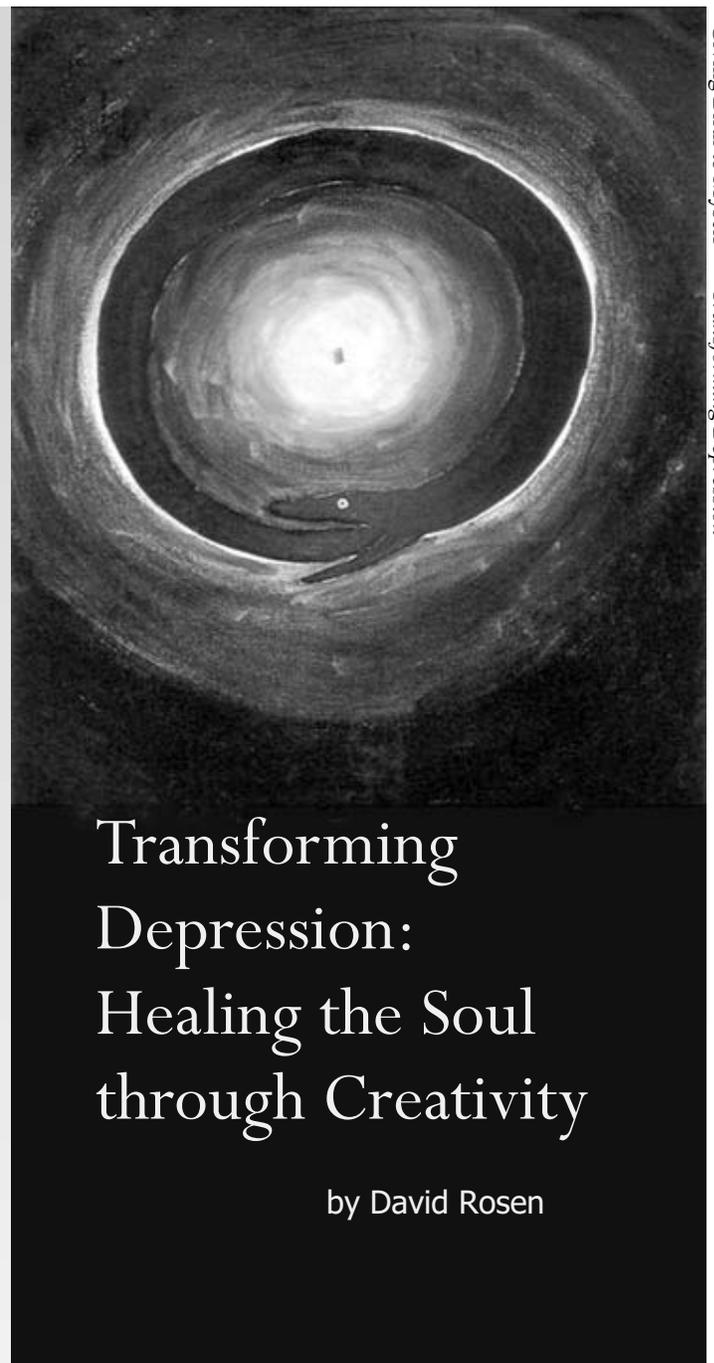


Long ago Abraham Lincoln was helped to overcome his suicidal depression by his law partner, John Stuart. In Lincoln's day there were no medications or psychotherapy so he relied on the friendship and support of his friend and colleague. Later, leading up to his Presidency, Lincoln became weller than well. He was transforming his depression and healing his soul. His antidepressants were laughter (humor is divine), prayer, endurance, and creativity (he wrote his own speeches and his depression with its burning rage fueled his creative work). Lincoln's transformation involved death of his false self and rebirth of his true self. He committed egocide (his old self-destructive ego died or was killed off) and he was reborn. He then was able to realize his personal myth and the true purpose of his life goals.

