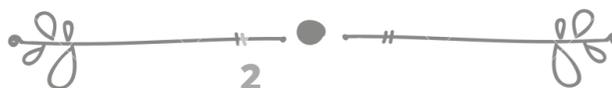


Las Traumadas

#10



It is a fallow time, one in which action is replaced with stillness. The darkness moves in, settles down for the season and we follow suit.

This is the time of the winter blues. For many, these low moods come and go and we're able to carry on with little hesitation or interruption. But for others this time brings severe bouts of depression or a spike in anxiety. **This is Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD.** SAD is a type of depression that coincides with the seasons, generally with winter.¹

We wake. We sleep.
The earth rotates on its axis.
The sun rises. The sun sets.
The moon circles the earth.
The seasons cycle from spring to winter.
The earth circles the sun.

Our world is ruled by cycles—cycles of time, of seasons, of life, and of light. Light is swallowed by shadow and then shadow in turn gives way to light. There is no denying the deep rooted and primal reassurance of this cycle— the consistent welcoming of the light and reverence for the dark.

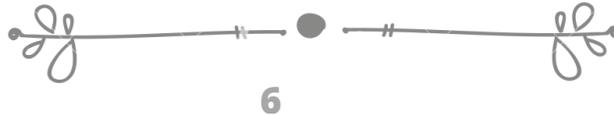
And yet every year with the coming of winter, we feel dread and we retreat. The days are short and the nights are long.

Those of us who experience its icy grip know just how debilitating it can be, especially with symptoms like low energy, irritability, and increased tiredness and appetite. The good news is you aren't alone! SAD is actually relatively common, with 6% of the U.S. population receiving a diagnosis and 20% experiencing mild symptoms; and the less-extreme-winter-blues are even more common.²

If you're experiencing these mood changes and wondering how to thaw yourself, you must first understand why this is happening.

It comes back to our utter dependence on cycles, particularly the cycle of our circadian rhythm (our internal sleep-wake cycle). In fall and winter, the delayed rise and early setting of the sun have been thought to alter our bodies' internal clocks, in turn affecting the length and quality of our sleep. This change can affect our hormone levels, energy, and moods, and is caused by our relationship with a little regulating neurotransmitter called serotonin. The happiness hormone. The calming chemical.

Serotonin affects our sleep cycles and moods; and its receptors are found in our brains and skin. Our serotonin levels



How exactly does this affect our moods? There is thought to be a link between decreased levels of serotonin in the brain and an increased chance of depression, though this hasn't been definitively proven.³ But there is a strong correlation between serotonin levels and our mood. And so if sunshine affects our serotonin levels, then our moods are also likely to be impacted by sunlight. Therefore in winter, with less sunshine and decreased serotonin production, our mood and energy levels decline, leading to the winter blues or the more severe Seasonal Affective Disorder.

actually fluctuate with the seasons and there is evidence that sunshine exposure has a positive correlation with serotonin levels: in months with more daylight hours, our serotonin production is increased; in darker months, it declines.

This makes sense when you think about how there are serotonin receptors in our skin. In the late spring, summer, and into fall, our bodies are more frequently exposed to direct sunlight than in winter. In the colder months, our exposure to sunlight declines and what little light we are exposed to is through layers and layers of clothing.

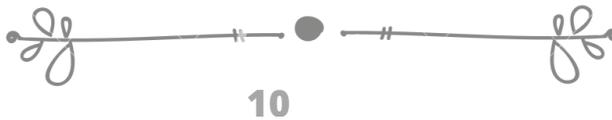
Treatments to help increase serotonin levels, like Bright Light Therapy or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, can help maintain the delicate chemical balances in our brains; these treatments can be especially helpful for those of us struggling with Seasonal Affective Disorder.

What about what's going on outside of our bodies?

During the dark season, the days are shorter, the nights are longer, but our day-to-day schedules and pressures remain the same. We do not adapt our daily cycles and routines to the darker times; instead, we press

on as if our energy is boundless and pretend nothing outside has changed.

From plants we might draw important lessons about adapting to environmental changes, valuing both the active and fallow times. We all know that light is an essential ingredient to plant health, with full-sun plants often having the most vibrant blossoms. But plants cannot bloom all year and neither can we. In winter, perennial plants retreat into the earth beneath them, drawing nutrients from the soil around them and the snow above; they lean into the fallow time, taking an earned rest in order to bloom again in the spring.



What would a healthy embrace of the darkness look like to you?

Think of intentional seasonal routines that would help you embrace the winter instead of wishing for summer: take a winter walk or spend extra time cooking nourishing, comforting meals.

We are currently coming out of the dark. In the Northern Hemisphere, March 20th - the Spring Equinox - marks an equality of light and dark. Since December 21st - the Winter Solstice, the shortest day and the longest night - the sun has been slowly returning. We have made it through the darkest part of winter, but let's not forget the lessons the dark and still

What if we tried that? Instead of dreading the coming of winter, we embraced it? Honored it, slowed down, and found a "different kind of light".⁴ In some of the northernmost parts of the world, places that sometimes go months without seeing the sun, rates of SAD are half what they are in the United States.⁵ And in many of these cultures they find beauty and value in the darkness. They embrace *hygge* (Denmark), *koselig* (Norway), *gezelligheid* (Holland), and *mys* (Sweden), those concepts and feelings of coziness.

time brought us. There is value in rest and stillness, and perhaps by leaning in and slowing down we can grow and thrive beyond our expectations.

