. We might also discover that depression has its own angel, a guiding spirit whose job it is to carry the soul away to its remote places where it finds unique insight and enjoys a special vision.

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In the late 1980s, after about seven years of developing my own approach to psychotherapy, I was looking for a different way to re-imagine psychology, one that would have depth and include spiritual matters. I always look to the ancients for inspiration, and so I pored over the works of Plato especially, where I found a constant focus on the soul and reference to therapy as service and care. After all, the priest was often called a curate. So I began referring to my work as care of the soul. It didn't hurt to know that the word psycho (psyche)-therapy (therapeia) means to serve or care for the soul. I got the idea of writing a book on these thoughts, based both on my doctoral studies in religion and depth psychology and my experience practicing care of the soul. They allow us to be in the presence of the great mystery of life—but to benefit from such powerful images, you have to take care not to make them into idols, interpret them too far, or get stuck on only one set of images. There is a great deal to learn about the imagination, and the best way to begin might be to read one of the sacred stories, as story, and open yourself to the mysterious state of mind in which the story places you. His latest book is *The Soul of Christmas*, from Franciscan Media. [If you like our article, give Conscious Reminder a thumbs up, and help us spread LOVE & LIGHT!](#) [SOURCE](#) spiritualityhealth. *Care of the Soul* in *Everyday Life*. 2. *The Myth of Family and Childhood*. 3. *Self-love and Its Myth: Narcissus and Narcissism*. By definition, psychotherapy is care of the soul. When you serve your soul, you are being therapeutic in this deep, Platonic sense. Today, when I lecture about care of the soul—and I still give talks and courses directly from the book—I often list certain things that the soul needs: a sense of home, deep friendship and casual friendliness, a poetic and metaphorical appreciation for words and images, attention to night dreams, the fine arts, an intimate relationship with the natural world, acquaintance with.