Egocide is something Buddhists have known about for hundreds of years. Egocide leads to continued life, whereas suicide is literally a dead end. The innovative therapeutic approach of egocide and transformation evolved out of research I carried out with survivors of jumps off the Golden Gate Bridge. These survivors told me that their self-destructive identities or egos died when they leaped to end their lives. They all told of a Higher Power or Force that took over and they survived. No one ought to survive, as it's 255 feet above the water and when you land it's like hitting concrete at 75 mph. The fact that these individuals survived seems miraculous. They all told of a new identity, the true self, emerging after yielding to something larger than themselves. In one of the interviews I was told "Dr. Rosen, you don't understand. The part of me that wanted to commit suicide, that drove me to the Golden Gate Bridge, and wrote a suicide note in the parking lot, died. I walked out onto the bridge and jumped off, but I survived." So he went through what William James called a religious experience. His old self-destructive ego died. It wasn't a failed suicide, for that does not convey what really transpired. I had to find a word for what happened so I ended up calling it "egocide," since the ego identity that wanted to kill him died. He then went through a death-rebirth experience. It's like any religious conversion, according to William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Every religious experience has a prodromal syndrome that is like psychotic suicidal depression. Afterwards, the person is filled with joy and has purpose and meaning. Everything goes to the opposite of the way it was before. In my book, *Transforming Depression* (2002), after reviewing depression and suicide I outline a therapeutic model of egocide and transformation as well as describe four actual cases.

Analysis means to break up or break apart and in the process a metamorphosis or real change takes place. The terms "talked to death" and "analyzed to death" are metaphors to emphasize the concept of egocide and both phrases mean killing a part of the ego. Of course, we don't like to do that in the west. But if you say, "analyze to death" the part of you that wants to kill you; most people can grasp such a concept. It is not the entire ego that you want to kill. It is just the part, the



"Giving Birth to Myself" — *Transforming Depression*

## Transforming Depression: Healing the Soul through Creativity

by David Rosen

negative self-destructive ego, which wants to kill you. It's holographic, that is, the part equals the whole and the process heralds a death-rebirth experience. I use the therapeutic alliance with the patient to work with the healthy, positive part of the ego.

Egocide is killing the ego. However, because of the holographic model, when you analyze to death the part that wants to kill you the ego does temporarily die. Depressed and suicidal people feel dead inside. The dying part is making them feel dead, but they are alive. They want to kill themselves, but the therapist helps them analyze to death that self-destructive part. Often my patients have to leave work or school, since they are temporarily unable to function. They would have killed themselves, but now they are not going to die, because it is sym-



bolic. They're analyzing to death the suicidal ego and a transformation is occurring.

Some patients who are not able to function are placed on disability for three months. I call this suicidal crisis, a "soul attack", and like patients with a "heart attack" they are not able to work for a period of time. It is a parallel problem because in a heart attack a part of the heart dies and a regeneration process takes place; As in a soul attack when a part of the psyche dies and then there is a rebirth of the true self. Some refuse to go into a psychiatric hospital and I've had a few patients stay at a monastery. Naturally they have to see a local therapist and I am in contact with both during this early phase of treatment. For example, a patient once contacted me when he was driving around in his car with a gun. He asked, "Why shouldn't I kill myself, Doc?" I saw him, after he gave up his gun to a trusted brother but he refused to go into a hospital. He ended up going to a monastery and staying there for several months. He was on medication and saw a therapist there. When he came back, he had gone through egocide and transformation. He also went through a religious conversion and his new positive ego identity was secondary to the Self.

