

CHANGE NEEDS HEART

HOW GRACIOUSNESS HELPS

When I came back from 6 months in Italy, a country where hugs are the norm and warmth not only from the sun but from people, their generosity, their friendliness, and kindness, seeps into your pores and into your heart, I felt cold all the time. In August, the height of summer, I was freezing. A sort of stasis hit me and it took me a while to acclimate to change. My heart needed healing. And I needed to listen to my heart. Here is how I turned the freezing waters that shocked the life out of me into the soul-soothing warmth of the Mediterranean.

Step 1: Realise that the waters have changed

Shock isn't helpful when you try to get warm again. While your head—and most likely people around you will tell you to get over it, your heart will have a say in the matter. And it won't take brainy advice. Coming back was a shock to my system that I hadn't expected. Adjusting to a new country can be challenging, I knew that. But adjusting to your own country? It's what you know. Are familiar with. Yet not. As your horizon changes, becomes more colourful with experience, you see things in a different light. And you may find yourself shedding light on things you didn't see before.

Things had changed, and so had I. When I realised that, I had already taken the first step out of the shock. Because during stasis I was in survival mode. When I accepted the situation, shock loosened its icy grip. And I took my first breath.

Step 2: Analyse

Would I call myself logical? Maybe. Would I call myself organised and process-orientated? Definitely. So I took stock. Taking stock is something we are all familiar with. We do it all the time: before we go shopping, we assess the larder, the fridge, and take into consideration the hungry mouths we have to feed. When at work, we take a look at projects finished, at resources available. Even children do it. They take a look at the things at hand and are then able to create something: a 4x4 out of blocks, a home and hearth out of three sticks, and a space shuttle out of thin air.

So I took stock: what did I like in Italy? What did I miss? What had become strange to me upon my return? What did I not yet have. Yet. The magic in that word is simply astounding.

Taking stock is similar to rounding up all the material you need for a project: resources for the launch of a product (or space shuttle), ingredients for your meal, bricks and mortar for the home you are building.

When I had all my things gathered, I created something. Astonishing. Beautiful.

Step 3: The vision aka hope

Without hope, you won't go anywhere. You won't find the drive, the energy, the joy to do so. Of course I was, and we all are, capable of dragging myself out of bed, getting the job done. But you can't do that for all your life. If you do, burn-out or depression may feel invited to take up the space. Call it a room for rent, the space inside of you you are not filling with a vision. With hope. Then despair, hope's shadowy twin, turns up.

Creating a vision can be tough. When you feel like there is no chance you will ever get it, then what will you do? From my moment of despair I can tell you this: inside of you is a light. A tiny sparkle able to grow into something big. When I first felt it, it was as small as a splinter of a diamond. Let me assure you: it's enough to kindle your heart.

Your heart doesn't follow brain's logic. Brain says: That's impossible. All odds are against you. You can never have that. Brain's best friends are Criticiser, Memory, and Pleaser. I have thrown more than one party for these guests of dishonour.

This is when you turn to your heart. Or call it your gut. It's the same thing. It's where the universal wisdom lies. And when life throws you into the cold waters of unprecedented events, it doesn't help that your brain tells you to swim. You won't be able to, unless you have a really good reason to. A reason strong enough to override fear, experience, logic. But if your heart fires up, you will feel a boost, warmth. Survival it is not. It is Life, the connection with all that is and the absolute certainty that you have to fulfil your purpose here on earth. Welcome to the flow.

Step 4: Rituals

Rituals help. Science on trauma and resilience says that rituals are a pillar in recovery. As long as they are not too rigid. I have found that flexibility has to come with rituals, as otherwise they feel too constraining. It is helpful for children to have bedtime, story time. One of my major rituals is Christmas. I buy pink champagne, I delight in wrapping gifts for my loved ones, in planning the meal way in advance. Christmas to me is peace, happiness, and heartfelt love. Other rituals I found useful included taking a bath, going for a walk. Learning something new.

During these days I felt like I were moving into a new flat. Having to find new places for all the familiar items—friendships, university, neighbours and so forth. Yes, some had to go, but my space had grown, so most of the trusted, reliable stuff (and connections) remained.

Step 5: Reconnect

Losing something you love is never easy. It wasn't for me until I realised two important points: 1) expectations are not your friend and 2) love is like energy, it can't be lost. My vision was clear, my focus was not. I felt like I had to get from others (circumstances/the Powers that be/friends/the universe) what I wanted. Opportunities, love. And that I would be someone if only...When you expect too much of others, you often expect too much of

yourself. The moment I realised that, I was able to change it. And expectations fell away. And with them a lot of frustration, sadness, pity, anger.

It also helped me to see the connection between love and one of the basic principles in physics—the law of conservation of energy. And it always pains me to think that my physics teacher was right when he told us: One day you'll realise that this matter is so important. It's life itself.' He taught us that energy is never lost. Energy can be transformed, but cannot be lost.

And the same is true with love. When you loved someone, truly, this love will never stop. Remember the final scene of Ghost? The love inside, you take it with you. You can of course move on, love another, because there is always space for more love. But lost it will never be.

Step 6: Believe

**"No one could take from me what was in my head."
Dr. Edith Eva Eger, The Choice**

No one says it better than Dr. Edith Eva Eger in her book The Choice. Believe. Have faith. This is why I love Christmas so much. It was always a time when miracles happened. Not just for the gifts under the tree. But for the serene, happy togetherness of people who on other days quarrelled often enough. For these special, serene moments. The hope. The promise and its being fulfilled.

Right now I am looking at a carnation. I bought flowers for a photo shoot and this little flower was part of it. It's still there, 9 weeks after the shoot when all the others have long gone. A miracle.

No one can take your dreams from out of your heart. Listen to it. Believe in it. Cherish it.

Believe. It helped Dr. Eger, helped Viktor Adler to survive. Me to create my vision. And it will help you.