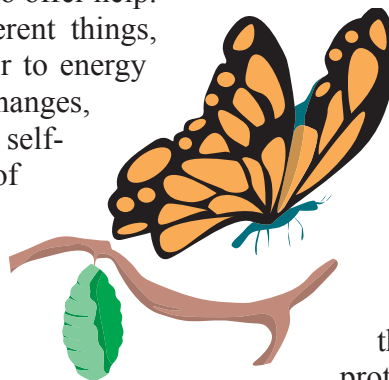


Tough Grace — Mental Illness as a Spiritual Path

During the first three years of my diagnosis of manic depression I was in denial because of the stigma of mental illness. Then I got mad and decided to be as well as I could be by turning over every rock that seemed to offer help. I tried some 50 different things, from Reiki and prayer to energy healing, dietary changes, exercise and many self-help methods. One of the most powerful tools I used, however, was to reframe my experiences as a profound spiritual path.

Often we think of the spiritual path as sweet and easy, but there is plenty of evidence that it is instead one of suffering and

hardship. Mine included numerous hospitalizations, periodically living on the streets, encounters with the police and courts, huge financial losses and other losses such as self-esteem and colleague/friends, etc, etc, etc. The suffering for 12 long years was nearly unendurable.



But I could later see that all along the way I had been protected by acts large and small. My book, *A Tough Grace: Mental Illness as a Spiritual Path* has many examples. These plus the reframing I did added up to a very tough

grace, and the insight was healing in itself.

The trouble with mental illness is that we enter the abyss of darkness and too often do not find our way back. We fail to see the compensations that illness offers as we concentrate on the lemons rather than the tough task of making lemonade. But such a journey can be seen as noble and worthy of the highest esteem. We can reframe it; we can also become aware of its many gifts such as surrendering to a higher power, facing death with courage, being thankful for small things and carving out profound self-knowledge. My path was a bone-crushing one, but choosing to call the tests and trials “tough grace” has made all the difference.