Patients are encouraged to be open and engage in an inner creative process, like the second part of the title of my book,

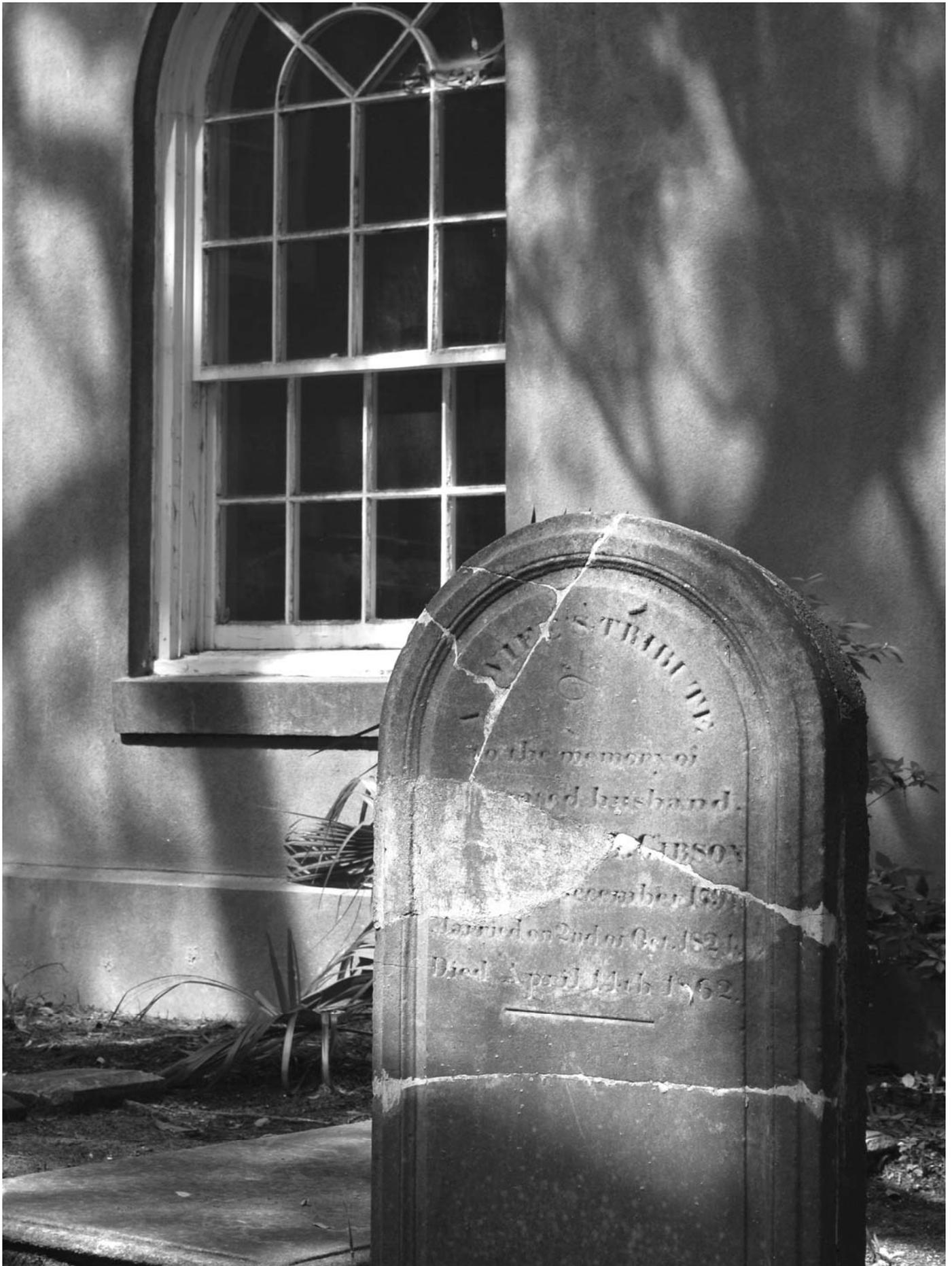
"Healing The Soul Through Creativity." Creativity is essential because when you break up that false self, that negative self-destructive ego dies and it frees up a lot of energy that must be used as fuel for creativity. This patient chose the creative art of ceramics that he had learned at the monastery. Now he is a master ceramicist and has a kiln attached to his house. He talks about clay in spiritual terms. When he uses the wheel, which is like a mandala, he can tell if he is in balance, because the symmetry of the bowl or plate informs him.