Thanks for being here,

Las Traumadas

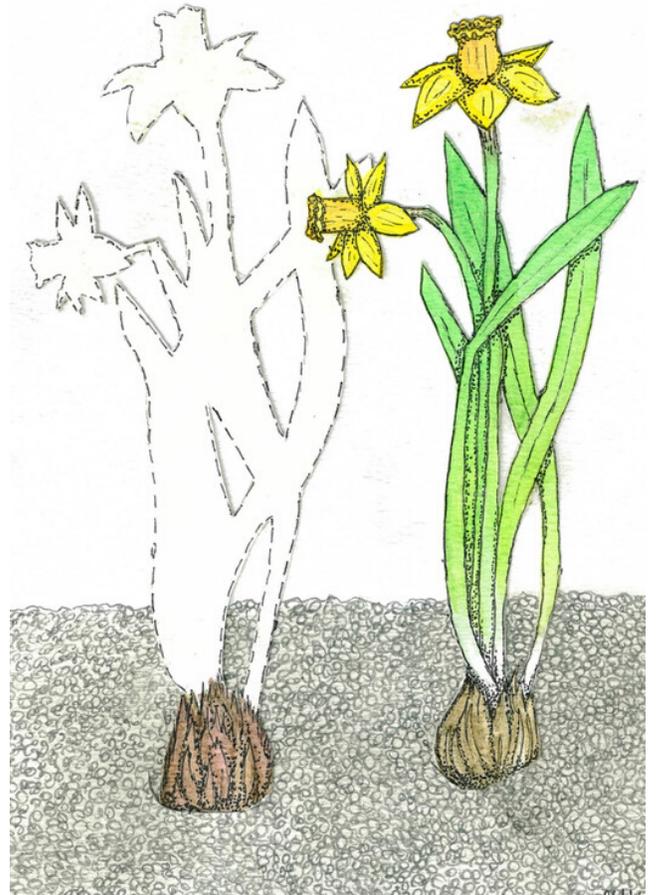
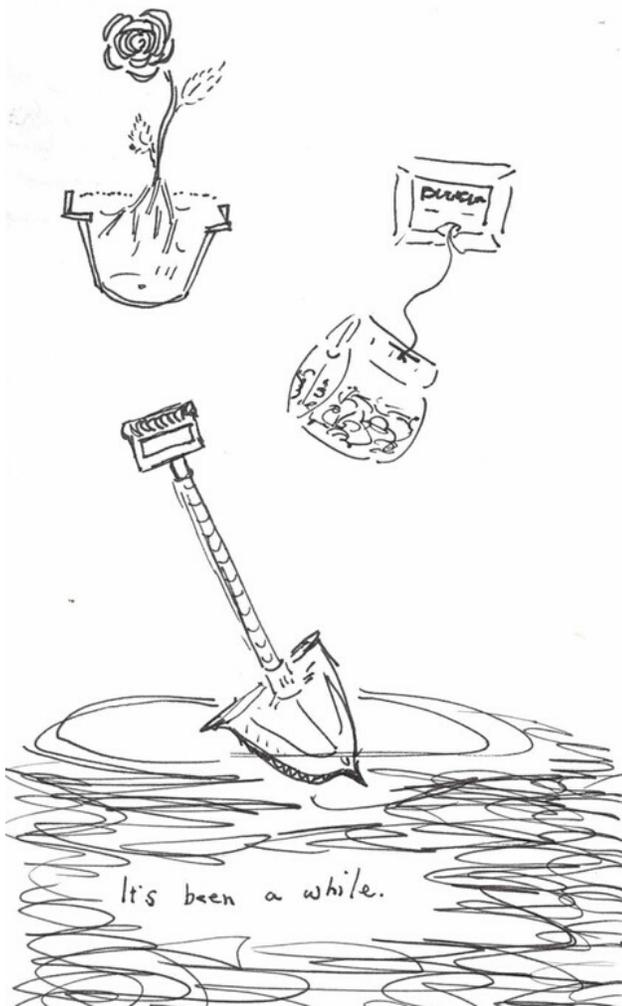
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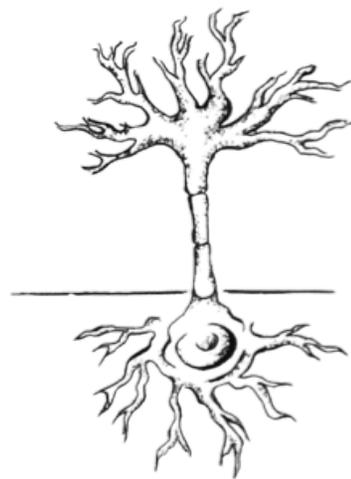
5. Geddes, L.



Untitled

by mackenzie jenkins

An empty bird feeder
 Hangs in a barren tree
 Bare like me?
 Winter approaches.
 I sit outside -
 Waiting for the first snow.
 The frost arrived this morning
 To kiss the grass with its icy lips.
 The sun still shines,
 And though her warmth is slowly fading
 She's close enough in this moment
 To kiss that same grass,
 To warm it with her gaze.
 The fields are almost barren,
 Yet some animals still graze.
 Here the grass is still green,
 But the leaves are all brown,
 They know when to make their exit.
 And they'll know when it's time to
 exist again.
 I believe I'll know the same.



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