

How I got through a butt-kicked, soul-crushed time and transition

I had a number of years that were challenging as I worked hard to save a doomed marriage, be there for my daughters and for my aging mother, grow my business and, simultaneously, look for a well-paying job, “just in case.” I told myself I was fine and strong and surrounded by loving friends. All true, and I was fine - until I wasn't. My spirit broke. I grappled with the extremely painful ways my then-husband dealt with his own pain. And eventually, I crashed.

I leaned into familiar practices but they didn't “work” like normal, so I became an experimenter. I learned a lot and found some things quite helpful. I offer some here in case they can spark something in you. AND if you are feeling depressed and/or anxious, please get care. These practices are meant to be an aid but not the treatment for clinical depression or anxiety.

THE HARDEST PHASE. Liminal comes to mind. As does cocoon. No, cocoon sounds too warm and cozy. I'm talking about the transitional space between what is known and what is not yet known. I could also call it the Feeling Like Shit phase. During this phase, I fell into a clinical depression which I scratched and climbed out of over the next few months with the aid of a very low-dose old-school antidepressant. During those months and well beyond, I also experimented with new practices and ways of being with myself that proved helpful. This is what I did and what I learned:

KEY: Step out of fear and turn toward kindness for yourself as much as possible.

This is what shifting from fear to kindness looked like for me:

- I agreed to stop scaring myself with “what ifs” and future fearing. When I noticed that I was indeed going too far into the future with my thoughts and getting anxious, I'd think: “Oh yeah, I decided I wasn't going to scare myself anymore. How can I be a friend instead, right now?” And/or “What would I prefer to do or focus on right now?”
- Reminding myself of reality vs. fears (see below)
- Holding myself, hugging myself, putting my hand on my heart.
- Imagining a circle of friends and family around me, extending love and kindness. And saying YES to actual offers of kindness. Practicing making requests that could help.
- Moving my body because when I change my body position, often my mindset or thoughts also change. Instead of starting the day with a sitting meditation, I started with fresh air and movement. Let the anxiety chemicals move through.
- I realized that maybe even if my life is unsettled, *I* could be the settled place, the home to return to. If life is feeling unsettled, how do I settle myself anyway? I can be settled, my body can be settled even if my life isn't. ME vs. my circumstances.

- Having conversations with my heart. “Hello heart. What’s here? What else? What do you need?”
- Naming my emotion vs. BEing my emotion. “Oh fear is here. Hi fear.” I realized it’s perfectly normal to feel fear but it didn’t need to get in the driver’s seat. By saying “hello” to fear, I acknowledged it AND I shifted to being the observer vs. being the fear. I could even get curious, e.g. “What am I fearing? How can I be with that kindly?” I also realized that there is always more than fear present. So I’d ask myself “What else is here?” And maybe I’d notice there was also hope. “Oh hope is here too. Hi Hope. Thank you for being here too. How do I lean into you?”
- Seeing the good, even when it felt impossible.
 - A gratitude walk: walk and notice and thank and take in the good of anything that is beautiful or kind or feels good.
 - “What’s working?” Even when everything feels impossible, there is so much that is “working.” I’m breathing. My daughter is making dinner. My dog is cute. The mail was delivered. The toilet works.
 - Name 5 things grateful I’m grateful for
 - ONE thing grateful for and really feel into it, describe it, feel it for 20 seconds (shown to be more effective than a list of gratitudes)
 - When all that was impossible, I took a walk and said YES to trees, etc. even if I didn’t feel anything...eventually a little crack opened and feelings of gratitude started to return.
- Softening my jaw. Softening my eyes. Especially in the night. Softening the jaw often helped me sleep. We have bands of holding and the jaw and eyes are two biggies.
- Headspace app. Every day. And remember it in the night too. A regular practice that you can call on that can become available even when stressed. Practice often with attention is key.
- Being good to others. Doing something to help others. Maybe. If you feel up to it.
- Reminding myself of REALITY, not what I wished would be and hadn’t been or the future that I fear. E.g. I’d list it:
 - My husband is leaving.
 - I worked hard to save the marriage.
 - It hasn’t served me. I want to honor myself fully now.
 - I am doing my best.
 - I can trust that life will feel better.
 - Many people love me.
 - I’m doing my best to love me
 - I can believe in me.
 - I’m tired.

- It's okay to sleep. This is not a good time to think. There is nothing to do right now. (in the night)
- Remembering who and what I love.
- Remembering my values even if some felt far away, disconnected
- Doing one kind thing for myself a day, one thing that might feel good or normally would have.

OTHER PHASES:

- **Feeling Better** - Still liminal but feeling more up for it! Feeling more embodied and resilient. Taking shape - the caterpillar.
 - Take easy or simple or inspired steps in some direction. E.g. start looking at houses and apartments online. Just looking. Stop when it starts to feel bad.
 - Align more with your values. E.g. Creativity or Kindness. Have your values listed nearby. How can you bring more of one into life now? A simple way? A fun way? A bold way?
 - Add more enlivening things to life. "I used to love...?" "I used to love music." Okay, how can you bring music back into your life?
 - Take safe risks.
 - Start to envision other possibilities, other futures. Write them down, talk about them, perhaps draw them!
- **Ready to Create.** The Butterfly. More grace, beauty, possibility, aliveness.
 - Have a daily practice/s.
 - Include the body, the senses. Come back to your senses!
 - Vision. Keep the vision of what you are creating alive. Or the feeling of it.
 - Values Alignment. Know your values and keep them in front of you.
 - Relational - be with people, learn from each other
 - Practice kindness

- Set goals. And timelines. Be kind about them. E.g. selling the house. Break it down into room or categories of belongings - e.g. bring all coats into one room and sort give, keep, toss. Have a friend be with you, especially for the more difficult ones. E.g. my childhood friend came over when I sorted china, etc. that was from my childhood. We could tell stories, laugh, cry and be helped to let go and give away. Lighten the load!
- Within your goals and timelines, let yourself breathe and break and partake! Jump in a lake! Do something outside of your normal. Don't walk in straight lines! I walked in curves down the sidewalk and marveled at the subtle shift in orientation opened fantastic new views! Be ABnormal for a change! Dance down the bike path! What the heck, live out of the box a little!

Helpful practices: See my Resource page for links to many of these.

1. My morning words.
2. The 3 questions
3. GRATITUDE
4. Standards of presence
5. Practice being kind to self over and over again.