Active imagination is like Hegel's idea of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The synthesis, the third principle, is the transcendent function. The patient starts out by meditating in order to relax and get the ego out of the way so that what is in the unconscious can become conscious. It is a creative process and through the synthesis of conscious and unconscious an artistic product emerges. The patient chooses some creative art form, such as ceramics, painting, dance, writing, or composing music. It has to result in an artistic product, that is, something of substance.

In *Let Your Life Speak* (2000) Parker Palmer outlines a surrender to depression in his 4th Chapter "All the Way Down," when he seeks psychotherapy and comes out a better person. In his transformation Parker describes a death of his "false self" and the birth of his "true self." Another noteworthy account of an experience of suicidal depression is the late William Styron's memoir, *Darkness Visible* (1990). Before I wrote the 1st edition of *Transforming Depression* (1993), I corresponded with Styron after sending him my manuscript. I asked him if he had gone through egocide and transformation and he responded in the affirmative.

As illustrated in my book, *Transforming Depression*, the case of Sharon was difficult because she had a borderline personality disorder, was suicidally depressed, an alcoholic and she suffered from anorexia nervosa. The first thing I had to do was to help her become neurotic, that is, to have a strong enough ego to go through the three stages of egocide and transformation. You cannot really do this unless you have enough ego strength to go deeper. A lot of the initial therapy is designed to build up positive ego and help the patient find his or her true self. The patient's authentic self, is affirmed by supporting the patient's strengths and unique qualities. This includes homework of determining what they like and do not like about themselves which leads to their true self and false self.

If you want to know more about my work, and the therapeutic model of egocide and transformation, please read the 3rd edition, and most up to date version *Transforming Depression* (2002). This book tells the in-depth stories of two women and two men who suffer from suicidal depression and have very difficult journeys. However, they opt for the arduous but transforming path of egocide. These individuals were chosen, because I felt many people would be able to relate to their stories. Issues of depression, despair, meaninglessness, hopelessness, and suicide are endemic in our society, and these four cases involve all of these issues plus sexual abuse, abandonment, problems with alcohol, and adoption. *Transforming Depression* tracks the metamorphosis of their meaninglessness and demoralization into meaning, hope, and the morale-enhancing unfolding of their personal myths. It reflects the courage to be. This book offers people from all walks of life an alternative to depression and suicide via the path of egocide and transformation: a journey of suffering encompassing symbolic death and new life. *Transforming Depression* is a guide for despairing indi-



Don Huntley—Graveyard at a Church in Charleston

viduals who are attempting to survive dark nights of the soul.

I think Jung put it best when he said that the world hangs by a thread, and that it is on the verge of destroying itself. It is as Martin Buber's implies, it is imperative for individuals to heal themselves first, as he said, "Everything depends on inner change: when this has taken place, and only then, does the world change." From research that we have done at Texas A&M University, when hope, spiritual meaning, and healthy humility increase, anxiety and depression decrease. Also we have found that drawing mandalas is healing, particularly when individuals focus on love and joy. Once realized in individuals, this can be realized on a larger scale in communities, nations, and the world.

## *Poetry by Jack Hayes*

### BLACKBERRY PRAYER

God, grant me your prolific root,  
that I may spread the good by branching.  
Let me poke up through the sidewalks,  
under fences, in the wasted places  
and of course in flower gardens  
side-by-side the daffodil and dahlia.

Let me intermarry like the Irish  
and the German, Jew and Christian,  
like the African and Cuban.

Teach me, teach me ways of blossoming  
that I may be resplendent  
though my legs are little more than canes  
and cannot stand for long.

I ask you, let me reach with sweetness,  
let me offer up my treasure,  
let me serve myself to hungry passersby.

Yes, let the birds, let even turtles taste of me,  
for I am all I am and nothing more.

Yet I am nothing, nothing less than wonderful.

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**Jack Hayes** (2046-2007), a long-time Jung Society member, was a poet and a journalist for more than three decades. This poem, one of his finest, appeared in our 2006 newsletter.



Don Huntley—Ironwork Detail, Charleston